



SOLIMAN LAWRENCE

Readers Write

FAITH

ONE SUNNY MONDAY MORNING ABOUT fifteen years ago, my mother was attacked in her home while she was doing her hair. She was getting ready to go to her teaching job at a nearby church preschool when she heard the doorbell ring. She went to the living room and peeked through the curtains. A man she didn't recognize was standing there. Deciding he must be a salesman, my mother quietly replaced the curtain and went back to the bathroom.

The man, whose name we later learned was Kenneth, went around to the back of the house, where our overfriendly black Lab watched him break in. He came across my mother's purse in the living room, then continued to the master-bedroom suite.

My mother never saw Kenneth. He grabbed her from behind and started punching her repeatedly in the face. When he was done hitting her, he simply left, tak-

ing her purse with him.

At the hospital my mother's face was so swollen and purple that I wasn't sure it was her until she said, "Cindy, it's OK. I'm all right."

A few days later Kenneth's mother turned him in after seeing his picture on the nightly news. He was sentenced to fifteen years. My father installed a high-tech security system and bought a ferocious guard dog, but my illusion of our home as a place of safety was shattered.

My mother returned to work at the preschool after two weeks. (She would have returned sooner, she said, but she didn't want to scare the children.) Kenneth had chipped one of her facial bones, and her left cheek still sagged a little, but otherwise she was OK.

More remarkable than her physical recovery was her emotional resilience.

She never experienced flashbacks or post-traumatic stress, or even felt afraid when alone in the house. (I, on the other hand, wouldn't be comfortable at home alone for years.) By the time Christmas rolled around, she had sent a New Testament to Kenneth in jail, with a card telling him that she'd forgiven him, just as Jesus Christ had forgiven her.

My mother and I rarely see eye to eye on religion, but her grace and strength remind me daily of all that is good about faith.

*Cindy Y. Ogasawara
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PAST MIDNIGHT ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2001, I was lying in my uncomfortable twin bed in my tiny graduate-student dorm room. I'd been attending journalism school at Columbia University in New York City for a little more than a month and was still so new to reporting that I hesitated to call strangers on the phone. The city's summer heat was finally lifting, and my twenty-fourth birthday was just a few days away, but sorrow was seeping into my bones. My eyes filled with tears, and though I rarely went to synagogue and seldom prayed, the prayers of my childhood spilled from my lips. "Shema Yisrael," I whispered, then sang it louder and louder and louder. "Adonai eloheinu. Adonai echad." (The Lord is our God. The Lord is one.)

I moved on to the Jewish prayer for healing, whose melody and words have always comforted me. I'd learned these prayers during countless fidgety Sunday afternoons in synagogue classrooms, and I'd sung them to myself as a child during late-night bargaining sessions with God.

In the dark hours before dawn on September 11, 2001, those old prayers came back to me. Before all the passengers on those planes awakened, brushed their teeth, kissed their spouses goodbye, and left for the airport; before all the secretaries and janitors and business executives put on their shoes and grabbed trains and taxis to work, I lay in the dark crying and singing, singing and crying.

*Jocelyn Wiener
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