The Coldest Night In January

Posted @ Dec. 01 2010 12:00PM by admin - back-issues



By Jadrian Klinger



These are just the facts, nothing more.

On the evening of January 10, 2003, in a quiet neighborhood in Camp Hill, Pa., Randi Lee Trimble's life was stolen away. Her husband, Brian Trimble, along with his friend and coworker, Blaine Norris, now locked away in prison for life, confessed to conspiring and then carrying out their plan to murder 28-year-old Randi Trimble. Their motive: cash in on a life insurance plan that would

pay out \$100,000, of which \$20,000 would go to Blaine Norris to cover credit card debt he accumulated by filming an independent horror flick. To Brian and Blaine it was simple: Blaine would be free of debt, and Brian would be free to live the bachelor life with \$80,000 in his pocket.

The rationale and logic that motivated two psychopaths to murder an innocent woman stands as the only explanation as to why Randi is not turning 36 this month. Survived by her mother, Nancy Chavez, as well as countless friends and family members whose lives were touched by Randi, her homicide makes just as little sense now as it did then.

These are the cruel facts Nancy Chavez must accept and attempt to live with each and every day. But they are just that; only cold, hard facts. The facts do not remember Randi for the amazing granddaughter, niece, wife, friend and daughter that she was. They do not mention Randi's love of music, the way she helped people as a speech therapist or even the strong unconditional bond she shared with her mother. They do not describe how happy she was on her wedding day or how she stuck by her husband as he faced multiple sclerosis. They do not explain the grief that her mother still endures. They are only facts, and they will never come close to telling the whole story.

Despite the facts, despite the numerous local and national news pieces about Randi's brutal murder and despite the almost eights years gone by, Nancy Chavez feels shortchanged. The following is not just Randi's story but also Nancy's. As a survivor, a victim, a woman who knows the bottomless sorrow of living through a nightmare and an advocate for domestic violence awareness, Nancy Chavez readily and candidly tells her story in the hopes that it will inspire others to seek help or speak up or even just cherish the fleeting moments that we are lucky enough to share with our loved ones. This is the

story of Nancy Chavez, 55, director within the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Camp Hill resident and proud mother of Randi Lee Trimble.

Nancy, The Survivor

"I sometimes think about the fear I have experienced in my life. At 55 years old, you look back on your life and you think about certain things that impact you."

At 19, Nancy got married. "He was in the Navy," she explains. "I never really had relationships when I was in high school, mainly because my mother and father were very protective. Then all of a sudden, this guy comes into my life. I didn't have any intentions of getting into a relationship; I just wanted to go see the band Chicago play at the farm show. I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice to go with a guy?' So I did. But it took me aback because this guy just fell head over heels for me."

He wrote and called her from where he was stationed in Norfolk. He would visit her on the weekends. "He made me feel like I was a queen, like I was everything to him. After about six months, he decided he wanted to spend the rest of his life with me. He approached my mother and father about marrying me, and, of course, they were absolutely against it. In spite of my parents, I decided I needed to be with this man, and I ran away and got married. Looking back now, I can remember driving to Norfolk with my new husband, looking out the window, hoping my mom and dad would be riding beside me saying, 'Come back home.' But I made a decision that impacted me for the rest of my life."

Almost as soon as the newlywed couple arrived in Norfolk to live out their lives in what Nancy thought would be marital bliss, the abuse began. "Once my new husband got me to Norfolk and we were in his apartment, he set the rules down. I wasn't used to that — I was very naïve. The abuse started from the very beginning and never ended for seven and a half years. I didn't know where to go or who to tell. I couldn't go to my parents, I didn't want them to know that my husband was abusive. He was so controlling that I thought there was no way out."

In April of that same year, Nancy found out that she was pregnant. On December 15, 1974, Randi Lee was born. "I thought that she would be my savior, my angel to stop the abuse, because it was pretty severe. But I stayed with him, I stayed with him because I was threatened. I was beaten down mentally and physically to the point where he made me feel that I was worthless. My name was 'f-ing bitch' – that's how I knew myself. When I looked in the mirror, that's what I knew about myself. I was worthless, no one would ever want me. He did everything to just chip away at my self-esteem so that he had absolute control over me.

