

Lest we forget

Geneviève, Hélène, Maryse, Annie, Nathalie, Barbara, Anne-Marie, Maud, Barbara Marie, Maryse, Anne-Marie, Sonia, Michèle and Annie, massacred in Montreal;¹ Chia-Tsu, hacked to death with a meat cleaver; Gina, axed to death while sleeping; Valerie, tracked down and murdered; Sakina, beaten and then drowned in a bathtub; Pamela, killed with a chainsaw; Jacolena, doused with gasoline and set on fire; Lorraine, hacked to death; Comfort, stabbed to death by a common-law partner, a year after she left him...²

Death by misogyny

We need to remember the names, to etch them in stone as we do other casualties of war; we must say them again and again to each other, lest we forget.

The rape and murder of women in our society is so common, so ordinary, that it is only when fourteen young women are gunned down in public that an act of violence against women is deemed worthy of front-page coverage. This issue of *CWS/cf* is dedicated to those of us who have died and to those of us who have survived. The focus of the articles is not on any one form of violence against women, or on women of any particular race, age, class, ability or sexual orientation, but on what we know, as women, from every incident of violence. Each incident is an expression of the rampant woman hating that exists in our culture, a misogyny that is often denied and seldom addressed by individuals or institutions. It is so embedded that it is invisible — yet it is lethal.

Even within the relative safety of this editorial board, making visible some of the many forms of violence has been a difficult task. The testimonies of the women recorded here resonated with our own experiences and resurrected memories of the violence that has permeated our personal lives. As we shared stories, we began to feel a power in our words. In our efforts to break the silence that surrounds the issue of violence against women, we were finding our own voices.

As children, many of us felt the power of language in the silencing of our voices. As women, we struggle to find the words with which to speak of our abuse. bell hooks reminds us that “talk is the mark of freeing... the act of speaking is coming to power.”

Our very act of speech can elicit further violence and in self-defence we may retreat, at times, to our silent worlds. But in the words of Audre Lorde,

*when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.*

To speak is to resist. This issue is an act of resistance — breaking the silence — providing a forum for women to express, for perhaps the first time, their personal sorrow, rage, bitterness, hatred and knowledge, in their own way.

They express it, name it, draw it, sculpt it, quilt it, sing it.

¹ First names of the fourteen young women gunned down 6 December 1989, at the École polytechnique in Montreal because, in the words of the murderer, they were all “a bunch of feminists.”

² From *Balance the Power: Background Report—Annual Lobby*. TO: Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, 1990.

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