

Words from the dark side

To the guy who yelled "You have beautiful breasts," and "I want to fuck you," at Friday's Take Back the Night March, I only have two words to say. Thank you.

No really. Single-handedly you reminded me — and perhaps the two hundred women and children who attended the march — exactly why this demonstration takes place every year. For as annoying, immature and pathetic your comment appeared to a group of women, the same words could ignite a woman's worst fears if she were alone.

There isn't a woman out there who hasn't experienced the fear I'm talking about. Whether it's walking through campus to attend an evening class or staggering home after a night downtown, every woman's heartbeat quickens and brain screams "Run" when she hears behind her walking behind her after dark.

The Take Back the Night March is about women and children reclaiming their right to walk the streets even after the sun has set. When I heard that this year's turnout wasn't as high as other years, I figured it was either because people (like me) forgot which night it was, or people just aren't into demonstrations.

However, talking to one of our new reporters I realized there is another very big reason for not attending the march.

"I wanted to go," she said, "But I didn't want to walk home by myself."

Kind of speaks volumes doesn't it?

Now I'm not into this whole woman-as-victim thing and I am prepared to take responsibility for my actions. But there are times when I have to walk alone after dark. Half of the time I'm not even thinking about my surroundings or the possible dangers waiting for me to turn the next corner. I may be mulling over a homework assignment, planning my weekend, or, if I'm feeling especially self-absorbed, imagining headlines that read "Female student wards off six attackers without breaking into a sweat."

The rest of the time, when I'm not feeling quite as brave and my goal is to get to my destination before the streets get any lonelier, my thoughts run a different track.

"OK, that guy didn't cross the street because he saw me. Maybe he just lives around here. Where are my keys? Got them. I'll just hold on to them so I can poke him in the eye if he tries anything. Or I can slam my fist down on his collarbone. I hear an eight year old girl is strong enough to break a man's collarbone. Right. Maybe I should just cross the street. Dammit, where is everybody?"

I had always thought I would be so scared and angry and pumped with adrenaline that there would be no way a guy could hang on to me long enough to really hurt me. But one night when I was twenty I was proven wrong. He wasn't a stranger and as it turned out I didn't get hurt, but for a few seconds when my arms and legs were pinned to the floor I knew the only way I'd get out of there was if he let me.

I've since taken Wen-Do and karate, and started weight training, but I'm no longer sure I could defend myself if I had to.

Some of my male friends disagree with the women-only policy of the Take Back the Night March. They want to show their support and don't think it's fair to exclude men. I understand most men would not harm women, but I ask them to try to understand my point of view. When you walk by yourself after dark it doesn't matter if the guy behind you is a friend, because if all you can see is a shadow out of the corner of your eye, all men look the same.

Judy Reid



Unknown abilities

In a time of racial harmony and awareness of visible minorities, I feel that there's an unknown group. The group that I am referring to is that of disabled persons. Dalhousie University is a flourishing multi-culture community, but I feel that the disabled students are still forgotten. A lot of people are not aware of the issues that face disabled students. Issues such as mobility, finances and just the day to day problems of being disabled.

There is no good time to be disabled, but it's much better today than it was 20 years ago. Technology has greatly helped the lives of many disabled people. It has allowed them to dress by themselves, eat by themselves, climb stairs and most other things that most people take for granted. If you had no arms or legs even the simplest of tasks becomes more of a challenge. A challenge that does have a solution. A solution that may be different than what most people do, but nevertheless it works for the disabled individual.

People may feel uneasy being around a disabled person and so to make them feel less guilty the term physically challenged has come to be. They feel it is less harsh than calling a disabled person 'disabled', or 'handicapped', or worst yet, 'crippled'.

I am a disabled student here at Dal, and I have first hand experience of what it is like to be a disabled person. I myself use the term 'disabled' to describe myself when in fact I am very able.

Once someone asked me why I didn't use the term physically challenged, when it would better describe me. I told them it's like apples. You have red and green apples, you have Macintosh and Granny Smith.

"It's just a word," I told them.

Why call apples green when in fact they are called Granny Smith.

The thing that people have to keep in mind is that there are many different types of disabilities like there are many varieties of apples. They are all apples, but each one has its own distinct characteristic. I most certainly have a distinct characteristic, but the fact remains that I am still disabled. That is a long explanation, but I hope it will make you think about classifying people into groups.

People just aren't aware about what it is like to be disabled and they start to feel sorry for those who are. I

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have a number of pet peeves that arise out of this fact. The first is, as I mentioned before, people feeling uneasy being around me. I've always wondered why? Is it that they don't like me or is it that my fly is open?

They are just plain unaware. They see my disabilities instead of my ability. They are afraid to ask me or talk to me about my disability. I have found that over the years people have a general curiosity about me.

Let me assure you, I will always answer questions about my disability and most other disabled people that I know will too. After all, we are the experts on our disabilities. We know what we can and can't do.

This leads me to my second pet peeve. People are always willing to help.

Sometimes I get so frustrated with people because there is always someone trying to help me. This is always a problem with disabled people. Other people are always trying to help, but sometimes it is better if they would just stay away. At times, I have gotten violent and said, "Just leave me alone!" I know what I can do and opening doors is something I can do. I appreciate people helping, but if need help I will ask. The key is to ask first.

The greatest issue that surrounds a disabled person is that they want to be accepted, to fit in. This is not a big problem that I have encountered, but it does exist. There have been times when I have felt that I didn't fit in. It usually happens when my friends would go and do something that because of my disabilities I couldn't participate in.

A word of advice: if you know of someone with a disability do something with that person that you can all do. I am most fortunate that I can do almost anything.

It really doesn't matter if I can't do everything because I will probably live longer than a 'normal' person would. (I use the term normal very loosely.) It is a known fact that a person with a congenital disability has a longer natural life span than most other people. Bet you didn't know that!

I have accepted my disability and have made the most of what I have. I would like if everybody would see me for what I can do instead of what I can't do.

So as the saying goes, "When life gives you lemons make lemonade!"

Brian Wade

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