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FOCIS NEWSLETTER

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My Ex Used Guns to Terrorize Me Without Ever Pulling a Trigger

BY LESLIE MORGAN STEINER WWW.XOJANE.COM

Conor first attacked me five days before our wedding. In the little ranch house we'd bought to start married life together, he choked me and banged my head against a wall. His fingers left ten red-brown bruises on my neck. They faded just in time for me to put on my mother's wedding dress and marry him, despite what he'd done.

I'd met Conor the year I turned 22. Back then, I had never seen or touched a gun. I'd just graduated from college and was a writer and editor at Seventeen magazine. Conor was a Wall Street trader.

We met on the New York City subway, and after a whirlwind courtship, I'd agreed to marry him and leave my job and the city I loved to start a new life with him in a small town in New England.

After that first assault, I assumed he'd never hurt me again, because I knew that he loved me. I also knew Conor's secret: that he'd been repeatedly abused by his stepfather as a child.

But I didn't know anything about the long-term impact of childhood trauma, or how difficult it would be for him to keep his abusive past out of our marriage.

A week after he strangled me, while on our honeymoon, he punched me in the face. As we drove home from the beach cottage where we'd spent our first days together as a married couple, he threw a cold Big Mac at me in a fit of rage.

The first time Conor came home with a gun, we'd been married for three months. Gun ownership was widespread and legal in the rural state where we lived. Conor's Fortune 500 manufacturing plant had an employee gun range, the way other corporations had gyms or daycare centers.

I froze the first time I saw Conor's gun, which looked like a matte black children's water pistol, sitting on our dining room table next to a bowl of apples. It turned out to be something called a "Glock".

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Conor smiled when he saw my surprise. “We need to stay safe, babe,” he explained. “You have no idea how violent people can be. You grew up so sheltered. I want you to be able to protect yourself when I’m not here.”

Living with loaded guns, especially in a small town with almost no crime, in a household where the guns were not for hunting or recreation, baffled and frightened me. It undermined my sense of safety in my own home.

The manipulative tactic of “gaslighting” always comes this way, disguised as love and concern, but it’s really an attempt to deny someone’s perceptions.

That Glock was not there to keep me safe, though it did make Conor feel strong in ways he’d never felt as a child. As a young boy, his mother had stood by helplessly as his stepfather broke Conor’s arm, his ribs, and his collarbone. His stepfather also beat his mother in front of Conor.

What I couldn’t see as his wife was that Conor’s power came at my expense. If he kept me insecure and afraid, I couldn’t leave him, couldn’t abandon him the way his mother had. For that, the Glock soon wasn’t enough.

A few months later, Conor came home with a Colt .45. Next was a Smith & Wesson .38 snub-nosed pistol. He put the .38 in his pants pocket, the Glock in our car’s glove compartment, and the Colt .45 under the pillow of our bed. He kept them loaded with hollow point bullets.

A cold shiver ran through me when Conor explained that this type of ammunition “worked best” because it exploded upon impact with human flesh. Conor insisted I clean his guns and join the NRA; on weekends, he pressured me to accompany him to the gun range. Conor acted as if he were teaching me a shared hobby, like fly fishing.

To me, having guns in my house and my car and my life was like drinking poison in our tap water every day. I couldn’t see, or measure, the danger. But bit by bit, living with Conor’s guns destroyed the trust I had in the man I loved, and in myself. I know now that abuse victims face a 500 percent greater risk of death if they live in a home with firearms.

I know now that between 2001 and 2012, more American women were shot to death by a current or former boyfriend or husband than the total number of American troops killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined.

I know now that the most dangerous time in an abuse victim's life is after she leaves her abuser, because the majority of homicides occur after the relationship has ended, and that usually the murder weapon is a firearm

I didn't know any of that then. I didn't see myself as a battered wife. I was a strong, smart, independent woman in love with a deeply troubled man.

I told myself he needed these guns to feel safe, after all he'd suffered as an abused child. I thought I was the only person on earth who could help him stare down his childhood demons. I thought I could take it. I was misinformed about this too.

Once or twice a week, when Conor got angry, because I forgot to buy milk at the store or overcooked pasta, because I had talked on the phone with a male friend from college, or because my voice reminded him of his mother, the fights often ended with Conor pressing one of his loaded guns, usually the larger Glock or Colt .45, against my temple.

I don't remember feeling afraid he'd pull the trigger. I don't remember feeling anything. The next morning, looking in the bathroom mirror at the circular bruise the gun barrel had left on my face, it seemed impossible that my own husband had used a loaded pistol to mark me like that.

That's the most insidious part of abuse. Even with the obvious danger of guns, the violence escalates so gradually, you don't realize how crazy your life has become. Conor never had to pull the trigger; the numbness that came over me from living under the incessant threat of violence was incapacitating on its own.

When I finally left Conor, five years after I first met him, one of the first things I did was to put his three guns in a cardboard box and walk the box to the police station a few blocks from the home we'd shared. Months later, as a term of our divorce settlement, Conor's lawyer stipulated that I had to give the guns back. I refused. Conor got them anyway.

