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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Abuse comes in many forms

To the Editor:

I grew up in western North Dakota where I learned the values of hard work and self-reliance. From many, I also learned to keep painful emotions to myself so I didn't appear weak.

The first ten years of my marriage were extremely stressful. We were dealing with new locales, kids and careers.

She was adjusting. I was not.

Those stresses brought back painful memories of another stressful time. I tried to deal with them by burying them. I was so wrong.

I grew up mostly alone with a drug-addicted and alcoholic mother. We siblings put up with her constant denial, blaming, and anger—and her terrifying rages. My siblings were wise enough to finally move out when they could.

So I was her primary

caretaker from the time I was ten. I'd put her back to bed when she wandered into my room at night with a butcher knife to kill rats (we didn't have rats in our house). It meant bringing her back home. It meant she'd staggered outside in her nightgown. It meant cleaning up after her. It meant keeping her in and others out.

In our marriage, whenever a strong memory cropped up, I'd try hard to ignore it. When I'd scream from night terrors, my wife would try to help. I'd say they were just bad dreams. When she'd ask why I was so quiet, I'd make up a lie. If she persisted, I'd blow up—anything not to talk about my past. I wanted her to think I was "normal."

Finally, she went to therapy herself — and then insisted that I get therapy, as well. Her message was clear: get help, or else.

My therapist quickly diagnosed me as having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I fought that diagnosis. I hated the word "victim." But that diagnosis changed my life—as did the unconditional love and support from my wife. I began accepting and forgiving myself. I'm still trying. Last year, we celebrated our 42nd anniversary.

Domestic abuse comes in many forms, not all of them physical. It can include constant criticizing and controlling. It can include frequent outbursts of anger, rages, and blame. It's all abuse, as damaging as getting hit. No one deserves that.

I learned a lot from western North Dakota, including the courage to act. If you know others who might benefit from this letter, please share it.

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