

No history of violence...Really??

Last week, yet again, Quebec mourned the murder of a victim of domestic violence. We have been exposed to many testimonials of individuals who were surprised and confused by the alarming news. They had perceived the couple as one without a history of domestic violence, believing the Ghannoums' separation to be what had motivated the tragedy. Was this however, really the case?

Without revealing the confidences shared with counselors, for Jinane Ghannoum, as for many other women, domestic violence is present within the relationship well before an actual separation. For the victim, leaving her partner is an effort to escape violence and reclaim control of her life. If violence persists after separation and in the days, weeks and months that follow, the risks and dangers can increase; we would be wrong to believe that such violence uniquely surfaces at the moment of separation as an isolated incident. In the many years that we have worked as counselors, the thousands of women we have met and come to know during our careers, have confided that even before they had begun to envision an end to their relationship, they had suffered grave acts

of violence.

These testimonials also shed light and reveal that even in situations where the victim will seek help and share the details of the violence with certain individuals, neither the majority of her entourage nor neighbors truly know what is going on within the relationship and the nightmare she is living. This proves that domestic violence remains a taboo subject and that even in 2009 it is still difficult to break the silence. When woman actually do speak out, they must do so with great strength and courage as they will face prejudice, negative reactions from those that share their lives as well as pressure from their communities. And so we must emphasize that women are not responsible for the domestic violence they suffer and that nothing can justify such acts of violence.

In present times, many relationships end in separation and divorce. Fortunately the majority do not come to know such fatal consequences. When it is the case however, the media and society as a whole

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must recognize its responsibility to provide an accurate picture of the situation. They must not simply rely on superficial appearances but instead they are obliged to ask the right questions and properly investigate as well as analyze the situation.

Although money, hard work and energy have all been invested to counter domestic violence, the murder of Jinane Ghannoum proves that as a society, there is still much work to be done. All parties that intervene with the aggressor and the victim, in particular those who decide matters of justice, must be capable of evaluating the degree of danger and level of risk posed to the victim and then act to ensure their safety. If prevention campaigns affirm that conjugal violence is unacceptable, we must build on this effort. The message must grow to be a norm of society which is respected by all and not words that go forgotten. And this strong collective stand must be complimented by serious consequences enforced upon the men

who disregard it.

It is important to remember that helpful resources exist throughout Quebec, ready to offer needed support and valuable services. If you fear for your well being, your safety or that of a loved one, we urge you to contact us.

In conclusion, on behalf of the counselors of Laval let it be known that we are truly saddened by this tragedy. The families involved, especially the three children, are in our thoughts.

Organizations in Laval working to put an end to domestic violence:

La Maison Lina : 450-962-8085
La Maison l'Esther : 450-963-6161
La Maison le Prelude : 450-682-3050
CAVAC : 450-688-4581
Bouclier d'Athena, family services : 450-688-6584
CHOC : 450-975-2462

Elsewhere in Quebec:
SOS Violence Conjugale : 1-800-363-9010

Letter to my friend *(my daughter, my sister, my mother)*

Elyse,

How are you my dear friend? Let me begin by saying how happy I was to hear from you and how touched I was to come to know that you sometimes think of me too. I only hope that you are not angry with me for having neglected our friendship... Although life's circumstances have lead me to refuse several of your invitations, know that I have missed you terribly Elyse.

I often think of the talk we shared the evening before my wedding. I remember how Paul and I surprised, and maybe even shocked everyone, when we announced our plans to marry so soon after we had met! Truth is, I was kind of scared to take such a huge step so quickly, but we were so much in love.

How time passes... My little Samuel is already five years old. The three of us spent a lot of family time together. So much so that my mom feels she doesn't really see me anymore. I know it's hard to imagine; remember how close my mom and I were? But the reality is, it's easier this way. It's sad but my parents don't really get along with Paul, so I try to avoid the tension and keep my contact with them to a minimum.

And Paul, he's as protective of me as he's always been. He calls me often during my day and if ever he can't get a hold of me, he's worrying kicks in. I know he's had some tough relationships in the past and I guess he just needs me to prove that I'm a woman he can trust. He's still super organised and responsible, so it just kind of came to be that it's him who handles our finances. So now all I have to do after a day at work is come home, cook and take care of our little guy Samuel. Of course the cooking didn't come easy. In fact Paul had to ask his mom to teach me some of her recipes because I had absolute no talent in the kitchen. Oh how I remember him making fun and laughing at me at the beginning... The cooking was just one of his many obsessions. Now that I think about it, he always wants things at home done in a specific way, his way and if not there's trouble. But I guess its cause he has good taste and God knows he's smarter than I can ever be.

