



A note from Joan Shirley, as one victim to another:

Resource Center for Victims of Violent Death - May 2014

The “ripples” of murder...

This month we are going to talk a little bit about how the trauma from a murder or attempted murder can affect so many who had a connection to our loved one; it’s very much like a stone thrown into a pond. There is the initial splash and then the ripples that go out from there.

Also, I am passing on some new knowledge that I acquired recently that gave me some hope that in time, we may be able to see a future when fewer perpetrators will leave prison to hurt someone else. This is a bit long, but I hope it helps.

I don’t know about you, but when our Kevin was killed on May 19, 1999 , not just Wayne and I were severely traumatized, but so were our daughters, our parents, his aunts and uncles, his cousins, his friends and his classmates. Also traumatized were our church family, our neighbors, the neighbors of Sandia Park where the boys were killed, and Albuquerque as a whole felt threatened and afraid. Nobody knew who had killed Matt, Luis and Kevin and everyone knew that the killers were still out there and we didn’t know where they might strike next; nobody felt safe. I suspect you can tell the same story because your loved one’s murder or attempted murder rocked not only the lives of those in your family but many others around you; just like a rock thrown in a pond. Murder is not a private affair, although many times it feels like that we are suffering alone, but it affects everyone in our community and makes people afraid.

Before 11:35pm on May 29, 1999, our family was happy, life was good, we felt safe and unafraid to go out in public, we slept well at night and we had no problems with doing our best at our jobs and school. After 9:00am on May 30th, when the detectives knocked on our door; all of that changed. None of us felt safe any longer, we felt horribly frightened in every part of our lives; we felt shattered. We had no idea what to do next and feeling frozen in place; unable to think or move for months. I bet you can say the same thing about the people closest to you when you learned of your loved one’s death or victimization. How many hours have we stayed awake at night crying or jumping every time we heard any little sound? How many mornings

did we go to work or school almost unable to hold our heads up let alone keep our minds on our work? How many of us have felt like we were having a heart attack, like an elephant was sitting on our chest, making it almost impossible to breathe? How many of us have seen a car or someone who looked like our loved one and had to look twice to be sure that it wasn't them or worried that the killer was near us? And for those who have perpetrators in prison or jail, whenever there is a prisoner on the loose, are you afraid that it is your offender out there free?

Additionally, what about those other persons in our lives, how many are still struggling as we are? Yes, trauma keeps us captive for a long time, sometimes making us feel like we are losing our minds and yet, we find ways to cope. Maybe it's reading our Bible, praying, writing in journals, trying yoga or meditation, painting or drawing, reading books on recovery, writing songs, talking to others who listen, hiking, biking, camping, counseling or support groups; I hope that you have found an outlet to help you find peace and some comfort in your life. If not, give me a call and we let's try to explore what might be helpful for you.

Yes, our reality of safety has changed and I don't know that we will ever feel completely safe again. Our lives have been damaged and changed; we can't get them back the way they were. However, we are learning to live in the lives that we fashion for ourselves overcoming many things that are threatening against our recovery. I hope that you are finding that each day that you live is one more day further away from those horrible frightening days and nights and one more day towards some kind of resolution in your case and in your ability to live again. We may still feel totally frustrated by the inability of detectives to solve our case, DA's to prosecute the perpetrators, and fears of a justice system that often feels unjust, but we have to keep going; hoping that things will happen and change. We do not live without fear, sadness, or worry, but we are forced to live a new life with courage and strength that we never knew existed within us; we can do this! However, do not walk alone through this journey; call Pat or I and we will walk alongside of you today and until you are ready to walk alone once again. Come share your story and your successes with other survivors so that they feel supported by someone who has walked in their shoes. Call us with your questions and frustrations and we listen and if possible, we will try our best to help find some type of resolution.

Talking about how murder can ripple through different lives of so many people who were traumatized by a death, I have a story to share with you.

