

Rita Moir -1993

The year we first came to this vigil - in 1989 - several of us women were in the middle of writing a play about how a lot of women got killed. About how they resisted. And how they were silenced. The play was about women in Europe, and they were called witches. We believed the women in Montreal were silenced just as those millions of ~~women~~ *women witches* were silenced hundreds of years ago. They had stepped out of the narrow ~~line~~ *line* defined for women.

Every time a woman is put down, <sup>W</sup>sunned, isolated, battered or killed, it is about being silenced.

It is easy to be silenced. Most of us want to belong. We don't want to be laughed at, dismissed, ignored, told we have no sense of humour. The other day, I saw pornography in an auto repair shop. The words by the pictures said, nice ass, nice tits, doosh. But my car was up on the hoist by then, and I stayed quiet. I wasn't really supposed to be in there. When I paid my bill, I objected to the posters, and the man said, oh, you weren't supposed to be in there. Pornography is pornography, I said. I was not proud of myself. I was silenced and belittled, and all I really wanted was a universal joint.

Sometimes I am proud of my actions. In Nova Scotia recently, a friendly man at the local Legion, the only social gathering spot in that town, told a joke about a man and his horse. When the beaten horse wouldn't get up and go at the count of 10, one..two...three...the man shot the horse. You've heard these jokes, they're regaled with great detail, and the correct pauses, and you know what's coming next. And then, the guy says, I told my wife, let's get going, and when she said no, I said, I'm going to start counting to 10, one..two... and he ~~bursts out laughing~~ *then we're supposed to laugh*. That's not funny, I said. Wife killing jokes aren't funny.

Another time, a drunken man kept yelling at our women's softball team - "Cows, cows" he kept hollering and jeering. I strode over to him with my softball bat. Fuck off, I said. That wasn't an historic moment, but I was proud of myself.

When we first held this vigil four years ago, we came together because all of us understand these small acts of silencing, and some of us know the larger acts - rape, beatings, murder. Four years ago we understood the biggest <sup>attempt at</sup> mass silencing we have witnessed. Fourteen women were shot for being engineering students, and when we ~~and~~ attended these vigils to say, this is not a coincidence, this is violence against women, there was an attempt to silence us. No, we were told, these murders were the tragic act of an individual lunatic. You feminists are just trying to make political hay. An attempt was made across this country to say, women, shut up. To deny the violence on a mass scale. But we believed in ourselves. We knew that this was our reality magnified. That this was only the hatred we see so many times in our daily lives.

These deaths have taught us to believe in ourselves, in ~~our~~ <sup>four</sup> analysis, and our individual and collective acts of courage and resistance.

These act of courage are hard enough when we are facing an enemy from the outside - we all know we're good at fighting the CPR. But it is very hard when we are taking these stands in our own homes and community. It is hard to threaten our own web, even when that web traps and violates us.

In our rural community, there are many individual acts of courage that change who we are and how we see ourselves. Sometimes they are done with a community behind us, sometimes <sup>alone</sup>. ~~in isolation and terror.~~ Many individual women live in terror in their own homes, and they take their courage and leave to make a safe place for themselves and their children. These are women who are not part of a community of women, but are acting from their own strength. There are women who act quickly and from conviction - like Sandy Korman ripping

sexist posters in a rural bar. It was women, mainly, like Tika, and K, Linda Kivi, Beryl Clayton and Antoinette Hlaberstadt, <sup>and many others</sup> who came forward to rescue Michael Cassidy's life and keep his home safe; it is Mitzi Hufty's voice on the radio breaking the silence about AIDS in small towns.

We are a community rich in individual and collective courage. Soon the Doukhobour people will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the burning of arms - when they piled up their weapons and said no more war. No more war toys. As women, we know what those war toys are used for in our homes and in our country, and we say no.

We have within our community the people who live and work in our sawmills and forests and watersheds, who take tremendous courage and patience to negotiate change and find a way to live together without violence.

We have the women, who for 20 years run our women's centre, with or without funding, who have made feminism part of our daily reality. There are women who run the transition house in Trail, and the women setting up the transition house in Nelson. There are the senior citizens and students who sat in at our university for 96 days to save the books; there are the women who have formed the anti-poverty group, and the women who made the housing co-op, the women who make the women's festival and who make theatre; there are women who love women and men who love men, and there are the women and men who have girded themselves and testified against the pillars of our community and churches, finally naming the men who abused them. All of these are courageous acts, communal efforts, and in this we redefine our community.

Sometimes we are involved, sometimes more and sometimes less. But always, whether on the front lines or the side lines, we admire and cheer on courage. Acts of courage, even small ones, are easier when we know there is a community behind us, who will love, and stand with us, and laugh with us, too. Sometimes all we can do us send a cheque and a message of support. Other times we intervene, put our bodies on the line, organize the meetings, tromp the street for support.

And always, we must celebrate and take care of each other.

Four years ago, the deaths of these 14 women in Montreal delivered us into sadness and fear, but it gave us something else. These murders made us angry, so angry, and when once again they tried to sell us the notion that this was an isolated act, we didn't buy. We stood together on this spot, like women and men across Canada, and we said we know what this is about, and No, you cannot silence us again.

Thank you.

Rita Mon  
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