#22

August 27, 2013

To all Michigan Legislators:

My name is John Cotaling but everyone knows me as Jack. I am the father of the deceased James Cotaling but of course everyone called him Jimmy. I would like to introduce you to the people that were directly involved in my son's death as well as many of the victims.

James Hyde has been described as the instigator of the crime. James Hyde was a kid he was only 5' 7" and 150 pounds he had no car, no job, no place to live and he was not terribly smart. He was on his way to New Mexico where he thought he could live happy ever after with his girl friend and her father. He was not smart enough to figure out that this fairy tale was not going to happen.

He never contemplated the fate of a skinny white boy who was messing with a Latino girl in New Mexico. Life in New Mexico might be more like hell then a fairy tale. He was her means of getting to New Mexico. He was her driver, her accomplice and nothing more.

Then there is inmate No. 218771.

She bought the knife and a purse for her to keep the money in. She lured the deceased to the house. She was 16, but she got it all this done in one trip to K-Mart. Evidence indicates her involvement it the murder. No doubt about that.

She was held in Ohio for 2 or 3 days but never told the police what had happened or how Hyde was abusing her. Her first statement was made to the FBI and it was to the affect of "I will tell what happened but only if I can go home with my mother."

Could you ever imagine a 16 year old trying to cut a deal with the FBI?

In the last 23 years she has never felt the need to send us a note saying she was really sorry for what happened. That would be step 3 of her rehabilitation. Step one would be admitting to the crime. Her rehabilitation has not even started yet and I don't think it ever will.

This hearing seems to be more about the inmates abuse than the punishment that should be served by a cold blooded murder. Is it abuse to set a curfew for your children to be home at night? Is it abuse if you punish your children physically by spanking them? Is it abuse if you confine your children to their room because of something wrong they have done? Is it abuse if you refuse to speak or look at your child for a week because he violated your trust?

If it is, than I am guilty of abuse. I did all these things and more, but somehow my children never felt the need to steal a car or kill someone. Twenty or thirty years ago it was called discipline. Something that is missing in many households today, and the consequences are evident.

Is it abuse if your mother attempts to admit you to a juvenile facility because she can not control you? Is it abuse if you strike back in defense? Is it abusive to drive your girl friend across the country to visit her father?

Abuse is not an excuse for murder or crime.

Abuse is not a "Get out of jail free" card.

Let me tell you about the deceased – Jimmy. Jimmy was a happy person and always had a smile on his face. He was always willing to help someone. He loved working on cars and he was employed as a mechanic. Jimmy loved to sail and he had a small sailboat that he sailed with his brothers & sisters.

But Jimmy's real love was skiing. He was a ski instructor at Pine Knob Ski Area and Pat Diebel was the director of the Ski School at that time. Upon Jimmy's death Pat sent the following message with his condolences.

> Jim loved to ski, was a very caring teacher.
>
> He brought excitement and happiness to many who wanted to
>
> experience the thrill of his beloved sport.
>
> We will miss him a great deal.

Jimmy's picture and Pat Diebel's card sit on my bedroom dresser and I look at them many days and wonder what I should have done differently.

Jimmy's mother suffered the most. When he was born we almost lost Jimmy and that caused her to have some special feelings about Jimmy. She passed away very shortly after the trial was concluded. Their 2 deaths in that short time was the toughest times for our family.

As for me every time this hearing business starts my blood pressure goes up and I spend many sleepless nights wondering. Parents are not supposed to bury their children. Fathers and sons should not have to go to the morgue to identify the body.....That was tough!

We are not a wealthy family. We work hard and play hard and we do it as a family. Repairs to our homes and other projects are seldom done by others. We do them ourselves as a family. I worked two jobs most of my life to support the family. Their mother stayed home and took care of them. I was involved for many years in little league and boy scouts. I served as president of our subdivision, our ski club and the Electrical Manufactures Representatives Association.

I taught skiing and therefore the family was allowed to ski. We became a skiing family. Jeff & Lori were also instructors at one time. Skiing was Jimmy's real love and it remains today as our family's sport. Last March the family spent a weekend up north skiing..... Jimmy was missed.

My whole family was hurt by this senseless crime and the pain gets brought back over and over with each hearing. It is terribly abusive for us to have to go through this again.

John is my oldest son. John's career started installing security systems. He is now a sales representative calling on hospitals, corporations, school facilities.
John was Jimmy's big brother and that leaves him with some guilt. What could he have done better as Jimmy's big brother? John has been active in cub scouts and little league.

Roberta my oldest daughter was a second mom to the gang. She had 2 children at the time of the murder and they heard the discussions within the family. Kids hear everything even though we think they aren't listening. My grandchildren had nightmares and were afraid of the bad people coming to get them.

They are adults now and suffer also.

Roberta, her husband and her 2 children are all active at the local high schools coaching their bowling teams. Roberta is also involved in (D.A.R.E.) Drug Abuse Resistance Education, an organization that promotes drug abuse at the local elementary schools.

Jimmy was the next oldest.

I couldn't afford to send them to college but Lori and her husband made it happen. Lori has a Masters in business management and accounting. She is now a controller with responsible for the food concession at 27 airports.

Next comes Christine. She went to work at a credit union when she was a senior in high school. Through hard work she is now a Vice President at that same credit union.
Christine has been an elder at her church for many years. She still teaches bible classes and is a Girl Scout leader. Her husband is even more deeply involved in their church. Her brother Jim stood up in her wedding and a day before her 1st anniversary was stolen from us.

We contribute to the community. We are givers not takers!

Then comes Jeff. He worked at many jobs and finely decided to do something more with his life. He enrolled in some computer classes and is now a dimensional engineer currently working for General Motors.

Jeff and his wife have adopted 2 young children. At great financial expense I might add. Jeff is already involved to his son's sports activities.

Last but not least comes the baby of the family, Jody. Jimmy was Jody's big brother and hero. The 2 other boys had by now move on, but Jimmy was still coming around the house regularly to visit his mother and his siblings.

Jody is obsessed with the fact that one of the people responsible for Jimmy's murder might be set free. She was a teenager when it happened and it affected her deeply.
Jody has made herself known to the Prosecuting Attorneys of both Wayne and Oakland counties as well as many members of the State Judicial Committee.

She is recognized by people at the Heritage Foundation and she is a founding member of the National Organization of Victims of Juvenile Lifers. Jody will fight this fight to her death if necessary and the rest of the family will stand behind her. I just ask should she have too?

I have just introduced you to my immediate family the real victims.

They suffer every time we have to go through this senseless charade.

They are good people.

They are hard working people.

They contribute to the welfare of their local communities.

They deserve better than this.

They thought the sentencing 23 years ago was their final closure.

They deserve to have the sentence handed down by the judge enforced.

Please do not apply Miller Retroactively , do not sentence all of us, the innocent, the victim to a lifetime of undue, unnecessary pain and suffering.

Remorse is not a ticket to freedom, redemption is not a "get out of jail free card" and calling murder a "MISTAKE" means they have no remorse and place no value on human life.

Sincerely,

John Cotaling
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