For as long as Mary can remember, she’s always had a job. Starting at age 14, she worked after school and on weekends, then fulltime once she graduated. So when her husband suggested she quit work in order to stay home with their two small children, Mary knew her life was going to change, but had no idea just how much.

It happened almost imperceptibly, just little things at first. Her husband set up a bank account in his name only. Soon after, he changed their phone service so she could no longer call her family long distance. Then, when he’d leave for work, he started disabling the phone altogether. Next he implemented an allowance of $3 a week for gas making it impossible for Mary and the kids to wander far from the house. Little things at first that as the months passed, grew to become more and more ominous. “Our house didn’t have bars, but it might as well have,” said Mary.

It was about five months into her life as a stay-at-home mom that the physical abuse began. “He would orchestrate fights. They say it takes two to fight, but that’s not true – it just takes one crazy person,” she confides. Mary recounted one story about a night when she was asleep in bed with the kids. Her husband came in demanding to know where she’d been. When she answered, I’ve been here – all Hell broke loose. The details are too graphic to repeat, but that incident led her to seek medical care. It was the doctor who examined her that told her about Safe Home, a shelter in Pennsylvania and strongly encouraged her to go. Soon after, she took the kids and fled.

That should have been the end of it, but for Mary it was the beginning of a saga that continues even today – almost ten years later. The trail is littered with numerous protective order violations, divorce, death threats and workplace disruptions that prompted at least one employer to tell Mary “I don’t think you... Continued on page 2
should come back here anymore.” She’s never asked for child support or received any, yet with each move and each new job, a new campaign of terror begins.

While working for one well-known men’s clothier, Mary came to work to discover flyers accusing her of having a STD plastered on 400 cars in the parking lot. “We’ve moved 17 times and he always seems to find me,” she said. Just last year, he discovered she was working at CBS Radio – a job that she’s not only held for six years, but has excelled to become one of their top salespeople. “I’m at work one day and I started receiving texts – 49 in all – saying he knew where I was and that he was fantasizing about killing me.” Mary told her supervisor and together, they went to inform the General Manager. “Our GM is a very tough businessman, but when he heard the story, he became like Papa Bear,” she tells me. Within 24 hours, a full-scale safety plan had been put into effect, complete with cameras, panic buttons and a mug shot on hand at the front desk. Mary went back to court to apply for yet another protective order and CBS’ Legal Department filed to keep him off their property. “I never asked for or received child support, but then to not be able to work at your job – it just feels like you’re being victimized twice.” Mary lights up when she talks about her job and the support that CBS has given her, but her stress over the situation is also evident. “He’s like a ghost. He goes away, but he’s never gone for good. I can’t help but wonder, is it ever going to be over?”

The House of Ruth Maryland applauds CBS Radio for its proactive stance on behalf of victims of domestic violence. If your business doesn’t have a protocol or plan in place, the House of Ruth will gladly provide recommendations and training. To find out more, contact Lisa Nitsch, Training Institute Manager, by calling (410) 554-8453 or email lisanitsch@hruthmd.org.

Letter from Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Most of us grew up believing that anybody who wanted to work could always find a job. Over the last few years, that mindset has been turned on its head. Today, it’s not unusual for a single job posting to receive, literally, thousands of applicants. So with that backdrop in mind, imagine being the sole breadwinner of your family and suddenly discovering that your job is in jeopardy – not because of performance or anything you’ve done, but because your ex has brought his campaign of terror to your workplace.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t take much imagining because it’s happening to domestic violence survivors across Maryland every day. We hear the stories, we see the threatening texts and we wade through the hundreds of recorded phone messages designed to frighten and ultimately cost that woman her job. In this newsletter, you’ll hear one of those stories and, perhaps, begin to understand the feeling among survivors that it’s tantamount to being victimized twice.

You’ll also read about how one company fought back – they did it quickly, they did it successfully and they did it without ever calling attention to that employee’s situation. That company is CBS Radio and we commend them for their proactive and very clear policy around domestic violence.

The question the other 552,956 Maryland companies need to ask themselves is this - what would my company do in a similar situation? If you don’t know the answer you could be headed for disaster.

