

Week of Reflection

MESS OF REJECTION

Making a difference one person at a time

I was eighteen when those women in Montreal were murdered. I was visiting some friends in St. John's, sitting down to a dinner table parked in front of the tv, watching the supper time news. It was five years ago and I forget some details like whether I cried or if I was angry or if I was just shocked. The only thing I can be sure about is my host's reaction:

"Dammit. You can bet this is really gonna make it hard to get a gun now."

I suppose those weren't his words exactly and I'm sure he said something like what an awful thing to happen, but it was his gun control comment that stuck in my mind.

Five years ago. Fourteen women. One killer. It's hard to even think of them as people now, they've just become numbers. I think that's the problem with violence. So many people just see the overwhelming statistics and often forget that there are people behind those numbers. Chances are some of those faces behind the statistics are your neigh-

bours, friends or family. Or my neighbours, my friends and my family.

There is a saying that is often used during the week. It's "First mourn then work for change." I think part of the problem is that it's difficult to mourn for so many people. It's so hard to imagine that many women dying by one person's hand that it's almost become unbelievable. I no longer think of fourteen women after talking to Suzanne Laplante-Edward whose daughter Ann-Marie was one of the women killed. Instead, I think of Ann-Marie and her friend Genevieve who died holding each other after Marc gunned them down in the school cafeteria. Suzanne's story has made the Montreal Massacre more of a personal issue than any other event during the Week of Reflection has.

Week of Reflection, the week we commemorate the fourteen women that were killed is almost here and I'm trying to figure out what I've accomplished since last year's commemoration. I had promised that I

was through with mourning and I was going to work for change. Well, I haven't written to the government asking for better gun control laws, I haven't broken up any fights and I don't think I've even signed any petitions lately.

I have been writing however, and around this time of year I have this strong urge to explain why I'm a feminist, as if it was some kind of mystery that needed explaining. My argument normally starts off with "Who wouldn't be a feminist? All feminists want is equality," or something unobtrusive like that. Every now and then I'll add something equally inane like "I've even laughed at some sexist jokes."

Ha ha.

So Week of Reflection is here again meaning exhausted organizers are hoping people show up to their events and most students are either wondering what Week of Reflection is or why we don't just let the whole thing rest. I've often wondered about the same thing myself and in the

process have found a few answers.

Last year I was part of a group of women that did readings for Week of Reflection. The piece was written by Dalhousie law students and covered everything from judges' ridiculous comments about domestic violence to retelling the sequence of events of the Montreal Massacre. The readings had done very well at the law school and in the SUB lobby, so we decided to aim for a bigger audience by doing one in the SUB cafeteria at noon.

Bad idea.

Even though we were using microphones, while we described horrific scenes of violence I could still hear the constant chatter and laughter of the cafeteria diners surrounding me. My hands shook as I gripped my script and tried to raise my voice while I could feel my face burning in embarrassment and frustration. When the reading finally ended all I wanted to do was hide someplace where no one could see me cry, but while making my escape I was stopped by one of

the diners. He thanked me for the reading and assured me that there were people who both listened to and appreciated our reading.

I must have been concentrating really hard on keeping the tears back, because I forgot about the whole incident until today when I tried to explain what Week of Reflection accomplished to a friend and used the incident as an example. Maybe there were 200 people who couldn't care less about remembering fourteen women killed in 1989, but through that reading, at least one person was moved enough to speak up.

Personally, I think that's a damn good start.

Judy Reid

Lessons to reflect on

by Milton Howe

People of my parents' generation talk about how they remember where they were when John F. Kennedy was shot. They can close their eyes and relive the fateful moment, running it through their minds frame by frame. And as our generation grows up and moves out into the world, we cultivate our memories and commemorate our own unique tragedies in our own ways.

We all remember when the space shuttle Challenger exploded, or perhaps the suicide of Kurt Cobain. And I will never forget the tears I shed when cancer forced Terry Fox to stop running for good. No generation is without its share of sorrowful moments but I doubt if any will live longer in my mind than the murders at l'Ecole polytechnique on December 6, 1989.

