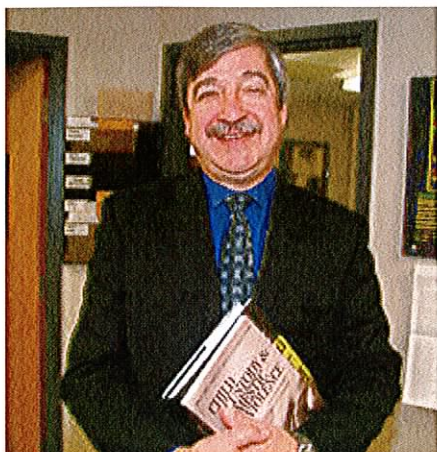


# Wearing two hats – academic and social activist

By Karmen Dowling

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*The son of escaped German Jews, Faculty of Education Professor Peter Jaffe carries a heightened awareness of the need to be socially active in combating discrimination of all forms.*

It took three decades, but Peter Jaffe can finally boast of being a full professor at Western.

The last time Jaffe taught his own classes at the university he was a Psychology graduate student in 1974. Shortly thereafter he founded the London Family Court Clinic, where he remained until last year when Western wooed him back with an opportunity he couldn't pass up.

The Faculty of Education was looking for a senior faculty member to teach on issues around violence and to take on the role of Academic Director for the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. Jaffe says the position was tailor-made for him.

"I am at a stage in life where I still enjoy doing the clinical work, but I wanted to spend more time writing and teaching. As you get on in years you realize you have to leave a legacy in the sense of training future professionals to understand the issues around violence against women and children."

Jaffe has just finished his first term of teaching a half-course elective for preservice teachers called "Safe Schools".

"It shows how far we've come," says Jaffe. "Thirty years ago we didn't have shelters for abused women and now we're giving a talk to future teachers about the warning signs of children living with violence in their home and how teachers might approach this both with students and with parents."

Through the centre, Jaffe is involved in at least six large community talks/events each year, with themes exploring cutting-edge issues and bringing together academic community practitioners.

He also has a number of research projects underway.

As a member of a domestic violence death review committee, Jaffe and other members look at issues around training, lack of resources, lack of collaboration and good communication and the need for public education.

"Most cases we've deemed with hindsight and without judgment that they appear predictable and preventable," says Jaffe. They also look at how to perform better risk assessments when women call police, go to a shelter or talk to co-workers. Risk management with the perpetrator is important. Where people may be lethal, the hope is that the appropriate intervention at the right time can save lives.

One of priorities of the Centre is to get men engaged in the issue of domestic violence, a subject about which men are often defensive.

The Sustainable Strategies for Violence Prevention is a study of two dozen elementary and secondary schools in Ontario. The objective is to understand the violence prevention process schools go through and how they shift from awareness a problem exists to developing programs that will be self-sustaining.

"I grew up with a family where social justice issues were very important," remembers Jaffe. "My parents were German Jews who escaped Nazi Germany in 1938 and settled in Montreal and they taught me about the meaning of discrimination based on race or culture and gender. There was a heightened vigilance around the issues. I knew that my role would never be a passive one - I would never sit and let things happen. My

job was to be a concerned citizen and speak out."

When he first arrived at Western more than 30 years ago, Jaffe got involved in the issue of domestic violence before there was much public awareness.

"It feels like we're 30 kilometres down a 100-kilometre road," he explains. "The good news is that people now know this is an issue, but we have to do a better job in taking action, getting professionals whose primary job isn't domestic violence to be aware of their roles and responsibilities."

Although he says his lifetime commitment to this field often doesn't feel like work, he admits it can be an overwhelming responsibility. That is when his wife puts him in check.

"I have a great partner who tries to keep balance in my life," says Jaffe.

He says he is also blessed with four sons, who are 24, 10, 7 and 4, with the eldest attending Western's medical school.

While joking he'll have to work forever, or at least wait to retire until he gets all of them through medical school, Jaffe says he definitely wants to continue working for a long time to come, especially at Western.

"I feel coming here and being a professor is an incredible privilege, in terms of job security and freedom," says Jaffe. "Every day it feels like a blank page where you can do the research that interests you and see the wonderful students who inspire and challenge you."