

Karen Kinnaman  
Professor Faery  
Essay #4 Final Version

## Murderous Marriage

I never really knew her. Nor will I ever get the chance to now. I have pictures to remember her by. They always adorned our family room as I grew up. Cindi's luscious golden curls cradled her smile, emitting a radiance that lit up the shelf on which the picture sat. Even though I only saw her once every couple of years, I still looked up to her: to her beauty, her humor, her kindness. Although I have three younger cousins, she was my only older cousin. I always acted shy around her, perhaps because I wanted her acceptance. Growing up, I had two younger brothers and always secretly wished for an older sister. I wished that she would fulfill that role for me. As a child, I desperately wanted us to be close despite our fourteen-year difference in age and the 300 miles that separated our homes in Maine and New York.

As I became a teenager, I saw Cindi less and less, and so did her own family. Her life remained unknown to us, burrowed deep beneath the ground. As I look back now, I can only wish that we as her extended family, had listened to our instincts and intervened. I wish we had pried into that hole of hers and pulled her up to safety before the walls of the hole caved in and collapsed on her.

The story begins when Cindi married her first husband, Mike, in Portland, Maine. I remember the enthusiasm I had for the ceremony, as it was the first and only wedding I have ever attended. For three years, Mike and Cindi led a seemingly happy marriage. This all changed when Cindi met Thomas Power, the vice president of the insurance company she worked with. Separated from his wife with whom he had three children, Tom quickly seduced

Cindi away from the life she had been leading. Swept up in a whirlwind of excitement and energy, the two left their jobs and moved to Sarasota, Florida. It wasn't long until he proposed to Cindi in May of 2004. As they exchanged their vows on the shores of Hawaii and he promised her a life of love, commitment, and protection, he handed her a huge diamond ring and a \$100,000 engagement gift. But the indulgence did not end there. Cindi was suddenly thrust from a modest lifestyle into one of cruises, vacations, and luxury homes; it was a big change for the girl from the backwoods of Maine, one that could lure in anyone eager enough to accept it. He seemed like the ideal man: handsome, courteous, smart, and wealthy. Everyone liked him, from Cindi's parents to the customers at the small Internet café they started up. His 6''1' frame complemented her own petite build, as her beauty and his handsomeness made many regard them as a model couple. They worked together everyday, side by side, to make their business a success. Customers noted how easy going and personable each was. When they first got married, Tom was very helpful to my grandparents, Nana and Papa, who lived in nearby Tampa. Life for my grandparents has become increasingly difficult as Papa struggles with Parkinson's disease, which has left him cut off from the active life he once led. Tom seemed willing to help them out in any that that he could, assisting with repairs around the house and taking the time to entertain Papa. To the naked eye, it appeared that Cindi and Tom were the perfect couple that had everything. But as is often the case, things were not what they seemed: this perfect couple was not ideal by any means, but had deep, dark secrets and flaws.

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Every year in the United States, more than 2,000 women are murdered and 2-4 million women assaulted by their current or former male partners as reported by the consumer health website *Emedicine*. If those statistics alone don't convince us of the magnitude of this problem,

there is the fact that policemen in the United States spend one third of their time responding to domestic violence calls. Domestic violence is used to establish power and control over another person through fear, intimidation, and violence. The abuser often feels entitled to control the victim. Domestic violence is a term that encompasses abuse of children and elders, but is most commonly used to describe a relationship between spouses or partners. Although a relationship can exist in which the woman inflicts abuse upon the man, domestic violence is more commonly a situation where the man perform acts of psychological, economic, sexual, or physical abuse against the woman. It is not restricted to solely the poor and certain ethnic groups. Women of different races, socioeconomic status, ethnicities, and religions are all victims of abusive husbands.

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In addition to her parents, Gary and Anita, Cindi had a twelve-year-old brother, Matt. Cindi had also once had another brother, Jeff, a year her junior, but he had died in 1988 in an auto accident. On Tuesday, April 25 of this year, Cindi had made plans to celebrate her father's birthday on the upcoming Friday with him, her mother and her brother. Friday arrived and passed without any word from Cindi. Gary simply assumed that Cindi and Tom had changed their minds about meeting with him and had instead gone away to celebrate their first anniversary, which would have been on May 1. He found it a little odd, though, that Cindi had not called and notified him about a change in plans. He was especially concerned that something was wrong because Cindi had always called on Gary's birthday. On Saturday, he called Cindi's friends, none of whom had seen her. He visited the café, but learned that it had been closed since

Thursday. They called the house several times only to get an answering machine. They drove to the house to find that it was locked up, so they checked all the windows to see if they could see anything wrong. Everything looked fine. On Sunday morning, they called one more time, leaving a message for Cindi to call and saying that if they didn't hear back in a little while, they were going to call the police. When again they got no answer, Anita called the police who joined them at Tom and Cindi's house.

