

**Voices That Echo: Three Narratives About Abused Women  
And How Education Levels Impacted Their Lives**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Education  
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Education  
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**Voices That Echo:**  
**Three Narratives About Abused Women**  
**And**  
**How Education Levels Impacted Their Lives**

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

If there is a key to change and empowerment for women it will be through education (Tahir-Kheli, 2001, p.1).

For many years I was a victim of abuse. As a 60 year-old woman looking back at what made a difference, I see that formal education, and the furthering of it, gave me the power to address the abuse that affected me. I also developed a keen interest in studying the issues of women in abusive relationships, the reasons women remain in abusive situations, and how women managed to leave the abusive relationships. Although research shows there are many reasons for family violence, the consequences of low education levels for women, in family violence situations, have not been thoroughly examined in Canada.

Health Canada, (2002) suggested that women without higher formal education, in abusive relationships, have fewer choices than those with high formal education. Women with less education find it difficult to make empowering life decisions. This is not to suggest however, that educated women are not abused. Rather, I am interested in understanding if and how higher formal education levels make a difference in the choices women make before getting into, living in, and eventually leaving abusive relationships.

## The Aim of this Study

Drawing from personal experience and using ethnographic narrative inquiry, I will relate the stories of three women who entered into relationships that became abusive and how they lived in and survived the abuse. The women's economic status played a major role in the decision to stay or leave the relationships. Without a higher education and/or training that would have provided employment and economic security the women tended to stay with their abusive spouses longer than should have been tolerated (Evans, 1990; Mandell, 1998; Turner, 1990).

The women in this study left abusive situations and depended on low incomes or social assistance to survive. They lived at what would be considered the poverty line in Canada (Status of Women Canada, 2004). The abused women entered family court with the belief that their abusive partners must support their children. Too late they discovered the decisions made by the courts were not always enforced. Men who abused their partners often did not pay child support or alimony. Mandell (1998) states, "The legal system, for example, has repeatedly responded to intimate violence with suspended sentence and inadequate follow-up (p. 143).

The aim of this study was to explore the significance of the formal education levels of abused women; the intersections between their everyday life decisions before, during and after abusive relationships; and to what degree their economic dependence on the offender kept them in abusive relationships. Specifically, I wanted to understand the to which extent does formal education levels empower women to make life changing decisions.

## Focus of this Study

Most of the research regarding intimate partner abuse pertains to family backgrounds, low self-esteem, poverty, frustrations over job losses, physical, social, and political factors and other influences such as stringent religious beliefs regarding man and woman relationships or the abuse of alcohol and drugs (Mandell, 1998). This study explored another piece of this enigma; the education levels of battered women who want to get out of abusive relationships.

Statistics Canada (2002) examined the impacts and consequences of family violence on victims. The study revealed 62% of Canadians believe that family violence is more serious today than 10 years ago and that the courts treat the cases of family violence too lightly. Statistics show traditional services that evolved from this research have not helped women to be safe in or out of intimate relationships. In fact, battered women are in the most danger when they decide to leave. The Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence Prevention (2001) stated that 97% of Prince Edward Islanders surveyed believed if family violence occurs once, it will happen again. The phenomena of family violence and specifically wife abuse have not stopped even though there have been numerous interventions and better legislation over the last 50 years in Canada (Bradford, 2001).

Research showed that women's value, influence, and economic security are less than that of men whether in abusive situations or not (Mandell, 1998). Younger women are valued more than older women and as women age their influence and security lessens (Wolfe, 1997). For many women the most noticeable areas of hardship are in the education and training fields for employment. (Mandell (1998) states, "Women are often

left out of studies using a functional framework or allotted the position of housewife” (p. 241). Health Canada (1999) states that females are still being discouraged from entering non-traditional jobs. They cannot always get training for positions with higher wages in public or private sector jobs. It frequently takes more years for women to work their way into the same levels of powerful and secure positions as males. Young men are more often streamlined into powerful and secure positions in agencies, cabinets, boards, commissions, and as law partners, bank managers, or chief executive officers (Lott, 1987; Mandell, 1998; Turner, 1990). For any number of reasons, men in similar jobs with similar educations advance at a faster pace than women.

Women of .com: A Service Provided by Pro Solutions (2004) suggests that a glass ceiling prevents females from making advancements in employment and in higher wage positions. They add that in many situations women are experiencing glass walls because they do not have the background education or training that prepare them for executive positions. Groups working from a feminist and critical perspective have worked very hard to make changes; yet, many women in Canada do not have full access to opportunities that would help them establish economically comfortable lives. The Status of Women Canada, (2004) suggests:

The structural nature of gender and family relations influences women’s educational careers and thus income potential at multiple points throughout their life course. This is detrimental for low-income women particularly single mothers . . . they have the fewest resources and opportunities (p.15).

Vogel, (2000) states women received only 73 cents for every dollar men earned in 2000. The gap between the earnings of men and women has worsened over the last ten years with cutbacks in education, health, social services, and privatization of public



sector jobs and there are now more part-time jobs for women with low wages and no benefits (Morris, 2004). Women may experience abuse in personal relationships but equally abusive is the poverty and inequality outside the relationship. Lack of economic security makes it very difficult for women wanting out of abusive relationships (Health Canada, 1999).

Many women who work outside the home face additional burdens with household responsibilities and unpaid family duties. For women in lone-parent families, daycare must be paid out of an already small pay cheque. "Many of the mothers we interviewed lack marketable skills that could improve their economic security" (Status of Women Canada, 2004). In situations where abusive husbands continue to create obstacles by fighting over child-care payments and alimony, the stresses for single mothers are overwhelming. Women in abusive relationships who do not have the education or training to achieve economic security, are still expected, by society, to take their children and leave the violence as soon as it begins (Donner, Busch, & Fontaine, 2002). Lone-parent women are now often expected to do by themselves what once they did as a family group.

As Tahir-Kheli (1980) argues, the key to change for women is through education. From her perspective females must have career choices and employment opportunities that will allow for financial independence rather than being funneled into secondary, low paying jobs. Education toward this change must occur at the earliest grades so females can develop a positive self-esteem that will enhance their lives, as they advance through school, college, or university. Research indicates that relying on voluntary compliance for educational equity and job/pay equity for women has not worked. Seemingly, there is

a need for legislation to force public and private institutions to give women equal access to education and employment (Mandell, 1998; Tahir-Kheli, 2001). The lack of education limits the freedom for women to make choices in a male-privileging culture. Research suggests that males still have more power and prestige simply because they have been given more power and prestige (Mandell, 1998; Wolfe, 1997).

## Potential Significance of the Study

This study, told in narrative from the perspective of life experiences, may potentially give a deeper understanding of domestic violence in relation to society. Through organizations such as Status of Women and Women's Network this study may stimulate conversation about family violence and it may shed light on the commonly held misconceptions about family violence. It may give hope to women in family crisis, who want to leave the violence. As well, it may educate people interested in the welfare of abused women. People who have never experienced family violence situations may understand more fully that psychological abuses and indescribable fear are major factors that keep women in the abuse. This study could potentially help females to understand the significance of education in their early years and encourage positive changes in educational policy for females. Potentially, readers may develop a greater understanding of the circumstances of victims in family violence situations and hopefully understand why abused women need help, rather than derision. It is my hope that educators will consider curriculum regarding the signs of family violence at the junior high level if not earlier.

## Limitations of the Study

Finding women to speak about personal abuse was difficult and for this reason ethnic groups are not represented in this study. Female immigrants may often become Canadian citizens but in some cultures they are still controlled by their spouses. "Women and children have long been considered the property, sexual and otherwise of men" (Mandell, 1998, p. 143). In some cultures abuse to women is often a way of life and they are afraid to discuss their lives because it could mean death. Mandell states that, "Intimate femicide is not peculiar to Canada" (p. 139). Women who were raised to believe what takes place in the privacy of the home should be kept in the privacy of the home are at great risk if and when they speak out (National Film Board Canada, 1994). It was difficult to find women who would participate in this study because most of the women I contacted did not want their stories documented. The women who did participate spoke about their own experiences and their words are not intended to be representative of all abused women.

Some women define abuse as being battered and very often do not regard other types of abuse as being harmful. "One of the greatest accomplishments of modern feminism has been 'naming' and the exposure of the violence women endure" (Mandell, 1998, p. 142). Women subject to abuse at home often anticipate abuse outside the home and on the job. They assume when others have economic and hierarchal power over them not much can be done about it (Bradbury, 1993). "They described feelings of being depressed, angry, fearful, embarrassed, confused, ashamed, hopeless, and humiliated or developing low self-esteem, self-blame and uncertainty" (Lutenbacher, Cohen, & Mitzel, 2003, p. 59). Even with all the feelings that point to abuse, many women do not have a

clear enough understanding to name or define the various abuses in intimate relationships.

In Prince Edward Island, some women are afraid to speak out because they live in close proximity to the offender. Other women live in rural areas where it takes longer to get emergency help if they need it. The consequences of speaking out could be devastating to the victim because they are often brutalized or killed by angry partners (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). Some women are afraid to question religious institutions even when they know the indoctrination is negative (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000). Women who believe men are the heads of the house, the chosen sex, or next to deity have great difficulty breaking away from religious beliefs because they are already, frequently very submissive to the men in their lives (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000). Finding women who will speak about their personal abusive experiences was difficult and this study was limited by the willingness of women to volunteer to participate.

Many researchers do specific studies because they have personal interest in the specific study. Marshall and Rossman propose that the, "Three major purposes for research: to explore, explain and describe the phenomenon of interest" (1999, p. 33). Bias is a part of every study because most researchers start out with their own personal ideas and thoughts about subjects they are researching. As studies deepen, new information and ideas allow for first opinions to change. Though this may not be always the case, bias is more likely to be reduced with more information. Bias can, and will, affect the outcome of any research study if researchers are not aware of their personal bias. When the researcher is part of the story, as I am, it may be difficult not to lean

toward bias because bias is inescapable (Marshall & Rossman, 2000).

## Significance for the Researcher

I began this study about family violence and the abuse of women with one idea. I wanted to know if lack of formal education in my youth made my life unaccommodating throughout the last 40 years. As I studied the work of other researchers, talked and listened to professors and victims, I realized there were many other factors that caused the problems I had experienced throughout my life. As I researched, I discovered that the problems came to me in stages and layers. The more I dug for answers, the more information I uncovered about my life.

At age 60, I am beginning the “golden years” with expensive housing and low income. There is no doubt that I will be struggling in my government pensioned years on low income. Already, I have had 24 years of struggling following a bad marriage, separation, divorce, and poverty line living that created serious hardships raising a child. I worked for over 30 years, in a job I disliked. There were no pensions or benefits at the end of those 30 years even though most of those years were in provincial government positions. I did not always have the education or job skills to find another type of employment that would support my son and myself. I eventually returned to school and university but in the short and long term that has not significantly increased my income.

Throughout this study, I searched for answers in the various stages of childhood, home life and religious practices. As I dug deeper, I realized my parents were under-educated and sometimes abusive or neglectful. Due to their personal circumstances my parents offered me little support. During my teen years and as a young adult I felt they could have done more for the females in the family. As I have grown older and my own situation has deepened my awareness of my parent’s circumstances, I realize they did the

best they could with what they had. Older siblings and relatives have confirmed this. My parents raised us with the tools and skills they learned from their own under-educated parents. All nine children in my family were hard workers but we all had low paying positions in the workforce. My siblings did very little to support each other during our youth because we were all struggling to survive. The strong, deep love that many families rely on in crisis was not part of our younger years, and in some cases in our family, that deep sibling love is still not there.

During my teen years I was exposed to some tyrannical teachers, unwelcoming institutions, insincere religious leaders, snooty neighbours, and uncountable other obstacles. I suspect more formal education in youth would have helped me through the different stages of life in a knowing manner and with more ease. I suspect I would have been spent less time trying to get to this stage of understanding. I surmise I developed a low self-esteem at a very young age in my home environment. The social and community environment seemed to confirm what I already felt about myself. This increased my sense of frustration.

I felt subordinate to people with wealth, with higher social profiles, with more education, with better training and with superior employment. Although I belonged to various social groups in my teens, I was never a part of the preppy group or in-crowd. I never had the education, clothes, or money to be part of that group. When I could not meet my own needs I allowed other people, to control what they thought I needed, even when it was negative affirmation.

I believed I did not deserve better and my beliefs and thoughts reinforced a sense of insecurity. I have often wondered if I was unknowingly more vulnerable to being



abused. On a deeper level I felt like I could do better if I was given the opportunity. I dreamed about and wanted an easier life than my parents and married siblings experienced. On a daily logical level I reasoned that without more education and a better job I would never reach high middle class or low upper class. I suspect that lack of higher formal education, poor life skills and lack of training for first-rate work positions were obstacles throughout my life. As I moved through this project I realized I had only once totally depended on one person in my life, my husband. That was a big mistake on my part because he did not give me the support I expected from him. Except for the support from my son, I now depend solely on myself because I do not know who I can trust in my life.

After years of trying to find answers I finally understood that abused, single, and married woman like me, find it more difficult to move on and up when they lack confidence. They often are unable to leave negative situations because they either lack the knowledge to understand the situation, or they lack the life skills to make a decision. When the decision to leave is made, it is difficult to act upon it because even with the knowledge they have acquired they are often unsure of themselves.

I believe I now look at life differently than people who have walked a smoother path. The people who have not endured similar hardships very often do not understand my thought processes. Although life was not easy for me, I developed an inner strength that influenced my "never give up" attitude. Because I was considered academically stupid by teachers in my youth and I considered myself stupid, I developed many artistic talents. I was just trying to prove to the world I was okay. Very often I have insight into both sides of most situations, and I easily weed out what is fact and what is fiction.

When I assess the character of people, I am not often wrong.

Although the memory of the hurt is often fresh, I have learned to forgive most people for the pain they have caused me. These personal characteristics may influence my opinion one way or another in this study. However, I have learned to welcome new ideas. I am now more flexible and I find it easier to take advice and learn something new through other people.

## Chapter 2

### Personal Biography

At age 50 I could not figure out what had happened in my life or in my marriage. Throughout my life I could not describe my feelings or what psychological abuse had done to my spirit. I had been legally separated from my former husband for three years when I saw a cartoon in a textbook. The exchange of words between Charlie Brown and Lucy described how I felt.

Lucy to Charlie Brown: "Life is full of choices. You may choose if you wish to throw a snowball at me. Now if you choose to throw a snowball at me, I will pound you right into the ground. If you choose not to throw a snowball at me, your head will be spared."  
Charlie Brown: "Life is full of choices, but you never get any" (Corey, 1983, p. 4).

This study and my personal story led to a novel (unpublished) based on my life journey. I began to examine my life from my first memory until the time of this study and it was a long journey in this quest for answers. This has been an enlightening because I discovered there were many factors and influences that led to my situation especially in my youth, when I had no control over many circumstances. During the critical examination of my life I realized my biases were many. Because I have developed a very deep understanding of the issues that comprise my story, I have a good understanding of the participants' stories. This understanding would not be possible if I was an unaffected bystander.

### Family

I am interested in this topic because I was a victim of different abuses, in many areas of my life, from youth until now. I came from a large, poor family of five girls and

four boys. When I was six or seven years old my oldest brother and one older sister lived at home for short periods of time. My five oldest siblings were gone from home by the time I was in Grade 2. I grew up with one older brother and two younger brothers. I suspect we were poor because my parents often did not get paid enough money for their long, daily labour and when their wages were higher, in my opinion, they had difficulty managing the money.

Education was assumed to be more important for the male members of our family. My parents believed their five daughters would get married and their husbands would take care of them. Dad always said, "Why waste the time and money on an education for girls, they are going to get married anyway." I have heard this same story from many other women in my age group.

Shepherd (1993) relates that, in the 1950s and early 1960s, success for a woman was defined as an advantageous marriage. Shepherd's father would not pay for her secondary education and he would not reveal his salary so she could apply for a scholarship. Her mother worked to financially help her through university (p.32). A woman in another study by the Status of Women Canada, (2004), confirmed:

I wasn't getting a lot of support or encouragement at home, (regarding her schooling). In fact I was basically told by my parents that it wasn't as important for me to succeed as it was my brothers (p.12).

The first 16 years of my life were spent at home and school, and during some of my teenage years I spent time in church activities. Although, my parents never beat me there was physical abuse toward my brothers by my father. There was verbal abuse from my father, who seemed to be angry all the time. Many men in my father's generation were "cultured to control" (Evans, 1993) and when my father raised his voice, everyone

in our house jumped. Children were to be seen and not heard. My father threatened my brothers and me if we cried or if we laughed. I do not think I have ever screamed in my life because we were not allowed to scream. My parents considered talking back disrespectful, and there was no debate in our home. I was silenced at a very young age and, because I was silenced, I believe I never learned to defend myself.

At a very early age in most social settings I was subjected to teasing, bullying and other types of abuse. The neighbours' prejudices toward me caused me great pain. As early as age five many neighbours did not want me near their children or in their houses. They often told me to, "Go home." Jo Goodwin (1996) explains that this often happens to poor children. I was omitted from children's party lists and at age five I unknowingly crashed a birthday party.

## Church

By Grade 3, I had heard many nice Bible stories in school. I presumed church was a haven. My opinion changed after I joined some of the church groups. Church was no different than school. I was often overlooked and rarely chosen for anything in Sunday school, choir, and the girls youth group. Maybe the leaders recognized my shyness, or maybe there were other reasons that related to being poor? There was an unspoken dress code for church but poor girls like me had to wear what they had. The preacher's wife criticized me for wearing red shoes to the Christmas vesper service. I was very upset over the criticism and I wish she had talked to my parents instead of me. My parents did not attend church, so I never told them or anyone else.

## School

At school, bullying by some teachers was a daily occurrence. It was usually

verbal abuse but not always. We were all familiar with the strap. I was especially affected in junior high when my peers were being disrespected by a teacher or harassed by peers. I was embarrassed for them and fearful for myself. Weiner, (1985) speaks about this type of abuse in schools. In Grade 8, a teacher beat me with a yardstick. I returned home with welts on my back and lumps on my head. My parents came to my defense and the trustees of the school were involved. My parents never discussed with me what happened. This episode caused trouble for the principal, who a year later in Grade 9, harassed me incessantly and humiliated me in front of other students in the class. Almost everyday, this man told a group of students, including me, "Go out and dig ditches because you are never going anywhere." Weiner (1985) speaks about the abuses toward girls of all ages, by males, (including male teachers) during their school years. The abuse by the principal in Grade 9 ended my formal education for many years. I dropped out of school in May 1960. I felt very sad because I had loved school and I loved learning. My parents did not seem too upset because leaving home while young and getting a job was more or less expected. (The Status of Women Canada (2004) states:

By not providing adequate social capital, parents inadvertently interfere with the ability of their children to reach their educational potential, thus increasing the likelihood they will encounter economic disadvantages throughout life (p. 5).

### Summer Holidays

That summer (1960) I went to my oldest sister's farm. Looking back I realize my self-esteem was fragile. I learned all kinds of new things that summer but I was miserable. I felt like a social misfit amongst the young crowd who were returning to school. I was terrified when my sister asked me to enter some type of beauty contest. I

had nightmares and hid from neighbours who I thought might pressure me. My self-esteem was at an all time low and my shyness added to my feelings of failure.

Turner (1990) explains that young girls often do not validate their own sense of wants and needs and often rely on other people's opinions. I had grown up believing that my parents, teachers, and people in the church knew what was best for me. Even when I did not agree with them, I abided by their decisions because I was young and full of fear. I had been treated like an adult but I was just a scared 16 year-old girl. I realize now that I was too young and naive to make the decision to leave school. As the summer came to a close I realized I did not want to quit school. I just wanted the problem fixed.

My oldest sister thought I should take a job as a nanny in Boston. In fact, she sent me for an interview but the employer told me to go back to school. Back with my parents there was no talk about returning to school. I was so confused I did not know what to think or what to do. In September, when my parents returned from vacation they thought I should go to work. The Status of Women Canada, (2004) reports, "The qualitative data suggests there are numerous ways through which parental absence may decrease educational attainment" (p. 5). My parents did not talk to me about what would be best for me. They carried on with their lives as if nothing had happened to me. For many years I believed they had detached themselves and did not care about my future. Years later I learned my father had a very nasty fight with the principal and he realized the principal was not going to soften his negative treatment toward me.

### First Job

In October 1960, my father got me low paying employment, as a nurse's aide, at a hospital. I began to work at 7am on November 1, 1960. I was a 16 year-old child

entering an adult world and trying to be an adult. From the first day on the job, I knew this was not the job for me. I detested the long 12-hour split shifts. There was an endless list of rules to learn and follow and they differed with each charge nurse. I felt contempt for the hierarchy that demeaned me and identified me as a nurse's aide rather than a person. Cruel words and looks of disdain tore at my soul. The little bit of self-esteem I possessed was soon gone. I began to verbally abuse myself to the point of self-hate. To keep the job, I buried my hurt and rage. Evans (1993) states self-criticism is a very common practice when women are repeatedly criticized (p.159).

The uniforms worn by most of the hospital staff identified their position in the hierarchy. I wore a green uniform and a white bib and apron. Each group of people with different coloured uniforms stayed within their own class/level on that hierarchy. When I sat with friends on the cleaning staff my supervisor told me, "Nursing staff are not allowed to sit with cleaning staff." I, in the mean time, was cleaning toilets. I enjoyed working with most of the patients and many of them praised me for my efforts. I got through each day because they were good to me.

There was no union to protect anyone from anything and this very strict hierarchal system in the nursing profession made my life almost unbearable. Although many people have tried to change the hierarchal structure, it is still used in most organizations (Sergiovanni, 1992). I suffered emotional and verbal abuse from many staff members above my station and sometimes student nurses. Physical abuse resulted from working 11 to 16 shifts without a break and being kept overtime without pay. I felt like I did not have a life outside of work. Work ran reasonably smooth as long as there was compliance on my part, but I was at a disadvantage if I showed any resistance. The work



for a nurse's aide was hard, heavy, and dirty. I felt totally exhausted from the endless walking. Because there was no union and no protection for the average worker, I felt enslaved by the employer (Bradbury, 1993; Lott, 1987). I developed a worry and fear that never left me.

## Moving On

I was young, naïve, and under-educated. I did not know how to prepare for the future. In the 1960s apprenticeship programs were popular. When hospital began to phase out nurse's aides I took a one-year Licensed Nursing Assistant course through an apprenticeship program with the hospital. I graduated as a Licensed Nursing Assistant in 1963. After completing a one-year contract with the hospital, I moved to Vancouver Island in British Columbia in the autumn of 1964.

In my youthful ignorance I believed if I went to another hospital, my life would be better. I found employment at a newly opened general hospital. At the time there were no Licensed Nursing Assistants or Registration Board in British Columbia. I was a nurse's aide again. Even with a strong union, it was not long before I experienced the same type of abuses. There were complaints at every union meeting about our supervisors and superiors. The majority of union members complained at almost every meeting that non-professional staff was blamed for almost everything that went wrong.

Even though I was still very backward in comparison to city girls, I enjoyed everything outside the hospital. My social skills improved. I learned to dance. I tried to drive a standard shift Volkswagen. I drank wine and discovered that "rye with ginger" was an alcoholic drink. I attended parties on ships from all over the world, sailed Loveland Lake, climbed switchbacks to a ski lodge and visited the Okanagan Valley on

holidays. I learned about religious sects (Mennonites & Hutterites) and other religions. I ate German, Russian, and Chinese food, drank brewed coffee, watched forest fires through field glasses and learned to love the mountains. I lived life like every day was my last. Despite all the good times, working five days a week at a job I did not like was depressing.

I got homesick and one year later I moved back to Prince Edward Island. I was hired on the same unit at the hospital that I had left a year earlier. I was still unhappy and had bouts of depression. I had absolutely no social life. I was constantly searching but I never knew quite what I was seeking. I did not know what was wrong with me. I felt a bit more independent but I beat myself up mentally everyday. I needed help to get out of the awful job but I did not know where to go for help. Nothing was resolved.

In the autumn of 1966, I moved to Ontario. I found work in a nursing home but the working conditions were worse than what I had left and the segregation in the cafeteria was degrading. I quit that job at noon the same day. I became employed at a large general hospital but it was so impersonal I resigned two months later when I was hired in a dental clinic. The staff at the dental clinic consisted of Licensed Nursing Assistants and Dental Nurses. There were no threats of being fired and I worked permanent days, and had evenings, holidays and weekends off. However, the wages were 50% less than government institutions and I was living at the poverty line. I felt hopeless and (Mandell, 1998) identifies this when she states:

The majority of poor women haven't a hope of a career which is personally satisfying, financially rewarding or even pleasant. Mostly we get jobs. And our jobs give us no prestige or power, very little pay and often are very bad for our health. (p. 48)

I believe I never had a choice when it came to having a career or vocation.

## Dental Assistant

I did not want to be a dental nurse. I did not know what I wanted to do but I did know that low pay and early morning shifts were not what I wanted. I developed a strong dislike for the doctors after witnessing staff being verbally abused. At the time I did not realize it was verbal abuse but I did know that I did not like it. Working in this dental clinic was like a nightmare that continued day after day. The desire to get out of nursing became even stronger. I did not have the money to go back to school and without Grade 12 education I could not find work that paid enough to support myself. There was no one who would help me and I did not know how to help myself. I did nothing.

I was 24 years old. I hated my life as a poor person. I went without necessities like decent food, so I could save money. With a small loan from a bank I went to Europe on a three-week holiday with a Baptist tour. When I got back it seemed to take forever to repay the bank two hundred dollars. I worked for two dentists who were very wealthy but there were no dental, health or drug plans and no pension. "Poor women are virtually washed out of social consciousness by their invisibility" (Mandell, 1998, p, 48). My choices were: to work three shifts at a hospital (which I hated) with better pay and benefits or continue at the dental clinic (which I tolerated) five days a week, with low pay, and no benefits. My choice was a cement wall or brick wall.

