

The Virgin Islands Consortium

38 Years Later, The Women's Coalition's 'Take Back the Night' Struggle Continues

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ST. CROIX -- In 1981, about 20 women gathered in Christiansted for a rally that sought to bring awareness to Domestic Violence in the territory, as there were virtually no voices speaking out against the abuse women had been experiencing. Back then, such efforts were so taboo that the women who rallied were accused of wanting to breakup homes; they were called men haters, and the weren't well received in the community at the time, said Carol Battuello, a founding member of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix, who spoke Thursday night following a march from the St. John Episcopal Church in town to the Scale House at Fort Christiansvaern.

During that rally -- still called "Take Back the Night" to this day -- "men lined both sides of King Street and they were not happy. There was cursing and threats," said Ms. Battuello. "I was somewhat frightened; I wanted to support this young organization, I wanted to support the cause but I honestly thought that first night I wasn't sure that I was going to come out of there alive. It was really messed up."

Thirty-eight years later, "I am happy to be alive to see that men are among us and that the community has embraced Take Back the Night," she added.

Indeed, Clema Lewis, executive director of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix, said the organization has seen solid support over the years from the men of St. Croix. "Let's be real clear, this work could not be done without men supporting us. Let's not be misunderstood, it's the Women's Coalition with the brothers helping in the back," she said.

Participating in the march were three male senators: Kurt Vialet, Kenneth Gittens and longtime supporter Novelle Francis. There were no female lawmakers at the event.

The rally has long served to raise awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault not only on St. Croix but territory-wide. Women's Coalition itself has grown into an essential organization facilitating a number of services -- from offering support to rape victims, to providing crisis intervention and safe emergency housing.

There were 56 pairs of shoes lined on a sidewall of the Scale House, all representing women, children and even men who have died as a result of domestic violence.

The night ended with what is called a "Countdown to Violence", which sees attendees of the rally forming a circle and naming aloud their respective numbers in the order they were called in a show of support for the movement. Last night's count went up to 118.

To learn more about the Coalition and how you can support, visit their [website](#).