

Three Dead Women



By Nate Smelle

WITH NOTHING OUT OF THE ordinary just before 9 a.m. on Sept. 22, I poured a cup of tea and headed into the office. The day began with the usual chaos that ensues on a Tuesday in the newsroom of Bancroft This Week. As I started laying out the paper I opened up my accounts to check this week's wave of emails, messages and other online notifications. Everything in order, I smiled my last smile of the day and settled in to my expected routine.

Then, from out of nowhere a tsunami of pings and other electronic noises meant to grab our attention filled my ears. A feeling of dread came over me as I read the words 'One dead, shooter still at large in Wilno. Residents are advised to remain secure in their homes and to contact the police if they notice any suspicious activity.'

This can't be true, I thought to myself. Wilno? No way.

Unfortunately, as we all know now, it was.

Spending the rest of the day in conversation with our neighbours under lockdown in the Wilno area and Sgt. Kristine Rae of the OPP, I kept my other ear glued to the police scanner, listening to the all too real and tragic chaos unfolding in real time so close to home. For me our close proximity to the murderer on the loose really hit home a few seconds after getting off the phone from my first call of the day to Sgt. Rae, when a line of police cars sped by the front window heading north with their sirens blaring. Driving north to Wilno the next morning to pay my respects and to give the story the attention it deserves I felt the shock and the terror this man unleashed upon the community when he selfishly and savagely stole the lives of Anastasia Kuzyk, Nathalie Warmerdam and Carol Culleton.

Sitting at the bar at the Wilno Tavern on Wednesday morning, speaking with those who knew the women killed and their killer I tried desperately to find a little light amid the darkness hovering above us.

As I sat there trying to make sense of the senseless, I thought about the candlelight vigils and other events that I had attended in the past few years held by a variety of organizations and advocacy groups working to bring an end to violence against women. I thought of the many conversations I have had with the compassionate and impassioned activists from groups such as Sisters in Spirit and Maggie's Resource Centre. Reflecting on all that I have learned from these experiences with regards to violence against women and what needs to be done to prevent men from continuing to harm and kill women in the future, it became obvious to me that one thing was for certain: Not enough is being done!

Violence against women manifests itself in many different ways. There is something inherently wrong with our society when our grandmothers, mothers, sisters, cousins, daughters, friends and lovers are forced to live in fear because of men. When asked by the CBC's chief correspondent Peter Mansbridge last December why the Harper government had not called for a national inquiry into the more than 1,100 missing or murdered Indigenous women in Canada, Prime Minister Stephen Harper replied 'Um it, it isn't really high on our radar, to be honest ... Our ministers will continue to dialogue with those who are concerned about this.'

This admitted lack of interest in preventing any further killings or abuse of women in Canada by our government is more than a flashing of true colours. Our government's indifference when it comes to violence against women is a contributing factor in its cause.

Not taking meaningful action to put an end to these types of crimes only enables men to continue abusing, violating and killing women.