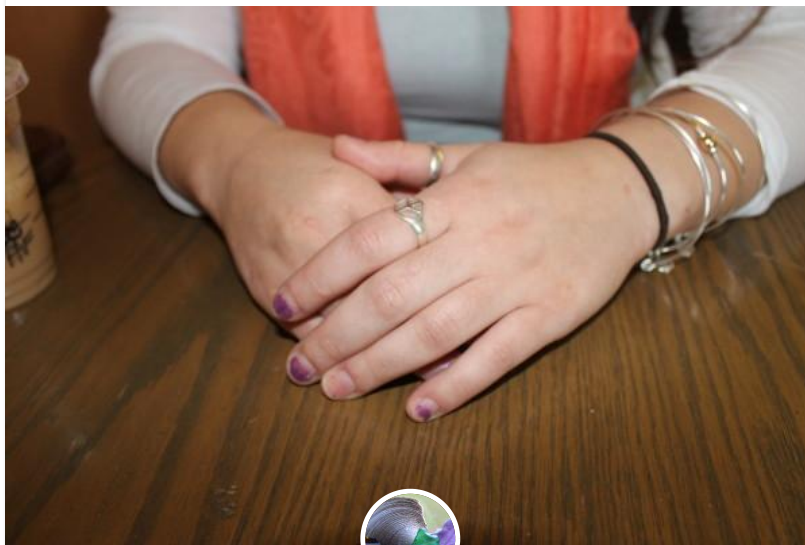


Currents • Long-Form Stories

Story of a Cape Cod Domestic Violence Survivor: “My Week of Hell”

March 18, 2014 • 7 Comments • by Laura M. Reckford

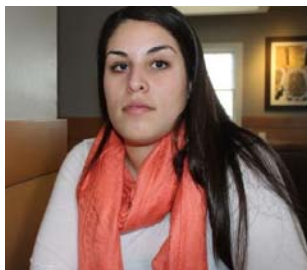


Written by Laura M. Reckford

Watc
Watch L App
watchknow.org

FALMOUTH – Gabbe Rowland’s week of hell began on Saturday, June 29, 2013.

During that week, her boyfriend, the man she loved and planned to marry, humiliated her, threatened to kill her, beat her with a belt, hit her repeatedly in the face, tried to strangle her, shot her up with heroin and forced her to have oral sex with a dog.



Gabbe Rowland is a survivor of domestic violence and feels empowered to tell her story in hopes of helping others.

At the end of the week, finally out of his control, she called the police and pressed charges. He was arrested and jailed to await trial.

Last week, eight months later, after a jury trial at Falmouth District Court, her 24-year-old abuser was convicted on seven charges, including four counts of assault with a deadly

Turning Pointe Dance Studio

Jump into Summer!

5 Weeks of Summer Classes for all ages, levels, and styles
Ballet, Pointe, Tap, Hip-Hop, Acro, Conditioning, Contemporary, and Jazz
Fantasy Ballet Camps for ages 4-8
Intermediate & Advanced Intensives



Turning Pointe Dance Studio • 2019 Thomas R. Lunders Road • Falmouth, MA 02536
508-464-6212 • info@turningpointedancestudio.org

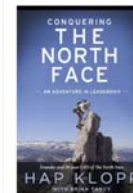
Categories

- Currents
- Long-Form Stories
- Music Videos
- Salty Air
- Sand Dollars
- Scenic Slide Shows
- Sponsored

WOMR



Books & More By Brian of Cape Cod Wave



Leadership & Creating
An Iconic Outdoor Brand

According to one law enforcement official, the sentence was a sizable one for a district court case where 2 ½ years is usually the maximum sentence.

But this was no average case.

Most domestic violence victims do not want to talk about what happened to them because of fear or shame. They do not want their names to be public.

Naming the Victim

Media, out of respect for victims, customarily withhold victims' names, in particular victims of rape or domestic violence.

But Rowland, who is 25, wanted her name used in this story. In fact, she told her story on only one condition, that her accuser not be named.

