

(Translated)

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Anne-Marie's Mom Does Not Take It

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When Suzanne Laplante-Edward calls, you answer. It is the least you can do. Mother of one of the fourteen victims of the Polytechnique tragedy, she commands respect. Especially when those blue eyes grab you like an eagle's Claw if she is talking about gun control.

Last week, Mrs. Laplante-Edward left me a message.

"Please, I have to talk to you. Harper want to destroy what took ten years Of my life to build. I won't let this happen.

She was referring to the conservative proposed law, meant to abolish gun registry, presently the talk of Parliament in Ottawa.

The projected law is officially a private members bill emanating from one Single Conservative MP, Garry Breitkreuz from Saskatchewan. But Prime Minister Stephen Harper supports it openly. And that, Anne-Marie's mom (does not take it) is furious.

I met Madame Laplante-Edward nearly twenty years ago, in Ottawa, while Covering the long legislative process which led us to the first Conservative law C17 on gun control, then to the Liberal law C-68. She was part of the dossier from the very beginning, because the long route Which led to a tightening of measures on firearms started with the killings Of École Polytechnique, in 1989. First, these was a petition, organized by Polytechnique students, of which Heidi Rathjen, which then led to the formation of the Coalition for Gun Control, supported by a great number of Medical associations, women's groups, police corps.

The process was gradual. The Progressist-Conservatives, in the time of Brian Mulroney and of Kim Campbell as Justice Minister (not to be confused with the reformists-conservatives of Harper), had their say, followed by The Liberals.

Seen from Pierrefonds where Suzanne Laplante-Edward lives, seen from this House where Anne-Marie grew up before getting killed with a semi-automatic firearm bought legally, this projected private members bill, aiming to abolish the gun registry is unbearable. Painful. And Harper's support of it is perceived as a slap in the face by the victims of this tragedy. Have we not said, a thousand times on the morrow of the tragedy, that ours daughters must not have died in vain ?

"In 1991, when we started working on gun control, there was in Canada that year 1441 gun deaths. In 2004, we were now at 792."

Suzanne Laplante-Edward is proud of these statistics.

"And Harper is telling us that it didn't save a single life ! How can he say that ?"

Mme Edward is however, not very impressed by two other party chiefs, the NDP Jack Layton and the Liberal Party Chief Michael Ignatieff, who still has not returned her calls. "I appreciate the social engagement of Jack Layton in the struggle on violence against women, says she. But it is rather useless if he allows his caucus members a free vote on the issue, aimed at dismanteling the gun law that protects them." Only Gilles Duceppe, Party Chief of Bloc Québécois, has assured her of his full support and has promised to vote against the proposed law which is going into second reading in a few weeks. "I simply don't understand their hesitation, she says. It is so obvious that the controls help us to protect lives." The argument often cited to criticize gun registry is its cost which numbers in the billions.

Mrs. Laplante-Edward understand that this astronomical cost can annoy taxpayers. "But it is not a reason to destroy the system! If you build a house that ends up costing you twice the price, you are allowed to be annoyed. But you would never consider demolishing it!

The complexity of the system and a certain number of administrative irritants - which could be delt with without throwing the baby out with the bath pan - are also part of the registry criticism. But here again, Suzanne Laplante-Edward doesn't buy it !

"We have never stopped anybody from hunting with firearms, says she. Do you know any hunters who were prevented from hunting because of the gun control law ?"

Sitting before me, in Pierrefonds, on a cold and grey day, Anne-Marie's mom is passionate and insists on certain points with a definite energy. After the tragedy that took her daughter from her, it is in this crusade that she invested this boundless energy, and having the opportunity to invest herself in this project has helped her to carry on despite atrocious grief.

After having arrived at a feeling of accomplishment, she needed to take a step back, she needed come back to her quarters, to bury her daughter, as she pointedly says. Grieve. Learn to live without her. But now, she is ready to bounce back like a lioness. "Am I going to need to unearth my daughter to make them understand that what they are trying to do doesn't make any sense ?"

She did not see Denis Villeneuve's film 'Polytechnique'. She does not fear for its quality and she particularly trusts young actress Karine Vanasse in this project. But she is in no hurry to take the plunge into horror once again, in "grief and disarray that is unspeakable."

Harper, in reopening the debate forces her, she says, to relive a tragic past that she was happy to have defied, finding happiness in world travel, and discovering the happiness of grand'motherhood.

"Really, I didn't want to go there again, she says, I could really have done without this. But now, he leaves me no choice. We are not going to let them do this."