

The Charming Prince loses his

by Anna Borowicki

Linda is a tall graceful woman with dignity and confidence. Ten years ago she was a battered woman — hurt, angry, and wondering where her marriage had failed.

Her father was both an alcoholic and a batterer. Although he always treated Linda well, her mother didn't fare as well. Linda's mother became emotionally incapable of dealing with an energetic 16 year old daughter. Linda left home and within three years was married to her Prince Charming.

Like many 19 year olds, Linda believed herself "to be in love." Marriage was to be the anchor she had never had in childhood.

But once the honeymoon was over, marriage became a nightmare. Prince Charming began tearing away at her confidence with verbal abuse so subtle neither party realized what was happening. "Why isn't supper ready? Can't you do anything right?" Linda over-compensated and the verbal lashings, ironically, increased.

After 5 years of emotional battering, Linda became aggressive and stood up for herself. The aggression increased his insecurity and the verbal abuse continued, even increased.

The tensions kept growing until, one night after 10 years of marriage, Prince Charming came home drunk. He pulled her off the couch, bounced her against a wall, cornered her in a closet and began strangling her. Linda escaped but to this day she still doesn't know why he exploded.

During a period of separation Prince Charming again attempted to strangle her. After four years of separation came a divorce and with a divorce came the despair. "I felt like a total failure. I kept wondering, if only I'd done something differently."

Alcohol became a temporary solution to the problems. A four year struggle with the aid of counselling and AADAC helped Linda rebuild a shattered life. Today she can speak to the press about her past with ease, but the struggle was never easy.

Over 500,000 Canadian women can sympathize with Linda for they too are battered women. Domestic violence crosses all economic barriers and backgrounds.

Ruth Pinkney, director of WIN (Women In Need) House, the shelter for battered women and their children, has seen many cases like Linda's. In 1983 the two WIN House facilities in Edmonton accommodated 482 families.

"WIN House offers a secure and supportive atmosphere where a woman can make decisions for her family's future," says Pinkney.

Perhaps better than anyone, Ruth realizes that WIN House is only a bandaid solution to a large problem. But the major aim of WIN House is "to provide emotional support to women, educate them on the alternatives in life, and help them use the resources available" to take control of their own lives again.

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The "battered woman syndrome" is complex, and an understanding of the victim and batterer is crucial to even begin dealing with the problem. Ruth describes a series of stages in the syndrome.

Phase 1 as a tension building stage. Minor battering incidents occur. The batterer is verbally abusive and possibly even slaps his wife "to teach her a lesson."

The victim's major concern is to prevent further incidents of battering. She exhausts herself physically, mentally and emotionally anticipating his every need. Or she stays out of his way and denies she's hurt, angry and tired of being abused. The more accepting a woman is of his behaviour the greater the frequency and length of battering.

Phase 2 is the explosion of rage whereby the batterer loses all his control. Again he starts to beat his wife simply to teach her a lesson. But at this stage the battering is brutally administered and the wife is usually in need of medical attention afterwards. Beatings may be repeated daily, weekly, monthly or yearly depending on the batterer.

Prior to the attack, the victim is living on the tightrope of terror. After the attack both victim and batterer find ways of rationalizing the seriousness of the situation; a woman choked with a metal chain around her neck remarked, "it didn't even break the skin." While the batterer may feel guilty, the victim is generally in shock and prefers to remain alone for several days.

Women try not to seek outside help for fear of retaliation. Only 10 per cent of victims contact the police. Fear of retaliation can be so strong, that some women attack the very police who arrive to help them.