"This is about me. I will not be referring to him by name," she said. "This is a way for me to heal and for me to continue."

She recognizes now that what he did to her and what he took from her—her sense of pride and self-esteem. Now she is taking back control of her life.

This is her story, not his.

She said after she was able to leave her batterer and press charges, she had two options.

"To totally fall apart, to turn to drugs and enter the downward spiral that he was in," she said.

Or to do the opposite. "To share my story and reach out to help other victims. To put my story out there for other survivors to relate to," she explained.

She chose the latter.

"For me, turning to drugs and going into a downward spiral for someone who didn't truly love me wasn't an option," she said.

Reclaiming Their Lives

Domestic violence expert Lysetta Hurge-Putnam, executive director of Independence House in Hyannis, said that for a victim to talk about what happened to them is an empowering moment. It is not for everyone, but for those who can, it is the beginning of reclaiming their lives.

"That's the building block of empowerment. That is the approach we use with survivors, to move from a victim to a survivor. To talk about it and get the message out to the general public," Hurge-Putnam said.

She said it is important that the survivor moves away from any feelings of embarrassment. "That's a big part of our work. The person is a victim of a crime and has done nothing to be ashamed of. It's important to move from a victim to a survivor," she said.

She said she does not categorize domestic violence cases as extreme or not extreme. "I don't want the survivor to think that if they were emotionally abused, that's not important. Any type of abuse is extreme," she said.

But she said the important point is to look at "what's wrong in our society that enables this type of violence that happens in families."

Hurge-Putnam said the national statistic is that one in four women will at some time in their lives deal with domestic violence. Last year, Independence House served 9,000 victims of domestic violence and sexual assault on Cape Cod. Of those, 1,500 came to the agency for the first time.

Yarmouth Police Deputy Chief Steven Xiarhos agreed that it can be healing for survivors to

GroovaLottos in Provincet...



GroovaLottos
"Do You Mind...?"

Follow Us



Archives

Select Month

Topics — Click one of these
"WORDS"

- #2-Minute Video
- #animals
- #Art
- #Barnstable
- #boats
- #Boston Sports
- #Bourne
- #Brewster
- #Cape Cod Wave
- #Cavalcade
- #Chatham
- #Culture
- #Dennis
- #Eastham
- #Essay
- #Falmouth
- #Falmouth Theater Guild
- #Fishing
- #Food
- #Harwich
- #Holiday
- #Hyannis
- #Longform
- #Mashpee
- #Music
- #National Seashore
- #nonprofit
- #Orleans
- #Osterville
- #Pets
- #politics
- #Profiles
- #Provincetown
- #Sandwich
- #Scenic Cape
- #Science
- #Social Issues
- #Storms
- #Summer
- #surfing
- #Truro
- #turkeys
- #Wellfleet
- #Woods Hole
- #Yarmouth

Sign up for our newsletter!

Get news from Cape Cod Wave in your inbox.

* Email

By submitting this form, you are consenting to receive marketing emails from: Cape Cod Wave, PO Box 29, Falmouth, MA, 02541, US. You can revoke your consent to receive emails at any time by using the SafeUnsubscribe@ link, found at the bottom of every email. [Emails are serviced by Constant Contact.](#)

Sign Up!



Home

Longform ▾

Sand Dollars ▾

Currents ▾

Salty Air ▾

Local Bands ▾

Scenic ▾

Sponsored ▾

About

Contact



Domestic Violence on Cape Cod

Domestic violence is an enormous problem everywhere, including Cape Cod. In the first two and a half months of this year, according to Falmouth Police Chief Edward Dunne, there have been 75 calls to Falmouth police for domestic violence.

The Falmouth Police Department has a civilian domestic violence advocate on staff to assist with the cases, as do three other police departments on the Cape.

Dunne pointed to the advocacy of Independence House in helping victims of domestic violence and getting the word out about the problem. "There is a lot being done here on the Cape," he said.

