

Community Response and Advocacy from the Ground up

Speaker #3 – Pat Noonan

This song is the beginning of my Inquest Journey:

My heart is moved by all I cannot save

So much has been destroyed

I have to cast my lot with those

Who age after age perversely

With no extraordinary power

Reconstitute the world.

This is the song I sang with a few friends at the December 6 Memorial in Chatham 3 years ago.

Women shared their memories of mothers, daughters and sisters, recent victims of femicide.

The Vince and Dupont families were both there.

They influenced me in making an important decision that day.

On my way out of the chapel I stopped at the lead car in the procession to speak directly to Barbara Dupont.

I introduced myself and told her that I would be there for Lori, referring of course to the upcoming inquest.

And today I sit with Catherine, Theresa Vince's daughter whose family led the way for us to follow, building the Windsor inquest on their strength and commitment.

Being involved in the Inquest became a life altering experience.

My original plan was to attend at least twice a week,

but once the hearings started my priorities changed.

If I only went in the morning I would miss the other half of the testimony.

I might miss a strong witness telling us about her own experience of harassment or threatening behaviour in the workplace.

Continual attendance enabled us to put together the bigger picture, to feel the all encompassing climate of the workplace.

Gradually the single incidents led to an analysis of how systemic and deep the problem was.

The lawyers' questioning portrayed the workplace situation and the lines of interaction among doctors, nurses and administration.

The line of command was very confusing.

It was difficult to watch the nurses testify under aggressive questioning.

The daily highlight was observing the lawyer from ONA (Ontario Nurses Association) cross-examine the witnesses.

Her skillful questioning usually opened up layers of the problem that had been passed over earlier. (Better than TV!).

One of the most difficult days was the presentation by expert witness Dr. Peter Jaffe, well known psychologist and Academic Director of Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children.

He identified at least 40 “critical events” during which someone could have intervened in a way that may have changed the situation that led up to Lori’s death.

We were able to spend time with the nurses who were there as witnesses or friends of Lori. We talked with the nurse who was right beside Lori when she was killed. These women experienced deep emotional repercussions from this experience. Other nurses talked about reporting harassment and unsafe situations that were not followed up on. Being with the Dupont family on a daily basis was another privilege. The Vince family was often present. Theresa’s husband would point out similarities and differences between the inquests. His insights helped us with follow up to our Coroner’s Report. Even though it was emotionally upsetting to attend the sessions, we got some sense of what the families had to live with for the rest of their lives. Sometimes Barbara would take the time to talk to a witness after testifying to make sure other information was shared.

There were other days when family members had to walk out of the session because it was just too much.

Because Windsor has such an active women’s community other supporters were well represented at the inquest.

One of our women kept detailed notes and sent them out weekly to people who were unable to attend.

Those of us who were regulars sat near the families.

We became identified as “The Women In White”.

We were silent witnesses but very present.

Definitely making a public statement.

I liked to think that we were expert witnesses!

The media deserve special credit for their accurate and detailed reporting.

Radio, television and newspaper reps were always present.

We felt the community’s awareness was definitely raised through their onsite work.

The inquest ended in January 2008 with the presentation of the 26 Coroner’s Jury Recommendations.

Three months earlier, I thought that this was when I’d go back to my other life.

But we knew as a group what we had to do.

We committed ourselves to a follow up year “watchdogging” the implementation of the recommendations.

The Dupont Inquest Action Group was born!

It is important to examine the structure of the group...the experience, skills and commitment brought by each member.

The diversity was central to the group’s effectiveness and solidarity.

Barbara Dupont, Lori’s mother, whose presence inspired and motivated us, the heart of the group always with us.

Beth, a young woman with computer expertise that I think we overworked. She represents UFCW...writes good briefs.

Lois, our wordsmith, brought clarity to our discussions and writings. Lots of editing. Some articles were co-written.

Lynn the faithful recorder of the weekly inquest sessions.
Administrative background. Helpful board experience.
Pat and Sandy, CAW activists. Expertise in lobbying and contract
Language. Big 3 contracts included right to refuse in cases of harassment since 1993.
Charlene, feminist researcher. Teaches Violence in the Lives of Girls and Women at U
of Windsor.
Carol, our facilitator who holds us all together. Sends out the agendas, cancellations etc.
Very media savvy. Persuasive too.
Joy is from WOHIS Windsor Occupational Health and Information Service...has access
to every possible health and safety issue.
Writes good letters to The Star.
Michelle our beloved Inquest specialist sharing her wealth of experience and organizing
skills. Connecting us to the Vince Family and their inquest.
My claim to fame is belonging to as many women's groups as possible but in this one we
got to do everything we said we'd do so I'm honoured to be part of it.
Pat Noonan.

The coroner's report gave the targeted groups one year to report back on the 26
recommendations. There were 34 subsections directed to all the hospitals with 3
specified for Hotel Dieu Windsor. The hospital board presented their progress report in
June 2008 but our group was not satisfied with their response...too many sections still
under review. We requested copies of their by-laws and policies so that we could make
our own recommendations. There was a lot of work involved but we shared
our results with the board and the administration. The dialogue was open and we felt that
our input was well received. The board presented their final report in December 2008.
Important training and education is in operation through The Workplace and Violence
Program facilitated by the newly appointed Safe Workplace Advocate.