

Is Trauma in Trouble?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Trigger Warning; gender-based violence and school gun calls.

Sometimes, as I ponder topics for this space, a theme naturally emerges. More often than not it's a theme reflective of current events happening around our own town, in other nearby communities and yes even throughout the province or country. This week, it's the use of the word 'trauma' that has me troubled and specifically, folks who are dismissive of it, apparently never having been troubled by trauma themselves. Increasingly, it seems to me I am hearing, reading and seeing more and more from those persons who possess less and less tolerance. I'm concerned that the idea that some people have experienced trauma or how they experienced it is in trouble, and that could make for troubled times indeed.

Just last week saw the conclusion of the month of November during which many communities, including our own, proclaimed it to be Woman Abuse Prevention Month. November was 'an opportunity to raise awareness of gender-based violence and to take a stand against this heinous crime in all its forms.' It is of course, appalling that we must even proclaim such a month in order to bring the appropriate amount of attention to intimate partner violence but here we are. Despite so-called advances in gender-equity, it's a fact that one in three women WILL (not might, will) experience 'at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in her lifetime.' That means if you have a mother, a sister or a daughter one of them has been impacted. Yes, it's that close to home.

Women are 3.5 times more likely than men to experience intimate partner violence and the statistics are significantly worse for Indigenous and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Violence can be physical, sexual and/or psychological and other forms of abuse also include financial and/or emotional manipulation. To provide further context, here in Peel Region alone there were seven femicides in 2023. Seven! Across Canada, the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability estimates one woman or girl is killed every 48 hours. If you are reading this and feel unsafe or suspect someone you know might be, locally, Caledon and Dufferin residents are served by Family Transition Place located in Orangeville with offices in Bolton and Shelburne. In addition to acting as a shelter, they also offer counselling services, youth education programs, support services and a rural response program.

Despite all this information being readily available to help everyone in our community better understand, respond to and support those experiencing violence what did I recently overhear in a casual conversation between two persons talking about a third? That 'she needs to just get over it.' Somehow it felt worse that it was two women who made the comment. They were discussing the intimate details (quite loudly, in public) of an assault on a woman they knew. Noticeably absent from the conversation was any semblance of empathy, compassion, or even a rudimentary level of concern that what this person experienced, or might still be experiencing, was 'worthy' of their attention. Where are we in this world when we don't have the capacity to offer compassion or at least a basic level of understanding that each of us comes to the table with a variety of lived experiences that have impacted us, possibly having caused significant trauma, and that each of us will respond differently to that trauma?

In a similar vein, a recent incident at a local high school involving a gun, a police tactical team and police dogs 'an unusual occurrence here in Canada by any measure' resulted in a barrage of braggadocious scoffing at the fact the school was making counselling available to those students, teachers and staff impacted by the event. Once again, the words 'get over it' were typed ad nauseam in social media posts, presumably by people who have no doubt lived through many gun calls personally and therefore felt free to offer their 'sage' advice. Worse still, the term 'snowflake,' was tossed around and a suggestion that by offering counselling we are 'bubble wrapping kids these days.' To these folks I ask, what happened to you that turned you into such a harda\$\$? Perhaps it was your 'coping skills' that involved suppressing your fear and your feelings rather than talking openly about them, resulting in little to no compassion, care or concern for your fellow citizens?

I for one am happy that we live in a world where trauma-informed counselling is available and where we are encouraged to talk openly about trauma's impact for it's in the open dialogue that we all realize we are not alone in our experiences and learn how to heal using more appropriate coping mechanisms. I've got to think that hiding under a desk, or hidden in a dark closet as students

texted one another for support and rumours swirled about a gun or guns in the school while police in tactical gear with dogs running around was indeed a traumatic event. The school offering some support to those impacted was an entirely reasonable, nay necessary, response.

Finally, these thoughts are particularly timely given that we are in the midst of the UN sponsored 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, and that tomorrow, December 6, is the annual day of remembrance of what's often referred to as the Montreal Massacre. For those who need a reminder, tomorrow ? more formally known as The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women ? came about as a result of a gun call at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique that resulted in the murder (femicide) of 14 women who had the temerity to study engineering. A short vigil is planned for this evening, outside the doors of Family Transition Place in Orangeville at 5 p.m. Do you know why we continue to honour these 14 women some 35 years after the event? It's because of the comments, attitudes and behaviours noted in the first few paragraphs of this column.

Some of us have learned nothing. We say things like ?you never heard about domestic violence in my day,? and ?she should get over it,? or ?what a bunch of snowflakes.? Yet sometimes gun calls are real. Intimate partner violence is real. People die. Often, it's simply because they were women. We didn't hear about gender based violence in the past because it was taboo and ?happened behind closed doors.? We were too afraid to talk about it and/or had no access to trauma-informed tools and resources to do so. This world is better in many ways in terms of the availability of such support, but obviously we still have a long, long way to go. Understanding that trauma is real, that it leaves a lifelong mark physically, emotionally and intellectually - and that supporting those who seek help in dealing with it is a powerful, and frankly necessary, gift. Give the gift of understanding and empathy. It costs you nothing but might just mean the world to someone who has experienced trauma.

Full disclosure, I am a proud member of the Board of Directors of Family Transition Place but these opinions are completely my own, expressed as a result of recent events heard and/or experienced in and around our community.