The house was empty upon arrival. Silent. Lifeless. The police and Gary scoured it room by room for clues as to where the couple had gone. A spontaneous vacation? An anniversary cruise? Where could they possibly be? Gary entered the garage. Lying on the ground was Tom's body. The police quickly followed with a discovery of their own: a suicide note written by Tom. The contents revealed the location of Cindi. Hoping the letter was not true, the police slowly opened the door of the freezer. Of all the lies and deceit that exuded from Tom, for once he had spoke the truth. Just as the suicide letter had indicated, there lay the delicate body of a petite, blonde female.

The news report read like a Patricia Cornwell crime novel. Choked, strangled, suffocated, poisoned, dumped. The words used seemed appropriate to describe the details of one of Conrwell's gory murder scenes. I struggled to read the entire article. Frankly, every sentence brought a challenge. I couldn't imagine how anyone could be capable of inflicting such harm on someone else, let alone a husband murder his own wife. The suicide notes left by Tom helped assemble the completely incomprehensible parts of the murder-suicide mystery, while the detectives filled in the missing pieces with their own speculations. An argument had ensued, perhaps leading to the violence that followed, they proposed. Tom, victim of his own ego, rage, and anger, wrapped an electrical cord around Cindi's neck, tied a knot, and strangled her. Then,

he placed her body in a chest freezer so as to preserve her body so she could “look good for the funeral”, as audaciously stated in another note written by Tom to Cindi’s parents. The detectives initially believed Cindi was still alive when he put her in the freezer, but further analysis proved otherwise. Rubbing salt into the wound, the note goes on to mention that Cindi wanted to die and never struggled when he strangled her. As if he had not hurt his father-in-law enough, the letter concludes with a final stab at his Cindi’s father: “Happy Birthday Gary — I preserved her body for you”.

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The profile of an abuser varies from one man to another. He often takes on a Jekyll and Hyde-type personality in which he can be caring, loving, and sensitive to the outside world but display abusive behavior behind closed doors. The common profile of an abuser is a person who displays extreme jealousy, possessiveness, uncontrollable temper, unpredictability, and verbal abuse. To justify his jealousy, the abuser will say it is a sign of love. The jealousy can take on extreme forms as the abuser questions whom the spouse talks to and constantly accuses her of flirting. An abuser can be jealous of the time a partner spends with family and friends, as was clearly the case with Cindi and Tom. An abuser will justify his controlling behavior and possessiveness by claiming he is concerned with his spouse’s safety. This characteristic translates to an abuser getting easily angered if the spouse comes back late from the store. As the behavior worsens, an abuser can even start making personal decisions for the spouse, such as what clothes she should wear and when she can leave the house. Another characteristic of abusers is that they come into a relationship strong and fast, even pressuring the spouse to

commit to the relationship. Finally, an abuser uses isolation as a tactic to cut off the spouse from all her resources. Tom made sure to distance Cindi from her family and friends by moving to Florida, monitoring her phone conversations, and not allowing her to meet with family members.

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After he had accomplished his mission, stealing the life of his wife and ruining the lives of her family and loved ones, he proceeded to finish off the destructive rampage by taking his own life. He sat in his car parked in the garage, having just finished three bottles of wine. Perhaps he was contemplating what he had done. I imagine that these thoughts rushed through his mind just as the carbon monoxide enveloped his mouth, throat, and lungs. He wrote a note from the inside of the car, stating that he had been sitting in the car for 50 minutes, but the poisoning wasn't working. What was going through his mind during those endless minutes? Was he scared or proud or indifferent? More importantly, did he feel any guilt? Did he suffer and struggle, as he had made Cindi suffer, with the murder that weighed heavily upon him? Did his mind eat away at itself for those 50 minutes, as the blood of his beloved wife soaked deeply into hands, the same hands that once enveloped Cindi's in matrimony?