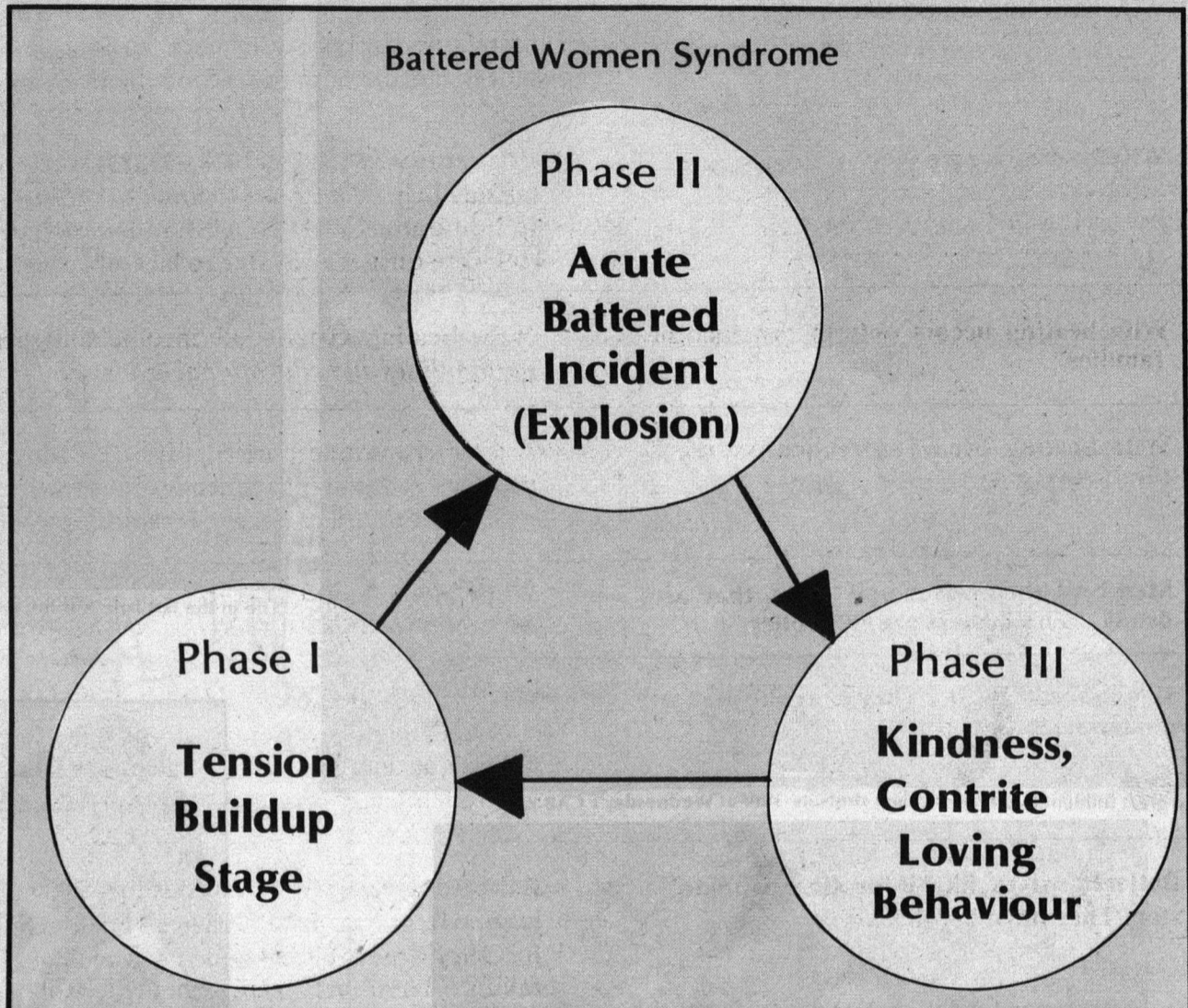
The police in turn become resentful when their aid is spurned.

Phase 3 is a period of calm for both parties. The batterer becomes loving, considerate and contrite. He needs the victim's forgiveness and promises never to hurt her again. She deludes herself into believing he

* They have a Jekyll and Hyde personality. They can be exceptionally charming one minute and extremely violent the next.

* They do everything to drive their victim away and then will promise anything to get her back.

The violent man who continually batters a victim



will never hurt her again and the batterer sincerely believes he no longer has a need to beat her.

