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**Connecting**
Cathryn Ramin

How can we restrain hate?

SIX MONTHS AGO, I made a note in my black leather book: "Write about restraining orders and why they don't work." I was thinking about a weekend I'd spent with my friend Barbara and her son four summers ago.

Barbara owned a thriving graphics design company. She told me, in one of our first meetings, that she had a son and a husband at home. I added her to my list of major success stories.

I did not know her very well, so I was floored when she called me one day to tell me that her apparently perfect life had unraveled. She had left her husband. He was an alcoholic and a drug addict, she said. He hit her occasionally, and abused her emotionally most of the time. She'd married him six years earlier, when she was 32, because she wanted a husband and a child.

The first year wasn't bad, she said. She still thought the drinking was amusing, that he was sort of a good-time guy. But after their child was born, that illusion vanished. She stopped thinking that her love and support would cure him. She threw herself into her work, and her company took off.

At a professional meeting, Barbara encountered a man she liked a lot. Over the course of a year, their friendship turned into an affair. Her husband didn't seem to notice, or to care. Late one night, she walked into their apartment. Her husband was standing behind the front door. When she opened it, he grabbed her. He pushed her on to the carpet. For a moment she thought he was going to rape her, but that seemed unlikely since he'd shown no interest in sex in five months. Instead, he yanked out her diaphragm and beat her up.

HE LEFT in the morning, but not before he told her that he was going to kill her and the man she'd been seeing. Barbara had been matter-of-fact, but when she told me that she started to cry. He'd found her lover's phone number, and he'd already made several threatening calls. I gave her the number of a lawyer who specialized in such cases. I invited her to escape from the situation, at least for a weekend. She could bring her son up to my cottage in the mountains. They could relax.

The lawyer moved fast. Before the week was out, a temporary restraining order had been issued. Barbara's husband was prohibited from harassing her and from entering their home or workplace.

Hours before she and her son arrived, the phone started ringing. Three times, a gruff, drunken voice asked for Barbara. I told him he had the wrong number. The fourth time, he asked for "that slut," and informed me that I was running a whorehouse. I hung up. I tried to call Barbara in the city, but there was no answer. I let my answering machine pick up the phone, but I could hear his shouted messages, most of which were obscene. He knew where she was, he said. She was with a man, he said, and he was coming up to kill them both.

I sat in a rocking chair and listened to this drama unfold. I could not imagine that this was not a play. I should have called the police, but I did not. I could not tell the gentle, pink-faced local cop that a friend's husband was on his way up from New York and was planning to murder us all.

BARBARA'S CAR pulled into the driveway just before supper. Her face was gray. I sent her little boy outside to pick some lettuce before I told her what had happened. I played the tape for her, and she started to shake. He had followed her home from work yesterday, making threats all the while. He had been standing just outside the elevator when she came downstairs this morning, and he spat at her as she walked out.

She had called the police in both instances, but they hadn't responded. They had more important fish to fry. They would not come out for an alleged case of spitting. They told her to call again if there was an actual assault.

We ate our suppers quietly by the fire and listened to the wind rattle at the door. ■

Cathryn Ramin's column appears on Mondays and Thursdays.