

YWCA on the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women

December 6, 2009

Twenty years ago today, one man armed with a shotgun walked into the Montreal École Polytechnique, separated the women from the men, and took fourteen of their lives.

I was ten years old at the time. I remember feeling the wave of grief, anger, and confusion from across the country. How could this happen in Canada? My own adolescent confusion settled on the question, why only women? What was this "feminism" that the killer seemed to hate so much?

I've come a long way since then, learning as much as I could about feminism, from society and from the long line of matriarchs in my family. Society has come a long way too, embracing at least the *concept* of gender equity. In practice, however, there is a lot of ground to cover.

Canadian women continue to have more violent crimes perpetrated against them, and as of 2007, were almost four times as likely to be murdered by their spouse. Women of my ancestry - Aboriginal women - are three times more likely to experience spousal violence. In family-related sexual assault cases, young women are the victim eight times out of ten (Statistics Canada).

But, the last few decades have seen significant improvements. Since the implementation of the gun registry, created in response to the massacre, the rate of murders with rifles and shotguns dropped by more than 78%. In 1991, more than 1400 Canadians were killed with guns. Now it is fewer than 800. Murders of women with guns plummeted from 85 in 1991 to 32 in 2004. Spousal homicide is at its lowest rate in 30 years. Yet, the registry is currently under threat with the debate of Bill C-391.

We cannot lose sight of the struggle. It is true that gender equity encompasses more than preventing violence against women, and we should not limit the debate to one issue. However, we must not forget that different sections of society experience different levels of violence. A problem alleviated for some women is still very real for other women.

On this National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, let us honour the lives of those fourteen souls who were taken so wrongly by not giving up our feminist ideals. Let us spread the cause, to our young women who may not know what feminism is, to our young men who deserve a balanced perspective, to grown men who can be the best champions of women's rights, and to our elders who were raised in more segregated times.

You can do your part by supporting local shelters, non-profits, and other front line agencies that make this part of their mission.

Thank you,

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