Lindsay Ann Burke: She Was Looking Forward to Being a Teacher

Lindsay Ann Burke grew up on a small street in the suburbs, knowing all the neighbors and playing with all their children. She attended church and schools in North Kingston, Rhode Island. She was a warm and outgoing person who cared about others. Her mother, Ann Burke, a middle school health teacher and an NEA member, suggested to Lindsay that she consider education as a career. And Lindsay Ann Burke agreed, graduating from Rhode Island College with a degree in elementary and special education.

Then, at a friend’s wedding, she met a man. She was drawn to him by his compliments, the attention he paid her and his charming ways. A fundamentally honest and trusting person, Lindsay had never before encountered a pathological liar. When the controlling behaviors began, she, like all victims, didn’t recognize them. They were insidious, occurring slowly, and when she did question him, she believed his excuses and apologies. He told her he’d had an unhappy childhood. That man murdered Lindsay before she could ever fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher.

After Lindsay’s death, the president of the high school she had graduated from visited Lindsay’s mother. She told Ann Burke that she was deeply sorry that the topic of abusive relationships had not been taught to the girls when Lindsay was in school. Ann Burke decided then and there to honor her daughter by creating the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund. The mission of the Fund is to help educate other girls and young women about abusive relationships before it’s too late. Ann Burke notes: “By remaining silent, abusers are empowered. Education gives us power to recognize an abusive relationship and help ourselves or others.”

Ann Burke’s website, http://labmf.org/teachers/introduction provides information, resources, lesson plans and curriculum on teen dating violence and abusive relationships. “Health teachers teach other health topics, yet this problem, which is so very prevalent and for which the consequences can be devastating, is not given the attention it deserves,” says Ann Burke.

A STUNNINGLY PERVASIVE PROBLEM

Late last year the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released the results of an exhaustive survey of women in the U.S. It received little attention in the media. Nonetheless, the findings are stunning:

- **One in five** women report they had been raped or had experienced an attempted rape in their lifetime.
- **Forty-two percent** of these rapes or attempted rapes occurred before their 18th birthday and 80 percent before their 25th birthday.
- **One in four** women reported having been beaten by an intimate partner.
- **One in six** women reported having been stalked.

When combined with a 2008 survey done by Liz Claiborne Inc., which revealed that one in three teenage girls had experienced physical abuse in their romantic relationships, these statistics reveal a problem that is widespread and deeply-rooted throughout our society, crossing class, race, ethnic and geographic lines.
Strategies For Preventing Violence Against Girls and Women

Denial is the life support system of violence against girls and women. So the first step in any prevention strategy is to acknowledge the breadth and depth of the problem in our society and schools.

The second step is to remind ourselves that however horrendous the statistics, we are not helpless. There are steps that responsible adults can take to push back against this tide of violence. Educators, parents, health-care and social service providers and community activists, working together, have the power of prevention if they choose to exercise it.

And there are specific things educators can do. Following Ann Burke’s lead, schools can provide staff—including school counselors, sports coaches, and education support professionals—with training in how to spot the signs of abuse and what to do about it. They can also provide middle and high school students with course material about the difference between healthy and abusive relationships.

Abused or sexually harassed or bullied students often feel very isolated. They don’t know to whom they can turn. If educators make it clear to students that they are there to listen, they will not judge but will help, and they are prepared to take action on behalf of the abused or sexually harassed or bullied student, they will make a huge difference in the lives of those students.

Violence Against Girls And Women As A Social Justice Issue

The Violence Against Women Act was developed and passed as a result of an extensive grassroots effort in the late 1980s and early 90s by caregivers and professionals from the battered women’s movement and by sexual assault prevention advocates. The authors and supporters of this legislation very much saw violence against girls and women as one of the leading women’s rights issues of our time and passage of the law as a major step forward in achieving social justice for women.

Passed in 1994, it was first U.S. federal legislation acknowledging domestic violence and sexual assault as crimes, and it provided federal resources to encourage community-coordinated responses to combating violence. It also led to the creation of the National Domestic Violence Hotline—1-800-799-SAFE (7233), which now receives 21,000 calls a month and provides access to translators in 170 languages.

The law’s reauthorization in 2000 created a much-needed legal assistance program for victims by expanding the definition of crime to include dating violence and stalking. Its reauthorizing in 2005 created the first federal funding system to support rape crisis centers and to develop culturally and linguistically-specific services for communities.

This landmark legislation is now up for reauthorization again. NEA calls on members to contact their elected Representatives and Senator in Congress and urge them to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. The struggle for social justice for women is far from over.

Sources (listed in order of appearance)


Liz Claiborne, Inc., Tween and Teen Dating Violence and Abuse Study 2008

