

MovingSpirit



Teen Death Sparks Mother's Anger

By Rabbi Marc Gellman
and Monsignor Thomas Hartman
Contributing Columnist

Q: I haven't slept. I am angry and pained. Recently, Jeff, a boy from our community, died in a car accident. He was 17. Jeff was so young, kind, smart, popular and engaging. I ache for his friends. I ache for his family. I feel literally about to lose my mind as I consider the feelings of his mother. I know what it feels like.

My own son was also taken from me in an auto accident. Jeff's mother will never again live a moment of her life the way she previously knew it. The hole that is there is big and dark and threatens to swallow a person whole. For a mother who loses an only child, there is no future, no logical reason to do anything we've done in the past.

We collected those silly state quarters, carefully putting them in the silly collector book, promising our son that someday the book would be his. Now, I don't celebrate holidays, don't fill my home with items of worth that might have someday been his, don't have a plan or a dream or a reason to live.

I look around my house and time has stopped. The pictures of my son are no longer being replaced by "the latest" ones. I'm angry at myself for not having enough pictures — of not having a picture of every single memory. And I'm angry that the pictures have stopped; there are no new ones, no new memories being made.

After this latest tragedy, I'm also angry at other people. They make comments that in some way assign blame for Jeff's accident. They say things like, "He was driving a little too fast." Or, "Well, it happened so late." Or "Why was he out at that hour?"

Children make mistakes. Adults make mistakes, too. Driving over the speed limit is not a death penalty offense and I resent the implied blame that somehow makes it understandable to these people. And does it

matter in any real way what time the crash occurred? Jeff's biggest offense was inexperience. He died because he hadn't learned enough yet to handle every curve ball thrown his way.

The whole thing stinks. It's not fair. Jeff's mother, like me, will have feelings of guilt and question every thing she ever did with or said to her child. It is wrong to place blame just to alleviate your own fears and try and make sense of the completely unfathomable? It hurts.

If time, in fact, heals, it's a very, very long time, indeed. Rabbi Gellman, I know that you presided over the service for Jeff. Protect and help his mother, please. And, although I can't imagine how, with all my heart I pledge to you that if I can be of help, I will be.

A: Eagles teach their chicks to fly by pushing them out of their nests, usually built high on the edges of craggy cliffs. The young eagle chicks flap their wings furiously as they plunge downward. Then, the mother or father eagle swoops down and catches the youngster on the pinion feathers of its huge wings and flicks it upward into the sky to try again to fly.

This falling and catching eventually produces flying eagle chicks. However, it's inevitable that some eagle chicks are not caught and fall to their deaths, perhaps because the parents were too late, or because the winds were just too strong.

As it is with eagles, so it is with our children. We can try to catch them when they fall, but the task of learning to live in this world the way we have chosen to live is dangerous and sometimes even a single bad choice is all we get before we fall.

What are the choices a parent has in this pirouette of teaching our children to fly and catching them when they fall? There is no choice. They must learn to fly and we must accept that we cannot be watching their every attempt. What eagles know by instinct we must learn by tears.

Asolo, from 1B

you, stay away. But this is an important play: this is our youth! We can't turn our backs on the message. This is not to say all of our youth are wasting their lives. However, it is a bit shocking that some of the brightest and most advantaged of our youth cannot handle their good fortune. There are intimations of parental failures, but the play doesn't spend much time on blaming others. The youth have to look at themselves.



We were impressed with the student performances and with Redmond's interpretation of the material. There are lots of hilarious moments, some very poignant ones, and some real sadness. In their discussions they display a depth that could come out if they allowed it to happen. But it appears they are almost too afraid of what might happen if they did or thought anything positive.

It is a great play to see with friends, perhaps with our youth, and discuss it afterwards. Might we see ourselves in this? Have we let our children down?

Asolo Conservatory has come up with an excellent little production, with no wasted time or space. It tells a story, asks important questions, and illustrates the moods and mood swings of a generation of 20-somethings acting with as much responsibility as young teens. There's a lot here.

This show only plays through January 21. We suggest you call at once for tickets and information at 941-351-8000.

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