

A week with Maggie, Lacey, and Lynn

Gwen Lynn

L'auteure travaille dans une maison de transition à Fredericton, N.B.. Elle nous raconte ici sa rencontre avec Maggie, 20 ans, et ses deux filles, Lacey (deux ans) et Lynn (dix mois). Elle nous fait revivre les effroyables expériences de Maggie avec un mari abusif, sa semaine à la maison de transition, terrorisée, et sa "fuite" vers une nouvelle vie.

Early one morning in February, I was working the graveyard shift at Transition House and had a call on our crisis line at 1:00 a.m. I said "Hello" several times before I got an answer. The voice was young and scared. Little by little I coaxed her to tell me where she was and how we could help. She was in a room in a hotel in Fredericton with her two little girls. She said she had been living in the country, had "stolen" her husband's car to drive into the city, then had left the car at the police station, and had walked to a nearby hotel. She explained that her husband, always mean to them, on that particular day was in such a violent mood that she was afraid to stay around. Maggie, two-year-old Lacey, and ten-month-old Lynn had been sitting in the hotel room for twelve hours, not knowing quite what to do next or where to go. Since she didn't know the city well and sounded scared, I told her to just wait in the lobby and I would walk over to meet her.

When I arrived at the hotel I had no trouble identifying them. Their eyes big and round and scared, they huddled together in a big chair in the lobby.

As we headed back to Transition House it was snowing. Maggie was visibly nervous. Suddenly a car sped by. Maggie screamed, "It's them," "them" being her husband and his brother. Taking off my coat, I had Maggie put it on and pull up the hood so that she would not be recognized. We kept on walking but now we went by back alleys and hoped that they had not spotted Maggie. I kept saying, "Never mind; don't be scared. They can't hurt you when you are with me." It sounded good, but I was relieved when we were finally behind the locked doors of Transition House. We found pyjamas for the three of them and put them to bed.

After Maggie had rested for some time she came down to talk to me. She was twenty years old, pretty, bright, and personable, and Lacey and Lynn were beautiful children. As she told me about her husband I understood her fear. Older than she, he had a history of violence. He had spent a few years in the penitentiary for manslaughter. His mistreatment of Maggie was mostly neglect and emotional abuse. He called her "slut," "whore," and "bitch" a lot and told everybody stories about her. Whatever money came into the family through social assistance or when he worked, he used as he pleased. He spent most of his time in bars with friends but never gave Maggie any money and seldom brought food home. Maggie often went for many days without anything to eat. Whatever food she could scrounge she gave to Lacey. When she was pregnant with Lynn she was taken to the hospital suffering from severe dehydration. Social services could not help her since she had a man to look after her and they had already given money to him. At one point she lied to social services in order to get help and said that she was an unwed mother.

The three years that Maggie had been married had been one long struggle to survive. She was not able to go anywhere. Her husband would not look after the children. She was so pleased when one day he said that she and Lacey could come with him for a drive. He got angry over something and made them get out of the car. Maggie had to walk five miles carrying Lacey to get back home. She was seven months pregnant at the time. "But it's so awful," Maggie said; "I loved him so much when we were first married and I try so hard to keep from making him mad."

Later that day a staff member opened the inside

door to someone who said he was a police officer. When she realized that the man on the step was not wearing a uniform, she asked for ID. He had no ID and was trying to force his way into the house. Maggie caught a glimpse of him through an upstairs window and identified him as her husband, who had come to reclaim his family. We were very nervous for a while about what he would do next, and poor Maggie was so embarrassed that he was harassing us.

For the week that Maggie was with us she lived in fear that her husband would somehow manage to get in the house to get either her or one of the children. She couldn't go out with the children for fear he would grab one of them. It is strange that the worse a man treats his wife, the more he wants her back.

Finally arrangements were made for Maggie to go to Toronto, where her family lived. Maggie came into the office to tell me her plans. Her face was bright with hope as she said, "Gwen, everything is going to be fine. My brother says not to worry about anything; he will look after me and the children. He is going to get an apartment and look after us." I said, "That's wonderful! How old is your brother?" "Eighteen," she said.

We got some attractive clothes for Lacey and Lynn and put all three on a plane for Toronto. We haven't heard how they are getting along but hope with a little bit of luck and the optimism of youth they will be able to live a comfortable life.

Gwen Lynn is finishing her B.A. and working toward a certificate in social work at St. Thomas College, University of New Brunswick (Fredericton). She works as a part-time relief worker at Transition House in Fredericton.

TRANSITION HOUSES ON THE EAST COAST

Crossroads For Women
P.O. Box 1247
Moncton, N.B.

Fundy House
P.O. Box 234
St. Stephen, N.B.
E3L 1G0

Hestia House
P.O. Box 7135, Station A
St. John, N.B.
E2L 4S5

Transition House
P.O. Box 1143, Station A
Fredericton, N.B.
E3B 5C2

Bryony House
P.O. Box 3453
Halifax, N.S.

Anderson House
Box 964
Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Women's Centre
83 Military Road
St. John's, Nfld.

Le Mont St-Marie
Edmunston, N.B.

Centre Aide Leroyer
St. Basile, N.B.

Transition House
Sydney, N.S.

Cecilia Mutch
Miramichi Regional
Development Council
155 Pleasant St.
Newcastle, N.B.

Shelter For Women
Tracadie, N.B.

Sister Julie D'amour
Director
Notre Dame House
Campbellton, N.B.

Transition House
120 Boylston St.
Suite 707
Boston, Mass. 02116