

I asked Jessica how often Michael Venable had abused her, how many times he had hurt her, had beaten her? When she didn't respond right away, I went on, "20 times? 30 times? 50 times?" She said, "I can't remember." I offered, "countless times?" "Yes," she said, "countless times." I asked her how frequently. She said, on average, probably every other day.

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Ninety minutes can pass very quickly. Or it can be interminable.

The 90 minutes allotted to me to visit with Jessica Venable in the Women's Center in Lusk recently went by quickly.

Later, I wondered how that time compared to the frequent extended periods of torment and beatings at the hands of her husband. How virtually every evening in his presence, every morning, every afternoon, had dragged by for her. Wondering what might provoke him, what might trigger verbal abuse of her or her sons or physical abuse against them.

Ninety minutes to most of us would mean an evening watching television, maybe reading or talking on the telephone. To Jessica Venable, evenings became an extension of the rest of the day. Pure terror. Neighbors told me that they could hear her husband yelling many, if not most, evenings. Without understanding what he was saying or at whom he was directing his wrath, more than one neighbor reported that they could hear a man yelling at others in the house.

When I asked Jessica about that, she was apologetic. She felt bad, she told me - she couldn't look her neighbors in the eye when she saw them on the street after these frequent episodes. I initially thought it was because she had been hurt - had cuts, scratches, a black eye or bruises.

It wasn't that - at least not all of the time. She was embarrassed because, she said, "I felt like I was a horrible neighbor."

While she was being threatened, while she was being physically beaten and emotionally abused, while her children were being cursed and threatened, Jessica Venable worried that people would think she was a horrible neighbor.

During my 90 minutes, I asked her questions that must have brought back painful memories. She answered them candidly, deliberately, completely and, I felt, honestly. She knows she was treated unjustly by the system. She knows she

she was left vulnerable and unprotected.

After listening to her recite examples of abuse after abuse inflicted upon her by a man she kept ordering to move out of her house for fear she and her sons would be evicted, while authorities protected her abusive husband and did nothing to alleviate her suffering or remove her tormentor from her house, I had to think that we, as a society, treat animals better than we treated this woman. None among us would allow a dog to be beaten like that man beat this woman. Repeatedly, with impunity. We have Dexter's Law, but nothing adequate for Jessica Venable.

Jessica had met the man who would become her abuser a decade or more before their paths crossed again. He was living in an adjacent apartment in the upstairs of a tiny house converted into three apartments - accessible only by an outside open stairway. He lived in the house I have described as a "meth lab" - the house then and now owned by a Wyoming State Senator.

When Jessica was moving into the house at the corner of 28th St. and Reed Ave., this guy saw her and came over to speak to her. Shortly thereafter, he was evicted from his apartment and asked Jessica if he could stay with her for awhile until he found another place.

She told him he could stay for only a couple weeks because she didn't want to get kicked out of this house. She liked it very much, especially after having lived for five years in a "North" apartment.

She did not know he had a warrant out for his arrest. She did not know of his past as a serial abuser of his previous girlfriend. She did not see his abusive side for awhile. In fact, she said she was chauffeuring him because he did not have a car and one of the places she took him was to an anger management class. She thought at the time that he did not need such a class - he displayed no anger toward her or around her. He was upset with his former girlfriend for pursuing child support he had been ordered to pay and

quit his job at one of the new car dealerships because they were "taking out too much" child support from his paycheck. He then got jobs at restaurants as a waiter so he could pocket cash tips and avoid paying support for his children.

She told him he should deal with the outstanding warrant and drove him to his "PO" where he was arrested and subsequently held in the Laramie County Detention Center for several months.

When he would return to her house, she continued to tell him he could not live there - that she would be evicted if Cheyenne Housing thought that he lived with her and she didn't want to have to find another place for her boys and herself. She liked her house on 28th St.

She had made it clear to him that she only wanted to "be friends." That she had no interest in him beyond that.

Then one day she returned to her home with a male friend and Michael Venable came to the car, opened the door, drug her out and threw her to the ground. He then proceeded to get into a fist fight with Jessica's male friend. Jessica went inside and locked the door and windows. He came onto the porch and was screaming at her. She thought she "could talk to him" and went outside for that purpose. She or a son locked the door behind her. Venable kicked the door in and drug Jessica into the house and down the stairs into the basement, where he beat her. It was, she said, the first time he had ever hit her and the first time in her life that she had ever been beaten by any man.

