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A Mother's Love - One Mother's Loss

Robert Bonvento - Feb 16, 2007

For almost all parents the thought of something happening tragically to their child is spine chilling and at the same time mentally numbing. Dedicated parents give of themselves in every way possible to provide a safety net around their children. They instill solid values, provide love, work to shelter, clothe, educate and, most importantly, enjoy them. Parents also realize that the world outside their home is not always as supportive or nearly as safe for the children and young adults that venture into it.



A Tarrytown mother, Gisela Marin, has experienced how unsafe a situation can be and how, in one singular moment, a child can be taken away and a life on earth ended. Sitting across from Ms. Marin in her home one is struck by her positive attitude in light of the fact that her only child, Jessica, was fatally shot in a drive-by shooting six short months ago. Gisela Marin recounted her daughter's life in a manner that spoke of a mother's deep love and respect for a young woman who was scheduled to begin her sophomore year in college the day after her death.

"Jessica was born at Phelps Memorial Hospital on July 22, 1987. She attended the public schools and graduated from Sleepy Hollow High School in 2005. Although she had great artistic skills and excelled in design, more than anything she wanted a career in criminal investigation. Her dream was to be an investigator for the FBI," her mother noted. That dream was born out of Jessica's desire to know "what made people tick" and what made people do the things they did. To her friends, she was the counselor, and Jessica knew no boundaries as to the race or social status of the people she came in contact with. "People were people to her and she had many, many friends," her mother said. That fact was evident at Jessica's wake in Tarrytown where over 1,000 people gathered to mourn and pay tribute to her. "I was overwhelmed by the number of people that came from everywhere. Even students from the

University of New Haven, along with faculty and staff who had only known Jessica for a year, made the trip to Tarrytown. Friends from the Purchase Day Camp, where Jessica had worked for the past two years as a lifeguard and swim instructor, also came. She became a lifeguard at age of 15 and worked at the Halston House and Carrollwood pools during the summer. More recently she worked for the Boys and Girls Club in Mount Kisco. She came home every weekend from college this past year, to work there." After a long, reflective pause Gisela Marin added, "Jessica was a very hard worker."

On Sunday morning, August 27, both Jessica and her mother came home from church and lounged around the house talking about the coming year at the University of New Haven. That afternoon Jessica received a call from friends in Yonkers wanting her to come by, to say goodbye before leaving for college the next day. She went with the understanding to be home by 10pm. The last friend she visited asked Jessica for a ride to a local grocery store. It was there that Anthony Burton allegedly opened fire in a drive-by shooting. One bullet struck and killed Jessica. Gisela Marin recounted the last call she made to her daughter's cell phone shortly after 10pm. Someone else answered the phone and Gisela could hear the commotion and the words in the background, "She's down, she's down." By the time she reached the hospital her daughter had been pronounced dead. "Never in a million years did I think I would be faced with this," Gisela said softly.

According to an unabridged edition of The Random House Dictionary, the word faith (in Christian Theology) can be defined as "the trust in God and His promises as made through Christ and the Scriptures by which man is justified or saved." Gisela Marin has a full complement of faith that has enabled her to cope and to carry on — carry on to the point of starting a Westchester Chapter of "New Yorkers Against Gun Violence." The Organization works at building awareness of the impacts of gun violence. It also lobbies for sensible gun legislation on city, state and federal levels. "I'm doing this selfishly so that Jessica is not a random statistic. For me it's too late, and for my daughter as well. I would just hate for another parent to go through this," Gisela said. The first meeting of the Westchester Chapter of NYAGV took place at the Warner Library in Tarrytown on February 8. Over sixty people were in attendance including the recently elected State Senator, Andrea Stewart Cousins, Yonkers Mayor Amicone and other dignitaries. Ms. Marin was so appreciative of the turnout and support. "My goal is to be able to visit area schools and bring guest speakers to educate young people about this violent issue," she said. In addition, she has begun to organize a family day in honor of her daughter's (20th) birthday on July 22, from 10am until 5pm, at Tarrytown's Pierson Park. A Jessica Santos Memorial Walk will begin the day at Patriot's Park, proceed to Main Street and down to the Hudson River. "There will be many fun things to do and we'll serve food as well," Gisela said. For further information readers can visit

www.RememberingJessica.com. Gisela Marin is also working with the University of New Haven to establish a scholarship foundation in her daughter's name.

"When Jessica died, I died with her. I won't get to see her graduate college, marry or have children. I want to turn this tragedy into something positive. I have to. February is the month of love and Valentine's Day. My love for my daughter and acknowledging her through education, events and foundations helps me to go on," Gisela said. "With love, faith and the grace of God, I will be able to."

New Yorkers Against Gun Violence is on the web at www.nyagv.org. Emails can be sent to nyagv@nyagv.org or calls can be made to (212) 679-2345.