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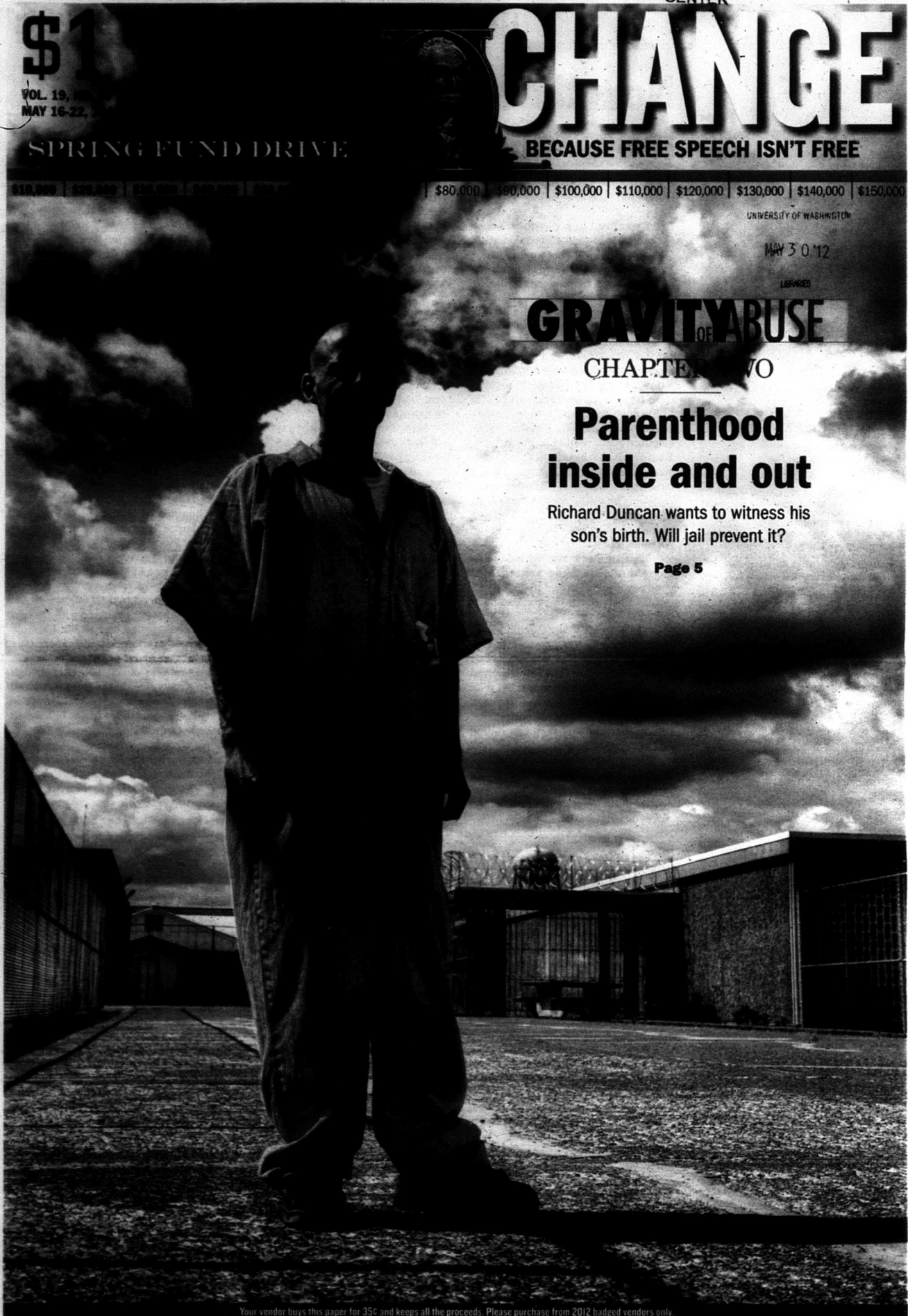
GRAVITY OF A BUSE

CHAPTER TWO

Parenthood inside and out

Richard Duncan wants to witness his son's birth. Will jail prevent it?

Page 5



GRAVITY OF ABUSE



This is the second installment in the four-part series "Gravity of Abuse," which examines how domestic violence and substance abuse affect the lives of a family and the people around them. The subsequent installments will run on May 23 and May 30.

Brandy Sweeney learned she was pregnant while she and her partner, Richard Duncan, stayed in Tent City 3. After he was evicted for assaulting her in January 2009, he began to stalk Brandy.

Photography by Kate Baldwin

With a child on the way, a family fragments

By ROSETTE ROYALE, Assistant Editor | Photography by KATE BALDWIN

Chapter Two

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Pursued

Ploomp.

Brandy Sweeney heard something hit the side of her tent. She sat up in the dark, listening.

Ploomp ... ploomp ... ploomp.

She thought, maybe ... But it couldn't be. Then she heard her name. *Brandy. Brandy.*

She knew the voice. Richard. *Ploomp.* He was throwing rocks at her tent. How did he get past the 24-hour security staff?

