

## 4 Corners: Article

### Forgiveness has power to change future

By Jay Evensen , Deseret News

Published: Monday, Oct. 3 2005 11:24 a.m. MDT

How would you feel toward a teenager who decided to toss a 20-pound frozen turkey from a speeding car headlong into the windshield of the car you were driving? How would you feel after enduring six hours of surgery using metal plates and other hardware to piece your face together, and after learning you still face years of therapy before returning to normal — and that you ought to feel lucky you didn't die or suffer permanent brain damage?

And how would you feel after learning that your assailant and his buddies had the turkey in the first place because they had stolen a credit card and gone on a senseless shopping spree, just for kicks?

Chances are, you didn't hear this story. It took place on Long Island last fall and didn't get much press out this way.

This is the kind of hideous crime that propels politicians to office on promises of getting tough on crime. It's the kind of thing that prompts legislators to climb all over each other in a struggle to be the first to introduce a bill that would add enhanced penalties for the use of frozen fowl in the commission of a crime.

The New York Times quoted the district attorney as saying this is the sort of crime for which victims feel no punishment is harsh enough. "Death doesn't even satisfy them," he said.

Which is what makes what really happened so unusual. The victim, Victoria Ruvolo, a 44-year-old former manager of a collections agency, was more interested in salvaging the life of her 19-year-old assailant, Ryan Cushing, than in exacting any sort of revenge. She pestered prosecutors for information about him, his life, how he was raised, etc. Then she insisted on offering him a plea deal. Cushing could serve six months in the county jail and be on probation for 5 years if he pleaded guilty to second-degree assault.

Had he been convicted of first-degree assault — the charge most fitting for the crime — he could have served 25 years in prison, finally thrown back into society as a middle-aged man with no skills or prospects.

But this is only half the story. The rest of it, what happened the day this all played out in court, is the truly remarkable part.

According to an account in the New York Post, Cushing carefully and tentatively made his way to where Ruvolo sat in the courtroom and tearfully whispered an apology. "I'm so sorry for what I did to you."

Ruvolo then stood, and the victim and her assailant embraced, weeping. She stroked his head and patted his back as he sobbed, and witnesses, including a Times reporter, heard her say, "It's OK. I just want you to make your life the best it can be." According to accounts, hardened prosecutors, and even reporters, were choking back

tears.

Slowly, humans seem to be learning to understand the power of forgiveness. As a healing agent, it appears to be stronger than any surgery, counseling or anger-management course.

Years ago, Nelson Mandela finally took control of the government of South Africa after spending decades behind bars as a political prisoner. Rather than fan the flames of revenge among the black majority, he set up truth and reconciliation commissions that allowed victims and assailants to come together to seek forgiveness. It didn't solve all of South Africa's problems, but things certainly would have been much worse there otherwise.

Today, other troubled nations are taking inspiration from Mandela's commission. Similar procedures are being set up today in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where passions still rage 10 years after the fighting stopped, and in East Timor and Indonesia, as a way to end harsh feelings between the two nations.

On a more practical level in this country, doctors and hospitals are discovering how important it is to apologize for their mistakes. Recent stories in Time magazine, the Christian Science Monitor and elsewhere have reported how sincere apologies seem to be reducing malpractice suits. This is happening even though attorneys typically advise their clients never to apologize for fear it could be used as a weapon in court.

Of course, crimes should be punished. And yes, not all apologies are sincere. But without forgiveness, no one could ever truly lay aside an injustice for good.

I wish there were a way to fast-forward 20 years or so and see how Ruvolo's act of mercy and reconciliation affects the life of a teenager who nearly threw his future away. Will it represent a moment of redemption, like the sudden forgiveness of a theft did to the fictional Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables"? Or will it have all the lift of the wings of a frozen turkey?

It all depends, of course, on Cushing himself. But my guess is his chances are much better now than they would have been after years behind bars with hardened criminals.

---

*Jay Evensen is editor of the Deseret Morning News editorial page. E-mail: [even@desnews.com](mailto:even@desnews.com)*

Copyright 2012, Deseret News Publishing Company

# Deseret News

## 4-Corners: Forgiveness

### Value Statements

Consider how much you agree with each of the following value statements:

- ✕ "Slowly, humans seem to be learning to understand the power of forgiveness"
- ✕ "As a healing agent, [forgiveness is] stronger than any surgery, counseling, or anger management course."
- ✕ "Without forgiveness, no one could ever truly lay aside an injustice for good."
- ✕ Cushing (from the article) has better chances of being a better person because Ruvolo forgave him.
- ✕ It's good to forgive people, but only if they're really sorry for what they've done.
- ✕ When people hurt me, part of their punishment should be suffering from my anger.
- ✕ "The rarer [better] action is in virtue [rather] than vengeance."
- ✕ Seeking revenge is just part of being human.

Now, turn this sheet over and fill in the graphic organizer on the back.

## 4 Corners: Graphic Organizer

Read the statements as they are presented to you and assign each one to a category below: 100% Agree, Pretty Much Agree, Pretty Much Disagree, 100% Disagree. **WARNING:** You can only use each category twice. After assigning a category to the statement, in a phrase or sentence write the reason for your opinion and then name two experiences from your life that prove what you've written is true.

### 100% Agree

Statement		
Reason		
2 Experiences	1.	1.
	2.	2.

### Pretty Much Agree

Statement		
Reason		
2 Experiences	1.	1.
	2.	2.

### Pretty Much Disagree

Statement		
Reason		
2 Experiences	1.	1.
	2.	2.

### 100% Disagree

Statement		
Reason		
2 Experiences	1.	1.
	2.	2.