By 1968 I realized my life was never going to get any better. I had worked more than seven years full-time and still lived at or below the poverty line. I suddenly understood why many of my girl friends got married at age 20. I understood that change for me could come only through marriage. I was willing to work but I knew my salary would always be secondary to a man's salary. Although, I was more educated than many

of the men I dated, they made triple the wages in similarly low-level jobs. Luxton (1980) understood very clearly how many women in my generation and older were knowingly or unknowingly nudged toward marriage when she states:

In some ways there is a basic economic compulsion to marriage and women's low wages keep the nuclear family together. Though women marry on the basis of free choice they have very few real alternatives because of how alternatives are structured. By associating themselves with men who are earning relatively higher wages, women probably have a higher standard of living. (p. 44)

## Marriage

I do not think I ever knowingly sat down and thought about how I could live better whether married or not. I do think I wanted to be married because I would not be alone in these circumstances. I was sick of dating and most of my friends had been married for five or more years. At age 25, I married a man who I had been dating for almost two years. He was 13 years older than me. At the time I believed I wanted to spend the rest of my life with this man. Even though I had more education than him when we met, he had a job with an annual income that was three times more than mine.

Even after two years of dating I did not realize that he was under-educated, insecure and functioned on even more fear than I felt. Prior to marriage he was critical of many things I did or said. During the first years of marriage I was the victim of his criticism. I felt depressed about the way I was being treated but I did not know how to defend myself. I wept.

My husband had decided to take upgrading before I met him and during our 13 years of marriage he continued with college part-time. He was eventually promoted to a better job and earned higher wages in a medium sized factory. As his education level rose he became more demanding. Always self-centred, his criticism was endless and

ongoing. As long as there was compliance on my part, life ran rather smoothly (similar to my first job). However, I could not express an opinion without being criticized. He thought he was right. Verbal abuse escalated to pushing and shoving. At first I pushed back with my voice and body but eventually I just stopped talking to him whenever he became upset with me. I was always wrong anyway, so why bother arguing. He became angry that I gave him the silent treatment but I did not know what to say to him. I knew it was not going to change his opinion of me. I cried. He became angry.

My husband was the main breadwinner. He controlled everything and made almost every decision. I had very little say about anything because he always misinterpreted my actions as wanting to control him. I did everything I could think of to please this man but it was never enough. Luxton (1980) states, "On some level all of the woman's work takes into account her husband's preference. What to buy, what to cook, what to wear, after all it was his money" (p. 51). Eventually, I realized I could give him the world on a gold platter but he would ask for silver. Luxton, (1980) has a true sense of what is happening in this male dominated house when she states:

Because they are responsible for the household subsistence, men often feel that they have the right to control the arrangements of the household and people who live there. Structured into household relations therefore is a "petty tyranny" which allows the man to dominate his wife and children. p. 65)

My husband thought I was weak but there was no way to show him a bruised and dying spirit. Whenever I voiced my opinion, I was ridiculed. He said I talked too much, laughed too loud, repeated sentences or words and cried too much. I realize now it was his sense of insecurity, shyness and own low self-esteem that picked on me but I did not understand at the time. His famous reply to almost everything was, "I can't help you."

Evans (1993) states, "Even when you know it is not your fault, you silently abuse yourself" (p.159). I did abuse myself. I beat my legs until they were black and blue and cried wondering why I could not do anything right. Although some people use silence as control I used silence as a weapon to defend myself when he was angry or when he lectured me. I had been told repeatedly by my parents, "What happens in the house stays in the house." My husband reinforced this belief.

Even though I hated the job in the dental clinic I returned to work three days per week after our son was born. My husband expected me to work outside the home but I really wanted to get away from home to counter-act the powerlessness I felt at home. I felt isolated. I cried almost every day. I wanted to leave the marriage when our child was six weeks old and again when he was nine months old but my husband convinced me to stay.

### Opportunity Knocks

In the autumn of 1976, a neighbour who knew I wanted to get out of nursing offered me a free keypunch computer course with a large Canadian company. I jumped at this opportunity with great enthusiasm because this was my chance to do work of my choice. I began training three evenings per week after working an eight-hour shift in the dental clinic. At the end of the second week, I arrived home to find our son alone, lying in the back seat of the car, in the dark, crying and terrified. His father had gone to visit a neighbour next door and had given no thought to our son. I was very upset.

There was no co-operation from my husband. There was no help in the home or with the care of our child. Emotionally and physically I was already worn down. I was working eight-hour days and going for four hours of training, three evenings a week after

work. I felt I had supported this man in every way I could throughout his school years but there was absolutely no support regarding my computer classes. He complained about missing golf. The baby-sitter complained about the long hours. Although there was plenty of argument here for what I should or should not have done, there really seemed to be no choice but to quit the course.

It was one of the most painful periods of my life. I was very depressed, frustrated and angry. I felt that familiar rage inside whenever I passed the computer business. This job might have changed my life. I wept for days. I felt like Francine, the protagonist in *The Burning Bed* (McNulty, 1980). Mickey had emptied her school bag in a heap. Francine watched while weeks of school work was destroyed. Mickey said, "Now take it out to the burn barrel and burn the whole lot" (p.186).

### The End of Job and Marriage

In 1976, I was laid off my job due to a court case at the dental office. I was finally free of nursing but at home I was made to feel worthless. My husband's words were, "You sit on your lazy butt all day while I work." I was already in shock after working for so many years and being laid off. I did not know anything about unemployment insurance. I felt like a total loser. The receptionist at the Unemployment Office told me to follow the coloured lines on the floor to get where I needed to go. I wanted to tell her where to go and the whole world along with her.

Losing my job was the beginning of the end of the marriage. Small hospitals in Ontario were being closed and this caused a shortage of nursing jobs. I could not work shifts because my husband wanted me home evenings so he could do whatever he wanted to do. I applied at restaurants, clothing stores, shoe factories, dental offices and many

other places. I felt this desperate need to work and this desperation drove me to apply for any job I thought I could do. I eventually found work at a large lingerie company, cutting lace, at home, for approximately 50-70 cents an hour. Cutting lace was usually done by immigrants who could not speak English. I took the job because the little bit of money I did earn was mine. Depending on the type of lace, I would work about 60 hours to make \$30.00.

At the time I still did not realize I was being abused. I reasoned to myself that I had tolerated this type of treatment in some form all my life and it would just take another level of adjustment. My head told me to leave the marriage but by this time fear kept me from leaving. I spent many hours, days, evenings and week-ends by myself. Neighbours gossiped about my being alone so much. It was during this time that I realized I had never fit anywhere in my husband's life or plans. Those were dark days for me with greater fear and more depression.

On my knees, I prayed incessantly that life would change for the better but it never really got better. I learned there were just more hoops to jump through as I tried to change my life. I learned to drive a car although I rarely got the opportunity to drive. I took out a membership at the local library. I read incessantly about battered women, single mothers, and how to raise a child by myself. I quit smoking, started walking, jogging, and biking to keep my sanity. I went to high school one night a week and completed Grade 12. When my husband refused to pick me up from school I made threats about our car so he would pick me up at 9pm.

He told me often that my son and I were weighing him down. I had no hope for the marriage after my husband physically beat me. He wanted us out of his life but he



made no effort to sell the house or sign the papers when I had the realtors come to the house. I decided to leave even if it meant taking only the clothes on my back. (Luxton (1980) discovered from her research that:

Women put up with this abuse because there are not enough public resources, police often consider the abuse a domestic squabble, women have few economic resources, and often the church say marriage is until death do you part (p. 69).

## Moving Back Home

It was 1982. I did not know where to go. Leaving the financial security my husband provided was very difficult. By this time I understood that economic benefits were luxuries and it was difficult giving them up. However, I moved with my son back to Prince Edward Island because I believed it would be easier to raise him in a small community. My son hated me for leaving all that he loved.

I received little support from my parents. My mother thought I should have stayed in the marriage for "better or worse." Many of my siblings avoided me because they feared I would ask for something. There was no support for me and even less for my son. Most of my siblings did not want to hear about my reasons for separation. A few of them did not believe me. Some of them ridiculed me and overall my family made it very difficult. That was only the beginning of the hardships.

With the money from the sale of our house I bought a second-hand car and a mobile home. I had a television, a trunk, stove, fridge, wash machine, and the two lawn chairs my father had given me. There was a hollow echo in the empty trailer. There were no beds and my son and I slept on the floor. Our parents taught us to do without when there was no money and I did without a lot of things those first years. I hated my former husband, my life and myself. I lived only to raise my child.

Most studies regarding abused women identify fear as a major factor in abusive relationships (Evans, 1998). There was no end to my fears. I learned to contend with the reality-based fears but the unknown fears overwhelmed me. I cried all the time. I worried that my crying would affect my son. I worried about finances. I had nightmares about my husband's verbal abuse and I had flashbacks of fearful moments. After these moments I was depressed for about three days. I feared the dark. I suspect the outside world would have compared me to a tightened spring ready to fly apart but inside I felt like mush.

I had completed Grade 12 in Ontario. With resume in hand, I went looking for work. Emotionally I was in no condition to be looking for work or even working but I applied for many positions that were advertised in the local newspaper and at Manpower. I received dozens of rejection letters or no reply at all. Without a job and no training for any other type of work I was economically compelled to return to nursing. It took several years to get a Licensed Nursing Assistant refresher course but in the meantime I was unemployed. I was looking at welfare by November 1982.

### Work. . . School. . . Job Creation. . . Unemployment

A professor at our church hired me for a six-month, term position through Social Services and the Job Creation Program. The professor was a very kind, understanding man, who seemed to understand my physical and my emotional limits. He allowed me to take my work home so I could be with my son on school holidays. I was so appreciative of his kindness. As a history researcher at the University of Prince Edward Island I worked for minimum wage. I loved the research, the books and the library. I suspect that is where the desire for higher education began. When this project was completed, I had

one year of low (\$105.00 per week) unemployment insurance benefits. Trying to make ends meet was a nightmare.

## Harassment

Eventually, I took the Licensed Nursing Assistant refresher course. By the summer of the next year I was employed in a part-time position in a nursing home. The first day on the job I was treated like an outcast by staff. Their attitude did not ease over the next six months. The Licensed Nursing Assistants who had worked on-call for two or three years had applied for the part-time positions that were advertised. Some of them expected to be hired in the part-time positions. I had come from Ontario; had just completed a refresher course; had not worked on-call but I had been hired. The regular staff was not happy with me getting one of the positions. In fact, one LNA told me I took her position. I had no idea at the time how the system of hiring was managed. All I was told was that I had higher marks than some of the others at the interview. Though I had a job, it came with a lot of repercussions.

I understood why I was being treated so badly after an older Licensed Nursing Assistant explained the hiring system to me. I could not give up my job so one of them could have a part-time position. Some of them were married and had two pays coming into one home while I was a single mother. As I recall an older friendlier LNA told me that the supervisors and other staff knew whom they could harass. Too often it was single mothers who needed the jobs and the supervisors knew many of these women would endure almost anything to keep their jobs. The same LNA told me that this type of treatment had happened many times to other women at this institution. Some female workers were picked on just because they were poor. I felt better knowing there was a

problem and it was not entirely my fault.

With her friendship I survived the harassment. I had little or no understanding of the hierarchy and as I continued my academic education I realized that some of the supervisors were not in touch with the workers. Some of the supervisors who worked with the Licensed Nursing Assistants and Resident Care Workers knowingly allowed the harassment. I was not part of the clique and I surmised there would be more trouble if I went to nursing office about the way I was being treated.

Sergiovanni, (1992) points out, "If the heart and head are separated from the hand, then the leader's actions, decisions and behaviours cannot be understood" (p.7). In this case I believed it was failure of good leadership. Sergiovanni, 1992) believes there are two reasons for failure with good leadership. The first is that people view leadership as behaviour rather than action, something psychological rather than spiritual, and having to do with people rather than ideas. Second, in trying to figure out what drives leadership the wrong things are overemphasized and professional and moral authority are often sorely neglected (p.3). Even though some nursing staff was not as trustworthy as was believed by the leadership, their word was certainly taken over mine. I became aware that little or no change in staff at institutions, year after year, gave them great power over new staff members.

I still cannot express how helpless, hopeless, and empty I felt when I was repeatedly called to the nursing office for innocent incidences that were insignificant to me and never pertained to my work. Some of the staff often reported parts of my conversations, almost always taken out of context. I seemed to be in trouble all the time without doing anything to make trouble for myself. Some supervisors overlooked my

peers, who smoked on the job and broke many rules. I never reported anything to nursing office because I trusted no one. One supervisor would walk a mile to get me to answer a call bell that was across from her desk. As stated by Occupational Health & Safety (2002) "Bullying usually involves repeated incidents or a pattern of behaviour that is intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group of people"

I did not complain to anyone about my circumstances because the union did not support on-call workers even though they took union dues off my cheques. After months of abuse I was suspicious of everyone. I no longer knew whom I should complain to and I no longer trusted my own judgements. This made going to work more than difficult. I told myself to quit but the union representative agreed that I had done nothing wrong. I stayed. I knew there was something wrong but I could never quite decide what it was. I did not realize I was being bullied and I did not know there was a name for it.

I had to fight to get paid the right amount whenever I worked extra shifts. There was a discrepancy of almost \$500.00 in two pay cheques. I dropped in to talk with the accountant three times in one month but I got nowhere. She kept telling me I was in the wrong pay period. All I knew was that I was working a lot and not getting paid. In this case the accountant had some hierarchal power and total control over my pay cheque. I felt oppressed. Freire (1968) calls these people "dominant elites" because they hold on to their power by exercising their power over the oppressed. One of the supervisors told me to make an appointment with the accountant. I made an appointment and took all my pay stubs and time schedules in with me. These documents confirmed she was wrong. With this proof I became an even greater outcast. After the pay cheque incident was resolved I

always signed a patient's chart as proof that I had worked.

I suffered in silence. One afternoon I was called to the nursing office at the beginning of the shift. There were a number of scathing reports written about me. The Director of Nursing read them to me. I recognized the authors and the incidents. As I quietly sobbed, the Director of Nursing picked up the ringing phone and talked and laughed with another nurse. There was no professional diplomacy and no sign of respect for me. I cried throughout the remainder of the shift. After this incident, when people were talking in groups I thought they were talking about me. I overheard them making fun of my deep voice and I was suspicious of everybody on the unit.

## Bullying

I could not logically put a name on what was happening to me until years later when I found a report on bullying. Through the Occupational Health and Safety reports about bullying and harassment on the job, I learned that the targets of bullying experience a wide range of effects. I had experienced all the offences that are named. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety brochures (2002) states people experience:

Shock, anger, feelings of frustration, helplessness, vulnerability, loss of confidence, inability to sleep, loss of appetite, stomach pains, headaches, panic or anxiety, especially about going to work, family tension and stress, inability to concentrate, low morale and productivity are feelings that most bullied people experience.

Although I had always felt I was being picked on, I had never experienced being "picked on" to that extent before. I was never so unhappy with an employer in my life and I did not know what to do. Looking back, I have often wondered how many hundreds of people have gone through similar situations and did not know what to do.

Just after I began work at this institution I had registered for a psychology course

at the University of Prince Edward Island. I thought if I could pass the first course I would continue toward a degree. I continued working part-time and went to class twice a week. I overheard negative statements by staff members. "She is just an LNA. Who the hell does she think she is, going to university?" Nothing came easy to me. Everything that could be done to hurt and humiliate me had already been done and there was nothing that could make my life worse. I believed I had nothing to lose.

It was March 1985. I could have written a book on the injustices of the seven months I worked at this institution. I was called to the nursing office repeatedly. The Director of Nursing and the administrator eventually told me that I had not passed the probationary period in this part-time position. Resign or be fired were the choices that were given to me. I resigned. A month or so later I received a letter from the Prince Edward Island Civil Service Commission telling me I would never be hired again as a Resident Care Worker. I had worked for Civil Service Commission for over seven months as a Licensed Nursing Assistant and they did not know my status.

After resigning I found the stress was overwhelming. I emotionally beat myself up everyday. The rejection I felt made me sick. At times I felt like I could not get out of bed. I cried everyday and some days I cried all day. According to Walker (1984) these types of feelings are not unusual. She reports that abused women are at high risk for depression. I had left spousal abuse and now I was enduring another type of abuse but it still did not register that it was abuse. I just felt like someone always had to "pick on" me. I was scared if I complained people would say I was a whiner. Many days I did not want to live. The barriers I faced seemed insurmountable. No one understood how hard it was to get through each day. People would tell me to, "Forget the past and get on with

your life.” I did not know how.

I knew I could not continue in nursing into my 50s because the physical labour was too heavy. The shift work, and being a single mother to a teenage boy, was already taking a toll on my health. I ate to fill a hole in my soul. Low wages buys high fat and high carbohydrate foods. I gained weight. I felt like getting drunken everyday but I did not have the money for alcohol. Even though I prayed incessantly there did not seem to be a solution to the problems.

I did a few weeks’ work at the local hospital. Some of the nursing staff treated me like an outcast. They went for breaks and lunch without me, never offered their help, did not answer when I asked a question and changed the subject when I talked. Sometimes they would just walk away as I was talking. They had their favourite on-call nursing assistants that they wanted to work with and I was not one of them. I did not to fit into the clique and the more I realized that I was not accepted the more depressed I felt. Some mornings I cried in every bathroom as I was looking after patients.

I struggled to complete an overwhelming amount of work by myself. I felt alone on almost every shift. Twice when I asked for emergency help (patient choking) on a unit the assistant head nurse told me to find my team leader. They showed no respect for my 25 years of experience in nursing. I told the assistant head nurse on one occasion that the patient could be dead by the time I found the team leader. I felt contempt for most of the head nurses. While I was struggling to complete my assignments one head nurse was on the phone making arrangements for a wedding party for her son or daughter. I was very upset and resentful and once again felt contempt for the hierarchy.

I blamed myself and felt very depressed over how I was being treated until a



patient's family noticed the disrespect toward me. They talked to me about it. They reminisced about the old way of nursing where every patient was staff responsibility whether assigned or not. They were not impressed with the younger nurses. A registered nurse on the psychiatric unit told me I had a depression mask and we discussed what was happening to me as an on-call Licensed Nursing Assistant. She had experienced the same type of treatment. When other people began to notice the disrespect toward me, I realized it was not my imagination. Only one head nurse noticed my problems and she was usually off on weekends. I was so happy when I no longer had to work at the hospital.

Eventually, my LNA refresher course instructor helped me get work in another nursing home. Even though I was happy to have the work, it seemed to me I would be employed as a Licensed Nursing Assistant until I died. I felt miserable but I learned to not think about it because I had to work to survive. I became an expert at stuffing and burying the things I felt I had no control over. I also learned to lash out to those with whom I felt safe. Sometimes my anger was aimed at my family, my former husband's family, oil companies, mechanics, or cashiers. Most of the time I cried to relieve the frustration.

I never applied for a permanent position in this institution. I was on employment insurance some of the time. I needed some control over my time schedule for my son and for university so I stayed on-call. It is ironic that the very people in power positions who were praising me for returning to school also did nothing to make life easier. The scheduling managers and supervisors knew I had classes but they often scheduled me in during class hours. I felt like I was always angry or fighting about something.

Some of the supervisors in this nursing home were lazy, mean, sarcastic, and ever vigilant for errors or omissions. They looked for negatives in my personality, if not my work. Though most of their evaluations were fair to good the supervisors said there was always room for improvement. I felt "a meanness" from some staff toward me but to a lesser degree. On the job there were many hardships that were endless, heavy and dirty.

I got to know some of the Licensed Nursing Assistants personally and they were a joy to work with. In fact, they were the best group of Licensed Nursing Assistants I had worked with in all 25 years of nursing. They worked as a team, got me through each shift with a lot of laughing and the greatest fun. When the nursing home amalgamated with another nursing home, I did not want to move or start over again. Nursing life was never the same.

### The Home Front

My son cried alone in his room at night. I could not comfort him because he was angry with me. His words were abrasive and though I understood he was in emotional pain, his words still wounded me. My words to him were not always kind either. I really struggled for our survival. I had been for counseling but I went back twice more over the years. I later sent my son for counseling. I could not tell anyone about my state of mind because I needed a job. Most of my family either ignored or criticized both of us. It was very painful. When I went to my parents' house there was always an upset. They wondered why I lashed out. There was no peace in my life because I worried about everything under the sun. Years had passed and it seemed like a long nightmare.

In the meantime my former husband had been coming to visit at Christmas. Our son spent two to five weeks every summer with his father in Ontario. The year our son

graduated he went to live with his father. Now 19 years old he was causing me more grief than I could handle. He stayed with his father for 15 months. At that time his father was laid off work and decided to retire. My son came back a different than the boy who had made so much trouble a year before. He found permanent employment on PEI, helped me out financially and looked to the future.

In the spring of the following year my husband and I tried marriage again. He moved to PEI. My son tried to tell me his father had not changed but I would not listen. I learned the hard way that he had not changed. Our reunion lasted about three months but we stayed together a year. However, I had changed over the nine years of separation. I asked my former husband to leave. The second separation was worse because he now lived here. In a small community he seemed to be everywhere. I asked him to leave the Island but he refused.

### Going Back

I had to continue on with my life. The two nursing homes amalgamated and once more I was forced to make a move that I did not want to make. I was now working in the building where I had started in 1960. The building brought back terrible memories. I somehow knew the environment would be much like the hierarchy I had left many years ago. Some registered nurses did their best to demean me, control me, keep me down, and silence me but I would not be silenced again. The next few years were not easy. In fact the nurse who had taught me to make the first bed was now my supervisor. I felt like it was 1960 again. She had always talked down to me in a patronizing voice and still did. This time when she tried to use her education to make me feel inferior I reminded her we had taken the same psychology classes together at UPEI. We had one big run in because

she did not like the way I expressed myself. I was moved to another unit shortly after that.

Several years later during the summer there was a shortage of staff during the vacation times. One morning I got up feeling very sick. I knew I would not be replaced if I called in sick so I went to work. I did not know why I felt sick but later learned the pain was from a gallbladder attack. As the supervisor rearranged the work list and gave two staff members, including me, three people's work, I began to perspire profusely. The pain became almost unbearable. I left work a half hour later with perspiration dripping off my face. I never went back to nursing.

I had accumulated 59.5 days of sick time. I took a few of these days. A clause in the contract disallowed on-call people (myself included) to take sick days without being scheduled. I was not scheduled me because I was sick. I was very angry. I had often gone to work sick just so I could accumulate sick time for critical medical problems. I had to apply for social assistance so I could have surgery. I went into surgery wanting to die and I was very disappointed when I woke up in the recovery room.

### Subtle Abuses

The rage I felt returned in 2004 when I learned there was one member of the legislative assembly in Charlottetown who had taken a year off with depression. As an MLA she received full pay (not sick-time pay) but full pay for almost one year along with a non-taxable expense account and an extra \$5,600 was paid to her for her position of chairperson of the legislative review committee, yet, she had not attended a single meeting since being ill (Nova News Net, 2005). I continue to ask how the provincial government could give so much to one woman and not another? Ten years ago I could

not get the sick time that was owed to me. I had lost approximately \$6,000. of pay by accumulating sick days I could not take. I was and still am disenchanted with the various governments of PEI over the last 25 years.

Six weeks after the surgery I found employment through the Department of Health and Welfare and their Job Enhancement Work Program. I was grateful for the work but there were no benefits and wages were low. Stats Canada, (2000) state: "Women and youth account for 83% of Canada's minimum wage workers and all welfare rates in Canada are far below the poverty line ranging from 20%-76% below." Some short-term positions were extended and employment insurance kicked in some of the time. I still applied for jobs that I felt qualified to do. I accumulated enough job rejection letters, from potential employers, to wallpaper the interior of my mobile home. Sometimes I wondered if anything was worthwhile.

### Fighting to Find Employment

Finding full-time work away from nursing took a lot of time and energy. I could not find meaningful long-term employment that would support myself. Health Canada (1999) states, "Low income in Canada is often related to gender. Women, especially single mothers and unattached seniors remain particularly vulnerable" (p. 63). I got physically worn down trying to find work away from nursing. With every rejection letter I developed a severe headache and days of depression. I mentally beat myself up everyday. I did not sleep well. I did not take care of my physical health because I felt hopeless about my life. I had no interest in anything. I caught every flu bug that came along. I developed asthma as well as other stress related health problems such as diverticulosis and other digestive problems. Research Action, (2004) states that the type

of stress I endured causes "Susceptibly to infectious and other diseases, increased risk of heart disease, stomach ulcers, migraines, clinical depression, and breakdown" (p.4). I had worked for more than 25 years and it seemed incredible that I was unemployed and sick. Even with child support, I was living at the poverty line in one of the richest countries in the world.

I began a campaign of letter writing to Prince Edward Island politicians, detailing my dilemma. They did nothing. I received "form letters" from their secretaries telling me to put applications into the Civil Service Commission. Dealing with Civil Service after my last job was a joke. I assumed that most politicians were in the political arena for the benefits because they were of no benefit to the average citizen like me. I noted that in some of the contract jobs there were always employees who got their full-time jobs through the politician in their area. I lost faith in the PEI government when I realized the politicians did not care whether I lived or died. The letter writing did not work for me and I stopped writing to them. I did not find full-time work.

I was very naive. I believed that after completing nine and one half years of part-time study at the University of Prince Edward Island and receiving a Bachelor of Arts Degree that I would find employment in some type of research. I did not find work! I completed a Diploma in Adult Education at UPEI but still did not find work. I now had a lot of education but I was getting older. Age discrimination was well entrenched and it worked against me improving my lot in life. I was being discriminated in the job market but I could not prove age discrimination. I requested reasons for not being hired. The return letters and phone calls almost always stated someone had more field experience. I no longer had the confidence, the willpower, the support, or the courage to fight back.

(LaborNet (2000) maintains:

Employers meanwhile pay little or no attention to the age discrimination laws. They openly favor younger workers, who generally can be paid less than workers with seniority and are less demanding because of their inexperience and eagerness to secure a foothold (p. 2).