In Yarmouth, in the first two and a half months of this year, there have been 158 domestic violence calls to police.

Xiarhos said his department typically gets about 350 domestic calls a year, basically one a day. He attributes the increase in calls to the amount of education the department does on the issue. "It's 20 years of being aggressive," he said. "It doesn't stop the problem but it makes it safer, the more proactive we are."

Yarmouth police frequently post information about domestic violence on the police department's Facebook page.

But Xiarhos said it is a crime police don't always hear about. "Domestic violence is very underreported," he said.

Police response to domestic violence has changed markedly from what it was 20 or 30 years ago. Back then, it was considered a personal matter," Xiarhos said. Now it is the only assault crime where police can make an arrest without actually witnessing the crime.

The change in police procedure, Xiarhos said, was long overdue.

Cycle of Violence

"What that does is we're trying to break the cycle of violence. That batterer will batter and if we don't take smart action, it will continue and it will get worse. Someone has to make an arrest and break the cycle of violence. We have no problem with arresting people who threaten and abuse and hurt people. It's one of the best things we do," he said.

Police do not wait for a victim to press charges in domestic violence cases. Xiarhos equates it to a bank robbery. "You don't ask the teller whether you should arrest the bank robber. When you use violence, that is a crime against society so it's not up to the victim. We, the police, bring the charges and let the abuser be mad at us," he said.

Xiarhos said domestic violence is a very common crime for police departments to deal with throughout the country. "It's typically one of the top calls for police," he said.

He said the crime knows no distinctions of race or class and cuts across all parts of society.

How bad can it get? Life or death.

Xiarhos recalls one call to the Yarmouth Police Department about 10 years ago. The caller hung up without saying anything and police were able to track the call to a home. When the officer knocked on the door, the husband answered and said everything was fine. The officer asked to speak to his wife. He let the officer in. The wife was on the floor, stabbed almost in half with a knife, bleeding to death. She was rushed to the hospital and survived.

"That's a real example of how serious it is," Xiarhos said.

What follows is Rowland's story. It is about what happened to her during what she calls her week of hell. Telling it is her way to reclaim herself.

And if just one other victim of domestic violence can recognize the signs and get free of their

[Home](#)[Longform](#) ▾[Sand Dollars](#) ▾[Currents](#) ▾[Salty Air](#) ▾[Local Bands](#) ▾[Scenic](#) ▾[Sponsored](#) ▾[About](#)[Contact](#)



Breaking the Silence

Rowland has joined the board of a non-profit organization based in San Diego called Break the Silence on Domestic Violence that advocates speaking out as a way to begin the healing process. She found the organization on Facebook when she was looking for answers about what happened to her. She has embraced their message about “breaking the silence,” speaking out as a way to heal and help others.

Rowland told her story this week without any long pauses. She held a steady gaze, unflinching. There were no tears. No downward glances. No shame.

This is something terrible that happened to her, but it is not her.

That, said Xiarhos, is one thing that it is important for victims to remember. He again gave the example of the bank teller who is robbed. The bank teller should not be embarrassed about the robbery. They are a victim of a crime that is not their fault.

Rowland grew up in Falmouth and attended public schools.

She met the man who was to become her abuser when they were in eighth grade. But they reconnected years later in 2010 through Facebook. They began a relationship in September 2011.

The first night they went out, he told her he was in trouble with the law and had already served time. “I took that as complete honesty. I thought that was an admirable quality,” she said.

Looking back now, through the help of counselors—she’s sees two a week—she realizes the warning signs, “what was there that I ignored or didn’t see as hazardous.”

There was the jealousy and violence, the red flags of a batterer, the cycles of abuse.

“Did I see this? Did I feel this? Is this something my abuser did? I’ve done a lot of education,” she said.



Red Flags

One big warning sign from the beginning was his criminal record and the fact that he boasted about it.

Another was the fact that he was using drugs. But he never pushed them on her during the early months of dating.

A big red flag was the fighting and controlling behavior, that he tried to drive a wedge between her and her family and friends.