*Two weeks ago, I went to a court sentencing of our most credible witness. Let me stress that I do **not** condone anything that this young man has done since the night of Kevin's murder, his bad choices are his own and he deserves to be punished, but I have kept in touch with his frantic, frustrated mother, who has tried everything to help her son. We have emailed since our trial in 2009. This "kid" chose to self-medicate himself with drugs and alcohol for the last 15 yrs of his life, as some people do when faced with trauma, dropped out of school, and did*

his best to try to escape the nightmares and the threat of also being killed. He has tried to clean up several times only to fall again to methamphetamine and continued fear. His family has felt that they have been stalked by the acquitted killer so they still feel afraid. I on the other hand have had no contact with this guy nor do I fear running into him any longer. As I walked out of the courtroom with his tearful mother, knowing that her son would be in prison once again, having to raise his kids, missing his son's graduation in 2016, she turned to me and said "We both lost our sons on May 29, 1999, yours to murder and mine to the witnessing of three boys shot to death." Now, she still can visit her son in prison, and I know that some of you don't see the tie into this story to us, but his family was destroyed by this murder as well; he was a witness, "a ripple." It just shows another family destroyed by murder, drugs, and lies.

Now to the other information I spoke about earlier; a "ripple" that gives me hope.

April 29-May 2 was the NM Crime Victims Reparation Commission's (CVRC) Advocacy in Action conference that Pat and I attended and at which, we experienced great education and new knowledge to help our families at the Resource Center. Below you see a picture of me with now Secretary of Corrections, Gregg Marcantel...in front of our agency display during the wellness fair for the conference attendees.



Gregg was one of the first detectives at my home in 1999 and led much of the investigation of our case through the trial; but giving the cold case detective's free reign to solve the case. Gregg gave a presentation at the conference on what they are trying to do to help inmates come out of prison so that they don't go back to their old ways and hurt someone else. He talked about how now when an inmate comes into the prison the first day, everything they and the inmate will do during their incarceration is aimed at helping them become a better equipped person. For many years, there hasn't been a lot for inmates to do to learn new skills in prison; they don't make license plates any longer. In order to work off frustrations and

stress, they are now fixing up old bicycles and wheel chairs to give to those who need them. They have eliminated conjugal visits, something I never did understand at all as good, and have replaced them with family visits where family skills are worked on so families are strengthened; now that's good. There are drug programs, therapy, and programs to teach them to behave with people that they don't like; rival gang members. Now, maybe this doesn't sound like punishment to you, but 99% of NM criminals are going to come out of prison sometime and we don't want them to hurt us or anyone else again? Right now 40% will reoffend.

Look at the picture again. I only wish that every survivor of crime could feel this way about their investigator; all of us deserve to feel this way. We deserve to be treated with dignity, trust and care. Gregg also taught a workshop for homicide detectives talking about building trust between them and their victims, keeping them involved and informed; isn't that what we all want and need? He is struggling to make a difference in the Corrections Department and we can only hope that his efforts are fruitful so that one day, we can feel totally safe once again.

Also, did you know that **15%** of each NM inmate's prison "wages" are deducted by the state to give to the CVRC for providing reparation costs to victims of crime and that federally; these monies are obtained through large fines against offenders given to the Victims of Crime Act fund which provides NM with its share of the fine monies. If nothing else, offenders at least have to "pay" for the harm which they have done to us and millions of others like us. It seems like a small thing, but understanding how many offenders there are in our NM prisons and how much money is given to our state reparation program; it adds up to millions of dollars that are used for doing good.

Time does not take away the pain from the loss of your loved one but it does give you time in which we hope that you will learn good coping skills that you will pass on to all those others who are in the "ripples" of this crime. It is my hope that you and those who are similarly traumatized by this crime will find ways to support each other and recover. Eventually, the ripples in and on the water do flatten out and the pond is once again still. That is recovery and healing.

Joan

"I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next."

~Gilda Radner

Pat will give you more information about a couple of other victim programs that we learned about that will aid you as you are in the criminal justice system in our next Stepping Stones newsletter. **505-243-2222**