

Editorial

Mary Ann's story

Charlotte MacAulay 9 hrs ago 0



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This year's Montreal Massacre Memorial Service held a little more meaning for an eastern PEI family, the loved ones of Mary Ann MacKinnon who was violently taken from her family in 1951.

Descendants gathered at the annual event in Charlottetown, joining the many other PEI families to light a candle in remembrance of women they lost to violence.

Traditionally the ceremony encompasses the memory of the 10 Island women who were killed by violence in the years since the Montreal Massacre took place, the 14 victims of the massacre and the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

But the sad fact is there are always more stories that can be told. Mary Ann's is one.

She was a young widow with 11 children who chose to stand up in the face of misogyny.



Maureen Howlett and her granddaughter JoAnna Howlett light a candle in memory of Maureen's mother Mary Ann MacKinnon at the service of remembrance held at the Confederation Centre on December 5. Charlotte MacAulay photo

She was murdered by a man who sexually assaulted her daughter, after Mary Ann went to the police wanting justice for her eldest child.

The investigation led to criminal charges and on the night of November 8, shortly before his trial on the assault charge was to begin, the man shot her in her own home.

He was never brought to justice. He was found not guilty on the murder charge because of "insanity due to alcohol" and he never had to face the original assault charges.

The ripple affects of that have been felt by not only the 11 children who were left orphans, but the generations that have come since.

A song created in Mary Ann's memory performed for the first time at the service was especially consequential for relatives who attended.

But the significance goes beyond that, said Patricia MacAulay, her great niece who enlisted Island singer/songwriter Catherine MacLellan to write the tribute. In response to the song, Patricia created her own artwork, an embroidered piece that seeks to convey the weight and sorrow of the events along with the irrepressible spirit that threads through Catherine's words and music.

“I have always wanted some sort of public acknowledgment of Mary Ann as a person and a recognition of the courage she showed in standing up for her daughter,” Patricia said. “How many young women on this Island have returned home after an assault and have either told no one or, if they do share their experience with others, they are advised to be quiet to stay safe protect their “reputation”, or keep the peace? Our mistaken belief in the safety of girls and women on PEI has been purchased by their silence.”

Mary Ann’s daughter Maureen Howlett and son Justin McKinnon felt their mother’s story being told in such a way wiped away the misplaced shame that victims too often hold and if not justice, some freedom for Mary Ann.

“I could picture Mom riding freely bareback on a horse as I was listening,” Justin said.

MacLellan was honoured and humbled to do the song.



Maureen Howlett, daughter of Mary Ann MacKinnon, was very touched by the song PEI artist Catherine MacLellan wrote to honour Mary Ann. The first performance was on the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women at the Confederation Centre.

Charlotte MacAulay photo

“It was daunting, but so meaningful to be able to capture (the story),” she said.

Her hope is listeners will take away the message that it is a story about not just family but also community.

“I hope it reminds people to try and keep each other safe.”

The song and Patricia’s work of art can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91GtiaZcYFU>.

Safe home Mary Ann.

