

Students say 'no' to domestic violence

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 27 February 2014 18:09 -



Purple worn to support local family

James Shuman thought a few students might wear purple last Wednesday.

The junior was amazed beyond belief when hordes of Gothenburg High School students showed up in purple to support James, his mother, Brenda Shuman, and brother, Kenny Shuman.

All victims of domestic violence, purple represents domestic violence awareness.

"I wanted to show my mom that people in Gothenburg do support her by wearing purple," James said.

James asked for support last Wednesday which was timely since the man convicted of abusing Brenda Shuman had a parole board hearing Thursday in Lincoln.

Because most high school students know James, senior Brett Mann said awareness of his request spread like wildfire especially when it was shared through texting and on Facebook.

Mann said domestic violence is not readily talked about and many in such situations try to hide it.

"When it affects someone you know personally, it's a whole different picture," he said.

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"We were overwhelmed," Brenda said. "It meant so much to us and showed us and other victims that support is out there."

Although there were signs of obsessiveness and control when the now ex-boyfriend moved in with the Shumans, James said he didn't see "behind the scenes."

"He'd check her phone and get mad if she called her family a lot," he said.

James said he never liked the man.

"He was distant from my brother and I," he said.

Eventually James said his mother told him she was afraid.

"I told him I needed help and that something would happen and someone would get hurt," Brenda said.

One day when James came home from school, he said Brenda was slurring her words and told him she'd had a panic attack and fell.



Later, James said he discovered that the boyfriend had beaten her and hit her head against the wall.

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Between that incident and the one that sent the abuser to prison, James said the Shumans came up with a plan if it became necessary to call 911.

Since the abuser had Brenda's cell phone, they hid a cell phone belonging to James.

Brenda told her boys to use the phone to call 911 if they knocked on her bedroom and heard: "Everything is perfect, Jimmy."

That's just what Kenny did on a warm September day in 2012 when James was competing in a cross-country meet out of town.

Kenny heard a noise from the bedroom when he returned home from school and knocked on the door.

Earlier that day, Brenda said the abuser had locked her in the bedroom for eight hours and abused her.

James said Kenny heard his mother say the code words and called 911.

Unfortunately, the phone had usage restrictions and sent a text notification to Brenda's phone indicating that 911 had been dialed.

The abuser had Brenda's phone and became enraged, she said, coming after Kenny as she tried to intervene.

"She told him to run," James said.

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Kenny escaped out a bedroom window and the police arrived, later finding the ex-boyfriend near the home.

The abuser later pleaded to strangulation, first-degree false imprisonment and third-offense felony assault.

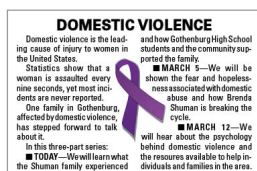
Once James arrived, he said his mother was panicked and could hardly speak.

"I felt disbelief and anger but I didn't want to express it because my mom needed help," James said.

He later took her to the emergency room where medical personnel discovered she had suffered a traumatic brain injury with bleeding in her brain and other injuries.

Brenda still sometimes slurs her words and struggles with organization and remembering dates.

Her boys often write the date, what their plans are for the day and when they'll be home on index cards to help their mother remember.



The mental and emotional scars are not so visible.

To help him deal with his own feelings about the trauma and abuse he witnessed, James said he talks to friends and pastors.

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"And good things have come from this," he said. "It's forced me to grow and my mom is helping other people in the same situation."

James said he also feels more compassion for his mom than in the past.

In addition, the experience has helped him relate more to people who are facing struggles.

James said he will always remember how fellow students and friends have supported his family.

While riding in the car to Lincoln for the parole board hearing, Brenda said she was at peace.

"I felt the arms of the school and community around me," she said.

On Thursday, James E. Green was denied parole and is serving time at the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services for third-degree domestic assault, first-degree false imprisonment and felony strangulation.

The board will again consider parole for Green in February 2015.

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