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Why they stay ... and how to leave

Advocates say leaving a domestic violence situation is a complex issue



JOED VIERA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

One of the domestic violence survivors who spoke to Sunday Lifestyle for this story is shown in a safe location. Leaving a domestic violence situation is a complex matter, but help is available.

BY JILL KEPPELER
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She had pages of handwritten notes, spread out on her lap, words crossed out and written back in in neat script.

But as she started to read, her voice started to shake, just a little, and her eyes filled with tears.

“No matter what you said or did,” she read, “he never has a right to hit you. And don’t try to justify him hitting you. ‘Well, if I wouldn’t have said this, or did that, then he wouldn’t have gotten mad enough to hit me’ or ‘It won’t happen again, he is just stressed out.’

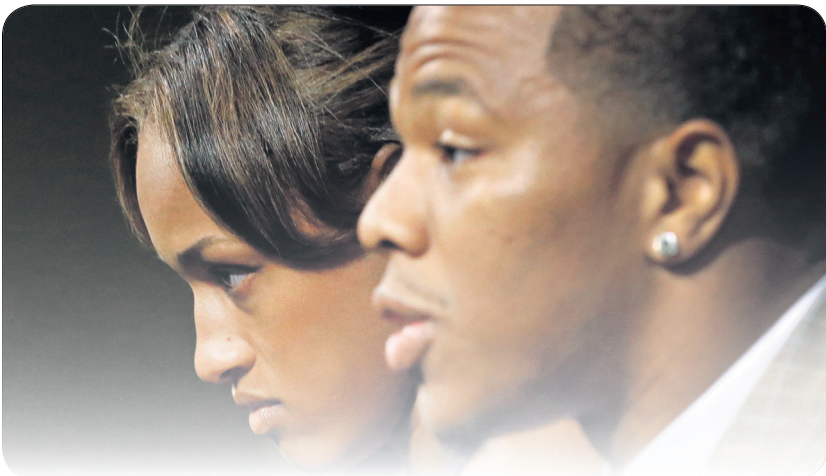
“NO. It will happen again, and it will get worse.”

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When the video of now-former NFL running back Ray Rice’s assault on his then-fiancee, now-wife, Janay Rice, surfaced last month, it started a national conversation on domestic violence. But with that conversation came the obvious question: Why does she stay?

Domestic violence counselors, experts and survivors say the often well-intentioned question amounts to a simplistic view of a very complex situation. The debate gave rise to a social media hashtag: #WhyIStayed, with thousands of social media posts

SEE **LEAVE** ON PAGE 4C



ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this May 23 file photo, Janay Rice, left, looks on as her husband, Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice, speaks to the media during a news conference in Owings Mills, Md. The Ravens terminated their contract with Rice on Sept. 8, hours after a video surfaced on TMZ’s website of him punching his then-fiancee, Janay.

HOW TO FIND HELP

24-hour hotlines

- YWCA of Niagara: Call 433-6716.
- Passage House Shelter of Family and Children’s Service of Niagara: Call 285-6984.

Other resources

- Niagara County Sheriff’s Office domestic violence intervention program: Call 438-3301.
- Niagara County Victim Assistance: Call 438-3306.
- YWCA of the Tonawandas: Call 692-5643.
- New York state Child Abuse Hotline: Call (800) 635-1522.

In their own words

SURVIVORS: *Three women who escaped domestic violence situations tell their stories.*

BY JILL KEPPELER
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Three survivors of domestic violence, all of whom are currently staying in a local shelter or transitional housing, agreed to speak to Sunday Lifestyle for this story. For their safety, pseudonyms are being used.

‘I made my own luck’

One of them is **Sally**, who teared up while telling her story, reading from her own handwritten notes. She has a 1-year-old and a 3-year-old — and is also pregnant with her former abuser’s child.

“If you have a fam-

ily together, it makes it even harder to leave; you want him to change,” she said. “You will do anything everything to get him to change. But you can’t.”

As in many abusive relationships, hers went in cycles, Sally said. Things would get better — temporarily — after he hit her; he’d buy her new things, take her to restaurants, “dragging you right back in where he wants you,” she said. Then it would happen again, and it would be worse.

“And now you really start to think to yourself, ‘What the hell am I doing? Why am I still here?’ But you still don’t leave,” she said. “You don’t know who to turn to because of embarrassment, and you are frightened.”

Eventually, Sally said, SEE **WORDS** ON PAGE 4C

Watch out for ‘Mama Bear’

SPORTS: *Niagara-Wheatfield girl plays football, soccer, lacrosse and wrestling*

BY MICHELE DELUCA
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Her teammates call her “Mama Bear.” But there’s nothing motherly about the way she throws a tackle.

Kendra Cheers is 13. She has been a starter on the Niagara-Wheatfield Wildcats for the past six years, including last year when her team won the amateur athletic association’s “Super Bowl.” This year, she’s a captain and the team has a 6-0 record.

She comes rightfully by her nickname, “Mama Bear,” according to Johnny Parks, who’s been coaching Kendra since she was 7.

“Anyone that touches any one of her team mates, she literally attacks them,” said Parks, head coach of Kendra’s Niagara Wheatfield Amateur Athletics football

SEE **MAMA** ON PAGE 6C



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jennifer Cheers stands with her 13-year-old daughter, football player Kendra Cheers, at the Niagara-Wheatfield football field.

Remembering the Aud at the Riv

MUSIC: *The Riviera Theatre to host second annual Tribute to the Aud Concert Series.*

BY MIA SUMMERSON
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Before its demolition, the people of Western New York flocked to the Buffalo Memorial Auditorium to see their favorite bands, and for many of them, it would be the place where they formed some of their greatest memories of how music influenced their lives.

North Tonawanda’s Riviera Theatre will pay homage to all the remembered moments that took place at the popular venue with its Tribute to the Aud concert series, which runs through May. The series features cover bands that perform the music of some iconic groups that graced the Aud’s stage in the ‘70s and ‘80s.

“It’s really a cool line-up of classic rock, all bands that actually played at the Aud,” said Gary Rouleau, director of development for the Riviera. “It gives people a chance to come to a cool, intimate venue and think back to the old shows at the Aud, and the younger generation gets to experience the music their parents listened to.”

SEE **AUD** ON PAGE 6C



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Who Are You, a Massachusetts-based tribute to The Who, will open the Tribute to the Aud concert series on Saturday at the Riviera Theatre. They will perform the rock opera, “Tommy,” along with several Who hits from different albums.