



## Finally a Princess

By Kamal Singh

**W**ho is a battered woman? What does she look like? It is hard to tell, as we, the battered women of the world, have learned to mask our bruises and pain. We protect those who hurt us.

Millions of women around the world have suffered some kind of abuse. Sadly, many of these victims can no longer speak—the abuse has escalated to the point of being fatal. We will never know exactly what happened in the last moments of their lives, the fear they felt, how they fought back, whether they pleaded for another chance.

Violence against women is a major problem in every culture of the world. It affects everyone. It does not discriminate. The abuse can be physical, mental, emotional or sexual, often a combination of all four. Domestic violence is a misuse of power to control a woman and keep her in extreme isolation. When that woman begins to stand up for herself and perhaps tries to leave the relationship, then she is in the greatest danger. The abuser's power has been threatened, and this makes him even more violent.

In my forthcoming book, *Finally a Princess*, I talk extensively about the enormity of the violence in my relationship with my husband, the lack of support from family and friends, and the isolation in which I was kept.

I grew up in a stable home. My father, a Sikh from India, and my mother, a Hindu from Fiji, had nine children. I was the sixth. There was no abuse of power in our home, no alcohol or drugs, no violence, no hint of trouble other than minor disagreements. The only thing I disliked about my upbringing was that my parents were very strict with the girls—the boys had much more freedom than we did. My parents even sent us to a private school for a better education.

When I was fifteen, we emigrated from Fiji to Vancouver, Canada. A couple of years later, some serious marriage proposals started coming in for me. I was glad that my parents had good taste in men.

Then a proposal from a prominent family came. I was eighteen, and my prospective husband was almost twenty-six. He was wealthy, handsome, educated and soft-spoken. In his family, I knew I would be a princess. A week later, we were engaged. In six weeks, we were married.

A few days after the wedding, my mother-in-law sat me down and gave me the rules. The conversation was one-sided. She began by telling me how wealthy and influential her family was back home in Fiji, how many businesses they owned and how much people respected them. Then came the rules. There were many of them. Some of the most prominent were:

- I must never speak unless I was spoken to.
- I must cover my head in the presence of my elders, especially my father-in-law.
- Whatever happens in the house stays within the four walls of the house.
- I must respect my husband and treat him like a god. Every morning, I must wake up early, touch his feet and seek his blessing.

What I couldn't understand were the demands my husband and his family placed on me, yet they drank and smoked and fought with each other. What kind of god acts in this manner? A week later, my in-laws went back home to Fiji. I was convinced that now my husband and

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I would start a new life together, and that he would show affection to me.

Instead, several weeks into our marriage, my husband broke my nose—because I had asked him to stop drinking. Instead of apologizing, he told me never to speak to him in that manner again—unless I wanted to be hit again.

That was the beginning of a life full of fear and misery. I always suspected that my husband was having affairs, although I could never prove it. He drank every day and was a chain smoker. Often he would comment that I wasn't good enough for his family. He constantly asked why he had not received a larger dowry and said that I should be grateful to be married to him. I kept doing things better and better in the hope that he wouldn't fight with me. The harder I tried to fall in love with him, the more he abused me.

Days before my first child was born, my husband took a gun to the house of some of my relatives in order to scare them. Fearful for my safety and the baby's, I had to protect him from the police.

My baby was born with a large birthmark on her arm. That gave my husband a further reason to pick a fight with me. He said that the mark was a sign of evil and it was there because of me. The second pregnancy went the same way. My husband had beaten me so badly with his belt that there were marks all over my body.

We moved often, as no landlord wanted my husband as a tenant. By now, he had begun to abuse me sexually.

Nothing I did was ever good enough. We had opened an auto body shop where my husband's friends would often come to visit, and they would end up drinking. I worked long hours—sanding and masking the cars, sweeping the

floors and staying away from him while he drank.

Finally, one evening my husband was arrested when he beat me up in a parking lot and made threats to kill me. After his arrest, both sides of the family reconciled. He apologized to my family and asked them to tell me not to provoke him. I went back home with him.

