

# Parents turn heartbreak over daughter into activism

**They travel the state on mission to educate on teen dating violence**

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Elsa and Jim Croucher, the parents of Tina Croucher who was murdered at age 18 by her ex-boyfriend in southern Ohio, are working to to raise awareness about teen dating violence.(Mike Cardew/Akron Beacon Journal)

Elsa and Jim Croucher continue to be haunted by the death of their daughter.

That she died at 18 with so much left to experience.

That it was senseless and so violent.

That it happened in their home, four days before Christmas, at the hands of someone who professed to love her.

Yet the Crouchers have managed to turn their heartache into activism, going full throttle to get the word out about domestic violence, and teenage dating violence in particular.

Their hope is that what happened to their daughter — murdered by her ex-boyfriend — doesn't become some other parent's worst nightmare, too. Sadly, unhappy endings like Tina Croucher's play out too frequently in large cities, small towns, suburban, inner-city and rural communities alike.

That's why the Crouchers, of Monroe, are crisscrossing the state, leading school assemblies and seminars, meeting with professionals and victims, all in the name of prevention.

The Crouchers — who don't accept fees for their talks, only expenses — are founders and executive directors of Citizens Against Domestic Violence (CADV), a nonprofit in Butler and Warren counties. CADV offers information to those who desire freedom from violence and abuse.

The Crouchers also helped establish a battered women's shelter in Middletown.

Their mission was advanced by the passage of the Tina Croucher Act — House Bill 19, signed into law by Gov. Ted Strickland on Dec. 29 — requiring all school districts to adopt a dating violence policy and include dating violence education in the health curriculum.

The Crouchers weren't always the activists they are today. The first four years after Tina was murdered on Dec. 21, 1992, they were in "absolute, rock-bottom depression," Elsa Croucher said. "But we decided we can't live like this," her husband of 44 years said.

Their daughter's ex-boyfriend broke into the family's home that morning when he knew she would be alone, shot her as she lay sleeping in bed and then turned the gun on himself. The Crouchers say what sealed the deal on their decision to take their message on the road was a conversation with their daughter's tearful girlfriends at the funeral home.

"We knew! We should have told you!" the girls said to the Crouchers about the abuses Tina suffered at the hands of the ex-boyfriend. "We have a little girl up there saying, 'Go, Mom! Go, Dad!'" said Jim Croucher, pointing heavenward, sharing the couple's battle cry.

The Crouchers said they knew the boyfriend was a little odd, but at the same time, he could be a real charmer. "He even went to church with her and he was in the musical pageant," Elsa Croucher said.

Eventually, Tina Croucher did wake up to the fact that she needed to end the relationship. "She broke up with him twice," her mother said. Even so, he managed to lure her back, saying he had changed, that he had been to three counseling sessions.

Two weeks later, she broke up with him for the final time.

Because domestic violence is so prevalent in our country and in our schools, the Crouchers are wedded to trying to prevent it. "We're tired. We're weary. But we still believe we're making a difference," and they'll continue to do so "for as long as we can walk and talk," Jim Croucher said. "We've seen a lot of parents burying their children because of this."

The Crouchers say there are people trained to help victims out of bad situations — counselors, battered women's shelters, police, the courts.

"You don't have to die!" Elsa Croucher said in a plaintive voice.

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