

Kelowna Presentation April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007  
By Jane Orydzuk



Thank you for inviting me here to share my story today. The theme by Mahatma Ghandi saying: “You must be the change you wish to see in the world”, was especially meaningful to me. As crime escalates in our society, it is important that victim’s families be heard. Hopefully, hearing our stories will be the closest you’ll ever get to being victims yourselves.

There is something in each of us, whether we are victims ourselves or care givers of a victim, that doesn’t want to enter the horror of victimization. To do so is to revisit the pain, the sense of powerlessness, the confusion, the fragmentation and the feelings of hopelessness. The first reaction to something as horrific as murder is a disconnection, shock and numbness. Many victims talk about being lost in a state of fluid emotion with no words, just darkness.

We lost our thirty-three year old son Tim on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994. We received a phone call from our daughter-in-law shortly after ten that Saturday night telling us that Tim and a co-worker had both been electrocuted. Tim was the Manager of the Crown Paperboard Recycling plant and he and his employee had gone into work that day to repair the baler, which had broken down. The power in the plant had been turned off and loose wires hung over the baler. When the paramedics and the RCMP arrived and said it was electrocution, the boy’s bodies were removed by flashlight.

For the next thirty-six hours, while in a zombie state, we planned our son’s funeral and met with family as they arrived from around the world. On Monday afternoon, the coroner’s office phoned to say that both boys had been murdered, each shot through the head three times execution style. For two days, the plant became contaminated after several people had walked through it, leaving very little untouched evidence. The next two years involved one of the most intense and costly investigations in Alberta history, and it was a case that brought the RCMP much embarrassment

I don’t remember much of life during the weeks and months following Tim’s death. The horror is cushioned by shock that numbs you for a long time. I do recall his funeral and winding his dark curls around my fingers as he lay in a casket, and rubbing his hands over and over, trying to get some warmth back into them. I remember driving to the funeral home two weeks later with my daughter-in-law to pick up Tim’s ashes, and sitting in the front seat of her car with what resembled a shoebox sitting on my knees. It was then that my thoughts took me back thirty-three years to when I brought him home from the hospital in a tiny blue blanket.

For six months, Tim’s ashes sat on a shelf in a closet, and it took everything in my power to open the door to get out the vacuum cleaner. Tim and Stephanie fled to Jasper for a restful holiday each chance they had, and it became a favorite escape for them. The decision to take some of his ashes there came easily and in May 1995, eighteen members of our family formed a caravan and headed for the mountains. We drove into snow and a

blizzard on the way up, but this mission was important to us and there was no turning back. We camped in the snow and set out for the valley after breakfast the following morning. We sat on the shore as Stephanie sprinkled Tim's ashes into the fast flowing Athabasca River, and we wondered why God had chosen us for this sad journey.

I remember, with pride, going up in a tiny Cessna with Tim at the controls when he was 18 after he had worked hard and earned his wings. Two of his sisters and myself soared over the city like eagles in flight and we were so proud of him. I think often of all the beautiful colored paper Tim brought from work to my classroom of mentally challenged kids, and of how he stayed the rest of the morning to take them outside for recess and taught them how to kick a soccer ball around the field. I marveled at his patience when their little legs took them everywhere but where the ball landed. I remember the heartfelt gratitude he received when he delivered a truckload of pretty paper to an inner city school so the children could draw and do art projects.

Tim was a good son, a loyal husband and a devoted brother to his four sisters. He married Stephanie in 1987 and her daughter, eight year old Genny, came along for the ride.

The young female officer who responded to the scene that night, came to our house with our son's wallet, watch and rings the evening following the boys' deaths. I recall staring at her as she explained the electrocution theory to us and I felt terribly sorry that she had to perform this painful part of her job. She was nervous and avoided eye contact with us as we sat absorbed in the shock that surrounded us. She reminded me of my own four daughters, and we learned later that she had just graduated earlier in the spring in Regina. Along with two other rookies, this was the first industrial death scene she'd had to respond to, and yet her watch commander never did come out that night.

The question of how and why this happened tormented us from the onset. My husband had drilled safety procedures into Tim for over thirty years, and he insisted on total safety measures with his men at work. None if it made any sense to us. When it turned into homicide two days later, the whys in our thoughts became more fierce. Not having an enemy in the world, Tim was loved and respected by everyone who knew him. He was a man of honor and businessmen he dealt with trusted him on the basis of a handshake. However, we learned very early on in the investigation that Tim's co-worker had been the target. Tim had just been in the wrong place that fateful day.