Upon further investigation of Cindi's room, the police discovered some photographs and personal notes she had written to herself. The photographs were like a visual diary of the past year of marriage to Tom. They were a visual documentation of his ongoing physical abuse. Picture after picture revealed the countless bruises on her body inflicted by her tyrannical husband. The notes she wrote were equally as chilling. On the anniversary of her brother Jeff's death, about two months after she married Tom, she wrote a note about the irony of how here she was fearing for her own life. Her writings revealed that his abuse extended beyond physical

afflictions, and entailed verbal, psychological, and sexual violence. She described how Tom beat her: that she feared for her life so much that she couldn't sleep at night, afraid of what might happen to her. How he wouldn't give any freedom: Tom wouldn't allow her to have friends, be around other people, or go to any parties. How he talked down to her: telling her that she was worth nothing and that the business and house were all his. Telling her that she was a peasant, that she was from the gutter. He talked down to her so much that she lost all self esteem. How he treated her like a sex slave, forcing her to have intercourse with his friends. How he threatened to kill her mom, dad, and brother if she told anyone of her secret life or tried to escape. She even discovered that he had been searching the Internet to purchase a gun with which he planned to kill his ex-wife.

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Physical violence is the most obvious sign of abuse that preys on the comfort of the partner. It encompasses assault with a weapon, shoving, slapping, punching, choking, kicking, holding, binding, denial of sleep or nutrition, and ultimately murder. Psychological abuse is employed in order to render the victim helpless and completely dependent on the abuser. Such abuse includes threats of physical harm, intimidation, coercion, degradation, humiliation, false accusations, and a recently developed form of abuse known as cyberstalking. Through sexual abuse, a batterer objectifies women with nonconsensual or painful sexual acts that are often unprotected from pregnancy or STDs. Abuse can also include forcefully isolating one from communicating with friends, family, or relatives. In such a situation, the abuser can make communicating with outsiders so difficult that the abused stops even trying. This was a tactic

employed by Cindi's husband, as in his desire for total control and power over his wife, he did not share any part of her with the outside world.

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The detectives found Cindi's wedding ring on the floor in the kitchen. It had appeared to have been thrown, maybe in anger or rage, suggesting a fight had recently occurred. Perhaps this was Cindi's first and last action of defiance. Maybe this was the night she planned to stand her ground, look the demon in his eyes and stare him back down to reality. Maybe that night was the night Cindi had decided for herself that she would no longer be the pawn in his vicious games of power. It could have possibly been the night she would throw that expensive diamond ring, the emblem of his failed promises of love and protection, right in his face and walk away a liberated woman. As she threw the ring to the ground, she could finally break free from the shackles of pain and abuse and suffering. He might have been able to inflict those scars and bruises, but they would not nearly amount to the strength of her courage and character, she would tell him as she released the ring into the air. At least, that is what I hope she was thinking. The police think that perhaps she was planning to leave and that he had discovered it. Her father found that Cindi had a secret savings account that she was putting money into. At the time of her death, the account contained upwards of \$75,000. Something obviously caused him to snap. The thought of losing the leash he had emotionally tied around Cindi's neck must have sent his world based on power and control into disarray.



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The pattern of abuse inflicted by victims in a relationship is termed by the *Domestic Violence Handbook* as a *cycle of violence* and includes three major components: tension building, acute battering, and reconciliation. The way this cycle works is that during the tension-building phase, the victim is usually compliant and kind to the abuser in order to avoid a violent assault. Regardless of such behavior by the victim, the abuser still becomes enraged and angered with both increasing intensity and frequency. Events of violence and abuse then ensue. After the battering has occurred, the abuser tends to display remorse and demonstrates bouts of love. This vicious cycle was evident in Tom and Cindi's relationship. Tom told Cindi everything she wanted to hear to lure her into his web. He would beat her both physically and verbally, then buy her nice things or take her on a trip to make up with her.

It is during the tension-building and battering phases that a victim will respond most willingly to intervention by friends, family, physicians, and others. Conversely, in the phase of reconciliation, a victim is enveloped in a blanket of love, sorrow, and affection from the abuser. This warm, friendly behavior assures the victim that the abuse won't occur again and convinces her to return to the arms of her abuser. Blinded by this mindset, a victim is much less likely to welcome help during the reconciliation stage of the cycle.

Surprisingly, the most dangerous time for a battered woman is not during the marriage, but during an attempt to escape the abusive relationship. In fact, women who are separated from their husbands have a risk for violence that is about three times greater than that of divorced women and nearly twenty-five times greater than that of married women. It is after a couple separates that greater bouts of domestic violence seem to occur, as 75% of domestic assaults reported to law enforcers occur between spouses at such a stage in their relationship.

