



A COLD-BLOODED **MURDER,**  
A WARM-HEARTED TRIBUTE  
**Parents Journey from Healing to Giving Back**

By Linda Firestone

**T**he challenge of surviving the brutal murder of a child can lead a parent down many different paths. One's response and the manifestation of that response can never be known in advance. On August 29th, 1995, Sara Jane and Ira Drescher were to experience the

horrifying reality of losing their daughter, Donnah, in a brutal attack. The truth of the event would emerge only years later: domestic violence.

For six years, over 2,100 days, 130,000 hours, the Deschers agonized over what they believed to be a cold-blooded murder by a psychotic man who had randomly chosen to

take the life of their beautiful, loving, and undeserving daughter. In 2001 the scars of their pain would suddenly give way to new open wounds. A phone call from the original detectives would horrify them as they learned that Donnah's husband, Marc, would ultimately be charged with her murder. Donnah's best friend, DeAnn, would summon up her courage and attempt to assuage her guilt by confessing that she had been having an affair with Marc and that he had threatened to kill Donnah.

Immediately following Donnah's death, Sara Jane flew out to Illinois and sent Donnah's things home to Florida. A decision was then made to bring Donnah's clothes to the Women In Distress (WID) thrift shop. Years later, after learning the truth about Donnah's death, Sara Jane would find the coincidence to be ironic. "For some unexplained reason I was drawn to bring all of her clothes there," Sara Jane reminisces.

In 2005, on the 10th anniversary of her death, the Dreschers paid the ultimate tribute to their daughter by establishing Donnah's Fund. "It was important to me to keep her spirit alive and make some good out of a horrendous event," Sara Jane comments. "Once Ira and I confirmed that Donnah was the ultimate victim of domestic violence, it seemed that Women in Distress was the most appropriate place to see if they would be interested in doing something." The fund now provides for housing payments, deposits, basic furnishings, and other necessities. "The money we raise through Donnah's Fund helps these women start over," Ira adds. To date, Donnah's Fund has helped over 72 families begin a new life.

Domestic violence touches every race, nationality, and class of people. Its destructive qualities reach beyond the immediate victim moving its tentacles out to children, parents, friends, and co-workers. Sadly, safe heavens have always been needed but were of limited availability. In 1974, Edee Greene, with other committed community

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members, began Broward County's first refuge for homeless women, Women In Distress (WID). Unfortunately, at the opening the agency was not licensed to accept children. A mother, in need of rescue from a violent domestic situation, came to the center for help. Separated from her children, she returned home to face her abuser, ultimately leading to her death one week later. WID rapidly responded by purchasing a facility that would house

a 54 bed site and make the necessary licensing changes. With an endowment fund established in 1999 by Janet Boyle to secure future operations, Women In Distress has a new facility on 6.4 acres, with five buildings, that will have the capacity to house 100 women and their children.

According to the FBI, every day four women in this country alone die due to domestic violence. More than half of the women who are victims of domestic violence have children under the age of 12 in the home. The heartbreak is more intense as 8.8 million children are witnesses to the violence. Despite the efforts to service as many families as possible, 503 women and children, in 2007 alone, 857 were turned away!

At present, WID is the only certified domestic violence center serving Broward County providing emergency shelter, counseling, education, outreach, advocacy groups, and a 24 hour crisis hotline. WID also provides another 20,000 hours annually of counseling to women, men, and children as well.

Last May the Dreschers moved in to a new community. "I wanted to become involved in some of the community activities. There was a needlepoint group knitting afghans for the troops in a hospital in Iraq," Sarah says. The President of the club received word that there was no longer a need for more afghans, so Sarah jumped on this new opportunity to give back. The afghans are now being presented to the women at Women in Distress, a beautiful gift to serve as warm and fuzzy reminders of where they've been and to help them embrace their future with comfort and courage.

For more information on domestic violence visit: [www.womenindistress.org](http://www.womenindistress.org) -DUO