"He would threaten me that if I ever left him, he would kill me. And so I didn't. No matter what he did, no matter how he treated me, no matter how much he abused me, I would always cover the bruises and the scars and uphold my image of being the best wife, making sure he was seen as the best husband. I never exposed anyone to the

abuse except my daughter, and that's what really hurts me. He would put her in the bedroom, where we lived, and close the door thinking she wouldn't hear or see, but she knew. That, to this day, really hurts me to think about."

After seven and a half years of abuse, Nancy discovered the courage to leave with Randi. "Something happened to me when I turned 25. I said, 'That's it, I'm going to leave.' And that's exactly what I did. I thought about Randi and I thought about how I couldn't expose her to this. It was not right and it was not the life I wanted her to live. So we left. But the fear that I had living with him heightened once I made the decision to divorce him, because I saw his actions even more so with the threat of killing me or taking Randi from me. I left and moved in with my sister and, of course, my parents were there to help me. But it wasn't until I was in my late 30s that I was actually able to talk about it and say that my husband abused me.

"I never say his name – they know who they are, they always know who they are. To this day, he frightens me. I remember when Randi was killed, I thought he killed her."

One of the first things Nancy did after the divorce was go back to college. She also landed a job working for the state. From HACC, she transferred to Penn State Harrisburg. But her top priority was always raising Randi and being a great mother for her.

"At 25, I set myself a goal to save money," she remembers. "I worked two or three jobs. I'd work over the weekends to save the money for Randi's education and also for mine so that I wouldn't have to have any student debt. I'd take one or two courses a semester throughout the entire year. When I sat at the table to do my homework, Randi sat with me. When Randi started school, we were both at the table doing our homework. And that meant an awful lot to me. It took me 15 years to go to school to get my undergraduate and my master's degrees."

The driving force for everything she did was always Randi.

Remembering Randi

Driven to carve out a great life for her daughter and herself, Nancy made sure Randi had all the opportunities that she had as a child. "My mother and father were always there for me and my three sisters growing up, and my mother was always out playing games with us and the kids in the community. I wanted Randi to have the same thing, so she was involved in all types of activities. She did tap dancing and tumbling. Randi played the flute and the piccolo. She was in band in high school and choir and marching band. I loved that she loved those things."

Music resonated within Randi at a very young age and Nancy recognized it right away. "Her love was music. She really enjoyed everything about music, and not just playing an instrument but musicals – everything about them. I thought that was something that

was special about her. If the Music Man came on TV, or Grease, we'd be sitting in front of the TV and she'd know every word."

Randi attended Trinity High School. While there, she followed her love of music and became a drum major. She also excelled in her academics. By the time she was ready to go to college, she had decided that she wanted to major in speech pathology at Bloomsburg University.

Being a single mother, Nancy doubly missed Randi's presence once she left for college. But daily phone calls and weekend visits back home helped assuage the lonely feelings of an empty nest and kept their close relationship strong. "At first, I would go get her on the weekends, and then she was allowed to take the car up," she recalls. "I always told her when she drove anywhere, especially up to school, that 'I don't know what I would do if something happened to you. If something happened to you, I would just die.' I always remember that because, after she was killed, I think about that all the time."

Randi's aptitude for music and academics flourished at Bloomsburg. She not only earned the position as drum major for the Bloomsburg band, but she also did so well in her classes that her high GPA compelled the university to offer her a full scholarship for grad school. Nancy urged her to look into other universities for her graduate studies, but Randi's practical sensibilities would not let her pass up such a great opportunity.

Throughout Randi's undergraduate and graduate years, the daily phone conversations they counted on continued to play an important part in both of their lives. "Each year, I thought, 'OK, now I'm going to wean her off the calls.' And, oh my gosh, she would not hear of it. Until the last semester in her graduate studies, we would call each other all the time. A couple of times, I would say, 'OK Randi, this is it, this is it.' And she would cry and say, 'Mom, please, no; you are my best friend and I need to talk to you. Even if it's for a second, I need to hear your voice.' So we did and, again, I don't have any regrets – that's how close we were."

The mother-daughter bond that Nancy and Randi shared was special and rare. As time passes, the lives of parents and children do not always follow a parallel path. But, for Nancy and Randi, their paths were forged for, by and through one another's support and love.

