

MUGWUMP

by Aime Phillips

I have definitely outdone myself this time, having left this until the last possible moment.

I was initially planning some creative filler consisting of running last week's issue in really tiny text so noone could read it, but Allan probably would have gotten upset.

So here I am, thinking as fast as I can because I have to take the newspaper flats to the SMT bus in 45 minutes.

There is a wide myriad of topics that I would love to mention, but we're already getting sued, I devoted an entire page to the Dunn fire, and there's not that much snow around.

It's too early for a Christmas Wish List, and the Blue Jays are old news.

I can't resist, however, in mentioning this Engineering Memorial Committee fiasco. The Chair of Woman in Engineering keeps refusing to talk with the News Department. Instead, she keeps sending faxes. Wouldn't it be cheaper not to send faxes? I mean, it's not long distance or anything, but the Student Union is paying for all that paper.

I have also been thinking about this meeting that Allan and I had with Tom Traves. Tom Traves is the VP Academic, but he called Allan down to his office to talk with him as a "concerned citizen." Allan brought me along because he thought that Tom Traves, VP Academics must have something of the utmost importance to relay to The Brunswickan on behalf of the university, but as I mentioned, he was just trying to get his personal views across. I was quite appalled by what he was saying, and the word "irresponsible" did come up, but when Traves asked me if I had anything to add to his and Allan's discussion, I said no.

Well, I've been thinking about what was said, and I have decided that I am very unimpressed that Traves called Allan down to his office in the Old Arts Building, implying that an official comment was to be made, and then ended up acting the part of a concerned citizen. Personal opinions, Mr. Traves, are more appropriately placed in "Blood and Thunder."

The megalomaniac Kwame Dawes, PhD is in town. The singer for Ujamaa has returned all the way from the University of South Carolina to perform in the Somalia Relief Initiative, a 12 hour concert at the Aitken Center this Friday night (hint-hint).

Only 35 shopping days left until Christmas. And more importantly, there are only two more issues of The Brunswickan this term.

OPINION

The opinions found in this column are not necessarily the views of the Brunswickan

by Thomas A. Fish, PhD

We must take responsibility for our actions. On March 4, 1991 I finally took responsibility for mine. On that day I pleaded guilty to assault. The victim was my spouse.

Can you imagine what I am like? Am I a chauvinist? Do I hate women? Do I have an alcohol problem? Am I poorly educated? Do I think women belong in the kitchen? Am I a monster? Let me tell you about myself. I am a university professor. I have fought against sexism and discrimination for the last 10 years. I do not have an alcohol problem. I believe that a woman's place is anywhere she wants to be. I am not a monster. You would be hard pressed to find anything that I do on the job that would suggest that I would be abusive. My classroom is nonsexist and I can often be found lobbying for the rights of others. To some, my public self seemed beyond reproach. I took pride in my work for social change, for equality, for fairness, for justice, for the rights of women and others who hold so little power in our society. Then I went home and my private self took over.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was frequently abusive toward my spouse, I, like many other men (as well as some women), did not consider myself an abuser. I did not come home drunk and beat my wife. I did not fit the description of what most people think of when they think of an abuser. Nonetheless, I was an abuser. Although my abuse was primarily verbal and emotional, it was, without question, abuse. Whether verbal, emotional or physical, abuse is abuse. A bruised body will often heal in a few days. A bruised heart and spirit may never heal, particularly if the victim remains in the abusive relationship.

Are you an abusive person? Consider these questions CAREFULLY. Look in the mirror and be honest with yourself, perhaps for the first time. Are you *usually* impatient and unkind with your partner? Are you *often* jealous and envious of your partner or her(his) friends? Are you *often* boastful and proud? Do you *often* remind your partner of how much you know and how little they know? Do you *usually* have trouble admitting a wrong and asking for forgiveness? Do you *usually* hold grudges or have difficulty forgiving your partner? Are you *often* selfish? Do you *frequently* demand your own way? Do you *often* find fault in whatever your partner attempts or accomplishes? Do you *often* belittle your partner or undervalue her(his) accomplishments? Do you *often* show disrespect for your partner's beliefs when you do not agree with those beliefs? Do you *often* use your affection as a weapon to control your spouse's behaviour? Do you *often* believe and expect the worst of your partner? Do you *often* try to control and manipulate your partner?

If these statements (adapted from 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7) describe you accurately (remember, be honest - at least with yourself), you are an abusive person. You are not loving your partner, but instead are contributing to the destruction of her(his) spirit. You are breaking a heart, if not her(his) bones. Unfortunately, in my case, a number of these statements described me all too well. Perhaps these statements describe your partner? If so, you are a victim of abuse. Perhaps, as in my case, the statements describe both of you? If so, you are an abuser and a victim of abuse. Although both women and men can be abusive or victims of abuse, overwhelming evidence indicates that men are more likely to abuse and women are more likely to be the victims of the abuse, particularly if the abuse is physical. Men are socialized to be aggressive, to exert influence, to dominate, to take control and to seek power. These are qualities that are considered desirable by many men and women. These are qualities that many people look for in potential leaders. These are also qualities that are often characteristic of the abusive person, particularly if they are not balanced by other qualities like empathy, sensitivity, humility, and unselfishness.

