

Are we any better off today?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

By the time you read this it will already be 'old news.' For some, like Habs goaltender Carey Price, it was apparently never news at all, old or otherwise. I'm referring to the massacre of 14 women at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989. As the anniversary of this horrific day in Canadian history hits the same week that a Brampton woman was shot to death while working at a gas station in what police are referring to only as 'targeted,' I have to ask this question when it comes to gender-based violence: Are we any better off today than we were in 1989?

Where were you on December 6, 1989? I was lucky enough to have graduated university, mostly unscathed by threats of toxic masculinity. Not completely of course, but mostly. I took my education for granted but still walked the campus at night only when the 'walk home' program provided by security was available. By 1989, I'd been married a couple of years but 'luckily,' the worst kind of misogyny I experienced were male colleagues making inappropriate remarks, being passed over for promotion because 'women shouldn't be on the road' and an interviewer asking me if I planned to get pregnant anytime soon. I took (and still take, as does every other woman I know) precautions walking alone at night, not parking in underground parking if it can be avoided and other safety measures, but I certainly don't remember fearing for my life at school or work, or thankfully, at home either.

December 6, 1989, however, was a watershed moment. A snapshot in time when the worst thing possible happened, to 14 intelligent, beautiful and hardworking young women who were just a little younger than I was at the time and who should still be here with us now making a difference in the world. It shocked us all to our core and it was an event that marked forever our awareness that gender-based violence is real, terrifying and has lasting consequences.

We continue to mark the anniversary of this horrific day as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. We do so because gender-based violence is still, according to the Canadian Women's Foundation, responsible for the death of one woman every six days in Canada.

In 2021, this meant a total 173 women and girls lost their lives to gender-based violence.

Further, it is widely estimated that during the pandemic, gender-based violence rose dramatically. Shelters providing safe haven to women and women-identifying persons choosing to leave domestic violence are still, sadly, as full as ever. Locally, just this past September, a woman was fatally stabbed while at work at a Canadian Tire store in Mississauga by her husband of three years (this is femicide) and now, as mentioned above, it appears another woman shot to death while at work (not yet labeled by police as a femicide) may in fact be an incident of gender-based violence as police comment that it appears to be a targeted incident.

We continue to mark this grim anniversary too because of men like Carey Price. The Ecole Polytechnique massacre 'is now widely regarded as an anti-feminist attack and representative of wider societal violence against women,' and yet just a few days prior to the anniversary, he posted a picture of himself in full camouflage, holding a gun and advertising CCFR's (Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights) discount code 'Poly,' which offered a 10% discount to its customers.

For shame. First, Carey for using his profile to promote guns and later, for claiming ignorance of the massacre and the awful timing of his post. Next up, for shame CCFR. Why no one is holding them to account for an absolutely disgusting discount code. (seriously, who thought this was a good idea? I have no idea.) Sure, the Montreal Canadians are apologizing on Carey's behalf and donating sufficient funds 'to send 14 underprivileged girls to Polytechnique Montreal's summer science camp'.to help promote the growth and development of women in STEM' but the whole situation reeks (and reminds us) of a continued, systemic and misogynistic view of the world around us.

Carey Price 'was unaware' according to the Habs posting on Twitter. Women everywhere have ALWAYS been aware of the potential for violence that surrounds them. Nothing has changed. Are we better off today? I think not.

(I am a proud member of the Board of Directors at Family Transition Place but write this article as a woman, and a mother, independent from my work with FTP.)