People ask me all the time how you move forward after violence has taken one of your children. I learned to fill my memory bank with all the wonderful things Tim accomplished during his short life. We desperately needed diversions during the long four-year investigation. Between hearings and the trial we fled to the mountains each time we got the chance. As we drove, we'd watch the clouds that took on the shapes of angels and wings. I constantly looked for Tim everywhere, in crowds or while shopping. While driving, I'd look into the car beside me and wonder if that person was responsible for my son's death. My sister Beth traveled the world and after Tim's death, she'd send me cards weekly, telling me not to worry about Tim, that he was there with her. I needed someone to tell me where he'd gone. Beth had taken some of Tim's ashes, and while they

were in Lagos, Nigeria, she wrote to say that one warm Sunday afternoon, they had taken them down to the edge of a jungle and scattered them into the ocean. She brought some to Venezuela, and to Scotland, and to their home on the ocean side in Florida. Tim's dream was to travel and he was now seeing the world. Another sister, Susan, bought a tree in the rain forest in Costa Rica in Tim's memory. It was a long time before reality set in and I could accept the fact that he was gone out of our lives.

I spent a day with Tim's four-year-old daughter Colm following his funeral. She was racing around me as I raked leaves in the front yard, and she ran up to me, holding a tiny silver foil star she'd found in the compost pile. When I asked her where she thought it had come from, Colm looked at me, then up at the sky and said, 'Daddy must have thrown it down from Heaven'. We once took our four-year old grandson, Jesse, out to the cemetery. When we arrived, he asked where Uncle Tim was, and we painfully tried to explain to him that Tim's ashes were in the ground, but his soul had gone to Heaven. He looked at us, then knelt down and put his tiny ear against the plaque on the ground, and whispered, 'Hello'. It was following these incidents that I knew I had to start putting my pain down on paper and I began journaling.

For months, I was trying hard to hold my husband up and was so wrapped up in my own grief that I didn't even think of the sadness my four daughters and daughter-in-law were living through. They'd lost a brother and a husband they'd adored. Their journeys were different from mine, but I couldn't be there for them, and that still bothers me today. We began looking forward to our trips to the cemetery where ducks swam in the pond and waited for our breadcrumbs. The children would pause briefly at Tim's gravesite and then race around. The place became a comfortable one for all of us.

Other than initial interrogations with each member of our family, we virtually had no contact with the RCMP for the first sixteen months following the boy's deaths and we felt alone and abandoned by everyone. When a new task force was set up in February 1996, we were able to meet with them several times, but there were still many pieces missing. The police kept saying that there was no rhyme nor reason for this senseless crime, they were unable to share much information with us, or come up with enough evidence that would have held a conviction in the courts.

Twenty-one months after the murders, with only circumstantial evidence, a man named Jason Dix was arrested and detained for the next twenty-two months in the Edmonton Remand Centre. Each time the RCMP went to see Mr. Dix in the Remand Centre, they'd meet with us and describe his psychotic personality. For almost 4 years, while waiting for answers, we braced ourselves through two bail hearings, both of which were denied, and a botched trial that collapsed two weeks into the proceedings. We sat each day and listened to two high profile lawyers, the prosecutor and the defense attack each other in a vicious power struggle that had virtually nothing to do with our two dead boys. The Crown Prosecutor slipped up over a letter that had been written to the accused by the RCMP, and he walked away from the case three weeks into the trial. By the end of the summer of 1998, the accused was set free and we were back to the beginning. Each of us

feared running into him somewhere as we attempted to move on with our lives –slow --- and I still went to bed every night with gunshots ringing in my ears.

We formed a close bond with the members of the task force during those early years, but in hindsight, I realize that many of the encouraging words and promises were their ways of calming the turmoil that raged inside of us. The puzzle remained unsolved and the case took its toll on many of the officers involved in the investigation, with one of them leaving the force to pursue another career once it was over. Their work was finished, but when they walked out of our lives and back to their families, we felt abandoned once again.

