

Is this News?

It was in the kitchen of a dear friend, in the thin, white and yet surprisingly warm November sunlight on what I thought was just another ordinary Thursday morning that I was forced to come to terms with a realization that had been shadowing me for some time. I hadn't even taken my coat off when my friend plunked the latest issue of MacLean's down in front of me on the table. "And we thought it was just us . . .," she said handing me a steaming cup of coffee. Okay.

There it was right on the front cover, the phrase that says it all: "Women in Fear." A quick thumb through the glossy inner pages convinced me that I really didn't want to read about women who had been beaten to death with baseball bats, nor did I want to think about shattered bones or disfigured faces, not this this morning anyway. I shuddered and put the magazine down, pretended to hunt for my cigarettes, and ended up reaching for the article again a moment later.

My friend and I are both survivors of long-term abusive relationships and although we have more or less put the horrors of the "good old days" behind us some months earlier, we have finally admitted to ourselves and to each other that although we have left our abusive situations, we nonetheless continue to fear for our immediate physical safety. At first we thought this nameless fear that lies like a cold marble in our bellies was just a residual affect of having lived under the reign of domestic terrorism for so long, or maybe it was just another step in the process of healing. But it is not just us. We are not alone.

There are a lot of other Canadian women out there who feel just like us. MacLean's revealed Gallup figures that show 56-68 per cent of women are afraid to walk in their own neighborhoods after dark (MacLean's November 11, 1991), but I wonder at the percentage of us who are more afraid in our homes? We all know the statistics: that one in four Canadian women can expect to be sexually assaulted at some point in her life: that three sexual assaults are reported every hour in Canada: that, on average, two women die each week at the hands of a current or former husband or lover - at least 234 Canadian women died this way in 1990. But most frightening, perhaps, is the number of women who just vanish or turn up dead some days or weeks later.

The names and stories of our

fallen sisters run like a macabre litany across the pages of newspapers all over this country. Here is just a sampling from the past few weeks:

. . . in Laval, a 29 year old woman dies of strangulation at the hands of her husband who proceeded to stab their seven month old son and five year old daughter more than 20 times; a 17 year old single mother with a month old infant was repeatedly stabbed (to death) in Sydney by her former boyfriend, age 20; a teenager from Oromocto goes missing and is found several days later in the river - her friend, a minor, is picked up for questioning but nothing more is said; a 14 year old Ontario girl is set on fire by her former boyfriend, and another 14 year old girl disappears from a friend's wake and turns up dismembered in a lake two weeks later; a Calgary woman was brutally raped and assaulted in her own home - Calgary police took 21 minutes to respond to her 911 call; a 35 year old Vancouver woman was killed by being thrown from the third floor

window of her "date's" boarding house - he was charged with aggravated assault; a 29 year old Salisbury, N.B. woman is murdered in her own home by a man who is awaiting a sexual assault charge in Ontario - his wife had posted his bail; a 25 year old mother of three was strangled (presumably by her boyfriend) in Sydney, N.S.; a 47 year old mother failed to arrive home despite a call to one of her daughters - her car was found blood and murdered in a ditch outside of Toronto; a 32 year old mother was killed by her former lover who also critically wounded her estranged husband before killing himself - this took place in front of the couple's children; in Montreal, the mother of a newborn infant was raped at knifepoint in her own home. Within the week, a 35 year old woman was killed by her husband who then killed himself. Also in Montreal, a 17 year old student failed to return home from a night club. Her coat and one lone pump were found in the club, but there are no other leads. In Toronto, another 17 year old

The Wimmin's Room by Flame

was beaten, choked and sexually assaulted on an upper deck of a commuter train heading into the city. A 19 year old Winnipeg waitress was abducted from her workplace by her former common-law husband and was found floating in the Red River the following day. Another 50 year old Manitoban woman was stabbed to death with a knife from her own kitchen, while yet another 43 year old Portage La Prairie woman, mother of two, was found clubbed to death with a baseball bat. Last week in Ottawa, a 31 year old lawyer was dropped in her tracks in the street as she let herself into her car. She was shot in the chest with a bolt from a cross bow. Her estranged was waiting across the street in a rented car; he had even gotten himself a coffee.

And this list is by no means complete. Women are under siege which is something we have always known, but now even parliament admits to the existence of "men's war against women" that runs the gamut from poisonous jokes to murder.

