



Anti-Violence Activist Remembers Her Murdered Friend

Wednesday December 6, 2006

While much work has been done to end violence against women since the Montreal Massacre 17 years ago, Deb Ashbee says the tragic story of her best friend's death proves there's much more that needs to be done.

Ashbee's friend Sandra Schott, a mother of three, was murdered by her estranged husband last year. Her spouse, Edward Smith, then killed himself.

"What I wish I would have done is I wish I would have had a little bit more knowledge on how quickly, you know, things could go bad," Ashbee said Wednesday. "I would have had her out of the house."

Ashbee said she spotted the signs of abuse in her friend, but didn't realize just how quickly the situation could escalate.

"I saw them, but, you know, when I talked to Sandra about them and, you know, she'd always try to smooth everything over and say 'Oh, that's just Ed being Ed.' The Monday before he actually murdered her, he threatened to kill her," she explained.

While Ashbee wishes she could've done more to save her friend, the terrible case highlights areas in which the government and police could've taken more action to save Schott's life.

Police had visited Schott's home just three weeks before her murder to respond to violence and removed Smith from the house.

Ashbee decided to take action, to help other women in abusive situations who may be reluctant to report the problems because they fear the violence could worsen, and started a grassroots campaign called Neighbours, Friends and Families.

"Ultimately nothing's going to change unless people, ordinary people, change the way they think about this and that's what I think the value of this campaign is," Ashbee said.

The campaign aims to teach the warning signs of abuse and how to help a victim escape a dangerous and potentially deadly situation.

On Wednesday Canadians are marking the deaths of the 14 victims of the Montreal Massacre that happened at École Polytechnique on Dec. 6, 1989. Marc Lepine, 25, separated the men from the women and opened fire on a class of female engineering students. Before he started shooting he screamed, "I hate feminists."

Canadians not only remember the 14 victims on the anniversary of the rampage, but all victims of woman abuse. A memorial service was held at Women's College Hospital Wednesday.

Here are some of the signs of abuse, in both the abuser and the victim, courtesy of Neighbours, Friends and Families:

- **He** puts her down
- **He** does all the talking and dominates the conversation
- **He** checks up on her all the time, even at work
- **He** tries to suggest he is the victim and acts depressed
- **He** tries to keep her away from you
- **He** acts as if he owns her
- **He** lies to make himself look good or exaggerates his good qualities
- **He** acts like he is superior and of more value than others in his home
- **She** is apologetic and makes excuses for his behaviour or she becomes aggressive and angry
- **She** is nervous talking when he's there seems to be sick more often and misses work
- **She** tries to cover her bruises
- **She** makes excuses at the last minute about why she can't meet you or she tries to avoid you on the street
- **She** seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and is afraid
- **She** uses more drugs or alcohol to cope

The danger may be greater if:

- He has access to her and her children
- He has access to weapons
- He has a history of abuse with her or others
- He has threatened to harm or kill her if she leaves him: He says, "If I can't have you, no one will."
- He threatens to harm her children, her pets or her property
- He has threatened to kill himself
- He has hit her, choked her
- He is going through major life changes (e.g. job, separation, depression)
- He is convinced she is seeing someone else
- She has just separated or is planning to leave
- She fears for her life and for her children's safety or she cannot see her risk
- She is in a custody battle, or has children from a previous relationship
- She is involved in another relationship

For more information on the signs of abuse, how to help a victim and how to help an abuser stop their violent behaviour, visit [Neighbours, Friends and Families](#).

And for more information on woman abuse and how to get help, visit the following links:
[Toronto Rape Crisis Centre](#)

[Woman Abuse Prevention](#)

[Woman Abuse Council of Toronto](#)

You can also call the Assaulted Women's Hotline at **1-866-863-0511**.