I would have liked to have been better prepared emotionally for the arrest and the preliminary hearing. Our first contact with a victim advocate was almost three years after the murders. Two days before the hearing began, we were contacted by a woman advocate from the Sherwood Park detachment and invited to meet with her the following morning to go through the courtroom and choose our seating. (She was also heard to have said that this family had enough support and that she wasn't needed) I recall looking around the tiny courtroom that morning and feeling uncontrollable fear as I realized that no matter where our family sat, we would only be ten or fifteen feet away from the prisoner's box and the man accused of murdering our son. There would be no safe place we could escape to. I vaguely recall staring at this man's face every day for three weeks and wondering what could have gone wrong in his life to enable him to shoot two innocent men in the head three times. I watched his mother's face each day and could only imagine what she was going through. However, I grew up with a father who was an attorney and a provincial judge and I kept thinking of his wise words to me, "A man is innocent until proven guilty".

We began seeing a wonderful psychologist who had never walked this road, but promised to travel it with us. However, feeling alone in my grief, I knew I had to connect with other parents of murdered children in order to survive this horror. I would scan the obituaries every day, and send off a card to anyone who had lost a child. They would be the only ones who would understand the depth of my grief. I needed to connect with the kindred spirits who were hurting as much as I was. My husband was much more reserved and couldn't grieve publicly, but God had different plans for me.

I had met a couple named Joyce and Noel Farion at a Compassionate Friends meeting. Their 16-year-old son Scott had been murdered the spring before Tim died. We felt from the beginning that our journey was different from the rest of the parents in the room. It is painful enough to lose a child to an illness or at birth, or even worse to suicide or a drunk driver, but when it's homicide, we felt stereotyped and branded. Our children had been deliberately taken from us by another human being. We made the decision to branch out and start our own support group and eight months later, in the summer of 1995, the Victims of Homicide Support Society was formed and today our group is unique in Alberta. It's a safe haven where we can vent our anger, support one another and share stories of our lost children and our disappointment in the Canadian Justice System.

At some meetings, our anger is directed towards the courts, the judges and more often than not, the Defense Attorneys. Other times, we just hang onto each other and talk about our loved ones and the joy they brought to our lives. We didn't wait in long lineups to gain entry into this group. It is not for the elite, and there are no perks. The price we've paid to belong is the lives of our children and loved ones. Most of us have come through botched trials where the offender slides into the role of the victim. He serves a minimum sentence, or no sentence at all, and walks back into the community where our families live in fear waiting for him to strike again. There are no rewards for us; no congratulations for having survived the horror. We know the feeling of being sentenced for life, and we don't escape without pain. We live the rest of our lives with more questions than answers.

Some of our children and loved ones made choices that cost them their lives. Others just disappeared from our world. But those of us who meet once a month deal with the anger and the absence of understanding friends, and we strive to instill hope in newcomers. Laughter has returned to our world and there is a certain amount of joy as we lean on each other. We are learning to live with a pain that never goes away, but for those of us who have had the support of our group for several years, it doesn't hurt as much anymore.

As the shock wore off and reality set in, we had to make profound changes in our family. My husband and I made trips to the mountains four times a year to sit by the river behind Tekarra Lodge in Jasper, where we had scattered some of Tim's ashes. We felt close to heaven on these trips and our time by the river was extremely healing. Each time we left the park to head home, we'd feel like we were leaving a part of ourselves behind. We had always been a close family and our circle had been broken. We still gather at the cemetery on Tim's birthday where we all sing and the grandchildren write messages on helium balloons and release them. We continue to seek normalcy in a world that doesn't understand the magnitude of our loss. The majority of the people who promised to be there for us at Tim's funeral have disappeared, and even 12 ½ years later, we remind them of a horrible event that many of them don't want to be connected with. They don't know what to do with our pain, and they are so afraid of the very idea of murder that they prefer to look the other way. Many of them are still angry, but in order to survive, I had to put my own anger behind me.

I watched a part of my husband fade away the day our son died. There was a deep sadness that settled in his eyes and connected to his heart. He didn't know how to grieve on his own, but he found comfort and direction from reading the chapters I wrote and listening to me talking incessantly about Tim. I found consolation and a certain amount of peace through my strong faith, my support group and my love of writing, as well as singing with an adult choir. He chose to stuff his sorrow deeper and deeper inside the depths of his soul until the day he died nine years later. Through the early years, I prayed for the strength to carry us both. We became closer to our four daughters, who were hurting deeply and missing a brother they adored. The horrible feelings of betrayal and

abandonment by the Justice System consumed us day and night, and the anger raised its ugly head over and over again. I knew I couldn't live this way – it was like facing a demolition crew every waking hour.

