

Glen Res

R.R. # 1

Winlaw, British Columbia

VOG 2JO

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An open letter to the community:

Last Sunday morning, I took it as my job to put up the directional signs for the West Kootenay Women's Festival. At that point, the signs had been torn down twice and defaced once, but we were expecting another small crowd of participants to arrive for the Sunday Stage and NFB film showing, some of whom had not been to the festival before.

A conference organizer

~~_____~~ had said that we needed someone who was familiar with the roads to put up the signs, and since I live next door, I volunteered. At that moment, I was feeling quite happy. There were old friends visiting me, and neighbours and co-workers and new friends all about. The workshops at the festival had been interesting and inspiring, the food, the music and companionship had been satisfying and enjoyable.

I got in my vehicle and drove off with the newly made signs. I stopped at the first turn, and started tying up the new sign, wondering for a moment where the old one had gone. Just then, a pick-up truck with several men in it went past, and I had my

first sense of fear: Were these the men who had torn down or defaced the signs? What might they do to me for putting them back up? I tied the logging tape tighter, and moved on to the next intersection.

The scene repeated itself, and the sense of fear got stronger with each sign that I had to replace. In my mind I was fighting against it. "This is my community," I said, "I have lived here in comradeship with the men and women here for 19 years. What could I have to fear?" And then I heard my heart cry out.

The impulse that caused those persons to deface and tear down and destroy the signs for the Women's Festival was the exact same impulse that, taken a few steps further, moved Marc Lapine to shout "feminists!" and, with his hatred, kill fourteen women engineering students in Montréal last December. And it was happening in the one place I had imagined that I was safe.

The world is changing. The world is changing all over the world. People of colour, women, aboriginal people, people from oppressive political regimes have all been actively seeking a more egalitarian society, a society that is not based on the exploitation of the many for the benefit of a few. We have been seeking a just society. One where there is food, education, and safe shelter for all, and gainful employment where health, safety and the continuity of our planet are considered.

For some who have had more than their share of the wealth of the planet, perhaps there is some threat to their order, but many see the benefits of greater social democracy—Less poverty, less violence, less welfare, and a stronger social net. But for those who fear the emergence of a more egalitarian society, where sexism and racism are no longer tolerated, where women and men have equal opportunity and responsibility in the world, for those people, violence is still used as a means of control.

How have we raised our young that they can think that those kinds of actions are acceptable behaviour? Where are we failing in our educational systems that our ability to communicate is so stifled all some can do is to tear down and deface and destroy that or those they don't understand. And what does it mean to the rest of us?

When will men turn to their brothers and say, "Stop! That is not the way I want to live!" Until men learn and are willing to speak out to each other on these issues, women and other disadvantaged groups will continue to have to struggle on their small but often effective paths on their own.

At the sing-along campfire Friday night at the festival, we sang "Bread and Roses", a song that has grown and changed since it was first sung in memory of the women who died in a garment industry

factory fire because they were locked in at their workstations. One of the changes in that song is in the verse that now reads: "As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men, for they are women's comrades and we stand as one with them." When I sing that verse, I have felt proud, and have believed the sentiment. The women in this community have been instrumental in promoting the change. It used to read, "for they are women's children and we mother them again."

It is time for the rest of the men to grow up and be worthy of that change. To be worthy of standing alongside those of us who want to make a better world for us all to live in peacefully, in health and happiness. And without fear.

In hopes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Marcia Braundy".

Marcia Braundy