Women are not possessions

I got an eerie sensation when I heard that singer Lesley Gore died Monday.

The day before, I had been singing Gore's song, "You Don't Own Me." I was walking the dogs and reminiscing about the day when Pat, my late husband, joked to our two boys that "You Don't Own Me," from the movie "Quarterback Princess," was my theme song.

I never aspired to play tackle football, as the film character played by Helen Hunt did, but I have always felt empowered to be a strong woman, starting when my parents bought me cars and trucks as toys and continuing into adulthood when I married Pat and then two more wonderful men after being widowed twice.

My outrage and heartbreak about women who are treated like possessions was fueled by a different song than Gore's, though.

On Valentine's Day in Erie, I watched women and girls, including sisters Brihan and Misah Dixon and their cousin, Khima Thompson, dance to "Break the Chain" at the Neighborhood Partnership Center, 254 E. 10th St.

Written by Tena Clark and Tim Heintz, "Break the Chain" is performed as part of 1 Billion Rising, a global campaign to end violence against women.

Amanda Kinter, 38, organized the local event, held in conjunction with SafeNet Erie, and she taught the intricate moves, which include pantomimes of women smashing shackles over their knees to get free.

Lyrics such as these made me weep: "This is my body, my body's holy, no more excuses, no more abuses; we are mothers, we are teachers, we are beautiful, beautiful creatures."

Amanda's mom, Eileen Toner, an Erie snowbird, learned the "Break the Chain" dance in Winter Haven, Fla., and suggested that Amanda teach it to her after-school dance class of third- through sixth-graders at the Downtown Y.

The Y gave its OK and then, Amanda says, she began to enlist more women, including co-workers at the Erie County Courthouse, where she is a bookkeeper.

At work, she taught the dance on her lunch breaks, and she encouraged participants to practice the choreography by watching the dance on YouTube.

Before the dance began, people paraded silently in by the stage, carrying placards with statistics like this: "One in three women will be beaten or raped."

Lynn Johnson, a community activist who leads drumming circles, and Tammy Johnson, a SafeNet staff member, beat on African drums as Amanda led the dancers. The drums helped shift the mood from somber to celebratory by the song's final stanza, which begins this way: "You've never owned me."

To learn how to get involved with "Break the Chain" for 2016, e-mail Amanda1billionrising@outlook.com.

LIZ ALLEN *writes about ordinary people every week. You can reach her at 870-1735, at liz.allen@timesnews.com or on Twitter @ETNallen.*