Is this evidence of a feminist backlash? Is violence against women growing, or are men killing, maiming, raping and/or psychologically damaging women in the same numbers as they have always done, except that in the past, their victims would remain silent? Is this the price women pay for speaking out against all forms of male violence?

In Halifax, the women editors of Pandora, a women's newspaper by, for, and about women, have been receiving death threats on their telephone answering machine for refusing to publish letters from men, specifically from one man who wishes to publish a letter detailing his experience with a child custody matter.

At Queen's University, the editors of Surface have also received their "politically correct death notices". The author(s) of this college on newsprint states that "we're gonna rape u dykes. In fact, we will kill any and all feminists slowly." Excuse me, but this is news?

A Last Look at the Senate

"The Senate will in all likelihood continue to exist as at presently constituted for many years to come, largely because of its convenience to the dominant political party, and the general indifference of the Canadian people." R. MacGregor Dawson, 1949

One way or the other, our Senate as presently constituted will shortly be consigned to the dustbin of history, an undemocratic oddity inherited from the British, lasting long after it lost the support of the Canadian people.

On its 124th anniversary, before it disappears forever, let's take a last look back at what Sir John A. MacDonald first called in 1865: "The Upper House—the controlling and regulating, but not the initiating branch, the House which has the sober second-thought in legislation."

As Ottawa tries to reconcile the demands of Quebec and the regions in its design of our new Senate, they might remember the words of George Brown, also from 1865: "Our Lower Canadian friends have agreed to give us representation by population in the Lower House on the express condition that they shall have equal representation in the Upper House. On no other condition could we have ad-

vanced a step."

As early as 1872, Goldwin Smith pointed out the central problem which bedevils us to this day: "For every vacancy there is a claimant who has done something or expended something for the party, and whose claims cannot be set aside. The Minister may feel as strongly as his critics how much the Senate would be strengthened and his own reputation enhanced by the introduction of some of the merit, ability, and experience which do not take to the stump. But party demands its pound of flesh."

Lord Dufferin, 1874: "An absurdly effete body."

In 1882, George Alexander, a senator himself, disagreed with Dufferin: "The people could not elect a body such as the members of this House are, for intelligence and experience, and we ought to desire to raise the Senate in the public estimation so that the people will love and honour this body."

Judging by this comment in *The Week*, 1884, George didn't have much luck: "The Senate of Sir John MacDonald is nothing but a political infirmity and a bribery fund."

Sir Wilfrid Laurier gave us this unblushing explanation in 1906: "When I have come to the moment of selection, if I have to select between a Tory and a

Liberal, I feel I can serve the country better by appointing a Liberal than a Conservative, and I am very much afraid that any man who occupies the position I occupy will feel the same way, and that so long as the appointing is as it is today, in the hands of the First Minister, we stand little chance of reform."

Sir Richard Cartwright gave us this justification in 1906: "The value of a Senate is not only in what the Senate does, but in what the Senate prevents other people from doing."

Canada's greatest humourist, Stephen Leacock, 1913: "Whatever be the virtues of an ideal system of appointment, the Canadian Senate is a mere parody of it."

Shortly before his appointment in 1920, George Foster wrote this in his diary: "As to myself, I have today signed my warrant of political death. How colourless the Senate—the entering gate to coming extinction."

R. M. Dawson, in 1922: "The senators take their seats in the Upper House as violent partisans, men whose minds have become warped and twisted, whose chief end in life is to promote the interests of those to whom they owe their position."

H.J. Pearce, in 1925: "Over this chamber there might be inserted *Requiesat in pace*."

The acid-tongued J.S.

Perspectives by William Stewart

Woodsworth, speaking in the House of Commons in 1926, gave us this timeless gem: "For ruining a life, six months with the option of a fine; for stealing an automobile, two years; for criticizing a government, twenty years; a pretty fair indication, let me say, of the relative values according to the standards which now exist. I have given these penalties. What is the penalty for debauching a government department? A senatorship."

John Haig, in 1950: "We members of the Senate are the highest class of pensioners in Canada."

Harold Town, in 1964: "We have one, mind you only one, really well-run home for the aged and infirm (prematurely or otherwise) and it is called the Senate."

And finally, this observation from Canada's greatest man of letters, Robertson Davies, in 1967: "The Senate should be reformed so as to consist entirely of the Cabinet."

So long Senate. If nothing else, you've given us a good laugh. I wonder, what will the Brunswickan be writing about your new incarnation, 124 years hence?