“He wanted complete control of me in the relationship,” she said.

She sees now that her poor self-esteem played into his abuse. “He tried to build me up and make me feel worthy,” only to then knock her down with belittlement and humiliation.

They began dating just before he entered prison for a one year term.

While he was in prison, they communicated frequently. He described how their life would be together when he got out of jail: a nice house with a big yard, children.

“He painted pretty pictures. Just that ideal life everyone wants. I believed him,” she said.

When he was released a year later, she thought they would begin that life together.

On January 7, 2013, he was released from prison and Rowland was there to pick him up.

She moved in with him at his grandparents house where he was living.

But the relationship was rocky from the start.

[Home](#)[Longform](#) ▾[Sand Dollars](#) ▾[Currents](#) ▾[Salty Air](#) ▾[Local Bands](#) ▾[Scenic](#) ▾[Sponsored](#) ▾[About](#)[Contact](#)

The first big break up was in March, a few months after he got out of prison. He accused her of communicating on Facebook with another man.

By then she was pregnant with his child. They worked things out for the sake of the child but the trauma of the breakup caused her to miscarry.

The second breakup came in May on his birthday. They had planned to move to Worcester together. They were staying at a hotel, hours away from signing their first lease when he went into a rage because he believed his grandmother had not given him enough money.

Rowland accused him of being spoiled and he turned on her, calling her names. He told her he did not want her in his life.

Rowland left him and moved her belongings out of his room in his grandparents' house.

He threatened to come to her place of work and cause damage. She got a restraining order against him.

But she dropped it a few days later, "because I still loved him and I believed I was pregnant again."

They got back together and Rowland believed because of his demeanor and appearance that he was sober. "He seemed more alive. He seemed to care," she said.

"We did sober activities, bike rides, cookouts. It was an enjoyable time," she said.



The Accusations

That lasted for about one month, until he began to accuse her of being unfaithful to him during the year he was in jail.

She had not been unfaithful and she repeatedly told him that. "I couldn't say it any other way. It was an obsession with finding out if I was [unfaithful] and getting me to crack. I didn't have anything to admit," she said. "That started the week of hell."

That first day, he picked her up from her job working the desk at a local inn. As they were driving home, he accused her of cheating on him.

As they were talking, she picked up her phone and he became enraged. He pulled over to the side of the road, grabbed the phone and threw it out of the window into a puddle.

She started to get out of the car to get the phone and he pulled her back in by her hair. He demanded she stay in the car and said she didn't need the phone.

"He had never put his hands on me before. I remember being really shocked. We had a month of genuine fun and getting along great and now this," she said.

He said he didn't want anything to do with her and she asked to be dropped at a friend's house nearby. He returned to the house not long after and dropped off his phone for her to use. That night, using his grandmother's phone, he texted her repeatedly.

Later that evening, he said he would take her back if she took a lie detector test. She agreed. "I loved him. I felt we had potential as a couple. I knew I didn't cheat," she said.

They made up and were taking a shower together when his mood turned. While they were caressing, "he just snapped" and began slapping her face with his hand, repeatedly hitting her. "He was livid. I tried getting out and he pulled me back in by my hair," she said.

She eventually was able to get out of the shower and was trying to collect herself when he got on top of her with one hand on her throat choking her. She tried to move out of his grip and he became furious.

"Thinking back now, I went into survival mode," she said. "I didn't want to scream or draw attention. On a scale of one to 10, he was at 8. If I pushed him to 9 or 10 . . . I just wanted to survive. I had to play along," she said.



[Home](#)

[Longform](#) ▾

[Sand Dollars](#) ▾

[Currents](#) ▾

[Salty Air](#) ▾

[Local Bands](#) ▾

[Scenic](#) ▾

[Sponsored](#) ▾

[About](#)

[Contact](#)



Violence Escalates

The next day, they woke up and were driving around town. He told her he wanted her to try heroin, that he wanted her to feel what he feels. His reasoning was that he was a good boyfriend despite how difficult it was to be good to her when he was using. He wanted her to feel those same struggles he felt.

