

## DECEMBER 6, 2017 TALK: EGANVILLE

December 6, 1989: Marc Lepine gunned down 14 women at l'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. It was an act of violence against women that stunned the country and the world.

September 22, 2015: Boris Borutski killed Anastasia Kuzyk, Nathalie Warmerdam and Carol Culleton in Renfrew County. It was an act of violence against women that has forever reshaped this community and has had an impact far beyond that.

As we gather here tonight, we remember these two dates, but I want us also to remember the violence that was done to women before December 6 and after September 22.

These two dates may be markers in the story of the violence women are subjected to by men, but we need to see them as part of a bigger story: the story of misogyny.

And the story of racism, as we are beginning to learn about the shame of missing and murdered Indigenous women in this country through the stories told by their families and communities, both within and outside the Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.

We are here tonight to honour all women whose lives have been affected by male violence. We are here to mourn; but we are also here because we want to work for change. That may be the only way to make sense of something that is – or should be -- senseless.

So, let us first take a moment to remember and mourn. Think for a moment about Anastasia, Nathalie, Carol or any woman you know whose life has been touched by gendered violence.

Think of the women who have had the courage in the past several weeks to call out high-profile men in the entertainment industry for their sexual predation and harassment.

Think of the many, many more women who can never call out the men who have sexually molested, abused and assaulted them because those men are not famous; those men are their uncles, their bosses in small workplaces, their patients in hospitals where they work, guests in hotel rooms they are cleaning, coaches of their school sports team, leaders in their religious communities. These men will not make headline news stories and so it is not safe for women who have been subjected to their violence to speak out about it.

Think of the women who are being abused by men they thought loved them.

Think of women who are the victims of male violence in war.

Think of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Think of the women around the world, and that includes here in Canada, whose lives are constrained by laws and public policies that ignore misogyny and patriarchy.

Think of yourself, because all of our lives have been shaped by misogyny and many of our lives by racism.

PAUSE

And now think about how we can work for change. What can each of us do individually and what can we do collectively?

Here are some ideas that rattle around in my head and soul:

1. Call ourselves feminists every day, even when people don't seem to want to hear us say so.
2. Call out misogyny and racism when it happens around us. We can't end violence against women without also ending racism.
3. Believe women. Trust women.
4. Find beauty every day. It may not be easy to find some days, like today, but it is there, and in it we will find strength.
5. Trust our rage. Rage is better than grief, and through rage will come action.
6. Recommit ourselves to working together. Even when we have differences, we can reach across them to find our places of commonality.
7. Dare to imagine - a day without violence, a week without violence, a lifetime without violence, a world without violence

Does anybody want to offer up an idea or a thought?

PAUSE

I am going to close with a poem by Mary Oliver, who reminds us that, no matter what else we do in our lives, we must start out by paying attention to ourselves.

One day you finally knew  
What you had to do, and began,  
Though the voices around you  
Kept shouting  
Their bad advice –

Though the whole house  
Began to tremble  
And you felt the old tug  
At your ankles  
“Mend my life!”  
each voice cried.  
But you didn’t stop.  
You knew what you had to do,  
Though the wind pried  
With its stiff fingers  
At the very foundations,  
Though their melancholy  
Was terrible,  
It was already late  
Enough, and a wild night.  
And the road full of fallen  
Branches and stones.  
But little by little,  
As you left their voices behind,  
The stars began to burn  
Through the sheets of clouds  
And there was a new voice  
Which you slowly  
Recognized as your own,  
That kept you company  
As you strode deeper and deeper  
Into the world,  
Determined to do  
The only thing you could do –  
Determined to save  
The only life you could save.