

A TRAGIC REMINDER OF THE PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

WOMEN OFTEN FRIGHTENED INTO STAYING IN RELATIONSHIPS, WRITES CARM BOZZO



CARM BOZZO Column

Like many people, on Feb. 14 I celebrated what is known as "love day" or "Valentine's Day" with my husband and my two sons; we took the boys to their first concert, and tucked them into bed later than usual for a school night.

As we crawled into our bed, exhausted, we heard what thousands heard that night - a loud, interrupting alarm ringing through the house.

Jumping out of bed, my husband ran through the house trying to figure out whose alarm was going off. He came back to our room and told me it was an Amber Alert. I had read about an 11 year old who was allegedly abducted by her father earlier that evening, so I assumed it was for her.

We hoped for the best and fell asleep.

Early the next morning I read on Twitter that the Amber Alert was over and

the child had been located - again, I assumed she was found safe and all was well.

Much to my horror and to many others, the alert was over, she was located, but she was not found alive.

My heart sank: she was in the age range of both my kids. She was celebrating her birthday, she was with her father. This should never have happened.

Many don't realize that this criminal act is related to violence against women; one way that men try to exert power and control is to threaten harm to themselves and to their children. Sometimes that is why abused women stay in their relationships - the fear of their children being hurt, or even killed.

Days after her murder, a vigil was held in her honour. Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie made this statement: "Let this trage-

dy serve as a stark reminder that as a society, we can and we must do better to protect our women and our young girls from violence because this is simply unacceptable."

On Saturday night at our 24th Annual Gala Fundraiser, Executive Director Diane Beaulieu dedicated the evening to Riya.

Violence against women and girls is still prevalent in all our communities. As well, there are many ways violence against women and girls is perpetrated - abuse can be physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or financial, just to name a few.

If you are in an abusive relationship, please reach out to Halton Women's Place. Each call or visit is completely confidential. If you think someone you know is being abused, you can also call our crisis lines for help.

And although I never want to hear another Amber Alert again, I will always remember the one that rang out for Riya - as a mother who tucked her children into bed and who knew her kids were safe, while another mother was frantic to have her child safely in her arms again. That ringing alarm was a call of desperation, hope and it can wake me up any time.

Carm Bozzo is the development manager at Halton Women's Place.

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