I faced an ocean of fears and cried a river of tears. I became bitter about life in general and society in particular. I learned the symptoms of depression are strikingly similar to symptoms of a spirit dying from abuse. This was economic abuse although most government officials would not identify my situation as abusive. I now realize that abused women who leave abusive relationships are often abused by government bureaucracies. I felt that I had more to offer than ever before, yet, I was looking at Job Enhancement which was a short-term job finding division of welfare under Health Canada. Jobs were usually minimum wage because welfare with limited dollars paid 50% and the employer paid the other half. Job Enhancement no longer exists. I frequently asked myself, what was the point of spending the time and money on education between ages 40-60?

I had searched for answers through every research paper at university from 1984-1994. I researched in psychology, sociology and religious studies to discover why my life had been a labyrinth of abuse, poverty, hard work, fear and worry. One day in the late 90s a professor asked me, "What would it have taken to change your life?" I truly did not know at that time and I wondered if I ever would.

### More Changes

My son had grown into a caring man, had a permanent job and he moved into his own house. I now had difficulty with the upkeep of my mobile home and supporting

myself. I sold the mobile home. The transmission and head gasket died on my car one hour after I got the sale cheque. I bought another second-hand car and got all the things that I had done without for many years. I moved into senior's provincial housing. After living for 17 years in my own place this was a very depressing change. Once more, I was looking at Job Enhancement for employment.

Naive as I was, I actually believed, with rent based on salary, my life would be easier in Prince Edward Island Provincial Housing. I was wrong. Prince Edward Island Provincial Housing took 30% of my gross earnings for rent. In reality it was closer to 50% of my monthly earnings because they did not take into consideration the deductions on each pay cheque. Health Canada (1999) states that 51% of one-person households have problems with affordable housing and this rises to 58% for seniors over 65 years of age. Moving to senior housing was not easier for me financially.

I was hired in another short-term contract job that eventually became a 15-month term position. Although the employer wanted my higher education and research skills they paid me minimum wage at the beginning of this project. I calculated that I would be \$750.00 in debt by the end of the three-month term. From past experiences I knew when this contract ended it would be four to six weeks before Employment Insurance began. This time it was 10 weeks due to errors made by E.I.. While working I tried to put enough money aside to cover that time span. My boss succeeded in getting me a small raise in pay. Without benefits such as dental care, eye care, drug coverage and added transportation costs I was no further ahead. This is when I realized that I would be very poor in my old age with only government pensions to rely on. Morris (2004) stated "Less than half the Canadian population with paid work (41%) was covered by an employer



pension plan” (p. 3). This job really did not help me financially even when it was extended to 15 months. I had just begun to feel financially comfortable when the job ended. Without a vacation, I was very weary and I had no tears left to cry.

In senior housing, women rented the majority of units. Most of them were 60 or older and they had been through hardships similar to mine. Many of their husbands had died or had walked out on them. The majority who had worked outside the home were employed in “pink-collar” jobs most of their lives. Women in pink-collar jobs are often paid low wages and have few or no benefits. They “tend to be confined to areas traditionally thought of as women’s occupations . . . a set of jobs that some characterize as “pink collar” professions” (Canadian Technology, 2004, p. 1).”

Lott (1987) described the “pink-collar ghetto” as women who have been concentrated into low wage, underpaid jobs and usually, though not always, are in professions that are financially less valuable than men. Historically, women in “pink-collar” jobs make about approximately \$4000 less a year than men in blue-collar jobs and there is probably a wider gap now (p. 221). Men overall do take home more money than women and “sole support mothers are more likely to be poor than any other type of family” (Mandell, 1998, p. 46). Statistics Canada (1999) states: “That according to the 1996 census, women ages 18-24 and age 70 and over were more likely to be living in low income circumstances in both 1990 and 1995” (p.42).

Employment insurance, old age pensions, disability pensions and welfare keep women at or below the poverty line (Health Canada, 2002). Female-led, lone-parent families quite often live in an economic abuse that doesn’t allow involvement in community activities, or allow small or lump sum payments for memberships to fitness

clubs, education classes, or social clubs (p.1). Cheaper activities such as book clubs, choirs or movies also cost money because of the need for transportation. Never having a choice or waiting for the simplest needs to be met, takes a toll on mental and physical health because people need social activities. There seemed to be no end to the financial problems for women who leave abusive relationships or reside in senior housing.

Morris (2004) states, "The Canada Pension Plan is based on earnings, so women's lower earning are reflected in the benefits, or lack thereof from the plan" (p. 3). As young, lone-parents, many of them had lived at or below Canada's poverty line. Now as retirees their lives were not much better. Decreases in government spending and the high rents have financially hurt many seniors. "In addition to cutting millions of dollars for health, education and social services it also eliminated the standards in Canada Assistance Program which guaranteed that people in need would be supported" (p 5).

I wrote a paper about living in poverty in Prince Edward Island based on all the complaints from the women who had lived at or below the poverty line. They told me the small raises in annual pension rarely covered the cost of living increases. After the rent was paid there was not much money for anything. Because there is no "personal needs" clause in Prince Edward Island Housing legislation, seniors have problems paying for specific drug prescriptions, dental work, eye exams, glasses, hearing aids and repairs to cars or property. Health Canada (1999) states, "the highest rate of unmet health care needs are Canadians in the lowest income bracket" (p.152).

Many women 50 and over are compelled to give up their cars so they can afford food. Buying personal insurance, a cemetery plot, headstone or gifts for family are almost impossible unless seniors do without other necessities. The problems women in

senior housing had juggling money reinforced in me the belief that there were many choices in this life but some people never get any.

## Women Abused

I spoke with the Leader of the Opposition party in the PEI Legislature in 2002 about expensive government senior housing. There is no cap on the amount the seniors pay for rent. It is based on pension incomes but the cost of living does not keep up with the increases in rent. I suggested how necessary it was to have a “Personal Needs Clause” legislated for pensioned seniors living in senior housing. Those who are now forced to do without dentures, eye glasses, optical examinations, medicines and other necessities would be covered under a “Personal Needs Clause.”

In 1996 I trained to be a Justice of the Peace for Victims of Family Violence in Prince Edward Island. Some of the JPs said they would do this work without pay because this type of work benefits abused women. However, I needed to be paid. This was a “paid by the call” position. Though I was on-call 24 hours, seven-days for one week each month there was no compensation. I felt the justice department financially abused me as I worked to help abused women. The Justices of the Peace for Victims of Family Violence asked for a per diem for being on call, as well as being paid for each emergency protection order that was done. The answer was no.

Through the issuing of emergency protection orders I discovered that many women in family violence situations worked shifts, in low paying jobs and often depended on their abusive husbands for economic support. Some women were totally dependent on their partners to keep a roof over their heads. Without police intervention and social assistance there was often no way out of the family violence. Women who left

abusive relationships often discovered they are abused by society and by government systems that had their own rules and agendas. The lives of the abused women paralleled my own life.

I questioned everything in my life. I married because I wanted to be out of poverty. I wanted some of the comforts and pleasures of life. I had been naive enough to believe that the man I loved and married would take care of me. I was economically secure all the years I was married but there was a price. I frequently asked myself, "Is there any relationship between women who were battered, their personal choices in relationships, their financial security and their education level?"

I had given up most outside activities that I loved because there was a financial cost. I also had problems walking into a social gathering and finding my former husband there. He seemed to be always on the fringe of social events I liked to attend. I did not want to be in the same location as him so I stopped going to bluegrass festivals and other music events. I felt he had invaded my personal and social space. Emotionally I no longer wanted to face rejection at social functions where I often felt invisible. Survival took all my energy and I had no time for superficial cocktail conversation at parties. I also resented the husbands and wives who were employed by the government and had a lot of money coming into one household while I had to decide between a quart of milk and a newspaper because I did not have the money for both. Life really was the pits.

I often became very angry when I realized all I had done to make my life better. I never stopped trying to improve my life. I fought on despite the setbacks but it just never came together the way I planned. I had worked hard to get where I believed I wanted to go. Like unseen obstacles on a golf course my constant struggle and practice never did

overcome the difficulties I experienced.

With some education grants, I am finished with the Master of Education degree courses. I am working. For the first time in my life I love my work. I was very lucky to be hired because I am 60 years old. I have hospitalization, medication coverage, eyes and dental coverage, but no pension. I worked for provincial government institutions most of my working life and have no pension. I have often questioned the Members of the Legislative Assembly, who receive indexed government pensions. Many people like me work a lifetime and get no benefits in their senior years.

I sent e-mails to the Prince Edward Island Legislature and asked for information on the pensions and perks that the Members of the Legislative Assembly receive. I received an e-mail back saying there would be a lot of red tape getting this information. I phoned a CBC political reporter and through more research I discovered there were two different retirement pensions (old and new) for MLAs. A small percentage of the new pension is paid by the MLAs and the province matches that amount. The province also includes inflation protection up to 8%. "Pension benefits are based on the number of years of service times 2% of average indemnity and salary earned by the member" (Chouinard, 2005, p. 1). "MLAs in Prince Edward Island earn \$36,689" (p. 2). That is about 10-15 thousand more than I receive working full time for 8 months of the year. After more than 25 years working in government institutions I do not have a pension. "The Premier's (Pat Binns) total earnings have increased to slightly over \$107,000 a year. Cabinet Ministers and Opposition Leader Robert Ghiz now receive close to \$90,000 a year" (CBC News, 2004). These statistics show the difference between the seniors' pension based on incomes and government employee's pensions based on income.

Because provincial housing took almost two weeks of my salary for rent, I was still living at Canada's poverty line. I was forced to move to another apartment because Prince Edward Island Provincial Housing raised my rent \$148.00 per month after I got a small raise. I worked only eight months of the year and instead of spreading that income over 12 months, the rent was lowered when I went on EI but raised when I returned to work. There is no clear way for me to move away from the abuse in a system that allows people to live at the poverty line through senior pensions, welfare, employment insurance and minimum wage in such a rich country.

### Personal Struggles Continue

I believe researching various other projects helped me to realize formal education in my youth was important. If I had been better educated in youth, I suspect the decisions I made would have been different. I might be planning for retirement now, instead of working until I die. I can only speak for myself when I say formal education at mid life did not have the same power as it would have had in youth.

When I married I wanted to be loved, to feel secure economically and to be free of the fear that had followed me all my life. I sorely needed approval rather than criticism. I believed because the man I married was older and had done so much with his life, he would help me in many areas of my life including the furthering of my education. That was only a pipe dream.

I suspect that lack of education was a major factor that led me into this relationship because, looking back, I certainly did not have the knowledge to assess the situation in a matter a fact way. I believe when I returned to school and realized there was another way to live, I took the first steps to leave the marriage. This education has

kept me out of abusive relationships. "Perhaps the single most universal thing about human experience is the phenomenon of 'Self,' and we know that education is crucial to its formation" (Bruner, 1996, p.3).

## Chapter 3

### Trying To Understand

#### Review of Related Literature

When I look back over the last 25 years I realize I have spent approximately 20 years doing research for this study. Almost every paper I researched for university was in some way related to my lack of education and lack of choices in youth. My research included the reasons for marriage, religion, womens' rights, raising children, separation, divorce, abusive relationships and existing on low income for more then thirty years.

I took many of the women's education courses at university. I eventually understood that the strong hierarchal model in the workplace had a gigantic negative influence on my life because in this model someone always had to be at the top or the bottom and in between. I felt I was always at the bottom of the hierarchy. Sergiovanni (1992) stated there was another model for the workplace and that was, "The head of the leadership is shaped by the heart and drives the hand; in turn, reflections on decisions and actions affirm or reshape the heart and the head" (p. 7). This confirmed to me that I was not wrong in my thinking about the hierarchal structure. There were better ways to manage the workplace and that is the circular model where everyone's opinions are of equal worth regarding what would work best for the whole.

Over 20 years I read hundreds of books related to all the subjects that affected my life. Throughout this study I did not find any specific documented cases or studies specifically regarding the relationship between low levels of education and women in abusive relationships in Canada. However, McNulty (1979) relates the true story of Francine Hughes, a battered woman, who had very little support or guidance from her



parents throughout her life. She quit school in Grade 10, had no specific training and very few skills that would provide a decent living.

As a teenager, Francine did not give much thought to her future except for what she expected/dreamed life should be like. She felt obligated to marry Mickey Hughes when she became pregnant. Like many young girls who cannot find their niche, she settled for a husband, (the father of her child) and a place of her own. She soon discovered that life with Mickey Hughes was harsh and difficult. Her husband could not provide the necessities of life for her and their children because he either quit job after job or he was fired from one job after another.

Throughout her story, a bigger and stronger husband abused Francine physically emotionally, mentally and financially. Francine learned to isolate herself to avoid physical abuse. Self-enforced isolation also protected her friends and family from Mickey. Years later, Francine found the courage to divorce Mickey but he refused to recognize the divorce. She accessed social assistance and tried to distance herself and her children from Mickey by moving into her own home. Despite numerous complaints to the police and the courts Francine could not keep Mickey from living in her house.

Francine realized the only way out of the abuse and poverty was more education and training. Returning to school gave her enough confidence to make a life for the children and herself. The abuse in her life escalated after returning to school because Mickey believed he was losing control of her. After another bout of severe physical abuse in front of the children and forcing her to burn everything related to school, Mickey went to bed. As soon as he was asleep, Francine set the bedroom on fire. Her ex-husband died from smoke inhalation.

There was a trial. Francine's whole life was exposed. Testimony revealed she had suffered different types of severe abuse for many years. She had accessed every legal avenue to get out of the abusive situation, but there was no help for her through any government agency or legal system. She had tried to educate herself and make a better life for herself and her children. She realized that killing her former husband was not the answer to her problems but she did not know any other way of getting him out of, and keeping him out of her life. I was still married at the time and after reading Francine's story I had many questions that eventually led to the main questions regarding education levels of abused women.

- ☐ Do women with low education levels feel powerless and unsure of themselves?
- ☐ Do women feel they need to be married to feel fulfilled?
- ☐ Are there subtle patterns in education and culture that link all abused women?
- ☐ Do women settle into abusive relationships when financially strapped?
- ☐ Do women financially depend on men because women earn less money?
- ☐ Do independent women have higher education levels?
- ☐ Do some women feel that an abusive relationship is better than no relationship?
- ☐ Do university and college trained women have more freedom of choice than those with just a high school education?
- ☐ Are social and religious beliefs so entrenched that society excuses spousal abuse?
- ☐ Do some women want the fairy tale wedding (the gown, rings, romance) but not the marriage (hard work, challenges, children)?
- ☐ With limitless information about violence, why does this phenomenon still occur?
- ☐ What will stop family violence?

- Are there family beliefs or social attitudes that attract women to abusive men?

Many years later I read the true story of Charlotte O'Donnell Fedders. She told her story about family violence and intimate abuse in the book, *Shattered Dreams* (1987). She lived in a middle upper class family in Baltimore, Maryland and though her parents were not in the millionaire class, they lived well. Her father was a high profile medical doctor. Her mother, who had been a registered nurse, became a homemaker after marriage. Charlotte was the oldest of five daughters. They were devout Catholics, especially Charlotte, who, with her sisters, attended private Catholic schools.

As Charlotte got older the only thing she wanted in life was to be married and have a husband and family of her own. She was shy, introverted, had low self-esteem and was not very popular with the boys. When she finally met a man who paid attention to her, she fell madly in love. Up to the time of her marriage Charlotte had led a very happy, sheltered life and never expected any turmoil to come her way. This was to change.

She completed high school and became a registered nurse, finishing her degree at Providence Hospital in Washington, DC. She met John Fedders, a 6'8" law student. Because Charlotte was tall she noticed John's height and dubbed him the "Jolly Green Giant." On the surface he was everything Charlotte had ever dreamed about. He was handsome, big, energetic, and intelligent. He had great potential as a lawyer and he wanted to get to the top. The relationship seemed perfect.

John became abusive during the dating years with long silences, criticism and derision. When he was not making fun of her, he was sarcastic to her friends. John had the constant need to change everything about Charlotte. She thought John knew best and

when he complained about her weight, hairstyles, clothing styles and a multitude of other insignificant flaws, she conformed to his wishes. At their wedding he crushed wedding cake into her face and nose. She felt humiliated. The warning signs of abuse were noticeable, but like many abused women she did not seem to recognize the abuse as abuse. Charlotte was an educated woman but surprisingly, instead of concluding John was abusive, she blamed herself for her shortcomings. An underlying fear for Charlotte was that John would leave her.

Charlotte worked as a nurse and turned her money over to John, who held the bankbook and controlled everything. He was both lavish with gifts and tight-fisted with necessities and both extremes seemed to depend on his mood. Charlotte looked to her parents' marriage for help. Because her mother had trusted her father, Charlotte figured she would do the same with John. She quit work for their first son and stayed home with six sons (one died in early life) as they arrived.

There was constant chaos in their lives. Charlotte usually went to church and prayed when things were difficult, which was most of the time. John moved them to different states for better employment often leaving Charlotte behind to complete business transactions such as selling the houses. He gained steps on the financial and social ladder until he was a powerful lawyer in President Reagan's administration. Charlotte and John traveled, bought expensive houses and socialized with the most prominent people in the United States.

This flawless portrait of a model family began to unravel when John hit Charlotte during an argument. She had been determined, just once, to stand by her thoughts and ideas, when John slapped her across her face. That slap ruptured her eardrum. She

reported this to her doctor father, who told her to leave John. However, she did not want to leave John. There was a loyalty to this man even though he made her life very difficult. Charlotte believed leaving would bring shame to the family, separation would ruin his reputation, John may lose his job, and she still had hopes that life may get better. She found endless reasons not to leave, most brought on by an inner fear of losing John.

John was always angry and became even more openly abusive as time went on. The controlling of the "do and do not list" from John to Charlotte became so long she could not keep track of everything that made him angry. He punched her in the stomach when she was pregnant and said he did not care if he killed her and the baby. More and more Charlotte began to fear him. As the children got older, John began to emotionally abuse them. Depression became a way of life for Charlotte. She saw psychiatrists, doctors and priests and finally a lawyer.

John controlled everything in Charlotte's and the children's lives. He was the Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde that many battered women describe (Evans, 1993; Forsdick Martz, & Sarauer, 2000). He had one personality for the outside world and another for his family. Although he had a high income, John fought over many issues and paid only \$1,000 a month for Charlotte and five children. Charlotte had problems getting child support and a divorce. She had written the book to make enough money to provide for the children and herself.

Although Francine Hughes and Charlotte O'Donnell Fedders came from completely different family backgrounds, economic social classes, religions and education levels, they experienced almost the same types of abuses. The men who abused them were also very different from each other regarding values, social status,

education and job opportunities. Yet, both men had the need to control their wives through violence. I pondered these women's lives and the reasons they married the men, knowing the men were abusive.

Francine and Charlotte's had a common need to have a husband and their own place to live. Francine wanted to get away from a miserable life at home with her parents and have a marriage unlike her parents. Charlotte wanted to have a perfect home and marriage because she had assumed her parent's marriage was perfect. Before marriage both women seemed to have a fairy tale (magical) idea of what marriage should be like. In reality their lives were not magical.

I have used the stories about battered women Francine Hughes and Charlotte Fedders to illustrate the differences and sameness of partnership abuse. I also wanted to use the stories because the stories are real based on each woman's perception of what happened to her. Every woman who has ever been in an abusive relationship will find herself somewhere in either of these two stories but not every researcher will be able to say the same thing. Because I will be dealing with battered women in this study, I felt the best place to start was with books about women who were victims of family violence.

### The Characteristics of Family Violence

These two stories suggest that family violence crosses all boundaries regardless of social class, culture and religion. This type of violence encompasses a variety of people, actions and locations, and may include psychological, emotional, economic, spiritual, financial, physical or sexual abuse (Bart & O'Brien, 1993; Lott, 1987; Mandell, 1998). The dynamics of family violence are complex and multi-layered (McNulty, 1980). This is one reason family violence is so difficult to understand. Research reveals that untold

numbers of complications in family violence situations create serious challenges for researchers, social agencies, police forces, legal systems and medical personnel (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000).

Family violence is in a category by itself (Mandell, 1998). It is different from street violence in that there is usually an intimate relationship between the victims and the offenders. Intimate violence occurs between married couples, common-law couples, blended families and more recently, in dating relationships. It crosses all socio-economic classes as well as ethnic and racial categories (Lott, 1987). In fact, injuries to victims of family violence (usually wives) requiring hospitalization are more frequent than the medical treatment for rape victims, muggings, and car wrecks (1987). Female victims repeatedly told researchers that they tried in every way to please their partner but nothing they did was ever right or good enough (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000; Luxton, 1980).

Circle of Prevention Working Group (2002) reports incidences of family violence usually involve a male offender and a female victim. Men are more likely to batter women than women are to batter men. Some of the identified factors that contribute to family violence are:

- ☐ Women who stay home have less money and less power than working women.
- ☐ Women in abusive relationships, who find work and become more independent, indirectly become threats to their partners authority and power.
- ☐ As women gain more control and men lose their assumed control, violence is very likely to occur. Pregnant women are at high risk for battering because the attention is now on the baby rather than the partner. "I was pregnant and sick with the flu and he made me stay in the bedroom with the door closed so he

wouldn't have to look at me" (Forsdick Martz, & Sarauer, 2000, p. 7).

- Women become easy targets if they are stay-at-home moms or have young children at home (Luxton, 1980).
- Abusive men often feel threatened by women who return to school to upgrade or by women with higher education and incomes (McNulty, 1979).
- Relationships often become more volatile when men with the power and control in the home experience job insecurity (Luxton, 1980).
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs are also leading factors in family violence (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000; Lott, 1987; McNulty, 1980).

The causes of abuse may increase or decrease depending on the life-style and circumstances of both the victims and the offenders. "The responsibility of being the breadwinner generates in men all types of pressure and fear and this in turn is projected on to women" (Luxton, 1980, p. 67).

Most people on the outside of the relationship do not understand why battered women return to offenders. This makes wife abuse a mystery (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000). Although returning to the offender is considered one of the oddities of family violence, victims have many reasonable explanations (McNulty, 1980). Victims who have tried leaving often complain they are harassed at all hours of the day and night, at home and in the workplace with phone calls. "He was trying to get me fired at work, there were times when I had to leave and go home because he phoned me 15-16 times a day" (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000, p. 9). In some cases women feel it is easier to go back than put up with the harassment.

The threatening phone calls from the men disrupt the normal daily lives for



victims, families and co-workers. Life becomes frightening for everyone. In more disturbing situations, offenders have been known to kidnap the children, destroy personal property of the victim, or ruin the belongings of the victim's families (Clarke & Pendry, 1997). In some cases the men will trash the houses of the victim, her parents or her siblings. The invasion of personal space creates even greater anxiety and insecurity for everyone directly or indirectly involved. In more extreme cases offenders have been known to kill the family pets (p. 490).

Even though patterns of abuse frequently escalate and there is a strong likelihood of severe injury or death, women return to the offender out of fear (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000; Lott, 1987; Mandell, 1998; McNulty, 1980; Walker, 1979). Some victims return to the offenders because death threats are frequently made in family violence situations. Victims who have been abused since birth may not know another way of life but even they, at some time, want the abuse to stop. Because most victims develop a low self-esteem they blame themselves for allowing the abuse. Evans, (1993) states "Every time something went wrong it was my fault, I wasn't a good enough wife" (p.7). Constant threats from the offenders lower confidence and self-esteem of women. "I can't tell you how many times a day I was called a stupid bitch. I never did anything right" (p.7). "He threatened to kill me in front of the kids" (p.16). Women who have been battered believe they have to be on red alert, 24 hours a day to survive. There is very little protection for battered women despite all the changes in legislation.

Walker (1984) argues there is a pattern to intimate relationship abuse and that the pattern is almost always predictable. From a large study she developed the three phases of abuse as:

- Phase one is the build-up of negative emotion by the offender. The victims often use every learned coping skill to delay battering,
- Phase two is the battering phase. There is usually an acute explosion of rage that is aimed at the victim.
- Phase three is the honeymoon phase. The victims are usually but not always black and blue from a severe battering at the hands of the offender. The offender is almost always contrite and loving, apologizes repeatedly and vows it will never happen again. Victims want to believe that it will never happen again because these are the men they loved and married.

Most battered women say they can predict, in advance, the eruption of violence in the home because there is a clear pattern. However, outside the home abuse patterns change. If women are being stalked it is almost impossible for them to predict attacks outside the house (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000; Lott, 1987). Many women return to the offender repeatedly because the attacks at home are predictable but attacks outside the home are not predictable and this creates greater fear in the victim. Some battered women say they just want to get the battering over with, so life can be reasonably normal again, or at least until the next incident of violence against them (Walker, 1984).

There are women who feel safest where the abuse occurs because they know what is going to happen to them. Outside the home they never know what is going to happen (Mandell, 1998). Abuse in the home is easier to manage than the stress of the unpredictable attacks and the incessant threats of violence outside the home. "I called it the dance cause when I got up, I would look to the body language to see what kind of dance I was going to have to do to make my day better" (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer,

2000, p.11). Some women call it “the dance” because most abused women tiptoe or walk softly around their abusive husbands. They must decide which steps to take to maneuver their way through the day with the least amount of friction so not to upset their spouses. Women in the gravest danger are those who decide to move out (Lott, 1987). “If you’re in an abusive situation and you’ve left it, you’re terrified, absolutely terrified” (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000, p. 28).

Frequently women are so physically and psychologically traumatized that they are unable to get out of a violent situation. “One reason I would never go anywhere else is because I never wanted to endanger anyone else” (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000, p.17). Women in these situations cannot make decisions because they feel overwhelmingly helpless and hopeless (Health Canada, 1996). Constant harassment may make employment impossible, because working skills and training do not guarantee the battered women a job, or retention of a job (Turner & Emery, 1985).

