

Taking Back The Night

by Rhiannon Grant

On September 18th, what must have been at least 250 men and women took to the streets (or rather, the sidewalks) for the annual Take Back the Night march. Take Back the Night has been going on since the 1970's to protest against sexual violence against women; occurrences that despite their many plateaus, have risen dramatically since the 1960's (hitting its highest point in America in 1992, according to Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics). This march is a shout to the world that women are not objects to be used, then disposed of. This was my first time participating in the Take Back the Night march, and despite my awareness of social justice issues, this event really did open my eyes.

I can vividly remember the mild rain, the grey skies and the constant switch between high energy and a beautiful sort of solemnity. There was the occasional group of children in the streets, who had been playing but stopped: to wave and cheer, or to stop and stare, depending on the mood. There were women talking about their experiences with Take Back the Night, or their experiences with sexual abuse. There were students, elders, and children of every culture. It was a night of unity, and not one I will be forgetting anytime soon.

Indigenous women and girls were a topic of discussion this year, what with the rise in awareness of the violence these women face, and the discovery of Tina Fontaine's body in the Red River. Nothing, I think could have struck closer to home with me. I myself am not Aboriginal, but I live in a community that has a large aboriginal population, and growing up, I had many friends of indigenous background. Among them, was a girl whom for the sake of her privacy I am going to call Vanessa. Vanessa and I were very close, and had been for a long time. I don't doubt my ignorance of a lot of her problems, as she was always a very distant person, but I do know her life wasn't an easy one. She had many friends, and despite the depression I knew she struggled with, she always found a reason to smile. She is the strongest person I know.

At the age of twelve, she was raped, coming home at night from a friend's house. She didn't have the support she needed, and I watched her slowly give up on everything. It was painful, watching her happiness fade. She attempted suicide once, to my knowledge, and I have no doubt that it was related to the aforementioned sexual abuse. She had so many plans for the future that she confessed to me over the years and whether they were just spur of the moment ideas, or genuine plans doesn't matter, because they stopped. Vanessa was once so full of goals, plans, and dreams for the future, and I watched her start running away from the present. I spoke to her recently, but I can't say for sure if she is doing well or not. I never could. I marched for her, and for the other women who have been in similar situations, and I'm quite sure that if anyone suffered blisters or aching feet from the walk, they thought it was completely worth it.

Hers is not the only story like this. It could be you, your mother, your sister, your best friend. There are many women who deal with sexual abuse, domestic violence, and the demons that come with it. These are actual human beings and it is unacceptable. The night should not be terrifying, women should not be scared to walk alone at night. Our keys should not be clutched like weapons, and we should not be viewed as walking sex objects with nice legs and breasts. One in six American women should not be the victim of attempted or completed rape. That is why Take Back the Night exists, and that is why I encourage you to take part in next year's Take Back the Night.

Sources cited:

<https://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims>

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