

Restorative Justice

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Can a murderer be forgiven - even if they murdered someone you loved?

The story of Emma Smiley and Glen Flett as told to Phil Hood



Emma Smiley

“She had this whole idea about me turning my life around and helping others.”

Glen Flett
Repentant murderer

Mrs. Smiley was a “fluffy” woman who saw life through rose colored glasses. A friend of my grandfather’s, She saw to it that I went to Sunday School and church.” Emma Smiley was an ordained minister of the Gospel at the Victoria Truth Centre. She continued to be a close friend to Glen Flett throughout his turbulent teen years.

“Mrs. Smiley listened to me, she talked to me and calmed me down.” Often in trouble, Glen was operating a cigarette theft ring at the age of 11. He occasionally carried a loaded .38 revolver to high school. He had once stabbed a store detective as a teenager.

Jail became a familiar place to him from the early age of 19. “Mrs. Smiley visited me at Wilkinson Road (Vancouver Island Correctional Centre) and in 1969-70, she visited me at William Head (a Federal prison near Victoria).”

Emma Smiley never gave up on Glen Flett. “She was like a grandmother to me, she sent me birthday cards and religious books and dreamed about how I would one day help other troubled kids. She had this whole idea about me turning my life around and helping others.” By the time Glen was 27, he had committed armed robberies from Texas to Ontario.

Finally one day John Glendon Flett was running through a Toronto store with a gun in one hand and a bag of money in

the other.

A bystander ran into Flett and grabbed hold of his jacket lapel.

“Give yourself up, man,” he yelled. “It’s not worth it!”

“Let go of me...,” Flett screamed back. “I’ve got a gun!”

But (The victim) wouldn’t release his grip. The two began to tussle. Flett, in a furious attempt to get free, swung (the victim) around violently, exposing (the victim’s) back to Flett’s accomplice who was now only a few feet away, his own gun in hand. When Glen’s accomplice saw Flett struggling with this unknown man, he didn’t hesitate. He raised his gun and fired once, hitting (the victim) in the back. At almost the same instant, Flett also fired from point blank range, shooting (the victim) in the front left shoulder.

As (the victim) released his grip and dropped to the floor, Flett tumbled awkwardly backward through a clothes rack onto the carpet.” Two quick gun shots and four children were without a father, a wife without a husband, and an arrogant, dangerous career criminal was sentenced to life behind bars.

No doubt Mrs. Smiley prayed hard for the unfortunate victim, his family, and the troubled little boy whom she painfully watched growing up making all the wrong choices.

"I didn't really care I was facing life. I was lost in my own grief. I thought I was the victim here." said Flett. In jail, he confesses that while trafficking drugs, another murder took place.

Flett readily admits that, originally, he felt no remorse for what he had done. "I wish that I could say I did--but I didn't." For three years in Miilhaven and then Kent Penitentiary, revelling in his status as a killer, he still carried a shiv while operating a hugely profitable drug ring.



Glen Flett, 1978

"I was a very dangerous guy," Flett admits. "I hated everybody." But his outlook began to change when his parents brought Glen's nine-year-old twin sons for an overnight visit to the family unit at Kent. Flett spent the whole night awake looking at them.

"I hadn't seen them since they were five, and while they were asleep, all I could do was watch them breathe and think how lucky I was to have them." Then he began to think of (his murder victim) and his children, and what he had done started to dawn on him. When

Glen's children left the prison, his feelings of remorse remained with him and he approached another prisoner who had embraced Christianity.

At the inmate's suggestion, Flett went to the prison chapel to pray, and although he didn't expect to become a Christian, he felt a calm come over him that he'd never experienced before. "I thought even if Jesus wasn't real, this was a better way to live." Shortly after that, he remembered Mrs. Smiley and everything she had taught him. He gave his heart to Jesus and committed his life to living for God.

He also got out of the drug trade and replaced his regular dose of pills with a daily reading from the Bible.

Mrs. Smiley must have warned Glen that living for God may not be easy. She must have told Glen that trials come along that test the truth of our faith.

The greatest test of Glen Flett's new-found faith in a living God came in 1982.

A desperate 18 year-old youth broke into Mrs. Smiley's apartment. He stole \$60--and bludgeoned her to death. Thirty-four hundred people attended her Victoria funeral and another troubled youth was sent to prison. "I had committed my life to Christ." said Glen, "But I was angry" when I heard about my beloved Mrs. Smiley.

Shortly after, the young man who had killed Mrs. Smiley was sent to the same prison where Glen was. Even though Glen's life was turned around, "I had a lot of influence" at the prison. Glen was still in grief at the senseless murder of Mrs. Smiley. "I could have had him killed in a second. But I decided I wouldn't tell anyone about this guy.

