

***Real Change* beginning May 9, 2012: “The gravity of abuse” by Rosette Royale**

*Real Change* Assistant Editor **Rosette Royale** may work as a journalist, but his heart is in storytelling. He graduated from Colby College with a bachelor’s in English and minor in Creative Writing, then attended the fiction writing graduate program at Boston University. From there, he wrote for a small weekly periodical on Cape Cod, eventually landing a job as a staff writer for the *Provincetown Banner*, a weekly, progressive newspaper. He turned out copy there for three years. After working as a freelance journalist in the early 2000s, he moved to Seattle in 2003. In late 2004, *Real Change* hired him as a staff reporter. Since then he’s won four first-place awards from the Western Washington chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. In 2008, he won the Sigma Delta Chi Award, a national journalism honor from SPJ, for his three-part narrative series “The Man who Stood on the Bridge.” In 2010, he received a three-month fellowship from Seattle University to study family homelessness. That fellowship, however, led to a 22-month multimedia project tentatively called “The gravity of abuse.”

“The gravity of abuse” tells the story of an abusive relationship between Brandy, a recovering meth addict, and Richard, a pagan skinhead. Covering a time span from December 2008 to April 2012, the four-part series follows the couple from their initial meeting in Boise, Idaho to the relationship’s disintegration in Seattle as the pair confronted homelessness and substance abuse, issues compounded by Brandy’s pregnancy. Along the way, Brandy and Richard relied upon unlikely friendships to help them weather the storm. But in the end, Brandy faced an important question: How do I protect myself and my child? Her struggle to resolve this question drives the narrative, as it takes readers from shelters to Tent City 3 to a motel to the courthouse. Using Seattle as a backdrop, the series shows the trials one woman faces in her quest to survive.



Rosette at a seminar for the Seattle University Journalism Fellowships on Family Homelessness, 2010

**EXCERPT:**

Anywhere. He could be anywhere.

Around the corner of the apartment building where they live. Across the street at the construction site where he works. At the nearby bar where he sometimes goes for a beer. She looks around, nervous. What if he sees her?

But she can’t wait. Not anymore. She tightens her grip on the baby stroller and heads off into the night.

She has a plan: make it three blocks, to the shelter for women and children. Borrow someone’s cellphone, call 911. She started to dial the number back at the apartment, but he yanked the phone out of her hands. Then he put the phone in his mouth and bit it to pieces. She zooms the stroller down the sidewalk of South Othello Street, heading west toward Martin Luther King Avenue South, a busy intersection in a diverse, yet gentrifying, South Seattle neighborhood. On her right, an empty lot, on her left, an unfinished luxury apartment

complex. By this time of evening, heading on midnight, hardly a car drives by, the light rail station sits empty. She's all alone.

Except for her son. *Their* son. Tomorrow he'll turn seven months old. About 90 minutes ago, shortly after the yelling and screaming drew her neighbors into the hallway, the child cried, while she splashed water on her face in the bathroom of Apartment 21. Now he sits in his stroller, bundled up in his blue, fuzzy snowsuit.

In a rush, she forgot to grab her own coat. Not that she minds. She barely feels the chilly, spring air rushing over the red mark on her throat.

But she can feel her right cheek throb. In the bathroom mirror, she saw the knot, the swelling, the purplish-maroon hematoma forming under her eye. But it's weird. Because when he hit her, she couldn't really feel it. Like she lost consciousness... Did she? Did she black out?

Outside, she hustles the stroller down the sidewalk. Streetlights cast an orange halogen glow, throw shadows that pile up under bushes, shadows large enough to hide a grown man. If only she knew where he went when he left the apartment.

Nearly 16 months ago when she met him, back in Idaho, she wanted to change her life. He told her the same. They would do it, together. But things got in the way. The poverty, the drug use, the drinking, the yelling, the fighting, the fists, the fear — All of it clouded their vision. All of it soaked through their lives.

And other lives as well. The best friend. The neighbor. The roommate. At some point, each witnessed parts of this turbulent relationship. Others, after tonight, will hear of its violence. People in close contact will feel altered by their experience.

But none more so than the woman fleeing the tempest: Brandy Sweeney, 28, racing a stroller down a sidewalk on April 29, 2010.

Which stands to reason. After all, an abusive relationship moves through a life like an unpredictable storm. Marked by violent outbursts, and sometimes life-threatening flashes of rage, more than a million women a year experience some sort of physical assault by a partner, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Not every woman survives.

But for those women who pass through the storm, aided by those around them and their own ingenuity, they can find, waiting on the other side, a peace that seemed impossible when the dark clouds gathered. That's what Brandy seeks now. The calm after the storm.

*See the full four-part series beginning May 9, 2012 in Real Change. More information: [www.realchangenews.org](http://www.realchangenews.org)*