

Chapter 9

The Imprint: One Parent's Perspective of Their Child's Life Forever Changed Due to a Loss of a Peer

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ABSTRACT

It was the end of seventh grade. The students anxiously awaited opportunities to celebrate another school year's close. Then, a shot rang out in the house of their peer, halting their community to its knees. Tears were shed, accusations were made, the empty desk, the empty lunchroom chair, the image within the memorial on the wall, all whispers and reminders of his missing presence. The loss of his smile, the silence of his songs, his stilled laughter, on all those of which he had walked the same halls, were forever left with his "imprint."

THE ENCOUNTER

I remember it as if it were yesterday. Tears were falling and there were students who were so determined to get the words just right as they prepared, with one less voice, to sing as a choir. They desired to sing for their peers and support their families. The day felt so much colder than the day before. As I looked around I saw such tremendous grief. Recalling my daughter's words from the night, she told me the news: "He is gone, and he was in the same grade!" At this encounter I desired to speak words of comfort, but instead, I wrapped my arms around her and was

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speechless. I thought, “How could this young man, who sat in the same classroom as my daughter, no longer be here?”

EXPLANATIONS

I heard the explanations. They were repeated time and time again. “It was not his fault!” “He may have pulled the trigger but did not realize it was loaded.” “He did not realize it was not a Bee Bee gun!” As a mom, even hearing these reasons, all I could think of is that, regardless of the intent, life was still lost when the boy chose to pull the trigger. My heart ached for his mother as she could no longer hug her son.

Later, I learned more details about this story. The boy’s lifelong best friend was the young man who had made “the choice” to pull the trigger. Humbled in my previous perception, my thoughts shifted to his mother. I cannot imagine how hard it was for her to endure the hatred, the sneers, and the labels all placed upon her baby boy. How hard it had to be for her boy, as until that decision, he had not realized the significance of a single choice. He had no idea its lifelong impact. It was at this moment I realized how on that fateful day, not just one, but two boys, lost their lives.

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL RESPONSE

In the coming days, counselors and members of the community made themselves available. However, since the majority of the students were already out for the summer, the halls remained empty for the most part.

When the new school year approached, the classroom arrangements could not erase the memory of his seat. The busyness of the lunch room did not replace the sound of silence as his peers recalled the sound of his voice singing Karaoke. His friends felt the lack of his presence. Thankfully, an insightful school community member planned a special memorial in his honor: a shadow box of a picture of the boy and his jersey was hung in the hallway to ensure that although he was gone, he was not forgotten.

At the beginning of 8th grade, there was a special tree-planting ceremony in his honor. Later, at his eighth-grade graduation, there was a special blanket presented to his family with personalized notes from his classmates. When our daughter graduated high school, they celebrated his memory again by inviting his parents to be present, and a special award was named in his honor. I pray any school that has experienced such tragic loss will be as thoughtful. The school district intentionally created space to remember and celebrate this young man’s life. There is no doubt

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