

Midd women Take Back the Night

by Lori Landau

Last Thursday approximately fifty women and men marched in the annual "Take Back the Night" march sponsored by the Women's Union to inform Middlebury students of the serious dilemmas women on campus face every day.

Historically, many myths surround the origins of the Take Back the Night march; however, its true origins can be traced to a group of Arizona women in the late 70's, who organized themselves to walk in a dark area of town where they spoke out against violence. They consolidated, so that they might symbolically "take back the night."

Although there is no formal nationwide date for the event, it typically is scheduled to take place in April. Last Thursday's walk at Middlebury, planned by Tracey Merrill '92 and Vranna Hinck '93, began at 8:00 pm inside Upper Proctor Lounge. Led by the members of the Women's Union, the participating men and women each lit individual white candles and followed in a march.

Despite the rain, they paraded through town, in front of Pearsons, outside the Chateau, down to Johnson parking lot, over the footbridge to the Marble Works, and then back up College Street to Proctor Terrace. During the procession the walkers chanted "Women Unite. Take Back the Night." Middlebury police officers and Mid-

Middlebury College security guards blocked off the roads, in order to provide clear paths for the sizable number of marchers.

Participants assembled at Upper Proctor after the march, where Merrill, Assistant Professor of Music Susan Cook, Jeffrey Spencer '93, and President Timothy Light spoke about women and violence. Merrill spoke first about some of the issues that relate most directly to women at Middlebury, specifically the poor lighting on campus.

“This is just a time to say that there is violence all around. It's tragic that women can't walk where they want to walk, because they are potential victims,” Merrill said. “Women walk faster when they are by themselves; they will hold keys between their fingers and hold on to their bags. Things change when the sun goes down. Where men and women are able to go changes.”

Merrill also offered a number of startling statistics. According to her numbers, approximately one out of two women will be beaten in their lifetime by her husband or spouse. She mentioned FBI statistics from 1987 which state that a woman is more likely to be killed by her husband than by a stranger, and rape, based on 40% of those which are reported, is currently one of the four major violent crimes in the United States.

While other speakers reminded us that rape is happening right here in Middlebury, Light's brief address to the participants illuminated his feelings about the evening's proceedings. He said, “[Rape] is happening in cities and increasingly in towns.”

Cook spoke about the woman's role in the world today, and Spencer introduced feminists as activists who are similar to gay/lesbian activists in that both are fearful subjects.

“Homophobia and sexism are inextricably linked. It is a scary world for a lot of people. Events like this are really encouraging. They show that even if people have to be fatalistic, everything is not all bad,” said Spencer.

The evening culminated when Alicia Mathewson '92, Aimee Young '93, and Laura Wells '93 sang their emotional rendition of Tracy Chapman's “WHY?”, a song which focuses on domestic violence.