"My priority was always my daughter, and I always made that clear to anyone who came into my life; if they did not accept my daughter and how I felt about her, then they were simply not part of my life. That's the choice I made because I made her my priority. I enjoyed my life, and I was able to allow her to grow, too. I don't regret that, even more so now because she's gone. When you look back on it, some people ask, 'Why'd you spend so much time with Randi? Why didn't you get married?' I never regret the love I shared with my daughter. I can say now, without hesitation, that it was truly unconditional love. We were mother and daughter, and we were best friends. I am very proud of what I did for myself, but more so for what I did for my daughter."

Mr. and Mrs. Brian and Randi Trimble

As a speech pathology major at Bloomsburg University, Randi chose to pursue a career in helping the elderly. Her mother advised her to try working with kids before her senior year began to see if she would like it. Following her mother's advice, Randi applied for a job working in the day care center at the New Cumberland Army Depot. During the application process, she struck up a conversation with a guy named Brian Trimble, who also happened to be applying for work in the day care center. They both got the job.

"They worked together and would take the kids to the pool and stuff – that's how their relationship started," remembers Nancy. "It was a date, and then there were more dates. Before I knew it, Brian was here at my house and I was being introduced to him. Soon Brian became a part of our lives and I was introduced to his family. Randi was with him more and more, and that was OK – he was a nice guy."

Randi continued her studies at Bloomsburg as her relationship with Brian became more serious. Brian attended Penn State, but dropped out and found a job at a local video store. "They dated each other for a total of five years, but within a couple years, Brian proposed to her and said he wanted to marry her," Nancy recalls. "And so they planned it for three years, they planned a wedding in between her schooling and him building his career. My family loved Brian. Brian was always there; he won everyone over because they knew Randi truly loved him."

Leading up to their wedding, Randi noticed that Brian began slurring his words. Being a speech therapist, Randi knew that something was not quite right with her fiancé's speech pattern. Doctors ran tests on Brian and he was diagnosed with early signs of multiple sclerosis. "Randi was really upset. We were trying to think of every way possible to make sure Brian was comfortable. We learned about MS – Randi really, really researched it.

"Once she graduated from college, I sat down with her and I asked Randi if she was sure she wanted to go through with the marriage. I wanted her to know what she'd need to prepare herself for; he could be wheel-chair bound, maybe they couldn't have children – everyone was very concerned. With that in mind, she said, 'Mom, I can't do that. I love this man. I wouldn't want him to do this to me. I'll stay with him, this is what my life will be devoted to – him and my children.' I knew then that she was truly in love with him."

On September 9, 2000, Randi and Brian were married. "It was absolutely wonderful," she recalls. "It was everything that she wanted."

Randi purchased a house three blocks away from Nancy. Randi got a job at Masonic Homes right out of college, and from there found her dream job at Hershey Medical Center. Brian, while suffering increased aches and pains associated with MS, worked his way up the career ladder at a local insurance company. It wasn't long before the newlyweds began considering having a baby together. Overall, things were pretty great

for Randi and Brian. "Having this perfect marriage, perfect husband, perfect home, perfect job and the planning for children – everything was just wonderful," Nancy recalls.

Hindsight Is Always 20/20

By living only three blocks away, Randi, Brian and Nancy often enjoyed each other's company. They'd sometimes eat dinner together or just hang out at each other's houses. Nancy recalls an odd occurrence at one such dinner: "Brian comes home from work and says that this guy at work wants to make a film in the same vein of the Blair Witch Project. Brian was into photography, very good with computers and had this video camera, and supposedly this guy told him that he wanted Brian to be the videographer. Brian agreed to do it because they were buddies at work. But I didn't know who this person was he worked with."

Brian mentioned that his friend at work wanted everyone involved with the movie to contribute \$5,000 towards production costs. With plans for a child and Brian's medical issues, Randi had no intention of investing that kind of money into an amateur film. "That started it, a real downward spiral," says Nancy. "I didn't realize it at the time, but I believe this is where it all started."

Brian's friend from work, who had aspirations of becoming an independent filmmaker, turned out to be Blaine Norris, the very man who would brutally take Randi's life.

