

Dear Crossings' Friend,

December 15, 2012

I began a letter to you Friday morning, and as events in Newtown unfolded, it was clear that I needed to begin again. One piece of news that caught my attention among all the sad details was that all the young victims were at the medical examiner's office and that parents had only been allowed to view photographs of their children. My imagination filled in the blanks - parents kissing their children as they dropped them off at school or at the bus, then hearing news of the violence, and discovering that their child is one of the victims. On top of this horror, the only time the parents are able to see their child again is in a photograph from a coroner's office and perhaps again at the funeral home before he or she is made up to look as if they were only gently sleeping.

As many of you know, I have been in a somewhat similar situation, and believe me, the only thing you want as a parent is to be with your child, no matter what she looks like. As awful as the destruction of their beauty might be, that child is yours and the only way to absorb the enormity of what has happened is to be able to touch and hold and "be with" this loss. Otherwise, your arms are empty and filled only with longing. So, I began to try to reach through to the parents, to let them know of their rights. I opened a twitter account, and tweeted to Newtown. We posted on our NHFA Facebook page, speaking of their rights. I posted on the Crossings listserv. And I was able to get an email address of one of the parents who is a public figure. I wrote to him directly and asked him to pass it along to other parents. He responded briefly and lovingly, so I at least know that my message was heard. There is more to be said about this, about invasive autopsies and embalming, and these little children becoming part of a system and being treated as "property of the state" because they were homicide victims, but perhaps this is not the right time and place.

There is an aspect of home funeral education that occasionally calls upon us to become what I call “spiritual warriors” and it is why I find that I need to keep showing up for this work. Having experienced the sudden loss of a child myself and ultimately gained strength from it and from working for the rights of others, makes me uniquely qualified to be a spokesperson for families’ rights in funeral care.

To this end, I have recently become president of the board of The National Home Funeral Alliance. This is an alliance of home funeral advocates that has emerged from all the years of our work of teaching workshops and educating communities. It is the Alliance’s hope that my Crossings experience may serve to strengthen a national voice for the empowerment of families in funeral care.

Because this new role will demand more of my time, I have found a friend who is willing to assist me with the day-to-day operations of Crossings. I am excited to introduce Lourdes Sims and hope you will find her as warm, competent and committed to Crossings as I have.

We are also taking the first steps to creating a more formal network of Crossings “Chapters”, piloting the idea with Sandy La Grega’s Crossings Care Community in Greensboro, NC. We hope this first Chapter will become a model for other informal Crossings networks to create a more visible, viable presence and use our support at the national level to do Crossings work in their local communities.

As always, your tax deductible gifts to our cause are of tremendous value in nourishing us for the challenges before us – educating everyone from state officials to families of victims of violence and all of us in between.

In gratitude always,

Elizabeth Knox, Crossings’ executive director