A few days later, my husband took me to the body shop and started beating me up—throwing me from one wall to another. Blood was dripping from different parts of my body. Shaking in fear, all I could do was to beg him to stop. Reluctantly, I agreed to all his demands. Still not satisfied, he plugged in the arc welder and began touching me with it, all the while asking me if I liked it.

When the case for his threatening charges came closer, my husband insisted we go away for a holiday to Hawaii. I couldn't understand why he was packing so many things and putting them away. Just before we left, he took me to a deserted place and beat me so badly that I couldn't turn my head. We left for Hawaii a couple of days later. I was too frightened to tell anyone what he had done to me.

Once we were in Hawaii, my husband suggested a visit to his parents' house in Fiji. I thought that might be a good idea—since they were well-respected people, they might discipline him. This wishful thinking turned into a nightmare. My husband's parents blamed me for his arrest and for bringing shame and disgrace to the family.

I spent the next four and a half years in Fiji and had two more children there. I survived many more painful experiences:

- My husband pushed me into shark-infested water on more than one occasion.

- My husband tied my sari around my neck and tried to hang me.
- My husband poured kerosene over me and then handed me the matches so he wouldn't be blamed.
- There was a marked increase in the number of incidents of physical and sexual torture. Many nights, I was choked, tied up and made to sleep on the floor in a corner.

Finally, I had to make some tough decisions. I had so much hatred for my husband that I wanted to hurt him badly, so badly that he would never be able to hurt me again. Instead, I asked his father to send me and the children back to Canada. But only I was allowed to return. Over the years, I had made myself numb so I wouldn't feel much. I made the unbearably difficult decision to return alone.

My husband, too, returned to Vancouver, leaving the children in his mother's care. After a few months, the older two children were returned to me on the condition that I live with my husband. The abuse stopped for a while, but slowly it started again. One night, my husband beat me up and raped me.

That was the last night I spent with him. I fled with the children and was determined never to look back. When we went to a women's shelter, we took with us only the clothes we were wearing. My husband was arrested a few times for making threats, and then he fled the country.

As I was struggling to raise my children in a safe home, my new friends at a local Christian church were praying for our safety. For over two years, my children and I prayed we would be able to get the younger two children back with us. Miraculously, one day I heard God say to me that I should go and get my children. I was able to pick them up at their school in Fiji; and with the help of

some prominent politicians, I escaped the country and brought them home.

Some time later, I was asked to give an interview to a local TV news hour on deadbeat dads. I agreed, since my husband was definitely a deadbeat dad. I had been hearing from him frequently while he was back with his parents. But the calls suddenly stopped, even though he had promised to call again.

A week or so later, I received a phone call from my husband's family saying that he had drowned. At the funeral, I struggled to recognize him. During the final ceremony before the cremation, I could hear God speaking to me and asking if I would forgive him. This thought had come up many times before, but I had not been ready to forgive. Then a verse from the Bible came to me: *Forgive. Ven-*

*geance is mine.* I immediately forgave my husband—not so much for his sake but for mine.

It has not been easy raising four children with little money. But God has been faithful, and we never went hungry. Today, by the grace of God, we have all that we need. I continue to tell my story, to expose the evil of domestic abuse, and to tell the many abused women in many cultures that there is hope. ❧

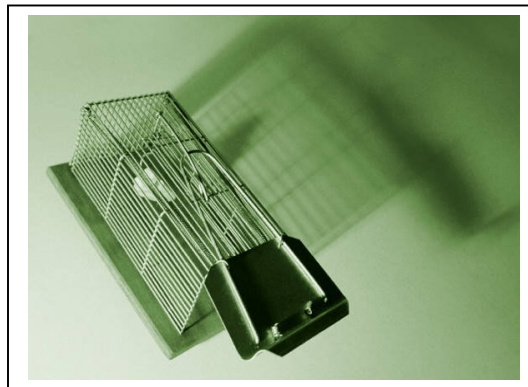
## The Many-Sided Trap

By Catherine Clark Kroeger

Once heard Janet Reno declare that some abused women live in a prison far more cruel than any created by a government. They exist within a many-sided trap. Try as they may, they cannot find an opening by which they might escape to a world of safety and sanity. The first side is denial: they cannot believe they are actually being abused, nor can the church believe there is family abuse among its members. Despite research showing that the rate is the same as in contemporary society, we all like to think that our particular church is too spiritual for such an evil to be found within its ranks. Some earnest Christians even go so far as to deny the validity of the statistics coming from police stations, shelters, hospitals and morgues. If the problem doesn't exist, then it need not be addressed.

