

“The Jones Family”

LUZERNE COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK FORCE CASE STUDY:

Steve Jones, Civil Engineer, 40,
Joanne Smith Jones, Homemaker, 38
Timothy Gregory Jones, 15.
Jennifer Kim Jones, 9.
Dorothy Smith, 70.

Steve and Joanne met 17 years ago when he was working as a civil engineer and she was the office manager in a large engineering firm. Joanne was attracted to Steve because he was good looking and personable. When they dated, she found him to be very warm, understanding, open and supportive, as she was to him.

A year after they began dating they married. But Steve soon began to criticize Joanne's family and friends, and refused to socialize with them. If she chose to spend any time with them instead of him, he would be hurt and angry, no matter how she tried to reassure him. So more and more she began to withdraw from her other relationships.

They both wanted children. She loved her work, was very well thought of, and in fact had just been offered the promotion to corporate secretary for the firm. But she came to agree with Steve that they should start a family now, and she should stay home with their children. After she got pregnant, he seemed to be more and more annoyed with her. He said she had become moody and was provoking him. And he couldn't see how she would ever be a good mother if she wasn't even adequate as a wife any more. When she tried to explain her moods and behavior appealing to the understanding he used to show, he just became angrier, saying that she was rationalizing and she should at least take responsibility for her faults. He started slapping her and pushing her. But after an argument like that, he would then feel terrible, and turn back into the sensitive, understanding, and very caring person she had married. Joanne sensed that his irritability and anger with her was related to what he had gone through as a child. His parents had been alcoholics, and although they were well off financially, Steve never got much attention from them. They were very critical and sometimes explosive. He really just needed some understanding, nurturing and reassurance. He had so many other wonderful qualities.

Steve was a warm, loving, involved father to their son Tim. And although Joanne really missed the adult stimulation she had when she was working, she was very glad that they could afford for her to stay home and raise their child. Steve still didn't like to be around her family and friends, and he didn't have many friends himself, so their social life consisted of going out with coworkers from the firm occasionally. At first Joanne looked forward to going out and being with other adults again. But when they got home, Steve would accuse her of being too attentive to one or more of the men. After a while, Joanne wasn't sure whether it was worse being home all the time or going out with other couples and then being accused of flirting and cheating on Steve.

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He even, started accusing and criticizing her right in front of the other couples. It was bad enough that he treated her that way, but she felt so humiliated to have other people know about it. No one had ever treated her that way before. Her parents certainly weren't like that. She felt that other people would think she really must be no good if she was being treated that way. And she was coming to think so too.

No matter how she tried to reassure him, he felt she didn't really care about him and was there just because of the money he brought in. He would often ask her to prove that she cared about him by having sex with him.

He had taken over the checkbook several years ago. He hadn't liked how much she was spending, especially now that she wasn't even contributing anything any more and it was all his money that she was spending. She tried to conform to his restrictions about how much time she could take doing the grocery shopping and who she talked to so that he would see that she really loved him and he didn't have anything to worry about. But no matter what she did, he accused her of betraying him and even being an inadequate mother. And when they got into these arguments, no matter what she started out thinking and trying to explain about her feelings, motives and behaviors, he seemed to twist things around until she started to believe he was right. The confident, competent, lively person she was when she met him had been lost, as he gradually convinced her over the years that he was right about her being selfish, thoughtless, incompetent, and no good.

Joanne's life had become a see-saw. They had wonderful, close times with each other and little Timmy. And at other times it was a nightmare. It had gotten so that when she heard him pull into the driveway, her stomach knotted up and her heart pounded, afraid of what kind of mood he would be in. She could tell by the way he walked through the door whether it was going to be a bad night or not. Joanne tried to make sure everything was done the way he wanted it to be done, not rock the boat, and stay out of his way then. But when he was in a bad mood, she had never been able to keep him from exploding.

