

# Hope in a Pickup

Hitting the road to help abused women is a very personal mission for this trucker turned attorney

Wynona Ward spends her days driving a 14-year-old pickup along Vermont's narrow country lanes framed by pristine woods and blue-green mountains. "It's beautiful here," says Ward, who grew up in these parts and now crisscrosses the roads as a lawyer serving rural women. "But sometimes, the beauty hides tragic things."

Through her program, Have Justice—Will Travel, Ward brings legal services to women who have suffered physical abuse at the hands of husbands or boyfriends. Isolated by geography as well as poverty, her clients lack everything from telephones to driver's licenses. During her house calls, Ward, 48, holds consultations in the cab of her pickup, drives clients to the courthouse to file for restraining orders, and often finds shelters where they can stay with their children.

Ward knows firsthand the problems these women face. As children, she and her three sisters and brother were abused by their parents. She survived by bonding with her sisters and by leaving home at 17 to marry Harold Ward—"a boy from the better side of the tracks," she jokes. Wynona and Harold made a good living as a husband-and-wife trucking team for more than 15 years.

Ward's life changed dramatically in 1991, when she got word while on the road that her brother had molested a child in the family. Stunned, Wynona and Harold drove back to Vermont and vowed to see her brother convicted. "I loved him," Ward says today,

"especially when we were kids. But I hated what he had become."

After steering the child's family through the complicated legal process—and realizing how terrifying it was for victims—Ward decided to return to school and become a voice in court for poor women and their children. After earning her bachelor's degree, she was accepted at Vermont Law School. She

she had helped some three dozen women—most referred by the county's domestic-violence hot line. Her first client was a woman with three children; she called for assistance after being beaten by her boyfriend and locked out of her home. "When I pulled up, she was waiting outside," recalls Ward. "She was so quiet, she seemed afraid of her own shadow." Ward obtained a protective order, then encouraged the woman to study for her high school equivalency diploma and learn to drive.

Ward's assistance, in fact, often goes



*She wrote her law-school admission essay on helping to convict her brother and father of child abuse.*

wrote her law-school admission essay on helping to convict her brother and father of child abuse.

Ward graduated from law school in May 1998 and by September had secured funding for Have Justice—Will Travel. She equipped her lumbering old pickup—lovingly restored by Harold—with a laptop, CB radio, cell phone, and printer. Within six months,

beyond legal advice. One recent client had a husband who left her with bruises and a debt of more than \$10,000. Ward called the woman's creditors, got her on an extended payment plan, and taught her how to draw up a budget. "I never expected to be doing this," says Ward of her new vocation. "But seeing these women grow is so satisfying, I don't plan to stop."

—Linda Robayo

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN JAKUBEK