For the past few weeks, Brandy had been living in Tent City 3, a free, legal encampment of close to 100 tents staked into the south lawn of Calvin Presbyterian Church in Shoreline, north of Seattle. She had moved into a tent with her partner, Richard Duncan, after a long bus trip from Boise, Idaho. Both agreed they wanted better lives, betting it could happen in Seattle.

But the drinking and drug use

pulled them in a different direction. They fought and yelled and kicked and punched — particularly Richard, who, hours after learning Brandy was pregnant, hammered a fist into her stomach in a drunken rage. Days after that punch, another tempest broke, leading Tent City 3 staff to evict Richard in early February 2009. Brandy thought she'd be safe in the yellow tent then, but Richard didn't let go that easily. He stalked her.

Come talk to me, Richard whispered.

Brandy stayed put. Even though she didn't know if she could trust him, she still cared for him. And she was six weeks pregnant with his child. She had experienced his violent temper, but she wondered if he deserved a second chance. Didn't everyone?

She remained in her sleeping bag, nervous. He threw more rocks at the tent; he called her name. She lay still,

waiting, hoping. And 10 minutes or so later — silence. He'd left.

Richard came back the next day.

In Idaho, Brandy had told Richard about a Washington state program called GA-U, Government Assistance-Unemployable, which provided \$339 every month. Because some recipients had mental health diagnoses, people nicknamed it "crazy money." Brandy received it, and she thought Richard could probably get it, too. A couple days after being evicted from Tent City 3, his GA-U came through. Now he had crazy money to burn.

Richard bought a cell phone with pre-paid minutes and called the Tent City 3 phone and asked, Can I speak to Brandy? Brandy picked up the line.

I'm sorry, Richard said. We need to be together, forgive me.

Fearful, Brandy wouldn't commit. Those people at Tent City are poisoning your mind, he said.

Brandy hung up. Richard called again. And hung up again. He phoned her so much, Brandy lost count.

He stood outside Tent City 3 and, like a modern-day Stanley Kowalski, yelled her name. *Brandy! Braaannddeeee!* The 24-hour security staff shuffled Richard away. When he saw people entering the encampment, he'd ask, How's Brandy? Can you tell her I really want to talk to her? They kept giving him noncommittal replies: She doesn't live here anymore, or, Sure, I'll let her know.

Richard knew Tent City 3 security could turn him in for trespassing, and he shied away from any interaction with police. He had a lengthy prison record from Nevada, marked by violent felony assaults. In November 2008, before meeting Brandy, he'd been released from prison for assault with a

See GRAVITY, Continued on Page 6

May 9: Chapter One
HONEYMOON PHASE
Brandy and Richard battle substance abuse — and confront domestic violence — as they move from Boise, Idaho, to Seattle

May 16: Chapter Two
NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

May 23: Chapter Three
NO CONTACT
A court order demands Brandy and Richard, new parents, must stay apart. But the pair reunites — with violent results

May 30: Chapter Four
THREE STRIKES
An arrest for assault sends Richard to jail and places Brandy on the witness stand. Will the jury find him guilty?

GRAVITY OF ABUSE



Photography by Kate Baldwin

Brandy and Richard moved into the Georgian Motel, above, in early February 2009, when Brandy was two months pregnant. Located at 8801 Aurora Ave. N., the motel often provides shelter to homeless people along the Aurora corridor, right. A room at the Georgian, below, went for \$245 a week.

GRAVITY, Continued from Page 5

deadly weapon. So Richard hid in nearby bushes, watching out for her. At night, he slept on the gravelly shores of Richmond Beach, three miles away. Every day, he returned to pursue her.

It started to wear Brandy down. The rocks, the phone calls, his yelling her name, looking at her from the bushes, tailing her whenever she left: Richard was obsessed. What would it take for him to stop?

Tent City 3 provided residents with bus tickets, and one day in early February, Brandy walked to a bus stop. Richard popped out from a nearby apartment building, surprising her.

"I'm really sorry I hit you, he said. I'll get help. Tears spilled from his eyes.

Brandy realized Richard had never apologized before, not like this. But could she believe him? Were his apologies sincere or a form of manipulation?

Richard's tears magnified into sobs. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, he said. Don't leave me. He looked so pathetic, Brandy's resolve collapsed.

All right, she said.

Richard dried his eyes.

Brandy told him they'd get back together. After all, her options seemed few: There she was, pregnant, living in a tent in the winter and broke. Richard promised he'd find somewhere better, that he'd protect her. "I just kinda got sucked in," she says.

It took her some time to fully commit, but she abandoned Tent City 3 less than a week later. Most of what she had, she left in the tent as she struck off to be with Richard and their baby. To make a family.

TLC

On Jan. 30, 2009, a few days before Brandy left Tent City 3, volunteers with SKCCH, the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, performed an annual One Night Count of homeless people. They found 2,827 people on the streets or without shelter. The King County Depart-



ment of Community and Human Services surveyed 65 emergency shelters the same evening, finding 2,552 people. Too many people, not enough beds.

But cold weather provided something of a boon. When the weather dipped below freezing, city hall opened as a winter response shelter. Brandy and Richard spent the night there on mats, women and men sleeping in different spaces. The city hall shelter closed at 5 a.m., which forced everyone back outside.