The second side is similar to the first: the church's unwillingness to believe the victim's story even if there is substantiating evidence. When a victim comes to a realization of the nature of her experience, her disclosure may well draw rebuke and repudiation instead of support. The church that might be expected to help

may instead refuse any kind of involvement. Often it is easier to lend credence to the abuser rather than to the victim. Recently, I was told of the wife of an affluent businessman who went to her pastor when the abuse became unbearable. When the pastor proved highly unresponsive, the woman revealed her circumstances to several others on the church staff. Thereafter, the husband made an



enormous contribution to the church building fund, and all who had heard the story were dismissed from their positions.

The next side is fear of rejection by her family or her church. A friend of a survivor complained, "Our church sends enormous amounts of aid overseas, but we can't even spare

a basket of groceries for one of our own members who is fleeing severe abuse." Some women are threatened with excommunication if they do not immediately return to their husbands. Many would rather continue in desperate situations at home rather than be condemned or shunned by their faith community. Yet the Scriptures call upon us to deliver the oppressed from the hand of the violent.

Sometimes we have not been realistic in dealing with a bad situation. Jeremiah said, "They offer superficial treatments for the mortal wounds of the daughter of my people. They give assurances of peace when there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11). Often there has been an idealization and idolization of the family that leads people to believe that God's blessing is only available when a married couple is living together. Yet, it is clear that Jesus' followers had left their homes to follow him and that there was a place for this in God's plan.

There is sometimes an insistence that divorce is never an option, although God declares three times that He has divorced Israel (Isa. 50:1; 54:6-7; Jer. 3:8). Both Old and New Testaments contain provision for

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divorce in cases that are destructive of the human spirit. It is sort of like a safety hatch, causing many congregations to force couples back into a living situation before it is advisable. God does indeed hate divorce, as do many people, but there are other things that God hates as well:

There are seven things that the Lord hates: There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil, a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family. (Prov. 6:17–19)

*“I hate a man's covering his wife with violence, as well as with his garment,”* says the LORD Almighty.... You have wearied the LORD with your words. “How have we wearied him?” you ask. By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them,” or “Where is the God of justice?” (Mal. 2:16–17)

Another barrier is our conclusion that if the situation is all that bad, the victim ought to help herself. Yet central to all of this is the victim's inability to help herself. Outsiders may ask why she doesn't leave the relationship. Often, however, she has been subjected to prolonged psychological warfare that leaves her incapable of constructive action. The director of our local agency recently declared, “Victims of domestic violence are in an altered state. Up seems down. It's important to understand that if someone is a victim all these years, it's sort of like she's been brainwashed. You are in

essence a prisoner.”<sup>1</sup> A woman at the shelter added, “They break you down. You feel less than human. They isolate you. They say, ‘No one cares about you. Only I love you.’ And you start to believe it. Then it builds to the physical. It's worse for people with higher social status. Society puts more pressure on them. It's more embarrassing.”

Yet another side of the trap is insistence on immediate forgiveness. Forgiveness is indeed a biblical concept, but only after the offender has radically changed his ways. It takes a substantial amount of time to insure that there has been actual transformation. Many a victim is compelled to return to a dangerous situation because the offender has been so convincing in his profession of repentance. Transformation is a long, slow process, as is also genuine forgiveness. Too speedy forgiveness may convince the perpetrator that the problem was not particularly grave and does not require much hard work on his part. It is important to differentiate between forgiveness and reconciliation. There can be forgiveness of past conduct while still maintaining a prudent regard for safety. A precipitate return to the home may endanger the victim and her children,

An extremely insidious side of the trap is the suspicion with which church folk view the services available at community shelters. There the staff, both professional and volunteer, is trained to provide safety and security to those in need. Only the church can supply the spiritual support needed by the victim, but community resources are often far better suited to address other aspects of the total situation. Sometimes the shelter movement has been suspicious of the church because of its disregard for the victim's needs

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<sup>1</sup> “This really couldn't happen to me,” *Cape Cod Times*, 11 April 2007, p. 12.

and safety. Clearly, there is a need for better working relationships, and a good slogan is “From the steeple to the shelter.” This is a good way to break open the trap.

