NEW YORK — Valerie Harper is crusading to promote “battered wives,” but admits “battered husbands” also need help from battered wives.

The former star of Rhoda has been here arranging to film the story of a woman who’s in prison for hiring a man to kill her battering husband. While visiting the prisoner in Indianapolis, Valerie heard a couple of husband-battersers talking.

“ALL I DID TO MY HUSBAND WAS PUSH HIM,” one wife said.

“Yeah,” replied the other, “with some scissors.”

“Some people think if the woman had stabbed her husband she’d have been acquitted.” Valerie Harper said. She and her boyfriend and business associate Tony Cerocchi believe it will be a great dramatic role for her.

But the idea that husbands also get abused keeps intruding.

“Men use their fists — or their belts — but women have great weaponry, too,” Miss Harper pointed out. “Their tongues. They can say very cutting things.”

MISS HARPER WAS heroine of a headline that said, “Loses Weight, Gains Mate.” Cerocchi helped her reduce 25 pounds, then she fell in love with him.

“I strongly defend women who are sexually harassed in business — who go through the casting couch routine. But lately,” she said, “I hear that men are now subjected to the same humiliation — from women.”

Midnight Earl

Carol Channing told me Ann Miller’s 50th birthday party at Bruns! that when she and Eddie Bracken take the national company of Sugar Babies on the road, “I won’t do Ann’s tap dances because I’m not a tap dancer. I do the soft shoe with George Burns, that’s about all.”

The road show will be tailored to fit Carol’s style; she wants to do ad libs, for example. Carol won’t try to copy Ann in any way. “You can’t clone Ann Miller,” said Harry Rigby, producer with Terry Allen, “and if you tried, you’d see you.”

Mikhail Baryshnikov, the Russian Don Juan, answered questions after a preview of Baryshnikov on Broadway at the Hudson Tea Room. When asked the difference between ballet and Broadway dancing, he hesitated and somebody saved the night by saying, “What we’re talking about.” In the special, Mikhail suggests to Lisa Minnelli that she do a chorus line finale; Lisa says, “You ask a lot.”

Misha replies, “You don’t ask, you don’t get.”

TODAY’S BEST LAUGH: “Last year I taught my son to drive a car, this year he’s teaching me to ride a bike.” (Steven Knudsen)

KAREN PEARL: “I took the Madame to the Port Authority,” says Wayland Flowers at Grand Finale, “and if anybody’s an authority on port, it’s the Madame.”

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By Earl Wilson

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