“His solution was to have me use heroin and that’s what he planned to do,” she said. It didn’t make any sense to her.

She didn’t want to try heroin, had no interest in it. “I wasn’t curious. It was something he did. I didn’t judge him for it.”

But he was determined. She remembers him grabbing her arm and putting the needle in the first time.

Shots had never bothered her at the doctor’s office, but this was different.

“He was not a healthcare professional. This was someone full of anger, rage and accusations,” she said.

He shot her up with heroin every day for the next five days. She remembers feeling the lasting effects during the day, feeling continually sick and nauseous and itchy.

She was in a fog and she realized later that he used that to his advantage. “I wouldn’t be able to say no. He was bigger and taller than me. I couldn’t physically stop him. If I was under the influence, I could be persuaded. He had to weaken me to make me go along with everything. In all reality, I was just trying to survive the week,” she said.

Later that day, they attended his family’s cookout and he berated her for drawing attention to herself as she had to leave to be sick.

The next day, they were driving around and he drove down the end of Pacheco Path in East Falmouth and parked the car. He put his hand on her throat and said she had been unfaithful and that he was sick of the lies. “He was screaming and yelling: ‘You cheated on me. You’re a liar.’”

“I remember crying and asking him to stop,” she said. Some people walked by and he began hugging her and telling her he loved her, until they had passed by.

“He went from one extreme to the other,” she said.

They later went to the Stop & Shop supermarket and he said she was not walking fast enough. Back in the car, he hit her across the face.

They went for another drive and he again pulled off the road, this time near Old Silver Beach in North Falmouth. He pulled into a wooded path, parked the car and walked to the rear of the car.

He told her to remove his belt and take off her pants. She said, “Whatever you do, do not apologize for this.” He beat her with the belt, repeatedly.

“He kept hitting me over and over on the same spot. I was crying and screaming and begging, pleading for him to stop. I told him it hurt. He eventually stopped.”

He began to have sex with her. She told him to stop. “I didn’t want him to think it’s okay.” They got in the car and didn’t speak of the beating again.

Threat of Murder

Later that night, they were again driving and he headed over the Bourne Bridge, off Cape. He again brought up that she had been unfaithful. It was 10 or 11 o’clock at night. He said he would be taking her to western Massachusetts where no one would find her body.

[Home](#)[Longform](#) ▾[Sand Dollars](#) ▾[Currents](#) ▾[Salty Air](#) ▾[Local Bands](#) ▾[Scenic](#) ▾[Sponsored](#) ▾[About](#)[Contact](#)

She considered jumping out of the moving car. "I'd rather have broken bones than be dead," she thought. Instead of continuing to drive west, he took the exit to Carver and said he would drop her at the town dump and leave her there.

She felt her only option to calm him down was to lie to him, to say she had cheated just to stop his questioning. After that the tension dropped.

"It was ironic. I told a lie and it changed everything," she said. He created the story of how the cheating happened and she agreed to it.

"I remember thinking I'll make it out of this car alive," she said.

But things would only get worse.

They returned to the Cape and as they drove into Falmouth, he decided he wanted her to commit her first criminal offense. He wanted her to go to her ex-boyfriend's house, the one he thought she cheated with and throw rocks at the window and scream that the ex-boyfriend was a rapist.

"I didn't understand why," she said. He said he would bail her out of jail. He dropped her near the house. She walked around, threw rocks in the bushes and walked back toward the grandparents house. He picked her up and said he had been listening to a police scanner on his phone and he knew she had not committed the crime as he had demanded.

He brought her back to his grandparents house and said he wanted her to give his dog, a pitbull, oral sex. She was confused and couldn't understand what he could possibly mean.

He instructed her to remove her clothes and he took out his cell phone. She could hear the phone clicking, that he was taking pictures.

"I remember thinking, how can I get out of this. I didn't know what would persuade him, so I did it," she said.

Looking back on what happened, she said, "It traumatized me. It horrified me."

