

We must not forget....

AT FIRST, THEY VIEWED IT AS A PRANK, SOME KIND OF COLLEGIATE FARCE IN KEEPING WITH THE FESTIVE SPIRIT THAT MARKED THE second-last day of classes at the University of Montreal's Ecole Poly-technique. The man was young, about the same age as most of the roughly 60 engineering students gathered in Room 303 on the second floor of the yellow-brick building sprawled across the north slope of the mountain in the heart of the city. He entered the classroom slowly a few minutes past 5 on a bitterly cold afternoon. There was a shy smile on his face as he interrupted a dissertation on the mechanics of heat transfer. In clear, unaccented French, he asked the women to move to one side of the room and ordered the men to leave. The request was greeted with titters of laughter. "Nobody moved," recalled Prof. Yvan Bouchard. "We thought it was a joke." an instant later, Bouchard and his students discovered that what they were confronting was not joke.

Shots: The young man, who would later be identified as a 25-year-old semirecluse named Marc Lépine, lifted a light, semiautomatic rifle and fired two quick shots into the ceiling. "You're all a bunch of feminists, and I hate feminists," Lépine shouted at the suddenly terrified occupants of Room 303. He told the men to leave - they did so without protest - and, as one of the young women attempted to reason with him, the gun-toting man opened fire in earnest. Six of the women were shot dead. Over the course of the next 20 minutes, the young man methodically stalked the cafeteria, the classrooms and the corridors of the school, leaving a trail of death and injury in his wake. In four separate locations scattered around three floors of the six-storey structure, he gunned down a total of 27 people, leaving 14 of them dead. Finally, he turned his weapon against himself, blowing off the top of his skull. Most of the injured and all of the dead - except for the gunman himself - were women.

It was the worst single-day massacre in Canadian history. And the very senselessness of the act prompted an outpouring of grief, indignation and outright rage. The City of Montreal and the Province of Quebec declared three days of mourning. Vigils were mounted in cities and towns from coast to coast. Churches held memorial services. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and his wife, Mila, travelled to the school to offer their condolences on behalf of the rest of Canada. "It is indeed a national tragedy," he said. Earlier, with the flag atop Parliament fluttering at half-staff, the Prime Minister had asked a hushed House of Commons: "Why such violence in a society that considers itself civilized and compassionate?" extracted from Maclean's Magazine.

1. Originally published in *From the Margin to the Centre: Proceedings of the 25th Anniversary Meeting of the Atlantic Association of Sociologists and Anthropologists*, Janet Burns, Gail Pool and Chris McCormick, eds. (University of New Brunswick, Saint John). Maureen Larkin was a graduate student in Sociology at Memorial University in St. John's in 1989-90. She has now returned to her job at the Coady Institute in Charlottetown, P.E.I. Georgina MacNab-DeVries is an Associate Researcher at Concordia University in Montreal, president Elect of the AASA and is carrying out research in Cape Breton. Barbara Moore is a fulltime doctoral student in the Department of Education at Dalhousie University and a part-time lecturer at Acadia and Mount St. Vincent Universities. Barbara Neis, Jim Overton and Peter Sinclair are all members of the Department of Sociology at Memorial University. Neis is an Assistant Professor with research interests in the areas of fishery and women's studies, Jim Overton is Associate Professor with research interests in unemployment and social policy and President of the ASAA. Peter Sinclair is Full Professor in Sociology with research interests in rural/regional underdevelopment, maritime sociology and education, Jim Sacouman is Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at Acadia University in Wolfville.

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