My mind and my heart were not synchronized for a long time. At Mass one Sunday, I heard the words St. Paul said to Timothy, 'I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course and I have kept the Faith'. Although some days, I felt that I haven't finished the course, and may never, I have indeed kept my Faith during a sorrowful time when I could have easily turned on it. That's not to say that I didn't question God – I did, many times, but now I'm grateful that I didn't give up on Him. There were many days though, during this long journey, that I felt deeply that He had abandoned my family too. I sensed often that we would never regain a normalcy that was once a comfort zone for all of us. There was no going back. In mid-life, we were forced to change gears and learn how to be new and different people and that wasn't easy for family members and friends to accept. Many of them still don't want the connection, even now. Some people suggest that perhaps one day, my doorbell will ring and the police will inform me they've found a killer. It's difficult for them to understand, but without my husband at my side, I wouldn't want to go through the hell again that kept us in courtrooms for five years. My husband was taken from me on Christmas Eve, 2003, following a massive stroke. As I planned his funeral on Christmas Day, I felt a vague comfort just knowing that he and our son were finally together again.

Because of the confidential nature of an investigation, victims are often denied access to the very knowledge we seek that might help us to organize the information overload that happens in our minds. We need information to understand, and yet professionals often refrain from giving a straightforward answer for fear of hurting us.

Mourning is a time of low energy with sadness and minor symptoms of depression. It is a time when we are highly sensitive and vulnerable; a time of ritual and a time when we take tentative steps. We visit the gravesite and light candles. We find there are times of confusion when we can't remember what we had for breakfast because we are absorbed in our grief. There are times when we don't care what happens in the outside world. I started caring more deeply in a different way when America went to war in Iraq and I thought of all the mothers and fathers who would get their children back in body bags. When four of our Mounties were killed in Mayerthorpe, I ached with the pain their parents were facing and the long journey ahead of them. Even today, I have difficulty singing 'O Canada' because this country no longer speaks of freedom and peace to me.

Losing a loved one to murder is one of the most traumatic experiences, because it is not only the person who is taken from us, but everything that person represents. Some victims may feel it may not be safe to mourn. They talk about not being able to be sad or to cry. They only feel fear, anger and numbness. Many parents of murdered children describe a pain in the heart similar to a heart attack, or a stab in the heart. The pain of a wounded heart takes time to heal. When we're mourning, we need a safe place to cry, to remember and nurse our wounds; to contemplate life and muster up the courage to live

again. There is a big difference between grieving and mourning. To grieve is to stuff the pain deep inside, while mourning is the ability to get those feelings out and share them – therefore, starting the healing process. Also, when there's deep emotional trauma, there is a barrier to break through along the way and the process takes longer.

After an act of homicide, the mourning process can be deliberately repressed until the trial has taken place, which may take one to two years. In our case, it was almost four years. Since some issues of murder are never resolved, it is not uncommon for grief to be permanently lost in the aftermath. We not only lose our loved one, we also lose our sense of safety, our privacy, our friends, our own story, our place in society and control of our lives. Many of these losses can be life-changing, and it is difficult to regain faith in humanity. The lack of familiarity with, and support from law enforcement, the criminal justice system and media intrusion lead to bereavement complications. The delays in resolution of the murder conviction, lack of adequate punishment for the crime, and lack of acknowledgment by society all heighten the feelings of loss and control. The intensity of our emotions might be so overwhelming that we feel we can't be in control of our feelings, so we prefer to repress them.

There are many members of our support group who feel betrayed and abandoned, not only by a Justice System we once trusted, but by society itself. It has taken a tremendous amount of work and energy to push that anger aside and move forward. Many of us feel contaminated from the criminal act itself. There is the involvement of the police and the justice system; the curiosity of the media and suspicion that someone in one's own circle has been responsible for the crime. People's behavior varies from sympathetic, to blame, unjustified avoidance and efforts to 'fix us' so we don't hurt anymore. All of these add to the load of grief that every parent suffers over the violent death of their child. During our trial, we would sit during breaks in the courtyard outside the Law Courts Building, and we could spot reporters lurking several feet away with their lenses poking through the surrounding bushes. They wanted nothing more than to capture the faces of the grieving families to show to the public.

