

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd



Dear Compassionate Friends:

I have always felt especially compassionate toward families who have lost their loved ones to violence. I can't imagine the feelings of helplessness and rage they must feel toward the person or persons who caused their child's death. Those poor families must relive their grief and horror over and over as the case goes through the justice system. It can seem they are forever stuck in their grief and unable to move on, even when there has been a conviction or resolution in the case. Especially horrible are the cases where families lose their children to violence and the authorities are never able to find or charge someone with the crime. The families of victims usually have very few opportunities to face their loved one's assailant and voice their pain and grief.

Recently our youngest son was the victim of an assault. He does not know the assailants and it seemed just a random act of racial violence. He was fortunate in that he escaped with a broken nose, black eyes and hurt pride, but the rage and helplessness his dad and I feel is really pretty frightening; not only because our son was beaten and seriously injured, but also because it seems the guys "got away with it" without consequences. The police department was not very encouraging about pursuing criminal charges even if we can find out who the guys were. Those of you who know our son know he is a good kid. He is kind and thoughtful and definitely not a kid who goes looking for trouble. The officer who took the report was professional, but pretty casual about deeming it a "mutual combative" situation. What??? Two older guys beating on a much younger kid who was fighting in self-defense and was hit in the head with a bottle? When I asked about the racial aspect he seemed to think that name calling "happens in the heat of the moment" and this assault did not fit the definition of a hate crime. He was also pretty casual about the assailants waiting outside for our son to come out of the house where he was to again assault him. The officer commented that they often see this kind of situation during bar fights when "one guy gets his *** kicked and waits outside to get back at the other guy". Really?

The recent fatal shooting of the young black teenager by a "neighborhood watch" participant in Florida has brought this issue again to the national conscience. A child with candy in his pockets was thought to be "acting suspicious" by what he was wearing and because he had his hands in his pockets? I don't know too many teenagers who DON'T dress in hoodies. If you have ever driven by one of the high schools on a weekday and observed their clothing you know what teenagers are wearing.

It is very discouraging to me that often it seems the victims are blamed in some way. You sometimes hear comments like "he was acting suspiciously", "he was asking for it", "he was running his mouth" and the like; or in our son's situation deemed "mutually combative". Our son was fighting for his life in self-defense. Are you not supposed to defend yourself? I am just very thankful these guys did not have a knife or gun with them.

People who have not lived in domestic violence situations also cannot understand why the victims don't just leave their abuser. Even though I work with domestic abuse abusers and victims I also have a difficult time understanding the psychology of their relationships. Often the victims depend on their abusers for financial support and a myriad of other emotional ties. They also have constant hope that it will never happen again. Often they believe they were to blame for the assault.

It seems that very few people take ownership of their bad behavior or crimes. They constantly seek to rationalize why they acted as they did. How many times do we hear "it's not my fault! She did....or he did..." I am glad I don't have to be the judge to find the truth. At least if you serve as a juror you can weigh the evidence and testimony before making a decision as a group.

Until you or someone you love is in a situation such as these examples you trust in the system to find the truth. You are confident that justice will prevail and the "truth will set you free". That may or may not be true. The justice system "truth" may not necessarily be "the" truth. Again, my deepest compassion and caring goes out to those families of victims of crimes. This includes families of people unjustly accused of crimes they did not commit, but are forever branded of those crimes, whether or not they are acquitted, AND families of people accused of crimes they did commit. Regardless of the crimes they are accused of committing that defendant is still someone's child, husband or wife, mother or father.

I urge families of victims of crime to contact support groups like The Center for Victims of Violence and Crime, Parents of Murdered Children, The Center for Missing and Exploited Children and many others you can find on-line or through victim advocates in your county attorney's office. As we all know, no one can understand what you are going through like someone who has been there also.

I pray for new understanding, compassion and support for those among our Compassionate Friends who suffer this additional burden; and I pray for additional strength and healing for you and your family as you undertake this journey.

In friendship,

Nadine