Today is December 6th, The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. I always know when this date is approaching, just like how others remember the birthday of a loved one who has passed away.

On December 6th, 1989, I was working late at Pavillon Jean-Brillant, on the campus of the Université de Montréal. On my way to the subway station, I saw a police cruiser, all lights flashing, blocking the access to the north entrance road, where École Polytechnique is located. I thought that a student got into trouble.

In the morning, the news came as a shock to everyone. I learned that fourteen innocent women were shot, simply because they were women. While I did not directly know any of the victims, I was a member of the Karate Club, where half the members were friends from École Polytechnique, and most of them knew at least one of the victims.

My Polytechnique friends started to tell their stories, and soon these stories weaved an invisible fog of sadness around all of us and the sadness became inescapable. Every day, we would have to breathe the sadness and live with it. I remember that the sadness was thick and heavy, and not the kind that makes you cry, but the kind that makes you think about how life is unfair for many people.

Fourteen women were shot because they were women.

Let’s not forget.

Sylvain Rheault, URFA President