

Community

Family Violence

Victims also have rights

By JACIE B. PALMER
Herald Special

The Dec. 18th, 1991 issues of both local papers carried articles about police charges being laid against a local babysitter. As usual, people in the community either feel strongly for or against having the name of an accused published. The Dec. 14th issue of the Toronto Star covered the case of a man cleared in a campus date rape case. The judge stated that in that case there was "reasonable doubt" and thus he was cleared.

What do these cases have in common? Both the people involved could be innocent but they could also both be guilty. We're all members of the community and we have a right to protect ourselves and our children from abusive persons. Yes, the accused does have rights and those rights are upheld in our courts of law. But the rest of us, well, we ought to have rights, too! We have a right to know if an assault charge has been laid. We have a right to know if someone has been accused of child or sexual abuse.

There is not one person in this country who would stand up and state firmly that our court system is perfect or that our police investigations are always well done. More than one member of the police force has remarked that the guilty go free every day and the innocent are sometimes found guilty! Lawyers tell us the same thing. That's all the more reason each one of us should want to be aware of charges laid.

A few weeks ago I was out for a walk in one of the two places where I felt completely safe to go. Inadvertently I found myself locked in the farm as dusk fell. I had a panic attack. I was almost



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hysterical. The possibility of having to leave my vehicle parked there overnight and having to walk home along two busy roads where he might see me was unnerving. He was not found guilty in court. He had assaulted me physically at least 20 times before I ever got up enough guts to go to the police. Although he'd beaten others, I was the first woman who laid charges. Had his name been published at the time the charge was laid, other women would have had the opportunity to know of the charge.

Some may have listened to his sob story - full of excuses and placing the blame on me - but others might have been smart enough to stay away from him. Instead, he walks around an arrogant man because he has beaten us and the system. And I live in constant fear!

My story is no different from that of many others. Perhaps if his name had been published I'd feel safer. Perhaps if his name had been published my children would feel safer. Perhaps other women would not be beaten or choked by this man. I wonder how long it will be before he assaults another one because I know of his 20 year history of violence.

Yes, the innocent have rights which must be protected but the protection of our homes and our families must come first. We expect to live in a safe community. We deserve to know if our neighbor is abusing others. We may even have suspected the violence but never been sure enough to do anything about it.

Others may have had an experience with the accused as victims of child or sexual abuse and may find the courage to come forward. The newspapers do our community a service when they publish the names of the accused and I hope that they will continue to do so.

Feel free to contact Jacie by directing letters to her attention at the Herald. All correspondence will remain confidential. Should you wish to speak to Jacie, call the Distress Centre at 877-1211 and your call will be returned. If you are a woman or child in crisis or an abusive male wanting help call the Distress Centre or dial 911.

A networking group is available for abused women seeking help and advice. The group meets every Wednesday evening, 7:30 p.m. at Georgetown Hospita.

For further information on the group please contact Pam Johnston at 877-8877.

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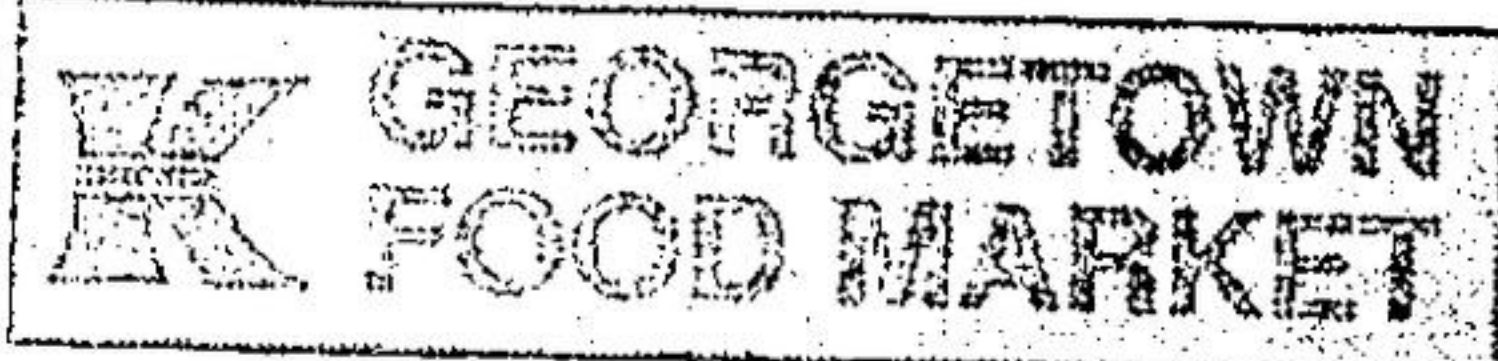


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