In the years since, Conor remarried, had a child, and started a company. I moved as far away as I could, setting up an unlisted phone number and a P.O. box for my mail. Eventually I remarried and had children, and wrote a book about loving, and leaving, an abusive man.

It's been over 20 years since I've seen or heard from Conor. But if I saw him again, my body would shake involuntarily. I believe I will always be afraid of him. I fear for the other women in his life, too. When I think of Conor today, I have to wonder, and worry: Where are those guns now?

NYC Launches a Bold New Plan to Tackle Domestic Violence

The mayor is announcing a task force to reduce domestic abuse in the city.
By Melissa Jeltsen Senior Reporter, The Huffington Post, www.huffingtonpost.com

New York City is safer than it has been in decades, that is, unless you are a victim of domestic violence. While it has seen its homicide rate halved over the past 15 years, murders involving family members and romantic partners have barely budged, NYPD statistics show.

Now, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio wants to change that. On Friday, he is set to announce the creation of a task force charged with developing an ambitious, citywide plan to tackle domestic violence.

“Violent crime in New York City continues to drop, but domestic violence unacceptably persists,” de Blasio said in a statement to The Huffington Post. “We must do everything we can to ensure that New York City is not just safer overall, but safer for everyone, everywhere, at all times.”

The task force, headed up by newly minted NYPD Commissioner James O’Neil and First Lady Chirlane McCray brings together members of law enforcement and social services, as well as survivors of abuse.

City officials described the goals of the task force as preventing violent crime, making it easier for victims to report abuse, stopping repeat offenders and increasing the conviction rate for prosecutions.

Cecile Noel, commissioner of the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence, said the task force would be evaluating innovative strategies from across the country to develop the best approach for the city. After 150 days, the group will present a comprehensive plan to move forward.

As violent crime has fallen in New York City, domestic abuse has made up an increasingly larger share of the remaining violence. In 2015, almost one in every five homicides in the city involved a family member or romantic partner, according to NYPD statistics. And it’s not just murders: Elizabeth Glazer, director of the Mayor’s Office Of Criminal Justice, said domestic violence now accounts for 40 percent of all assaults in the city.

Many experts believe domestic violence homicides can be predicted and prevented, as long as assaults are reported before they escalate and authorities have a chance to intervene. But in New York City, most victims don’t have any contact with police in the year before their death. That’s an issue the task force is likely to address.

Liz Roberts, deputy CEO and chief program officer at Safe Horizon, which provides services for domestic violence victims, said there are many reasons why victims may not report abuse. These include fear of retaliation by the abuser, the threat of deportation for themselves or loved ones, mistrust of the police, and concerns about loss of income or housing.

“Our systems are not yet effective enough in counteracting these barriers,” she said.

McCray said the group would center policies that protect the victim’s critical needs, such as housing and financial security, so that it’s easier and safer to come forward.

NYC Launches a Bold New Plan to Tackle Domestic Violence, cont.

The city has already taken some steps to do so. Last month, the mayor introduced legislation that would allow domestic violence survivors to take paid leave to attend to their safety needs, without worrying about losing their job. And the city is making housing lawyers available to domestic violence victims for free.

“Domestic violence is often just one of many injustices heaped upon the victims of abuse,” McCray said in a statement. “Homelessness and dislocation from community social supports, loss of jobs, changes in schools and other stressors are unfair and traumatizing.”

The task force will also address why the conviction rate for domestic violence prosecutions, which is under 33 percent in four out of five boroughs, is so low.

Maya Raghu, director of workplace equality at the National Women’s Law Center, said it can be disheartening for victims to see so few cases successfully prosecuted.

“It can create fear and distrust of the criminal justice system, and discourage survivors from reporting in the first instance, or cooperating with the prosecution,” she said.

Judy Harris Kluger, a former judge in New York State and executive director of Sanctuary for Families, an organization providing services for domestic violence victims, said it’s very common for cases to be dismissed because the victim doesn’t want to testify.

“In most of these situations, they are the only witness to the incident,” she said, making it hard to prosecute. “There can be fear to go forward; the abuser may have threatened her or the children. Sometimes it’s financial, if you go forward with the case, it may interfere with his ability to make money.”

Kluger said the practice of evidence-based prosecution, in which a prosecutor tries a case without a victim’s testimony and instead relies on independent corroborative evidence, may help improve outcomes.

“There are ways to build a case even when you don’t have a victim,” she said, “but that requires more tools for the prosecution and the police.”

The task force is also charged with taking a big picture view and identifying ways to prevent violent behavior before it starts, by intervening with youth.

Research has found that children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to grow up to abuse others or be victims of violence themselves.

“It’s sadly an intergenerational issue: young boys who see this as solution to conflict are going to repeat that in their lives,” Kluger said.

She cautioned that domestic violence has different root causes than other types of violence and requires a specialized approach.

“One can’t simply reduce domestic violence by saying we will have more police on the streets,” she said. “By and large, the victims of domestic violence are women, and we are still a patriarchal society. We have to change a lot of things societally.”