Furthermore, women are more likely to be murdered when attempting to report abuse or leave the violent relationship.

The natural reaction of a fox when hunted by a hound is an escape reaction. When presented with a stress or threat, it runs away and retreats into hiding in order to avoid its own demise. So why do abuse victims not respond in the same manner? Why do they continue to stay in horrible situations and submit to the suffering imposed on them instead of escaping their situation? According to *EMedicine*, it all boils down to four main reasons: love, hope, dependence, and fear. Love is especially the reason for a victim to remain with an abusive partner when their relationship is based on one person loving the other. The victim will often do anything to retain the love of her partner, regardless of the abuse that the partner may be inflicting. Hope is what keeps a victim within an abuser's grasp during the reconciliation phase. Often the abused person is so blinded by the words of love and remorse exhibited by the abuser and is so desperate to accept those lies as the truth that she will remain in the relationship despite the violence. Dependence impedes the road to intervention, especially in female victims who become emotionally and sometimes financially dependent on their abusers. It is common for the batterers to be the spouse in control of the money, making it more difficult for victims to leave. Many victims are unemployed and helpless without the monetary support of their abusive spouses. This lack of access to money forces them to put up with abuse in order to survive. Finally, the most powerful factor is probably that of fear. Victims are guided by the thought that seeking help will only further escalate the violence. Many of the abused refuse to assist in prosecuting their abusers for fear that their abusers will retaliate with even greater violence. Sadly, this is the reality. Upon attempts by the victim to separate or seek help, assailants do in fact increase their violence. *EMedicine* reports that during prosecution, approximately half of

batterers threaten retaliatory violence, and more than 30% actually commit assaults. When spouses share children, fear of their abduction by the abuser also plays a large role in why women choose not to leave their assailants.

Of course there are a myriad of other reasons victims, women specifically, choose to stay with their abusers. Isolation can be used as an abuse tactic that cuts off the victim from outside support from family and friends. Guilt on the part of the abused can make her convince herself that she is not doing everything in her power to make the relationship work. Denying that the abuse exists or thinking that fighting does not qualify as abuse can cause a victim to be unaware that they are in fact involved in an abusive relationship. The list of reasons extends indefinitely as domestic violence continues to both increase and evolve with changing times and technology.

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The worst part about this tragedy is the thought that it could have been prevented. The signs of abuse, although perhaps cryptic, were most certainly there. People who knew Tom said he was very controlling of his wife and was known to have a short fuse. He was violent and apparently even chased customers of their Internet café down the street for no reason. Customers recounted in local newspapers how when Cindi would wait on men, Tom would always stand right by her side. It was as if Tom feared that someone would steal his wife away from him. He would not let Cindi walk down the street alone without him. “Tom would grab Cindi in a ‘death grip’ when the couple walked to lunch”, recalled a customer in the *Sarasota Town Herald Tribune*. An acquaintance of Tom stated, "Beneath the outward flawlessness of their marriage, Tom had a darker side, a jealous nature. He was a possessive husband who wouldn't let that girl out of his sight.”

Gary moved with his wife and son from Maine to Florida just to be near Cindi. But they rarely saw her. Soon after the marriage, unreturned phone calls and cancelled dinner plans became a frequent occurrence. As Gary thinks back now, he remembers how whenever Cindi was on the phone with him, Tom was always right next to her. Nana, who at one point would talk to Cindi several times a week, would now try calling and rarely receive a returned call. One of Tom's most effective weapons was isolation. Before Tom entered her life, Cindi was very close with her baby brother, Matthew. Having lost her other younger brother to a car accident when he was seventeen, she held Matthew to her even tighter, knowing how fragile life can be. She truly treasured the time she spent with him. But when she married Tom, that all changed. She rarely ever saw Matt anymore, and even after her family moved to Florida, she never had him to her new house for sleepovers and wasn't allowed to go to Matt's basketball or soccer games she did when she was married to her first husband.

In addition to these changes that took place over time, there were also numerous instances that should have sent off warning bells. The problem was that none of us were looking for them. The couple spent last Thanksgiving with Nana and Gary. After a wonderful dinner in their gorgeous home, they had all planned to meet the following day at the café for breakfast. Cindi and Tom never showed up. As he replays the scenarios in his mind, Gary believes that Tom had beat Cindi after they left dinner that night and that she was too embarrassed to come to breakfast the following morning with bruises all over her body. Gary did notice those bruises, but when he confronted her about them once, she was quick to brush off their existence, replying that she simply "bruised easily". Last March, my brother Michael, who is a sophomore in college, was in the Tampa Bay area during his spring break vacation. Having not seen or heard from Cindi in years, he decided it would be nice to meet up with her since he was practically in

her neighborhood. On the day he planned to meet her, he called the café to confirm the directions, but found out that she was not there. It wasn't until much later that she called Michael back and suggested that they meet in a few days, which my brother couldn't make. Gary and my mother now speculate that Tom probably beat her when he learned that Michael wanted to meet with her. He manifested his feelings of insecurity and power with physical violence.