Out in the cold, Brandy and Richard migrated to a green space a couple blocks away called City Hall Park. They sat on a bench, shivering. As they huddled together, a man who cut through the park walked up to them. He carried a backpack, hard hat and tool belt.

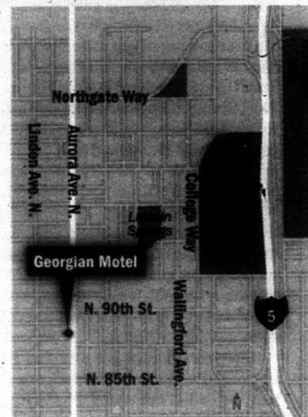
Hungry? the man asked.

Brandy and Richard nodded. He handed them trail mix and power bars.

He asked what they were up to.

Planning to leave Seattle, Richard said.

Well, if you want work, come with me. Brandy and Richard knew GA-U and food stamps couldn't lift them out of shel-



Hear University of Washington professor Terje Leiren speak about Odinism and white supremacy. Visit rosetterroyale.com

ters or get them off the streets. After he told Brandy to stay warm at a day shelter, Richard followed Mr. Hard Hat. Barely a half block away stood the office of TLC, Trades Labor Corporation. They walked inside.

A temp agency, TLC connected employ-

ers with blue-collar workers including construction laborers, drywall technicians and carpenters' helpers. Anyone possessing these or other skills might find work: All you had to do was show up after 5:30 a.m. when the office opened.

Once Richard completed his application, TLC hired him out to a construction site near the University of Washington and gave him bus fare. He rode through the predawn dark, proud he could support Brandy and the baby-to-be. Not that general labor offered excitement or good money. "I get paid minimum wage to push a broom," Richard says. Eight hours of work, \$8.55 an hour.

Family meant a lot to Richard. In the Nevada prison system, he had become involved with Odinism, a spiritual practice that followed the teachings of the Norse god Odin. His fellow Odinist inmates also embraced white supremacy. Tattoos on Richard's body spoke to that belief: a swastika on one pec, a profile of Hitler on the other, and across his fingers, "SKINHEAD." His practice taught him a man provided for his kin. At the end of the workday, TLC would cut him a check to support his family. Richard picked up a broom and swept.



As the workweek progressed, the pair found a rhythm. In the morning, Richard would head to TLC, and Brandy would find a warm drop-in center; in the early evening, they would reconnect for dinner and a beer; at night, they would enter male and female winter response shelters at city hall; in the morning, they would repeat the cycle.

By the weekend, Richard had saved up enough money for a motel room on Aurora Avenue North. The room was small and dingy, but it had a shower and heat. "It was like a suite at the Hilton," Richard remembers. But even a low-rent Hilton has a checkout time, so they returned to the shelter routine.

Richard wasn't too keen on Brandy walking around Seattle all day, alone. He also didn't want her to work. Ever. He had the job, so he would take care of their needs. He put finding a place where they could live on the top of the list.

One evening in mid-February 2009, Richard stepped up to the front desk of a motel, located at 8801 Aurora Ave. N. Rooms went for \$245 a week. That amount trumped what Richard had on him, so he spoke to the manager, showing him pay stubs. He told the manager Brandy was pregnant. Look, Richard

said, can I owe you for one day, then I'll pay tomorrow?

Sure, not a problem, the manager said. He got Richard's signature, then handed him a key.

Brandy and Richard walked across the parking lot and up to the second floor. Richard unlocked the door to Room 16. They stepped over the threshold and looked around. Wood paneling, hard mattress, leaky showerhead, running toilet, TV bolted to a rack on the wall, noises from the room downstairs. Welcome to the Georgian Motel.

The mother road

Brandy didn't like living at the Georgian, not one bit.

First, the rooms were smelly. A combination of dirty socks and cigarette smoke, kind of like a bar. Second, the motel was chaotic. The police always seemed to show up, or someone was getting beat up. Random people knocked at her door, looking in her window. And third, she found the place unstable. One night, you were in one room, the next day, you had to move. Since she spent most of every day there while Richard worked, all of it sank into her pores.

For Richard, leaving the shelter and staying at the Georgian proved he could

protect and provide for his family. But covering the cost, that took thought. He formulated a payment plan.

Rate at the Georgian\$245 a week
Richard's take-home pay	... \$52 a day
Amount he'd pay the Georgian	
on Mon. \$50
on Tues. \$50
on Wed. \$50
on Thurs. \$50
on Fri. \$45
Total \$245
Left over \$15

Tight? Yes, but the pair understood their situation. Monthly rents for one-bedroom downtown apartments averaged roughly \$1,000, almost equal to a month at the Georgian, but landlords placed legal hurdles before tenants that Richard knew he could never clear. At the Georgian, you didn't need first and last month's rent, plus security deposit; you didn't need to submit to a credit check; you didn't need to worry about having a felony record. All you needed was cash — plus you got cable, electricity, water

See GRAVITY, Continued on Page 8

STATISTICS ON STALKING

- More than **1 million** women are stalked each year
- Adults between **18 and 29** are primary targets of stalking
- **77%** of women who are stalked know the stalker
- **81%** of women who were stalked by a current or former husband or partner were also physically assaulted by that person
- Less than half of all stalking victims are directly threatened by their stalkers

Sources: National Institute of Justice, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship, call Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline, **1.800.562.6025** or the National Domestic Violence Hotline, **1.800.799.7233**

You can also contact the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, wscadv.org

WARNING SIGNS

How can someone tell if a partner is becoming abusive? According to Lundy Bancroft, author of "Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men," there are a number of signs that indicate one partner's attempts to control another in a relationship.

