

Faces of the Aftermath of Visible & Invisible Violence & Loss: Radical Resiliency of Justice & Healing

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Proximity to violent death and the aftermath of visible and invisible loss make for such a painful, disorienting implicit ugliness of trauma and vulnerability, a time that begs for a clarifying set of steps toward healing from grief. The disappointing news is that grief and loss encountered by and with violence neither follow models nor clear pathways toward healing. Grief is neither transformational nor redemptive. As a Community Dispute Resolution Specialist and Faculty Instructor at Wayne State University's Center for Peace and Conflict Studies and as a survivor of acts of terrible violence, I come to you at once as a professional and as an individual with deep personal experience in facing the aftermath of visible and invisible violence and loss. I come to you with an authentic, vulnerable, and conflicted heart, and with a story of grief as it sits inside a story of love. This complicated and complex grief is not a path to self-betterment; rather, it is a choice to find meaning and growth despite tremendous loss— an act of personal sovereignty and self-knowledge— as I learn to continue to carry grief, loss, death, my purpose, and a deep-rooted love in a fragile state. To date, I have

not had a good cry. I have not cried to the extent of a deep release that even comes close to the radical cleansing tears that are required to minimize the fear that I and a collective host of Black women who are mothers have of the length of time it takes to come to terms with a violent death. I would like to invite you to explore this with me, not in ways of persuasion or influence, but rather with your respect and agency.

In 2007, I became a front-line antibullying parent advocate for my youngest child. My only son possessed unique learning abilities and was a part of the cognitive impairment community. During his freshman year at a public high school in Detroit, he experienced a violent bullying attack during which he was pistol whipped. He sustained a severe concussion and received twenty-two stitches to his head as a result.

As a mother and the first and only teacher in my family, I would not tolerate bullying against my daughter and son, and I would not let them feel helpless and victimized. I created strong messages and tools necessary to become an effective mediator within my household, within the school that my children attended, and within my community. My aim was to somehow figure out how to transition from a long career in media to one in mediation, utilizing decades' worth of communication skills to help my children, so I obtained my master's degree in dispute resolution and a graduate certificate in peace and security studies from Wayne State University. I learned various ways to mitigate conflict and antiyouth violence practicalities, adding these to an already well-established skill set in conflict resolution simply from being a mother.

After my son's high school graduation in 2011, we decided to relocate him from Detroit to Colorado Springs, Colorado. My daughter had moved there a year prior, and she and I agreed that it would be a beneficial experience for my son to be in an environment that was less violent and to have more opportunity for growth and maturity. Although the transition from Detroit was tough for me and my son, my daughter and I motivated him to see another part of the country, away from one of the most violent cities in the United States.

I removed my son from this environment so he would no longer experience the extremes of violence that pervaded his life. Despite my intention to expose my son to a new, safer community, we soon discovered that violence is too common across the United States.

Although this is the most difficult writing I've done to date, this type of academic writing is beneficial in understanding my personal grief process, trau-

I had just seen my son 26 days— 26 days — before his tragic death on an unexpected trip that my daughter facilitated. My last visit with my son was full of love, laughter, and immediate plans for me to finally leave Detroit and relocate to be with my children. I was going to continue my work in Colorado Springs in advocacy for young people and anti-youth violence and restorative justice. In fact, I had just had a job interview the day before my last visit with my son. We held hands, we talked about my moving, and he was so happy. Conte told me he was in a good space and that he was a little bit more comfortable being in Colorado Springs after almost six years. His words brought me such immense joy.

I got that phone call— that dreaded unexpected phone call— from my daughter on the morning of October 31, 2017, at 3:35 a.m. her time, which was 5:35 a.m. my time. The ringing of my phone at that time wasn't anything startling because my daughter is a night owl. I really thought it was her or my granddaughter calling me because my granddaughter got ahold of my daughter's phone often and knew how to dial her Grammy.

bution to this horrific act . . . I could not think of what was going on through my son's mind, but I watched it.

We cannot heal what we are not willing to confront, and my request for a victim-offender dialogue was a key step toward my and my family's personal healing, as well as for the person who killed my son and for his family. The goal

of restorative community justice applications, and we are creating advocacy materials to assist policy-makers with enacting these changes in law.⁷ We champion a restorative justice framework and practices that seek to repair harm, and restore and promote healing in communities; actionable priorities that are not victim-led but victim-centered. When confronting violence, the long, hard journey toward healing should compel us to examine the qualities and conditions of being human. We must explicitly grieve for those we have loved and lost, not to prolong and sustain our connection to suffering, pain, hurt, revenge, and retaliation, but to sustain love, peace-making, peace-keeping, and peace-building. No transformative redemption in the aftermath of visible and invisible grief can occur unless we all understand how to acknowledge those we grieve in all we do. Radical and redeeming social values are at the forefront that demands the reduction and elimination of barriers for victim survivors/cosurvivors to participate at every stage of the justice process, systemically, structurally, and collaboratively across agencies and service providers. Victims must be given a more active role and voice not only in their individual experiences, but also in the broader conversations about criminal justice system improvement.⁸

To transform the world, it takes people willing to face the reality of how violence affects their lives, and to insert their own morality and mortality into social values that serve humanity from an absolute place of common good, genuine support, forgiveness, compassion, and empathy. Moving from crisis to hope must be rooted in love. In regard to Joshua Daugherty, one of the two young men responsible for the murder of my son, whose humanity will not be considered in the current state of the criminal justice system and who may not experience the benefit of restorative justice-centered legislation during his incarceration, it will be up to the community to help this juvenile convicted of second-degree murder, who received a seven-year sentence in a youth offender program, succeed once he successfully completes his sentence and is released.

The harm of murder or homicide ripples beyond the victim, their families, and cosurvivors, and into the broader community. Crime is seen as a tear in the community fabric. Therefore, the victim, offender, and community members should have a voice in how harm can be reconciled and repaired. This collective approach generates distinctive roles and shared responsibilities for stakeholders, including victims, offenders, justice professionals, and community members.⁹

Victims and offenders are helped to become contributing members of their communities in the aftermath of the murder/homicide by reinforcing moral education and the values and norms of community standards. Moreover, it is a victim-centered, offender-sensitive response by the community to address not only the harmful incident, but the underlying causes often rooted in the community, and its ability to help the offender repair the harm caused to the victim, the victim's family, cosurvivors, and the community.

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