

LearningNetwork

December 2, 2014

25 Years After December 6th: Personal Remembrances and Reflections

Giving the best of oneself in a crisis

You never get over an ordeal like December 6, 1989. Such dreadful, unnatural events continue to be painful over the years. But life goes on and we draw lessons from them, even though as a society we may not learn as fast as we should. Nonetheless, I remain convinced that a grave crisis provides an opportunity for people to give the best of themselves in order to effect change. It's like a catalyst. I remember noticing, on the day after the Polytechnique tragedy, how members of the administration, faculty, employees, student representatives, and others, just simply offered their help.



Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire, Eng./ing.
FEC, FCAE, C.M., C.Q.
Principal and Chair of the Board of Directors
Principale et présidente du conseil
Polytechnique Montréal



On December 6, 1989, Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire was Director of Communications for École Polytechnique de Montréal.



The evening of December 6th 1989 is vivid in my memory. It was a cold night, I was about to give birth to the first of my three sons. Having always identified as a feminist, the attack was personal. Twenty-five years later we continue to remember and educate. Far too many women have died as a result of gender-based violence. Why do so many of these deaths continue to go unnoticed by society and our political leaders? This is but one of many reasons why Canada needs a National Action Plan on Violence against Women -- addressing the symptoms will not suffice. We must get to the root causes of violence against women.

Lise Martin
Executive Director



Canadian Network of Women's
Shelters & Transition Houses
United to end violence against women



I was a student when the magnolia trees were planted at Western University to remember the fourteen women slain at École Polytechnique de Montréal. The fear and grief from that tragic day was still very raw and very real. Every year, we female engineers remember and mourn the loss of these fourteen bright lives to senseless violence and we refuse to let fear stop us from living life. We stand strong against gender-based violence that tells us women can't. WE are united in saying that "We Can" – that we can dream, that we can study engineering, that we are engineers.



Karen (Fong) Chan, P.Eng, BEngSc'99 (Mechanical),
Western University
Women in Engineering Advisory
Committee
Vice-Chair, Ontario Society of
Professional Engineers



This horrific event motivated me even more to be involved in the feminist men's movement to end femicide, sexual assault, beatings, coercive control, and other highly injurious patriarchal practices that hurt thousands of women on a daily basis. Unfortunately, though, when I think about the recent murders committed by [Elliot Rodger](#) and other misogynists, I realize that things are not looking up. Nonetheless, I continue to remind myself that there are still many reasons for hope and that I have to work much harder with my friends, colleagues, and family to make the world a more peaceful place.

Walter S. DeKeseredy, Ph.D.
Director of the Research Center on Violence,
Anna Deane Carlson Endowed Chair of Social Sciences
Professor of Sociology
West Virginia University



[Matt Reid](#) Remembers December 6



Matthew D. Reid
Lawyer, Cohen Highley LLP
School Trustee, Thames Valley District School Board

Everyone, Everywhere

THIS DECEMBER 6TH, OUR MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS AND TO ALL OUR ALLIES IS SIMPLE. WHETHER THE ATROCITIES ARE COMMITTED BY A TOTAL STRANGER OR AN INTIMATE PARTNER, THE PAIN AND SUFFERING AND TRAUMA AND LOSS LEAVES ITS MARK ON EVERYONE - OUR FAMILIES, OUR FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES - SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. WE, THE SURVIVORS, FEEL IT THE MOST; SO WHAT DO WE DO? WE MOURN. WE MOBILIZE. WE ADVOCATE, UNTIL ALL WOMEN EVERYWHERE LIVE LIVES FREE OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

Nneka MacGregor, ED of WomenatthecentrE



Nneka MacGregor
Executive Director
WomenatthecentrE



[The Co-hosts of CTV's THE SOCIAL](#) remember the victims of Dec. 6 and talk about feminism

Cynthia Loyst
Lainey Lui
Melissa Grelo
Traci Melchor
Co-hosts of CTV's THE SOCIAL



Twenty-five years later- How have we changed?

December 6, 1989 – I remember the moment I heard the news. It was a Wednesday evening, I was in my counselling sessions. I was 38 years old, my children Meg and Colin were five and two. The news came out in dribs and drabs that night – a shooting; at a university; a killer on a rampage; the isolated act of a madman. It would be another 24 hours before we would hear the real facts - it was women who were killed. Young women. Fourteen young women. Only women. “You are all feminists – I hate feminists”. One by one they were targeted. The aftermath for many of us working in the Violence Against Women sector was even more destructive. Feminists were attacked for telling the truth, that is, that this was a gendered crime against all women. Denial was rampant across the country. Except in rare circumstances, the media analysis was apolitical. The public and private conversations were excruciating. Twenty-five years later, what has changed?