What to watch for in a partner:

- speaking disrespectfully of previous partners
- acting in a possessive or controlling manner
- abusing alcohol or drugs
- using intimidation when angry
- getting serious too quickly about the relationship

GRAVITY OF ABUSE

GRAVITY, Continued from Page 7

and heat, all included at no extra cost. Brandy had enrolled in TANF, the federal program Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, once she learned of her pregnancy. With that and their GA-U, the couple eked by. And while it might not have been an optimal place to live, on one level, Richard had chosen the perfect spot: Aurora Avenue North embraced people in need.

Since its beginning, Aurora hosted services that the region required. Electricians, car dealers, appliance stores, mattress retailers and mom-and-pop shops dotted the avenue and brought an ever-changing stream of customers. Streets branched out from the central Aurora artery, giving birth to the Greenwood neighborhood. Aurora became the area's mother road.

Roads needed cars, cars needed drivers and drivers needed rest. Again, Aurora was there to serve. In the 30s, motor inns sprang up. In the late 40s, motels. And during the 60s, more motels to house visitors to the World's Fair. Ambassador, Orion, Crown Inn, Klose-In Motel; Marco Polo, Aloha, Nites Inn, Thunderbird: These names and others, some neon-lit with vacancy signs, called all who craved slumber.

But during the 70s, as Seattle fell into an economic slump and commuters buzzed along I-5, motels lost their usual patrons. Salesmen, part-time workers and other transients checked in instead. Working girls, many unbelievably young, sought johns. As the area declined over the decades, some of Aurora's motels transformed. They served as a form of low-income housing and offered shelter to workers, couples and families who couldn't afford to live downtown. Like Brandy and Richard.

While Richard bused downtown to work Monday through Friday, Brandy hung around the motel. With a phone in the room, she could call out, and incoming calls were transferred from the front desk. Not that anyone knew she was there. Sometimes Brandy spoke to the manager's girlfriend, who lived in a corner room. Other than that: "I didn't really associate with a lot of people," she says. Except for Richard, she lived in isolation.

At the job site, Richard was a model employee, efficient and polite. The moment he arrived back at the motel, though, he started drinking. A quick trip to the Aurora Grocery, two blocks away, supplied him with beer — lots of it. "And I don't sip things," Richard says, "I drink them." A regular 12-ounce beer would be gone in two, three good chugs. A 12-pack, no problem. He drank till he passed out.

Brandy wouldn't join in. She had partaken before she knew she was pregnant, and even a little after. "That's not the highlight of my life," she says. But by the time she arrived at the Georgian, she went cold turkey: no alcohol, no cigarettes, no meth. She didn't want anything to affect the baby.

Richard, in his own way, knew the child needed a good start, which fueled a desire to change. As he drank beer, oftentimes he watched TV. He liked history shows, and one evening he watched a program that detailed white



Photo by Kate Baldwin

Karen Ciruli sets out on one of her "motel tours" of Aurora Avenue North. She often brings motel managers flowers to strengthen community ties. During a motel tour in July 2009, Karen befriended Brandy.

Take a motel tour with Karen Ciruli.
Visit rosetteroyale.com

supremacy movements. That's my past, he told Brandy, and I'm going to leave it behind. Leaving drinking behind proved more difficult.

When Richard finished a beer, sometimes he gave Brandy the signal: He'd shake the empty can. That meant it was time to fetch another one. She'd pull one from the minifridge, feeling like a nag if she complained. By the time he downed a six-pack, his mood, like a storm cloud, darkened. A fight might break out. Yelling would charge the atmosphere. Sometimes, he hit her. Brandy washed clothes, cleaned up, fixed dinner. Inside of her, a child formed, kicked. Outside, the world felt tight, constricted.

June ticked by, July soldiered on. A heat wave cooked the city. Temperatures spiked to 103. Brandy, in her seventh month, tried not to wilt. They had learned the baby was a boy, a son. He drummed his foot against the inside of her swollen belly.

Brandy shopped for meals in the Aurora Grocery, buying items to microwave or heat up on the hot plate in the overheated room. The food was so expensive. Cans of tuna fish cost more than two dollars. And loaves of bread? She had to economize. Luckily she saw the flyer about the food bank.

Run out of the Bethany Community Church, the food bank lay seven blocks south of the Georgian. Brandy and Richard walked as the early August sun dipped to the west. Inside the cool of the church, off to the side, was a pantry filled with canned ravioli, corn flakes, peanut butter, bags of sugar. Grocery bags stuffed with food awaited anyone who asked.