The loving behaviour will rapidly become interspersed by minor battering incidents. Phase one repeats itself. Some victims will choose to continue living with the batterer. Others will be filled with so much hostility at allowing themselves to be deceived that they kill their batterers.

The majority of victims leave their batterers. To regain control over her once more, the batterer threatens her, or he will threaten to kill himself. This is not an idle threat; 10 per cent of all batterers commit suicide.

A victim who first arrives at WIN House looks and feels totally defeated by life. But with the support of the staff and other women in the same circumstances, the victim often begins to display a healthy personality change.

Mothers and their children may remain in the co-op atmosphere of WIN House for a period of three weeks. Most families will stay an average of 11 days until the mother has planned her next step. Only 43 per cent of women return to their husbands.

Women return to their husbands for a variety of reasons. Constant emotional battering causes the victim to become emotionally traumatized and, paradoxically, dependent on the aggressor. Some women are so emotionally dependent on the batterer that they cannot function without him. Also, the woman is made to feel guilty by the batterer for putting him through a traumatic period.

Also, many women have over a period of years become economically dependent on the batterer. To suddenly pick up the children and leave is not possible; life on social assistance looks bleak.

Other women don't like to end a marriage. Society implies that one "is not successful without a partner." Often there are children to consider and batterers may be very caring towards them. A wife is sometimes reluctant to end a marriage, for the sake of the children.

However, few batterers cease assaulting their wives. The batterer sees the woman as an extension of himself and not as an individual person. Ruth Pinkney suggests batterers have similar personality characteristics.

* They are extremely jealous and often believe their victim is having an affair.

* They try to isolate and control their victim's life as much as possible. Battered women repeatedly state "He won't allow me to ..."

* They are verbally abusive.

* They are more violent during a pregnancy. The birth of baby will mean he will receive less attention.

* They minimize the seriousness of bruises. A batterer sees his victim as being clumsy or "accident-prone."

has never learned to deal with his emotions. He lacks confidence in himself and in his ability to communicate. He is incapable of expressing his emotions in a healthy manner. Linda compared her husband's emotional maturity to that of a three year old child, always demanding attention and bursting into a tantrum if he didn't receive it.

Stereotyping of roles forces men to internalize their emotions. Hostility and anger, however, are acceptable ways for a man to express himself. Frustrations build up day by day and eventually the batterer's violent temper goes off like a firecracker.

Wife battering is assault and a crime. Police are permitted discretion when charging anyone and do not always charge the batterer. A recent study, however, done in London, Ontario, indicated that if a charge is laid, the number of beatings are reduced by 63 per cent, even if the charge is later withdrawn.

But, women often hesitate to charge their batterer for fear of retaliation. They have seen his gentler nature as well as his violence and don't wish to see him punished.

Women wishing to lay a charge of assault should also obtain a restraining order. A restraining order is a legal document obtainable within 24 hours that protects the victim from further harassment or violence.

The cost of obtaining an order runs from \$300 to \$400. If a woman does not have the funds to pay for this service, Legal Aid will cover the cost. In return, a promissory note is required stating that the amount will be repaid when the client is able.

All convictions require proof. Women are requested to save, as evidence, torn or bloody clothing, and anything that was used as a battering object. Color photographs of injuries and bruises also make excellent courtroom evidence. Photographs can be taken by the Police or medical staff at any hospital emergency unit. Pictures taken by shelter workers or friends are also acceptable.

If a batterer is charged and found to be guilty of assault, the penalty for the crime committed will vary with the degree of injury. Some batterers serve only weekends in jail while others receive longer terms. One woman whose husband shot her through the breast received 18 months in jail. Linda is one person who believes the courts are "too lenient."

Some judges are now attempting to send batterers for mandatory counselling instead of a prison sentence.

The Forensic Assessment and Community Service (FACS), an arm of Alberta Hospital Edmonton, provides a domestic violence counselling service for both batterers and victims.

The counselling programs last for 6 months and each participant must attend a weekly three-hour group session. Individual counselling is available upon request. After a participant has completed the program,