

Maine Voices: Art exhibit opens eyes to domestic abuse in our midst

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By Patrisha McLean
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ROCKLAND — “[Finding Our Voices](#)” is putting together an art exhibit in Main Street store windows this month to open people’s eyes to the domestic abuse all around them. It features a haunting image by Alan Magee – two faces, one with eyes shut and one with eyes open, paired with reflections from his visit to the women’s barracks of the Birkenau, Poland concentration camp.



“All acts of cruelty, even those committed on a massive scale,” Magee writes, “are experienced individually. We need to hear those individual stories so that violence is understood to be specific and personal.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrisha McLean is the founder/president of the Maine-based nonprofit organization Finding Our Voices.

Magee unveiled this art piece to me in an email as I was 10 minutes into a 22- minute Facebook video posted by [Jenn Quintana Hitchcock](#) about the 18 hours of torture her sister’s husband, [Corey Ater of Phippsburg](#), inflicted on her sister in April after she told him she was leaving him: Slashing, punching, sodomizing, holding the flame of a lighter to her breast “so you will be so ugly no one will want you,” and much of this in front of their little girl.

The Facebook video was a public plea that Ater not be let out of jail on bail on Nov. 10, as Jenn says a letter from the state and signed by the governor announced will happen, in part due to COVID-19 precautions against the overcrowding of jails.

According to news reports, Ater’s 15 felony charges for the assault on his wife include attempted elevated aggravated assault, domestic violence on a child younger than six years old, and domestic violence terrorizing with a dangerous weapon.

The eyes gloss over these terms as they do with “domestic abuse” and “domestic violence.”

It takes putting out to the public details like a brother-in-law laughing at a sister’s attempts to escape, and blood seen all over the walls, coffee table, and bed, for people to understand how dark domestic violence is, and what it means to be trapped with someone who

considers you a possession, and terrorizes you and fogs your brain to the degree that you say he didn't do it to protect him, over saying he did do it to save your own life.

In Magee's essay, he writes that for violence to be understood it needs to be publicly exposed and condemned.

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Jenn's video is the publicly-exposed part. Now for the publicly- condemned part:

In this week's County Courts report in the Lincoln County News, the word "dismissal" follows virtually every case of domestic violence assault.

For a couple of years now, I been tracking the leniency in the Midcoast Maine courts toward violent domestic abusers, but since COVID-19, this leniency has become lunacy.

Who in Maine has decided or is deciding that men beating up their wives or girlfriends and forever damaging a whole generation of children do not merit punishment or accountability, and that our communities do not need protection from a category of criminal —according to Rachel Louise Snyder in her book "No Visible Bruises" — that is responsible for half of all mass murders?

Jail overcrowding is a justifiable concern during the pandemic, but surely there are non-violent prisoners who can be released to free up room for the most dangerous members of our society.

During the pandemic, victims of violent domestic abusers need more protection from the men who are laser-focused on hurting them, not less.

A bloodbath has been pooling in the bedrooms across our state for at least a decade, with half of all homicides year after year a result of domestic abuse. But the blood will run through the streets this winter unless we get emergency domestic-violence legislation to address this clash of more violent domestic abuse and less accountability for violent domestic abusers.

I propose as a start, for violent domestic abusers: Mandatory minimum sentencing; no lowering of categories (i.e. felony strangulation dropped to misdemeanor assault); no bail for repeat offenders.

Domestic violence in Maine is as much a pandemic as the coronavirus, and the time for action on this one is NOW!

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