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AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

By Dr. Dorree Lynn

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One of my children is a daughter adopted 22 years ago from a little known orphanage in Pune, India. She joined our family at six weeks and became a US citizen before she could speak. Her pre-adoption history — as are so many other adopted children's — is a maze of facts and fabrications and we will never be able to weave together the complete truth about her origins. Her identity is the one formed as she grew up as part of our American family. She walks and talks with an all American athletic flair. In high school, one of her most memorable moments was to crew at the challenging Head of the Charles — a most all American event. Summers, she earned spending money working as a lifeguard, teacher's aide, an administrative assistant and a sales person at a local boutique. We taught her the American work ethic that with hard work and perseverance, she had a good chance of achieving her goals. Color was never to be used as an excuse to not do her best.

When I am with her, talking, cooking, arguing, I only see my daughter and I am colorblind. When I look at photographs of the two of us, I am often stunned at the stark contrast in our looks. It is only then that I see what the world sees. Her luminescent deep bronze skin, large dark eyes and exquisite long dark hair is sharply contrasted with my own green eyes, short blond hair, and pale white complexion. Sometimes it takes me a moment to recognize the two of us and to absorb the visual difference we present.

Helping her come to grips with her Indian looks in a Caucasian family has taken awareness on her and our family's part. When she was eight, I took her on a pilgrimage to India. I wanted her to know her heritage and to be proud of it. Young and still unsure of whom she was; she was concerned about how they would know she was American. Without thinking I answered, "By the way you walk." Not totally trusting my response, (which turned out to be true) she insisted on wearing emblematic blue jeans the entire time we were there.

I worried that those who saw her would think she was not well cared for. I was embarrassed and wanted her to wear a dress. She won, and made sure she flaunted the uniform of her adopted country for all to see.

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Now in her third year of college, she recently transferred to a university that is far from home, located in a city that is less cosmopolitan and international than her hometown of Washington, DC. It has a smaller international student body than she is used to, and at least in her eyes, more blue eyed females with long straight blond hair than she is accustomed to going to classes with. She has always been aware of being a minority, but before September 11th, she had experienced few ugly incidents related to her country of origin. If anything, she was developing a comfort level as "an attractive rare bird" valued by those of all skin shades.

Parenting always means walking a fine line between protecting your child and setting him or her free to learn on their own, how to manage life's downs and ups. After the September 11th attacks, I had to do something that I am sure many parents had to do and no parent in America should ever have to do. Sad and determined, I called my daughter. "Hon, I said, I don't want to worry you, but I have to tell you something. Times have changed and you need to be careful. I want you to live your life as usual, but

stay close to school, go out in groups and think carefully about where you go at night. And, please, when you party or shop, take care and don't go alone." She listened quietly. "Mom," she said. "I didn't want to worry you, but I was in a Seven-Eleven and some guy got nasty with me. He asked my religion and wanted to know if I was Moslem. It was scary. I was with my friends and we left." Painful memories of Jews, Japanese, Tutsis, Hispanics, Armenians, Blacks — other racial, ethnic, or religious groups under siege — flooded my brain. "You did the right thing, I responded. Just use your "street smarts" and you'll be fine." I hung up, feeling helpless, angry and heartbroken. The safest, most liberal country in the world was no longer safe. Not for my daughter, not for those of dark complexion, not for anyone who looked Middle Eastern or stereotypically Islamic.

I believe she will never again be as safe as she once was. I brought her to a free country where color shouldn't matter. As many ethnic groups know all too well, it does. And, after September 11th, I fear it will matter more. She is my daughter. I love her and my love is colorblind, but not everyone else's is. September 11th brought ugly unfounded prejudices once again to the fore. In the past, it has been other groups that think, dress, or who look different who became the recipients of hate. This time it is Moslems.

We are a diverse nation. Tolerance is our strength. Each of us has an obligation to be vigilant and to not let ignorance overcome wisdom. Now, it is my turn to worry about my child. Next time it could be yours. My daughter is an American. She shouldn't ever have had to face discrimination and concern for her safety. Now she does. September 11th has presented us with a new American Tragedy. We cannot let the evil of prejudice prevail.

This column's for you,

DR. D.

Dorree Lynn, PH.D.

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American Academy of psychotherapists and she is on the editorial board of their publication, *Voices*. She is also a regular columnist for the Washington, DC newspaper, *The Georgetown*. Dr. Lynn is a noted speaker and well known on the lecture circuit.

How to Grieve a Tragedy

By Stephen Bucaro

Bad things happen to good people. Have you lost your job or are facing bankruptcy? Has a cherished relationship ended or you have gone through a divorce? Maybe you received diagnosis of a serious health problem. Or maybe you are mourning the loss of a loved one. Unfortunately, these painful events are part of life.

If you have to endure such a tragedy, maybe you can find solace in your friends and in your faith. There is no way to completely avoid the pain of a tragic event, but I offer you a way to work through the pain. If a friend or loved one is grieving, you can pass this message on to them.

You should deal with the grief in three phases. You should carry on each phase for exactly 21 days before moving on to the next phase. Why 21 days? Because studies have shown that if an individual does the same thing for 21 consecutive days, it becomes a habit. That is the amount of time required to make a permanent life change.

Phase 1: Don't think about the event that is causing your grief. You may be forced to think about it in some way in order to take care of business related to the event. But otherwise don't think about it for the first 21 days. If the event comes to mind, think to yourself "I don't want to think about this right now", and dismiss the thought from your mind.

Every time the tragic event enters your mind, think "I don't want to think about this right now", and force yourself to think about something else. Usually friends and family will not be a problem because they will avoid bringing up the subject. For the first 21 days, keep pushing thoughts of the event out of your mind.

Eventually you will need to mourn, it's unavoidable. In Phase 2, you should think of nothing but the tragic event. How can this help? Even though you forcefully prevented the event from entering your conscious thoughts for the first 21 days, your subconscious mind was grieving. Now you need to deal with it on a conscious level.

You will be able to grieve with less pain now because your subconscious mind has already dealt with it. You can't put the tragedy behind you unless you deal with it on a conscious level. For the next 21 days, force yourself to focus on the tragic event.

If the tragedy is a broken relationship, think about the life you could have had if things worked out the way you dreamed. If the tragedy is the death of a loved one, think about the moments of your lives together. Focus entirely on how much that individual meant to you.

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Phase 3: It's time to move forward. For the next 21 days, think only of your future life and changes you will need to make. Plan your new life. What changes do you need to make to carry on under your new circumstances?

Unfortunately, painful events are part of life. Bad things happen, but life moves on. My plan doesn't let you totally avoid the grief of a tragedy, and not letting yourself grieve would not be healthy anyway. I promise you, no matter what the loss, in the end, the human spirit will always survive.

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How to Grieve a Tragedy

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Use and Abuse of Steroids

65 Tried and True Traditional Amish Recipes

Insider Secrets to Flea Market Profits



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