



Local 698

*East Detroit Federation of Teachers*

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## January 2012 Newsletter Extra

### On the Death of a Child

When I was a young teacher Jim Palonis told me, "If you're in this business long enough, tragedy will strike and you will have a student pass away." Unfortunately, after many years I know he was right. Ranging from illness, accident and even violence to suicide, I have seen far too much death among the young. I am truly saddened at the loss of Pleasantview third grader Alana Lee and her two-year old brother Lavale this past week.

Having buried one of my own children, I can tell you there really is nothing one can say to console the heart of a parent that has lost a child. We can sympathize, we can perhaps empathize, but we cannot fully understand the grief that comes with the loss of dreams as well as the abbreviated memories created by a life cut short. We can, and must do whatever we can to offer the opportunity to listen to those that are left behind and ease their burden if called upon and pray for the healing nature of time to work at soothing the anguish they are feeling.



At times such as this we often look to our faith or some sort of counsel to bring us comfort or address our anger about why things happen as they do. Ultimately one must reconcile in their own heart and mind what makes sense and why bad things happen to children. Why does our society tolerate such disregard toward life? Why are we so oblivious to the true nature and destructiveness of drinking and driving? These are questions everyone that knew these children will consider over the next several days as the weight of such a tragedy settles on our minds. You never know, perhaps we might actually attempt to do something about it.

I can't offer answers for anyone to accept, but I can extend a thought for consideration. I know that one thing that gave me comfort was coming to the realization that my dreams for my daughter Victoria centered on her life being a life that mattered. I believe that it did. I

wanted her to make an impact on the world and on the people she touched. I guess it really is what we all want for our kids.

Her lifespan only stretched 15 days, but as I thought of her I realized that everyone that ever knew of her struggle had knelt to pray and paused to love us and offer us hope. She caused her parents, grandparents, relatives and friends to set aside petty grievances and come together as a family to search for what was within us to deserve her presence and then strive to live to that ideal. Her memory inspired significant donations to the hospital to help other children survive similar circumstances in the future. The doctors used research from her life and death to improve science and save children in the womb, before they are even born with her diagnosis.

A life so short is not necessarily unfulfilled. If the purpose we serve in this world is to make those around us better and to leave a positive lasting impression on those we touch, then these children may have lived the most accomplished lives possible. It is up to each of us that remain to make certain that they are remembered, cherished and complete. I challenge you to make these young lives full and meaningful. Allow them to inspire you to be better today and better yet tomorrow. You don't have to have known them to allow them to bless you. You have to open your heart and absorb their essence. Be available to help those that are grieving and reassure them that these lives were of special value and still are. Hug your children and embrace that which is good in your life. When you do, Alana and Lavale Lee will be all anyone ever could be, and will rest forever in peace within each of us.

**By: Lincoln Stocks Photo courtesy Detroit Free press**