

WILL *this* RELATIONSHIP RECOVER?

Field Notes for Authentic & Loving Responses to Trouble in the World

By Kat Knecht with Laura Lallone
& Curtis Knecht

Illustration by Dina Pielat
based on glass sculpture
by Teale Rowe



THE SITUATION

When the unthinkable happens, as it did on April 16th at Virginia Tech, when a mentally ill student, Seung-Hui Cho, killed 32 people and wounded 25 before committing suicide, what is the loving response? We can't bake chocolate chip cookies as we would for a neighbor. Or can we?

Each of us has a unique and much needed piece to add to this world. When we focus on the positive especially at times when we want to hide, feel hopeless, helpless and angry, each and every one of us can make a real difference for those we love most and in the world.

The Virginia Tech massacre fired up debates around the world about U.S. culture, gun laws, care for the mentally ill, journalism and who is responsible. While it is important to be informed, what happens is that we replace our feeling of connection with the need for more and more information just for the sake of feeling the drama of it. We are a culture addicted to drama. An element of this tragedy lies in that addiction.

THE PEOPLE

Kat – “From the first moments of hearing about the shootings, I had a very strong sense that I needed to respond, not just keep it outside me as something happening to ‘other people’. I believe we are all connected and so this was happening to me; these were my children as well...As a radio show host and a citizen I also had a responsibility to address the way the media focused on the negative, feeding the drama and intruding on the lives of the people involved.”

Laura - Laura had been playing with a project she calls “Girlfriend on the Street” of just being there and befriending people in ordinary situations and through intense emotional experiences. Unaware of the Virginia Tech events, Laura launched this new project on the morning of the shootings.

Curtis - For Curtis, this was a professional as well as a personal issue. As the father of a college student and a therapist with 23 years of experience including treating the impact of sexual violence on victims, offenders and their families, he found himself heartbroken when he heard of the shootings. Here was another unthinkable act of violence that would be followed by the inevitable media feeding frenzy. He felt a longing to do his part to bring about a healing and prevent this kind of senseless killing.

THE QUESTION

Laura, Curtis and I gathered for our regular Friday Relationship Coaching Company meeting, four days after the shootings. We put aside “business as usual” to explore the question: In this situation and others like it small or large, “what’s the loving response?”

THE CHOICE

We made the decision to go on a quest to find a loving response to this situation, a response that would not only be helpful for the people involved but could create something positive for the future.

Hours later we had two plane tickets booked for me and Laura. Destination: Virginia Tech. Curtis would stay in Ventura to anchor the business and the radio show.

THE ACTION

Monday, April 23: Laura and I arrived on campus along with a throng of other people intent on helping the returning students.

Well, here we are; what now? We had come with a very clear intention: To discover for ourselves what the loving response was that we would only get from being on campus. Our other intention was to report to our radio show listeners what we experienced and see if we could actually achieve our goal of reporting without intruding.

With a cursory lay of the land, we headed to the memorial scene. A feeling of reverence swept across campus. Some were crying, others huddled together and shared their experiences of the day of the shooting, the relationships they had or didn’t have with those killed or hurt.

We stopped by the Red Cross counseling station, curious as professional life coaches to see what was happening and how we might get involved. Their set up consisted of a large, open room with tables on the far walls. On paper it must have seemed like a great idea, but we never saw a single student enter. No offense is meant to the Red Cross for what we imagine is their genuine desire to help. Something else was being called for.

THE LEARNING

Throughout the afternoon we simply sat among the students, overhearing conversations, observing the mainstream media harassment of passing students who made it quite clear they just wanted to be left alone.

We watched as students marveled with gratitude and awe at the outpouring of sympathy. A marching band from a local university strode across campus proclaiming “We Love You”. Hundreds of bouquets and banners with personal notes from schools and communities across the country and around the world adorned the Squires Hall student center.

We were really struck by the grownup feeling of the students’ response. The underlying atmosphere was one of thoughtfulness, a community pulling together. They included the shooter’s picture in the memorial with no mention of revenge, no feeling of public drama. We could all learn a lot from them.

It wasn’t until the end of the afternoon that we found the Rosetta Stone of our quest. While monitoring the “help center” and noting that we still had not observed a single person entering, we heard some music throughout the student center.

It was a man ‘playing glasses’. Jamey Turner, a glass harpist, had set up a station in a hallway. By using his fingertips to circle the rims of water glasses, each filled with a different level of water, he generated enchanting music. He even enrolled young men to play along with him. Before long, a large group of students had squeezed into the corridor. They stood in awe of Jamey’s talent and stuck around to hear his corny jokes, listen to the music, and, most importantly, experience that feeling of real community. We really are all in this together.

That was the answer we had come across the country to find. The feeling of positive/loving/healing community generated by one person who responded in his own unique way, bringing his form of “chocolate chip cookies” to his neighbors, letting them know he cared and creating a corner of magic for enjoyment and healing.

We also discovered our way of staying connected with world events and reporting for our radio audience, by just ‘being there’ as witnesses with a clear intention and telling our little piece of the story.

The loving response doesn’t have to be big or dramatic, whether you’re dealing with a national tragedy or a troubling personal issue. It just needs to answer the invitation from that quiet voice in your heart, responding with your own unique action as the ‘glass harpist’ did.

Kat Knecht, PCC, is a relationship coaching expert and author. Kat and her husband Curtis Knecht, MFT, PCC, are co-founders of The Relationship Coaching Company and hosts of the weekly live radio show “Partners in Paradise” on Ventura’s KKZZ1590 AM “The Connection” every Saturday morning at 9am. Tune in if you want to be entertained by a great conversation about what creates powerful, positive and fulfilling relationships. You’ll be hooked on their Live Coaching, Interesting Guests, Radical Relationship Recipes and “Wildcard Moment”. Stop by for a visit at www.relationshipcoaching.com

Laura Lallone is their friend and business associate. She works as a freelance writer, including her blog, “Get Out of Jail Free” in which she shares her unique views of the world.