One woman in the study of family violence in Saskatchewan said she was raised in a family where keeping things secret and keeping things quiet was part of her training. Speaking out was like a betrayal of her family (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000). This is a big problem for abused women because secrecy prevents intervention. “There is no one in the world who knows that he twisted my wrists, pushed me down the stairs, broke my collarbone, and, finally my nose” (Quindlen, 1998, p.77). It is not unusual for victims to hide the abuse with the hope that life will get better and/or the offender will change.

Sergeant Dave Franklin is an expert in hostage negotiations and crisis intervention with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A veteran of 28 years and internationally known, he likened family violence to terrorism. He compared abused women and

children in the home to the Stockholm Syndrome in which the victim of a hostage situation begins to empathize with the captor. Abused women, who are functioning in fear, become more passive and submissive just as captives do. The stages of evolution, from panic, disbelief, and possible initial resistance, to acceptance, loss of hope and depression are very similar stages in both types of terrorism (Gallant, 1998). At this stage only police and/or counselors may be able to help (Doran, 1994).

Bradford and Associates (2002) wrote a report regarding the use of Emergency Protection Orders by Justices of the Peace in Prince Edward Island. The Department of Justice, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Prince Edward Island Office of the Attorney General funded this study. The following statistics come from that report:

- ☐ Of 38 victims of family violence surveyed, all were female.
- ☐ Eighteen lived in rural areas. Ten lived in a town or village. Nine lived in the city.
- ☐ Twenty-five victims had graduated from high school.
- ☐ Thirteen victims had not graduated.
- ☐ Twenty-five victims reported additional schooling.
- ☐ Fourteen attended college or trade school. Ten received a diploma. Eleven attended university.
- ☐ Three graduated from university with at least a Bachelors Degree.
- ☐ Twenty of the victims reported an annual household income (from all sources) before deductions and taxes of less than \$30,000 a year.
- ☐ Thirteen reported an income of less than \$20,000 a year
- ☐ Thirty-seven had one or more children and 30 had children under 18 years at home.

Compared with the general population a higher proportion lived in rural areas, had graduated from high school, were employed, but they were in the lowest income bracket. In fact, compared to the general population, more than three times as many of the victims had incomes of less than \$20,000 (Statistics Canada, 1996. p. 29).

The economy influences the number of jobs and the types of jobs women can attain in Canada. Decisions about schooling are shaped by broader structures. The governments of each province decide on the policies that determine the expense of higher education and the availability of dollars to ease the burden. More women are returning to school and despite all the obstacles some women make it through the worst circumstances and then have to leave their home province to find work (Status of Women Canada, 2004). Gender relations often influence the extent to which women can manage the home, children, jobs, studies and other factors such as family support, illness, childcare costs and travel expenses.

In the powerful documentary *When Women Kill* (1994), author Ann Jones points out that society often asks, "Why do battered women stay, when in fact they should be asking, why won't the men let the women go?" The stories in this film detail the economic and educational abuse in the very early lives of three women, which ends in the death of their intimate partners. The viewer is clearly informed that many females living in abusive environments cannot get away despite all the changes to laws and the enforcement of these laws by police and the judicial system. This film shows that women who murder are in the minority in comparison to the number of husbands killing their wives. Women are more likely to be abused and killed by partners. Some women endured the abuse for 30-40 years and do not know how to start over and others finally

find the power to move out and move on.

## Structures and Traditions That Keep Women Subservient

### The Church

In the early church, men were more likely than women to be formally educated (Wijngaards, 2004). Because the majority of people did not have any formal education the educated men interpreted the holy readings for all the people (2004). "This inequality has a long history, as girls and women have been denied opportunity and equal access to knowledge" (Ghosh & Ray, 1991, p. 277). Later the heads of churches interpreted holy readings (Wijngaards, 2004). Men from rich and influential families often gained power in the church and community because they obtained formal education (Lott, 1987; Luxton, 1980; Mandell, 1998).

In the 1900s-1950s emphasis on religion in Prince Edward Island was strong (Ghosh & Ray, 1991) in schools and in communities. Most women stayed home to take care of the family while the men worked. Not having employment outside the home made many women financially dependent on their husbands. Some religious leaders, (mostly men) preached that men were the head of the house and women should obey (Wijngaards, 2004). Women, who believed in the traditional marriage vows "to love, honour and obey" their husbands for "better or worse," often stayed in violent relationships for many years. Women only recently have been admitted as ministers in some churches and their training has been to accept male interpretations of what God wants for them (Wolfe, 1997).

Today many people are married outside of churches, but in the 1950s-1960s marriage was still considered a holy bond with church and God involved in the

partnership (Evans, 1993; Gibbins & Youngman, 1996). When there was marital strife women often went to their spiritual leaders for help. There were psychologists and psychiatrists available to counsel but marriage counseling was often done mostly by ministers or priests (Evans, 1993). Women looking for help in abusive situations were often sent back into the violence by church authorities and told to work it out. "He said all he could do was pray for me" (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000, p. 21). Some priests/ministers made the women feel guilty by telling them they took marriage vows until death do you part (p. 21) and death was often at the hands of their spouses.

Less privileged men in the church did not receive the same education as upper class males but they still fared better than women and children. Women and children had little opportunity towards education specifically because they were thought to be of lower intelligence than men "The reason why man dominates in society is his superior intelligence" ((Wijngaards, 2004, p.1). Men believed they should be the dominant partners because the church defined men as superior beings and females as their property. Women's illiteracy allowed men who were given this power, to own them (Wijngaards, 2004).

Religious beliefs have kept women subordinate to men. Christianity taught/teaches, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:22). Men achieved this power position in the church, society and the home while wives and children had only the rights that the head of the house permitted them (Wijngaards, 2004).

Many abuses toward women occurred in name of God. Having babies every year was a major cause of female death in the early 19th-20th century. The Catholic Church,

led by men, did not believe in birth control. “Irish Catholic and French Canadian women practicing anything but abstinence transgressed church teaching which forbids contraception” (Bradbury, 1993, p. 64). This clearly was physical abuse to the female body. “The father as a full human being contributes the seed while the mother is no more than the soil in which the seed grows” (Wijngaards, 2004, p.3).

There were other abuses that followed after the birth of the child. Mothers worn down after delivering numerous babies and trying to feed and clothe their children often died young. Conditions in homes, factories, and hospitals were often not sanitary and without medications for communicable diseases, outbreaks spread quickly. Impure water also caused many deaths (Wijngaards, 2004).

The church sanctioned domination of men over women and gave social acceptance to men’s homes being their castles. What happened behind the walls of their homes was their business (Wijngaards, 2004, p.189). There was often no intervention by the extended family or friends because what happened in a private residence was considered a private family matter. This concept was based on religious belief or was often church law (Cohen, Lutenbacher & Mitzel, 2003; Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000; Lott, 1987; Wijngaards, 2004). McNulty (1980) described how Francine Hughes’ abuse was ignored by most of the community where she lived:

Mickey had abused her more horribly than ever before. His parents knew it. His brothers and their wives knew it. All of Danville knew it. Her own mother knew it. Not one, not even the police or intern who had treated her at the hospital expressed indignation on her behalf. (p.133)

Men are still thought of as being head of the family, even though the Bureau of Census in Canada stopped using the category, head of the house, in 1980 (Lott, 1987).

“Many men grow up to believe they have the right to assert their property rights in a wide



variety of situations” (Mandell, 1998, p. 143). It was the right of men to keep their wives and children in line, even if it meant violence (Wijngaards, 2004). Women were at the mercy of their husbands, the church laws and even the legal systems, which frequently ruled in favour of the men (Bradbury, 1993). Police, legal systems and medical systems did little to help female victims of violence. Men knew there were few if any consequences because no one challenged them (Bradbury, 1993; Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000).

Although many religious views about women have changed in Canada there are many women who still do not feel safe inside and outside their homes, especially where there is a strong attachment to religion. “So often women meet barriers in seeking assistance from relatives, friends, police, social services and the courts. Women are trapped in violent marriages as a result of their social, legal and economic disadvantage” (Lott, 1980, p.167).

## Marriage

In Canada most old church laws were passed down through congregations. Men being the head of the house at the time promoted these teachings in the home. Women were considered chattel and had few, if any, rights in the male dominated society (Wijngaards, 2004). Because females did not always have the opportunity to attend school they had little or no education. Many women did not have employment outside the home and with no means to provide for themselves they often continued to live with their parents. The woman was considered the lesser and she was expected to serve the greater, the man and his family (Wijngaards, 2004). Many young women were hired out to assist friends, neighbours or strangers who needed some type of assistance in their homes.

Some women worked outside the home in short-term positions at sowing or harvest time. However, the women who wanted to leave home often traded their domestic work and sexual access to men for economic support (Luxton, 1987).

In small, poor communities, marriages were frequently arranged and the young girls/women had no say in the matter. Single, pregnant women were forced to marry, or become social outcasts because the church and social norms required that mothers be married (Bradbury, 1993). At the time society believed that married women were protected from the harshness of life. Clearly for many girls and parents it was better to be married than to be alone. This idea/belief changed for many women after they were subjected to a husband-dominated relationship. All marriages clearly did not protect women. If there was abuse they may have gone home to their parents for a short time but too often there was nowhere else to go but back to the abuse (Luxton, 1987).

Bradbury (1993) points out that women's very labour and wages legally belonged to their husbands and without a marriage contract specifying otherwise, "a wife could not sell, alienate, or mortgage even her own estates without the authority and express consent of her husband" (p. 51).

In early 1900 Canada, women were oppressed because they had so few rights and this oppression made life very difficult for most women. Freeing themselves from this type of oppression took many years because it was a way of life and part of Canadian culture. Freire (1968) states that, "Functionally, oppression is domesticating" (p. 36). It was easier to go with the flow in a dominated relationship than make waves because the consequences were too often traumatic and women had no place to go. Women experienced doubly difficult lives when their labour-working husbands frequented

saloons and drank away their pay. When fathers went missing or died, young children frequently were forced to work in factories to supplement the household. Most women with large families had little if any social life. Their outings involved wedding or baby showers or community socials like card parties or church activities that required women's work.

In most houses and tenements the women had to contend with: tight living quarters, no electricity, no sanitary systems, poor health care, three generations living under one roof, and no privacy (Bradbury, 1993). In rural areas two or three generations of families lived in one house or near to each other to share in the farm labour. It was rare for women to leave or divorce their husbands despite hardships or abuse. Women and children were oppressed, had nowhere to go and were forced to endure this type of abuse (1993).

Luxton's (1980) study of three generations of women in Flin Flon, Manitoba, identified many reasons why women entered into marriages that later became abusive relationships. Of principle importance was the lack of education and training, which meant women were unable to support themselves. In many relationships, "Marriage made the man the legal guardian or tutor of his wife" (Bradbury, 1993, p. 50). Some women fought this type of mindset within the marriage but it was rare that married women gained personal choices and freedom. Without the necessary specialized training or high formal education that provided freedom, power, employment, and economic autonomy, young women missed their chance for independence when they left their father's house and went to the husband's house (Lott, 1987). Unfortunately, when adjustments were made, "Women disappeared during marriage" (Bradbury, 1993, p. 50).

The power imbalance and inequality between the sexes often led to violence in the home even when the wife did everything the husband's way. Without an education or job the majority of women stayed in the marriage whether it had positive or negative effects on them (Luxton).

Men who felt pressured into marriage by social customs or an unwanted pregnancy were often resentful. This resentment often built into a rage against their wives (Luxton, 1980). According to Luxton some married men identified their wives and children as liabilities because the men believed they were obligated to work and support the family. Some men thought this obligation to the family indirectly controlled their lives and they took their frustrations out on their wives and children.

Many company owners hired only married men, which reinforced the belief that men are better off married. Executives understood the obligation married men felt toward their families and this kept the men working and it signified a secure work force for the company (Luxton, 1980). Most men did not understand that the companies had their own agendas for the work force. The rights for women have improved and more women are working in two parent families, but men who are the main breadwinners still often have traditional ideas about being the head of the house. Gordon, (1988) proposes:

If large numbers of women have enough economic independence to reject the traditional hierarchical marriage, in which women barter domestic servitude and emotional submission for economical supports and social recognition, that is good news. (p. 1)

## Education Systems

Women have fought for various rights since the beginning of time (Mandell, (1998). It was not until the Industrial Revolution in America that capitalism lessened the

power of the male hierarchal church, which in turn lessened the male influence on females (Bradbury, 1993; Wijngaards, 2004). When the church and state finally became separated, women began to take steps to free themselves of rigid church rules and social customs. There were many chances for employment outside the home and this gave women an alternative to marriage. However, being employed outside the home was not easy for women either.

For many generations, women have worked tirelessly for the same rights and education as men. The middle classes were the first in the province of Quebec to question what they saw as unjust in during the late 1880's. Their complaints were aimed at the aristocracy and centred on legal structures that limited their rights. Females, who had questioned their rights in a quiet fashion, now took action (Bradbury, 1993, p. 217). Some insightful women fought to establish schools and made an effort to enter fields previously held by men. A few liberated women became writers and promoted women's rights through newspaper articles. It was a beginning and eventually, in part, some liberation for all women (Bradbury, 1993).

Women who had the opportunity to attend school often received only primary education (Ghosh & Ray, 1991). Most education classes were related to domestic labour because females were considered homemakers. If women studied anything other than music, sewing and cooking it was frowned upon (Ghosh & Ray, 1991). Females from lower and middle class families were lucky if they learned to read (p.123). The 1891 Toronto census showed young women's education was erratic because they were in and out of school. Coming from big families, parents often kept their daughters home to baby-sit siblings, help around the house or to run errands. Female literacy remained

questionable but males, in all age groups, were more likely to be able to read and write fluently (Bradbury, 1993, p.123)

Education was not very important for the working class because survival took first priority. Unskilled parents, who made low wages, were more likely to send their children to work instead of school. The children's income was frequently required to keep everyone alive. Large, poor families kept their daughters at home to help with the work and assist the older extended family, who lived with them. Some parents sent their daughters out at very young ages to be maids and earn money for the household (Bradbury, 1993). In most rural areas both boys and girls were kept home to help with the farm and fieldwork. The laws that allowed for children's schooling were often ignored and missing school created gaps in children's education (Bradbury).

Some parents in lower economic situations believed their children owed them, after all the parents were keeping a roof over their heads. Adult children were expected to take care of their parents in their old age, thus the extended family often lived with newly weds. Fathers and mothers were not always happy when educated daughters moved to urban areas to find work because away from home they were no help financially to the family left behind. The parents did not realize that their daughters who worked in the city earned barely enough money to support themselves (Bradbury, 1993).

Changes in educational access for women occurred when nuns in religious organizations gave free classes to females. The classes were overcrowded and did not necessarily provide the best or equal education that males received but it was considered better than no education at all (Ghosh & Ray, 1991). Men at that time believed, "Many young women were being educated above their station in life (Bradbury, 1993, p. 123).

Males in the most educated and powerful positions believed that women's reproductive systems would be weakened if they were allowed to attend school (p.140). Some fathers believed education for females was a waste of time and money, because females would not use the education after they got married. Church laws and social norms dictated that a female's place was in the home (Mandell, 1998; Wijngaards, 2004). Women who wanted an education or wanted to teach school had to overcome endless obstacles from the male hierarchy.

Before marriage some women had the opportunity to teach in schools. However, during marriage and the child raising years there were many changes to the educational system and women had difficulty getting back into the workforce because: only males taught in the boy's schools; more male teachers entered the education system, more money was given for boy's schools, more upgrading was required to teach in schools and nuns still taught in many of the schools for females. All of the changes decreased the number of jobs for married women who wanted to return to teaching and they had difficulty finding work (Bradbury, 1993, p.123).

The females who stayed at home to help their mothers were not considered working women but mother's helpers. In the urban areas, women without much education worked in factories on assembly lines, (12-16) hours per day for low wages. There were very few if any laws to protect these workers and most women faced serious health and safety issues on the job. Women, who did piece work at home, worked even longer hours (Bradbury, 1993). One of the largest areas of employment was domestic help. Young girls worked long hours and had absolutely no protection from the employer or hardships on the job. Most of these young women were on call 24 hours a day, 7 days

a week. Some, but not all, had the Sabbath off (Mandell, 1998).

Women with secondary education often worked in low ranking jobs, for low wages, in schools and offices away from home. They usually boarded in the community where they worked and every cent they made was needed to survive. By the early 1920s women in Canada took to the streets to raise the concerns about women's lives. Lack of education, poor working conditions and low wages were only a few of the concerns. Liberal feminists petitioned the Supreme Court of Canada and the Committee of the British Privy Council in England in the 1929, "Persons Case" (Status of Women, 2003) to declare women persons and thus the right to vote. This enabled women to gain entry into many professions previously held only by men (Mandell, 1998).

While women were fighting with the British Government to be called persons, men were dominant figures in all of Canada (Ghosh & Ray, 1991). They held high paying, powerful, executive positions in businesses, in politics, in governments or in churches (Ghosh & Ray). Men owned and controlled the tobacco and sugar factories, textile mills and other industries where large numbers of women worked. Men with little or no education worked in factories and made higher wages than women who were formally educated. Even with higher education there was no guarantee women would receive enough pay to support themselves. There were no laws regarding the hours of work, pay scales for women or sexual harassment in the workplace. Owners had the power to verbally and physically abuse women and financially abuse them by withholding their wages (Bradbury, 1993).

The Federal, Provincial and Territorial Minister responsible for the Status of Women (2001) issued a report that said the access and retention of girls and women at all



levels of education including academic, college and university is one of the factors for women's continued progress. The link between education and job security is recognized because higher educated women are less likely to be unemployed or a burden to the social safety programs (Lott, 1980; Turner, 1990). Although girls are staying in school longer, they are still concentrated in female domain positions as secretaries, nurses and teachers. "While no one variable could determine social outcome, socio-economic class background was the best single indicator of one's later life chances" (Ghosh & Ray, 1991, p.166). Yet, despite improvements in women's educational attainment, women still earn lower wages than men, even with the same education levels. It is also difficult for women to move to higher positions in every type of employment considered men's domain (Ghosh & Ray, 1991; Lott, 1980; Turner, 1990; Mandell, 1998).

According to the Canadian 1996 Census, women dominate in all but 5 of 25 occupations at the bottom of the earning scale (Health Canada, 1999). Women were and still are channeled into pink-collar jobs with lower wages, less prestige and less opportunity than men. Although women have more freedom and more choices of educational pursuits in Canada they still suffer sexual and gender bias (Health Canada, 1999). "Girls are more likely to be invisible members of a classroom" (Teevan & Hewitt, 1995, p. 353). Higher credentials do not necessarily mean women will get high paying jobs. It can be better understood that women considering this information would find marriage quite acceptable because "Marriage is more than an emotional bond, it is an economic union" (Mandell, 1998, p.81)

### **Definitions That Encompass This Study**

In order to understand more fully what is meant by the words: education, abuses,

poverty, isolation, power, language choice and freedom for this study; I have created a definition for each word.

## Education

In this study, education means formal education. Formal education is the systematic development of the mind from childhood throughout the school years to higher levels of thinking during college or university. As lifelong learners, education continues in many other areas of peoples' lives even though they may have completed many formal courses or degrees (Ghosh & Ray, 1991). Training comes through a series of steps that teaches problem solving skills, life management skills, and life crisis skills (Mandell, 1998). This includes increased knowledge toward training that allows for smoother transition into employment in a specific line of work. Formal education and training are necessities for women who have the desire to be independent. In this technical age most people are in specialized fields that require formal education and specialized training (Mandell).

The other type of education for many people, including this researcher (in her youth) is acquired knowledge from living life. It is non-formal education learned from all other societal situations. Some people call non-formal education "street smarts." This type of knowing can and will get people through the day to day living but too often due to ignorance of the greater world, they are held back. That is not to say that people with limited education and street smarts are not successful because some do become very successful. In my experience people who have limited formal education and street smarts think differently than higher formally educated people, simply because they have different kinds of experiences and different levels of knowledge.

I believe I was one of those people who did not succeed in youth. I had street smarts enough to survive each day but I really did not have enough education to make good, long lasting, logical decisions. I made a lot of bad choices due to lack of knowledge of the greater world.

### **Abuse**

Abuse for this study is defined as the misuse of power in regards to having the assumed right, ability or capacity to control women by ill treatment, slander, coarse language, psychological violence, threats, physical battering and spiritual abuse (Evans, 1993; Luxton, 1980; McNulty, 1980). Abuse comes in many forms: hitting, pushing, slapping, shaming, threatening, grabbing, name calling and pressuring to do things against personal conscience or will (Evans). Other types of abuse such as financial abuse and isolation frequently occur but are often overlooked (Evans).

Some types of abuse go unnoticed because they are socially accepted in the home, language and culture. Children become conditioned to constant friction, swearing or verbal and emotional abuse when they are raised in that type of environment. Too often children are pushed beyond their endurance by overbearing parents who demand better peer relationships, higher marks and to win at all costs in sports (Evans, 1993). At school, teachers often bully students by insults or humiliation (Buscemi & Smith, 1996). Coaches have been known to bully children in competitions. Very often peers become bullies during puberty and the teen years. Girls may be personally criticized about everything in their lives because there is an unwritten social standard that girls must live up to (Wolfe, 1997). Although most young females will never look like glamorous starlets they are expected to keep up with the styles and fads. This type of abuse can

affect girls even when it is not aimed directly at them.

Young girls out in the workforce are often pushed beyond their limits by verbal and emotional abuse from employers. It doesn't take long to break the spirit of youth who begin to doubt everyone and everything (Bradbury, 1993). During the teen years young males often use verbal or emotional abuse to control girls and coerce them into acts against their wills (Sacker & Zimmer, 1987, p.3). This power comes out of social norms that say males do the asking and girls should be honoured when they are asked (Bellous, 2003).

Verbal abuse is probably the most destructive abuse because it is insidious. Victims of verbal abuse are often alone with the offender and few people hear the insults or intimidation. When people do hear the verbal abuse it is often ignored because they feel humiliated by it. Verbal abuse often grows in the dark and slowly destroys the spirit. "Verbal abuse is a form of violence" (Evans, 1993, p. 26). One woman, who left after 11 years of verbal abuse from her husband, told her lawyer that she left everything behind. "I can't ever win with this man. But it doesn't really matter because he can't have my soul" (p.103).

Psychological abuse for most females is an innate and on-going fear of being attacked, beaten or raped by men (Luxton, 1980; Mandell, 1998; Turner, 1990). There is the fear of being seriously injured or killed by the attacker (1998). Girls and women live in fear of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or other deadly diseases when are sexually attacked (Health Canada, 1999). In many social settings young women fear being drugged and in the last few years this has become a popular way to incapacitate women (Dunfield, 2003).

Psychological abuse for many women is the offender's constant threat to kill himself, the victim, the children, the in-laws and their families. Some offenders repeat the threats so often they are no longer considered credible by close relatives or the police. Sometimes only the threatened women believe their partners are capable of murder and too often people on the outside consider her words an exaggeration. Barry Bradley, a Prince Edward Island man was one such killer. His son stated that his father (Barry) threatened to kill his mother so often that no one took him seriously. In many cases the threats do come to fruition and Barry Bradley did kill his wife (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).

Wolfe (1997) writes about the insidious psychological abuse perpetrated by multi-national corporations through advertising. Too often this type of abuse is not recognized as violence against women. Wolfe states that from birth onward females are indirectly told to be perfect in every way. Females must have a specific look, make-up, hairstyle or design of clothing to achieve and maintain this status. Women cannot have any extra pounds on their frames and young women are dieting to the point of death. As eating disorders escalate, females are dying at younger ages. Little girls are put on diets and entered into beauty contests with the emphasis on beauty and talent. Plastic surgeons are kept busy because beautiful girls have begun to have surgical changes to their bodies at younger and younger ages (1997). This type of psychological abuse is not considered degrading or offensive to females but good business for doctors and for multi-national corporations who sell a life-style to youth. Some or all these types of abuse are found in some or all abusive, intimate relationships.

Economic abuse is one of the greatest abuses endured by females in Canada

(Mandell, 1998). Most governments recognized physical and mental health issues related to economic abuse but overall not much has been done to help women in these situations (Lyon, 1997). Economic abuse occurs when women who work for minimum wages can not get help from the Department of Social Services because it is implied by provincial governments that minimum wage is enough to live on. Many women in lone parent families never have enough money to attend meetings, movies, concerts or appointments. Affordable housing, access to child care and legal aid are serious problems for many Islanders but having to leave Prince Edward Island for health care is almost impossible for poor women (Health Canada, 2002). Having to worry about transportation and lodging in Halifax or Moncton is one more stress that poor women bear.

Everyday stresses are the direct cost for buses and taxi fares or the indirect cost of car insurance. Repairs to vehicles are almost impossible on a small budget. Many single women are unable to afford a dentist, optician, optometrist, or hair salon. Women with young children have difficulty buying two pair of running shoes, (one pair for the school gym) sports equipment and other school supplies. Repairs to furniture and equipment in the home are almost impossible for people living on minimum wage or welfare (Health Canada, 1999).

A Report of the Special Senate Committee stated, "All income below the poverty line must be exempt from income tax" (Information Canada, 1968, p.181). Revenue Canada often threatens poor, working Canadians who cannot pay what is owed on income tax. This often happens to the middle and lower classes because Canada relies on a regressive tax structure. "Regressive taxes are those which take a higher proportion from the low-income group than from the high income group" (p. 46). An example of

this inequality was with the Bronfman family. Until 2000, the Bronfman family owned Seagram Company Limited, a large corporation headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. It was the world's largest producer of distilled alcoholic beverages. They also had shares in or owned movie studios and record companies. "A tax waiver was granted, saving the family (Bronfman) up to \$800 million in taxes. This is terribly unfair to other Canadians paying substantial taxes" (Francis, 2000). A new tax guideline that came into effect meant 19 year-old children could no longer be claimed as dependents unless mentally or physically challenged (Revenue Canada Tax Guide, 2004). Many poor people, especially single mothers, are financially hurt because 19 year olds were still in school or college and living at home. Again this imbalance of power startled most tax payers when it was revealed that Revenue Canada had written off a half million dollars owed by the Federal Privacy Commissioner George Rawanski, whose salary was \$200,000 per year (Canadian Press, 2003).