We are ordinary people who belong to a club we never hoped to belong to. Crimes strikes anywhere and we are a cross-section of the population of Edmonton whose common bond is that we have been touched and devastated by the murder of someone dear to us. Edmonton recorded 39 murders in 2006 and already nine this year. You maybe surprised to learn that half of our members are parents of victims whose murderers have never been brought to justice, and many of us are not terribly impressed by the efficiency of the Justice System. We've felt despair over the delays, the lack of answers to our questions, adjournments, the re-victimization of witnesses and all the complexities of the legal system. In Tim's case, the day following our son's funeral, the RCMP escorted our daughter-in-law down to K Division and interrogated her for six and a half hours while we sat in agony and waited for her. It was she and two of their neighbors who discovered the boys' bodies, and up until then there was little evidence to go on, and spouses are often the first suspects. Stephanie had gone to the plant twice that day, looking for her husband. Earlier, she had found Tim's truck parked outside but was unable to find anyone on the premises. She'd left little Colm in Tim's office as she called out his name and

searched the front end of the plant. She was terrified to go into the back where the baler was. The employees called it 'the pit', and it was dark. She returned later in the evening with two brothers who were neighbors of theirs at the acreage. It was then that they ventured farther back into the plant and discovered the boy's bodies.

Because we suffer from trauma, our lack of concentration, the ability to remember anything and the lack of ambition make it difficult to have the internal resources to find and obtain the needed information about the crime. There's an overwhelming fear by professionals and caregivers of hurting the victims even more, therefore, they protect them from information they think is harmful. Unfortunately, by not giving us the painful truth, they prolong the grief and accentuate the pain. We have a right to the pain that belongs to us. We have an enormous craving of wanting to understand and not being able to. Even though we avoid painful situations at all costs, most of us have to admit that it has been during the painful moments in our lives that we have the courage to change; that we have become open to new learning and are forced to cross otherwise forbidden boundaries. We need access to the pain of violent crime to benefit from the learning. Not knowing the truth might hinder us from being able to tell our story the way it happened and until we are able to tell it, it doesn't belong to us and we remain out of control of our lives. There is a saying by Smedes; 'The most creative power given to the human spirit is the power to heal the wounds of a past it cannot change'.

Wilma Derksen, in her book called, 'Confronting the Horror', says that 'when the present is interrupted by the unprocessed past, we suffer from intrusive memories, nightmares, flashbacks and anxiety attacks. We find we don't have enough memory for the details. We can't remember names, or what we did during the day and we are absorbed entirely by the trauma that took our loved ones from us to the point where people around us might call us 'self-absorbed'. We have a limited ability to empathize with others, or even listen to their stories. We can't concentrate. All we experience is the constant rerun of the violence that plays itself over and over again in our minds. We can't prepare ourselves for it. No matter how much police officers are trained to give us the most sensitive notification, there is always a feeling of confusion, avoidance and inability to comprehend. Violence never makes sense.

My anger came and went and I was relieved that it didn't stay long each time. It came back one day before the trial collapsed when the Defense Attorney stepped up to a microphone outside the courthouse and blatantly told reporters that our son had been in Vancouver for a weekend with two women in his hotel room. We knew that Tim had flown to Vancouver for a managers meeting on Tuesday of that week, and returned home Friday night to meet his death the following morning when he went into the plant to repair the baler. With my blood boiling, I wrote a letter to the Alberta Law Society and was told by them that when confronted, the defense lawyer denied saying any of the things reported in the press. How much higher could I go? There was no more energy left to defend my son's name, and I knew he wouldn't have wanted me to pursue this issue. Three years later, in a civil trial, Mr. Dix sued the Crown and the RCMP for fourteen million dollars for all the trouble they had put him through. When it was all over, he

walked away with over one millions dollars and became a very rich man because of my son's death. We were, once again, back to the beginning.