For the past ten years, the House of Ruth Maryland has offered companies its expertise and counsel on developing policy and safety plans should an employee be threatened with domestic violence. To date, only a handful has taken us up on it. On behalf of the more than 13,000 victims we counsel and represent every year, we will continue making that offer because we believe it’s the only way to ensure that domestic violence survivors have a real chance at holding on to their dignity, safety, independence and jobs.

Sincerely,

Sandi Timmins
Executive Director

Sandi Timmins
Get A Sneak Peak At The New Boscov’s
The House of Ruth Maryland is selling tickets for Boscov’s Gala Preview on October 5 at their new White Marsh location. The tickets cost $5 and enable ticket holders to be the first to see and shop at the new store, as well as be eligible for prizes and other extras. Tickets can be purchased at any upcoming House of Ruth event, Ruth’s Closet or at our table at Boscov’s on the Gala Preview day. 100% of the proceeds go directly to House of Ruth and if we’re able to sell more tickets than anyone else, additional funding will be coming our way.

Then And Now: Recollections Of The Early Days

When Rush Limbaugh said, “feminism was established so as to allow unattractive women easier access to the mainstream of society,” he obviously never met Marcella Schuyler. A tiny blonde with sparkling blue eyes and a megawatt smile, you could easily mistake her for a lady who lunches as opposed to one of the steel-backboned, steam-rolling, never take no for an answer, founding mothers of the House of Ruth Maryland. You’d also be hard pressed to believe that those efforts took place 35 years ago.

Marcella’s recollections of the early days began in 1973 when she was loaned to Kathleen O’Ferrall Friedman at Legal Aid as part of her social work field placement. “There wasn’t any extra space so I sat in Katy’s office and therefore, was party to everything. I could hear the agony, intimidation and fear among so many of the women who came in. What surprised me was their passivity, yet back then – there really wasn’t anyone to report the violence to.”

Marcella’s role was to go into the community and find out who was doing what and identify places – hospitals, clinics, community centers – that could be data points to determine the scope of the problem. “Once we started to track these cases, we were shocked,” she said. “A lot of these places were misidentifying domestic violence as depression or mental health issues – so we were able to train them on how to identify what was really going on.” Much like Judge Friedman, Marcella is quick to point out that the judicial system didn’t take domestic violence seriously. “They didn’t see it as a pattern,” Marcella said. “If you see it as a pattern, you can start to do something about it.”

When Marcella’s yearlong field placement was up, she took a fulltime job with the school system; however, it wasn’t long before Kathleen O’Ferrall Friedman came calling. “She said we’ve all done this work, you can’t walk away now so that was all she wrote.” In fact, the work became so all-consuming that Marcella says her young son attended so many meetings, he finally took to seconding motions at age four.

It’s obvious from Marcella’s stories that there was a strong camaraderie among the group. Certainly, that contributed to the times when they felt like they were in an uphill battle with no end in sight. “There were moments when we were up against the world,” she told me. “Sometimes it felt just too hard, but it had to be – changing perceptions is never easy.”

When the shelter opened in 1977, they all pitched in – board members, advisory committee members and friends. “Back then, we kept donor names on index cards in a shoe box. There were no computers and no Internet so we just divvied up the work. One person would type, one person would duplicate and another would stuff envelopes and stamp.”

As someone who keenly remembers the time when the term “domestic violence” didn’t even exist, I ask her – do you think things are different today? “Yes, things have definitely changed,” she said “but it’s obvious when you see the number of women and families still being torn apart by domestic violence, they need to change more.”

Thirty-five years ago, a handful of passionate believers changed the landscape for victims of domestic violence in Maryland. It’s now time to pass the torch to a new generation of Marcella Schuyler and Katy O’Ferrall Friedman’s. If that sounds like you, contact Cheri Parlaman at cparlaman@hruthmd.org and find out how you can get involved at the House of Ruth Maryland today.
If you ask most people about their memories of childhood, they’ll tell you about walking to school with their dog, Pudgy, summer vacations at the beach or holidays filled with laughter and family. That’s not the case with Greta – over lunch recently, she revealed why her childhood memories are ones she would prefer to forget. “My father was in the military,” she told me. “He was abusive both physically and emotionally, just brutal.” It’s hard to imagine this bright, vivacious and infectiously optimistic woman as a victim of domestic violence, yet it suddenly becomes clear why she’s been such a passionate volunteer and advocate for everything House of Ruth over the years.