Economic abuse is too often not recognized as abuse. It begins for many women as soon as they leave an abusive relationship. Many male partners are not willing to pay child support or alimony. They are repeatedly taken to family court for child support or alimony payments. Some men leave the province and just disappear to avoid payments. Other men pay too little or are always late with the payments. Women and children suffer because they cannot depend on regular income (Mandell, 1998).

Economic abuse is created by higher education systems in Canada, with outrageous fees for university courses. Students taking more than two courses are charged extra fees for the use of the gym and library because they are considered full-time students. There are also late fees /fines when accounts are paid over a period of

months and often single mothers feel they are penalized because they are poor. The high costs of formal education create gaps in the availability of education between the poor and rich (Status of Women Canada, 2004). Women who already make lower wages have difficulty paying student loans (McQuaid, 1998). “The loans to single mother will be proportionately larger because they are supporting children in addition to themselves” (Status of Women Canada, 2004, p.14). It is rare for women to make incomes equal to that of men even after higher education.

The constant increased charges for education courses are financial burdens for already poor women (Status of Women Canada, 2004). Abuse of this nature at universities and colleges has worsened and soon only those in the upper class will be able to attend educational institutions. Economic abuses of this nature make women feel more powerless as they are forced into low-level jobs. Some women still marry for financial security.

## Poverty

Poverty is a step down from economic abuse because it is more extreme. For this study poverty is best described from the book, *75 Stories Plus* (1996). Jo Goodwin Parker’s husband went missing, leaving her with four children. These are some of the words she used to describe poverty: dirt, living in a smell that never leaves, flies, ill-stained mattresses, old sheets, smelly clothes, rotting teeth, ill-fitting shoes, always being sick and tired, cold water, washing without soap, sour milks and cooking without food. Parker (1996) tries to enlighten people to the fact that poverty is not just lack of food. She explains that poverty is asking for help but not hearing or remembering because of shame and despair. Poverty is neighbour children not playing with your children because



you are poor. Poverty is when schoolteachers do not understand why there is no money for school supplies or a second pair of running shoes for the gym. Poverty is an acid that drips on pride and a chisel that chips at self-worth. It is malnutrition, no medicine, no iron pills, no birth control and a dark future for the children. For women living in poverty, the dream for tomorrow is not explaining to ten people, at social services, that they are poor, when they need help (Buscemi & Smith, 1996, p. 170).

Many women choose poverty over abuse even though they may be forced to live in less than comfortable surroundings (Health Canada, 2002). Poverty often becomes a battle for women who have removed themselves and their children from abusive relationships because rent, utilities, food, and medicines take the bulk of their annual wage. Poverty has become one of the greatest abuses toward women and children on this earth, and too often it is not considered an abuse (Parker, 1996, p. 170). There is a connection between poor women on welfare, working-women, and rates of family violence (Mandell, 1998).

### Isolation

Isolation is another form of abuse. Some women “found themselves in a continuous state of hyper-vigilant hiding” (Litenbacher, Cohen & Mitzel, 2003). Many abused women are isolated due to stalking husbands. Some women are isolated by their location in a rural area without a car, phone or internet. Women are isolated in urban areas when there is only enough money for necessities and sometimes not enough for even the necessities. Some women and children may have an outing to a park but they do not have the money for the swimming pool or skating rink. Too often provincial governments do not allow enough cash for poor people who do not have \$2 or \$3 dollars

for simple activities.

Too often the women do not feel safe in their homes or in public places. It is easier to stay home than be stalked by an ex-partner. Many women will stay home rather than be abused or embarrassed in a public setting. Some women are housebound because their spouses lock them in. Abused women learn to isolate themselves so extended family and friends will not get involved or get hurt (Evans, 1998). Isolation is often a necessity for the protection of themselves and others because some former husbands are so volatile. Being isolated is another form of abuse that many people, including battered women, do not identify as abuse.

## Power

For this study power is defined as the ability, believed right, or capacity to exercise control psychologically, socially and physically by using size, force and sheer strength to make another human being submit. Teevan and Hewitt (1995) define power as, "a differential capacity to command resources and thereby control social situation" (p. 528). This type of power was shown in the Canadian House of Commons in 1981, when Member of Parliament, Margaret Mitchell, raised the issue of wife battering. Her male colleagues laughed. When it was cited that one in ten women were battered in Canada, her male colleagues laughed (Saunders, 2003). Eventually, wife battering became such a big issue that the men in the House of Commons were forced to listen to Margaret Mitchell and other women. However, legislation to help women has been very slow and overall most women still do not have a lot of power or status (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000).

The power given to women in society is often informal and not legislated, in

contrast to the legitimated status and authority almost automatically given to men. It is this type of power that some men use to control their partners. Men who have this type of power are rarely seen as wife-beaters and too often women are not believed when they complain to police (Elliott & Fedders, 1987).

## Language

In Canadian society, the language is often patriarchal, hierarchal construct, which tells women what it means to be women. This language is so powerful and entrenched; it is used without being acknowledged as remotely exploitative, insulting or prejudiced to women (Beltane, 2003). The power of language that excluded women has been so subtle it has taken many years for language to be inclusive to women. In Canada it is still being changed so it can serve both sexes. However, male power is still reflected through language on every level in Canadian society and women in many cases need to act on their own to survive.

Power in the patriarchal language that is used often prescribes cultural concepts. "Man and wife" implies he is a person and she is a role. Patriarchy is implied in the way people talk to each other, "She drives a car as good as a man." The word chairman is still often used even when a woman is the chairperson. The power of patriarchal language dictates a phony and often inaccurate view intended to serve the many needs of the hierarchy (Sparks, 1992). Half the population, women, are left out.

## Choice

For this study choice is defined as the right and freedom to make decisions that will enhance the everyday life of the individual female. Considering patriarchy, social norms, religious beliefs and the volatile nature of family violence situations, the option to

personally choose what is best has often eluded females in Canada and around the world (The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 1997). Choice that involves genuine freedom should enhance the lives of women who want out of abusive relationships. "Women who live in abusive relationships are aware of the choice they make: poverty or abuse" (Circle of Prevention Working Group, 2002, p. 5)." The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women states, "It is not a privilege but a right to gain knowledge from life experiences and educational processes so that the most enriching decisions can be made without tension and pressure from outside forces" (p. 6).

### Freedom

In this study freedom is defined as having enough education, knowledge and confidence to make good choices, along with the ability to act upon the choices that are made (Grant, 1999). The opportunity for women to exercise freedom is often based on laws, rules and barriers created by men, and dictate to women what is in their best interest. "Lack of knowledge, embarrassment, fear of reprisal and fear of not being believed caused women to remain silent about the abuse" (Forsdick Martz & Sarauer, 2000, p.2). Social norms in most societies value women even less as they age (Gordon, 1988; Jacobs, 1979). Wolf's (1997) shows how mass media push language in the most powerful forms and restrict women's freedom of choice.

Without the freedom to make good choices in youth there is less chance for freedom of choice later in life (Gaskell & McLaren, 1991) Freedom is the ability to get out of an abusive relationship but too often without educated knowledge, freedom is often lost. Women are oppressed in abusive relationships and have great difficulty finding freedom within the relationship or outside the relationship. Abused women are afraid to

embrace freedom because there are consequences from the offender. On the other hand the offender is afraid of losing the freedom to oppress their victims and their families. In speaking about oppression Freire (1969) could be speaking to every battered woman when he states:

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom requires them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside a man; nor is it an idea which becomes a myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion (p.31).

## Conclusions

Throughout the research for this paper I have discovered that issues of education abuses, poverty, isolation, power, language, choice and freedom of choice, are related. I have not yet discovered how closely or loosely they relate to each other. I do not know how one affects the other or if there is a snowball effect at a specific time which makes the issues better or worse.

I discovered that in my youth I never thought very much about any of these words and I did not understand the meaning of the word abuse and poverty and the many ways they affected me throughout my life. I did not understand the words, "you always have a choice" because more often than not I did not have a choice. I did not understand, "you can be anything you want to be" because I knew at a very young age I could not. I understood only patriarchal language because that was all I heard in my youth. I believe isolation was always part of my life because there is a subtle isolation when you are poor and lowly educated. Only when these words affected me personally did I search for deeper meaning. I began to think about them after I had lost my freedom in my own

home. Even when I made the effort to improve my education levels there were endless obstacles that I could not and did not overcome.

I believe having clear definitions are important to the reader because the reader and the writer may not always agree on how the words are defined. I believe people who have been through abuse and lost many rights have different definitions for many of these words. It was important for me to let the reader know specifically my definition of the words that will be used throughout this study.

## Chapter 4

### The Long Journey

#### Design and Methodology

One of the many dilemmas I faced at the beginning of this study was to find a way to talk about my own life's journey and retell the participants' stories yet, keep each as individualized as possible. The objective of the interviews was to understand: if and how education levels, formal or otherwise, influence women's decisions and choices before, during and after an abusive relationship; whether females knowingly or unknowingly are influenced by families and culture to marry; to more fully understand abusive intimate relationships and how women unwittingly enter into relationships that become abusive; why some women leave the abuse quickly and other women stay in the relationships longer; how women survive the process of staying or leaving; and how difficult it is for women and their families to move on with their lives after the partnership has ended.

I had specific questions in mind that I wanted to ask the women who agreed to be participants. With the help of my advisors the questions were re-crafted many times. My intention was to understand the participants' stories by their answers to these questions.

- ☐ A very high percentage of women in Canada are abused everyday by intimate partners. What does the word "abuse" mean to you?
- ☐ Many types of women are abused. Do you know of any specific characteristics or deficiencies that make women more vulnerable to abusive relationships?
- ☐ Do you have any insights how/why women enter into relationships which eventually become abusive?

- ☐ Research tells us there are many types of abuse other than physical abuse. Could you describe other types of abuse that women endure?
- ☐ People say, "Why doesn't she just leave?" Describe for me the type of person who would make such a statement. What are major concerns when women leave abusive partners?
- ☐ Women are abused more often than men in an intimate relationship. What are some of the factors that might influence women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships?
- ☐ People are being educated about family violence. What type of education should they receive?
- ☐ Many organizations say we need more education. What areas of education would best help abused women? When should this education begin?
- ☐ Why do you think some women say they are not complete without a man?
- ☐ What would be considered the most important factors to stop abuse?
- ☐ Is there anything more you would like to add about women who are in or out of abusive situations?

Because there is no perfect question there was no perfect answer. Therefore, I used the information that appeared to be the most discussed by each participant. I had asked myself most of these questions many times over the last 20 years and had answered most of them the same. However, some of my answers changed after the interviews.

During this study I had four different advisors. Two of the advisors suggested Narrative Inquiry as a framework for this study. As I read about Narrative Inquiry I discovered this framework would give me the opportunity to tell the stories I wanted to



tell. I also discovered that it is a process through which people could make sense of their experiences by talking to me and indirectly speaking to readers about their lives.

The framework for this qualitative research is an ethnographic narrative inquiry. Ethnography is a method of studying and learning about people. It usually involves the study of a small group of participants to get an understanding of the circumstances of the participants involved in a study. (rather than looking at a small set of variables and a large number of subjects) Ethnographic accounts are descriptive, because detail is crucial, and interpretive, because the ethnographer must determine the significance of what she observes without gathering broad, statistical information.

The model, Narrative Inquiry, was developed by Clandinin and Connelly (1994). It is not easy to give any clear-cut definition of narrative inquiry. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2002) narrative inquiry is a framework and process through which people relate their experiences by telling their stories. Storytelling helps people to understand human experience. For many storytellers their stories are also their own realities. Narrative inquiry is used as a way of understanding people's life experiences. Clandinin and Connelly define it as:

A collaboration between a researcher and a participant, over a period of time and in a series of places, and in social interaction with milieus, living and telling, reliving and telling the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives both individual and social. (p.20)

An ethnographic narrative inquiry approach is but one example of how stories are being used to question the "taken-for-granted" in the lives of research participants, (as well as the researchers), to make connections between the details of the stories, to examine prior knowledge and to use stories to construct new knowledge. As well, this way of doing research may provide insight into the ethical process of generating research

knowledge that is specific to individuals.

A body of literature has emerged which provides researchers with new ways of conducting research (Brockmeier & Harre, 2000; Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). "Like all kinds of ordinary discourse it is universally present in everything we say, do, think and imagine. Even our dreams are, to a large extent organized as narratives" (Brockmeier & Carbanigh, 2001, p. 47). Many storytellers have lived the stories they tell and often the reader/researcher can better visualize and understand their situations and circumstances (Brockmeier & Carbanigh, 2001). From my perspective, ethnographic narrative inquiry would be a good way to explore family violence, particularly in a society where many people do not want to hear about it (ForsdickMartz & Sarauer, 2000)

In every story there are parts that will be multi-voiced or overlap even when people are telling their personal history. "Sometimes the tale is created jointly or cooperatively" (Brockmeier & Carbanigh, 2001, p.46). Researchers, who use "story" must direct their attention to the storyteller's insights and knowledge, rather than trying to decide if one version of the same incident is wrong or right. One storyteller's thoughts might be the same or different from another storyteller's thoughts. This often validates specific points. They might both describe the colour red as blood red or crimson red but despite the difference in words they used, the reader knows both storytellers saw the colour red even if in different shades. "Every word, expression, utterance or narrative bears the traces of all subjects, possible or real, who ever used or will use this word, expression, utterance or narrative" (p. 46). Brockmeier and Harre (2001) state, "that narrative is the most powerful mode of persuasion" (p. 49).

As I read about Narrative Inquiry I recalled how as youngsters, my siblings and I gathered around an old wood stove in our kitchen and listened to our parents and neighbours tell stories, about their lives. There were very few books in our home and I learned story telling from the voices of my parents and the neighbours. In my pre-teen and teen years, story telling was the way ideas were exchanged amongst my friends. In my late teens, reading books and having discussions developed my storytelling even further. Later, as an adult, story telling was a method of learning from others. Storytelling was, and still is, a method that helped me to understand human experiences. The stories I heard from my earliest childhood still echo today.

In my 40s, I discovered that writing about personal issues and hardships gave me new insight into my own life and it allowed me to make sense of many personal and social issues. Over the last 20 years, I discovered themes in my own writings that deeply affected my thoughts, ideas and decisions in my youth. The long road of research and discovery would not have happened without my journal writing because I reflected on my ideas and thoughts as I wrote the biography for this research.

The audiotapes I sent to my son the year he lived in Ontario were a great source of information. They told about my living alone for the first time in my life and trying to make sense of my life alone. All this information made me reflect on my early life in a different way. I asked myself more questions and tried to find answers. Because narrative inquiry is a form of story telling it was easy to document daily issues and hardship in a journal and on audiotape. Throughout the study the reader will hear my views as I answer the questions too.

## Overall Approach and Rationale

The core of this ethnographic, narrative inquiry is the women, former victims and now survivors of family violence, who were willing to participate in this study. Given the cultural taboos surrounding intimate partner abuse, stories about such abuses are often shocking to hear and difficult to understand. Many listeners do not want to hear the gruesome details about family violence (Walker, 1994, p. 23). After 20 years of dealing with abused women, a social worker told me she did not truly understand abused women returning to the men who battered them until her own sister was in an abusive relationship. Only then did she recognize the deeper, more insidious abuse that erodes self-esteem and creates great fear. The simple answer for many people living outside the abuse is that the abused women leave the violence. In my ignorance I have made the same statement.

Similarly, it is often difficult for those who have been abused, to talk about relationship abuse especially to parts of the population who have no desire to understand family violence. Abused women are too often embarrassed and ashamed that their partners abused them and they are unwilling to speak out. They frequently blame themselves despite all the information that tells them logically it is not their fault. They fear being disbelieved. They often feel disloyal to their partner, children and families.

Most abused women do not want to destroy the man or his name. They just want out of the abuse. In fact trying to destroy the men can only hurt the children. People outside the relationship do not understand how battered rationalize and battered women having difficulty explaining. Sensitive to this discovery, I looked for a research approach that would provide space and respect for the stories being told.

The assumption for many years has been that narrative inquiry could be used in literary theory and linguistics but not used in the human sciences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Traditional methodology of inquiry and data representation has employed numbers, charts, curves, and statistics. In wading through the masses of information, the people themselves were often forgotten. In this information age, a high percentage of the personal information appears as nameless numbers or statistics that tells only part of the story. Although impersonal questionnaires gather data quickly, there are always margins of error. In fact, formulas are used by Statistics Canada to determine many factors about Canadians lives but there is always a degree of error in their findings (Ghosh & Ray, 1991).

Ethnographic narrative inquiry introduces the reader to the teller's life and reality, which are often very personal. Everyone has their own way of telling a story and everyone has their own way of interpreting a story. Parts of a story may affect one listener differently than any other listener. Bruner (1990) describes narrative inquiry as, "one of the crowning achievements of humans" (p. 67). People learn from each other and by telling their own version of a story.

At the beginning of this study narrative inquiry sounded like a very easy way to tell the story about three women who lived in abusive relationships. However, it was difficult to express the voices of the storytellers. The storyteller's words had to be in the proper context for trustworthiness and every story had to be clarified or validated by the storyteller. Even though this allowed for contractual negotiation between the researcher and the participant it was time consuming (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p.46). I had to learn to focus on the storyteller's insights and knowledge rather than question the

accuracy of one person's version, in comparison to another person's version of the stories. "Narrative is a particularly open and flexible structure that allows us to examine precisely fundamental aspects of human experience" (p. 47). Yet, I discovered when the same type of story is told many times, by many people, the story itself may lose some of the flavour or the most important points. However, that did not happen in this study because the stories were always fresh to the women telling them. I struggled to create a story/study that would tell the story, yet, speak to the readers.

When people tell their own stories the meaning can be entirely different (Health Canada, 2002). These differences often involve the teller's beliefs based on culture, religion, philosophy, politics, legal systems, science, language, expressions, knowledge and education levels. Through personal narrative the readers will more likely identify with the participants as human beings, rather than by numbers and charts or victims and survivors (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Brockmeier & Carbaugh, (2001) state, "Narrative has a tendency to fuse diverse elements" (p. 46).

## Limitations

There are limitations with any research and this ethnographic narrative inquiry is no different. In essence the full reality of any story comes from the participants even when they are guided throughout the project using guided or pointed questions. Although the stories may be grounded in the particular perspective of the storytellers it allows the researcher to gather new and rich descriptive information. The interviews may be open-ended and require more time, but this could allow the researcher to collect a wealth of new and different data. It takes time to clarify information and that is why there was more than one interview with the participants.

Interviewing two women will not give all the answers that some readers may need but having the women speak this openly has opened the door to a whole new area of understanding. Although the interviews brought back many upsetting moments the participants had the opportunity to make sense of life experiences that, they may or may not have otherwise understood. Through story telling, participants did not have to conform to a specific order, measure and structure or defend their reality. They told their stories, as they knew them. Freire (1969) could have been talking to this researcher when he said:

It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world. (p. 85)

Bruner (1996) says: "Stories pivot on breached norms. That much is already clear. That places "trouble" at the hub of narrative" (p. 142). This research project was taken on because I felt troubled about the way my life had turned out. I was not satisfied with the studies I read and nothing I read solved any of my problems. Most of the research that has been done about family violence shows how poverty, freedom of choice, abuse and education levels are indirectly linked to each other but the link is almost insignificant because it is buried under other data. There has been very little directly written, in Canada, about family abuse situations and education levels of abused women. I had Robertson Library at UPEI do a specific search across Canada for me. On the advice of my advisors I did not use research from other continents. There were/are so many religious and cultural differences it would have created a thesis of gigantic proportions.

I approached focus group and safe house supervisors and managers but could not

get participants from these groups. Some safe house workers felt this type study may again place the blame on the abused women instead of on the abusive men. Whether the workers want to believe it or not women do blame themselves when they get into abusive situations. There maybe a hundred different underlying reasons (religious, social, governmental, emotional, financial, or family circumstances) that open the door to abusive relationships. However, for many women there is still a questioning whisper that asks what more she could have done to make the situation better or make the abuse stop? It is not the intent of this study to blame women because women in most abusive relationships have already learned to blame themselves and it often takes years to stop the self-blame (Evans, 1993). Men must learn to take responsibility for their actions.

I searched for women who were willing to talk about their experiences living in and leaving violence situations. Most women wanted to tell their stories but many women do not want their stories documented. Some women were freshly out of an abusive situation and in emotional pain and did not want to participate. Eventually two women offered to be participants in this project. After approval from the Research Ethics Board I interviewed these women using ethnographic narrative inquiry. These two women were very important to this exploration of education levels and abuse within intimate relationships. The challenge was to find a key that connected the stories to each other about intimate abuse.

### Participation Selection

The participants in this study were two Prince Edward Island women. This was a purposeful selection, from a subgroup of women who have lived in family violence. They survived the abusive circumstances, and, with their children have moved on with their



lives. "Often, however, researchers' site selection and sampling begins with accessible sites (convenient sampling)" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.77). It was not easy to find women who were willing to have audio taped interviews. "A realistic site is where entry is possible" (p. 69). Entry was possible here.

Because there is a shared interest in abuse and abusive relationships, both women have come to know my research interest over the last ten years and they wanted to be involved. I have known these women for many years from past employment, present employment, transition houses and organizations that help support abused women. I explained to them that they are under no personal obligation to be part of this research, can decline to answer any questions or stop participation at any time. I did want them to feel pressured because we are acquaintances. If either or both women had decided not to participate, I would have approached other women who have spoken publicly about their experiences of abuse.

I believed there was minimal risk in this study because the women who offered to be part of this study were not afraid of their former spouses. I identified this particular group of potential research participants because throughout this study these women were doing no more than what they had done publicly many times before talking about their experiences of abuse and how the abuse had affected their lives. The younger participant's former husband lives in another province and that gives her a certain amount of freedom she might otherwise not have. The older participant's former husband recently died. She and I are not at risk. Even if the two interviewed participants were identified in the written thesis, this did not pose any further risk because of their desire to talk about their past experiences.

Talking about the abuse had been an on-going education for the participants. Throughout the process they tried to identify what happened in their own relationships. Like me these women were looking for answers years after the abuse ended. Both women had access to counseling in their work places, had asked for counseling assistance in the past and would not hesitate to ask for help again if it was needed.

Both women were white and were raised in two parent family homes. One was 48 years old and the other 65 years old. The younger woman had been divorced twice, had three daughters from the second marriage all living at home. She was raised with two male siblings. The older woman married and divorced the same man twice, and is now re-married to another. She had three adult daughters from the first marriage. She was raised with four female siblings. Both participants were Protestant.

Even though there is 17 years difference in their ages the participants had similar stories regarding abuse. They had different education levels. They were born and raised in different provinces. They had lived in different parts of Canada or other countries and they returned to Atlantic Canada. Although one woman was married and two were single their economic status was similar and was low to middle income. The women had stories to tell and their stories had similarities to my own story.

### Data Gathering

The subjects of abuse and of illiteracy worldwide are of gigantic proportion so I tried to stay within the bounds of North America and Canada if possible. Most of the previous research used for this study is from Canada and the United States. I have used Canadian studies and stories where possible and specific information about abuse will come from two Prince Edward Island women.

Freire (1968) addresses oppression by stating, "Often educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the men [sic] they address" (p.85). As much as people want to understand family violence, no one understands it as well as the people who have endured it. Although many people know about family abuse from reading, taking courses or acting on behalf of the victims, only the victims truly understand the very essence of being in an intimate violent relationship. As a researcher, I too must be committed to writing so this study will be understood from the perspective of women who have been abused by a male partner. However, there are some areas of this study such as religion, culture, education and environment where it is necessary to include the male perspective.

## **Interviews**

Following the ethical clearance from University of Prince Edward Island and from the participants, I had each woman sign a consent form. They were verbally informed about the process. I discussed safety issues, transportation and any other needs.

I acknowledged my own limitations to them because I am not an expert in the field of abuse or interviewing. I interviewed each participant separately. The participants could refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study. Each of the women had 3 interviews. To connect important points the second and third interviews gave the participants the opportunity to add anything, fill in any gaps and to clarify information.

The women were audio taped and the tapes destroyed immediately after being transcribed. The transcriptions were done by me and will be destroyed five years after the study is completed. The women have been given copies of the transcripts to confirm

and sign as part of the criteria for consent. Secondary information for this study was gathered from research in books, journals, articles, and films for the literature review.

### Data Analysis Procedures

The interviews were transcribed and the collected data was analyzed by tracing themes that ran through the women's lives. I used colour coding to determine the key words for analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.155). Key words were education, abuse, poverty, isolation, power, language, choice, and freedom. "The researcher determines where the greatest emphasis lies after the data have been gathered" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.117). I tried to thread the story together based on the key words and the answers from the participants in the collected data. This created some specific themes. I was not interviewed but my words are part of the data. The two participants read the final product to prevent errors in my interpretation of their words.

### Validity

(Freire (1968) states, "Dialogue cannot exist without humility" (p.78). The data quality and the credibility of the women's words are reasonably assured, however, I could not question their reality of life as abused women. I did not judge or criticize their opinions or words. I did not argue or dissect words, sentences or conversations because these were their stories as they remembered them. I do not have to prove their memories as abused women are right or wrong. I only have to tell their stories. Because the participants have spoken out, hopefully, their words will have a positive affect on other abused women. Abused women are often inclined to hide the abuse and nothing can be done to improve conditions when abuse is hidden.

Many of the findings from the study were very similar to the research in the

literature review. I tried to categorize their word in different ways but the themes seemed to be the best way to include all the data. The participants' answers could be compared to the literature review or applied to most women who have entered, lived in or left abusive relationship. Because the participants have had a number of years away from the abusive men, they have had a lot of time to define abuse. Their answers were well thought out and deep thought had gone into the suggestions on how to stop family violence.