By October 1999, I thought I had felt the last of the hostility over Tim's death, and I thanked God many times in its absense. I didn't want to go back there. That fall, the CBC's Fifth Estate contacted my daughter-in-law and said they planned a documentary that was to co-inside with the fifth anniversary of the boys' deaths. Because the murders hadn't been solved, the producers were doing a recap of the entire investigation and they were also interviewing Jason Dix and members of the RCMP. I received an email three days before the show aired and was warned by Victor Malarek, host of the Fifth Estate, that some parts of the documentary were disturbing, but that they had tried their best to produce a show that was 'fair and unbiased'. They'd made a very conscious decision to keep out the disturbing parts, he said.

I told myself there would be no surprises as we sat down to watch the documentary on Wednesday night. We had seen, heard and read everything on the case during the precious five years. --- However, nothing could have prepared us for the first five minutes of the documentary. Footage was shown, to the entire country, of our sons lying dead at the scene of the crime. The cameras kept rolling back to Tim's body, covered in blood and showing his hand still gripping the screwdriver he'd been using to repair the broken baler that morning. The rage that built up in me was unequaled by any I'd felt so far. I felt the CBC and the Fifth Estate had deceived us, and I went to bed that night with ongoing images of a gun at my son's head. The documentary was compiled of Mr. Dix complaining about his two years incarcerated, and of all the mistakes made by the RCMP from the beginning of their investigation. It really had nothing to do with Tim and Jamie, and I was very upset.

I fired off letters to the Edmonton Journal, as well as a letter to the CRTC and the executive producer of the Fifth Estate, demanding an apology, knowing that I would not rest until I had one. Six weeks later, after I had sent additional letters to Members of Parliament, and the Justice Minister, I received a letter from David Studor, Executive Producer of the Fifth Estate. He wrote: 'It seems clear to me that the producer, who is both a very experienced journalist and a decent human being, ultimately decided to include this footage. He wanted to give viewers a sense of what the crime scene looked like and the extent to which the two victims were taken unawares. Mr. Studor admitted that he should have caught the mistake before harm was done to the families. That this was not done was clearly a serious error and Mr. Studor took full responsibility for it. He said that for journalists to bring unnecessary pain to people who have already suffered enough was simply wrong. He apologized sincerely and promised that, should the show ever be repeated again, the first few minutes of footage would be electronically removed to conceal the disturbing images. From then on, my anger slipped again into the background.

Victims discover rather quickly that we can't rely on friends, the police or the community. We have to fend for ourselves. Having a murder in the family has dumped us, without warning, into an unfamiliar world. Funerals, police investigations, media curiosity and the Justice system; our own internal emotions, especially our feelings not simply of anger, but of rage, helplessness, regret and depression all contribute to our fragile state. We are overwhelmed with grief and we don't know where to turn. We have been thrown into a situation where we are very much under the control of other people, and if we submit to this, it can destroy our self-confidence. It upsets those around us that our broken hearts can't be fixed overnight.

My healing came in many different forms. I was privileged, along with another member of the VOH group, to attend the Restorative Justice Conference in Hull, Quebec in the fall of 2002. We mingled with lawyers, judges, correctional and peace officers, as well as advocates from across North America. We also had the opportunity to meet a couple of lifers and we returned home with a strange sense of forgiveness. Shortly after arriving back in Edmonton, we received an invitation from Roy Trace, a Lifeline worker in the prisons of Alberta, to attend a meeting with fourteen lifers who were preparing for parole. They are chosen by the Parole Board to attend these meetings, but never before in Alberta had victims sat in with them. Most of them had already served thirteen to fifteen years of their life sentence and I knew that Tim's killer wasn't in the room because Tim had died eight years earlier.

Walking into that room was probably one of the toughest things I'd ever done. But we realized quite quickly that we weren't the only ones hurting in the room. In the course of the evening, we saw these lifers as human beings, some of them in a lot of pain for their mistakes and having a strong desire to make things right. As they spoke, some of them told us about their victims and their crimes, and we sat and waited for our turn to speak. We told them of the pain our families had experienced since the loss of our loved ones, and of how the murders had changed our lives and we told them of how we wanted our lives back, too. The lifers were more nervous than we were and many of them couldn't speak that night. Some of them expressed their appreciation to us for having the strength and the courage to walk in there that night. They weren't the horned monsters I had envisioned them to be. One burly man sobbed and said he hadn't been able to look in a mirror for four years. A woman who had drowned her two year old in the bathtub, told us that when the officials were called out, they took her baby's body, along with her other two children and she knew she'd never see them again. She lived on a remote farm in rural Saskatchewan with an alcoholic husband, and without any support, she just snapped one day. These lifers all knew that meeting with their own victim's families would begin the healing for them but they also knew it would likely never happen. It was a time of sorrow for all of us - a time to share and to try to understand. It became clear that one minute of anger, fueled by drugs or a few drinks of alcohol, could destroy so many lives. The tragedies that had shattered our world became turning stones as we sat with murderers other than the ones who took our children from us

