

# Trail of candles pushes back darkness of abuse

By SANDRA OMAND  
Special to The Champion

It was a chance to remember those who suffered and those who survived.

It was also a time for those opposed to violence, and violence against women in particular, to show support during Halton's Take Back the Night walk.

About 250 women, men and children took to the darkened Oakville streets, their candles flickering in the warm September night, as they threaded their way along Lakeshore between Coronation Park and East Street.

Chanting slogans like, "The Streets Belong to Us" and "Yes means yes, no means no, however we dress, wherever we go", the mood was upbeat and optimistic.

Keynote speaker Dawna Speers, 53, of Mississauga, put a personal face to violence by talking about her 19-year-old daughter Monica, who was murdered by her boyfriend in 1991.

## Daughter preyed on by boyfriend

Ms Speers said her daughter's story was one involving abuse of a young girl who had low self-esteem and was preyed upon by a boyfriend who wanted control over her. After she left him, she was stalked and eventually killed.

Ms Speers has created a film of her daughter's story called "The Love That Kills" in hopes it will prevent a similar tragedy. The film was made in collaboration with the National Film Board and the Ontario Women's Directorate. It will be shown in high schools and universities across Canada starting in November.

The film depicts the warning signs of an abusive relationship — symptoms that are not always obvious.

"It is obvious if someone punches you, but it is not so obvious if they emotionally abuse you," said Ms Speers. "The emotional abuse ends up as isolation, intimidation, threats and finally assault behaviour."

Relating Monica's story over and over again has not been easy for Ms Speers, but she does it in remembrance of her daughter and as a reminder to others.

"Monica was always a very caring, loving girl and it is her spirit which carries me to tell her story and help others not to walk in her footsteps," said Ms Speers in an interview after her speech.

## Both genders support cause

People of varying ages and backgrounds joined in the trek.

"It makes me feel really good that everyone is together like a family and I think it is really, really good that men and women come out to support women's rights," said Julia Puffer, a 16-year-old high school student.

Martina DeSouza, 36, came with her two children from Burlington to attend the walk, feeling it was important for her seven-year-old son and five-year-old daughter to learn that any kind of abuse or degradation is unacceptable.

While some of the walkers were there for the first time, many, like 19-year old Justin Clarke of Oakville, had participated in past walks.

"With all the crazy stuff going on they need the support from all men, all women, all cultures as everybody needs to support each other," said Mr. Clarke, who was accompanied by a number of his friends.

Tara Nolan, 22, has also been on past walks, attending her first when she was 17. She said it is her way of supporting other women and making a statement that

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**DAWNA SPEERS**

women are not going to be afraid anymore.

But women in Scarborough, recently faced with the 'bedroom rapist', are afraid and in view of that some in the crowd expected a larger turnout.

Still, low attendance did not stop participants from enjoying the evening, which started at the band shell in Coronation Park with songs by Dream, Toronto folk singer EJ, dancing by the Loyola Drill Team and ended after the walk with singer Anjuli, and an open mike session.

The evening was organized by the Halton Rape Crisis Centre.



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