

# WOMEN PROTEST ABUSE

On Friday, 15th of September 1989, the Fredericton Rape Crisis Center sponsored the Fifth Annual Take Back the Night March. The march was one of the thousands held annually across Canada and the United States to protest the fear and violence that women and children endure on a daily basis. The event is also a celebration of sisterhood, unity, and empowerment. It is an opportunity for women's voices to be heard as they work towards their common goal: a world in which violence, sexual harassment, rape, battery and incest are no longer heard of.

This year the march began with an opening rally on the lawns between the SUB and the men's residence. Over the past several years, the Rape Crisis Center had received many reports of sexual assault and harassment at UNB. We hoped that, by beginning the march on campus, we would raise student's awareness of sexual violence and also make our services known particularly to the women at UNB. The march publicised around the campus by posters and radio announcement and invitations were sent to the resident students via the don of each house. The only students who responded were a group of about 20 women from the Lady Dunn Hall who walked over with their don Lynn Frases to attend the opening rally. In the mist of the apparent indifference and apathy of the UNB student populations, it was encouraging that these women came out to show their support and concern. It was hoped that many more young women would participate as the majority of the women march each year are older women (30+) in spite of the fact that 80% of sexual assault victims are between the ages of 15 to 21. More disturbing than the apparent disinterest of the students were the cat calls and laughter that could be heard from some of the men's residences while two members of the Rape Crisis Center were making the opening speeches.

Carrying placards bearing messages and chanting slogans such as "Women unite, take back the night!", "Not the church, not the state, women must control their fate!", and "Yes means yes, no means no, however we dress where ever we go!" The marchers proceeded down through the main gates, along Beaverbrook, down Regent, and along Queen Street. At Queen Street, the marchers left the sidewalk and walked along the right-hand lane (contrary to the conditions imposed by the City Council). Many passers by in a car on foot stopped to cheer us on to join the march.

The march ended at City Hall

with closing addresses by guest speakers Kit Holmwood, national president of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League and Marguerite Levesque, president of the local chapter of the Federation des Dames d'Acadie (Acadian Women's Federation). In her speech, Ms Holmwood illustrated the inter-relatedness of different forms of violence against women by describing the devastating psychological and physical effects on women of the restriction of access to safe, legal abortions. Speaking in French and English, Ms Levesque expressed the need for power to be shared among all members of society so that violence and obsession can end.

The organizers of the march had invited several other women to speak on behalf of different

minority groups but most were unable to attend because of prior commitments.

The evening ended with a reception at the Rape Crisis Center. The march was once again a success helping to raise both society's awareness of sexual assault, and women's moral in the struggle against violence. The women of the center would like to express their gratitude to the men who helped us with the reception, with child care, and with setting up the P.A. system, also to Tony's Music Box and the Fredericton Recreation Department for their generous loan of equipment.



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