Montana Judge Targeted For Impeachment For 60-Day Incest Rape Sentence

District Judge John McKeon sentenced the man to 60 days of incarceration and probation, far less than the plea agreement recommendation of at least 25 years in prison

By, Rory Carroll, from RETERS reprinted from The Huffington Post, www.huffingtonpost.com

Signatures on a petition to impeach a Montana judge who handed down a 60-day sentence for a man who admitted to raping his 12-year-old daughter approached 80,000 on Friday in the latest case of citizens targeting judges for doling out what they believe are light sentences for sexual crimes.

District Judge John McKeon sentenced the 40-year-old man to 60 days of incarceration and probation, far less than the plea agreement recommendation of at least 25 years in prison, according to court records.

The Montana case comes in the wake of a controversial six-month jail sentence for sexual assault of an unconscious woman by former Stanford University swimmer Brock Turner, which caused an uproar because it was far shorter than the six years prosecutors had sought.

That case led California lawmakers to pass legislation to ban probation in similar assault cases and expand the definition of rape. It also set off an effort to recall the judge who handed down the sentence.

In the Montana case, the petition on the website Change.org set up by the group Justice4Montana says the sentence “does not match the crime and fails to acknowledge the horrors the victim had to endure.”

McKeon did not respond to a request for comment on Friday, but he wrote in his judgment that the exception to the mandatory sentence was appropriate since prosecutors did not challenge a psychosexual evaluation that said the man could be safely treated and supervised as a sex offender in the community. He also cited the lack of direct input from the victim or an advocate on behalf of the victim to the court.

McKeon also cited letters written by the girl’s mother and grandmother asking for leniency.

The defendant’s suspended sentence comes with such restrictions as a ban on owning firearms or pornography, or using the internet without permission from his parole officer and a sexual offender therapist. Any violation of those conditions would likely lead to “significant time in state prison,” McKeon wrote.

Deputy Valley County Attorney Dylan Jensen said on Friday he was “disappointed” in the sentence, but respected the judge’s decision. He declined to say whether an appeal was planned.

HAPPENINGS

ANGER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Wednesdays, 6-7:30pm. Co-ed six week group, start date contingent upon sign-ups.
\$40 fee for non-native clients.
Contact Tom @ 532-6811, ex 270

POSITIVE PARENTING & POSITIVE PARENTING OF TEENS

is done on an individual basis as space and time allow.
\$30 fee for non-native clients. For info or sign up,
Contact Mark @ 532-6811 ex 249.

FOCIS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

Women's Support Group Tuesdays 3 p.m. to 5p.m.
For info, contact Brittany@ FOCIS
PROGRAM, 532-6811 ex 270.

BRAVE AT HEART CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

For anyone who has been touched by Cancer
Meetings every 2nd Thursday
5:00 to 6:00 pm
Call Ashley, 532-6811 ex.272

GIRLS TAKE CHARGE GROUP

Every other Wednesday, 4:30 to 5:30
Teen Girls are invited
Call Ashley @ 532-6811 ex 272

BOYS TAKE CHARGE GROUP

Thursday afternoons, 3:30 to 4:30
Teen young men are invited
For info or sign-up call
Ashley, 532-6811 ex 272

THURSDAY SUPPORT GROUP

Explore both Modern & Traditional forms of beadwork and other Traditional crafts. Thursday afternoons from 3:00pm to 5:00pm in the South Conference room, Call Mark @ 532-6811 ex. 249. For info or sign up.

MOTHERS STRONG GROUP

New Moms Supporting New Moms
Through Baby's Challenging First Year!
Contact Brittany to sign up
(530) 532-6181

HISTORY KEEPERS

Elders group, 55 and older
Tuesdays 12:30pm to 1:15pm
For more information or to attend,
Call Ashley @ 532-6811 ex. 270

RED ROAD TO WELLBRIETY MEETING

For those that have suffered alcoholism and drug addiction and other forms of self-defeating behaviors, you can walk the 12 steps of the Red Road to recovery.
**WEEKLY MEETINGS ON WEDNESDAY @ 6.00 PM
@ FEATHER RIVER TRIBAL HEALTH
530-534-5394
EVERYONE IS WELCOME!**

LOCAL DV SERVICES

FOCIS PROGRAM SERVICES

Advocacy Services, Restraining Order assistance, court accompaniment, Community education and in-service training, Crisis intervention services, Women's Talking Circles, Resource information & referral service.
Feather River Tribal Health 530-534-5394 ext. 270

Catalyst DV Services

24-hour hotline for DV intervention & referrals, Emergency Shelter, Children's Program at HAVEN, Transitional Housing & Household establishment Drop-in centers, Individual counseling, Support groups, Restraining Order assistance & Court Accompaniment, Community Outreach.
24-Hour Hotline 800-895-8476 Oroville Drop-in Center 530-532-6427

SHARP (Self Help and Referral Program)

Self Help center that provides general assistance to people who do not have attorneys. Assistance is provided in the areas of family law, guardianships, evictions, small claims, name changes, and restraining orders.
1675 Montgomery Street Oroville, 530-532-7015



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