

TAKE BACK THE NIGHT

By BETH LINDSEY
Staff writer

One out of every three women will be a victim of sexual assault during her lifetime. Only 16 percent of rapes are reported. Seventy-five percent of rape victims know their attackers. The Senate Judiciary Committee's 1991 report found that 624,000 women are raped every year, 12,000 women each week, one woman every 50 seconds.

The atmosphere was hushed, some greeting each other in muffled tones while others sat in nervous silence. The mood was intense as students, faculty members, administrators, and members of the Davidson community awaited the fifth annual Take Back the Night.

Take Back the Night, Davidson's annual forum on rape, focuses on an issue that is much more prevalent than many at Davidson would care to admit. "Davidson is very good at doing intellectual exploration of very tough issues, but is not very good at exploring the emotional side," says Sarah Carlson '93, a news intern in College Relations.

Letitia Campbell, who headed up Women's Month, agrees. "This event puts a human face on what is

sometimes a really abstract issue."

This year's event featured four speakers, including Courtney Gilbert, Jessalyn Wynn, an additional female, and a male. Each presented his or her own story, as descriptive or as general as each would like and exposed the powerful "human face" of this problem. They brought to each listener the frank realization that the issue of rape is not just on the news or in the newspaper but is a reality at Davidson.

The speakers were followed by Junior Laura Leibfreid's rendition of Tori Amos' "Silent All These Years" and a poetry reading. Each audience member then tied a red ribbon around his or her wrist in support of rape victims. The event closed with a silent vigil outside of the Union in which members present held candles and tied ribbons on a tree in remembrance of rape victims.

Carlson was part of the first Rape Awareness Committee formed at Davidson in 1989. When she joined, she "felt a strong sense of solidarity based on something more than similar academic and ideological interests," she says.

Although at that time the Dean of Students Office made the rape education program top priority,



Students gather for a candlelight vigil to memorialize rape victims and protest violence against women.

Brandon Clarke

"we encountered considerable opposition from other students who felt threatened by our frank discussions of sex, Patterson Court, alcohol, and power relationships... and vehement letters filled *The Davidsonian*, debating feminist agendas," says Carlson.

Take Back the Night, a program which now takes on a variety of forms and serves a variety of purposes, began in England as a protest against the fear that women encountered walking the streets at night. It came to the United States in 1978 and has taken root in most

of the country. Occurring in a variety of forms, Take Back the Night finds unity in its desire for the self-empowerment of the women planning and attending the rally and march.

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FLAG

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ognized FLAG's supporters and expressed excitement about the forum, saying, "It makes me realize how far FLAG has come."

However, Grimmel also described recent incidents which she said "make me realize how far we have to go." On a men's freshmen hall two weeks ago, a FLAG member was verbally harrassed by a group of three students as he posted flyers for the sexuality forum. Recently, FLAG's bulletin board in Chambers was vandalized and torn down.

Panelists responded to three general questions regarding the discovery process of their sexual orientation, people who have helped them through their discovery process, and how their experiences at Davidson have been instrumental. Then the forum opened up to audience questions, oral and written. The panel included two men and four women. Senior Hal Dougherty, former Co-chair of FLAG and a panel member at last year's forum, joined the group during the audience question portion.

Freshman Robert Knight, a new Co-chair of FLAG, spoke poignantly about losing a friend in high school because he was homosexual: "My friend told her dad, and her dad said I had mental problems and needed to go to a counselor. She felt like she couldn't be my friend. The situation is still not resolved."

Knight's mother travelled from Orlando to be at the forum and addressed the crowd. She said,

"I know that you love somebody first, and you love them no matter what comes along. Robert is a blessing in my life, and I love him."

Freshman Amber Sharick spoke candidly about her bisexuality: "I've never said I'm straight, I'm gay, bisexual, whatever. Being bisexual is a weird thing. I think it is misunderstood.... Rules were never very clear for me. I hate to put a limit on friendships, and say, 'Because you are female, I can only love you so much.'"

Sharick's freshman hall attended the forum en masse and cheered loudly when she spoke. Sharick spoke emotionally about their support. "My hall has been amazing. Without them, I'm not sure I could be here tonight... I have been amazed by the acceptance. They treat me with respect."

Lisa Moore, a 1994 graduate, travelled from Washington D.C. to speak at the forum. Moore says, "I didn't want to deal with [my homosexuality] while at Davidson. I was at Davidson at a time when there were several black students who did not make me feel comfortable with this issue at all."

Moore, who is African-American, said, "For me, it is a racial issue... I'm still in the process of dealing with the black community." Moore said she returned to Davidson for the forum to let people know that "gay people are all types."

Senior Allison Greenlee spoke of using the Davidson FLAG network to feel more comfortable with her sexuality. After the sexuality

forum her sophomore year, she wrote Meg Jones, who had spoken at the forum, a letter. Greenlee said, "Anytime you know there is somebody else who is in the same situation that you are, it makes it easier."

Amy Bertram, a 1994 graduate, explained how her classes at Davidson helped in the process of discovering her sexuality. "I began questioning my sexuality when writing papers last year at Davidson... now I look at my journal entries, and I'm amazed I didn't put two and two together."

Bertram described how she encounters problems when she and her current girlfriend are together. "Any time that Allison and I show any form of affection, even from good friends, we get some kind of flack... it's a real uncomfortable thing for some people. We try not to flaunt it, but sometimes I want to hold the hand of the person I am dating."

In response, Dougherty said, "It takes time to work through that. Holding hands might be a jerk to their system, but maybe that's a jerk that they need."

Sophomore Zac Lacy kept the mood light with his witty insights, especially when responding to a question asking why he uses the word "faggot." "I use those words because they're descriptive. I used the word 'fag' for 19 years before I realized I was one."

Lacy also spoke about the Davidson community. "These people sitting at this table are the only openly gay students [at

Davidson]. That is the definition of repressive. I have to go elsewhere to find a social life within the gay community... We need a more open dialogue. That is the way you lead to less repression."

After two hours of dealing with issues ranging from homosexual marriages to having children to Biblical issues, the tone of the participants, which had ranged from giddy to frustrated, ended on an upbeat note.

Jones, who could be called the mother of the Sexuality Forum, says there is still room for more discussion: "Those people are basically the only people who are willing to come out to more than two or three people. There are

people sitting out in the audience who are not quite so open. One of the keys to this whole issue is to have visible role models.... Davidson can't go back. I feel good that this movement or whatever you want to call it will continue."

Jones, who is leaving Davidson to attend graduate school, says, "Those people yelling and clapping for them wouldn't have happened three years ago. That was the neatest thing I observed sitting in that room: there wasn't that tension."

"I hope that the sexuality forum will continue to happen and that people will care enough to make it happen."

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