



THURSDAY DAILY TIMES-CALL

No. 172 LONGMONT AND THE ST. VRAIN VALLEY, COLORADO

Speaking out for women

By Bill Ellis

Special to the Daily Times-Call

Her name is long forgotten; her sadness unforgettable. I'll call her Mrs. Schmidt because I do remember her slight German accent and that she always wore gray wool suits like those I recall ladies wearing from my days stationed in Heidelberg. "Proper" would be a good catchall word to describe her.

She sat up straight, prim almost, and was punctual as one would expect from an upper-class Bavarian wife. Yet she never smiled, and our last encounter in a doctor's office would stay with me forever.

Our sons were being treated on a regular basis by the same orthopedist. My son played football; hers was an Olympic-caliber ski jumper destined to win a gold medal. The injuries both boys suffered were not significant, thus my brief visits with Mrs. Schmidt chatting in the waiting room took place over a short period of time.

Nevertheless, during our last conversation, I diplomatically inquired about what had made her so sad this time, so despondent that I believed her near tears.

It may seem forward to you that I asked such a personal question, but you might have done the same having come to know someone congenially and then found them so obviously desperate to control their emotions.

It seemed to me that she should have been ecstatic over her son's recent success in the Junior Olympics. He'd won and was headed for the big games in another winter. Her family — she, the son, and her husband — traveled all over the world. They lived in Cherry Hills, a wealthy suburb of Denver. They were rich! What could

possibly be wrong?

"I'm tired of being hit," she said. "I never know when he'll do it, and it hurts."

I was stunned, awfully surprised. What could I say? I probably muttered that I was sorry and then sat in shock until she left.

Over the years, I have rethought that event and wondered what I could have done. Nothing really. I'd seen this before, just hadn't realized how wide a swath male abuse toward women had taken.

Carol, her real name, was my project manager in Washington. She didn't show up for work one day, and before I could call the office to ask about her, our division director called me. Would I come back to the office to meet with him? There were some things better dealt with face to face. I would discover that Carol's disappearance was not that unusual. She and her husband worked for our agency. Both were brilliant analysts who competed for the top projects and achievement awards. Evidently, when the husband felt Carol had bettered him, well, he beat her and threw her out, literally.

For the rest of that project, I was told to meet with her in different locations around town, often taking several different buses, and always checking to make sure no one followed me — frankly, it was too much like a James Bond movie.

Carol always wore sunglasses to hide the bruises, the shame. Fortunately, this stupidity involving me personally stopped when her husband began calling my wife during the day to ask if Carol was hiding out there. I demanded it be stopped, and it was.

But I remember my director's words when he told me about this recurring scenario: "Bill, if you and I did this to our wives, we'd be

in jail. But Carol keeps going back no matter what." And within a couple of weeks, she did.

So it happens: men abusing women no matter the social class, or wealth or intelligence. It so disgusts me that I created the most putrid character ever in my first novel. He had no redeeming qualities. He was a bully and I figuratively "trashed" him at the end. He'd become a disgrace to his family: a beautiful wife, a daughter and son. He was controlling, secretive and kept another woman in another state who thought she was his lawful wife. He beat her too. Seething with the memory of Mrs. Schmidt and Carol, I tortured him more than a bit, and had the cops batter him around until I felt better. It is a very strong issue with me, you see, and, as a writer, I just have to write about it.

You must know that I've never hit anyone, man or woman, off the football field and off the written page.

Oh, and there is my upbringing in which I was taught to love and respect women, especially my mother.

Dad never knew his mom; she'd died when he was an infant, and by golly he made sure I did right by my mother and, frankly, by all women.

Now men are being urged to speak out against violence against women.

I've found out in other areas there is little I can do to shift the whole pile. But I can act right and treat everyone like I want to be treated. I hope my sons have caught on to this; my daughters too.

Bill Ellis is a local author and president of the Longmont Writers' Club.