A woman, with wavy, ginger-colored hair and sea-foam green eyes, handed

out the food. She pointed to Brandy's purse. I like your bag, the woman said.

Brandy smiled, then asked, Do you have diapers? Or baby food?

No, but I can try to have diapers the next time, she said, and handed Brandy a bag. Richard carried their groceries to the motel.

They returned the next week and the next, Brandy always asking for diapers and baby food. Finally, the food bank had received some, and the woman with the ginger hair passed them on. Brandy supplemented their diet with what she brought back and played the homemaker, which pointed to a truth she hated to admit: Even though she dreamed of leaving the smelly, chaotic, unstable Georgian, after five months, the motel had become her home.

A neighborhood day in the neighborhood

The first time Karen Ciruli saw the grit and grime of Aurora Avenue North, it reminded her of home.

She grew up in a quiet, little town in southern New Jersey, but not far away shone the bright lights and high-roffer glitz of Atlantic City. You could travel there on the expressway or take White Horse Pike or Black Horse Pike, two major streets known for concrete medians, used car lots and neon-lit motels. Her father, a cop, thought the roadways spelled trouble, but Karen felt differently. The sight of them became etched in her childhood memories, the same as fireflies blinking across open fields.

After high school, Karen visited her sister in the Greenwood neighborhood of Seattle. When she ventured a few blocks west, she ran into the seedy motels and used car lots of Aurora Avenue North, a little bit of the East Coast out on the West. She vowed to move to the area, and, in 2003, she settled down in Greenwood.

She joined a local church soon after. One Sunday morning, the pastor delivered a sermon on a core biblical tenet — love

thy neighbor — and challenged parishioners to extend their circle to encompass people who lived and worked on Aurora. Karen, moved by his words, stopped at motels, introducing herself to managers. She learned the stereotype of the motels, that they served as fronts for sex trafficking and rampant drug use, wasn't entirely accurate. True, she couldn't deny those things occurred there, but families lived in the motels; too, for weeks, sometimes months, on end. It was a neighborhood — not like Mister Rogers' — but one all the same. The people were her neighbors, ones she wanted to serve. And in motels reminiscent of those back East, Karen, with the green eyes and wavy ginger hair, found her calling.

She also found an internship with AmeriCorps, a community service program created by the federal government. She would weave together a network of care for her neighbors in need. By the summer of 2009, she had a routine: Two or three times a week, she'd conduct what she called a "motel tour." She'd start on Aurora Avenue North and North 95th Street, walk south down the east side of Aurora to North 80th, cross at the light, then walk up the west side, back to North 95th. She'd bring flowers to make the managers smile. If someone living in the motel needed help, she'd do what she could. One round-trip tour might take hours.

Karen set off on one of her tours in mid-August 2009. Walking past North 88th Street, she turned into the parking lot of the Georgian Motel. As she left the front office, a woman caught her eye. A pregnant woman. Karen knew she'd seen her before. But where?

Hey, I know you, she said. Brandy stopped.

You had that green handbag I liked, remember? I met you at the food bank?

Yes, the woman who'd found the diapers. They introduced themselves,

GRAVITY OF ABUSE

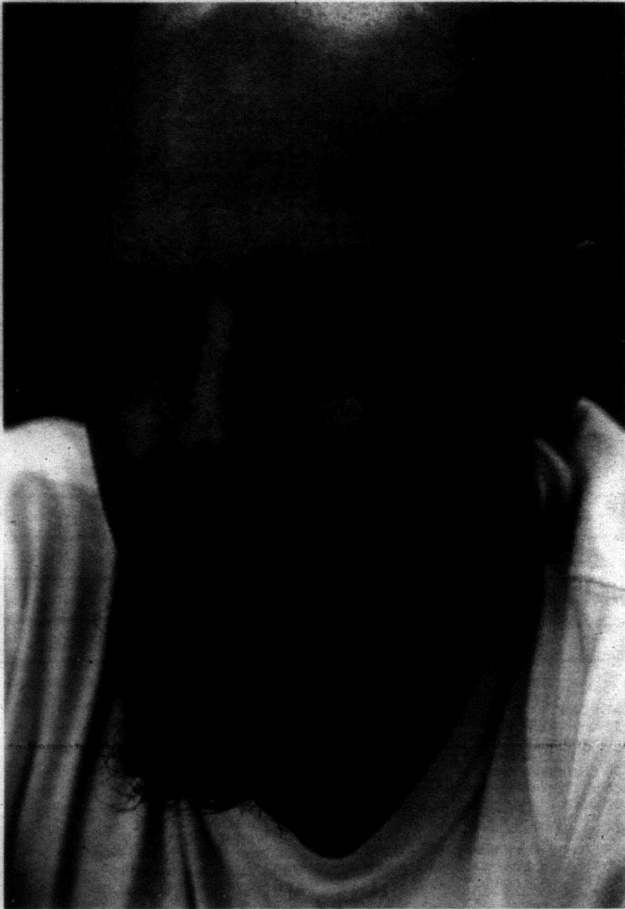


Photo by Kate Baldwin

Richard assaulted Brandy in the Georgian Motel in August 2009. He was arrested and later pleaded guilty to domestic violence assault in the fourth degree.

