

Law enforcement experts in domestic violence say a woman is in the most danger when she's trying to leave an abuser. That proved to be true in the case of Bob and Nancy Seaman, who had been married for 30 years and had what many would consider a nice lifestyle in an upscale suburb outside of Detroit.

Towards the end of their marriage, Bob had been unemployed as a civil engineer, lost a wrongful discharge lawsuit, and watched several investments go sour. While he was spiraling, Nancy's career was flourishing. According to his longtime friends and family, Bob's anger and rage had always been at the core of his personality. Nancy received the brunt of it their entire marriage.

Nancy could no longer take the fact that she was constantly covering up bruises with clothes and sunglasses. She's a very private woman of Italian descent, and family meant everything to her. She kept her mouth closed and tried to hide the reality of her life behind closed doors.

When Nancy asked her husband if they could divorce in peace, he told her, "You can die, die, die - that would be a good start."

May 2004 was going to be a new beginning for Nancy. She kept it a secret from Bob that five months prior to the tragic event, she purchased a condo with her father's money. She was an award-winning fourth grade school teacher and was waiting for the end of the school year, and her son's graduation from Purdue, to move and start a new life without abuse.

To this day, she doesn't know how her husband found out about the condo. On the morning of May 10th, Nancy was getting ready to teach school. She walked down the stairs and saw Bob sitting in the kitchen wearing the same clothes he had on the night before. She could sense his smoldering rage and knew something was about to happen.

When she walked into the kitchen, he looked up, confronted her about the condo, and cut her arm with a knife. He planned the attack on her that day by removing the inside deadbolt key, knowing Nancy would try to escape through the front door, like she had in the past.

When Nancy saw that the key was gone, she was in fear of her life. She ran to the garage to try to get into her car. But her husband chased her and threw her on the floor of the garage.

Nancy is a very small woman and was afraid of her 189-pound husband. She was rolling around on the garage floor when she grabbed the first defensive tool she could find ... a hatchet. She swung back and hit him in the head. Nancy didn't know he was dead with that first blow to the head. When he fell on top of her, she was in fear and panic, then she turned the knife on him, and repeatedly stabbed the man who had beaten and threatened her for 30 years.

Nancy was trying to save her life. She did not premeditate to kill her husband in a horrible physical altercation knowing he would overpower her, like he always did. The medical records proved the injuries she sustained that day were in self-defense.

Former Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Gorcyca (who made world news in 2017 for judicial misconduct) told another story about Nancy's life. The prosecutor pointed her finger at Nancy, blaming her for not leaving her husband earlier since she had a career, even though she had an escape plan in place.

Gorcyca was adamant Nancy purposely bought the hatchet with the intent on luring her husband into a brawling match. Even longtime friends of Bob Seaman testified in court that Nancy was a peaceful woman and Bob had been a bully since childhood.

Gorcyca was even cited with misconduct in the courtroom when she pulled a cover off a hatchet in front of the jurors. What the jurors didn't know is that Nancy Seaman was a card-carrying Craftsman and expert in the use of tools dating back to college.

For years, she patched the drywall when her husband punched holes in the walls of their Farmington Hills home. She even fixed the chandelier he yanked off the ceiling. The hatchet was purchased to cut down a small rotting tree in the yard, as the couple was planning to sell the house they could no longer afford after Bob lost his job.

A renowned expert in domestic violence, Dr. Lenore Walker was at Nancy's trial to testify on her behalf. She believed in Nancy's innocence, but was not

allowed to educate the jurors specifically on what led up to Nancy's behavior that day and afterwards, due to an archaic law in Michigan (People vs Christel) that limits expert testimony in domestic violence cases.

On Jan. 24, 2005, Nancy was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

“Shame on this prosecutor and her handling of this case,” Nancy’s son said after the trial. “She did so many injustices. Her entire case, she spent hand waving and dismissing 30 years of spousal abuse, which I thought was disgusting. She did a great injustice to battered women everywhere. I told my brother that mom did this in self-defense. Dad was going to kill her and you know he would have. My father had a violent temper, he was a fighter. Everyone who knew him testified to that.”

Ironically, prison initially brought an odd sense of relief. Nancy’s mind and body were still in shock. She could barely comprehend what happened that day, except wishing she was the dead one. But she was no longer living in a war zone in fear of another beating, or pretending life was normal when it wasn’t. Her hair even stopped falling out.

Nancy started counseling with the MDOC prison psychologist, Nels Thompson, who specialized in a domestic violence program. He diagnosed her with PTSD from all the years of abuse. He believed in her innocence, that she was a non-violent person, and had no doubt she killed her husband in self-defense.

So, how could they possibly send this woman to prison for life? In 2005, Thompson wrote a letter to advocate for justice on behalf of Nancy Seaman.

“In my professional opinion, violence is not natural to Ms. Seaman’s personality structure and the violence that occurred at the time of her husband’s death is related to her history of abuse, her fear of present abuse and the trauma of what she believed was happening between them. The previous violence that she had suffered caused her to believe that she was being attacked when he confronted her about leaving. When he fell on her it terrified her and caused her to fight as only a frightened individual would fight who believes they are fighting for their lives.”

About that same time, the Honorable Judge Jack McDonald, who was Nancy’s sentencing judge, read a letter Dr. Lenore Walker wrote explaining

what she wasn't allowed to talk about in court due to the law in Michigan ... the dynamics of Battered Women's Syndrome as it pertains to the actions and behavior of Nancy Seaman.

“Had the jury been able to hear (Battered Women's Syndrome) testimony, they would have had a better understanding of Mrs. Nancy Seaman's actions both before she killed her husband and afterwards, and they probably could have returned a verdict no greater than 2nd degree murder with a very strong possibility of a verdict of not guilty because of self-defense.”

In 2005, McDonald overturned Nancy's sentence at the state level and thought his career as an elected judge was over. Instead, he received nationwide support. Deep down McDonald knew Nancy couldn't have premeditated to murder her husband.

“It didn't even make sense. This is the only case that haunts me after 17 years on the bench,” McDonald said.

Nancy won her first appeal in 2005 and her second appeal in 2010, when Federal Judge Bernard Friedman ordered a new trial for lack of evidence of premeditation. The decision, however, was overturned by the Michigan Supreme Court.

Nancy Seaman's application for clemency was filed on April 6, 2017 by Carol Jacobsen of the Michigan Women's Justice & Clemency Project in Ann Arbor.

In August 2017, McDonald and Nels Thompson mailed Governor Snyder and every member of the Michigan Parole Board a letter advocating for Seaman's release. In their letters, they mentioned that a precedent was set in 2009 when former Governor Granholm commuted the sentences of three women who were sentenced to first-degree murder for killing their partners. Like Nancy Seaman, these women had judges advocating on their behalf - only they were released.

In his letter, Thompson offered her to meet with Snyder and the parole board so he could share his expertise and opinion on why Nancy Seaman should be given clemency.

How many people have their own sentencing judge speak up and advocate for their release from prison? McDonald never reversed a sentence until Nancy

Seaman. He has written three letters to Governor Snyder ... but has yet to receive a reply. In February 2017, Judge Friedman also wrote to Snyder recommending Nancy's release from prison.

Please Governor Snyder - respond to Judge Jack McDonald, Federal Judge Bernard Friedman, Nels Thompson and all of Nancy's supporters with her immediate release from prison. You have the power to give clemency and justice. We need you to act today.

Kelle Lynn is president of Justice Thru Storytelling, Inc.

Supportive documentation can be found at jtsadvocates.com

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