

Never forget the past

The history of ICASA is inseparable from the survivors who speak out about the sexual abuse in their lives; the workers who are dedicated to advocacy, healing and prevention; the women and men who collect evidence, investigate, prosecute and deliberate; and the friends who understand that sexual assault is a violent crime of power and domination in a society that suffers from inequality. While ICASA wishes it could achieve its own non-existence, we cannot yet stop our work. Until sexual assault is eliminated, ICASA will continue to challenge institutions, issues, policies and practices that perpetuate sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism. Never forget that.

Until the early 1970s, amazingly little had been done to understand the crime of rape, the impact it had on victims or what was needed to help survivors and punish perpetrators. Centuries of rape – by family, friend, stranger. Centuries of oppression. Centuries of pain. Centuries of silence. Never forget that.

The great social and political movements of the 1960s propelled women to re-define their relationships within and outside of their families. Prior to this time, women had told their secrets and revealed their pain only to a best friend or trusted family member or maybe to no one. Then, with the rise of feminism, women began to whisper these heart-wrenching stories to new acquaintances in consciousness-raising groups. Women trusted other women with their greatest fears and their fragile hopes for a better life. This transformation of secrecy and pain to openness and courage turned personal grief and horror into political action. Never forget that.

From there, women both created and embraced rape crisis hotlines, volunteer counseling, Take Back the Night Rallies, debates with public officials and a new approach to healing from the terrorism of inequality. Women reported so many sexual violations to the police that the FBI started counting the reports. Never forget that.

For so long, women's torture and pain had gone unacknowledged. Women's screams were ignored by whole communities. Some victims lived out lives in quiet desperation, others were trapped in mental institutions, and more than a few victims turned to self-medication in the form of alcohol and drugs. Women suffered alone and in silence. Never forget that.

Never lose sight of the courage, strength and stamina of a woman who survives rape. She knows as much as anybody, about the cruelty and rage and destructiveness of humankind. Never lose sight of her heroic nature when she chooses to tell her story. When she chooses to speak out, she gives hope that stigmas can be overcome and myths dispelled. And when she speaks, we learn that rape is forever her reference point. Never forget that.

Rape crisis workers carry the message of rape victims. They print fact sheets, write plays, develop curriculum, educate students and repeat over and over that rape is about inequality, vulnerability and opportunity. Rape, they remind us, is not about what you wear or where you are or how you behave. Never forget that.

Rape crisis workers listen without judgment to her story. They extend trust. They keep her story confidential. They answer calls 24-hours a day. They go to the emergency room in the middle of the night. They cry when she is not looking. Rape crisis workers build bridges with law enforcement to encourage investigations and keep victims engaged in a long, grueling and sometimes futile process. Rape crisis workers study the law to hold

their own with prosecutors who have the power to reject a rape report, reduce charges or not file charges. Rape crisis workers collaborate with probation officers who must keep track of released sex offenders who stalk their victims. Rape crisis workers make fruitless efforts to dialogue with judges who declare “impartiality” as the reason for their silence. Rape crisis workers will not be silenced. Never forget that.

The number of people who have been raped is unbearable to comprehend. The number of people touched – whether directly or indirectly – by sexual violence is numbing. In comparison, the number of people responding to rape is miniscule. Volunteer and staff rape crisis workers and the hospital personnel, law enforcement officers, crime lab technicians, prosecutors, judges, probation officers and supporters of anti-rape work dedicated to the healing and safety of sexual assault victims need far more time and money to slam the door shut on rape. Rape is the most underreported crime in America. Never forget that.

Until rape ends, the work of the anti-rape movement must go on. The work will end when we say no to power and domination and control by some over others. The work will end when society says no to rapists – when a rapist can no longer get away with it. Until that happens we will keep working. Never forget that.