Are you abusing your partner? Remember your honest responses to the questions I asked and remember that physical abuse is only one type of abuse. The damage caused by physical abuse is more visible than the damage caused by verbal and emotional abuse, but the effects on the victim are just as devastating. Let's assume your answer is YES! What can or should you do about it? Well, you have already taken the first positive step - admitting it! Say it aloud when you are by yourself "I am an abusive person". Feel the words as they roll off your tongue. Taste the words. How do they feel? How do they taste? When I said these words they felt rotten and they tasted even worse. If you are not comfortable with these words (and I pray that you are not), then you want to change. Congratulations! You have already taken the second positive step - recognizing that you no longer want to be an abusive person and that you want to change, that you *must* change. Now say this aloud when you are by yourself: "I am an abusive person and I want to change". These words should feel and taste a bit better. They should, because if you are being honest with yourself, you are already changing! Don't stop now! Have courage, my friend.

OK, so you have admitted to yourself that you are an abusive person and that you want to change. What's the next step? The 3rd step is to accept responsibility for your actions and repeat the statement you made in step 2 to the target(s) of your abuse. It is important to know what I mean by this. I *don't* mean saying you are sorry about a particular incident and that it won't happen again. Chances are that you have said that before. Perhaps you really believed it. Perhaps your partner believed it. Well, that's no longer good enough. If you want to change you will have to talk differently with your partner. Instead of the usual "I'm sorry for, it will never happen again", say something like "....., I have come to realize that I have been an abusive person. I am truly sorry. I don't want to be like that anymore. I want to change. I must change because I love you and because I no longer consider my behaviour acceptable. Will you help me?" Use your own words, but mean every one of them! Don't be surprised if your declaration receives a cold, neutral or lukewarm response from the victim(s) of your abuse (if you receive any response at all). You will have to do more than just talk. As they say, talk is cheap. Although you may think that your partner should give you credit and applaud your accomplishments to this point, the response you get is *not* as important as your commitment to change that you made in step 2. Perhaps your partner has already left you. Perhaps the damage is irreparable? Perhaps s(he) does not believe you? Do not be deterred! You are *not* responsible for convincing her(him). If you feel the need to convince her(him), you are again revealing your need to control others. Release what is not yours and own what is.

Perhaps you are saying, "Why should I go through all this? My partner has abused me as much or more than I have abused her(him)". I have said this many times myself. I repeat; you are not responsible for your partner's behaviour, but you are responsible for yours. You should change for you, because to be happy - you must change.

Steps 1 through 3 are only a beginning. You have initiated change, but the transformation is far from over. With or without your partner's cooperation or encouragement, you take Step 4 which involves seeking help and support from others. You must realize that very few individuals are capable of making such changes on their own. This is because abusive, controlling behaviour is well learned, often from observing the way one's parents abused one another when they were angered. You have likely learned inappropriate ways to deal with anger. You must unlearn these and learn new ways to negotiate with those around you. You will need help to do this and can be comforted by the fact that help is available.

Seek help before it is too late. In my case, I was directed by the courts to attend a program for abusive men conducted by Tim Gallagher and Bob Stranach at Family Enrichment and Counselling Services. (By the way, this program is being seriously threatened by proposed cuts in government funding - I urge you to let the government know that cuts to these types of programs are dangerous and unacceptable). Do it now. Do it before you hurt someone you love. It is important to do it for them, but it is also important to do it for you.

In my case, I attended the group faithfully for 6 months. I was humiliated - but I did learn. I learned much from the group and its leaders. Rest assured, however, that the success of this and any other program depends on the motivation of the participant(s). Some men who attend the group do not change. You will not learn if you are not motivated to do so. You must be ready and willing to change. You must work hard to change. This is the 5th and perhaps most important step in your transformation.

As an abusive person, you will need to learn about your role in the cycle of violence. You must learn to take responsibility for your actions; to own them. You must also learn that no matter what another person does or says to hurt you, it is all irrelevant because how *you* respond is your choice. No one makes you do anything. You choose how you will respond and you are responsible for your words and actions. Believe me, I have heard all the excuses "She did this to me, she treats me like dirt, ... yeah, I was abusive to her ..." and on and on it goes.

It is true that some of the men in the program, like myself, had been abused by their spouses or girlfriends; some to an incredible extent (usually emotionally, but sometimes physically as well). Perhaps the person(s) you abuse is (are) also abusive to you. Whatever the reasons for this, you are not responsible for another person's behaviour. You *are* responsible for your part in the cycle of violence. You can not control another person, nor should you try. You are responsible for how you choose to respond. You can do things to accelerate the wheels of violence or you can do things to slow them down. You have choices and are responsible for those choices *and their consequences*. Projecting the blame on another is simply an attempt to absolve yourself of the responsibility for your own actions. To change you must accept this responsibility and be willing to learn new ways to express anger and deal with frustrations.

Many men and women need to learn communication skills that are assertive but not aggressive; that are constructive rather than destructive. This also requires a learning effort.

Unfortunately, many people in relationships are abusive to each other in one way or another. Although women can also be abusive, much of what I have said more often applies to men. If you are an abusive man (or woman), let me summarize the steps you need to take to change your behaviour and make life more bearable for you and those around you:

- Step 1: Admit that you are an abusive person
- Step 2: Decide that you want to change
- Step 3: Accept responsibility for your actions
- Step 4: Seek help and support from those qualified to help
- Step 5: Work hard to change

Good luck and God bless!