



The Week of Reflection: closer to Montreal than we think

Have you ever seen a deer caught in the glare of your headlights? Transfixed — like it knows it's going to get it. That's what happened to me. I have always considered myself a strong woman. I am combative, wary and aggressive. I never thought I could be a victim of sexual assault. I was not the "the type". Perhaps these attitudes gave me a feeling of security I needed: it can't happen here. But it did — right here, on Dalhousie campus, in the Killiam Library.

It is a busy time for everyone. The end of classes, the beginning of exams. Students spending extended periods of time at the library, numbed from the amount of information being absorbed but nonetheless excited for the upcoming holidays. The atmosphere must have been the same in Montreal at the Ecole Polytechnique eight years ago. An engineering school consumed with the second-last day of classes, wrapping up the last of the oral presentations, or printing out the last essay. Ingesting a coffee in the cafeteria, everyone a little silly from the caffeine and the stress.

At about five minutes after five on December 6, 1989, a man walked into the Ecole Polytechnique carrying a garbage bag concealing a semi-automatic rifle and two 30-clip magazines. It took him 20 minutes to kill 14 women, injure 13 more, and then turn the gun on himself.

Before the massacre began, the students viewed it as some kind of prank, a practical joke, perhaps something to release the pressure of the end of term. He was about their age, dressed in causal clothes, smiling. Instead, he killed the first woman he saw, a financial department employee on the second floor. He arrived at a classroom, demanded that the men and women be separated, and then asked the men to leave — everyone followed without hesitation. He fired two shots into the ceiling and screamed, "You're all a bunch of feminists, and I hate feminists". The whole scenario became instantly unfunny. As one woman tried to reason with him he opened fire, killing six of the ten women in the room.

It was supposed to be a study date. I had met him at a party the weekend before. He called and wanted to see me again, but it was a busy week and the best I could do was to meet him in the library. He took me to one of the empty offices on the back of the fourth floor, and before long he was all over me. Once the physical aggression began, I was convinced I was going to die. It wasn't an act of sex I was going through — I thought I was being murdered. In many ways I was. I suffered a total paralysis of will. I cried, squirmed, pleaded — too frozen in fear to fight back.

He proceeded down to the cafeteria, on the first floor, where he killed three more women. He finished his butchery in a third-floor classroom packed with students, trapped, hiding under tables. He ended the lives of the last four women

there, before taking his own.

The police would later find his three-page suicide letter with a hit list of "radical feminists", defining the reason for his actions. He wrote, "...I have decided to send the feminists who have always ruined my life, to their Maker...the feminists have always enraged me...They want to keep the advantages of women...while seizing for themselves those of men."

December 6, 1989, shook the foundation of the reputable university. The gunman targeted intelligent, talented, skilled young women at the very institution that rewarded them with tools to fight such misogyny.

With women in non-traditional roles running a much higher risk of being raped or killed, the Montreal Massacre is more than a random act of violence. It is one example among many where the very women in privileged positions of independence and assertiveness become the victims of violence at the hands of men. The Montreal Massacre was not just a tragic and isolated event, it was only the biggest, and possibly most horrific, of many.

Since 1989, 49 women have been murdered in Nova Scotia by men. Women, in this province, in this city, who represent a small section of a much larger group of women that have been directly affected by violence. One in four women will be sexually assaulted in her life, half before the age of seventeen. Accounts of violence against women continue to shock and disturb us.

When it was all over, I ran home clutching my jacket to conceal the torn clothes underneath. I showered for hours that night, watching my blood run down the drain, trying to get the smell of cum off my body. At some point my mother came home and got angry at me for wasting hot water. I got dressed, ate supper, and went on with my day as if the whole thing had never happened. It's been five years since I've been raped. I blocked that day from my mind for two years and have spent the last three recovering.

To what extent does an act reflect the society in which it occurs? The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6 is an attempt to reflect a different picture. It is observed to mark the tragedy of the Montreal Massacre, as well as remind us of all the violence women experience, such as this rape, which should have never happened. And while it chronicles these experiences, it also shows the extent to which women live in fear of men.

We question how unfortunately fitting a school, or a library, is to target strong and bright women with promising futures, and how the victims — women praised for moving into untraditional roles — are left to die or pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.

The italicised testimony was written by a Dalhousie student. The rape occurred in November of 1992.

ERINN BETH LANGILLE

Week of Reflection Events

Friday, December 5th
- 9:00am- Flag Lowering Ceremony
Province House
Halifax, N.S.

- 12:00pm- Memorial Ceremony
St. Mary's University Art Gallery
Halifax, N.S.

Saturday, December 6th
- 12:30pm- Community Act of Remembrance
Art Gallery, Seton Academic Centre
Mount Saint Vincent University

- 4:00pm- Candlelight Vigil
Windmill & Wyse Road
Dartmouth, N.S.

- 6:30pm- Event marking the Montreal Massacre
including an open mike starting at 6:30
with the main program starting at 7:00
Includes music, readings, speaking, singing,
banners, candles, and roses.
Greenroom, Dalhousie Student Union Building

Have we forgotten?

The following opinion piece is reprinted from the January 11, 1990 issue of the Gazette. It was the first issue following the 1989 Montreal Massacre. We find it particularly poignant, as the Week of Reflection drifts into obscurity.

Natalie Croteau, the name is forever engraved on my heart. She was one of the fourteen now nameless women killed on December 6 in Montreal.

I know that you are probably saying "Enough, already. I'm sick and tired of hearing about that. It was just one isolated incident involving a madman." But it was not an isolated incident. It will reoccur. In fact, it is probably reoccurring at this instant. Somewhere out there someone is being raped, or a lover beaten, or a job is denied to a woman, or someone is afraid to walk the streets, or...the list is endless.

So what now? It is January 11, and it has been over a month since the killings occurred. Enough time for the wounds to begin to heal, and the faces

to blur. What remains is our anger at not only this incident, but at a society in which such an outrage can happen.

So what now? Now we have to take action. We have to change our ways. And it starts with me, and each and every one of you. I must not allow those nameless women to have died in vain. There must be something I can learn, some action I can take to prevent this tragedy from reoccurring in another form.

But what can I do? The problem seems hopeless.

I can get involved. I can try and change something. There are many agencies and organizations in Halifax where I can start.

Please get involved. The involvement can be as personal as questioning your own beliefs and values or it can involve working through an agency. The important thing is that change happens. In order to achieve action TAKE ACTION!!! Please don't let them die in vain.

SHANNON GOWANS

The following are the names of the fourteen women who were killed on December 6, 1989 at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal.



Genevieve Bergeron, Helene Colgan, Natalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Maria Klucznik, Maryse LeClair, Anne-Marie LeMay, Sonia Pelletier, Michele Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte