

AlbertMohler.com

The Revenge of the 'Prom Moms': Our Children Have Been Listening

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Sparing themselves a murder trial, Amy Grossberg and Brian Peterson pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the death of their newborn son. The plea agreement came as no great surprise, for few persons thought the state could win a first-degree murder conviction against them. The victim, after all, was only a newborn.

The case made headlines across the nation in late 1996. The two 19-year-olds came from wealthy backgrounds and were college students at the time. They had dated in high school and continued their relationship as she entered her freshman year at the University of Delaware. He began his studies at nearby Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania.

On that November night Ms. Grossberg called her boyfriend for help. Just hours later she delivered a baby boy in a room at a local Comfort Inn. Though both parents would later claim that the baby had been born dead, the autopsy would prove otherwise. The baby's body was dumped in a nearby garbage bin, and would probably never have been found, had authorities not grown suspicious after Ms. Grossberg showed up at the hospital with complications from the birth.

The medical examiner's report established that the baby had been born alive, and had died of multiple skull fractures caused by blunt trauma and shaking. Peterson cut a deal with prosecutors and accepted the manslaughter plea on March 9, agreeing to testify against Ms. Grossberg if necessary. Their case in jeopardy, prosecutors allowed Ms. Grossberg to enter the same plea on April 22.

In appearing before the court, Ms. Grossberg's lawyer said that his client felt "remorse and contrition" for the "unintended consequences" of her actions that night. Furthermore, he claimed that Ms. Grossberg suffers from a "life-threatening disease" and had never planned to harm the baby.

That was simply too much for the prosecutor, who rejected Ms. Grossberg's claim that the baby's death was an "unintended consequence." Delaware Deputy Attorney General Paul Wallace asserted "three truths" in this case. First, "This child had a separate existence." Second, "He was born alive." Third, addressing Ms. Grossberg, "She showed a chilling indifference to his life." Clearly, Ms. Grossberg does have a "life-threatening disease," but it was the life of her baby that was really threatened.

In the notorious "Prom Mom" case, Melissa Drexler, then 18, casually left her 1997 high school prom and gave birth in a bathroom stall. She quickly disposed of the baby in a trash can, and went back to the dance floor. When a friend checked on her in the bathroom, Ms. Drexler yelled, "Go tell the boys we'll be right out." And so she was.

Teachers became suspicious when a large quantity of blood was found in the bathroom. Shortly thereafter, the baby's body was discovered. The autopsy showed that the baby boy was born alive and died from asphyxia, either from manual strangulation or the plastic bag into which he was placed, before being thrown in the trash can.

What can explain this chilling pattern of casual infanticide? What would cause a mother - whatever her age - to murder her newborn, and then attempt to return to life as usual?

Sociologists are often quick to look for poverty as an excuse, but economic privation is a hard argument to make in

these cases. Peterson's family had lived in a \$700,000 home and he grew up as a son of great privilege. As a young child he was a model for magazines and TV. According to news reports, he remains an active member of the Screen Actors Guild. Amy Grossberg was raised in similar circumstances. The argument for poverty is hard to make in Drexler's case as well.

Unable to play the poverty card, some have tried a reverse tactic, claiming that these teenagers are the victims of wealth. Dr. Linda Bips, director of the counseling center at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania argued that "having money doesn't mean you'll respond well in a traumatic situation."

With an Orwellian twist, a USA TODAY editorial blamed these murders on those who advocate abstinence before marriage and oppose abortion. "When we vilify premarital sex and abortion counseling, we surely drive some pregnant children deeper into psychosis." Amazingly, the editorial asserts that "it almost doesn't matter whether Drexler's baby was stillborn or murdered." Doesn't matter? The real pain, we are told, is the mother's. "It is her distance from society that tears the heart." All USA TODAY can say in conclusion is: "The poor child, the baby. The poor child, the mother."

Columnist Ellen Goodman claims to believe that there are "evil acts," but her file on prom moms "doesn't read like that." These women are not shameless, she argues. Rather, they are driven to kill their newborns by a culture of shame "and its cousins guilt, dread and desperation." These women must be seen as sick, she argues, not as criminals. This is a difference, she claims, between evil and illness.

The reality is that these young people are simply living as they have been taught. For years, the educators, media mavens, and "progressive" cultural authorities have been teaching our young people that sex is there for the enjoyment, abstinence before marriage is unrealistic, abortion is always available as an option, and human life is of no intrinsic value. Obviously, our children have been listening.

National statistics indicate that hundreds of similar cases of infanticide occur each year, but few make it to the headlines. Having sown the wind, we will now reap the whirlwind. A culture that casually accepts the murder of newborn children is probably past the point of moral return. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