The women and their backgrounds were described as fully as possible. Their words about abusive relationships could be used by other researchers and abused women. Their conversations could be used in other areas of Canada to promote healthy relationship education. Although this researcher set out with one idea, the participants changed my ideas about how different types of education would help prevent family violence. It would be difficult to replicate their words. The data does confirm that various types of education (formal, social and relationship) would probably prevent/ease many of the hardships laid out in their own lives.

The voices of these three women speak to the readers, the many women who find themselves in abusive relationships, and the women who have found their way out of the violence. It is important to remember that this study was exploratory and in the context of discovery rather than in verification. I did not try to verify everything the participants said. I took their words as their factual stories. There were unexpected findings that not only changed my mind about what I expected at the beginning of the study but with more education this information will hopefully help to prevent young girls and women from entering into family violence situations. I believe they answered the questions in such a way that it measured not only what I thought should be measured it went a step beyond

what I expected. Everyone involved in this study may learn something new from each other. I may be able to access new information from the participants.

### Human Participation Protection

As a researcher my goal was to provide a safe space where the women felt free to respond openly. Both women had been away from the offenders for a long time. They believed their lives were open books and they talked very openly about their abusive relationships. One woman did public discussions and educates at every opportunity in church groups, panels or junior high schools when invited. The younger woman's former husband does not live in this province. She was very open about her relationship and the abuse she suffered. Their court battles are available from family court records. I am not aware of anyone who knew that I was interviewing the two women.

I did not reveal their names in my thesis, to my advisors, or anyone else. Their places of work were not disclosed. No real names of participants, former spouses or their families were used in the proposal or study, however, in a small province and community I could not guarantee that readers would not be able to identify the participants. The participants realized readers may identify them from the stories but this was not a major concern for them. I could not prevent them from discussing this study with other people. The issue of confidentiality was important to this study and every effort was made to ensure the rights of the subjects were protected. In this matter, I could guarantee it would not be me who broke the confidence. If I had not felt safe myself I would have never begun this study.

### Data Analysis

Two female participants were interviewed and their conversations were audio

taped. The audiotapes were transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were then read with the tape recorder going so that errors or omissions could be corrected. I used colour-codes to categorize themes. I, as researcher, am the third participant in this study. I was not interviewed but a lot of my thoughts and ideas are on the audio-tapes. I had asked and answered the question many times as they were being devised.

I chose the pseudonyms for the two participants who were interviewed. Abira and Odeda are Hebrew names for "strong". These names were chosen because they were and are strong women. There is no pseudonym for the researcher. My story is part of the research.

This researcher did the analysis. There were many themes but I chose the themes that shed more light on the research questions. I manually counted the number of times the themes names showed up. I selected these themes because the colour-codes showed that the most emphasis was on these themes. Many of the themes held the key words that threaded together the stories of the 3 participants. Most of the literature review and the questions I asked the participants touch on one or more of these themes.

## Chapter 5

### Honour to Voices That Echo

#### Research Findings

As a writer I had the choice of using italics for the voices of the women who so bravely spoke about their experiences as women living in abusive relationships. The key themes to emerge from the research were: "Home Culture and Early Education," "Employment and Marriage," "Abuse and Fear," "Leaving and Other Issues." I arrived at these themes when the colour coding showed that these groups of words were mentioned repeatedly.

#### Theme I: Home Culture and Education

The first theme represents the participant's first language, their race, place of birth, sex, era they lived in, religion, characteristics of the participants, the dominant parent in each family and the formal education of both parents and participants. All three women's personal stories had similar patterns with respect to their: parental home, religious beliefs, social conditioning, education levels or lack of education, reasons for marrying, the type of men they married, types of abuse they endured and the types of abuse used by their partners. The participants' experiences before, during and after the abuse were similar.

The participants were white and between 48-65 years old. They were raised during the 1950s, and the late 1960s. All three participants were raised in two parent families and each had between two and eight siblings. All three were Protestant and in



their youth spent time in activities at the Baptist and United churches. At that time many of the staunch rules of the church and community were still intact and were enforced by their parents.

Abira and Flora's mothers worked as homemakers but when the children started school they became employed outside the home. Odeda's mother was a full-time homemaker who took in sewing and other work for people in the community. Odeda and Flora's mothers had not completed junior high and Abira's mother completed grade twelve and attained a teacher's certificate. The fathers' of Odeda and Flora had low formal education levels. Abira's father was a trained mechanic. All three fathers were employed at various jobs for many years due to job scarcity or lack of education and training to acquire other employment. Eventually, Abira's father worked as a mechanic and car salesman, Odeda's father worked at a sawmill, Flora's father worked as a self-taught mechanic in a government garage. All the participants agree that their parents did the best they could do for their families with their formal education; their social education; the culture at the time and their annual income.

Throughout the interviews there were incidents that I identified from the participant's youth that seemed unrelated to this study. Yet, as I listened to the interview and re-read their stories I realized many of the incidents were directly and indirectly related to the decisions the participants made later in life. There were direct and indirect influences related to the culture, the era, their religion, their parents, environment, and education levels that impacted their teenage and adult years.

Abira the youngest participant had a happy, carefree childhood and was sheltered from most negative aspects of life. There was never any type of abuse that she heard or

saw in her parent's home. *Abira said, "I am sure they had fights like every married couple but I never heard them."* She had two older brothers, lived in a small town and began school at Grade 1 in a one-room school where her mother was a teacher. She was very shy throughout her childhood.

Odeda had a happy childhood, was raised with four sisters, lived in a rural area and began Grade 1 in a small community schoolhouse. She says she never saw or heard abuse in her home. *"We were poor but safe."* At a very young age she was exposed to the prejudice of the rich/poor in the community when children teased her about her homemade clothes.

Flora had happy early years, started Grade 1 in an urban school and moved to a rural school for grades 2 to 9. She was not sheltered from social problems in her community and she witnessed verbal and physical abuse at home and at school. Flora stated, *"I often felt poor, neglected and looked down upon."*

Abira's parents would have supported her in whatever education or training she had chosen. After completing Grade 12, she chose one year in a commercial course, taking typing and filing. There was no thought given to more education, better employment or for supporting herself financially at a future date. Abira, thought working for just a few years was the thing to do and then get married.

Odeda was outgoing and did a lot of sports during her teen years. She completed Grade 10 but did not go on to high school. There was no money to pay for higher education and rent in Charlottetown, where Grades 11 and 12 were taken at Prince of Wales College. Odeda stated, *"Being poor interrupted my education."*

*Flora, "Leaving school in Grade 9 created gaps in both my formal and social*

*education. I was not only ignorant, I was shy and backward."*

The participants experienced many of the normal changes that take place during puberty and they sometimes felt overwhelmed with some or all of the changes (hair growth, growth spurts, pimples, menstruation and breast development) to their bodies. Along with the biological changes Abira had the stress of moving to a bigger school; moving from one class to another; coping with a bigger school population; meeting new students; trying to find comfort zones; maintaining grades and being accepted into a whole new way of life. Odeda and Flora faced full-time employment, a team of co-workers, management of personal budget and trying to live on low wages. The biological changes during puberty and adolescence were not easy. Parallel to these life changes were the social changes that often made these women feel insecure about themselves. Odeda and Flora experienced the overwhelming stresses of being a teenager and working full-time in an adult world.

Abira was the only participant who experienced the social and personal changes that occur in both junior high (grades 7-9) and senior high school (grades 10-12) age groups. Abira experienced moving from class to class, which took away the security of having one teacher, one room and familiar classmates in a one-room school. She also experienced trying to meet the teacher's and her parent's expectations with good grades, planning future education and preparing for life employment. She dated boys and experienced the social activities in school.

Odeda did not experience high school because she took Grade 10 in a small rural schoolhouse. Flora had not finished junior high and most of the changes she experienced were made as she worked to make a living. She did complete grade nine by

correspondence with the Prince Edward Island Department of Education in 1962.

The participants believe there was a long and broad transition from teenager to adult world but guidance that was available was not what they needed. There was little or no discussion about intimate relationships between boys and girls or between parents and children or in schools. The dilemma for the participants was the need for the freedom to mature and relinquishing the comforts and security of childhood and home.

*Abira said, "I just thought I would grow up, graduate, get a job and then get married. I had been going out with a boy for four or five years by the time I was twenty."*

*Odeda said, "My parents believed children go to school, grow up, get a job, get out on our own and get married. I guess we all think like that. You bring kids up to go out on their own."*

*Flora said, "My parents were unenlightened enough to believed that the transition from childhood to adulthood was a natural process. For me there was nothing natural about the process."*

Abira, Odeda and Flora used the words inferior, naive, shy, inadequate, incomplete and ignorant to describe themselves. They were naïve about life away from the parental home and community. Very little was taught about sex in their schools and at home sex was rarely acknowledged. The participants wanted love and commitment and the boys they dated often wanted sexual gratification without love or attachment. They were naïve about boys and later men simply because they did not have the necessary education regarding relationships.

*Flora, "There was no sex education in the school I attended. I was embarrassed by the mention of it."*

All three participants frequently felt like they did not fit into the "preppy crowd" whose lives seemed to be mapped out for them. As teenagers, the participants did not always know where they belonged. They did not look toward the future with any long-

term goals or firm plans. Abira was the only participant who had the financial support and other supports to do whatever she wanted to do after Grade 12. Odeda made plans to enter the air force where she could get more education but allowed her dreams to be swept away. At ages 16-18 Flora had no plans or dreams for her future.

*Abira, "I was shy. I thought people were always looking at me."*

*Odeda, "I did not fit in with college girls because we had nothing in common."*

*Flora, "All the girls going on to college seemed to have better everything than me."*

According to Erikson's Theory regarding the phases of the life cycle there is great importance attached to the early years at home where children are either encouraged or restricted. It should also be noted the first years of school are also very important according to Erikson because children either develop a sense of industry or a sense of inferiority. This is a foundation for social and educational learning and children need to be treated properly in order to develop to their fullest potential in later life (Sandrock, 1989).

## Theme 2: Employment and Marriage

The second theme represents the type of jobs that were available to the participants when they completed their formal schooling. The three participants agreed that the lower the formal education level the less likely girls are to find prosperous jobs and be independent. They may have listened to me talk about this subject for many years but this is based on their own findings in the workforce. They as participants and women agree that many females married for security, especially during the 1940s and 1950s (some still do) because females who completed college or university frequently made less

money then men who worked in the trades. All three working participants agree that more married women work outside the home but they still take on most of the responsibility for the children and home. The participants have been employed outside the home most of their adult lives yet, made lower wages than their former husbands. They receive or will receive fewer benefits as they age due to pensions based on past income and the breaks in their employment during childbearing years.

At young ages (16-20) Abira, Odeda and Flora became employed in what would be described as “pink collar jobs.” Abira had an office position and women did receive slightly higher wages in the late 1970s. She got married just out of school. She said, *“He had his money and I had mine.”* The next job she had was in Alberta, a province with much higher wages than the Atlantic Provinces.

Odeda and Flora were forced to leave their childhoods behind, work full time, and survive on low wages. There was little chance for them to advance without higher formal education and even less opportunity for benefits such as medical plans, dental coverage or work related pensions. Rather than thinking about a career, vocation or college, their lives became a matter of survival. They did not get the opportunity to return to school for higher formal education until their mid thirties or early forties. The participants remained in, and married men in, the “pink/blue” social class.

Odeda and Abira dated during their school years and after they became employed. The participants believe that girls from puberty through adolescence would be better equipped to make better choices in boys/men if they had more education about dating relationships. Odeda and Abira were either shy or naive and they dated only a few boys during their early teens. Although Flora did not date until age 19 she too was shy,

backward and naïve about male/female relationship

*Flora, "When I first began to work, I felt like an unlucky girl having to work 44 hours per week for less than \$88.00 per month. By the time I got married(1969) I was making \$300 per month. No wonder I wanted to get married. At the time I do not think I realized how much economics played into the decision to marry. A lot of the girls my age left school early, found jobs, worked for one or two years and then got married. Most of my friends were married by age 20. I understand now why they married so young. I had only two dates during my teens. I dated a boy on and off at age 20 and then more men when I was about 22-24. I did not really like dating because nothing was permanent."*

Abira and Flora believed, at very young ages, they were conditioned to marry. As young children Odeda and Flora played skipping games in which the rhyming chants were related to marriage. One skipping game began with this question, "Who are you going to marry? Tinker? Tailor? Cowboy? Sailor? Rich Man? Poor Man? Beggar Man? Thief? Doctor? Lawyer? Indian Chief?"

At age five Flora and some playmates went to visit a neighbour for cookies and milk. This woman bypassed every page of toys in Eaton's catalogue and turned to the wedding gowns or dolls dressed in wedding gowns. Flora and her playmates looked at the wedding gowns. This motherly neighbour told Flora repeatedly, "You will be a beautiful bride." Were these incidents the first stage of conditioning toward marriage?

*Abira, "I do not know where I got the idea. I have no idea where it came from but as far back as I can remember I just knew that I had to be married."*

*Odeda, "I never really thought a lot about marriage but I knew a lot of women got married for security."*

*Flora, "I know now I wanted the wedding but not the marriage. I believe I got married to have security."*

During the dating period Abira, Odeda and Flora were charmed by the kindness shown to them by the men they dated and eventually married. Their perception of love was very narrow and the attention from the men was not thought of as negative,

possessive or controlling because the women equated the attention with love. They presumed the men wanted the same things that they wanted in marriage. Not once did any of the three women consider the men's personal agendas. The women pictured loving husbands, warm, cozy homes, children, more education, travel and security. Though all the women had different strengths and weaknesses, they took only what they knew into the relationships.

At one time or another during the dating relationship the participants believed the men they married would take care of them. This was easy to understand considering the women at times hardly earned enough money to take care of themselves. The men had some or all of what the women considered important: better jobs, more money, access to travel, transportation, health and dental care, pensions and other advantages that the participants (without better jobs) would never be able to afford. Odeda and Flora presumed they would reap some or all the benefits of world travel, golf, summer holidays, transportation, decent housing, higher education, health care and pensions. Abira wanted a good marriage and children. These men were also able to buy a vehicle while these women hitched a ride or took the bus.

The men they married appeared to have different visions and ideologies than the participants. The women have never pinpointed what the men truly wanted from the marriages. There was a disconnection between what the women thought life would be like with their husbands and their actual life with their husbands. All three women believed that the men's interests would include them and to some extent that they could experience their lives and dreams, through the men they married.

The decisions the participants made in youth were based on a culture of their day



that said females should marry, have babies and take care of a husband and home. In their families the little girls played house, dressed up as mothers and pretended their dolls were their babies. In Flora's family, females were expected to baby-sit, care for younger siblings or elders and to take over the household chores when necessary. The participants' mothers often knowingly and unknowingly guided the participants in the desired direction to serve, take care of the house and everything inside the house. Marriage was extolled by their parents and most social and cultural institutions. The participants were subtly being trained to be wives and mothers.

Odeda and Flora thought their parents perhaps unknowingly influenced their choices to marry even though they rarely or never discussed marriage partnerships with them. Abira was guided by what she experienced at home; by what she personally believed and by society's expectations. All their parents thought their daughters would have security, protection and a man to take care of them. The women admitted there was not a lot of thought, common sense or educated knowledge put into their decisions to marry. They were either in love or it was the thing to do. They felt the need to marry, wanted to marry, had the mind-set to marry, felt somewhat worthless without a husband, or believed they could obtain what they wanted through the man they married.

They all agree that you do not know a person until you live with them. The boyfriends and later husbands of the participants made them feel loved but what Abira, Odeda and Flora thought was love, was actually control. It began when they were dating the men they later married but none of them recognized the problems or they were unable to admit there was a problem. It took a long time for the women to admit they made a mistake. The further into the love relationship the less they focused on their own needs

and too often the women allowed their wants and needs to be overlooked. Eventually, they did not believe in themselves or did not have the energy to defend their rights. Nothing was, as they believed it would be. For the participants it became easier to concede than to fight. They conceded to their partners until there was nothing left to concede and the concessions led to a dictatorship.

*Odeda said, "If you did not marry, people wondered what was wrong with you."*

*Abira said of both spouses, "It was not as if I really loved him or anything like that. I had the mind-set that I should be married."*

*Flora said, "I was totally influenced by unending advertisements on the radio and in two newspapers about being June brides and entering the June bride contest. Young women and June brides just seemed to go together. I guess I wanted the wedding but I never really thought about the marriage."*

The parents of the participants passed down rules and laws of the culture, church and household rules based on parental beliefs. "Thus, sexual impropriety, or its appearance mattered greatly" (Mandell, 1998, p. 80). Odeda and Flora agree that in the 1950s and 1960s that girls had to be married to have children, otherwise some families, some churches and some segments of society treated the girls like outcasts. Odeda and Flora knew some young women who were often forced into marriage by their own guilt after their first sexual encounter or they were forced by their parents to get married if they became pregnant. Pregnant brides lost most of their power before marriage because they often felt grateful to the men who married them. If the girl did not marry then the children were often put up for adoption by their parents, or by religious organizations.

*Flora, "Some of the student nurses where I worked were kicked out of nurse's training because they were pregnant and unmarried. The rules about single motherhood eventually changed and the girls came back to complete their training."*

*Flora, "I know both men and women who felt forced to marry because the women were pregnant. Some marriages worked and others did not work. No one is forced to marry today. Girls can get social assistance and keep their babies. Many morality rules of 30 to 50 years ago are not enforced today."*

Abira now believes at age 20 she was too young and too immature to take on the responsibility of marriage. Divorced at age 23, she eventually moved to another province to begin a new life. Within six months of meeting her second husband she married for the second time. She had three children and after the births she became economically dependent on her husband.

At age 20, Odeda met and married a man in the Canadian Air Force. She believed they would have a great life together. She stated, *"I thought I could do all the things I wanted to do with him. The Air Force meant more education and traveling the world."* Her husband persuaded her to leave the Air Force and after having 3 children she became economically dependent on her husband.

Flora worked for nine years before she married at age 25. She had one child. When the dental clinic where she worked closed, she became almost totally dependent on her husband because she could not find another job. Significant in all three relationships was the belief that they could live their dreams through the men they married.

Knowing they would be poor in many ways the women stayed in abusive relationships longer. After the marriages dissolved the participants worked at low paying jobs as: babysitters, daycare workers, coffee shop clerks, animal hospital aides and lace cutters. Social assistance meant living at or below the poverty line. It took years for two to get completely out of the abuse. Before they got back on their feet they moved to home provinces, lived at the poverty line, returned to school for more education or training and tried to fulfill their own dreams.

### Theme 3: Abuse and Fear

The third theme, abuse and fear, represents two major topics in this study. They did not always define abuse as abuse because they did not know what the term abuse covered. Early in their relationships the participants considered abuse as physical beatings, pushing, shoving, and slapping. Much later the participants learned there was a wide range of abuses such as isolation, verbal and emotional abuse, financial abuse, psychological abuse, religious abuse, sexual abuse and more. Fear of the male abuser toward themselves and their children was a major factor that kept the participants in abusive relationships. All three participants agreed that they were afraid to stay with their abusers and afraid to leave. Their fear included issues such as: not being believed, harassment, stalking, being killed, being alone, failure, poverty, losing their children and unreasonable fears regarding a wide variety of emotions.

Abira, Odeda and Flora all agree that information about family/intimate violence should begin before girls and boys begin to date. As the participants recalled their youth they realized there was abuse in various forms and degrees while they were dating the men they married. There were tiny snippets of sarcasm, insulting remarks or flaring tempers from the men they were dating. Too often the participants ignored the verbal abuse and tried to do better because they wanted their relationships to work. Not long into the marriages their husbands blamed them for everything that went wrong. At first there was a sense of loyalty to their husbands and they did not want to betray the men they married. They feared being blamed for the problems in the relationship and they did not reveal the abuse to anyone. Though the participants had witnessed their husbands verbally or physically abuse other people, the participants were shocked when the abuse

became physical and it was aimed at them.

*Abira, "My husband had a horrible temper but at the beginning the rage wasn't directed at me. Later, I just thought that I was just having a rotten life."*

*Odeda, "I believed he (husband) just needed more love and understanding."*

*Flora, "I did not know what more I could do. I was trying to make his life better and felt miserable and anxious myself."*

There was an unspoken rule to keep private what happened behind closed doors.

It was part of a culture that indirectly told the participants to marry for better or worse and put up with whatever happened in an intimate relationship. They now realize they did not recognize the insidious abuses in their dating relationships and they did not understand what was happening in their marriages. They spent a lot of time thinking about and trying to define the problem.

*Flora, "I was in a constant state of confusion. I felt anxious all the time."*

The three participants were frequently confused about the fluctuating moods of their partners and kept in a constant state of instability because the men would say one thing and do another. Abusive spouses deliberately keep their partners off balance by using mixed messages. Not fully understanding abuse, the participants had difficulty deciphering the mixed messages and even when they did interpret them, they were unsure of their own interpretations.

*Abira, "He had lost his job, yet again, and he blamed it on me. He blamed me for everything that went wrong."*

*Odeda, "I never felt stupid until I got married. He would praise me then call me stupid, make promises to come home and be late, or not come home at all."*

*Flora, "He criticized me continuously about the way I talked; what I read; types of clothes; my make-up, hairstyle, weight, and posture; everything I cooked and I could go on and on. Dancing, he tramped on my feet and blamed me."*

In the beginning all three participants tried to remember the dozens of nit picky things that upset their spouses. It was an impossible task and for everything remembered there would be one thing forgotten which made their spouses angry. The participants soon learned that it did not have to make sense and almost anything was “just cause” for anger. If their husbands were drinking or drunk the rage could be uncontrolled.

*Flora, “Mom bought a lot of Dad’s clothing. I bought clothes for my husband when I had extra money. After all he had married me and financially supported me. It was okay at first but later in the relationship he became enraged if I bought him anything. He stated, “I am not your little boy.” He also got angry when I saved to buy something for myself. He said I was hording money while he paid for everything. I did not understand and I still do not understand.”*

The marriage relationships of Abira, Odeda and Flora became more confusing as time went on and sadly none of the participants realized they was being verbally abused. Abira, Odeda and Flora could not emphasize enough that they did not understand what was happening in their relationships. How could these men swear undying love and then be so inhumane? The most powerful revelation for all three participants was having a neighbour, or friend, or lawyer or counselor actually say, “He is abusing you.” As soon as the abuse was named and the types of abuse defined there was a better understanding of the relationship. It took years to understand the insidiousness of abuse but eventually each woman could define abuse.

*Abira, “Abuse is any unwanted act that causes pain, whether it is physical emotional or sexual or anything else that causes pain. I believe I wasn’t educated in the signs of abuse and control when I was dating and I did not look for the signs. Now when I look back at the relationship the signs of abuse were there. I can only speak for myself when I say I had low self-esteem and I was very shy but I know there are many women who I considered very strong and out-going, who made the same bad choices and ended up in abusive relationships. Standards for a husband are not going to be the same if you have the mind set that you have to be married or you have to have a partner. My whole mind set was on getting married.”*

*Odeda, "Abuse is an assault on your body, soul, and heart. Abuse hurts. I believe that women are more vulnerable to abusive situations when they do not have enough education to get decent employment. They are often poor and want financial security. Women who are poorly educated make poor decisions because they do not have the skills and knowledge to make better choices."*

*Flora, "Abuse is negative words and acts that cause physical and mental pain. Looking back now I realize I was vulnerable because I was shy and socially backward. I had low education; was very insecure with the opposite sex; did not date until age 19 and I lacked many social skills. I tried to please then got tired of that. A greater vulnerability was the feeling that I was nothing if I was not part of a couple. This pressure came from family and friends and then from inside. In hindsight, there were signs of abuse in most men I dated. Looking back I realize I was interested in the men who had a subtle, abusive nature because at the time they represented strength and security. I did not know I know my interpretations were totally wrong."*

The mind-set of needing to marry made Abira more vulnerable to an abusive relationship because she was just looking for a man to marry her. As long as she and a man got on reasonably well there was not a lot of thought to anything beyond getting married. She did not love either husband.

Trying to find a way to get more education, to travel the world and live her dreams made Odeda more vulnerable to an abusive relationship. She did not think through her decision about resigning from the air force and how dependent she would become on her husband. He made lots of money and he traveled and she did not think beyond that at the time.

Flora was vulnerable because she could not meet her own economic needs and other peoples' expectations. In most dating relationships she was trying to please to prove she was good enough to love and marry. She was looking for someone to praise, approve and take care of her. In some instances older than her years but she was very immature in girl/boy relationships.

The participants pretended everything was fine for a long time. They lied to themselves about the abuse to protect their own psyche and lied to everyone else because they were ashamed. Lying was a defense mechanism they used to protect themselves, their children, their siblings and their parents. Unfortunately telling lies also protected their abusive partners. Even though they were victims, there was shame attached to the abuse and lying about the abuse made the whole situation seem more shameful. For the participants there was endlessness to the wrongs and there was confusion as to how to make it right.

The three participants described feelings of being deprived of a safe and quiet spot in their homes. They believed there was no freedom of movement or freedom of choice. The participants felt they had some power when their husbands were away but the dread of the spouse returning too often overshadowed these hours or days. When their husbands returned they seemed to fill the house with their overbearing ways and the women felt restricted once more. The participants knew they would return to submissive role when their husbands returned, otherwise there would be trouble.

*Odeda, "You grab on to the power while you can. My husband sometimes would be away for months with his job. As soon as he returned he took my power away and there were many ways for him to take your power away."*

*Flora, "I could not wait for him to leave in the morning. I wished he would die in a car accident. Then I would feel so guilty. My dread was his coming home drunk and the dread was always there. When he was gone I had a few hours of being myself. Near the end I never felt any power, even when he was away."*

At home the abusive partners assaulted the participants' perceptions, interpretations, integrity and intelligence with derogatory words and insults. One husband ridiculed his wife by twirling his fingers at his head, then pointing to his wife, telling her she was crazy. If she gave an opinion he would roll his eyes in the presence of



friends, neighbours and his family. These gestures were demeaning. Their husbands either refused to talk or made excessive noise so the participants would be kept awake at night. The women would lie awake and wonder if their husbands were coming home? What would transpire when they did come home? The psychological abuse was meant to break the spirits of the participants. Yet, the women were not ready to leave.

