

The Gift of a Son

What would you have said when the mothers with mournful eyes but soft smiles said, “Take him, he is your son, your child now.” But they were not children. They were grown men locked behind bars, locked away from their Moms who often lived across the country or in some cases across continents from their child.

But the proclamation was never, “Here take him, I don’t want him anymore. I don’t love him anymore because he murdered someone’s uncle or cousin. He’s not worth anything to me.” It was never like that. Could you muster an answer to do justice to a suffering woman offering you their beloved offspring?

Please understand, when your job is to spend hours each week for sometimes years, with a man, in a locked interview room, your client charged with murder, digging into private memories of their life, the relationships with the families become intimate. You are no longer just a person on a defense team just doing a job. You report back to Moms. “Yes, he is eating. He doesn’t like the food but he is dealing. Try not to worry. No he hasn’t been beaten up. He is safe for now.”

You seem puzzled as to why it was hard to answer the question about the gifted son. You weren’t sitting cross legged on the floor in the Mother’s living room drinking coffee, looking at family albums, crying mothers reminiscing with you about when Johnny or Joe took their first step, laughing about the time their son crashed his new shiny bike in Wilson’s Creek and beat up the neighbor kid bad for laughing at him. Beat him up bad. You have what loved ones no longer have-time. And they know, like you know, the son has already been lost years before he was lost to the system and they are already mourning.

You say they were mistaking your care for real love but I’m not so sure. You weren’t filling yellow legal pads with family secrets entrusted to you, grabbing at straws, hoping this secret will keep the needle out of your client’s arm. The luxury of knowing someone that deep was not afforded to you but most importantly not to the families either. So, you ask again, how was the question answered? Often in silence.