When the evening came to an end and several lifers approached us for hugs and heartfelt thanks, we wondered why we had been so afraid to meet these people. They had made

terrible choices in their lives, and many of them were truly sorry for them. We met again with another group the following year and these were powerful meetings for all of us, with a lot of healing going on in the room for both sides. ----- However, the need for redemption is a positive and necessary need in the course of rehabilitation, but it becomes manipulative when the offender seeks redemption as a means of escaping the responsibility for what they'd done, and we knew that. We also knew that many of them find God while in prison.

Our inability to tell the story of our lives after homicide can become a critical factor in the way we deal with the murder. Our society often bases a person's credibility on the ability to tell his or her story coherently, concisely and spontaneously. A person who can't tell their story can be held suspect, and often is. Crisis demands clear thinking and the integration of fact, story and reason. At a time when we need to make critical decisions based on all the facts, we might not be able to access all of them. This can leave us feeling vulnerable, and we might defer decision making to someone even less capable or to someone who is self-serving. Through telling our own stories, when the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. Until we can validate our stories, vindicate our actions and have our faith restored, we cannot feel healed. Some people never move on, because to do so means they have to leave part of themselves behind. For victims, 'getting over it' isn't an option, but moving forward is. We are average citizens who have been dealt the heaviest cross a parent can carry. We will never 'get over' losing our children, but we are learning to move ahead with a hope and a trust that future victims suffering will be lessened with alternate and fairer decisions in Canadian courtrooms. Our deepest wish is that society and the Justice system begin to recognize the pain left in families when homicide robs them of a child or a loved one. The changes won't come in time for many of us in our support group, but perhaps future victims won't have the same feelings of betrayal. Maybe they can move on with their lives feeling a lot safer than we did, and raise their children knowing they can trust once again.

It is important that we are able to tell our stories. The victim's voice is a powerful one. The honesty, --- the pain,---- the suffering and anger are heard. Politicians know the power of the victim's voices, and some use it to make political points and necessary changes. The positive changes are always good, but if they are not positive, but rather popular ones, then we know that the politician is cultivating these changes, not for the common good, but for the assurance of a longer political career.

On October first, 2004, I felt compelled to acknowledge this ten-year anniversary in a more meaningful way than we did in previous years. With the untimely death of my husband the year before, and my daughter-in-law re-marrying a wonderful man, our family had taken on new dimensions. I wrote an article for the Edmonton Journal to be printed on the anniversary date of Tim's death, and I'd like to share it with you. It was not written in anger, but in love. I no longer feared for my life as I once did, but I did fear for my heart as I went through this special anniversary without my husband at my side. This is my tribute to our son, and a message to the person who took him from us. I titled the story 'If You Had Known Our Son, You Wouldn't Have Killed Him'.

Ten years ago, you killed my son and his friend. You shot them each in the head three times, and you have never been held accountable. Over the years, I thought of you often and wondered what had gone wrong in your life, but you rarely cross my mind anymore.

You wouldn't have known the love in our hearts the day our son was born. You couldn't have known the thrill of hearing him say 'mommy' or 'daddy' for the first time and of seeing him start walking across a room when his tiny legs couldn't sit still any longer. You couldn't have experienced the feelings of joy we had as parents when he built his first birdhouse, or walked to school alone, trying to convince us that he was old enough. You weren't looking out the window on rainy days to see him carrying his sisters on his shoulders because they were afraid of the worms. You didn't feel the swell of pride inside of us when he graduated from high school and his life as an adult unfolded. You couldn't possibly have felt the exhilarating excitement when he earned his wings at eighteen, and took myself, and two of his sisters flying in a small Cessna. You weren't there when he married the love of his life, and a year later presented us with a wee granddaughter who sported a mop of black hair and beautiful oval eyes. You didn't see him cradle his child in his arms and stroke her with his massive hands when she cried, or watch out the window to see him arriving at family gatherings with his little daughter perched high on his shoulders, clutching a fistful of his dark curls in her tiny hands.