I wanted to keep myself as separate from him as possible." God had another idea.

A prison guard, recognizing Glen was refocusing his life and helping others, approached him: "There is a young fellow here, his name is Lon. He's not fitting in. He comes from an abused background. He's functionally illiterate. Would you kind of look out for him?" Glen couldn't do it. He did pull in a few favors and was able to direct others to help Lon out.

One day, according to Glen, Lon "Got into a jackpot." There was a chance Lon would be "stabbed that night". Glen had been "mediating beefs" between inmates and asked for a favor, "Don't kill Lon. I'll owe you if you do this for me."

They didn't and Glen honored their favor. Shortly afterwards, Glen was transferred to William Head prison. He was relieved to get away from the man who had murdered Mrs. Smiley. "I had escaped." he said.

Glen began tutoring other inmates through a university introductory English course. One day, Glen's teaching partner came to him with a newspaper clipping. "Look at this" he said. This guy kills an old lady and now his sentence has been appealed. They reduced his sentence to manslaughter." It was a story about Lon, the young man who murdered Mrs. Smiley.

"I was in shock." But before his mind flooded with resentment, "A peace came over me.

"I felt I heard Mrs. Smiley say she was pleased." that Lon had his sentence reduced.

"She lived like that", said Glen. "She would have hated to see some young guy locked up. She would have been

pleased Lon was given another chance.” Shortly afterward, Lon was transferred to William Head and he was placed in Glen’s English class. “At first”, said Glen, “I wanted to bash him on the head.” But “wouldn’t you know it, he became my best student.” Lon’s education progressed well and he soon began taking further university courses.

Glen was transferred to Fernale Institution and began an advocacy service for inmates working toward their parole.

He had continued his silence about his relationship to Mrs. Smiley and Lon had no idea that Glen Flett had been so close to his victim.

“At Ferndale, I had to really work on my attitudes about forgiveness.” During a group session, Glen opened up about his feeling about Mrs. Smiley--and his unique relationship with Lon.

Word some how got back to Lon at William Head--“Watch out for Flett, he’ll ‘gut you.’” Then Lon was transferred to Ferndale.

“I was kind of miffed.” said Glen. Lon, whom he had worked hard to build up a relationship with, was avoiding him at Ferndale.

Finally, the two men met. Glen asked Lon why he had been avoiding him. Lon told him that he had been turned down for parole and was feeling down.

“Meet me tonight, after visiting hours,” he told Lon. As an inmate advocate, Glen wanted to offer his help. The area Glen chose for the meeting was a “quiet, secluded place”. Lon showed up.

“Before we start I want to tell you something,” began Glen.

“I’m really angry at you (for murdering Mrs. Smiley) but I want you to know I’ve forgiven you.”

Lon started to cry. He had been afraid Glen would have acted out his revenge.

Lon told Glen he had been really scared to meet him. “I’m really sorry for what I’ve done.” They both cried.

“Mrs. Smiley would have forgiven you, too,” said Glen. “I saw Lon change from a hicky, punky kid to a man who was really changed.” As a result of Glen’s advocacy, Lon was released and finished his university degree.

Mrs. Smiley is likely looking down from heaven and smiling.

Two troubled young men-who had committed murder, a serious crime against society-turned their lives around and were set free.

Both are restored back into the society they wronged and are living productive lives.



Glen Flett recently received a “Volunteer of the Year” award from the University College of the Fraser Valley for his Partnerships in Learning program for troubled teens.

In a very real way, Emma Smiley gave her life to help men like Glen and Lon.

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV).

Many of the direct quotes concerning the crime in Ontario are taken from the book: ‘Murder at Englington Square’ by Robert Knuckle, - Kayson Publishing, Dundas, Ontario, Canada. 905-628-0220. Used by permission.

After serving eight years in five different penitentiaries, Glen Flett was sent to the minimum security Ferndale Institute in Mission, British Columbia. While there, he developed an inmate-tutor program called Partners in Learning that reaches out to troubled teenagers in the community. After his release, Glen and his wife Sherry developed another program called L.I.N.C., an acronym for “long term inmates now in the community.” L.I.N.C. provide a support network for lifers and chronic offenders about to be released from jail. The goal of the program is to help these hardened criminals cope with the temptations and difficulties associated with living in the unfamiliar outside World) and thereby help break the cycle that often leads them back to crime and imprisonment. For more information about L.I.N.C., contact Sherry Edmonds-Flett at 33270-14th Avenue, Mission, B.C. V2V 4Z7