The abusive men seemed determined to somehow rid the participants of friends and family. The participants either kept people at arms length or stopped inviting people over. There most likely would be repercussions if the women exposed their husbands' moody and unstable behaviour. Due to lack of money or transportation there were days and weeks when there was no life outside the house for some of the participants. To be home most of the time was not a choice they made freely because this further isolated them and sadly it gave the abusive husbands more power.

Understandably the women did not confide intimate sexual details to the researcher. While the abuse was still infrequent the participants tried to bring back the sexual intimacy or desire for the men they married. However, the husbands wanted intimacy when they were drunk, after degrading actions, after assaulting the participants or after beating the children. As the overall abuse increased, the sexual abuse increased. The participants wanted to believe their spouses' apology, "I'm sorry, it will never happen again." After repeated abuses their spouses' apologies wore thin and the women stopped trying to hold a bad marriage together. The men were never contrite, never apologized and never admitted to ever doing anything wrong.

The participants no longer wanted sexual intimacy with the increasingly abusive men. When the wives did not respond to this type of bullying in the bedroom, husbands

called them names. The participants now understand that physical and sexual attacks were part of a strategy to control. The ultimate control in the marriage was coerced or forced sex. It was not until 1980s that marital rape was recognized and the laws began to change to protect women (Canfield, 2000).

In their daily lives the greatest emotion felt by all three participants was indescribable fear of the offender. The degrees of fears were different for each woman. Abira feared her husband killing her, getting custody of the children or killing her family. Odeda feared her husband running her off the road with his car, shooting her or kidnapping the children. Flora feared the unstable moods of a drunk and began to fear the night . . . darkness. The participants all knew what could cause trouble and to keep peace, they kept quiet. Many issues were never discussed with their spouses because they had to edit every word before they spoke and it became easier not to talk. Today they realize how much they had changed their daily lives to survive.

Fear was the reason the participants stayed in abusive relationships and fear was the reason they left the abusive relationships. They feared was for their lives (homicide and suicide) and their children's lives. They understood if anything happened to them, their spouses would have guardianship of the children. Abira and Odeda made an extra effort to stay alive to protect their children. At times the participants also experienced irrational fears. Every issue regardless of the size or importance became a fear. The women constantly asked why this was happening to them.

Fearful for their lives Abira and Odeda stayed longer. Their minds never had a rest because there were so many things to think through. Flora experienced horrible dreams and nightmares. Though help was available, at first the women were too afraid

and traumatized to accept the help. They had to be very careful about making plans to leave. Abira and Odeda felt that leaving would put their lives at risk. Eventually, Abira, Odeda and Flora decided they would rather be dead than exist in this type of environment.

*Abira, "I never told my parents how bad it was. I didn't want them to worry. He threatened all our lives. When I went home (parents' home) with the two children and I did, my husband phoned and threatened to hunt us down and kill all of us."*

*Odeda, "I was afraid for my sisters because he told me what he would do to them. He constantly threatened me with death. I felt very powerful when I told him, you either kill me now or leave me alone."*

*Flora, "I didn't tell anyone about him hurting me for a long time. I feared his finding out. I know I feared him and he knew it too. I sought legal counsel. That is when I felt free and safe. I told my former husband I was leaving. He was different than most men who abuse their wives. He was happy to see me go because he just wanted to be free and single. As long as I stayed I would be abused in one way or another. I think I was too naïve to think of him killing me in a moment of rage."*

Fear was paramount when the participants of this study moved out. Abira and Odeda waited until their husbands were out of the house before they made the decision to leave. They had to be hyper-vigilant of their whereabouts at all times because they never knew where their abusive husbands might be. Abira went to a transition house. Odeda had found an apartment. Flora moved to her home province.

Abira, Odeda and Flora agree that society needs to understand that fear makes women return to the offender because women fear for themselves and their children's lives. The participants agree that depending on the nationality, culture and religion of the victims and the abuser, the percentage of women who return to an abusive relationship could go much higher.

Abira, Odeda and Flora were assaulted with negative words and feelings every

day. Some of the words the participants used during the interviews to describe how they felt about themselves or their abusers were: abused, afraid, angry, ashamed, alone, bitch, taking blame, blamed, blue, courageous, crazy, depressed, deprived, dread, embarrassed, frustrated, hatred, hurt, ignorant, lacking in confidence, liar, loathing, low self-confidence, low standards, longing, love, low, loyal, lucky, mixed up, motivated, naïve, normal, pain, poor, pressured, relief, ridiculed, sad, safe, self-confident, shame, shy, stupid, worried, unmotivated. Despite this daily barrage of mostly negative words the three participants did not decide to leave until their former husbands began to berate and beat the children.

*Abira, "He got mad at our 3 year old. I was holding a three-month old infant. I tried to get between him and the child he was trying to beat. He slammed my head into a wall. I saw stars. I thought if he can not control beating a small child then what next was going to happen?"*

*Odeda, "He was me beating me as I was going up the stairs, not down the stairs, up the stairs. I was trying to get away from him. Our oldest daughter tried to get between her him and me to stop him. He threw her down the stairs." Odeda's eyes filled with tears as she recalled this life-changing incident.*

*Flora, "My child and I were watching a beautiful, heart touching movie called, "Where the Red Fern Grows." My child and I were eating Thanksgiving dinner on the coffee table. I had left the room for some reason and when I got back his father had come home drunk and turned the television channel to a football game. He said he paid the cable. My child's tears were dropping on his dinner plate as he tried to swallow a mouthful of food. When I intervened this led to incredible verbal abuse toward our child and then me."*

The participants believe that from a victim's point of view, that people do not understand the dynamics of wife abuse and most people did/do not fully understand family violence. People who are seemingly there to help battered women also blame them. After leaving the violence the participants were victimized again by people who did not understand. Too often all three participants have heard people suggest the victim

leave the abusive spouse. This is a simple solution to the problem of family violence but the same people do not understand the confusion, the fear and twisted sense of loyalty the women have toward their husbands. Women who are abused do not usually choose to harm their husbands. They just want the abuse and all it entails to stop. They fear leaving all that is familiar, house, school, neighbours, community or province. They fear being poor. They fear being a single parent. They fear the harm that will come to their children or their family. They do not want to become a separation or divorce statistic. They fear being alone. Some women fear the destruction of everything they own, stalking and death threats. When Odeda and Flora left there was no recognition of wife abuse and women had few if any choices.

*Flora, "I would get into bed at night, and before I went to sleep I would make the decision to leave. I solved all my problems before the lights went out. However, with the light of day the problems seemed too overwhelming and I did not know where to begin. So for a long time, I did nothing."*

In the beginning the three participants wanted the situation to get better, the abuse to stop and their marriages to work because they had young children. They spend a lot of time focused inward, taking inventory and trying to find out what they did wrong. The participants were unsure of themselves because fear had slowly altered their beliefs about almost everything. They looked for some logic where there was no logic and at the same time questioned their interpretations of every word and action. They did not know what to do and when they eventually realized what they had to do, they had difficulty acting. In each marriage there was love and even loyalty. However, after years of abuse the participants felt numb. Many women leave when they no longer love or hate the men who have abused them. They describe it as feeling numb.

*Abira, "I had phoned transition house a couple of times but I was too scared to*

*go. I did not know how I could leave with three small children so I stayed for another year. Finally, a friend helped me go to a transition house."*

*Odeda, "We (a friend and I) sat the two kids at the corner of the house and told them to tell us if his (their father's motor) bike moved. We threw everything into garbage bags. I took what we needed, couple of beds, table, clothes, dishes . . . we left just enough for him that he would not be after us. Anyway he was away with the air force for several months after we left and by the time he got back we were settled."*

*Flora, "I phoned every agency in Ontario to get help. There was no help. The social agencies and the lawyer did not understand the desperation I felt. I did not understand my situation or the social or legal systems. I wondered how anyone outside the relationship could understand."*

#### **Theme 4: Leaving and Other Issues**

The fourth theme represents the threats to the participants especially when they decided to leave and after leaving their partners. All three women agreed that the most dangerous time was making plans to leave, leaving, and after they left their abusive partners. These women already had a fear that almost paralyzed them and now they were facing economic hardships, child support, child-care, guardianship, lack of employment, decent housing, custody and visiting privileges and constant doubt about themselves and the world they faced as single mothers.

The women used almost identical sentences when asked why they finally left their partners. Responses included statements such as:

*Abira, "I left when he started beating the kids/children. If a grown man couldn't control his anger around the children . . . then what?"*

*Odeda, "It was okay when he was beating me but when he started beating on the children, I was like a mother lion with her cubs."*

*Flora, "I accepted that he would be mad at me but when he began verbally attacking the child that was the end."*

After leaving the abuse the participants suffered economic hardships. Abira and

Odeda did not receive child support. The three participants found it difficult to find meaningful, well-paying jobs that would support a household. One of the causes was lack of jobs in Prince Edward Island. Flora suspects Prince Edward Island's long history of political patronage regarding employment hurt her and other women who have little political clout. The participants did without many things the general public take for granted simply because they did not have good paying jobs.

*Abira, "I was still going to university when I left. I went to a transition house."*

*Odeda, "I worked in early childhood education. I was lucky to get the job at my age."*

*Flora, "I was poor and vulnerable. I could not afford Kleenex. High paying employment never did come my way. I had aged. Ageism is alive and well in PEI. I suspect the laws are not enforced because it is hard to prove ageism."*

*Abira, "I was lucky that my former husband wanted to upgrade. He wanted me to upgrade too. I think that this is where he was different from most abusive men. With a Bachelor of Education I became more economically stable. I work but not full time and this keeps us poor. When I left I had three kids to feed. I didn't even think of child support. I just thought of saving my kids and myself. If anything happened to me what would happen to my kids? He would get the kids and they didn't want to be with him. I didn't want them to be with him."*

*Odeda, "No one wants us after we get a certain age. Women are not valued as they age. As long as men are in the positions of power we are always going to have this. I worked. I worked all the time. I could provide the needs for my kids, food, clothing and warmth. Maybe it is like the old saying need or want. It wasn't poverty. It was more of a want for me at the time. I knew I could not take money and he (husband) didn't give me any money, so in that sense we were poor. To take money from him meant he owned us. He believed he could sit at my table and sleep in my bed even though we were divorced. I would not consider myself in poverty. I guess we were poor. My kids missed out on school pictures. There are very few kids that didn't get school pictures."*

*Flora, "I sold everything and left. He gave me the money from the sale of house, contents and paid full child support. Even working, my economic status dropped through the floor. It was very hard. I never had money for anything extra, like white soled-gym shoes because the school gym floors were light coloured. Gasoline was rationed because food, heating fuel, taxes, insurance, lights, phone, and rent took every cent. Anything extra came out of the food money."*

Lack of higher formal education was a big factor in the choices and decisions that the participants made before marriage and after marriage. They agree higher education and training should take place in youth to allow for more options and high paying jobs that are equated with pensions, important for the golden years. They now understand that formal education also offers the opportunity for women to meet and marry more educated men. Higher education and training also opens doors to higher economic and social classes. The participants noticed that most of their friends have married someone in their own social class. Most important for all the participants, is that higher education and training in youth might have supported their own ideas and dreams instead of trying to live their lives through their partners. More income might have made it financially easier to leave the abusive relationships sooner. However, the participants agree that formally educated women are not guaranteed freedom from abuse and that strong, well-educated women also end up in abusive relationships.

*Odeda, "I thought I could get more education in the air force. Only 1 girl in our family got an education and she never got married. You know if women got an education and got a job they would be off the system. Instead, because the woman was going to school, social services would not give her a cent. What the hell is that all about? Human resources and social services keep you in poverty."*

*Abira, "Even if I had been a nurse, teacher or lawyer, I still thought I should be married."*

*Flora, "In youth I didn't have a lot of guidance. I never gave much thought in youth to long-term employment though I have worked for over 40 years. I guess I hoped I would be married but I don't really know. In my teen years I did not think anyone would marry me."*

All three participants had gone to Protestant churches until they got out on their own and then they stopped going to church. Even though the participants were married in a church, they did not continue going. The men they married did not attend church.



They vowed “for as long as you both shall live” until their husbands abused them. Yet, religious beliefs did not influence them to stay or leave. They did not seek help from spiritual counselors or the church and rarely mentioned religion during the interviews.

Odeda and Flora came to the conclusion that when they were married the religious community was for them. However, when they divorced, even when it not their fault, the religious community was often against them. They believe that widows are still respected more than divorced women because widows do not have a choice. Odeda and Flora agree from their own experiences in churches that most religions have not addressed the problem of male control in the church nor male control in the home. Some abused women continue to attend structured religious activities because they receive strength from their personal religious beliefs.

The participants discovered that women who are going through marital hardships often find outsiders want to know the details but they do not always want to help or get involved. Some people in the church helped out while others were caught between feeling sorry for the women and the church’s rules about breaking of marriage vows. Some married women in the church felt threatened by the separated and divorced women. Some men in the church and community acted as though separated and divorced women were easy prey and made advances to the women. Helping the separated and divorced women was not always done out of love and the women did not know whom they could trust in the church or in Christian counseling.

*Flora, “The church family in Ontario was sympathetic. The church family in PEI also helped me but I was let down when four or more ministers who preached or counselled women in marital crisis, left their families and took off with women they were counseling or got involved with other women.*

*Abira, “My brother sent us plane tickets to come home to our parents’ house. (a*

*safe haven) My husband phoned my parents' house and threatened us all with death. My family was willing to help us but when he threatened them with death I went back to him." There was no mention of a church helping.*

*Odeda, "Most people were good to me. Some helped me a lot. One mechanic allowed me to trade down for an older car and he gave me the difference in cash. Those are the things that helped me because I needed the money."*

*Flora, "Some siblings avoided me when I needed help the most. They were afraid I would need a place to stay or money. Mom's motto was, if you burn your ass you sit on the blisters. She asked us to leave her house. My son and I felt totally forsaken. Although Mom believed in God and she was a good woman in her own way, she turned us out. How Christian was that? I felt like no one wanted us so I avoided as many people as possible including my family. My former husband has no idea what my son and I went through to survive."*

## Interventions

Odeda and Flora believe the police often become pessimistic when battered women do not leave permanently after repeatedly being abused. The police become cynical when they are called repeatedly to the same family violence situations. Odeda and Flora believe that more prevention measures are needed and these measures will only come through education. Abira, Odeda and Flora did not call the police at all or had called and there was no help for them. Sometimes the neighbours called the police because the battering took place outside the house in full view of everyone in the area.

*Abira, "The police did the best they could with the legislation that was available."*

*Odeda, "It was useless to call police because the police talked to the offender and then let him go."*

*Flora, "I never called the police. I think I was as scared of them as I was my husband because the police called family violence, domestic abuse. Domestic to me implied tame but women were killed in what is considered "domestic abuse." It should be changed to family violence. Call it what it is. When I left Ontario in 1982 there was nothing to help women. Today the police are better trained. It is a bit easier for women. People need to be educated more about family violence and that includes police."*

The participants now understand there are disadvantages for women who are abused. Despite the slogan, "justice for all," the legal system very often serves only the women who can afford legal expertise. The participants were employed at minimum wage jobs, economically dependent on their husband and really could not afford a lawyer. The long waiting periods for legal aid were gigantic disadvantages to them. All the participants had difficulty finding or paying for a lawyer. They all stayed in abusive relationships longer because there was no legal guarantee for their welfare or security.

*Abira, "Knowing he (husband) was abusive, the judge gave one of our kids to him. It seems we were in court a lot. She eventually came back to me. She had a very hard time and now it is all coming out. She is so mixed up."*

*Odeda, "Our judicial system stinks. That was why we picketed outside the (Charlottetown) courthouse every Tuesday. If a guy can murder someone and only get three years, more women are going to die."*

*Flora, "A lawyer talked to me regarding my rights. The rights had to do with my staying in the house. The lawyer told me my husband would have to pay the mortgage, and make sure we had food and clothes. However, my husband did not have to pay for heat, electricity, phone, or anything else. It was October. I had no job and he was making over thirty thousand a year. I wanted to leave but without a job I could not leave. Social service told me I would have to get the house sold before they would help me. The lawyer asked if I wanted my husband removed from the house. I laughed because the lawyer did not get it. I laugh when I hear "justice for all" because there was no justice for me. I had rights but what good were they without money? I was stuck!"*

*Abira, "As to why I got into an abusive relationship, I think there are many factors: lack of education, mind-set to get married and ignorance about abuse. Maybe I needed to be smarter. Maybe it is the way boys were/are being raised. I think young girls, junior high age, should learn the signs of abuse. Girls and boys at the junior high level should be made aware of abusive relationships, the types and ranges of abuse and girls especially be taught the red flags concerning abuse in dating relationships. You have to start at the bottom and work up. Start with the kids. Girls don't seem to be able to interpret. They interpret what they think is love. Girls in junior high seem to have a problem defining true caring. Often what they decide is love, is in fact control and later abuse. They need the education before they are abused. A boy gave his girlfriend a cell phone. The*

*girl believed her boyfriend was being very attentive and loving when in fact, her boyfriend was tracking her movements. He wanted to know where she was, who she was with and who she had talked to since she last talked to him."*

*Odeda, "I believe in education. We can change this if we educate. Get to the young children. Make them aware of abuse. Once in a while we go out to schools (junior high) to talk to the children about abuse. We are cut short, (school rules) allowed only 5 to 10 minutes in a class. We cannot discuss too much with the children. What is that all about? Kids need a lot more than five minutes. I could pick out the ones where there was abuse by the questions they asked me, by their whole body language. Education about abuse will empower young girls and women. Go after the younger men. Teach young boys that whatever pushes their buttons or pisses them off . . . teach them to control the, work it out, not pass it on. Reverse that. No one teaches us about relationships.*

*Flora, "I think my story tells it all. There were so many reasons for making wrong decisions and then there were so few choices. I often wonder how any marriage survives."*

*Abira, "I was very naïve in the ways of the world. The signs were there but I was not educated enough to know the signs. If you have the mind-set that you have to be married, that you must have a partner, you don't make the right choices. Your standards are not going to be the same. I think they should have classes in relationships. It is after you are married that you are in crisis. That is when you get the counseling. Why not reverse this process through education?"*

Abira and Odeda talked about the importance of intimate relationships education.

The participants agree that females often do more research on other subjects than they do on the men they choose as partners. Young girls should be taught to differentiate between loving and controlling actions. Do most teenage girls know that, "Boys seek physical intimacy while girls seek love and commitment" (Teevan & Hewitt, 1995)? According to Gilligan (1982) women and men are often worlds apart in their thinking even when they have all the other necessary attributes for relationships. These differences need to be communicated long before intimate relationships begin.

In pondering what had happened to all us we questioned almost everything. We all wondered whether our mothers-in-law had demonstrated controlling nature to their

sons. All three mothers seemed to be the dominant voice in the home, especially in the early years. The participants wondered if their father's-in-law maybe submissive natures affected their sons. The sons may have decided at very young ages they were not going to be pushed around.

Odeda said there was one incident, seen through the eyes of a child, when her husband thought his mother was cheating on his father. (Father was fighting overseas in WWII) Abira, believed her mother-in-law was mentally ill just from the way her husband talked about his mother. Flora believed her mother-in-law was a strong, determined woman who did not have boundaries. She pushed until she got what she wanted whether it was right or wrong for the rest of the family. How much of all three mother-son relationships were brought into the marriages we will never know but it does show that boys and men also need education in the areas of relationships.

## Chapter 6

### Final Steps to Understanding

#### Discussion

I know many academics will not agree with the women and books I have chosen to begin my discussion. There are world studies about women that many readers would rather see referenced and there are statistics and stories from all over the world that academics would prefer recognized. However, the women who know the most about battered and abused women are the women who have lived in family violence.

Francine Hughes and Charlotte Fedders lived with husbands who abused them. I chose these two books because the women were extremely different from each other and yet, for whatever reason, they both married men who were abusive to them. I felt the participants in this study were also very different from each other and, yet, they got into abusive relationships. I believe these books/ stories show the variations in women and intimate relationship abuses.

The true-life accounts of Francine Hughes and Charlotte Fedders revealed that both of these women lived in family violence for many years. Although the women were from totally different social, religious and educational backgrounds, their stories were very similar to each other regarding their feelings about themselves and the choices and decisions they made throughout their lives. Their stories about wife abuse relate in many ways to the abuse suffered by the three participants, Abira, Odeda and Flora.

Abira, Odeda and Flora grew up somewhere between the world of Francine Hughes (McNulty, 1980), and the world of Charlotte Fedders (Fedders & Elliott, 1987). Francine was poor, lacked parental guidance, had a low education level and when she

became pregnant she married because she thought she had to marry. Charlotte was raised in the upper class, acquired family and social guidance, was educated as a registered nurse and married because she wanted to have children, security and comfort.

In this study, Abira, Odeda and Flora were raised in two parent family homes. With the social skills they learned from their parents and their formal education, they were able to function reasonably well in society. They never got into any trouble with the law and were respected in their communities. They had enough formal education to be employed and they could take care of themselves financially but it was difficult to realize any dreams with low annual income.

Two participants loved their husbands with great passion in the beginning but with the endless abuse this love faded. One participant felt she never did have that great passion but married because it was the thing to do. After marriage, they had families and their lives followed what was expected and accepted by the culture. At the time the women believed married people set up a home and became part of a community. Although each of the women in this study may have had personal dreams and goals, these seemed to be put on hold after marriage.

A short time into the marriages the women suffered verbal abuse and then loving words. The women were extremely confused. As the days, months and years passed there were different types of abuse that increased and eventually became physical. A dread of what might happen was always with the women after the first episode of physical abuse. The participants made plans to leave but without really understanding what had happened in the relationship. They eventually separated from their husbands and later divorced. They raised their children without much help from their former

husbands. Abira still has teenagers at home. Odeda's children are grown and gone from home. Flora received child support but not much else.

On a personal level, Abira, Odeda and Flora felt disadvantaged in some specific areas of their lives. One or all of the participants at one time or another mentioned these personal disadvantages: the economic, the social, or educational insecurity of parents; the belief of parents that higher formal education would be wasted on girls because girls get married; the lack of money for higher formal education; working in pink-collar jobs with the expectation of marriage for security; that marrying would give them financial security; social norms of the day that told females what they should do and be; the learned belief that women were nothing without a man; that females must be married to bear children; and the belief that they could somehow live their dreams through their husbands.

The more personal reasons that disadvantaged the participants were some or all of the following: extreme shyness; low self-esteem; feeling unworthy of love; the craving or need to feel wanted and loved by the opposite sex; the mind-set that girls should be married; naivety regarding male/female relationships; the desire to nurture and help the men they met and married; and believing that with love they could overcome the problems and somehow change the bad behavior of their husbands. The participants believed that they made poor choices and decisions because they did not know anything else and their personal make-up allowed them to believe they could live out their dreams and expectations through their husbands instead of through themselves.



## Formal Education

Abira, Odeda and Flora believe that formal education is needed first and foremost for women to be self-sufficient and independent. Due to their economic instability, forced out to work, wanting/feeling the need to get married or having parents who did not realize the importance of formal education, the women did not seek college or university education in their youth. Odeda and Flora knew at very young ages that education at the college or university level was not possible. In the parental home there was little money for higher education and family support was not always in the area of high formal education. They chose "pink-collar" courses/employment because they had to work and pay their own way.

Abira could have done whatever she wanted to do in regard to education because her parents would have supported whatever choice she made. She chose to be married twice. It wasn't until the violence in her second marriage that she realized she needed more education to leave her abusive partner and to be able to financially support herself and her children. Over the years most of their employment has been in low wage jobs and at present none of the participants have full-time work. Since Abira completed a Bachelor of Education, she is the only participant at present making more than \$15.00 an hour. The women are better off out of the abusive relationships but there has been serious economic stress throughout their years as single parents.

Abira, (48) Odeda (65) and Flora (61) all agree if they had more formal education in youth they might be looking forward to retirement with pensions. As it is, they will either live in financial despair in their senior years or work until they die. Two participants researched the Canadian Pensions and realize that many single women and

widowers in their age group will receive less than \$1200.00 per month. They now realize they have worked a lifetime and there is going to be a pittance for pay in their golden years.

Higher education in youth might have given each participant a better base for better employment; choices in a vocation/employment; the opportunity to work at a higher wage job or a job of their choice, maybe a private pension from a job; vacations farther than their own backyards and the opportunity to buy bonds or put aside money for retirement. Higher education in youth might have introduced them to the more prosperous level of society. They may have socialized with more educated people and married into a higher economic class. The participants realize there are no guarantees in life but with more formal education and training in their youth, the probability for more choices are greater, with better jobs, more money and a brighter outlook for the future.

### **Social Education**

Each of the participants agreed that social education almost parallels formal education in importance. Social education begins at birth and during the first five to six years of life most children take in enormous amounts of information. Social skills are usually learned at home, in school or with groups in various venues. Although their parents addressed most of the social skills at home the participants were not always familiar or comfortable with the social skills they needed outside the home. There were many things the women did not learn. They felt socially backward some times and in some ways due to shyness or low self-esteem. Abira and Flora were/are stressed at large social functions where there is a lot of surface (cocktail) conversation. They prefer small groups of people. Odeda is very comfortable in large groups but often feels she does not

fit into specific groups, especially the upper class because for her the socioeconomic status is not there. Because there are gaps in their social learning the participants realize they are never going to be comfortable everywhere and amazingly they still have problems with social skills that were not developed in youth. Because they are uncomfortable in many social situations it is easier to stay home or stay in the background at social events.

