

National Day of Remembrance observed in Bancroft



By Chris Drost

It has been 33 years since that fateful day of Dec. 6, 1989 when 14 young women were murdered at Polytechnique Montréal. A group of approximately 20 individuals gathered at the pebble mosaic in Bancroft's Millennium Park to observe this National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

Tanya MacKinnon, executive director at Tamarack/Maggie's, welcomed everyone. "Today is so important to the work we do. I remember hearing about the murders 33 years ago when women died, because they were women," said MacKinnon.

Donna Reid, from Tamarack/Maggie's, stepped forward and read two of her poems, one called Dec. 6th, 1989, and the other, Breaking the Silence.

Dec.6, 1989

Many years ago, we promised we would come together yearly,

And even though the years have passed, we miss each woman who has passed on dearly,

Many years ago, we made a commitment to keep the candles burning,

And even though we honour them, our hearts are silently yearning.

Many years ago, we picked red roses as a symbol of their lives,

And even though abuse must stop, we still lose sisters, mothers, daughters and wives.

Many years ago, we decided to read each woman's name out loud,

And even though we join in sorrow, as women we stand proud.

Many years ago, 14 gave their lives without consent or permission,
And even though we teach new skills, some women still live in submission.
Many years go by and we still grieve for the women who can't find their voices,
And even though we spread the word, they often lack safe choices.
Many years go by and we still mourn for the women who spoke before,
And even though we reach for them, we still keep on losing more.
Many years go by, and we still cry for the women that live in fear,
And even though we dry our eyes, the tears are always near.
Many years go by and we still weep for the women who live in pain.
We work toward ending violence, but still have great strides to gain.
Many years go by and we still scream for the women who can't escape,
We work for change and women continue to suffer from murder and rape.
Many years go by and still we need shelters for the women who can get away,
We are able to offer safety but there are too many needing to stay.
Each year we must all gather to listen to each woman's name,
And as we pray in silence, we re-affirm that we're not to blame.
Each year we must ensure the list does not get longer,
When a woman is hurt we must all join in and make our commitment even stronger.
Each year we must move forward, we must keep our dream in sight,
Living free from harm is not a privilege, but each and every woman's basic right.
Each year we make a difference. An end to violence there will be.
And when we reach our vision, the spirits of all women will finally be set free.
Breaking the Silence
When the voice of a woman is a whisper,
And her story is too painful to relate,

We need to listen, encourage her and wait.

When the voice of a woman is a whisper,

And the words that she attempts just make her choke,

We need to listen, believe her and respect the words she spoke.

When the voice of a woman is a whisper,

And she finds a way to tell you of her pain,

We need to listen, support her and help her trust again.

When the voice of a woman is a whisper,

And each one of us join in and whisper too,

Then breaking the silence depends on me and you.

Following the reading of the poems, the names of the 14 women murdered in 1989 were read aloud, one name read by each of 14 people attending.

Geneviève Bergeron

Hélène Colgan

Nathalie Croteau

Barbara Daigneault

Anne-Marie Edward

Maud Haviernick

Maryse Laganière

Maryse Leclair

Anne-Marie Lemay

Sonia Pelletier

Michèle Richard

Annie St-Arneault

Annie Turcotte

Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz

The group attending the vigil then formed a circle and each placed a rose and a candle on the pebble mosaic before bowing their heads for a moment of silence.

MacKinnon concluded the gathering with a disturbing fact that in the past 52 weeks, 52 women were murdered. "This is awful. We don't want to be here," she said.