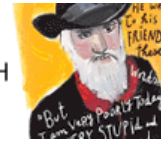




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## Domestic violence still at our doors

If you hear or witness anything, please call for help.

By Ayla-Monic McKay

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Over Thanksgiving weekend, in the early hours of Sunday, my partner and I were woken by the sounds of a very loud fight happening in the apartment above us. A man's voice screamed continuously, loud bangs and crashes from what we assumed was furniture being thrown around. A woman's voice cried and pleaded. My partner called the police. I heard the woman wail, "You're hurting me." I felt powerless: I was terrified that the police would show up and find a dead body.

"I hope he has drugs up there, because that way they can hold him," I said. "It doesn't sound like they have a kid, at least. That would make it a million times harder for her to leave." I thought about my mother, whose first husband abused her. She was only 19, 20.

We watched the police arrive, heard them pound on the door upstairs. It sounded like there was a struggle. We watched the paramedics arrive as the police led a man to their vehicle. I told my partner to stay behind the curtain—if the guy looked up and saw him in the window, he could be a target.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, "every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner." Sixty women a year, killed by an intimate partner. A woman a week. Leaving the relationship doesn't help. More than half of the violence women experience happens after they have ended the relationship. The Ending Violence Association of BC explains that "violence often gets worse when a woman tries to leave," and points out an "abuser is most likely to kill his partner when she leaves or tries to leave him."

The police officer came to the door and asked if we would be willing to give statements. He told us the guy had tried to put up a fight, that they had found drugs on him. I breathed a silent sigh of relief, because they could hold him for at least a little while. The officer told us the woman wouldn't tell them anything, which I expected. She was bruised up, and there was broken furniture and dishes all over the apartment, which was all they

needed for now. He said she was very pregnant.

My heart broke. I thought of my older brothers, who watched my mother get abused by their father.

Domestic violence is very real, and very close. It happens to our family, to our neighbours, to our friends, to the women in all of our communities. It crosses class, cultural and religious boundaries. The Canadian Women's Foundation reports that even though "rates of domestic violence have fallen in recent years [...] In 2010, the rate of intimate partner homicide committed against females increased by 19 percent, the third increase in four years."

This is not an acceptable statistic to live with. We need to keep working against this. We need to teach our boys to respect women, and to respect themselves enough to find a solution other than violence for their problems. We need to increase social support for survivors of domestic violence—men and women alike. We need to stop turning away when we hear our neighbour screaming for help.

My partner and I were the only ones who called for help. Had we decided to stay at my place, there likely would not have been a call to the police. Domestic violence can easily turn fatal. If you hear or witness anything, call for help. You may save a woman's life.

For more information about domestic violence in Canada, or on what to do if you suspect someone is being abused, visit The Canadian Women's Foundation. In Halifax, please consider supporting Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, Adsum House and Bryony House.

***Ayla-Monic McKay is passionate about women's issues, and is a co-founder of and editor at the Halifax-based independent publishing company All Grown-Up Books.***

Tags: Voice of the City, Voice of the City, Domestic violence, Opinion

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