

Remembering Victims and Survivors as an Attorney - Marilyn Harp

By Marilyn Harp, Executive Director of Kansas Legal Services

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“I remember the ones who celebrated their orders after years of living in fear.” - Marilyn Harp

I Remember

I remember the faces.

I remember the stories.

I remember the desperation – the panic that seems so real to them and so unbelievable to me.

I remember the fear, partially based on the threats that had been hurled toward them for years – that they would never see their children again, that no one else could ever love or take care of them, that they were too stupid to take care of themselves.

I remember the determination that they were going to escape; that they were going to make a life for their children without the constant threat of violence, without seeing their mother constantly subservient to their father for fear of the consequences.

I remember the research stating that one of the factors in survivors escaping their abusers was that they had the assistance of legal counsel.¹ I was determined to

support those women.

I remember the ones who quietly put their protection order in a safe place, understanding that paper wouldn't stop bullets, but it could bring the police to remove their abuser from their safe place.

I remember the ones who celebrated their orders after years of living in fear.

I remember the ones who were murdered — killed shortly after our meeting.

I remember the cross placed in her memory in the symbolic graveyard.

I remember the hugs of appreciation, when I met one of these women again.

I remember the ones who felt safer after getting a protection from abuse order.

I remember the ones who left the courthouse with an order of protection, only to find their abuser waiting in the parking lot or their driveway at home - or him showing up at the place she frequented with her friends on weekends.

I remember the ones who were left out of protections in early criminal and civil laws and those who benefited after various expansions of existing protection laws.

I remember the ones who had a difficult time getting a protection order, because their abuser was in the military, a police officer, or a prominent citizen. And, I remember victims who did get a protection order from judges despite the status of their abuser.

I remember the ones who were determined to be good parents to their children despite the obstacles and systems they faced.

I remember the ones who knew their abuser would harm the children, just to get back at them, and feared for the children's safety every time the children had to spend the night at his house.

I remember the look of relief when I told her I was a staff attorney with Kansas Legal Services and was able to go with her before the judge, so she didn't have to go alone.

I remember being her voice before a skeptical judge, knowing a rundown of pertinent laws and experience with the words to educate and persuade in these

types of cases, so the judge could understand the consequences of courtroom decisions for her and her children's lives.

I remember being part of and leading the Wichita/Sedgwick County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition, meeting monthly to coordinate services, create new services and make the path of survivors easier.

I remember the excitement of being on the founding board of the domestic violence organization in Wichita, StepStone, Inc., as we worked to create a resource for families in order to continue providing housing and support after they left domestic violence shelters.

I remember having to tell women, who needed long term solutions to situations that would inevitably lead to more domestic violence, that limited funding meant we could do some of what she needed, but not help with a divorce or paternity case. The Victims Of Crime Act (1984) funding has changed that.

I have rarely been in a courtroom for the past 10 years, as I have had a mostly administrative job, leading Kansas Legal Services. One of the most remarkable things of the last 3 years has been the expansion of legal services, made possible by the Victims of Crime Act funding and the expanded definition of available legal services by the Department of Justice. In 2014, we were able to help 1,372 victims get a protection order. Only about 400 victims were able to obtain a divorce. This is in contrast to this year of 2017: We are able to help 2,273 victims. About 1,900 people will have legal assistance in court to obtain a protection order, and nearly 700 survivors will receive legal assistance to obtain a divorce - with children involved in most of these cases. Additionally, other more encompassing services are also available to meet legal and related needs.

¹ Amy Farmer & Jill Tiefenthaler, "Explaining the Recent Decline in Domestic Violence," 21 Contemp. Econ Pol'y. 158 (April 2003); [U.S. Department of Justice, "Access to Justice for Victims of Domestic Violence Project,"](#) Access to Justice Initiative. Washington, D.C. 20530.

[Kansas Legal Services](#) has been a partner of the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (<http://kcsdv.org/>) on legal issues for many years. Before becoming Kansas Legal Services Executive Director in Topeka, Kansas, Marilyn Harp was the Managing Attorney of Kansas Legal Services in Wichita, Kansas. This piece of writing, which she wrote for KCSDV's blog, shares her memories over the years.

If you or someone you know is experiencing [domestic violence](#), call a [domestic violence or sexual assault organization in Kansas near you](#) or contact [national resources](#) that are available to you. <http://kcsdv.org>

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