

Disarming an Attacker

On Monday, August 9, 1993, a 31-year-old woman, Sophia White, burst into the hospital nursery at UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, wielding a .38-caliber handgun. She had come gunning for Elizabeth Staten, a nurse whom she accused of stealing her husband. White fired six shots, hitting Staten in the wrist and stomach.

Staten fled, and White chased her into the emergency room, firing once more. There, with blood on her clothes and a hot pistol in her hand, the attacker was met by another nurse, Joan Black, who did the unthinkable.

Black walked calmly to the gun-toting woman, hugged her and spoke comforting words. The assailant said she didn't have anything to live for, that Staten had stolen her family.

"You're in pain," Black said. "I'm sorry, but everybody has pain in their lives ... I understand, and we can work it out."

As they talked, the hospital invader kept her finger on the trigger. Once, she began to lift the gun as if to shoot herself. Nurse Black just pushed her arm down and continued to hold her. At last, Sophia White gave the gun to the nurse.

She was disarmed by a hug. It's amazing what compassion can do.

Every day, in the centers of Life Care and Century Park and in the work of Life Care at Home, our associates face people who have pain in their lives, who are burdened with fear and uncertainty. The caregivers' touches, hugs and soothing words help bring peace and comfort.

--Beecher Hunter