

Years ago something happened to one of my mother's friends that I have thought of many times in the ensuing years.

There was a couple who was part of my parent's circle of friends. They stood out in a crowd because of their exceptional good looks and impeccable dress. He was a successful bureaucrat and she was an accomplished homemaker.

Their house was a showpiece- beautifully furnished and clean as a whistle.

Everyone commented on their perfect life. They particularly noted how he doted on his wife, touching her frequently, standing close to her whenever possible and extolling her virtues at every opportunity.

You can imagine the shock when word spread that these two had split. Speculation was stymied because all of the possibilities seemed impossible. It couldn't be lack of love, for they obviously loved each other. It couldn't be financial because there was no hint of money trouble. It couldn't be internal discord because he praised her so often and so devotedly. No one knew what had happened.

Several months after the split, my mother received a phone call from the wife. Could she come over for a visit? My mother did not hesitate to welcome her.

The woman came over one morning when I was at school and, according to what I overheard later when my mother recounted the tale to my father (in private of course), she spent several hours pouring out her heart to my mother.

I recall this clearly because it was the first time I remember being so shocked about the actions of another person. This woman had been physically, mentally and emotionally abused by this man for the 10 years of their marriage. She revealed that when they were in public he would

viciously pinch her under the table or from behind, being careful not to be detected. She would have to endure the pain without any sign of discomfort. If she moved away from him too quickly or tried to avoid him, he would verbally attack her and punch her when they got home. He avoided leaving marks that would be visible.

She was terrified of him but she felt immobilized by fear of losing her children and her home. He convinced her that she could not leave him. The straw that broke her was when he hit their eight-year-old son. She told my mother that everything crystallized for her in that moment and she took her children to a relative's home, never to return.

Since then I have heard many such stories. At the time I asked my mother, "But why didn't she just walk out the door?" Now I know what fear and low self-esteem and loss of hope can do to an individual.

Things are not always what they seem. One in five Canadians is a victim of some kind of family violence. Almost half of all solved homicides are domestic violence cases. If you are being abused, I encourage you to tell someone who can help.