I remember the way I felt when I woke up and went to work the next morning. I was stunned, still reeling

from that graphic illustration of the awesome power of a single man. It underscored the importance of not letting even one person slip through the cracks of the progress previous generations had made toward social harmony. We all saw it: one man dramatically undoing so much of the work of thousands who have laboured for change.

Most of the men in the office, born in the '40s and '50s, seemed that day to be more moved by the idiocy than the atrocity of the events at l'Ecole polytechnique. They laughed at the inarticulateness of the English translation of Marc Lépine's maniacal declaration to the women before he murdered them: "You're all a bunch of feminists."

I tried to reassure myself that this was just a defense mechanism they were employing to protect their feelings from public scrutiny — a common occurrence in such arbitrary social groupings as a large office. But I was not reassured. This event was

just too horrific. It did not merit being treated as merely a jovial discussion around the water-cooler of another fleeting news item.

I realised then that it is our generation who will preserve the memory of the women who died that day. It is important that we keep the Montréal massacre fresh in our memories for years to come. Not just as an example of why we need stricter control of firearms in our society. Not just as a platform for women to assert their place in our society. Not just as a way to impress humility upon men for their millennia of social dominance.

Don't get me wrong, these are certainly some of the important lessons to be learned from the Montréal massacre. But the foremost lesson is simple. We look at December 6, 1989, and we see, in the form of 14 lost lives, the disastrous consequences of permitting the rift between men and women to continue to manifest itself on even the minutest of scales.

A week to work together

I was living in Montreal when the massacre occurred, a fifteen year old girl without any knowledge of what it was to be afraid because I am female. At this time of year, I am brought back to a time when the world responded to a horror in my backyard.

At the time, my friends and I did not think to bond as women. It did not occur to us to revel in our femininity. Young men and women alike, we were afraid. Angry, confused but

mostly afraid.

Five years later I have found myself thinking of the Week of Reflection in many ways. The anger is not so fresh, the pain has faded, but the fear remains. When I walk dark streets alone, when I can't afford the cab fare, when men do not pay attention to the Week of Reflection, the fear is still with me.

These are not Women's issues. They are people issues. The fear cannot be eliminated without both sexes

demanding a new attitude, a forward motion while keeping the past in perspective. This is a request for men on campus to acknowledge that their place in the Week of Reflection is beside the women involved, not hidden behind the scenes, feeling ignored and separate from the process.

Participation in this week's activities is important, so that nothing like this can happen again to anyone.

Joanna Mirsky

On December 6 1989, a man walked into l'Ecole Polytechnique at the Université de Montreal.

L'Ecole Polytechnique is primarily an engineering school and this was the last day of classes. Many students were giving their last presentation and would be graduating in the near days. The man who entered the school began firing randomly at women students in the hallway with the semi-automatic rifle he carried. He entered a classroom on the second floor, separated the men from the women and sent the men outside.

He shouted, "You're all a bunch of feminists. I hate feminists!" And then opened fire. He leapt onto desks and fired at women cowering underneath their desks. He continued after through the halls where his rampage ended with his suicide. After approximately 20 minutes, 27 people had been shot and 14 women killed.

This tragic event launched the nation, especially campuses, into a whirl of emotions: rage, mourning, confusion and backlash. While many people saw this as indicative of the misogyny all too common in our society, others called it an isolated incident.

As Nova Scotia students went into the Christmas exam period, Women's Studies profs at Dal and Mount Saint Vincent University received death threats. Women Studies exams at Dal were written with security personnel standing at the doors. Feminists organized demonstrations and safe spaces for people to vent their confusing feelings.

At Dalhousie, Week of Reflection began in 1990 to remember Montreal and all women who continue to suffer and survive violence.

Purple Ribbon Campaign

The purple ribbon campaign is an annual event to:
-remember the 14 women who died in Montreal on December 6, 1989
-remember all women who have died violently or continue to live with abuse
-raise awareness of the pervasiveness of violence against women
-raise funds to continue work against violence against women

During Week of Reflection wear a Purple Ribbon to remember and reflect.