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chatting. Karen asked what Brandy needed. More diapers, Brandy said, maybe some baby clothes.

As Karen walked away, she realized she wanted to do something more for Brandy. But what? She mulled it over for a couple days before it came to her: a baby shower.

She emailed a church group about her idea. "Is this something that you would be interested in doing?" A group spokesperson replied, "Yes."

As August wound down, an email thread lengthened, with neighbors suggesting ideas for the shower. "It wouldn't need to be girls only." "Gift cards from Target." "We can arrange to have some meals brought to them after the birth." The Greenwood Senior Center, five blocks from the Georgian, agreed to host. Karen felt pride seeing the whole community come together, and she finalized the date of September 1 for the shower.

In late August, Karen's phone rang. It was the manager at the Georgian. Brandy was taken to the hospital by ambulance a few days before, but she was back. Karen rushed over.

She knocked at Room 16. Brandy

+ Watch Brandy and Karen talk about the baby shower. Visit rosettaroyale.com

opened the door. And when Karen looked at Brandy's face, what she saw made her drop her eyes in embarrassment.

Hands, fists, teeth, etc.

On Saturday, Aug. 22, about a week before Karen walked into Room 16, Richard walked out of it. Already loaded on Red Stripe beer, he craved more, so he went to the Aurora Grocery. It was sometime after 11 a.m.

A small corner market, the grocery offered, along with canned tuna and beer, a computer with a free Internet connection. Richard opened a cold one, and he logged into his email. A subject line read: You have an important message from Sandra D. That was Richard's sister's name; Sandra Duncan. "I clicked it," he remembers, "and it was one of those dating sites."

His click initiated a VIP tour. Richard never entered any information but pored through the site's offerings. For roughly an hour he sat, scrolled and drank. Then he meandered toward the Georgian.

Brandy met him at the door. What the hell is this? she asked. She showed him

her cell phone. Richard's email account, with a confirmation code from the dating site, appeared on her screen.

Shut the fuck up, he said.

Eff you, Brandy said.

Richard picked up a box of doughnuts and threw it at her. Brandy slapped him. He hit her in the face. Fearful the baby might be injured, Brandy grabbed Richard's goatee in hopes he'd stop. Richard kept hitting.

The fight escalated.

Richard struck Brandy's face with his fist. She yanked his goatee. Hairs came out in her fingers. She yelled, Stop!

Richard smacked Brandy in the mouth. In the melee, he knocked her down. Her right fingers gouged his left cheek. A sharp pain electrified Brandy's foot.

The fight ended.

In the mirror, Brandy saw her face, then hobbled to the front office. "And I told the manager to call the cops," she recalls, "because I didn't want to lose my son."

After their fights, Brandy didn't usually leave the room, so Richard found it a little odd. Then he heard what sounded like a semi pulling into the parking lot. He looked. A fire truck. "And I'm thinking, 'Oh, fucking great.'" Richard slipped out and hid in another open room.

At 12:33 p.m., when a Seattle Police Department cruiser pulled up to the motel, Richard slunk away. Motel neighbors milled in the parking lot. One of them pointed and told an officer the man — bald head, white T-shirt — had gone south. The officer intercepted Richard two blocks away.

He noticed Richard's left cheek. How'd you get scratched? he asked.

I did it myself, Richard said.

Police escorted Richard back to the Georgian, where he was arrested for domestic violence assault and read his Miranda rights. In the police report, the officer described the weapons used: hands, fists, teeth, etc.

Seattle Fire Department staff examined Brandy's bruised and swollen face. Because of her pregnancy, an ambulance shuttled her to Harborview Medical Center, where she learned that though she was six weeks from her due date, her cervix had dilated two centimeters. But the baby was fine. An X-ray revealed a fracture in her left foot, so hospital staff fitted her with a cast. She hobbled on crutches to a cab for the ride back to the Georgian. The room was quiet. The doughnut box lay on the floor. For the first time in six months, she spent the night alone.

Motion denied

A week later, Brandy still sported a huge black eye. She couldn't attend the baby shower, not the way she looked. Karen didn't argue.

Without Richard, Brandy had to cover the Georgian's \$245 weekly rate alone. A manager took money out of his own pocket to help her out. Brandy's caseworker at a social service agency found a program that offered up to \$750 for emergency housing needs. That way, Brandy could cover rent for

three weeks. The baby was due in less than four.

Brandy scrambled to find long-term shelter, but eight months pregnant and wearing an orthopedic boot, the scramble turned into a slow shuffle. Karen ferried her to almost a dozen housing agencies, where they spent hours with numerous intake personnel, only to hear, after filling out paperwork, Brandy would be put on a waiting list. One agency's staff member told her they could help after the baby was born. At the end of it, Brandy was back where she started: the Georgian.