The significance of this to the study is that lack of social skills holds women back. Women will often settle for less instead of fighting for what they really want. They very often stand back and wait to be chosen. I believe that men who abuse recognize very quickly the women who will bend to their will and very often they are the women who will allow the men to make all the decisions. My former husband wanted me to be independent but every decision I ever made he told me was the wrong. Men also develop a whole scenario of persuasion and love chatter that goes into getting the women who will bend to their will (Evans, 1993). Women have said, "I was so lucky he chose me." Although this is not true of all abused women, many abused women are in some way socially backward (Evans, 1993). Girls and women can overcome this backwardness/shyness. However, they must recognize it first before they can change it.

### Relationship Education

Abira and Odeda pointed to a gap between formal and social education, the gap being relationship/partnership education. Odeda believes that relationship education should be taught in school as part of the curriculum and that it should be started in kindergarten and continue on through junior high school and high school. Abira believes that relationship education should be introduced at the junior high level. Flora believes

relationship education should begin as soon as possible in school. They suggested that relationships programs should be developed (similar to bullying programs) but with more indepth curriculum as students move up, from one grade to another. Abira and Odeda believe that relationship education was missing from their own lives in youth. After their interviews, Flora realized it was also missing from her life.

I felt the effect of the women telling their stories to me as I told my story to them validated all of us. I also believe when they see their word documented they will realize how far they have come after leaving the abusive relationships. I believe the most important aspect of this study for all three women was to get the word out to educational facilities as quickly as possible.

### Looking Back

In hindsight the participants admit they did not have all the skills to make good choices in their youth. The participants believed that finding a partner and falling in love was considered a natural process by some parents and that partnership relationships did not need to be discussed. Teenagers in the participants' age group did not or could not talk to their parents about relationships. As Freire, (1970) stated, "Without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education." At present, going into or already in the golden years of their lives all three participants realize dialogue is important and that dialogue should not be used to win an argument but to learn from a specific situation. The participants agree that the dialogue between parents and their children has not changed very much since they were teens. Even today teenagers think parents' advice is outdated or that the parents are lecturing them.

*Flora, "I had problems at home because I felt I never had a voice. Throughout*

*my life I was not allowed to bring my problems home. I do not remember having a serious dialogue with my parents about anything in my life. Both my father and husband were dominant figures in the home and they would bully rather than dialogue."*

Two participants agree that engaged couples often research family medical histories but the history of family violence is often ignored. There was no discussion about family violence between the participants and their parents or their boyfriends before marriage. There was no discussion with family members, friends or community because of the shame connected to abuse. An article in a newspaper or on television about wife abuse provoked conversation but most times in their youth, the participants would use the same words that many outsiders used. "I wouldn't take it or I'd be out of there in a minute" (Canfield, 2000). The participants dated, became engaged and married but still there was little or no discussion about family violence.

When Abira, Odeda and Flora talked about their lives they realized they had always defined abuse as physical beatings and visualized women being black and blue from physical abuse. Abira said because this was not happening to her she did not think she was being abused. Flora did not realize that negative language was abuse until after the marriage was over. Even when Odeda was being beaten she did not use the word abuse. All three women at some level knew it was not right but they did not know what to name it. Their definition of abuse did not coincide with the Canfield's (2000) definition of abuse that includes verbal, emotional and psychological and many other types of abuse. All three women said they would never have used the word "abuse" because they did not understand the definition of abuse at the time. They might have said a husband was cruel or mean but they would not have used the word abusive.

Canfield, (2000, p. xv) asks the question, "How can you really help if you don't

know what abuse looks like, feels like and tastes like down deep in the gut?" The participants initially found it difficult to admit to being abused because they could not interpret or understand what was happening to them. "I was so ashamed . . . I thought I was the only woman on God's green earth who couldn't deal with her own problems" (Gray, 1988, p. 210). For years the participants tried to make it better by trying to please. "I could never seem to make him happy" (p. 210). The participants felt confused, hurt, sad, and shocked about the way their spouses were treating them. They also believed they were the only women who were enduring this type of relationship and that isolated them. They admit they have never been able to make sense of the love/hate relationship. Elliott & Fedders (1987) stated, "But for the most part she just tolerated the criticism and followed his instructions" p.56). The participants tolerated and followed until there was nothing left to give and nothing more to take from them.

Abira, Odeda and Flora realize there is no guarantee that they would have chosen differently or made different decisions even with all the necessary education. However, probability suggests they might have had more self-determination to make their own dreams come true. They probably would have been better prepared for intimate relationships. They might have understood that few, if any relationships (parents or other admired couples) can be replicated. Rather than the participants seeking security through marriage they might have married men who enhanced their lives. Overall the participants believe they would have had more choices in almost every area of their lives if they had better formal, social and relationship education in their early lives. (Martin & Macdonell, (1982) could have been speaking to all the participants when they stated:

Several characteristics of Canadian society create the conditions that often make it difficult for the high school dropout to find full, employment, to be upwardly

mobile once he(sic) has found employment, and to adjust to the social and economic changes of society (p. 297)

### **Reasons to Marry**

Abira, Odeda and Flora felt there were many reasons they found themselves in abusive relationships. A few of the main reasons they mentioned were: family, social, cultural and religious expectations. For the parents and some of the participants being married might have meant protection and security . . . financially and otherwise. The women believed that marrying a man who made double or triple their annual salary would help them. Their personal dreams were of wonderful weddings, perfect marriages, good children, proud husbands, and houses with white picket fences. In some of their social circles there was a belief that women were nothing without a man/husband or there was something wrong with them if they did not want to date or get married. The participants all married for some or all of the following: love relationships, personal and economic security, comfort, children, having dreams realized and good marriages. Even though there were many hardships having a husband and some security was prized by all the participants, their families and society.

In the beginning of the relationships the participants believed that both men and women have to tolerate irritations in a marriage simply because men and women are different. The participants all admitted they wanted to nurture their husbands, children and the marriage. For them that was what family was about. However, their husbands expected them to be at their 'beck and call' with little thought for anyone else but themselves. Early in the marriage they said it was easier to concede than fight over what they considered a minor or insignificant matter. The participants now realize they gradually had to concede everything to keep the peace and even that did not work most of

the time. As time passed the women had no lives of their own.

### **Societal Norms**

Abira knew her husband had a horrible temper but before marriage it was not aimed at her. Odeda talked about being raised in an era where too often women were roughed up and the neighbours just accepted the abuse as “that is just his way.” It was an acceptable part of conversation when people joked about battered women, as the men giving the women a “tuning up.” “Wired into our culture is the idea that men have the right to control and abuse women” (Canfield, 2000, p. XI). Flora had been raised with verbal abuse but she still did not identify the verbal abuse as abuse. She had been told by her mother, “It happens in every home.”

The culture at the time Odeda and Flora were being raised in was so attuned to the condescension of women that wife battering was not taken seriously. All the participants are educated enough to realize that down through the ages most cultures were patriarchal and the world is still a patriarchal world.

The language used in most cultures is still from the male perspective. Culture is transmitted through the different languages or images and usually covers societal beliefs, values, laws, traditions, food, economics, etiquette and much more. Acceptance of language in most cultures either, connects and unites people or it isolates and excludes people. The language in which the participants were raised often isolated and excluded them. It allowed them to accept and believe in what they thought was a “normal life” when in fact there was nothing normal about it. Some husbands laughed at the participants’ accusations about abuse because the biases in language were entrenched, accepted and taken for granted. A major problem for the women was trying to



understand and identify what was happening to them.

Turner (1990) stated, "Mary Daly taught me the importance of 'naming' many years ago. It sounded so easy. It proved to be so difficult" (p. 221). The participants needed a sounding board but due to fear, like most abused women, they did not communicate with anyone about their situation. In the beginning, some of the participants were in numerous ways; so needy themselves, they felt beguiled by their husbands. As time moved on they were ashamed of their husbands for hurting them but they did not want anyone to know. The participants developed a sense of shame that they would put up with the abuse. They felt a sense of duty to keep the marriage together and an obligation not to ruin their partner's name. Canfield (2000) points out what is often the overall view of abused women, "I could never do that to my husband because he's respected in his church" (p.140). When couples are still together the wives have difficulty reporting the abuse because there is a sense of shame and betrayal. It was difficult for the participants to name the abuse even after someone outside the marriage defined the problem.

The participants admitted it was difficult to face this reality because the reality meant they had to do something about the situation to move out and move on. They were not ready to do that. The participants were fearful to reveal anything about their personal lives but they knew that keeping the secret made them more vulnerable to more intense abuse. More intense abuse was when the women worked around all types of verbal and physical abuse by agreeing whenever possible, trying to remain detached and keeping a low profile. The women began to dislike themselves more for not doing something about their situation. Some of the children also became abusive to the mother who they defined

as weak. My own son began to speak to me like his father spoke to me. My son told me, "You are not the boss. Dad is the boss." Children learn very early how powerless their mothers are in an abusive relationship.

The participants realize now that Canadian parliaments, courts, churches, legal systems and educational systems had not considered that the bias in language was detrimental to women until feminist writings and the women's movement highlighted the problems. Turner (1990) points out that language biases are in some marriage vows, with the pronouncement of man (a person) and wife (a role). Although some of the language bias has been addressed, it is so ingrained in culture and social systems that it is difficult to overcome.

In the midst of the abuse the participants did not realize that acknowledging the abuse would allow them the freedom to do something about their situation. The women in this study were alone when they tried to get out of abusive relationships. The separation, divorce and stay away orders were only as strong as the paper they were written on. Their situations were no different than that of Francine Hughes when a social worker said, "You can get a peace bond but if a guy is really determined a bond doesn't do much good" (McNulty, 1980, p.153). In 2005, by communicating to social workers or the police, women would probably receive assistance, receive an emergency protection order, maybe save themselves, their children and find the strength to leave the abusive relationship. However, these deterrents make no difference to determined ex-partners who wants to stalk, beat or kill former partners. Some men do obey the emergency protection orders and some continue to harass their former wives until one or the other dies.

At one time or another all the participants had heard their husbands say: "I am not going to conform to a woman's ways." "No woman is going to control me." "I can do whatever I want in my own house." "I pay the bills around here." "As long as you live in my house you will do what I say." "No woman is going to push me around." "Where did you get such a stupid idea?" "I'll come home when I feel like coming home." "I don't know when I will be back." Over a period of time all of these statements kept the woman off balance and worried and eventually eroded self-esteem and confidence.

### Factors that Create Family Violence

The participants, being victims of abuse themselves and helping other victims, understand that men are more likely to abuse women, than women abuse men. I believe in some cases of wife abuse that men choose women they think will be compliant and too often young girls/women interpret power and control as love and strength.

*Odeda, "It would be difficult to change a whole population of older males already set in their ways and the change should be started with boys in school. If through curriculum boys can be taught that males and females can live as equals, in peace, there might be less incidence of family violence."*

Abira, Odeda and Flora pointed out that there are many factors that created family violence. I have already covered most of these factors many times in the literature review and the data from the study. I would like to reinforce these factors because they make males and females more susceptible and vulnerable to abusive relationships. Some of the factors the participants mentioned are: being raised with overbearing, under-educated, violent parents, mental illness, alcoholism, drug addiction, social structures, patriarchal culture and language. More personal reasons were low self-esteem, selfishness, fear, the

need to control or the thirst for power. Abused boys often grow up to be abusive men. Too often girls accept abuse as normal after seeing or hearing abuse or being abused themselves in parental home, school or community. The participants' spouses might have experienced some or all of the causes of abusive behaviour at one time or another but did not know they were factors in family violence.

## **Fear**

Fear ruled the lives of all three participants. In the beginning they feared: drunkenness and fighting; people finding out; their children's mental health; their own mental health; parents, siblings and friends' safety; staying in the abuse; leaving the abuse and that no one would believe them. They realized fear had taken a toll when they began to look at issues from their husband's perspective and only then did they try to out think their spouses to protect themselves.

After they left the marriage the participants experienced more and other fears. Some or all feared: being run off the road by former husbands, stalking, child kidnapping, economic difficulties, finding work, and being afraid of the dark. Some or all feared: losing their jobs, problems with Employment Insurance or Welfare, cheques not arriving in the mail, empty oil tanks, empty gas tanks, cars crashes or breakdowns, tires blowing, driving in winter and endless other worries. The participants tried to live their own lives but there was an unending tiredness from the fear.

## **Stopping Abuse**

The participants believe there is so little known about the wide range of abuses in family violence situations. They believe that family violence and especially violence against women could be prevented with programs about family violence built into the

school curriculum. Although the participants would like to see education about family violence begin early in school education, if it cannot be started in kindergarten then at least start educating at puberty for both boys and girls. More indepth education for girls starting at the junior high and on through senior high school would be ideal. Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, (2003) state,

Dating violence is extremely prevalent among this population, and adolescent girls who report a history of experiencing dating violence are more likely to exhibit other serious health risk behaviors. (p. 572).

From their experiences as parents Abira and Odeda, who have girls, said that violence against girls starts in junior high when they begin dating. They agree that girls and boys (12-14) are not emotionally or intellectually prepared for the pressures of dating but whether they are prepared or not, it is a fact that dating begins at that age. Both participants agree that teenage girls need to learn their strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities and to learn to appropriately interpret the boy's actions and words. Abira and Odeda believe girls and boys but especially girls should be taught how to identify the signs of abuse early because girls are most likely to be on the receiving end of violence. Boys need to understand their anger and how to control it.

Some girls become afraid of their boyfriends, yet, are reluctant to break up with them. Like battered women, there is less fear for them knowing what they know, than what they don't know. The participants thought that girls and boys (ages 12-14) are not ready to date but there is peer pressure to have a date for the various social functions in school.

The participants have learned to spot abusive personalities in boys/men. Males who: witness their father abusing their mothers, or have a love-hate relationship with

their mother, were abused in childhood themselves, are physically abusive, have a flaring and violent temper or make contemptuous remarks about women, are more than likely to batter women. Very often the men who date women will talk about the negative relationship with their home life and very often the women will take on the nurturing role instead of identifying it as a danger. Other flags to the participants are: being jealous, critical, constantly advising, feeling superior, twisting words to suit the situation, low self-esteem, having a dual personality (critical and cruel then kind and loving), acts of cruelty to animals or others, threats with guns, being on drugs or drinking to excess.

The participants have discovered in themselves and other women that they wanted to please in the dating relationship and often took their boyfriend's advice. Too late they learned in a marital relationship the spouse's kind advice could become an unreasonable demand or command. Odeda's husband advised her to leave the Air Force after they were married. Odeda felt this was one of the biggest mistakes she made in her life. Flora did not complete the computer course because her spouse put obstacles in her way. Abira was advised by her spouse to come home with the children or there would be a bad outcome. Young girls in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship are not usually aware how quickly a relationship can change because they do not know the signs of abuse.

## **My Learning**

### **Conclusion:**

Through my research I was surprised to learn:

I contacted women who were willing to tell their stories but they did not want their stories documented. With so much emphasis put on family violence with more

police and court involvement I assumed that more women would find it easier to speak out. Some of the women in the group counseling sessions were suspicious about this study, asked numerous questions but refused to participate. This too was surprising because fear and shame seem to be strong factors in abusive relationships. They seemed very concerned about who would find out about the abuse rather than being part of a study that may help abused women. Many women do not want anyone to know about their abusive relationships, yet, in small communities most people do know.

Women who were living in transition houses were too fresh from abuse to even talk to me. Personally, once I was out of the abuse I found I could not stop talking. I talked to anyone who would listen. I felt like I had stuffed 30 years of abuse down and I had such rage. If I had not talked I do not know what I would have done with the anger. I could not make sense of it but I talked about every abuse that was ever done to me. I thought some women who just came out of abuse would be the most willing participants. I learned they were not.

There was fear and doubt in the voices of the women who did speak to me. I understood their fears. I believe there will always be doubt because everyday women die at the hands of their husbands. Some days I feel like we are just beginning to make life better for women but it becomes overwhelming when I realize there is such a rough, upward path ahead for half the world.

I discovered there were studies that categorized abusive males.

- I discovered that 50% of men who batter are coercive, controlling, blaming but may, at times, have empathy for their partners.

- Another 25% of men, who batter fear being abandoned by their wives, are

jealous, and suspicious that their wives have other men. They control their wives through fear. Women leave this type of abuser because the men threaten to kill themselves or their partners. They sometimes succeed at one or both.

- The most dangerous abuser is the 25% of men whose acts of violence do not agitate the men themselves but actually calms them down. Their heart rate actually slows during the episodes of violence and they are considered like a “cobra” because they just spring. There is no pattern to their abuse. (Canfield, 2000).

The three former husbands in this study did not have any empathy toward their spouses. Not one has ever apologized for the harm they have done or the damage they have caused. They still believe they did nothing wrong. In fact if anything they still blame their spouses.

Abira and Odeda’s husbands were in the second category of men. Odeda had a meeting with her first husband before he died. Some 30 years later he still did not understand the damage he had done to his family. Abira’s husband is still wreaking havoc within the family, especially with the children. He still tracks them down and at the end of every meeting he blames them for all his life troubles. This part of his personality has not changed. My former husband never apologized for any act or word against me in the 37 years I have known him.

In this study there were only a few subtle differences in the men who battered. I have learned that all men who batter seem to have the same characteristics. The major difference is the extreme to which they act upon the need to control. Although, I never had to deal with the type of men identified as cobras (Canfield, 2000) I have heard and seen these men at social functions. I do not personally know any men who have this type



of personality.

### **Passing of time**

I was surprised that the participants told their stories in a matter of fact manner. They became more emotional when they talked about their children but when they talked about their former husbands it was as if they were telling a story about a stranger. Odeda's first husband had a stroke and died during this study. Although there were many changes in him for the better (he was happily married) Odeda still cannot see beyond the abusive man. Neither Abira nor I could see beyond the abusive men either. Not a day goes by that we are not reminded of some seemingly insignificant abuse that makes us more aware of the broad scope of abuses against women. Talking about our former husbands as if they were strangers is the way we still protect our minds and souls. I too talked about my former husband like he was a stranger. I have not spoken to him for over ten years. I was never allowed to communicate without fear of criticism while I was married to him so why bother now. I have learned from this study that my silence has been the way I have always protected myself when I did not want to be hurt anymore.

### **Same but Different**

I discovered that much of what the Abira said about her youth was indirectly connected to my own youth, especially being painfully shy and backward. As I write this I think I wanted to be married because all my friends had someone and I did not. I do not think I looked toward marriage as two people striving toward a goal. We each had such entirely different lives. I was a homebody and valued my home life first. He wanted to play golf, tennis, baseball, run, exercise, and attend educational classes. I discovered you cannot have a home life if you are never home. I believe I was valued last on my former

husband's list of wants. Our son came second last.

I did not have the same type of relationship with a man before marriage that many girls have. My girlfriends knew long before they were married that they were going to be married. I did not know until I was married. The day after the wedding I remember waking up and being almost surprised I was married.

Abira did not know where the idea/need to be married came from. I do not know either. I still do not know if I really had the need to be married for love, economics or just having a man around. My ideas on this change from day to day. I wondered if there was an innate need and desire in some females to marry (stronger in some than others) and the culture they live in feeds that need and desire. For now, I can only assume this need was ingrained from youth.

### Types of Education

"I began this thesis because I believed I lacked formal education in my youth. I suspected that is why I made so many poor choices and decisions in my early adult years. After interviewing Abira and Odeda I realize I did not have enough of the right kinds of education. To avoid a bad relationship I really did need all three types of education. I needed the formal education so I could have choices. I believe having the freedom of choice would have allowed me happiness in my employment. I believe my social skills might have improved through that happiness. I may have felt less inferior. But to avoid an abusive relationship I needed the man/woman relationship skills.

I assumed from the beginning of this study that formal education was the only way to stop family violence. I believed that more formal education would prevent women from getting into abusive relationships. I believed women would have more

independence with better incomes and more social skills to choose differently. I believe that education about family violence needs to be thoroughly discussed much earlier through education in schools.

I still believe that with more formal education women would be more self-supporting, have more choices and better choices; choose better partners and with better jobs; more pay and benefits they would be able to make their own dreams come true. I still assume that formal education and training in youth is the number one priority for women's economic survival and independence. If women have enough education and training they will most likely acquire good jobs with high wages and benefits. This will allow for good economic support with either a pension or enough money to set up benefits for retirement.

Females who become pregnant no longer "have to" get married. Women who have high formal educations are having babies without marrying by personal choice. Single women who become pregnant without good economic support have greater difficulty but there and there is no longer shame attached to single motherhood.

At age 61, with a Master of Education Degree almost completed I still live at what would be considered Canada's poverty line. My net income is low for eight months of the year, after deductions my net income is lower. For more than three months of the year I am on Employment Insurance and receive only 55% of my gross income. For eight months I work and pay rent/heat, utilities, insurances, car repairs, gasoline and burial fees and I still have to pay the same amounts with 45% less income on EI. When I collect EI I have less than one week's pay remaining for everything else. Ghosh & Ray (1991) state that people who use more than 58.5 % of their earning on food clothes and

shelter live at the poverty line. I still believe with more formal education in my youth I would be better off today.

I would have had a better social education if I had continued in school. Many of the skills I lacked during my earlier years are learned in high school, college or university. When I quit school in Grade 9 I missed many social activities that would have prepared me for the future. I noticed how much I had missed when I began university in 1984. I had always managed to get through the pomp and pageantry but I was into my forties before I knew what most teens learn in high school, college and university. I did not have the basic skills that most teenagers learn between Grades 9-12. The gaps in my learning are apparent to me daily.

I probably would have had a better job and more money to do the things I wanted to do. I would have loved to date a man with the same passions as me but those with the same passions as me came with more education and from the upper class. I believed that I married at age 25 because I was tired of being poor but this belief changes from day to day depending on the circumstances.

I also needed the relationship education that both Abira and Odeda discussed. If I had the information and the training about relationships I might have had enough information and self-confidence to avoid abusive relationships before marriage or leave the bad relationship sooner after marriage. Instead I stayed too long and, in hindsight I felt was too old, had too many responsibilities and that it was too late for me to begin again. I was only 38 years old but I felt very old. It took every bit of energy I possessed to survive and raise my son. Twenty-four years later, I have never dated and no longer have the desire to try to fit into a man's world.

Acquiring all three types of education (formal, social and relationship) equally, the possibilities of having choice in everything in life would probably increase. There is no guarantee but the decisions I made might have been made more wisely. The freedom to choose a vocation/employment and the ability to earn a living wage with benefits and pension would open different worlds. Each type of education allows the opportunity to make better judgements about the type of relationship that are necessary for personal happiness.

The participants were honest about their relationships. I do not think there could be anything added by these women. Comparing the three relationships, there were many similar abuses. We all felt worn down before we could identify what was happening to us. We all stayed too long. We all had low incomes and economic issues after leaving the marriages. Only one woman has remarried. Every issue in this study could have been a study on its own.

### **Suggestions**

Several professors explained to me that in narrative inquiry there could be only suggestions not recommendations. I have used the word females instead of women because some of the suggestions are for girls between 10 and 17 years old. Many females this age are not women although many of them think they are older, act older and dress older but they are children.

All three women made some or all of the following suggestions:

- Females in their early teens should be made aware of the many types of abuse that battered women endure. This type of abuse has no boundaries and just about any woman is susceptible unless well educated (formal, relationship, social ) about

abuse.

- Females should be made familiar with the signs of abuse which often begin with control and then domination. He will try to control what you wear, think, say and feel. He will break confidences, break agreements, tell lies, keep secrets, have temper outbursts, pick fights, fight with others, verbally abuse, hit or threaten you or use degrading names for you. He will smirk, laugh at, make fun of or criticize things you like or do. He may abuse drugs or alcohol. He will isolate you from family and friends, or job and peers but he will have the freedom to come and go as he pleases. He will keep control of you by using financial abuse which would take in everything that cost money from a hair cut to stopping the insurance on your car. Though he may never cut the grass, it will have to be cut the ways he wants it cut (Evans 1993). If the learner digs deeper each one of these negative characteristics have deeper negatives attached to them.
- Females should be made aware that male abusers often direct their abuse at others or strangers in the beginning of relationships but eventually the abuse will be aimed at people closest to them (girlfriend, spouse or children). Abira pointed out that in the beginning of their relationship the abuse was always directed at strangers.
- Females should be mindful of all the cunning ways in which male batterers hide their abusive natures from their significant other before marriage. This is often because: he wants to show you off; says that he cannot live without you; he needs to be with you and only you all the time; he can love you better than other men and that you belong with him; he loves you so much that he wants all your time

and not to waste it on family, friends and especially other men; he can't live without you; he will die without you; and he will give you everything.

- Females need to be told that they are not for sale and are not owned by a man. It must be understood that you are two people with two distinct personalities. That you will try to work together unless it is detrimental to either.
- Females need to be informed that their bodies belong to themselves. When I worked on an obstetrics unit in the early 1960s women could not have a hysterectomy or their tubes tied without their husbands consent. Women need to know their body is their body. They can do what they want with it and no one has control over it but themselves.
- Females need to know that love does not hurt their minds, spirits or bodies.
- Females need to be aware that abusive men often do not support every realm of the women's lives and frequently criticize her personal ideas and dreams. Odeda, Abira and I gave up our dreams because it inconvenienced the men we married. Criticism wore each of us down until some of us did not know where to turn or what to do.
- Females need to understand that they cannot live their lives through someone else. They need to be strong in their own lives before they become intimately involved. Parents need to know they should send adult female children out on their own so they can learn to become independent of man.
- Females need to realize that formal education and training are necessary for good employment, wages, benefits and pensions. Many women cannot support themselves in pink-collar jobs where wages are usually low. Women often

become dependent on their partners.

- Females need to learn that they do not have to be what others/men want them to be but they can be what they want to be.
- Females need to learn that marriage is often a commitment to a mate, hard work, raising children and more work to keep harmony in a relationship.
- Females need to learn that bruises from physical battering heal but when there are tears to the mind and soul, the healing takes longer. For some women the mind and soul never heal completely and many women out of abusive relationships just learn to cope from day to day.
- Females must learn that any type of abuse will change how they experience the world but their children will experience the world from an impaired perspective from the beginning.



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