

In 7 minutes Innocence Was Lost

by Dr. Anna Baranowsky

www.annabaranowsky.com

April 23, 2019 is the Anniversary Date of the Tragedy on Yonge Street

In 7 minutes innocence was lost. April 23 2018, started like any normal day, I walked to work through Mel Lastman Square toward Yonge and then South to Yonge and Sheppard. By the time I finally walked home, hours later, there was yellow tape, no cars, few people and police presence.

10 innocent people died, 16 people were physically injured, and unknown numbers were left impacted with terrible emotional burdens.

As a psychologist specializing in trauma, I know that April 23 is now a significant anniversary date that can result in disturbing memories rushing to the surface. This is a normal response to exposure to extreme events. Trying to bypass the emotional pain and suffering only leads to hidden wounds that lead to deep inner struggles. For some, moments of this terrible day will come alive in thoughts, physical discomfort, emotional distress, disturbed sleep and flashbacks that can feel all too real. Even returning to Yonge Street can feel too intense to tolerate as the memory comes flooding in so powerfully. These are real wounds.

I see this pain and share the sadness and loss of innocence today.

This anniversary date carries a heavy burden. It is laden with many terrible moments that when woven together can cause emotional landmines. I know we can tread this landscape honourably using the gentlest of tools to pull out these splinters and ease our fractured memories. Good help and support is available and it does make a difference.

It is good that we can come together to remember the great losses that this day represents to families, loved ones, friends, colleagues and this community. We must also see the hidden emotional wounds of post-traumatic stress that can haunt us for days, months and years.

I have heard from so many that the emotional strain continues to be troubling long past the time when physical injuries may have resolved. For some who must now endure ongoing or life lasting losses, or chronic physical injuries, the added emotional wounds become even more impactful.

In an unconscious act of self-preservation our brains store bad memories along with the indelible emotional pain associated with the trauma. We remember the trauma and the emotional pain comes flooding in reminding us to avoid certain things in the hope that we will remain safe. But by telling stories of hope infused with the potential for growth, we reclaim the memory within our community, softening the past through collective acts of witnessing, showing kindness, and helping to shoulder the burden of those most deeply injured.

By coming together we share emotional space as a community. We can lean toward the grief and sadness courageously holding space for the deep collective wounds. Through this act of collective witnessing today, we create the possibility of lightening the heavy individual and lonely burdens of grief and loss that many carry today and every day. Rather than reflexively recoiling and stiffening around the pain of sadness, here, we can join together in the powerful and time honoured community act of bearing witness.

This is the path to move beyond violence and isolation and back toward inclusion, hope and community. There is courage in coming together that defies the sleepless nights, intrusive fearful images, dread, loneliness, and frightening memories. Now, by coming together we give fresh air and light to the tough inner wounds which are lightened by our carrying them as a community.

1 minute of silence

Let us use this time for silence to hold space for the (memory of those who we lost, for those who were injured and) for suffering that we still carry – let us carry this burden collectively in this moment of peace, in this moment of silence.

LINKS

American Psychological Association – Anniversary of a Trauma

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/anniversary>

National Center for Crisis Management – Anniversary Reactions

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/what/anniversary_reactions.asp

National Center for Victims of Crime – Trauma of Victimization

<http://victimsofcrime.org/help-for-crime-victims/get-help-bulletins-for-crime-victims/trauma-of-victimization>

Quick Victim Response Program

<https://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/vqrp.php>

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

<http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/cicb/>

Dr. Anna Baranowsky
Bear Psychology | Trauma Practice | Traumatology Institute
4789 Yonge Street, Suite 703
Toronto, Ontario M2N 0G3
Tel. 416-733-3838 | Fax. 416-733-8998
annabaranowsky.com | ticlearn.com | traumapractice.org
Inform * Inspire * Uplift