He was the only son we had. As a child, he spent hours watching his dad building and fixing things, and then he built his own little family a beautiful new home they had just moved into one month before you took his life. He had big dreams for their life in the country- plans that never materialized and dreams that shattered in a heartbeat. You turned those dreams into mourning for all of us.

I often wondered if smiles would return to my husband's face and if the imaginary ton of bricks would lift from his chest, giving way to happiness once again. You couldn't possibly have known that nine years later, my husband would join our son on a cold and frosty Christmas Eve, never having recovered from his loss. You will never know how rudely death interrupted our plans of growing old together, and that the only comfort I felt on Christmas Day, as I planned my husband's funeral, was knowing that he and our son were together again in a wonderful place that knows no pain.

If you had known our son; if he had touched your life in the gentle and loving ways he touched ours for thirty-three years, you wouldn't have killed him that sad day in October 1994. The memories I'm left with are filled with the sadness you caused us. Will I ever know the freedom you have today, of walking the same streets as my family or perhaps lurking around the same playgrounds my grandchildren enjoy playing in? Have you ever bounced your baby boy on your knees and promised him the world? Have you ever watched over him as he sawed through his first log on a camping trip, or carved the family name into a piece of driftwood? Have you ever shared his joy when you held his first child?

Wouldn't you have loved the chance to say goodbye if you knew you'd never see him again, and how would you have prepared for the pain that followed

Only you will ever know.

I know that Victims' Advocates have come a long way in the past twelve years. You are receiving more training now and your work entails much more than handing out Teddy Bears to victim's families. (I don't even want to tell you where to stick those bears when you walk into our homes after our child has been murdered.) I know your jobs are not easy, but my message to you is this: Please try to reach the parents of an adult murder victim at the time of the crime. An advocate offered help to our daughter-in-law when the police and paramedics arrived at the scene, but we were left floundering on our own. Be ready to lend a sympathetic ear. Part of their therapy is to release the intense emotional burdens they carry. Be patient with your victims. If this is a high-profile case where the media are interested, protect the family by organizing some person as the spokesperson and sole media contact. We were fortunate to have our son-in-law who was a reporter with the CBC and he kept the media at bay and away from us. That was a tremendous relief to the family.

Don't ever promise your victims that there will be 'closure' some day, but reassure them that time has a way of healing and everyone's journey is unique. I once read that after homicide, it takes ten years to feel sane again. I knew then that the person who wrote it hadn't lost a child to murder. It's a life-long journey and one where you feel terribly alone. If possible, link your victims up with some form of support group. Those who have been there are living proof that it is possible to move forward and survive the horrors of homicide in their family.

If time allows, call your victims two or three months down the road. That's when reality sets in, and most of our friends have returned to their lives, able to hug their children and share special anniversaries and birthdays with them. If all of you, in your different compassionate ways, can get us quickly flying again, you've carried out the work you're trained to do, and you've done it very well. For this, we victims thank you.

My 12-year journey has taken me on some exciting and interesting ventures. Every time I get the opportunity to get the Voice of Victims heard, I feel it's one more step for me. I've spoken to inmates at the Women's Institution, and I enjoy presenting at Victim Advocates training sessions at the Justice College in Edmonton. I have recently spoken at Grant McEwan College to Correctional students, and last Fall, I joined the Citizens Advisory Committee in the Edmonton Max. I am learning the ins and outs of the prison system and about the mindsets of the people inside.

Tim's daughter, Colm is 17 now. She has inherited her father's creativity, is a budding artist and she's graduating from High School this June. Along with wonderful memories and the chance to watch her grow up, she is the greatest gift my son left me. We had four small grandchildren when Tim left us. Now we have eleven and they are all growing up knowing their Uncle Tim with the pictures we have around our homes, and the funny stories we share with them. I often wish that Tim were here to share in the lives of all the teenagers and growing youngsters in our family.

It's been a long, and sometimes painful journey, but I'm on my way.