According to Nancy, Brian went back to Blaine and said that his wife wouldn't allow him to contribute the \$5,000 for the movie. "I learned this after the fact because I had no clue at the time of Randi's murder who killed her," she says. "I had learned that Brian, at around the same time, started thinking, 'I want the money, I want my freedom, I want everything."

And so they continued on with their lives; they went on vacation and they shared holidays. "We didn't hear too much about the movie anymore. Maybe we talked about it a little bit, but we went on summer vacation and we had Thanksgiving, we had Christmas and Randi and Brian were planning to take a cruise in 2003. Everything was just fine. Everything was perfect."

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Whether together or separate, vacation cruises were just another fun activity that Randi and Nancy both enjoyed. In January of 2002, a year before Randi's murder, one of Nancy's friends told her about plans for a cruise that embarked the following year. "One of my girlfriends and I decided to get a room together on the cruise," she explains. "We were planning that, and it was going to be over my birthday in January of 2003."

On Sunday, January 5, 2003, Nancy left Pennsylvania to enjoy a week of cruising the Caribbean with her friend. The day before scars Nancy's memory as the last time she saw her beloved 28-year-old daughter alive. "I saw her on Saturday. We talked and she

showed me her Christmas presents and everything – it was very nice. She got new china for Christmas and she wanted to show me where she was going to put it."

After a short flight from Baltimore to Miami, Nancy called Randi just like she promised she would. Nancy left a few words on her voicemail, but Randi never got the message. It was so uncommon for Nancy not to speak to Randi, even while on vacation, that Randi became quite distraught as days passed without hearing from her. While on the cruise, Nancy unsuccessfully tried several times to reach her. "I finally got a hold of her at work when I was in Saint Martin, and she was crying. She was like, 'Mom, I thought something happened to you. I was trying to get a hold of you."

After countless phone calls shared between Nancy and Randi over many years — mother to daughter, best friend to best friend — this brief exchange of words, a connection made across a thousand miles of land and sea, would be their last. "We had a conversation, and it lasted about 15 minutes. After talking to Randi, I felt comfortable. It was that Thursday, January 9, around noon. I was so happy to talk to her, to finally get a hold of her."

On the evening of Friday, January 10, 2003, Randi Lee Trimble was murdered.

"It was strange because, on Friday evening, my girlfriend and I were going to go to dinner, but I just didn't feel like it. I just wanted to sit in my room. The whole evening I wasn't feeling like myself, and that's when Randi was killed."

The next day, Nancy's cruise friend received a note to report to the captain's office. Her friend was informed about Randi's death, but she kept the awful news to herself, believing that Nancy should hear it from her own family members. Nancy knew that her friend's brother was not in good health, and logically assumed that the news was about her friend's brother. Thinking that her friend did not want to talk about it, Nancy had no clue of the tragedy that had already transpired in her own life. Arrangements were made by the cruise line for them to get off the boat and catch an earlier flight back to Miami and then to Baltimore.

At the airport in Baltimore, Nancy's family was there waiting for her. "I walked in there and saw my mother, my brother-in-law and my sister Patty, and they just screamed at me, telling me something happened to Randi, that Randi was dead, that Randi was murdered. I was just devastated. I couldn't believe what they were saying. It's still very hard for me to comprehend, even to this day. They were telling me that something happened to her, that they didn't know what happened, but she was dead. At first, I didn't believe it.

"I don't even remember walking out of the airport. In the car, I just remember hearing bits and pieces of what they were telling me. I wanted to talk to Brian to make sure he was OK. Once I got him on the phone, he just lost it. I wanted to be with Randi, I wanted to hold her, I wanted to be beside her. When we got home, we went to her house. There was police tape and trucks and Christmas lights were on, and it was just

very difficult for me. You know, when you go into a state of shock, you don't quite comprehend, but things come back to you later. And even seven years later, I still remember certain things that I experienced and words that were said to me and the feelings that I had, but there will always be vivid parts of this whole big event that I'll never forget."

Brian's Story

Nancy could not sleep. Her life no longer made sense. She just could not make sense of what happened. All she knew was that her daughter was dead. Feelings of grief, guilt, despair and desperation crippled her.

