**International Women’s Day Remarks -2018**

Just the other day I was asked why IWD was important to me. I had to think about that for a moment – I know why it’s important on the grander scale – but why is it important to me personally? I think it is because, for those of us who work all year long trying to make a difference in women’s lives, seeing the struggles they face, the challenges and barriers they are up against, working to educate our youth about healthy relationships, non-violence and respect only to see the shelter beds still full every night, one can sometimes lose site of any progress or forward motion. On March 8, we stop everything for a few hours and look up from the work and back through history and realize that through the dedication and courage of women throughout the decades, we have made a difference. We are making a difference. It was, after all, less than 100 years ago that women were still “chattels”. It was in 1929, the year my mother was born, and that we were finally declared to be persons! We have made great strides since then – the vote for one thing, (use it wisely people!), in education (more women than men are graduating from post-secondary institutions now), in professional work and even to a degree, in politics. These achievements should be – and are – celebrated today. After all most of us here today have the autonomy, the independence and the means to be sitting here with like-minded people sharing our time today because of the accomplishments of our mothers, our grandmothers and great grandmothers before us!

But while we are celebrating we mustn’t lose site of the bigger picture. We mustn’t be lulled into a false vision of the world because our experience is is good. Back in January, after the Women’s Marches, I was reading an article about their success, their message and why they came to be. it was a good article – and then I made that fatal mistake. I scrolled down and read the comments. The worst ones, I have to admit, were the ones from other women. One I remember in particular said “ ohhhhh! Soooo oppressed! My hubby came home tonight, made dinner and then took out the garbage! The horror!!”. Many others also had this sarcastic tone, ridiculing the need to march for equality when women obviously had everything so cushy – because she herself did. It is a narrow, egocentric way of looking at the world. But one that is easy to fall into.

We cannot allow ourselves to forget, no matter how “perfect” you think your own situation is – that across the world millions of women are living in squalor, are raped within and out of their intimate relationships, are used as tools – and spoils - of war, denied an education, denied access to reproductive choices, denied their very human rights. And if that’s too hard to get your head around, closer to home, on the other side of town is a shelter where the beds are full every single night and where there is a waiting list for counselling to get help for trauma because of oppression, humiliation, violation, assault, abuse, and power inequity. Not so far from chattels after all.

If we are fortunate enough to enjoy privilege and a good life that is filled with respect, love and equality then aren’t we the very people who need to be marching? Aren’t our voices the exact voices that need to be raised protesting the oppression of those who perhaps do not have the platform, or the ability, or the strength to speak out?

According to the World Economic Forum, Gender parity across the globe is over 200 years away. Imagine! Men and women. Each represent 50% of the population – give or take. And yet, true equality of the sexes is still 200 years awa, at the rate we are progressing today. The theme for this year’s IWD is Press for Progress, with the hope that if we all start pressing, perhaps we can shift that time line.

During this time of almost unprecedented turmoil and focus on women’s voices – Me Too, Times UP, with the spotlight being shone on multiple allegations of sexual assault, harassment, misconduct and abuse of power, we, more than ever, need to join our voices with those brave women who are stepping forward in unprecedented numbers to say “**Enough!!”**

My article in Celebrating Women this year is entitled “Climate Change”. I’m not talking about the kind of climate change that is going to destroy the world if we don’t act soon to stop it, I’m talking about the kind of climate change that is going to continue to destroy the world if we don’t do something to move it forward, faster!

200 years? That’s ridiculous! We can do it much faster than that. I know we can. Heck, we went from being chattels to this in less than 100! We can do this! Press for Progress.