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Gilded cages

Even Santa Fe women of wealth and status get trapped by domestic violence

By: [Corey Pein](#) 10/14/2009

The 70-something couple would not have stood out amid the shoppers at the Sanbusco Market Center, the upscale mall next to Pranzo Italian Grill, where the couple was about to sit down for lunch.

But this would not be a leisurely meal, like so many others that crisp May day.

Soon, the white-haired man was in the back of a patrol car, explaining himself to Santa Fe Police Department Officer Michelle Williams.

He still had food on his plate, according to Williams' report of his account, but his companion was in a hurry to leave. She had finished her martini and refused to eat. She was, he said, an alcoholic, much to his frustration.

He resented having to carry her purse because she was drunk. He resented having to walk her through the parking lot, where they began to argue over who had—or should have—the car keys. When she started cursing at him, he said, he lost his temper.

And not for the first time.

To a witness in the parking lot, it looked like he'd "clotheslined" his companion. He told Williams he'd swung the purse at her face. Either way, the woman fell to the ground, and passersby gathered to help her to her feet. Witnesses heard the man shout that he would "do away" with her, then kill himself.

The threat echoed one heard in dozens of domestic violence cases documented in Santa Fe over the last year. It was different in that the man shouting it was neither young nor poor.



Michael Snideman pleaded guilty to domestic violence last year and got a light sentence. A previous charge was dismissed in 2001.

Officer Williams arrived to find the couple's take-out containers strewn through the parking lot. The woman's face was bleeding and swollen. Her companion did not heed Williams' order to stand back, she wrote; instead, he "puffed up his chest, gritted his teeth, and moved toward me while he clenched his right fist and cocked his right arm back."

That move landed him in handcuffs. He spent a week in the Santa Fe County jail, charged with two counts of domestic violence and assault on a peace officer.

Prosecutors dropped that last charge. He pleaded guilty to domestic violence, and Santa Fe County Magistrate Sandy K Miera punished him with unsupervised probation, a \$114 fine and a written apology to the victim. It seemed a light sentence, considering the woman's evident injuries, the dire tone of his threats and that this was not the first time he had been arrested for beating a woman close to him.

Would it have turned out differently had the man been of lesser means?

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