The dominant narrative remains painfully familiar – protect the perpetrators, blame the victims, and excuse the bystanders. Our Indigenous sisters continue to go missing and are murdered in the hundreds. A woman is murdered by her male partner every six days in Canada. This is not personal. This is systemic. It is political. It is about race, gender and class. I take hope that more and more mainstream people seem to be “getting it”. We need a critical mass of 10% of the population to turn the ‘Titanic’ around. I hope it happens in my lifetime. In the meantime, I will keep working and honouring all my sisters and brothers who make a difference every day of their lives to break down these barriers that are killing us. And I will take comfort from these words...

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly now. You are not obliged to complete the work, but neither are we free to abandon it.... Jewish Talmud



Deborah Sinclair, MSW, RSW, Ph.D. (c)
Mother, sister, daughter, activist, life-long learner.
Member of the DVDRC.
2010 recipient of the YWCA Woman of Distinction
Award for Social Justice



December 6th, 1989 forever changed me. From 1991-93 I was a member of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women that travelled to 139 communities from coast to coast to coast and spoke to thousands of Canadians about the meaning of December 6th and what we could do as a society to achieve equality and end the violence. In many communities, we had to meet in secret locations with special security because women felt unsafe in coming forward to name the problem and describe their experiences. Hearing about the violence was overwhelming but even more frightening was the many ways our helping systems ignored or re-victimized abuse victims. I continue to be both haunted and motivated by survivors' stories. As a man, I feel a unique responsibility to address these issues with my sons, friends and colleagues. Progress in the field has been too slow but we can never lose our hope and commitment to create a different kind of society where violence against women is no longer embedded in the daily fabric of our lives. Since 2002, I have been a member of the Chief Coroner's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee – the vast majority of homicides involve female victims and most of those tragedies appear predictable and preventable given the many red flags or risk factors known to friends, families and front-line professionals. These tragedies continue to be a sobering reminder of how far we still have to go on this mission.

Peter Jaffe, Ph.D., Academic Director
Centre for Research & Education on Violence
Against Women and Children



Centre for Research & Education
on Violence Against Women & Children



[Esther Enyolu](#) talks about how to end violence against women and girls



Esther Enyolu
Executive Director
Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of
Durham (WMRCC)



Although I am proud of our work on the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women many years ago, I am still discouraged by our lack of progress to fully acknowledge the plight of Aboriginal women. We have asked the government for an inquiry into murdered and missing Aboriginal women but we continue to be treated as second-class citizens. You know, an Aboriginal woman could be disposed of and that's it, that's all. There's no new action, just a continuation of what's in place So what's that going to change, really?

Claudette Dumont-Smith
Executive Director
Native Women's Association of Canada



[Kim Gibson](#) remembers



Kim Gibson
Member
Learning Network Resource Group

Dec. 6

*Hate made visible
Chosen, selected victim
Because I'm female*



Robin Mason, Ph.D.
Women's College Research Institute



This a time to remember the innocent victims of this senseless tragedy and to think about the work that still needs to be done. Violence against women is a serious problem in our society. We all have a responsibility to do our part in eliminating this problem and make our communities safe for all women.



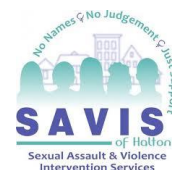
Greg Marshall
Head Coach
Western Mustangs Football



The Day of the Montréal Massacre by Bev LeFrancois

The day of the Montréal Massacre is forever locked in my memory. I can readily recall feelings of shock and disbelief when the radio blurted out its cruel message. On December 6, 1989, 14 young women were gunned down because they were taking up spots in a university engineering program. Mark Lépine coveted one of those spots taken by those “FEMINISTS”. He separated the men from the women and shot the women. That evening was the regular monthly Women of Halton Action Movement (WHAM) meeting. WHAM is a feminist lobby group working to improve the status of women in Canada. This meeting would not be business as usual. The women gathered quietly in a circle, lighting candles, sharing words and tears for the murdered students. There was an overwhelming feeling of fear in the room. Many WHAM members worked or volunteered in shelters, women’s centres, rape crisis centres and all members advocated against violence against women. The Montréal Massacre provided further impetus to carry on their advocacy for gun control, education on sexism, and adequate funding for services for victims of violence. Last night, November 11, 2014 at the WHAM meeting, we once more remembered our efforts after the massacre and sadly agreed there is much to be done.

Bev LeFrancois
Founder of Halton Rape Crisis Centre
(now SAVIS of Halton)





The headlines and images of this inhumane event made my 7-year-old-self grow up in a heartbeat. This was the tragic outcome of what I saw on the playground on a daily basis: the awful consequences of living in a world that normalizes and glorifies oppressive binaries. I could speak out or remain silent. While the choice was mine, December 6 showed me there was no choice. I had privilege and I needed to use it. Today I use fashion to give voice to those who are oppressed and advocate for gender justice.