A seemingly insurmountable barrier is that the Bible speaks of the husband as “head” of the wife and instructs the wife to “submit.” In these mandates, both pastors and abusers find justification for the male exercise of power and control. We need always to ask how terms were understood among the people who actually spoke the ancient languages in which the texts are written. In point of fact, “head” was not ordinarily used as a metaphor for leadership or dominance, but rather as source or point of beginning, just as today we speak of the “head” of a river.

It is just this concept of life flowing from a source that we find explicated by the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:19 and Ephesians 4:15–16. In the only two passages dealing with the function of the head in relation to the body, he maintains that the head not only causes growth but causes the body to build itself up. A more expanded paraphrase might read as follows

From the head the entire body *grows* with the *growth* of God as it is supplied by the head and held together by every ligament and sinew. (Col. 2:19)

Paul gives very nearly the same concept when he turns to the relationship of head and body in Ephesians 4—certainly a passage to take seriously when we are considering Ephesians 5. The Apostle wrote:


Let us grow up in all things unto Him who is Christ, the Head. He causes the body to *build itself up* in love as the head *provides empowerment*

according to the proportion appropriate for each member as they are bound and supported by every sinew.

We cannot do better than to emphasize the interdependence and relationship noted by Paul between

head and body. How illuminating to conceive of the husband as empowering the wife to build herself up in love so that she may grow into the person God meant her to be.

Christ declared, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." Survivors of abuse, along

with their caregivers, can step outside of the trap. By God's grace they can live lives of wholeness, standing in His freedom, affirming the healing power of the written and healing Word. 

## But I'm Such a Loser!

**By Brenda Branson**

**W**hen a marriage is broken, when a life is destroyed by abuse or addiction, when a heart is filled with bitterness, when a ministry is plagued with scandal, does that mean you are resigned to God's second best for the rest of your life?

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells of people who failed to live up to God's ideal. Not one of them disrupted God's plan of redemption. In spite of man's failure, God's faithfulness and purpose remained intact.

God may not have to settle for second best, but how about you? Have you ever made a mistake that has seriously impacted the rest of your life? Do you feel like decades of your life have been wasted because you were entangled in an abusive relationship?

Are you doomed to accept the scraps of a sad existence because you don't see any other options? Does God take you out of active service forever because you deliberately walked off the path of obedience?

It is true that we all have to endure the consequences of our choices, but if we sit too long in the pity parlor thinking about what might have been, we will miss God's wonderful plan for the *rest* of our lives!

God never wastes any of your experiences and does not punish you by limiting you to only part of His goodness. In God's hands, failure can become your greatest teacher as you realize how much you need Him. Failure and pain can draw you closer to God in a way that success and self-sufficiency cannot.

When God rebuilds a life, He does not use second-rate materials just because you messed up the first time around. His love is always generous and His mercies are "new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness, O Lord" (Lam. 3:22-23).

You don't have to settle for mere crumbs, because you have an advocate who pleads your case (1 John 2:1-2). Jesus stands before the Father on your behalf as your defense attorney. His sacrifice on the cross completely paid the price for your sins and failures. Jesus satisfied the law of God on our behalf, and will come to your defense when the enemy tries to accuse and destroy.

In God's plan, failure isn't fatal or final! "The steps of a man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord holds him with His hand" (Ps. 37:23-24).

How can you be successful in God's sight when you have failed so



miserably? The secret is by allowing His grace to transform your failures into opportunities to grow closer to Him, to develop a greater passion for living, to learn valuable lessons from past mistakes, to reach out to others with compassion and mercy.