This year we're focused on saving money for Paul's new business. As for my work, a weird thing happened the other day. A close colleague of mine said she was worried about me. She thinks I pay less attention to myself and to my physical appearances than I used to and it might actually be true. It's like Paul says, there's no need for me to make myself "up" just to go to work. Mind you, I never really have anywhere to wear make-up or a cute dress to apart from work; I really don't go out much anymore. Anyways, Paul he likes me fine just the way I am; the natural look. And anyways, who else do I have to please? Who else's eyes must I look pretty in, other than his?

So that's it, things are well. Wait, that's not really the whole story, although I shouldn't complain, I must admit that the truth is, I feel alone. I'd like to see you again Elyse. I'd love for you to call me. Just remember to call me at work and not at home. Paul often has the phone off, he likes to have "quiet time" and not be disturbed. And other times, he just forgets to give me my messages. Maybe we can have lunch sometime and just talk. I kind of have a big decision coming up and I'd appreciate hearing your opinion. Guess what? I've been offered a promotion at work and it really is a great opportunity but Paul doesn't seem too happy about it. He thinks the fact that I'd have one evening meeting a month would affect our relationship. He says he makes enough money to take care of our family and that the financial responsibilities shouldn't weigh on his wife. But still, I find myself wanting this position. It'd be a great challenge and the sense of accomplishment would feel great!

Hoping we'll speak soon, I leave you with one last thought: I think of you often Elyse and can't wait to see you again.

Your friend,

Sylvia

Dear Sylvia,

What a pleasant surprise to have finally heard from you last week. The fond memories we shared are often on my mind. Remember the hours we spent sipping our café au lait and chatting? Those were the good old times! Reading that you missed me really had an impact on me. I was touched Sylvia, because I miss you too. I miss that you're no longer in my life.

I always wondered what made you refuse my many invitations. It was so unlike you, you were my social butterfly, always the first to accept an invitation. Oh how I remember how hesitant you sounded the last time we spoke on the phone...

But I'm happy to hear that you seem relatively well. Especially your news of the promotion you've been waiting for all these years! I always believed it would come your way. As devoted as you are, you truly deserve it. And your little guy, I can hardly believe he's already five years old. Seems like only yesterday you told me you were pregnant... With your pregnancy, the move, and your marriage all in the same year, it just feels like somehow, somewhere, we lost touch. You often seemed so stressed and I sometimes worried you'd collapse under all that pressure...

Sylvia, my dearest and oldest friend, there's something I just need to share with you. For a long time I've had something on my mind, something that weighs heavy on my heart, something that has only been intensified since your last letter. I find myself feeling uneasy when you write of your relationship with Paul. I must be honest and admit that I worry when you write that "there's trouble" if things aren't done Paul's way. What do you mean by trouble Sylvia? And when I realize just how isolated you've become, I'm just so surprised, it seems so unlike you to limit the time you share with friends and family, especially your mom.

It hurts me to have my best buddy writing, that her husband has great taste and is "smarter than she can ever be" and that it's okay for him to be in control of everything: the budget, your social life, and even your physical appearance! He seems to have some strange hold on you and a huge amount of control of you and your life! What happened to the Sylvia I knew and loved? A confident woman with great strength and a positive attitude? Where is she hiding? Because I'm sure she's still in there somewhere...?

Why are you questioning this promotion that you've been waiting and hoping for since forever? Are you really thinking of not realizing your childhood dream? You're worried about Paul's reaction and scared he'll get mad? What's going on Sylvia? We must get together and talk.

Sylvia, I hope you know that you are precious and a loved friend. I hope you realise that I speak of all this only because I worry about you... I couldn't consider myself a true friend or deserve your friendship if I simply closed my eyes and ignored what is going on. Please be careful Sylvia. Whatever your worries, whatever your troubles, I am here fir you. Don't live this alone...

Your loving friend.

Elyse

For emergencies please contact 911

**THREE SHELTERS
IN LAVAL:**

**La Maison de Lina
450-962-8085**

**La Maison l'Esther
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**La Maison Le Prelude
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**S.O.S Violence Conjugale
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