For the next two hours, she gave me a glimpse of what it means to grow up with an abusive father and a mother that, in this case, looked the other way. “As a kid, you never want to have anyone over,” she explained. “And you also never wanted to go home.” There were stories of black eyes for not raking leaves fast enough, beatings for going outside wearing white socks, but no shoes – and even worse, doing it the one time that her best friend from second grade came home with her after school.

“It was ‘my fault’ – that’s what I learned from an early age and for a long while,” Greta said, “you believe it.” However, that belief was put to the test when she found herself at age 19 in a relationship that was shades of her father. But it was after she broke it off that the real trouble began. “He knew I worked at the Downtown Athletic Club in the evenings so he’d be waiting in the parking lot when I got there. At first he’d just sit in his car and watch, but then it escalated.” After one incident where he tried to physically remove her from her car, Greta went to the police, but was told there was nothing they could do.

Not long after that, it happened again, but this time Greta found an ally. “My boss, Leroy Merritt, found me cowering behind a dumpster. I was hysterical.” After getting her to safety inside, Mr. Merritt called the police, put a safety plan into effect with staff at the front desk and urged Greta to take immediate action. Soon after, she met with the State’s Attorney’s Office. “The State’s Attorney suggested I go to House of Ruth for counseling. The first day I went, I sat there surrounded by women with small children who had no job and no options and I thought – what am I doing here?” For Greta, it was a turning point in her life. Today, the mother of two sons, an executive with a well-known insurance group and a passionate advocate on behalf of victims, she has closed the door on her past, but says some lessons have served her well. “When you grow up like that, you become very skilled at assessing moods. It’s actually benefited me in business, but there are still moments when I wait for the other shoe to drop.”

Leroy Merritt was a lifelong friend of the House of Ruth Maryland and we were among the many who mourned his passing in 2010. He was not only the kind of man, but also business owner, we all could do well to emulate.
The Stars Aligned

On July 12, in the midst of one of those long runs of 100 plus degree-days, the clouds parted, the humidity lifted and the stars aligned for another perfect Crabbaret. More than 500 people, including Maryland’s First Lady, the Honorable Kathleen O’Malley and Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake, turned out to toast the work of the House of Ruth Maryland while sipping wine, sampling crab dishes, and dancing to the sounds of Mambo Combo in the BMA’s Sculpture Garden. Thank you to all those who helped make this event the highlight of the summer season and especially to John Shields and Gertrude’s for making it one very delicious night to remember.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

September 22: Knights of Columbus Jessica Meredith Jacobsen 5K

October 4: HRM Young Professionals Group and the Center Club’s Young Member Committee joint Networking Happy Hour from 5:30 -7:30 at the Center Club

October 18: One Great Thing kicks off at Ruth’s Closet

October 25: Enrollment for Adopt A Family begins

November 3: Yoga Salutes Nonviolence

December 1: B’More Bags Annual Trunk Show at Ruth’s Closet

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

• The Clearinghouse Ltd for supporting the House of Ruth Maryland with their annual sidewalk sale
• The Super Senior Women’s Tennis League for their Wimbledon at Woodholme event
• Allstate for sending volunteers to help us do some summer cleaning
• Ulla Popken, Lee Andersen, Chezelle and Lexington Lady for making Fashion Splash at Ruth’s Closet a success
• Baltimore’s Classic Five for hosting the 2nd Annual High Heels for Hope event and raising over $1,000 for the House of Ruth Maryland
• Frannie Guiou of BudLight Contemporary for donating gift cards and event tickets for the Young Professional’s Cornhole & Karaoke event at Padonia Station
Animal Abuse Is A Major Predictor Of Domestic Violence

A study conducted in 11 U.S. cities revealed that a history of animal abuse is one of the four most significant indicators of who is at greatest risk of becoming a domestic batterer. Subsequently, a Texas study found that batterers who also abuse pets are more dangerous and use more violent and controlling behaviors than those who do not harm animals.

For years, we’ve known that abusers will often use the family dog or cat as a point of control over their victims. That’s why in 2011, the House of Ruth Maryland pushed for legislation to include family pets in protective orders and continues to work closely with the MD SPCA to house pets when families enter our shelter.