When a diamond is lost in a mudslide, it does not lose its value just because it is caked with mud and grime. The hand of the jeweler can gently clean it and restore its luster. When God restores and revitalizes a life that has been wrecked and cast aside, it shines as brilliantly as the most precious diamond in the jeweler's case.

You may have wandered off the path of God's best for your life, but the path is still there! You do not have to stay in the brambles of your failures or live in the mediocrity of "good enough" Christianity. God will meet you right where you are and, if you let Him, He will guide you back in the right direction.


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In her book *Look at It This Way*, Jan Silvius writes, “God loves you and longs for you to lean on Him. He will give you more than your *what-might-have-been* could ever give you. He knows you, loves you, and has plans for you. Trust Him. He knows where you have been and He knows what you long for. He is God. As long as you have breath, God has

a purpose for your life, and your job is to be about living it.”

Don’t listen to the voice of the accuser or the discouraging words of negative-minded people who say you must settle for less than God’s best because of your circumstances. It’s not true! The God we serve is more powerful than any of your past mistakes. Your difficult circumstances

may not change, but God will change you—if you let Him.

Stop languishing in what might have been. The best is yet to come! “*I am sure that God Who began the good work within you will continue His work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again!*” (Phil. 1:6) 

## The RAVE Project is Building Bridges

By **Barbara Fisher-Townsend and Cathy Holtmann**



One of the chief goals of the RAVE (Religion and Violence e-Learning) Project is building bridges between faith-based and secular advocates (*the steeple and the shelter*) who share the common goal of ending domestic violence. But attempts to bring people to the collaborative table regarding this issue are often met with resistance due to mistrust on the part of both secular advocates and clergy members. We are increasingly finding that easily accessible research, best practices information, online training, practical examples of helping strategies, and data-based stories of both those impacted by violence and those who wish to help them, can assist in breaking down barriers and in facilitating collaboration. All of this information allows people to step back, examine the perspectives of others, perhaps put aside stereotypical views and concentrate again on the common goal of assisting all those impacted by domestic violence. We are pleased to report here on one recent example of community outreach that was successful in bringing together a number of relevant constituent groups in our geographic proximity.

The RAVE Project was on the road this spring. In collaboration with the Advisory Council on the Status of

Women, we conducted four lunch-and-learn sessions around the province of New Brunswick in the cities of Saint John, Sussex, Moncton, and Woodstock.

Participants for the Saint John lunch-and-learn were keen to learn more about the RAVE Project. The presentation by Nancy Nason-Clark and Steve McMullin was interspersed with many questions and comments from those present. While the group of thirty people ranged from shelter workers to United Church clergy to Catholic nuns, other constituencies were noticeably absent. One woman in the audience remarked that she liked the fact that we interspersed the term “victim” and “survivor” in our presentation and on the website. She said that based on her own experience of abuse, sometimes she felt like a victim and other times like a survivor. Both identities were real to her and had ongoing meaning for her. There appeared to be substantial interest in the colorful folders containing print versions of some of the RAVE web pages as well as a copy of the DVD, *When Love Hurts: Understanding and Healing Domestic Abuse*. Three participants each won a folder in the draw at the end of the session.

About twenty women and men attended the session at the Sussex Public Library. Lively discussion

followed the presentation by Barbara Fisher-Townsend and Cathy Holtmann on the resources available on the site, particularly on the necessity for a community response to domestic violence. Participants recognized the risks involved in addressing issues of violence in a rural context and that the support of the entire community is needed, including health care professionals, social workers, teachers, clergy, shelter workers and police. Clergy from several different churches were present and remarked that more clergy need to learn about these issues. It was suggested that the ministerial committee in Sussex take a closer look at the issue of domestic violence. A couple of people mentioned the need for RAVE Project print materials (a small poster perhaps) for libraries, shelters, and community access centers that would help direct people to our site. A good place to put up such a poster, once it’s developed, is in washroom stalls where privacy and safety are ensured.

