

## A day to remember

December 7, 2009

### Vigil held to honour Montreal Massacre victims

*By Nicki Cruickshank*

Anya Brown spent her first two years of life in an abusive home.

Though her father never raised a hand to her, seeing how his emotional abuse tormented her mother, Ing, hurt her just as much.

"I was too young to remember anything happening back then," she said. "But it was rough seeing my mom go through all the grief, and I grew up knowing it was my abusive dad that did it to her.

"I remember living in the shelter, and life after that on our own with mom," she added.

Brown performed a solo dance yesterday during the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Massacre event at the Downtown Community Theatre.

The event paid tribute to the 14 women slain on Dec. 6, 1989 at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal, Quebec. The women, who were all engineering students, were shot and killed by a 25-year-old man claiming to hate women and feminists.

Yesterday was also National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

The Barrie event was in memory of the women and children in Simcoe County whose lives were ended by violence.

"We're taking time to remember those who died as a result of gender-based violence and abuse," said Lynda Muir, executive director of the Women and Children's Shelter of Barrie, who hosted the event along with Colibri Centre des femmes Francophones du comte de Simcoe.

"We want to make sure women are safe and violence is not tolerated," Muir said.

That's where city police step in, and Sgt. Sue Gillies said domestic abuse calls are frequent at the station.

"Depending on the month, it's not unusual to have between 150 and 200 domestic-related calls in a month," Gillies said. "We do our best to make the situation work out for the people, but if an offence has occurred, charges will be laid."

Gillies and her daughter attended yesterday's event.

The event included native drummings, dance performances, the names of each Montreal Massacre victim was read, and Muir read a letter sent by three of the massacre survivors aloud.

A candlelight vigil with battery-operated tea-lights was also held, and the candles cast a warm glow in the dark theatre.

The room fell silent as the names of women and children in Ontario killed by domestic violence over 20 years flashed on a projector screen.

Two of the youngest victims were an 11-month-old child and a 16-month-old child.

"That's the message right there, and we didn't even finish playing the list," Muir said, adding that a few of the names belonged to Barrie victims.

Thankfully, Brown's mother wasn't one of them, and she lived to tell her own personal story of leaving an emotionally abusive husband 16 years ago.

"He didn't destroy me but he tried. When I left, I never looked back. I never changed my mind," Ing said, trying not to cry. "It's frightening how many women are still affected by abuse, and it's sad my speech is still needed."

When she introduced Brown for her solo dance, the teen fought back tears as she hit the spotlight. She glanced twice at her mother while dancing, wiping tears away each time.

"I've heard my mom tell her story 100 times, but somehow, when she was up there speaking, this time it was even more powerful to hear.

"My dance wasn't just for me. It was more for my mom. It was so overwhelming for me, but when she asked me to do a dance, I was honoured."

The event brought back painful memories for Carol, too. Carol, who asked that her last name not be published, said her home and marriage weren't safe places a few years ago.

"Three years ago, I was in the Women and Children's Shelter with my two girls," the Barrie woman said, shifting her gaze to the ground. "I remember living there, and how that felt. My marriage got very bad right near the end, and I knew I had to get us out before someone was killed."

Carol let her tears flow during the ceremony, and let her mind wander back to her own abusive past.

"It was definitely emotional for me today," she said. "There were some parts that really hit home for me."

It was just as emotional for those running the event.

Linda Ivsins, outreach group facilitator for the Women and Children's Shelter, said her mind was on a girlfriend after the presentation.

"I had a friend who died (from abuse), but her name couldn't go on that list because her husband was never charged," she said. "This event is one that victims can come to and start to heal. It gave me a chance to remember my friend and how her family must feel to this day."

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