

In 1990, an ad hoc group of women artists and writers, upset about the growing number of women in Minnesota being murdered by their partners or acquaintances, joined together with several other women's organizations to form Arts Action Against Domestic Violence. They felt an urgency to do something that would speak out against the escalating domestic violence in their state, something that would commemorate the lives of the 26 women whose lives had been lost in 1990 as a result of domestic violence.

After much brainstorming, they decided to create 26 free-standing, life-sized, red wooden figures, each one bearing the name of a woman who once lived, worked, had neighbors, friends, family, children – whose life ended violently at the hands of a husband, ex-husband, partner, or acquaintance. A twenty-seventh figure was added to represent those uncounted women whose murders went unsolved or were erroneously ruled accidental. The organizers called the figures the Silent Witnesses.

On February 18, 1991, more than 500 women met at a church across the street from the Minnesota State Capitol with the newly constructed Witnesses lined up at the front of the sanctuary. The women formed a silent procession escorting the figures single file across the street, up the steps, and into the State Capitol Rotunda for public statements and a press conference. The sheer volume of space the figures occupied spoke of their power... and the loss.

Inspired by the impact of the exhibit on many lives, a few of the project supporters – Janet Hagberg and Jane Zeller – determined, in mid-1994, to set a larger goal, namely the formation of a national initiative dedicated to the elimination of domestic murder using the five part process model, starting with the creation of Silent Witnesses Exhibits in all 50 states. Within one year, as of September 1995, a total of 800 Silent Witnesses had been created representing women who were killed as a result of domestic violence in seventeen states. By February of 1996, twenty-four states were involved. As of March 1997, forty-six states had joined the initiative. Now all the states are involved as well as twenty other countries.

**The Silent Witnesses standing before you represent victims killed as a result of Domestic Violence in Rice County during recent years.**