As the due date approached, the stress exhausted her. Raising a baby alone felt impossible. If only Richard... Richard. She knew people would judge her, but she still cared for him. She loved him. They'd dreamed of a family together. But the violence. Maybe prison would change him.

But a change had already taken place, at least legally. On Sept. 14, Richard pleaded guilty to domestic violence assault in the fourth degree, a misdemeanor. A judge sentenced him to 120 days and initiated a no-contact order. Richard couldn't come within 500 feet of Brandy for two years, and he was barred from any type of communication. Only a judge could change that. So on Sept. 24, 2009, Brandy, desperate for help to raise a child, had Karen drive her to the courthouse.

She and Karen sat in Courtroom 1102 in the Seattle Municipal Courthouse, as a prosecutor for the city addressed Judge Adam Eisenberg.

"The first matter is going to be Richard Duncan," the prosecutor said. "In this case, Brandy Sweeney is present to address the court."

Judge Eisenberg flipped through the case file. "He's serving a substantial — Oh, my goodness. These are photos of the injuries? And the alleged victim was taken away by ambulance?"

"She was substantially pregnant at the time," the prosecutor said.

Judge Eisenberg read papers detailing Richard's prison history from the bench. "Assault with a deadly weapon charge that occurred in 2005. That's a conviction, that's a felony, and it's out of the state of Nevada." He turned a page. "He also has a DUI from 2004. That's a conviction, so that would suggest he has alcohol issues underlying. He has possession of a stolen vehicle, which is a felony from 2002." The judge's tone was no-nonsense. "He had a domestic violence battery charge from '98; it's not clear what happened in that case. All right," Judge Eisenberg said. "Ma'am, would you like to identify yourself for the record?"

"My name is Brandy Sweeney."

The judge replaced his no-nonsense tone with fatherly compassion. "And Ms. Sweeney, what did you want to tell the court?"

"He's the only person I have right now. And obviously, I'm pregnant with his baby, so I feel that he should be able to be part of the baby's life," Brandy said. "Obviously we have problems, and we probably shouldn't be in a relationship, but I feel that I should be able to

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contact him and address him as just, as the father of my baby."

"So, Ms. Sweeney," Judge Eisenberg said, "I don't know if you were aware of all those convictions —"

"I was aware."

"But that makes it seem substantially likely that he is a very dangerous person, particularly for you. If he consumes alcohol, you and your baby will be at risk," Judge Eisenberg said.

Brandy nodded.

"I think you should really take a step back and decide what's in the best interest of you and your baby in the long term, because any person who would cause the kind of injuries that I've seen on a woman who's expecting their child, is extremely potentially dangerous," Judge Eisenberg said.

Listening to him, part of Brandy agreed. Another part felt overwhelmed by the prospect of raising a child alone.

"I understand you're going to have a baby, which is a great thing. But I'm very, very concerned for your welfare, because if he drinks and gets violent, you know, you and the baby are in risk, so," Judge Eisenberg said, "the no-contact order is going to remain in effect."

Brandy felt dejected. Not only did she need an affordable place to live, but her hopes for a family were falling apart.

The seven-minute hearing highlighted Karen's internal struggle. She wanted Brandy to be safe, but Karen felt reluctant to tell her how to live. Instead, she decided to support Brandy. A ride to and from the courthouse was nothing big.

Their next ride together carried a little more importance.

Twilight zone

Four days after the hearing, Brandy and Karen sat at a coffee shop. Brandy felt a slight pain arc across her lower



Brandy gave birth to Ian Robert Duncan on Sept. 30, 2009. While the baby was born, Richard, the child's father, sat in King County Jail.

Photo courtesy of Brandy Sweeney

stomach and thought: menstrual cramp. Except it couldn't be, because she was pregnant. Karen asked if they should go the hospital. Brandy told her no. Instead, Karen drove her back to the Georgian.

Every few minutes the pain would return. "Then I knew: Oh, my gosh, I've been having contractions all day." She phoned Karen, who jumped in her boyfriend's oversized truck. At the motel, she helped Brandy up into the seat.

Karen thought she'd memorized the directions, but behind the wheel, she got lost. Left turns, right turns, stop signs: They created a maze in her head. Finally, she pulled up to the University of Washington Medical Center. Forgoing a wheelchair, Brandy duck-walked to the reception desk. Her contractions were four minutes apart.

Brandy expected the contractions to become stronger, but as she walked the hallways with Karen, her contractions stalled at two minutes apart. One hour passed, another, a third.

She lay on a gurney in her light blue gown while Karen dozed on a couch. Another hour passed. Karen started awake. The contractions were still coming every two minutes.

Three hours, four hours, five, six. No change. A doctor ordered an epidural, a medical procedure to administer an an-

esthetic to the base of the spinal column. An anesthesiologist inserted a needle through the skin above Brandy's cervical column, hoping to see spinal fluid in the syringe. He punctured her skin a second time. A third time, a fourth, a fifth. Nothing. Before he could try again, Brandy told him to stop.

A doctor examined Brandy. With his hand on her stomach, the doctor shifted the position of the fetus. The baby inside her stirred. The labor progressed.