She said he had a vacant look in his eyes and as he beat her, he called her by his previous girlfriend's name and he tagged Jessica with the word he often used as he threatened her or beat her. He called her "a slut." In my visit with Jessica, she spoke calmly and kept her composure. But in the telling of this incident, she said to me, defiantly, "I am not a slut." "And I am not a liar." She couldn't remember how long the beating lasted. The next day, she was taken by ambulance to the hospital.

She told me she was hospitalized for about "a week and a half." She said it was the first of several times she thought he was going to kill her. He would threaten her: "I'm going to kill you." But that night what she remembered most was that he "looked like he was in a trance" and called her by the wrong name.

When she called 911, all she could do was repeat her address. The operator wanted more. She could only say over and over, "727 W. 28th, 727 W. 28th."

I am not a reporter. I am not a journalist. I do not work for anybody. I do not answer to anybody. I am not impartial. And I am not always fair. I don't worry about "getting the other side." As the WTE has praised, I am an advocate. In this case, a victim's advocate. Most of my material comes from public records. Most of my stories are done without interviews with the people involved. I take sides. And, I will always take the side of a woman who is abused by a man. If there is a man out there who has been physically abused by a woman, he has not contacted me. I doubt there are many.

I am not a bleeding heart liberal. I don't believe everyone in prison is innocent. I am not a conspiracy theorist. I am also not a raw meat conservative. I do not think public officials are, as a whole, corrupt or dishonest. I think too many are incompetent, exercise poor judgment, lack intellect and are lazy. I do not think the courts are inherently biased or deliberately make bad judgments but I think who a defendant knows is sometimes more important than how innocent they may be. And who they don't know is more apt to lead to a conviction.

I believe money talks in the justice system. When O.J. Simpson and Robert Blake can walk out of a courtroom free men and someone like Jessica Venable is behind bars, no one can convince me otherwise. I believe that a private attorney is fifty times more likely to better represent an accused than a public defender.

I think the justice system is overwhelmed and is mistake prone. I think the courts often make rulings for the sake of expediency and without knowledge of the law. I think judges were often mediocre lawyers who make even poorer judges. I am not in awe of anyone. Especially not based on their position or title or lineage. There is probably no one in this world that I want to meet that I haven't already met.

And, I think Jessica Venable is innocent of any crime. And I will advocate for her freedom as often as I feel it is warranted and that is likely to be frequently and for some length of time.

That radio station

In the last Cheyenne Herald, there was a brief story about a radio station that purports to be "local" and plays a version of a popular country song that was watered down to eliminate the phrase, "toes in the water, ass in the sand."

I personally thought it was a pretty silly exercise and removed that radio station from my preset buttons.

The only things I rely on country music stations to bring me is music, occasional news and some weather. I don't want them taking political stands because they seldom have a clue about what they're told their position is - or should be.

When the ultraconservative Clear Channel-owned stations blacklisted The Dixie Chicks because of something Natalie Maines, the Chicks' lead singer, said about being ashamed the president was from Texas, I just found other stations that did play their songs and switched.

The bonehead station ownership and obedient jockeys had no idea how much good the Dixie Chicks had done for worthy causes - they just thought a boycott of the Chicks' music was "righteous."

After the story about the station's treatment of the song "Toes" appeared here, I received e-mails detailing other shortcomings of that sissy station. Still a Clear Channel-owned station, the prudes broadcast from a studio in Loveland, Colorado, I was told. Next to a Hooter's. I don't have a problem with the Hooter's chain, even though I have never eaten in one. But for a pious Clear Channel radio station to have Hooter's as a neighbor is a hoot in itself. There is a hit song now being played on that station, sung by Toby Keith, the faux conservative who waged a war of words with the Dixie Chicks even though he later admitted that he had never supported the war in Iraq himself, that has a much more off-color line than the "Toes" word that was censored.