The Crowne Plaza Hotel was the site for our Moncton lunch-and-learn, hosted by Lanette Ruff and Barb. Session participants represented a variety of constituencies—victim/survivors, clergy members (mostly from the United Church), community advocates, therapists, and interested faith community members. The

meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation of our latest research information and then moved on to a demonstration of the RAVE website. As various sections of the site were highlighted, participants interacted with helpful questions and comments. These focused on issues such as churches as safe places to disclose abuse, definitions of abuse, female violence, the impact of batterer intervention programs and the need for widespread distribution of our RAVE materials. Following the completion of session evaluation forms, three names were drawn to receive a copy of our kit folder. As the session ended, participants seemed reluctant to leave, with many lingering to speak with each other and with the RAVE team members about issues raised during the session. There was certainly evidence of important bridge building between the advocate

community and clergy members and between the RAVE team and all the participants.

Lanette and Steve hosted the final RAVE lunch-and-learn session, held in Woodstock. Attendance in Woodstock surpassed that at the other venues, perhaps due to local media coverage prior to the event, with thirty-nine women and one man attending. Discussion began quite spontaneously as the presentation progressed. At first people asked questions and then became more involved in contributing to the discussion. Questions were about topics such as the use of the word “submission” among evangelical churches and the lack of support from women in such churches for women who divorce. Discussion ensued about how to change the attitude of church women toward women who have

been divorced because they left abusive marriages.

As a result of the RAVE lunch-and-learn series, over one hundred and thirty New Brunswickers from a variety of constituencies involved in responding to domestic violence were introduced to faith-based resources that can help them with their work. Now they can access these resources any time via computer. With simply three clicks of a mouse, a pastor can help a victim of violence find the nearest shelter or a social worker can find prayers to help comfort a woman of faith as she journeys toward healing and wholeness. We are confident that all of those who attended the sessions will pass on the news of the RAVE Project and thus continue to widen the circle of those who feel better equipped to respond to domestic violence in families of faith. ☞

*For more information on the RAVE Project, visit [www.theraveproject.org](http://www.theraveproject.org)*

**RAVE**

*believes that every woman, man, teen, and child who looks to their faith community for assistance in the aftermath of abuse deserves to receive help that is compassionate, practical, based on accurate information, where SAFETY is a top priority.*

**RAVE**

*delivers training and resources, immediate help and referrals, as well as best practices (and pitfalls to avoid) to religious leaders and congregations through web-based sources accessed in clergy offices, internet cafes, seminary classrooms and churches around the world.*

**RAVE**

*grows out of 15 years of social science research examining the relationship between communities of faith and domestic violence.*

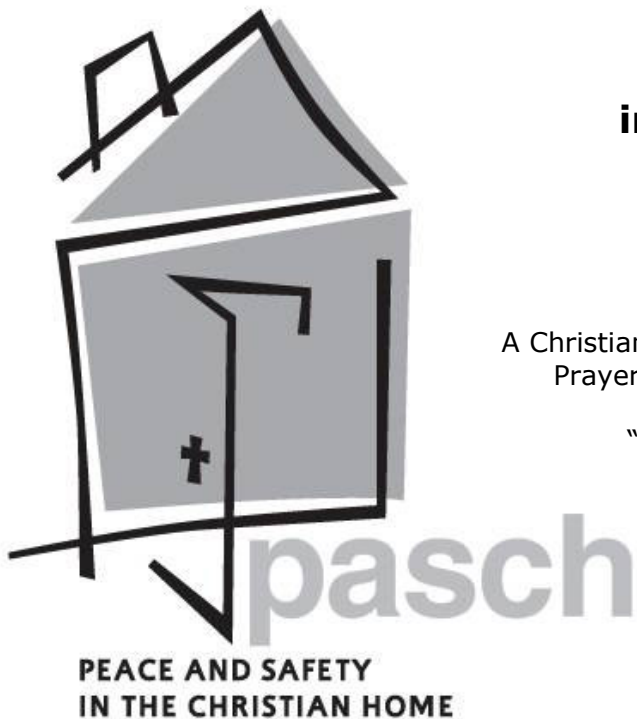
**RAVE**

*believes that churches and their communities are co-partners in responding to abuse and working together towards its elimination in every home and every congregation.*





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