"Of course, calls were coming in, people were here the following day," she recalls. "Brian came over and I consoled him. I wanted to hear from him. I wanted to hear how he found Randi, how this all happened. And his story was as follows: He said that he came home from dinner in Lancaster. He said that he came home, saw the Christmas tree lights on and assumed Randi was home. So he went up to the door and saw that the door was ajar. Thinking it was strange, he walked in and he called her name twice but she didn't respond. He walked in and saw that the house was in disarray, it was turned upside down. He saw the [interior] door to the garage was opened. He looked in the garage and saw Randi lying there.

"I said, 'And? What did you do?' He said, 'I looked at her.' I said, 'You know CPR, did you go to her, did you pick her up, did you hold her, did you see if she was breathing, was she alive?' He said, 'Oh no, she wasn't. I saw her eyes were open. Her head was turned to her side and her eyes were open, and I knew she was dead.' That's where I first learned about it, from him, and I was so worried about him. I promised him, 'Brian, I'm going to do anything that I can do to take care of you, because that's what Randi would want, she loved you terribly and we're going to find out who killed her.'"

Face to Face With The Killer

At Randi's funeral, Nancy and Brian stood together and greeted the many mourners as they came to pay their respects. During this most solemn tribute to Randi's life, Nancy emotionally leaned on Brian for support and, at the same time, extended her love for Randi to Brian. Brian's state of mind and his personal welfare had become one of Nancy's main concerns.

A group of people from Brian's job came to offer their condolences. Among them was Blaine Norris. "At the time, I did not know Blaine Norris or that he was there," she says. "He was with this whole group from Brian's job. I gave them each a hug, and said, 'Please, whatever you do, take care of my Brian – he needs for you to support him. I want you to do that for me and Randi.' I hugged Blaine Norris, just as I did the rest. He then sat in the back of the room the whole time – right beside my brother-in-law."

Eventually The Truth Comes Out

Three days after Randi's murder, Nancy and Brian found themselves at the police station talking to detectives. "Everyone was there questioning us left and right, and that was the beginning of many times of being questioned," says Nancy. "It was frightening because I was never in a police station. Everyone at the table was throwing questions at me and Brian, and reversing them and just trying to do everything possible."

Nancy learned that the police swept Randi's house for evidence as to what happened. Detectives called everyone in Randi's address book. All of her friends and the people she worked with were brought in for questioning. Everyone was a suspect at that point.

All through the questioning, Brian and Nancy supported each other. "Brian was there with me that entire week," she says. "He held my hand, he sat with me, he cried and wailed at times and we had to comfort him. I made sure he was OK. His parents were there, too. It was just so horrific being questioned by the police. I did not know that they were suspicious of Brian from the very beginning."

Behind the scenes, the police were watching Brian. "I remember them telling me, 'This is not CSI; it's not going to be done in a hour, it's going to take days and days, it's going to take the cooperation of both of you and we're going to find out who killed her."

As the investigation wore on, Brian's involvement in Randi's murder became more and more apparent to the detectives. Brian was their prime suspect.

According to Nancy, Brian had planned Randi's murder for over seven months prior to the act. "Brian was the mastermind," she states. "He built up a whole perception at work of Randi being a controlling and unreasonable wife. He would complain to Blaine that she never let him do anything, and that she even refused to give him money for lunch. So Brian says to Blaine one day at the water fountain, 'Man, I could just kill her.' And Blaine says, 'Well, I could do that for you.' Apparently, Blaine wanted to experience the thrill of killing someone. Both Brian and Blaine enjoyed playing role-playing board games together, and I believe this became part of a game. In fact, Blaine confessed that he did not know Randi personally, only that he met her one time briefly. The bottom line was that Brian wanted his freedom and wanted the money."

To get a full picture of the coldness and brutality with which Brian and Blaine carried out their plan, Nancy relives the grisly details of Randi's murder. "On Friday, January 10, Brian got home around 4:15 p.m. from work and Blaine Norris followed him. They came into the house. Blaine changed his clothes to black sweatpants, a hooded sweatshirt, strapped a knife to one leg and then a gun to the other. The plan was to just stab her, so Brian goes, 'What's the gun for?' Blaine goes, 'In case she runs, I'll shoot her.' Brian and Blaine trash the house to make it look like a robbery. Then Brian leaves, but Blaine stays to wait for Randi to come home.