Jessica Venable

When I visited with Jessica at the Lusk Women's Center on October 14, 2009, I found her to be dealing with the injustice perpetrated upon her better than I could. She was pleased to hear that there are people in Cheyenne who support her and believe she had committed no crime. She did not know that there were witnesses trying to come forward for her and who wanted to appear at her sentencing to show their support. She was not told that by her public defender.

Shortly before the incident in which her husband took his own life by charging her from behind, he had beaten her in the presence of his friend. He told her that he was going to break her wrist and proceeded to try. His friend watched. His friend did not intercede to help Jessica. That guy was not called as a witness in her behalf.

Her husband was arrested and she next saw him in Judge Campbell's courtroom. She commented to me how the Court must not understand how traumatic it is for a woman to be standing next to a guy who had beaten her, and in Jessica's case, tried to break her wrist. She said, "he is standing there, glaring at me, trying to intimidate me, trying to threaten me into changing my story." She told me, "I felt like I was still defending myself."

I thought she meant because her attacker had an attorney by his side and she was alone. But what she meant was that she felt like the judge believed her husband - believed him when he said "nothing happened," even though Jessica was standing there with marks on her face, on her neck and injuries to her wrist that he had tried to break. She felt like what had happened was being doubted by the judge.

It sounded much like a rape victim being attacked all over again in the courtroom by an attorney who puts the victim on trial, not the defendant.

She heard Judge Campbell sentence this serial abuser to 180 days in jail, 4-6 years in prison. Although feeling violated again by the system, she left the courtroom believing that she could finally escape - that she could do what prosecutors expect domestic abuse victims to do - flee their abuser. She had made application to Interfaith Hospitality Network and she expected to be accepted. Within days.

Finally, after this interminable period of beatings and abuse, she would be safe. She was relieved that he would finally be held in custody long enough for her to flee to safety. That is what she heard in the courtroom that day.

She went home. She went back to the house that she loved but would have to abandon because of this man who had weaseled his way into her life and made it a living hell. But at least she'd be safe while she found a more permanent place to live. At least he'd be out of her life. At least he'd finally be punished for the terror and torment he had inflicted on her.

As she sat in her living room talking on the phone to a girlfriend, he appeared at the door. Drunk and belligerent. He had proven to her once again that he could beat the system. That she could not get away from him. That he owned her and she was his to do with as he wanted. That the system wasn't going to protect her or punish him. It wasn't long after that night that he was abusing her still another time and an unintentional act took his life.

The system never protected her. But, in the end, it did punish her. Not him. Her.

The special visit required so that I could meet with Jessica Venable was approved quickly and with great professionalism. The warden and associate warden were cooperative with my request. The head of security at Lusk was prompt and helpful even though he was busy with transferring to the new men's prison in Torrington and he was also cooperative when I had to reschedule because of bad roads. At my visit, the officers I met were friendly and the official who oversaw the visit and conversation did not interrupt and was inconspicuous in his presence. I understood and accepted why they might want to have someone present.

I will now make application, with Jessica's acceptance, to become an "approved visitor." That would allow me to visit her in Lusk and also allow me to make deposits into her account at the prison so she has adequate cash to purchase things like stamps, paper, personal items, etc., that she may want or need. I already have readers who would like to help and they can do that by becoming an approved visitor or by directing money to Jessica through me. Only family members and approved visitors can do that.

Letters can be written her without becoming an approved visitor and I can provide her mailing address upon request here at the Cheyenne Herald. Call or e-mail.

With Jessica's acceptance, of course.



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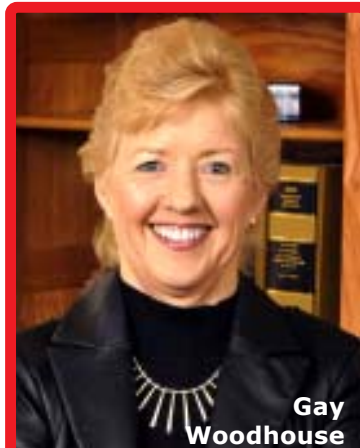
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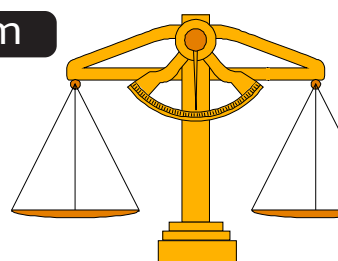


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