He instructed her to go to the bathroom and brush her teeth and then return and give him oral sex.

"We had sex. I considered it consensual at the time. Now I don't," she said.

Later she was curled up in the blankets and crying and he asked her what was wrong. She said she had not cheated on him. "He looked at me and said, 'Then why did you let me make you do that to my dog.' That was his way of saying, 'you did it.'"

The next day, she was taking a shower and noticed in the mirror that she had bruises all across her eyes and cheeks and she could glimpse the bruise on her backside. "I remember standing there on the ledge of the tub and crying."

He asked her what was wrong. She pointed out the bruises. He responded, "You look sexy all beaten up."

She remembers wondering how someone could believe that.

The next day, on July 3, his grandmother noticed the bruises on her face and asked her about them. "I felt we could have a future together so I didn't say," she said. Instead, she made up an excuse.



Nightmare Ends

Later that day, he asked his grandmother for \$100 to purchase fireworks and she refused. "He was livid," she said. He had gone drinking that day and missed a court date and mandatory counseling. He became furious at Rowland, his mother and his grandmother for not reminding him of the court date. Then he shot Rowland up with heroin again.

On July 4, she accompanied him to meet some friends in the ice arena parking lot and purchased heroin from them and injected himself. He asked his friends if they wanted to see

[Home](#)[Longform ▾](#)[Sand Dollars ▾](#)[Currents ▾](#)[Salty Air ▾](#)[Local Bands ▾](#)[Scenic ▾](#)[Sponsored ▾](#)[About](#)[Contact](#)

Later in the car, she told him she hated him. He said she needed some heroin. "I think Gabbe needs a 40. Let's get Gabbe a 40." She said she didn't want it. She had had enough.

"I was his property, his own personal punching bag. He could display me any way he wanted to," she said.

Throughout the day, because of the heroin, she needed to vomit. At first he would let her walk away from the car to throw up. Then he decided she could throw up by just opening the door of the car. Then he would not let her vomit outside the car, but instead into an old shirt in the car. "I wasn't even allowed to throw up where I wanted to. He had to control that," she said.

The next day, she went to work. He had decided they would move to New Bedford. He told her to tell her boss at her job that it was her last day.

Instead she told her boss that if she went with him, she was not sure she would make it through the weekend.

Her boss advised her to drop his car off at the police department—a neutral place—and to get to a women's shelter. She made calls to find a shelter and there were no beds available, so she stayed with a friend.

The next day, on July 6, she filed charges against her boyfriend in court. She spent three hours at the police department telling her story to a female officer. She showed the scar tissue on her arm where he had shot her up with heroin and the bruises on her backside.

On Saturday, he was arrested, and the next day, she gave police a recorded statement to police detailing the abuse.

On Monday, he was arraigned. Later that day, she went to his grandparents' house with police to pick up her belongings.

Her nightmare—her week of hell—was finally over.

Rowland has now become an advocate for people experiencing domestic violence.

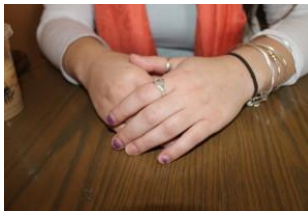
"It's impacted a lot of people. I didn't think about domestic violence until it happened to me. It's a lot easier to see once you're out of it," she said.

She recognizes now how unhealthy the relationship was. Even then, she remembers thinking, "This isn't normal. This isn't safe."

She realized the pretty pictures he painted when he was in jail were all fake.

"I see now we had no future," she said.

She wants to get the message out to others that they too can have a future if they can leave their abuser.



The hands of a survivor of domestic violence.

"It only feels like the end of the world at the beginning. It gets better," Rowland said.

Breaking the Silence—the group and the action—have helped her recover, she said.

— Laura M. Reckford

— Please like us on Facebook.

Resources: [Independence House](#) is a nonprofit organization established in 1979 to serve the needs of survivors of domestic violence and their children. Services are free and confidential.

