

# Refuge for battered women

(First of two parts)

By CANDACE KNIGHT

Wife beating in Santa Cruz County? Oh, come on now. This is Santa Cruz, you know, the beaches, good living; NICE people live here.

Nice people may in fact reside in Santa Cruz County, however, even the nicest people can be involved in a violent domestic situation. Battering involves all classes, all age groups and all geographical areas. And Santa Cruz is no different. According to officials of Mariposa House, the local shelter for battered women, Santa Cruz is right up there in average nationwide statistics of female abuse.

Carol Givertz, coordinator of the month-old shelter, noted that although "Every case is individual, for sure," there can be a pattern around beatings. Verbal, mental and emotional abuse usually begin the cycle. The husband or mate start belittling the woman, causing her sense of worth to be depleted. Continual criticism, stony silence followed by verbal attacks, ridiculing . . . all of these may be a part of the buildup period, she said.

Torture is a fair word to describe this stage. Some women, according to Mrs. Givertz, will antagonize their mate to the point of physical abuse just to end this period. At least something will happen to end the mental abuse, even though it can result in bruises, broken bones and chipped teeth.

What follows the emotional beating is the physical battering. Compared to the buildup stage, the battering is short-lived, she continued. Wife beating is usually emotionally charged, loud, and often involves alcohol and occasionally drugs.

After the woman receives the beating, what is called the honeymoon begins. The man, filled with remorse and guilt, attempts to make up to his mate. The abuse over, he may buy her gifts in an attempt to reconcile the battering, and is probably very gentle and seemingly protective of her.

According to Mrs. Givertz, this may be the happiest time for the couple of their entire relationship.

Unfortunately, there is an excellent chance the whole thing will start again.

Because so many women feel they are economically dependent on their husband, particularly in this county where decent paying jobs for women are scarce, battered wives often feel they have no other choice but to stay with their man. "The alternative, they think, is poverty," explained Mrs. Givertz. That can be as frightening a thought as another beating to many women, particularly those with little education and job skills, she said.

These women are caught in a vicious circle. They often feel they are alone, and must deal with their situation by themselves.

Many do try the police, district attorney and other law enforcement agencies, but become discouraged with the complications and amount of time involved in reporting and pressing charges regarding an assault.

Battered women are not alone. Mrs. Givertz stresses the fact that women in a violent situation are in danger, and there is a great deal of help and support available. They cannot, in just about all cases, solve such an all-inclusive problem by themselves, she said. Besides, they don't have to. They can call for help — 425-2058.

Women's Crisis Support, a county agency, will be at the other end of the line, day and night. In any violent or troublesome situation, the number may be dialed for immediate assistance, be it someone to listen, or someone to arrange for emergency pick-up and shelter for someone in danger of physical abuse.

In the event a woman is in danger due to violence, she may be referred by the Crisis Support to Mariposa House for shelter. The home, located in an undisclosed area of the county will provide a woman and her children with food,

shelter and assistance for a period of four to six weeks. During this time, a woman is able to recover physically and begin to regain her self esteem and take first steps to become self-sufficient.

Women who stay at Mariposa House are put in touch with public assistance agencies if needed, they may contact their families, they receive legal and employment counseling, and attend support groups with other women in similar situations.

"They are not 'just taken care of,'" commented Mrs. Givertz. She went on to say the women are supported, emotionally, mentally and physically. "They learn to feel safe," she said.

For one who isn't in a violent domestic situation, it is difficult to understand why a woman remains in the home, and why she doesn't do something, anything, to help herself. By the time a woman realizes the battering will not stop, that "this won't be the last time," she is so emotionally and mentally beaten down that even a trip to the grocery store is frightening; especially when she must wear a scarf, long sleeves and dark glasses to hide marks from the latest abuse. Imagine this same woman going to, say, a local department store to apply for a job as a salesclerk. For many, there is no decision to make between staying in the home, or trying to make it "out there" all alone or perhaps with two or three children.

Should a woman decide to press charges, she likely will not follow through, said Mrs. Givertz. Generally, a lot of time passes between the incident and the trial, which makes the crime seem less serious. The woman, by the time the case goes to trial is often physically healed, and many husbands, during this time, are able to convince their mate they will never harm them again if they stop the charges. There is little support from law enforcement agencies for a woman to continue her case, and she

realizes that with her mate in jail, there will be a greatly reduced income, or perhaps none at all. Besides, said Mrs. Givertz, "If you love someone, it's hard to put them in jail."

If charges are not filed within 24 hours, it is nearly impossible to prosecute. Photographs are required, and witnesses are often necessary. When a woman who thinks so little of herself in the first place, must face the ordeal of filing charges in this manner, it is little surprise she rarely carries through.

In addition to complicated legal procedures, many battered women face reprisal should they take any steps at all for help. This is a real threat; in the past few years, two women who sought help at La Casa shelter in San Francisco were murdered by their husbands while residing at the home for women, according to Mrs. Givertz. The assaults did not take place at the home, but while the women were out on errands or shopping in the neighborhood. Security at Mariposa House is very tight, according to Mrs. Givertz, and the location of the building is kept secret for the safety of the women residents.

The women are free to leave, she said, and many do. No pressure is put on the victim to end her relationship; that decision must be made by the woman herself. By the time a woman does reach the shelter, though, it is hoped she is ready to make some choices about her life. By contacting Women's Crisis Support, then agreeing to take part in Mariposa House, a change from the old battering pattern has already taken place.

What the woman does with the change is up to her. She receives support and positive reinforcement to assist her in becoming more self reliant, and to gain skills needed to function alone, rather than in a subservient role. Women do not get "just one chance" at Mariposa House, they may return as needed. The primary goal of Mariposa House, according to Mrs. Givertz is to remove a woman



Carol Givertz — "Every case is individual. . ."

and her children from a destructive environment and allow them to feel safe. After that a great deal of constructive action is taken to allow the woman to learn how to rely on herself and certain others in building a new life, if she so chooses.

One problem which may cause a woman to think she does not deserve help is that of the woman-beating myth. There are many erroneous beliefs about battering, noted Mrs. Givertz. Perhaps the worst is the notion that it doesn't exist, or that it may happen in, say, the lower East Side of New York every now and then, but certainly not in midcounty. This a major reason why battering is sanctioned by our society, she said. By doing nothing about it, and refusing to realize it exists right under our noses, so to speak, Mrs. Givertz feels our society gives its stamp of approval on violence of this sort.

Another myth, she said, is that the woman enjoys being abused, and often proudly flaunts her bruises and cuts. Many also feel the wife who gets beaten deserves it; she

must be a nag and ask for it. Shaking her head, Mrs. Givertz stressed the fallacy of both philosophies.

Wife battering does not usually stop by incarceration, either. What is needed, Mrs. Givertz said, is to bring the crime (and it is a crime to hit someone, she said) out of the closet, discuss it, and learn to deal with it. Myths and stories must be dispelled, as much as the jokes and tales that keep the ignorance going. The age-old notion that Saturday night is the night a man goes out alone, sits for hours in a bar until he drinks himself half-blind then comes home and beats the hell out of his wife, must be removed before education can be implemented.

The beaten wife, she said, is not the only victim. The husband is also victimized, as are the children, the law-enforcement agencies, and society as a whole. And the problem does not get solved behind the closed doors of a violent domestic situation; it must be brought out to be seen, and once seen, it can be dealt with.

Next Week; How one may face a battering situation in midcounty with the help of Women's Crisis Support and Mariposa House.

**Child tumbles from auto**

