

Thanks
86 men in
a big parade

Gloucester's 1999 Horribles Parade was joyful, as loud and as grand as ever. Refreshed by an occasional breeze off the harbor, crowds cheered, trumpets sounded, and bands marched on a hot and sticky Fourth of July weekend.

Local political figures, businesses, social service agencies and even a few brave individuals paraded past the crowd. Many of the floats were beautifully crafted — innovative and colorful with enchanting costumes and laughing children. But one newcomer drew special attention.

My View



Nicole Richon Schoel

Gloucester Men Against Domestic Abuse. Eighty-six men put their feet down to help raise awareness about a silent epidemic that is the leading cause of injury to women in America today. With a few exceptions from Essex or Rockport, these were Gloucester men who care about what is happening to their daughters, their sisters, their aunts and

nieces. These were men of all ages and backgrounds. These were men who fix cars, men who write books, men who teach, men who are artists, men who build houses, men who counsel others, men who fish, men who manufacture, buy and sell the goods and services produced in and around our community.

As coordinator of the Gloucester office of HAWC (Help for Abused Women and Their Children), I had been somewhat involved in the planning, but only peripherally. It was clear from the start that this was to be a men's event.

Local art dealer William Greenbaum and local builder Ted Hoague were the co-organizers of the event, and they were the ones who fed the vision — calling friends, asking them to call more friends, posting fliers and enlisting volunteers who would be willing to walk through the streets of Gloucester, informing thousands of city residents that domestic violence feeds on silence, that this is not just a women's issue, and that there is no excuse for abuse.

According to the F.B.I., a woman is beaten every 7.5 seconds in this country. Gloucester is no better or worse than any other community in this regard. Domestic violence knows no boundaries. But here is what's different about Gloucester: men of risk and courage who can parade down our streets and say, "Enough."

I viewed the parade from near the Pilot House with a small group of women — the wives and daughters of some of the men who were walking. Although I had heard detailed descriptions, I was not prepared for what I saw as the truck cleared Tally's Corner and floated down Rogers Street.

bystanders and reminded us that men's hands are not for hitting — they are for joining, for giving, for building, for clapping, for planting, for praying.

Nor was I prepared for my own reaction. As the truck drew closer, I ran toward it taking as many pictures as my shutter would allow, only slowing to take the camera from my face and look straight at these men — my brother who drove the truck, my husband who walked, so many friends from my lifetime on Cape Ann, as well as men I had never seen before.

They carried signs that said, "No one should live in fear in their own home." "There's no excuse for abuse — not alcohol, not drugs, not 'losing it,' and "Strong men don't bully." A thousand stories rushed into my consciousness — stories of beatings and brutality, of isolation, fear and despair and even of death.

And a thousand faces rose before me — the face of Jennifer Chute, murdered five years ago in Gloucester by her boyfriend, the faces of countless courageous women from Gloucester and Rockport and Manchester and Essex, who attend H.A.W.C. support groups, seek shelter from domestic abuse and struggle against the silence and shame that keeps it all behind closed doors.

Advocating for victims of domestic violence is profoundly rewarding yet difficult in so many ways. Sometimes those of us who choose to do this work feel discouraged, isolated and burnt out.

Sometimes we feel alone in our efforts to raise community awareness that domestic violence is everybody's business. As the Gloucester Men Against Domestic Abuse walked down Rogers Street, I felt something shift and lighten in my heart. I was so deeply moved by this show of support, this commitment to address what has been traditionally a women's issue. I have yet to fully comprehend my reaction.

Men who walked in the parade later told me the response from bystanders was overwhelmingly a positive one — "It's about time!" One man said he looked into people's eyes as they slowly came to realize what the float was all about — then the recognition, then the reaction. Viewers gave thumbs up to Gloucester Men Against Domestic Abuse.

As the Gloucester Police Department takes initial steps to establish a Domestic Violence Response Unit, and as groups such as the Cape Ann Partnership for Families and Children, the Mayor's Health Needs Assessment Committee, and the Gloucester Alliance Against Domestic Abuse begin to come forward to speak out against domestic violence, there is cause for hope.

Add to this list Men for HAWC, a group of individuals who have been meeting for almost two years to bring men into the fight against domestic violence, and now add the 86 men who walked through the streets of Gloucester on July 3, 1999.

As a woman, I applaud these men and the risk they took.

Thank you.

As a lifelong member of this community, and as a voice for battered women and their children, I thank you.

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