

An assault and a healing

by [Linda Mercadante Ph.D.](#) in the [November 17, 1999](#) issue

*Working with Available Light: A Family's World after Violence*, by Jamie Kalven

Hyde Park, home of the University of Chicago, is an intellectual warren in the midst of poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Those who choose to attend school or work there know that they must balance their concern for personal safety against their wish to take advantage of the community's incredible resources. Photographer Patricia Evans was brutally attacked there one pleasant autumn day in 1988 while out for a run along the lakefront. Fortunately, she was ingenious and plucky enough to distract the man and get away before she sustained lasting physical injury, but emotional damage had been done to her, to her husband, writer Jamie Kalven, and to their two young children. This book is Kalven's sensitive, compassionate and labored effort to document the tragedy and its aftermath.

At the book's end Evans is slowly emerging from the dark, but is forever changed by the events of five years earlier.

The best thing about the book is Kalven's slow realization of the threat of violence that women daily endure. His book is as much about his awakening—through his love for his wife—as it is about her gradual healing.

As a victim of violence myself, I wanted to like this book. I wanted to feel that someone had understood how violence can shape a life, and the isolation and despair that are its permanent scars. Kalven has tried to do this, but he has only begun the process.

More than anything else, his book expresses shock at the reality of evil. I felt distant from Kalven and his family on this point. They seem unaware of how unique and fortunate their lives have been. Their experience of evil has been buffered by rich and deep privileges. They have had loving, educated parents, intact families, intellectual stimulation, peaceful mountain retreats, a rich cultural environment, interesting and intelligent friends and proximity to enormous resources.

Evans's courage is beyond doubt. It helped that she did not come to this experience with the instincts of a victim. She bravely fought off not just the attacker, but the

temptation to let the attack turn her into someone who permanently felt victimized. But she had the help of friends, a husband, children and a rich community. The evil she had to confront was not associated with those she loved or with the institutions of society. All this cleared a space for her healing. I wish to God that all who have been struck by violence had resources like hers.