

At Christmas.....A Story of Redeeming Love

December 16, 2011

*“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in times of trouble.”*

-Psalm 46:1

Dear Friends,

What happens when a son is taken away from this world at age 17? Where does a grieving mother turn? How can she make sense of such a loss? Nothing short of a miracle could sustain her in the face of her worst fear. This is what happened to Anna (not her real name).



It was an ordinary day in June. Anna left her home to work as a case manager, helping those less fortunate than herself. Her life calling is with the neediest of all people, the homeless. Most of us, if we're honest, prefer to look away from people lying on the streets, those with incoherent minds and dirty bodies. Most of us are fearful and uncomfortable. But Anna was not. That day, she looked forward, as she did every day, to reaching out to help the homeless, whom she had learned to respect.

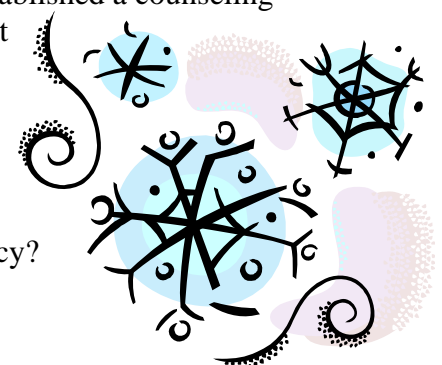
Before heading to work that morning, Anna took a little time to read her Bible, her daily source of nutrition for spiritual strength and sustenance. She opened to 2 Corinthians 4:18, which said “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” This caught her attention—and it stuck with her.

The day went as uneventfully as any other. When she returned home from work, she found a message from her 17 year old son, who called, just to check in, as he ordinarily did. But that night would be anything but ordinary.

At ten o'clock, she received the knock on her door from her neighbor with news no mother every wants to hear. Her teenaged son was rushed to the local hospital's emergency room after being shot while he was walking to a nearby grocery store to buy something to eat.

Today marks six months since this horrific tragedy turned Anna's life upside down. The process has been, as you can imagine, filled with pain and many questions. I have been privileged to walk alongside her since the death of her son. In the sovereignty of God, I had established a counseling relationship with her two years before this happened. What amazes me about Anna, is her faith. In the midst of her grief, I see extraordinary and unusual strength. She attributes this, to put it in her own words, “To my belief in Jesus Christ, the One who is the heart of this holiday.”

During a group counseling session that we held for grieving, bereaved mothers (and a father), I asked Anna, what she would say was her son's legacy?



She was very moved by this question, but it was the very anchor of her relationship to her son. He loved animals, and her home was a small oasis for little creatures. This pointed to his tender heart. Whenever there was a person who had a disability, or a playmate that all the other children rejected, her son made it his point to reach out to that young child and be a friend. In one of his school assignments, in high school, he was asked to journal on any current events that he felt, if it were up to him, he would change. This was his response, written in his personal journal:

The first historical fact he wanted to change was the Holocaust. If he had the power to stop Hitler, he would have stopped it. The second event was the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And the third, it was September 11, 2001.

Just think about this life that ended at 17. Was he in the wrong place at the wrong time? Was he tempted in any way to associate with the wrong crowd? Only God knows.

The one memory that is most encouraging to Ana is her son's words in describing his belief in God. At age six, he looked at her one day and said, **"Mommy, I know what God's image is. He can become any color because He made people, and they look like Him."**

As we celebrate this Christmas season, may we, like this young man, remember those who are less fortunate than ourselves. May we seek justice and righteousness, and may we too have a deep desire for the reconciliation of all suffering. Above all, may we remember that each life is worth the sacrifice of the Redeemer who became flesh in the form of man.

Let there be peace on earth!!

As our Redeemer seeks us, let us seek Him and all the peace and righteousness of his ways.

Anna would say, love, love, love and celebrate—nurture those nearest to you, family and friends.

Each year, Refuge helps so many individuals, couples, and families work through their troubles in a part of Philadelphia where there simply are not enough services available. When you consider the educational outreach efforts and the training programs we offer, there are hundreds more touched by the work being done here. We could never do this without your partnership. You have made this possible, and your continued support makes it possible for us to grow.

Your year-end gift to The Place of Refuge will keep the heart of our organization beating and will make an immediate impact in people's lives. Thank you for all you do.

Merry Christmas and a Happy Holiday!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hernandez, M.A.R.
Executive Director