

**Writing Sample of Michael Blankenheim @ LetMikeyWriteIt.com** -- Concise, Compelling, Communication.

*Follows is an excerpt from the keynote speech of a national women's health conference. To review the full speech, contact Michael Blankenheim.*

...The fact that there is still much work to be done could not be clearer than in the Washington Post article I read earlier this month. It was about a young woman we'd all be proud to know, 15-year-old Sonye (pronounced sun-AY) Herrera of El Paso, Texas.

Her story is one that women of all generations can well understand. It is a story that happens in cities and towns and rural areas across the country. It happens to Latinas and African American women. It happens to White women and Asian American women.

Sonye's mother, aunts and uncles adored her. She sewed. Played sports. Kept a journal. Was in ROTC. Looked lovely at her first formal dance.

And Sonye's friends respected her. Thought she was strong. They were right. They didn't know just how strong, as the national and Texas media reported.

Thanksgiving weekend, 1999, was apparently like many others for Sonye and her mother. Her alcohol-enraged father came to their home and assaulted them. Hard. Sonye responded by doing something her mother could not do. She had her father arrested. Only 15, Sonye had the courage to break domestic violence's vicious cycle.

Sonye should be here telling you her story herself so all of us could celebrate her strength. But she can't.

That's because even though the police went to her house often, it seems there was:

- § No follow-up investigation by child welfare
- § No protective order from a court telling Sonye's father to stay away.
- § No counseling for her or her mother.
- § No intervention for her father's drinking.
- § No case manager.
- § No integrated care or coordinated effort to guide this family about would come next.

Five months later on Palm Sunday 2000, Sonye was again dialing 911 as her father rampaged. She begged for help to come. Quickly. Her father was drunk. She feared for her life and her mother's.

When police arrived half an hour later, they found Sonye shot dead by her father. He also killed Sonye's mother, and then turned the gun on himself, ending his own life.

As I've suggested, what makes Sonye's story sadder still -- if that's possible -- her tale isn't unique. El Paso isn't some horrible place where women are treated differently than anywhere else. It's a wonderful, vibrant community. What happened to Sonye there happens across the country.

Too often, when a woman takes the Herculean step of seeking help she doesn't get it. Or she gets it in piecemeal, inadequate fashion.

### WHO FAILED SONYE? WE ALL FAILED HER.

All of this happened to Sonye and thousands like her, even though we've studied the dire effects of domestic violence for a quarter of a century.

We know how it intertwines with alcoholism, drug abuse and mental illness. We know sutures must be applied to all these wounds -- physical as well as emotional -- if they are to heal. We know a seamless, integrated system of services using the latest in science-based knowledge is vital, is desperately needed.

That's why hundreds are here for the next several days. To teach each other. To share knowledge of what works and what doesn't. To share experiences, joys and fears.

By the close of this conference, let's identify ways to ensure that the next time a young woman like Sonye or her mother, sister, grandmother or girlfriend asks for help, there'll be a better chance she and her family can be saved.