"When Randi got home, she walked through the garage door and then into the dining room. Blaine had an extension cord from one of the Christmas ornaments – she still had her Christmas things up – and strangled her. I know she fought because, when I

saw her, she had marks on her hands – it was just terrible. She passed out. And he took her back to the garage, pulled her back and slammed her head into the concrete. Then he stabbed her 27 times and cut her throat. He wanted her dead. My daughter, she didn't have a chance.

"That's what I live with, the fact that she was lying in that garage for hours because a coroner told me they got there immediately, but she laid there until the early morning while the police investigated the scene. I wasn't there with her. That hurts me to this day because I promised that I would protect her and I wasn't there for her. She was alone and she died there – those are the images I can't get out of my mind. I feel guilty that I wasn't there."

After an exhaustive four-month investigation, Brian was arrested in May for the murder of his wife. He confessed and identified Blaine. "Brian said that he killed her because he wanted the life insurance money and he wanted his freedom. But more importantly, he did not want to put the family through a divorce, that killing her was better than divorcing her."

After a cat-and-mouse-like search for evidence linking Blaine to the claims made by Brian, Blaine was arrested five months later. Both Brian and Blaine pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and were sentenced to life in prison. In late December of 2007, Brian challenged his guilty plea. Brian cannot appeal since he pleaded guilty, but he filed a post-conviction relief petition, which alleges that his original plea of guilty was not voluntary and that his counsel was ineffective. The issue remains unresolved.

"Randi never really knew Brian – I never knew him," Nancy admits. "A lot of people in my family never knew him. And that's what really hurts me to this day. When I think about the facts of how my daughter was murdered, it was horrific, absolutely horrific. She had no clue that this was going to happen to her when she walked in that door. And I also know that she loved Brian up to the minute she died. That's what's really sad; that he never saw that. He took everything from me. He took my whole life from me. What was I supposed to do with the rest of my life?"

And So, Life Does Go On

For the rest of Nancy's life, thoughts of Randi will never be far from her mind. For the 28 years that Randi lived, Nancy dedicated her life to her daughter. And it is that same dedication – which, through it all, never once waned – that compels her to move forward. Eight years later, Nancy continues to live for Randi.

In 2005, on Mother's Day weekend, Nancy organized Randi's Race for Hope and Courage. Next May will mark the seventh year of the 5k run or walk, which takes place at Adams Ricci Park in Enola. In total, Nancy's charitable tribute to the memory of her daughter has raised more than \$185,000, which benefits the Domestic Violence Services of Cumberland and Perry Counties and, in the future, Randi's House of Angels, a non-profit organization where children of all ages receive counseling in an

effort to break the cycle of victimization and abuse. "It's a place for children to be able to express what is happening in their lives so that they won't perpetuate the violence that they have in their home," she explains. "I feel very strongly that because there are so many good programs out there for victims of domestic violence, helping children is where I want to concentrate my efforts." Nancy also sponsored Randi's Camp for Hope and Courage this past August.

Nancy started the first support group in Cumberland County for family members affected by domestic violence. She also regularly speaks to audiences about domestic violence awareness. She shares the story of her daughter and of the domestic abuse she endured in the hope that it will inspire others to find the courage to change their lives. "I just want so much for the women out there – and there are men, too – who walk around in silence, behind closed doors, protecting their abusers, like I did, to know that they can make a difference. It starts with them. They have to want to change. And that's where I will concentrate my efforts for probably the rest of my life. I miss Randi every minute of my life, but if this wouldn't have happened, I wouldn't be helping others. And yet, that's the good thing. I can feel good about what I've done, how I've impacted other people's lives."

For years, Nancy has kept a journal. In it, she chronicled her own life and that of her daughter. She continued to fill its pages as the nightmare of Randi's murder unfolded. Even today it remains a constant confidant. One day, she plans to transform what has become a small library of journal volumes into a book. And she will no doubt dedicate it to her beloved, beautiful Randi.

"There's a little more of a comfort level now because of how I've adjusted. And certainly in how I look at my life now. My perspective on living the rest of my life is different. At first it was so traumatic; I didn't want to go any further without her. I love saying that Randi was my life and that she will always be my life – that's how I wanted it. I feel very, very proud that I was her mom." **HBG**

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