

Men Shuman thought would protect her instead abused her

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 14 March 2014 14:00 -



She regarded them as heroes in beginning.

Jim was too good to be true when Brenda Shuman first met him at a bonfire in the Sandhills.

“I thought he was charming, thoughtful and loving,” Brenda said. “He would text ‘I love you’ when we were in the same room.”

The man who moved in with Brenda and her two boys for several months in 2012 soon started isolating his girlfriend from friends and family.

And because of her relationship addiction, Brenda allowed it.

Experts say that addiction to anything—alcohol/drugs, people or something else—appear as a solution to dealing with negative feelings of anxiety, despair, self-doubt, rage, fear of abandonment and more.

However the fix, like any addiction, doesn’t last.

Brenda said Jim controlled her phone and made her leave the door open when she used the bathroom.

The day he slammed her head against the wall, which required a trip to the hospital, Jim told Brenda he would get to her kids before she could if she told medical personnel what he had

Men Shuman thought would protect her instead abused her

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 14 March 2014 14:00 -

done.

“I told the doctor that we had just moved into a new house and I fell,” she said.

Brenda’s abusive relationship with Jim is just one of several throughout her 40-year-old life, a cycle she’s now trying to break.

Abused since age 4, she ended up in foster care in California and later ran away, moving in with a man who said he would take care of and protect her.

“I looked for men who could be my voice,” Brenda said.

She became pregnant, had a child and managed to finish high school while trying to survive the domestic abuse.

When Brenda left the relationship, a friend’s brother helped her get her son back from her first husband.

“I thought he was my hero so I married him and had three more children,” Brenda said.

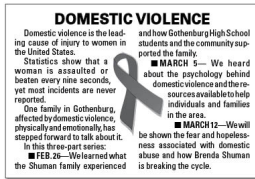
But her second husband was abusive as well and a drug addict.

“People would come over and destroy our house because of the money he owed them for drugs,” she said.

After 10 years, Brenda took the kids and was homeless in Oregon for about a month.

Men Shuman thought would protect her instead abused her

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 14 March 2014 14:00 -



Desperate, she called a former employer and a co-worker, who planned to travel to Iowa. He said he could take Brenda and her kids with him.

“He saved me and he felt like my best friend,” she said.

They were homeless for months, staying in campgrounds and rest areas. Eventually they bought property in Dunning, NE.

Ultimately, because of domestic abuse and other problems, Brenda said good-bye to that relationship too.

“I was scared the whole time,” she said.

Then came Jim and terrifying incidents. One day, he locked Brenda in a bedroom for eight hours and abused her, she said.

That action put him in prison for domestic assault, false imprisonment and strangulation.

These days, Brenda is trying to work through her problems and some physical shortcomings caused by a traumatic brain injury during the last assault.

She sometimes slurs words, suffers migraines, has trouble with organization and remembering dates and other things.

Men Shuman thought would protect her instead abused her

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 14 March 2014 14:00 -

Counseling, for both Brenda and her sons, has been invaluable, she said.

And that's largely what gave her the courage to share her testimony at a parole board hearing in Lincoln several weeks ago.

With a few Gothenburg residents at the hearing, and knowing that her sons and their schoolmates were supporting the Shuman family, Brenda said she felt surrounded by an army.

During her testimony, Brenda said one of the parole board members stopped her and said she'd heard enough and that Jim would not be eligible for parole for another year.

Brenda said the woman described the abuser as a predator of weak women who eventually become strong.

The woman noted that many who are abused are too afraid to show up and testify, Brenda said.

At some point, Brenda hopes to start a support group for victims of domestic assault in Gothenburg.

"For the first time, I feel like the real me," she said.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636