

Montreal Massacre victims remembered at Bolton vigil

By Bill Rea

Last Wednesday marked the 28th anniversary of the Montreal Massacre, in which a lone gunman entered École Polytechnique and shot 28 people, killing 14 women, before committing suicide.

He claimed he was fighting feminism.

The anniversary was marked with a vigil last Wednesday evening, a joint project between Family Transition Place and Caledon Public Library. It was held at the Albion-Bolton branch of the library.

Library CEO and Chief Librarian Colleen Lipp observed such events have been held regularly for the last 28 years, and she said she was sad to observe there is still a need for such tributes, as violence against women still exists.

‘I’m outraged,’ she declared, also expressing hope that more women will speak out.

‘The courage of a woman alone is not enough,’ Norah Kennedy, executive director of Family Transition Place, remarked.

She observed that after 28 years, people still gather to remember 14 women they never knew.

She also pointed out Canada is not known for having mass shootings. She said there have only been 31 of them here since 1649, as she observed the United States has that many in a month.

Kennedy said it could be argued that this was the act of a lone, disgruntled person, but such acts are also deeply entrenched in accepted norms.

These 14 women were studying engineering, which in those days would have been seen as exceptional.

‘They were breaking down barriers by their very presence in the program,’ she commented.

She added Marc Lépine, the gunman, had been denied access to the program, and he evidently believed women has stolen his rightful place.

‘He could not bear the thought that women were receiving the education that had been denied to him,’ Kennedy commented.

She also pointed out that as one group advances in things like education, another group must go down, and that can be hard to for some to accept.

There are still examples of abuse, but Kennedy said more women are speaking out, and are being heard and believed. One reason for that is groups gather and talk about these things.

She also pointed out more community leaders are talking about these issue, but she cautioned people not to get the idea that it necessarily means anything is being done.

‘We have changed the landscape,’ she said. ‘We are shifting a culture.’

Kennedy also said there have been a lot of cases in which powerful men believed they could get away with abusing women and would not be held to account.

She said there had been a vigil earlier that day at the Family Transition Place facility in Orangeville, and a former Board member had observed the word of the year is ‘complicit.’ He had asked men to reflect on how they may have been complicit, if it was only making jokes or comments about the issue.

‘We cannot be complicit,’ she said. ‘We need to take a stand.’

Local resident Emily Rowsell said she is currently studying public policy and women's issues as she provided a youth perspective on the issue. She said she has learned that she knows 13 women who have been assaulted.

Trustee Stan Cameron, Caledon's representative on the Peel District School Board, said he's been attending the vigil every year, and said he last year started to reflect on his two daughters and two sisters.

He said the violence against women is a manifestation of inequality, as some men abuse their positions against women. He added statistics are not needed to reveal there's a problem, as he pointed to how many women are in shelters. He said people must commit themselves to ending this.

‘It is men and boys who must stand to hold other men and boys to account,’ he declared.

Mayor Allan Thompson reflect on the events 28 years before, observing that 14 bright, young, talented people were gunned down because they were women.

‘It was a shock and this cannot be happening in Canada,’ he recalled thinking at the time.

He stressed the need for individuals, communities, governments and organizations to share the vision with no excuses.

‘My commitment is for all of us to keep the conversation open,’ he said, adding everyone has to take a stand when they see abuse or violence happening.

Library staff member Kelley Potter recalled she was 23 when the massacre took place, realizing several of the victims were her age.

She added that beyond the tragedy, there still cases of violence against women all over the world.
?We are not powerless to help with this issue,? she declared.



Local singer Carly Cianflocca performed at last Wednesday's vigil.



Norah Kennedy, executive director of Family Transition Place, pointed out more people are talking about violence against women, but more needs to be done.