The main source of Tom's abuse resides, ironically, in his last name: Power. Thomas *Power*. Power is at the root of most domestic violence. There is a constant struggle for it; a struggle to impose it, maintain it, and regain it when lost. Power was his addiction. He drank of it, shot it in his veins, indulged in its every variety. To get his fix, he beat his wife. He beat her with his fists, his words, his money.

A question that has continually crossed my mind is how anyone could be capable of hurting their spouse. More specifically, what causes men to batter their wives? There are a multitude of different types of batterers and just as many theories to explain why men batter women, ranging from family dysfunction, poor communication skills, provocation, stress, and economic hardship such as unemployment. But I don't believe that such things as unemployment, alcohol, or drugs cause abuse. There are plenty of people in our nation who are jobless, drink, and smoke and who also do not abuse their spouse. Although alcohol may affect the severity of the abuse, it most certainly is neither the root cause nor an excuse for such behavior. The prevalence of spousal abuse in Muslim countries where alcohol is forbidden rules out alcohol as a root cause, as reported in an online article by World Travel Guide. The same logic can be applied to the myth that stress is a cause of abusive men. If that statement were true, then why do women under stress not attack their male spouses with the same frequency?

According to Brian Nichols, public policy manager of Men Stopping Violence, battery is commonly accepted as a learned behavior. As the phrase “hurt people hurt people” suggests, abusers tend to be past victims of violence themselves. Michael Groetsch, a researcher of spousal abuse, writes “Most batterers were brought up in domestic ‘war zones’. As babies and young children, they grew up in hostile surroundings where emotional and physical violence were ‘normal.’” A boy raised in such an environment learns at a young age that a man must always be in control of women. Witnessing the violence of an abusive father, he learns that this control is achieved through scaring them, hurting them, and demeaning them. The environment in which one is raised most certainly does not excuse their behavior, but it does provide insight into the psyche of certain types of batterers.

Nichols presents the argument that spousal abuse is not simply a manifestation of poor anger management or communication issues, but a choice made by the abuser based on sexism. He believes that prejudicial views of women as inferiors are at the root of men’s desire to gain this unrelenting power and control over women’s lives through abusive tactics. Thus by eliminating sexism, men will be more likely to respect women rather than abuse them.

As I think back on her life, I contemplate how life failed Cindi; she was let down not only by her husband, but by her extended family. Her husband stripped her of her voice, her freedom, and her safety — he stripped her of her life before he had even murdered her. But we as her family did not do everything in our power to stop the abuse before it ultimately led to her death. If we had only trusted our doubts and acted upon our instincts, all those times when we sensed something odd and out of sorts instead of brushing it off. In a phone conversation I had with Gary, he informed me of how he always had a gut feeling that something was wrong with the relationship. I tell this story to illustrate the importance of the role of family and friends in

recognizing the signs of abuse in their loved ones' relationships. A simple confrontation or questioning could have saved a life and ended an abusive relationship before it turned murderous.

#### Note

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The texts cited in this essay are: Brian Nichols, "Why Do Men Batter?" in *Men Stopping Violence*, [www.menstoppingviolence.org](http://www.menstoppingviolence.org); "Maybe This Time He'll Change," in Watchtower, [www.watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org); "Domestic Violence," in *Emedicine*, 2004, [www.emedicine.com](http://www.emedicine.com); "The Problem," in *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*, [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org); **"Cycle of Violence" in *Domestic Violence Handbook***, [www.domesticviolence.org](http://www.domesticviolence.org); **"Islam" in *World Travel Guides***, [www.columbusguides.com](http://www.columbusguides.com); Jenny Lee Allen, "Wife's Body Found in Freezer," in *Herald Tribune*, 2005; **Jenny Lee Allen, "Authorities Say Husband Killed Wife and Then Himself," in *Herald Tribune*, 2005**; Gary Colasanti, Personal Interview, 2005; Eileen Kinnaman, Personal Interview, 2005;