Brandy pushed. Karen squeezed her hand. Nurses coached them both. Brandy pushed harder. Then it happened: Brandy gave birth. A boy. Her son. Eight pounds, 14 ounces. Endorphins flooded her bloodstream. She cried. "To just see this perfect baby," Brandy remembers. "It made me feel very good."

At that same moment four miles away, Richard sat in the King County Jail. He didn't know he'd become a father.

During the pregnancy, she and Richard had discussed baby names. Richard chose the first name, and for a middle name, Brandy invoked her brother. Ian Robert Duncan. She cradled her son on her chest.

Karen found the birth powerful — and relieving. It signaled a new start for Brandy, a new life for Ian. Then Karen

looked around. The room was empty. Sure, she was there. The staff, too. But what about the balloons and flowers and visitors? People should have been there to celebrate with Brandy. "I just remember feeling so lonely and lost," Karen recalls. The moment felt both happy and sad to Karen, like being in another dimension. Like "The Twilight Zone."

Brandy was indeed about to cross a boundary. Shortly after the birth, Brandy received a call: The Eastside Domestic Violence Program had a room for her in one of its confidential shelters. But the shelter, a safe house, existed in a nebulous world, its whereabouts a secret. Brandy couldn't have visitors. No one would know where to find her.

When Ian was three days old, Brandy checked out of the hospital. She slid into a waiting cab. In her past lay Tent City 3, the Georgian, the last six weeks with Karen. In her future, her son, an opportunity for change. Woven through it all was Richard.

Ian screamed his head off as she held him in the back seat. The cab driver shot her a dirty look. Brandy rocked the infant to soothe him while she tried to tamp down her own fear of going to a strange place and the likelihood of a reconnection with Richard. Nothing she did worked. So the fear rode with her, an unwelcome passenger, as Brandy and her wailing, newborn child journeyed out of the city and into the unknown. ■

"Gravity of Abuse" grew out of a three-month 2010 Seattle University fellowship to study family homelessness in Washington state. The fellowship was funded by the Gates Foundation. All quotes, thoughts and feelings of individuals stem from interviews, personal correspondence, police reports and court documents. Research for the series lasted 22 months.

COMMUNITY

Every action deserves a reactionary, but I'm not wedded to the idea

I heard a previous editor once remark that columns are inherently reactionary. I gathered he'd taken a course in college or something, so I figured he knew what he was talking about. My reaction to people knowing what they're talking about and saying something interesting is generally to try to know it, too.

That's why I get a reputation for challenging authority. No disrespect is intended. I honor the authority by trying to confirm things they say, and in so doing, really nail down what the authority is telling me. I wouldn't bother questioning if I didn't care.

Here's what I've come up with so far on that. It's not that I can't not be reactionary. It's that I can only get away with it in incredibly small doses, because what it takes to be not reactionary is actually super dull reading.

I mean, everybody imagines themselves to be so evolved that they would prefer not to read reactionary opinion, but that's because they never contemplated what non-reactionary opinion looks like. I'll give an example below, and you'll see.

First, let's get our reactionary fix

Adventures in Irony

Dr. Wes Browning

of the week! Boy, that Joe Obama sure did something didn't he? I don't know what exactly went on there, but Joe may have figured he's going to be looking for a new job anyway next January 20, so what the heck?

Obama got outed on same-sex marriage just one day after being reminded that it would be stunningly bad politics to be for it in North Carolina.

One theory going around is that Obama did this as a cynical grab for votes. Really? He's not even going to get votes from many supporters of same-sex marriage if he doesn't follow this up with effective policy or leadership. What can he do in terms of policy? Try to get DOMA repealed instead of merely not enforcing it? It would likely fail in this Congress and

just generate disappointment.

Obama's support for same-sex marriage is just another one of those moments in life when you're reminded that having all the ice cream you want after a tonsillectomy is a rip-off.

I want to help. I want to offer a way out. The way out is to change the game by telling the American people something new. By not being reactionary!

Barack, don't just say that you are for same-sex marriage. Present a new alternative way of understanding what state-authorized marriages ought to be, so that all the public can understand clearly how they benefit from letting same-sex marriages happen. And while you're at it, really dispel the myth that men marrying turtles is at issue.

This leads to the part where I am nonreactionary myself. Notice how phenomenally boring this is. To state a novel opinion is to present a political theory! Who wants that? When was the last time you said to yourself, boy I could sure use some fresh ideology today?

Anyway, here goes. Church marriages can be anything. Churches are the ones that could marry men to turtles if that's what their scriptures

say. The real slippery slope is the idea that churches can do what they want. We've lived with that slippery slope for two centuries, and it's only been a problem once or twice. Mormons know what I'm talking about.

Marriages done by the state are what are at issue. Here's what Obama needs to get across. As a society we benefit from state-sanctioned and state-supported marriages enough to justify giving benefits to the couples in return. The benefit to all of us in supporting people in their contractual commitments to support each other is that in the long run the government has to prop people up less, because they are taking care of the propping up themselves.

All you have to do is get the idea across that it pays to promote loving, caring, committed relationships between adults. Show the public why it's in their own best interests to encourage that kind of mutual care. ■

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