

George Lardner
5604 32 St., NW
Washington, DC 20005

6/1/92

Dear George,

Six mornings each week I follow the same routine. When I feel it is safe for me I drive to the end of our lane where, usually at about 2 a.m., the Post is there. I sit in the car, listen to the stereo when^{re} it can't disturb Lil, and go through the Post until the local paper is delivered. First I lay the main news section aside, then sports, then Style or Metro, and then go over whichever is more inside. This morning the first section I looked at was Metro. And there was your tragedy. I've not been able to pay attention to the paper or anything else since.

So I just sat and thought, knowing I could not make sense out of it, but I thought back over my many years in the world that has grown increasingly and more senselessly violent. After 60 years or so I still remember some of the details of the first suicide I covered, so poorly that the desk rewrote the story. To my own commitment to nonviolence, to Gandhian belief, to the Oxford pledge of before World War II, to my opposition to compulsory military training in college, which cost me my degree, and to my hastening my induction when I did not have to be a soldier. I remember but a single violent act, when not realizing that a fellow soldier had serious emotional problem I stopped just short of throwing him overboard when his pestering became intolerable.

Having lived with violence, as we all do, and having worked with it these many years, it still makes no sense to me, ever. and although we can all understand why some resort to it, I can make no sense of it. It is one of the world's most pointless and self-destructive acts.

We've all been touched by it in varying degrees and this is not the first time I've had a friend who suffered from it as you have. Whether it is from accident or irrational intent, as I've thought of this and groped for a way of expressing sympathy or seeking to suggest what^{may} bring a modicum of comfort so often^{it} seems awkward when, unlike with my brother-in-law who died just last week at 85, it is so utterly pointless, so without any rational meaning at all.

We can't make sense of the senseless. We can say we are sorry and to the degree possible sorrow with the victims, and hope that we are understood and that we do feel this, and yet not be content with what we can say. But the reality for the victims is that what has been done cannot be undone, that their loss is a finality. That nobody else can feel as they do. We can only hope that they cope with and adjust to it as well as they can, as I^{hope} do.

You can take comfort from your own religion. I suggest that as you do you extend it to Ecclesiastes. Read it again. It may mean something when nothing seems to mean anything.

I am, sincerely, very sorry.

Lardner