

When Death Becomes More Precious than Life

Monday I was leaving work. I was viewing my messages as I was rushing to my car. There were three texts from my good friend Heather. My heart immediately fell to the floor. I knew something wasn't okay. I frantically prayed that her boys were safe.....

Heather and I were co-workers years ago. Though Heather is quite a bit younger than me, we became very close. It always seemed that she looked up to me, not as her manager, but as someone she could trust. We grew very close, sharing life stories, keeping our children together, and learning from each other. Heather has two boys, 7 and 5. I have always had a lot of respect for Heather. Being a single mother, hard worker, and dedicated to doing the right thing. We had so much in common. Heather has been involved in a relationship this last year. They have started a life together. Juan has two children, 5 and 2. It has been an awakening challenge combining the families. His children stay with them on the weekends. Through many joys and pains, Heather and Juan have remained committed to one another, and committed to each others children.

As I thumbed through my phone, my entire emotional state froze. Juan's two year old daughter Leeya had died. Heather was desperately reaching for help.

I regained my conscious state, and called her quickly. At the hospital they were not allowed to see Leeya. They also were very unclear of the cause of death. Heather was devastated. She was clearly overloaded with questions, assumptions, and trying to rationalize everything she could think of. I felt my heart in my throat as I listened. I tried to step carefully. I wanted to support her, not give her more stuff.

Two days later, the detective met Heather and Juan at home. He announced that the cause of death was abuse. Leeya had been assaulted to the point of death. It was mid day when Heather called me to explain. At this point her pain was obvious. Her strength was amazing. She was explaining to me all that was said and done. All the things she said to Juan. Everything she was saying to her boys. She wanted my advice, asked me what she should do and what she should say. I remember being so proud of her. Her actions were selfless, filled with love, and completely connected to their needs.

Late that evening Heather called me. I couldn't make sense of her words. She was frantically yelling and crying. I could barely handle the amount of anguish. I will never forget her words, her tears, or her pain. Thoughts of the child were rushing through her mind. Heather was rambling story after story of things that they did. Things they should've done. Things they planned. Her regrets and fears were clearly surfacing to the point of being unbearable. Being in her house, seeing the toys, the clothes - I could imagine the visual impact to her heart. I immediately went and picked her up. We took her boys to her sister's house. Then we came to my house and spent hours together processing this horrid nightmare.



Princess Leeya,

Rest in peace... God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, **neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.** Revelation 21:4

The boyfriend of Leeya's mother is a fugitive. The mother obviously trusted him. She was a full time worker, went to school, and had a very active social life. This places him unemployed and the convenient live in babysitter. Leeya's five year old brother has often taken the blame for the bruises and marks on his little sister.

Heather replays over and over again the signs. Everything she could have, should have noticed. Her and Juan had talked of getting custody of the kids, but hadn't taken action yet. When questions started coming up in Heather's heart, she decided to make the weekends all about Leeya. Heather decided not to be the "disciplinary parent" that was going to ensure that his kids were behaving as well as her kids. She decided to shower her with love. Leeya's last few months at Heathers house were spent with a lot of playtime, bath time, and connecting time.

Heather and Juan also had Heathers sister's kids over one day. Leeya started to bite on Heather's nieces face. Heather said, "I was so upset with her. I sat her down and told her how she can't do stuff like that...etc". "But now, I see, Leah was only trying to tell us something!" All of their weekend nights were consumed with trying to sleep, because she would get up 2-3 times a night and need a lot of water. Leah would crave and scream for food like she would die without it. Heather once told Juan, "We have to do something! It's like having a newborn in our house." "But now I see. Leeya was not able to absorb the food because of the countless numbers of blows to her stomach."

Heather was in shock after visiting the home of Leeya's mother. The police station shares their back yard. The family talked and yelled of how they "knew that man was doing something, knew he was no good". The mother, drowning in her pain, has only been able to say repeatedly, "this is my fault, this is my fault." We could not believe the level of awareness but the lack of prevention.

It feels as though my gut has been turned inside out and my heart is being pulled from my chest. I can not even imagine in the clearest state of mind, the pain that one bears when this has happened to their child. So many questions flood my mind as I try to figure out the psychology behind the predator's brain. The most disturbing question of all, is how many of us are accomplices to the perpetrators around us?

In our emotionally phobic society, people diminish the power of the human intuition- For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? (1 Corinthians 2:11) This is why our own emotional work is so important. We must make room for others. I believe that so many people around Leeya were aware of what could be the circumstances, but lacked the ability to do anything about it. Perhaps everyone was maxed out and in survival already. Perhaps people felt as though they needed to mind their own business. Assumptions could go on forever, but the truth remains the same. The wisdom that comes from Heaven is of all pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of Mercy, impartial and sincere. James 9:17) If we can love, and build relationships, then we will be invited to share our wisdom. If we are invited to share our wisdom, we create awareness. If we create awareness, we then become a part of the solution.

Offenses are created when people react to emotion. Love creates a common ground to address someone with empathy, compassion, and selflessness. Are you reacting from your own life experiences, or are you responding with love to the individual need before you?