Ben Barry, M.Phil., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
School of Fashion
Faculty of Communication and Design
Ryerson University



The senseless deaths of 14 young women triggered the Canadian movement toward stronger gun control. In 1995, Canada passed the Firearms Act that required gun owners to obtain a renewable gun licence and register their guns one time. The law was recognized by the victims' families as a monument to their memory but it has been seriously weakened by the federal government in recent years. Safety experts argue the risks of gun violence faced by vulnerable women and children have increased with this weakening.

The Coalition for Gun Control

guncontrol.ca

@cgcguncontrol



On the 25th anniversary of the tragic loss of 14 women at École Polytechnique de Montréal, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) renews its commitment to work toward the creation of a more progressive and diverse engineering profession by encouraging the full participation of women in the profession. OSPE will continue to encourage and inspire women to study engineering at the post-secondary level and to pursue licensure as professional engineers. It will also continue to engage the engineering community to remove the barriers that limit career and leadership opportunities for women.



Valerie Davidson, Ph.D., P.Eng,
Chair Women in Engineering Advisory Committee (WEAC)
Director, Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) Board



The horrific event of the Montréal Massacre has had a profound and lasting impact on me. It underscored how violent acts towards women are unfortunately still a social and cultural plague on our society. But importantly, it inspired me to do my part in helping to create and shape the kind of society that I would like to live in, a society where women do not have to live in fear from those who hold ignorant and bigoted attitudes towards them. I realized that every man has the ability, and more importantly, the responsibility, to be a role model both personally and professionally to young boys and men, to demonstrate the importance of valuing and respecting women, and to teach them that gender equality and ending violence against women is not something that only feminists should be striving for, but is something that we all should work towards. In that sense I consider myself a feminist and I always try to show other men that that is something to take pride in.

Jonathan S. Cant, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Toronto Scarborough



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
SCARBOROUGH



For twenty-five years we remember their names and faces and sparkling presence at École Polytechnique de Montréal. For twenty-five years we try to come to terms with losing them. Their legacy is the lesson we all learned on that day: make change, expose wrong, celebrate right and never forget the young women of December 6.

Sally Armstrong
Human Rights Activist
Journalist
Documentary filmmaker
Author



I think the way in which I have been most impacted by the Montréal Massacre is by the awareness it has brought to the need for equality and that as a culture, we collectively condemn what happened on December 6, 1989 as well as any other actions that stem from the same hatred. As we move forward, every female engineer opens a door for the next female engineer or scientist behind her.

Lara Treiber
B.Eng (Chem), McGill 2006
Ph.D. (Photovoltaic Engineering) University of New South Wales, 2012
Morgan Solar Inc., Senior Scientist



The violent deaths of 14 young women at École Polytechnique de Montréal in 1989 should never be forgotten. The anniversary serves as a reminder to educators that we have a responsibility to do all we can to instill in our students the values of equality including the rights of women.

Amit Chakma
President & Vice-Chancellor
Western University



Violence against women continues to be a major concern in Canada and worldwide. In order to end gender-based violence, we need to develop educational programs to be delivered in daycares, schools and universities to teach both genders how to understand, relate and interact with one another in a respectful and supportive manner. We also need increased law enforcement and consequences to violence toward women and to provide better support and protection to women so they can safely come forward and report incidents of harm or threats of harm by men.



**Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies**
The voice of child welfare in Ontario

Nancy Friedman
Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies



The enormity of the Montréal Massacre of young women, simply because of their gender, created a moral obligation on every Canadian adult male to work tirelessly to bring about the eradication of such a hateful phenomenon. Once my level of consciousness about this discriminatory attitude was raised, as a family lawyer, I was alarmed to find out how it manifested itself in my professional interactions amongst clients, lawyers and even judges. Unfortunately, 25 years later the fight for universal equality for women is not yet won. We must reignite the moral imperative to act.

Alfred A. Mamo, LLB
McKenzie Lake Lawyers
Author of Carswells *Annual Review of Family Law*
Editor of *Matrimonial Property Law in Canada*



Lépine was not alone. As a Superior Court Justice for Ontario on the bench for 25 years, I have participated in many trials where women and children have paid the ultimate price. These include a quadruple murder where two women and two children died from an attack by a man with similar motives. Today, we read of women with the courage to come forward and it is being described as a "watershed" moment. While I have the good fortune of knowing and working with those that have worked tirelessly challenging sexist attitudes and systems for many decades, it is telling that the current cultural shift of acceptance of victims' complaints comes 25 years after 14 women were murdered and their potential was taken away merely for being women. I hope that the recent dialogue and apparent acceptance continues to challenge perspectives and substantive equality for women can be realized.

The Hon. John F. McGarry, Q.C.
Retired Superior Court Judge



[Nicole Pietsch](#) shares how Dec. 6 impacted her



Nicole Pietsch
Coordinator
Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres



The [Learning Network](#) commemorate the victims of Dec. 6

Elsa Barreto
Anna-Lee Straatman
Linda Baker
Joy Lang
Marcie Campbell
Learning Network Team

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