

Mag Cywink

I would like to share that I, as family member, share your sorrow, and know the pain that you are experiencing and that you will continue to go through over the course of time, of your life-time.

We found our Sonya had been murdered through one of my brothers that called us and, so, in shock of the news, and disbelief of that news, that it was true, was something that I thing was just, something that I hung to was hoping that it wasn't true. And, I felt that the only way that I could be of use at that time, was to go out and start searching for whoever had done this to my sister Sonya. So, I went from bar to bar and I went in the area where she was last seen. And we were just doing our own questioning, we were talking to people possibly who had known her and, knowing it but still not wanting to believe it.

The impact, not the impact statement, but the statement that I wrote for the police, the very first night that we had found out, the full night, was very grueling, was very difficult. I thought about all of the past ten years that I had had some kind of memory of Sonya and so it was probably about ten pages long, hand written. And that was very difficult, to sit there and write it out and talk about Sonya, but see it in black and white. Because the police needed every possible scenario, or story that I had that might possibly give them some kind of clue as to who she was and what happened to her. [I went to] the East end because it was the last place that Sonya had really any friends that we knew of, and so, we figured that somebody may have known something at that location, and I had written up stuff that I had hung inside of the bars as well. So it was almost like a desperation. Like, I didn't know what the police were doing; it was kind of complicated because, Sonya was last seen in London, Ontario, and she was actually found at the Southwold Earthworks and that was OPP jurisdiction and so there were two police divisions that were working and trying to coordinate themselves. And we didn't know really which one we needed to talk to. We never even knew the OPP was a part of the investigation, until they showed up at Sonya's funeral, at her wake. [They were there] possibly, because they felt people from London might have gone there, so they had suspicions about some people in London and they wanted to see who was going to show up at the funeral, like possibly with a guilty conscience or, they say that sometimes the people that are perpetrators they actually end up showing up at the funerals and the wakes. They just showed up. For me it was a comfort, they were actually doing their job, you know, they were actually doing their job, they were actually doing something as opposed to not seeing them and wondering what was going on. So they were

actually in the background, they were never a part of it so, just I guess knowing that they were doing something was a comfort.

I had called London police division and they gave me the OPP detachment in London and so I went down to write a report for them because I basically was the closest person to Sonya so they wanted me to write everything down that I knew – there could have been something in there that they could have used as a clue to go on.

I think one of the areas that has been very difficult to try to understand and accept is the fact that the detectives who were actually working on Sonya's case change about every two years. So, I feel like I just establish a relationship with the officer, detectives, and they change, they move to another part of the OPP or they move out of the area so, it's one of those things where you build trust and then all of a sudden the trust is you have to start all over again so that's something I wish I knew was different, could be changed but it's just the way they work.

I believe that my need for justice for Sonya is based on a promise to her as a human being and, knowing deep in my heart that I wasn't able to keep that promise to help her heal from that trauma. I had the premonition to go to London I was in fact with my sister Viviane when we found out that my sister Sonya had been murdered.

When you know there's nothing you can do help your family member heal from trauma, I think you become the biggest advocate for that individual because you want to save their memory, and you want to keep who they were alive in a very sacred way. I want families to know that I feel your pain. And that the pain never goes away, it will lessen but it's never going to go away.

What gets me through having to deal with my sister's murder is being able to help other families understand that they need to take more precautions in knowing where their loved ones are, being much more in contact with those people and the guilt that I feel as a family member lessens when I help other families and when I'm doing the work that I do to end violence against women and girls.

When you just find out about your loved one being missing or going murdered the most important thing to do is not continue to abuse yourself by continuing, if you are using alcohol and drugs, to continue to do that, you need to end that because that will only increase the pain and your own self-inflicted trauma so it's very important to get clean very quickly, to stand back and try to look at this objectively,

to call your closest friend, if that's not your sister, call your closest friend who can be an advocate for you, who can stand beside you and speak the words you are not able to speak; to find a very loving picture of your sister or your loved one that you can share with media, that you can put online, that represents who your loved one is, make those things available to share because the media or even the police services may use a photograph that's not who your sister represents so it's very important to be prepared that way.

The suggestion or advice I would have for families who have just discovered that their loved one is missing or has been murdered would be to prepare a place for her at home to bring her back in a good way. How I began my healing journey was: I began to feast my sister on a regular basis, and I learned to journal a lot more about her life, and my relationship with her so, rather than allowing that to stay inside of my mind, I was actually able to share that on paper, so that's a record that I hope one day her grandchildren will be able to have because, they will get to know another part of who she is. So it was very healing for me to be able to do that and, I continue to do it weekly, I write about her. Sonya had one son. He was adopted by a family member as an infant and he has children now. She had him when she was 18 so, a family member, a close family member, adopted him and, it's kind of really, for me, some comfort in knowing that her life lives on through her grandchildren, that's a nice feeling, and those children are very special to me.

I found that for me when I was first dealing with Sonya's death I was very angry and I didn't know how to cope with that anger so, I stayed angry for a long time and, many times I have witnessed families who have lost people in a tragic way and rather than healing from that in a good way, they suppress it with alcohol, substance abuse and it never really heals it just keeps drowning itself it is still very much there. It may take years for that to resurface again and it affects every facet of your life. It touches every relationship you have because, you can't run from it, you have to deal with it. There's a freedom in that, a sense of hope. I can't bring Sonya back. All I can do today is, work towards prevention programs; share her story and her tributes in a way that brings out the good of who she was as a human being. Show people that this was a young woman who was loved. This was a sister who meant something to many people and brought joy to other people's lives and was care free and selfless in so many ways.