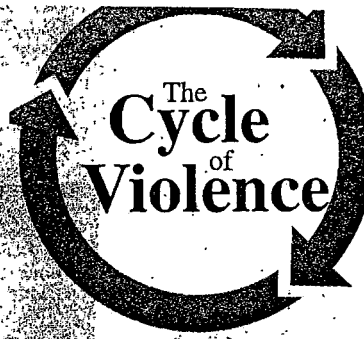


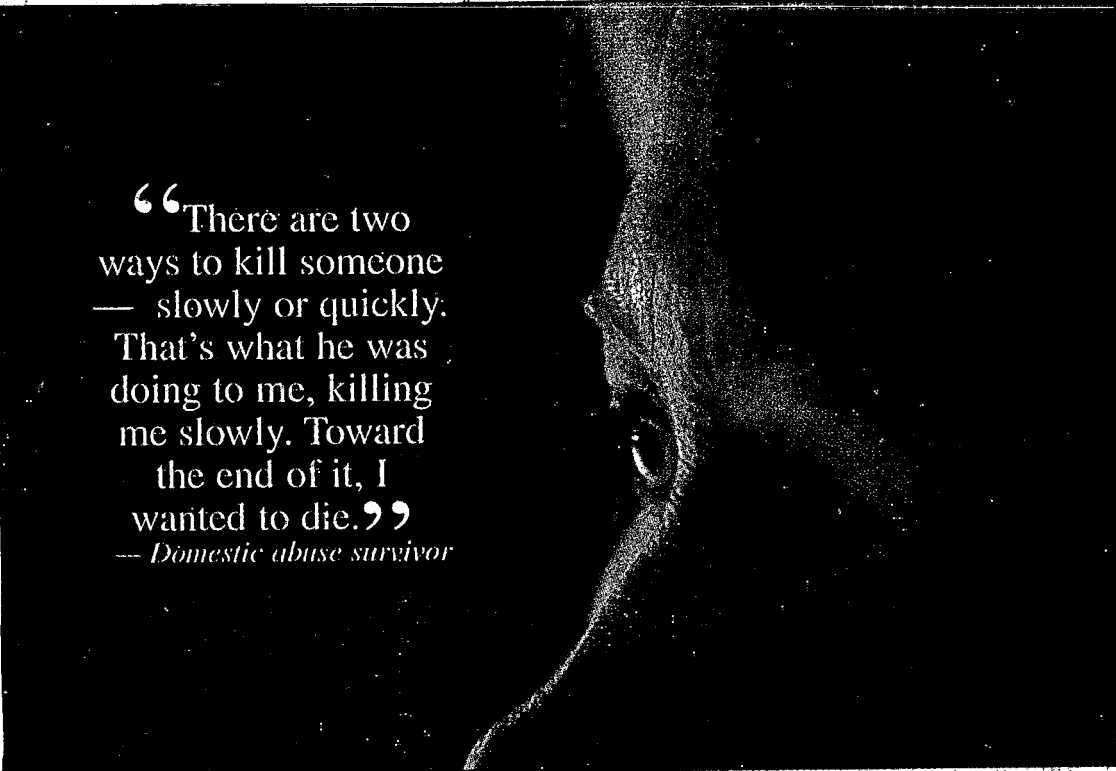
The choice to change



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Feature writing



“There are two ways to kill someone — slowly or quickly. That’s what he was doing to me, killing me slowly. Toward the end of it, I wanted to die.”
— Domestic abuse survivor

A survivor tells her story of abuse and recovery.

Story by Daniel Bartel • Photos by Torin Halsey

Survivors of abuse find the help they need to travel along road to recovery

Editor's note: The names of abuse victims in this article have been changed for their protection.

BURKBURNETT — Surrounded by the warmth of fireplace and family, Sarah Archer, 42, is never far from the shadowed memory of her abusive ex-husband.

There's no problem lifting up her armor to show the emotional trauma, inflicted. She recalls the horrific events of her past with ease.

Only the scars and memories remain now.

"I've been through it all — starvation, rape, neglect, sleep deprivation, abduction" and all from the same man, she said.

Sarah endured an abusive marriage for nearly 10 years before getting help. She credits the Wichita Falls-based First Step center with saving her life.

"Those people are miracle workers," she said. "If it wasn't for them, I probably would've died."

Reports of family violence

County	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Archer	3	7	7	3	10	30
Baylor	28	25	26	16	7	102
Clay	12	15	2	5	4	38
Jack	35	27	20	24	17	123
Montague	95	106	110	95	118	524
Throckmorton	36	31	30	30	39	166
Wichita	1,365	1,256	1,223	1,358	1,425	6,627
Wilbarger	141	147	145	176	164	773
Young	138	149	113	121	89	610

Source: Texas Department of Transportation Information Bureau

First Step Inc. is a community outreach center dedicated to changing and redirecting lives of domestic violence and sexual assault survivors, Janet Rivers, a First Step training coordinator, said.

Now in its 25th year, the center handles 11 counties in North Texas. Abuse survivors get help from First Step's abuse shelter and one-on-one counseling.

But before they can get help, abuse survivors must take the initial steps to get

away from the abuse.

The choice is theirs to make.

The bitter cold

A dreary, gray-colored sky is enough to conjure the hurtful past, Sarah said.

The setting outside her Burkburnett home reminds her of the small house where she and her four children lived in the town of Joshua, Texas, south of Fort Worth.

January chills were enough to snap bones.

There was no job because

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