

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER IN HEARTACHE

Brittany Gathering in Garema Place, Canberra, 16 December 2022

Speech by Biff Ward

We stand shoulder to shoulder here today with Brittany

For all she has already gone through

To wish her the best possible outcome from the legal morass

And to wish her well in the rest of her life always and always and always

We stand shoulder to shoulder here today with all women who have ever reported rape or sexual abuse or harassment

Or not been able to report it

Probably all of us

We stand shoulder to shoulder here today with those unable to be here

Because to do so would be too triggering for them

We stand shoulder to shoulder here today with our first nations women

Who are 34 times more likely to be subjected to sexual and/or domestic violence

We stand shoulder to shoulder here today

With women with disabilities

And with trans women and non-binary and intersex people

All of whom are far more likely to be victims of sexual predation than others

We stand shoulder to shoulder here today with the women of Iran

Who right now are protesting every single day about the right to walk freely in the streets

And are being shot and gassed

Yet still they come

We also stand on the shoulders of all the millions of women who have gone before us
All the women who have ever refused to be silenced about sexual predation
By speaking up or speaking out
By whispering when necessary
Or shouting when possible
By developing language to name the crimes
By gathering and speaking with one voice
And sometimes by singing and dancing

We want what they all wanted
A world without rape
A world where sexual predation of any kind is an inconceivable act.
It's so simple. So very simple.

In the last ten years, we have reached a huge milestone along the road.
Public consciousness has crossed over from the default position of disbelieving the woman
to believing her.
Key sections of the media have done the same.

It's taken around 50 years, but here we stand, shoulder to shoulder in this moment of
cultural realignment, this moment of revolution.

Having attained this goal, the next step is clear – the legal system – as Avan has outlined.
Centuries of structures that privilege perpetrators and tear victims apart will not be
transformed overnight.

The milestone for complete transformation of the law and the legal profession is situated a
long way off, along a winding, hilly road. But we will get there! It is highly likely that the
women in the legal profession will play a leading role here.

Steps are already being taken – tougher workplace arrangements and complaints systems.
Our ACT Govt is working to implement recommendations from last year's *Sexual Abuse
Response and Prevention Report*.

Other Governments are making moves too.

What is our role? What can we do?

1. Talk with any lawyer you happen to know or come across. What do they think about rape being by far the most under-reported crime? What ideas do they have about how to change the situation?
2. Talk with some friends and create a movement of allies to First Nations women. Study what being an ally means and act accordingly.
3. Also forge connections with the Iranian women in our community. Find out how we can support them.
4. In general, talk with anyone. ... remember that every big leap forward is actually built on the tens of thousands, the millions, of conversations, big or small – and the meetings, rallies and demos and choral performances - that happen over years and years and years. One sentence of feminist insight overheard by a stranger in a café can make a difference that you'll never know about. Ideas come from seeds - every bit of talk might be a seed.
5. The men here today – our allies – know what their job is. It's other men, the men project. Raising consciousness. Go for it.

Everyone single one of us is crucial to the making of this history.

Our fury, our grief and our love drive us forward.

We go beyond hope. We will prevail.

To end, I'm going to return to the language of dreams, as in the song *Blessings for Brittany*, and the lines of a poem I wrote over 40 years ago...*

To dream a world into being
is regarded by many as insanely
impractical

*We know there is a world
Without rape and this world is
In our minds*

As we struggle cross the plains
towards the mountains of freedom
we know

what to take with us and what
to leave behind. Travelling
light

we know when to speak or be
dumb (eyes glazed with the matt
of our knowing)

we know when to run, or to lie
in the sun. We know when to run
from danger

and circle and weave and return
from behind, clearing the plains
of the canker.

And the plains will rise up,
The mountains sink down
when we dream

This world into being.

Remember – even when we leave here today – we stand shoulder to shoulder.
Together.

- Published in *Father Daughter Rape*, The Women's Press, 1984