

Gruenberg's letter in The Aspen Times is as follows:

Dear Editor:

A recent letter to the editor, titled "Act before it's too late", written by Andrew Kole on 2/13/10 not only demonstrates some of Mr. Kole's opinions about the crime of domestic violence, but unfortunately illustrates some of society's basic misperceptions about relationship abuse. My intention is not to personally attack Mr. Kole (for all you have to do is listen to any of the news coverage about the Sheen case and you hear the same undertones coming from a variety of sources), but to provide some meaningful dialogue on the subject. Jokingly, Mr. Kole stated that he was "thinking of doing a show called Sheen vs. Klanderud Who should really be in jail?" Mr. Kole seemed to be outraged that on the one hand Mr. Klanderud was not being charged by the D.A. with a felony, and that on the other hand perhaps the taxpayers had already spent too much money pursuing the charges against Mr. Sheen.

In my opinion, this is not and should not be a case of one or the other. In crimes of domestic violence it is imperative that all offenders are held accountable by the criminal justice system, by the victims, by the larger community. If the D.A. were to not pursue the case against Mr. Sheen, the simple yet dangerous message that is sent to abusers and victims is that money, power, and influence buy leniency. For Mr. Kole to use comments such as "Brooke looked pretty good" and "the fact that they want to work it out together says a lot to me" as his basis for advocating for clemency for Mr. Sheen goes against all that is understood about domestic abuse. Unfortunately, it is common that a victim will want to reconcile with an abuser; not because the abuse didn't happen or that it was not at a high level of severity, but because this is the complex and insidious pattern of domestic abuse. Typically a victim will experience abuse and make attempts, whether physically or emotionally, to leave an abusive relationship up to 8 times and then return, before they ultimately end the relationship for good. I am not speaking specifically of the Sheen case, but rather in terms of basic tenets of truth about domestic violence.

Therefore, I want to help educate the community not to fall into the all too easy oversimplifications of understanding domestic abuse. Simply put, just because a victim says that abuse didn't occur, or that they don't look like a victim of abuse, or that they say that they want the relationship to continue, does not negate the significance, the evidence, and the effects of the abuse. Most victims will say that they don't want the relationship to end; they want the abuse to end. And the only way to achieve that is for all offenders to be held accountable and for all of us to become educated.

Jill Gruenberg