

*Rhymes and Reasons*  
*Jan. 30, 2016*

## **Tragedies Hit Hard and Feel Personal**

Growing up in a small West Tennessee town was wonderful on so many levels, but hard on a young girl who liked to read the newspaper. We were a newspaper-rich family because my grandfather believed taking the paper was a sign of affluence. Once he got off the farm and became a business owner, he grabbed onto those little things.

My mother adopted that belief and loved to read the newspaper. We got one of the Memphis papers on Sunday, the Jackson Sun from nearby Jackson, Tenn., every day and the Lexington Progress on Thursdays.

There wasn't a lot of bad news in the Progress, but when there was, it always hit home. Fires, deaths, car wrecks – any local tragedy was always a hard hit because the chances were good that you knew the family, or, if not, knew their cousins.

I had a tender heart as a young girl and would often cry as I read something sad or tragic in the local paper. I still cry pretty easily, and there has been a lot to cry about lately.

Today, with continuous news – and a lot of non-news – so easy to access, bad news even with no personal ties can break your heart. Little lost Noah, the 7-year-old gunshot victim in Crossville and our own Zaezion Dobson have weighed heavy on the hearts of parents and grandparents the past weeks.

But what do we do about our children's access to the information? How much should they know?

Last year I was embarrassed when my visiting daughter-in-law had to ask me to switch channels when one of those murder-news shows (and I use the word "news" reluctantly) came on. She didn't want my then 9-year-old grandson to hear it, which was exactly the right call. It was one of those "can't look away" shows that have little value, even to adults.

Recent events are harder. If now 10-year-old Cohen was here, I would want him to know about Zaezion and the community response, as would his parents. Noah and the shooting victim are harder calls. Cohen, too, has a tender heart.

Some of my young parent friends said they are all talking about it as moms and dads because it's hard to know the right thing to do.

"Wait," say some, to see if the child hears about it at school or day care and asks you. "Wait," say others, then ask the child if has heard about it and take it from there. "Tell them about it

within your own family's frame of reference," was another's advice, because, if they are school-age, someone is going to be talking about it.

The goal of all the parents wasn't to necessarily teach a life-lesson, but to reassure. "We want our children to feel safe, but we want them to be smart about what's around them," said one mom, who has a 9-year-old.

Our access to news of things that happen outside our communities has exploded since I had only a weekly community paper and would only occasionally see a dateline that said "Lexington" in the daily paper. On some level, it is encouraging that these tragedies still hit us so hard, even when we don't know the people or their cousins.

Knowing also means we can participate – which is something all the parents said they make available to their children. Whether that is getting involved in solving the problems, monetary donations or remembering the families during prayer time, it helps to heal our hurting hearts.