

Sisters in Spirit

Tragic statistics regarding Aboriginal women discussed

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An audience of young and old, women and men and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal gathered at St. James United Church Feb. 16 to hear a presentation on the tragic research findings by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC).

Quaker Dick Cotterill and Nova Scotia Native Women's Association representative, Rose Julien of Paqtnkek First Nation, spoke during the event and the statistics they enlightened the audience with clearly illustrated that there is a disproportionate number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada compared to any other demographic group in the country.

Between 2000 and 2008, 153 cases of murder have been identified in NWAC's Sisters in Spirit database.

These women represent approximately 10 percent of the total number of female homicides in Canada despite the fact that Aboriginal women make up only three percent of the total female population in Canada.

The majority of women and girls in NWAC's database were murdered while 115 women and girls are still missing.

I thought the night was a great success," Julien said of the well-attended event. "Having the support and interest for our Sisters in Spirit, it's great to see the town of Antigonish, the county of Antigonish supporting Aboriginal loss. I feel confident they're going to support us in our campaigns."

Julien said she will continue to work with other groups such as St. F.X., the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority (GASHA) for this cause and others that support women.

"The more power we have as women together, not just



Elizabeth McGibbon makes a presentation to Rose Julien at the conclusion of last week's Sisters in Spirit event at the St. James United Church Hall. Looking on is Dick Cotterill who, like Julien, made a presentation during the event. (Richard MacKenzie photo)

"It's tiring to see another of my sisters missing and gone. I don't want her to be just another statistic... I don't want more statistics. I want it to stop."

Rose Julien

Aboriginal women, we can overcome the barriers we face right now," she said.

Julien spoke of her own efforts and how she maintains energy and motivation against such demoralizing statistics.

"I deal with it because I'm the voice of women who can't speak," she said. "For the women who are still missing and the ones who have sustained abuse and are scared to be part of the justice system, I speak and do what I have to because if I don't, who will."

"It's tiring to see another of

my sisters missing and gone," she added. "I don't want her to be just another statistic... I don't want more statistics. I want it to stop."

Cotterill, a Truro resident, said he became involved in the issue as part of his role in the United Church a few years ago and their work with social justice and reconciliation.

"And the Quakers have a long history of social justice and Aboriginal peoples' concerns," he said. "I do some volunteer work in prisons and also some volunteer

work within Aboriginal communities, working towards reconciliation."

Considering all the tragic statistics presented during the night, he talked about one which resonates with him.

"I think the high percentage of unsolved murder cases of Aboriginal women versus the norm, I think that's a big one," he said.

And as for what continues to motivate him, Cotterill referred to the old and well-known parable.

"I'm a Christian and I was going to finish last night and again tonight with the parable of the Good Samaritan," he said.

"You're walking down the road of life and you see somebody lying in the ditch, bruised, battered and bleeding, do you just walk on by or do you stop and help that person. That's how I got involved."