Some nights were horrible and she was terrified. They usually had a couple of drinks with dinner. But she dreaded those nights when he kept on drinking. He was more dangerous when he drank like that. His rages would go beyond just slapping and pushing and hitting. He would pull her hair, hit her head against the wall, choke her. He even threw her down the stairs once. When she saw the signs that it would be that kind of night she would think about how she could slip away from him, grab Timmy out of bed, and get out of the house. She felt like she was trying to escape from the KGB.

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Joanne had tried many different ways to keep him from getting angry. She had tried to explain to him that he was mistaken to think that she did not love him. She had tried to help him to see that he was overly fearful about her because of what he had gone through as a child, and that she really understood and sympathized with that. She suggested marriage counseling. But he said that she was the problem and she should be strong enough to fix her own problems. She threatened to leave him if he continued to hit her.

But he threatened her back: she would have no place to go—no one would put up with her the way he did. Her relatives never saw her and she didn't have any friends any more. She was lucky he would still have her. If she did leave, she was not taking Timmy with her. He had talked to their lawyer who told him he would have no trouble winning full custody of his son.

She had almost gotten Steve to accept the idea of her getting a part-time job when Timmy started school. Joanne wanted to get out of the House and make a little money of her own. But during a passionate making up after a prolonged fight she became pregnant again. (Steve objected to her using contraception.) Their little girl Jennifer was born six years after Timmy. Joanne loved the kids but it was so hard to get herself going in the morning. She had all she could do to get the necessities done. She had no energy or enthusiasm to play with them or bring them anywhere special. Their father was the one who did that. Her moods swung from very nervous and irritable to exhausted and depressed, with occasional times of great relief, happiness and hopefulness when she and Steve were close again. She told her doctor about not having any energy and being irritable. Steve got furious about her irritability and said that her being that way was really hurting the children. She was a rotten mother. That's what he grew up with and he wasn't going to have his kids going through that. The doctor gave her a tranquilizer to take when she needed it and an antidepressant.

There were fewer and fewer happy times and the rages came more and more often as time went on. She and the children had run out of the house in the middle of the night in their pajamas and coats half a dozen times in the last couple of years. Sometimes they would stay with her mother for a few days. Then Steve would call and apologize. Or he would say that if she didn't come home he was going to get her mother thrown out of her subsidized high-rise apartment for allowing them to stay with her. He also threatened to take the kids from school, leave the area, and she would never see them again if she didn't come back home. She thought more and more about how she could divorce him. But as Tim got into his teens, he was getting unwilling to leave with her. And he told her recently that he would live with his father if they got divorced.

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Then her mother became so crippled with rheumatoid arthritis that she couldn't manage on her own any more. Joanne was grateful that Steve would let her live with them, since he didn't like Joanne's family. But Dorothy was so slow doing things, and now she was also becoming so forgetful that Steve was very impatient with her. Now when he and Joanne got into a fight, she didn't feel she could get out, because she would have to leave her mother behind with him, Steve had pushed Dorothy out of his way once and she broke her arm. The next time he went after Dorothy, Jennifer got pushed up against the wall when she tried to protect her grandmother.

Several days later, Jennifer had physical education class. Her teacher noticed that Jennifer seemed to be favoring her right shoulder and arm while playing team volleyball. The instructor took Jennifer aside at the end of the gym period and inquired if she was OK. Jennifer said “no problem,” so the teacher told her “I noticed you seem to be favoring your one shoulder and arm like it hurts you.”

Jennifer hesitated and then said that she had tripped and fallen on her shoulder at home. The teacher asked if she could take a look at it. Jennifer was obviously embarrassed but said “OK” and pulled open the shoulder of her T-shirt. The teacher saw a multi-colored bruise that ran from the top of her shoulder to just below the shoulder blade. The teacher asked again what had happened and Jennifer gave the same response.

The teacher consulted with the school nurse. The nurse then met with Jennifer to look at the bruise. The teacher and the nurse decided jointly to make a report to CYS and called Childline.

An investigation was begun.

