

Cindy Simpson

I am Cindy Simpson, I am the mother of Ariana Simpson, also known as Harley who died February 12th 2009. Ariana at the time was not living at home. She had been off and on the street and she was murdered when she was hanging out with her friends with she was hanging out on the street when a couple of drunk guys came and decided to have some fun with the crackheads. Ariana stood up to defend her friends and she was 5 feet tall less than 100 pounds, the two gentlemen were over 6 feet tall: she stood beside one of them on the side of the road and flicked a straw at them and he pushed her into the street as a bus was coming so she lost her life under the wheels of a bus. I go to that spot often we always go there every year for the stolen sisters memorial walk. It happens to be around the same time as she passed away and we always plant some plants in her memory. We had a cross there that all her friends had signed but it was removed without any word to us which was devastating. It stayed there for almost two years. It was my touchstone. I would go there if I was missing her which was always and just sit and look at the cross and think of Ariana and wish her peace. And I wrote a letter to the city because I was very upset that they had removed it without letting us know. They knew who we were, so I never heard anything back. To me it was just one more: is it because we are considered less than for some reason? Was Ariana killed because she was considered less than for some reason? And I can't have anger because for me anger is a forbidden emotion I just don't want it in my life. It causes too much pain but I'm so sad that there was no respect for her.

I spend a lot of time in nature - my husband and I love birds so we spend a lot of time taking pictures of birds. I'm a very social person so I also spend a lot of time with friends, talking to friends and just feeling the comfort of their support. And we have two other daughters: one daughter lives in New Zealand so she's far away and the other daughter is just returning to Victoria. It's difficult for us because I know they don't want to do anything but comfort us and I worry that they're suffering in silence. There's nobody there for them like there has been for us.

My husband and I were lucky to be part of a support group for people who had lost a loved one through violence and that support group helped us tremendously. It helped us bond with somebody else who had been through what we had been through and gave us ideas on how to honour Ariana's memory and still move forward in our own lives. So we now have a tradition where every January in Ariana's memory we go and get a tattoo and it's pretty special. The first tattoo that we got was the word Imagine and my husband and my two daughters all have Imagine tattooed somewhere on our bodies in memory of Ariana.

It makes me feel good to know I am doing something a little bit rebellious for somebody my age with my upbringing and I know Ariana is looking down in joy knowing that I'm doing something like that in her memory. My other two girls and my husband and myself. My husband and myself are the ones that go every January

for the tattoo but the imagine tattoo is something we all have. And it's so nice to be able to look at that at any point in time.

It's a touchstone I have many touchstones for Ariana – the last Christmas before she passed away she gave me a pair of earrings and I wear them almost every day because they remind of her. They're a piece of who she was. We were blessed with the last time we saw her was Christmas, both of my girls were home, my other girls were home so Ariana got to spend one on one time with each one of us and it was almost eerie when I think of it now because for her and myself our one on one time was about forgiveness and understanding. It was about me telling her how hard it was to let her go and live on the street knowing that she was in danger but also knowing that if I pulled her home forcibly the next time she ran I might not find her and her telling me that the reason that she left home was because she was struggling with addiction and she didn't want to pull the family into that mess and the reason she took the street name of Harley was to keep her friends away from her family and also my favourite shoes were Harley Davidson shoes so that's why she called herself Harley and I didn't find that out until after she passed. One of her friends phoned me up and said I wanted to let you know and he told me that and some other things about Harley that I was not aware of. Since she's passed three babies have been born named after her because of how hard she worked to get her friends who were on the street off of the street into healthier living and she was successful in that. She was starting to turn the corner and be successful in that herself and unfortunately that chance was taken away from her. One was named Harley and two were named Ariana.

She had so many awesome qualities: she was a trickster; she loved to play jokes she was fierce in supporting the underdog. She herself was always the underdog in school and with her baseball and anything like that and anybody that was being picked on, she was the first one there to pick them up and stop somebody from bullying them so I was always proud of her for that. She was very cheeky she had such a hard time at school because the teachers didn't appreciate her sense of humour and if she didn't agree with something she was not shy to say she didn't agree with it. She didn't want to play the banjo when she was in grade three and she got in a lot of trouble for that but she stuck to her guns and she didn't play the banjo.

We were really I think blessed in our experience the whole situation from the beginning – it was a Thursday a rainy Thursday night my husband and I were in bed asleep and there was a pounding on the door and we ignored it and the pounding just persisted and persisted and finally I got up and answered the door and it was this man that I didn't know and he was very upset and he says I'm Ariana's friend George and she has just died and I wanted to be here to tell you before the police were here to tell you because you should hear from somebody who cared about her. And he was so kind to us because I'm sure as any mother I was refusing to believe him I was calling him every name in the book because I hated him for what he was telling me but he stayed and he just told us how much he cared about Ariana

and he was a few years younger than us so old enough to be a father to Ariana and he had taken her in so he was sharing his apartment with her and giving her a safe place to be and he stayed with us until the police arrived. I found out later he had ran all the way from Pandora and Quadra to our house which is about 5 kilometres so a big run in the night, on a rainy dark night to tell somebody something like that. He was not there when it happened but people went straight to him and told him what had happened. There were so many people that loved Ariana and were right there when it happened.

The police were amazing they stayed with us, it felt like over night, it felt like they were there for 24 hours straight because it was just I was not wanting to believe it took me probably 5 years to believe that this had happened everything in my head screamed no for so many years. My husband is very much a he needs the detail so he wanted to go and see her body and the police were so not wanting him to see that and finally when he said I'm going to walk if you don't let me drive there the police took him there and made sure that the body was covered and made sure that he didn't have to actually see her body. There was two police officers assigned to us during the whole investigation which took 2 years. They visited us often, they gave us their private cell numbers so we could talk to them at any time. One was a woman. They called us into meetings with the integrated homicide investigation unit to talk about their progress so they were always very good at keeping us informed answering any questions that they could answer for us.

When it came time to go to court the crown prosecutor was amazing Kimberley Henderson Miller and Jesse Patterson were the two crown prosecutors and they were so caring and so good with us. It was such an unrealistic time for me. I know I made it through those days but it was just so difficult just to be alive through that. It's almost like it didn't really happen but we went to court every day. We had friends with us every day in the courtroom which made it easier. Everybody that stood witness to what had happened with Ariana I made sure that I went and talked to them after they gave their statements to know that I appreciated whether I agreed with what they said or not I needed to let them know that I appreciated them coming and reliving what must be the most horrific thing they had ever seen. There were people there that were addicts that had trouble with the legal system and they still made it to those court appearances to make sure that Ariana got justice and I so appreciate very single one of them. And the courts were kind to those people that were struggling those people that were there that were obviously deep in addiction and having a difficult time being sober enough to give their statements I was so impressed with the judge and the lawyers on both sides – how kind they were to everybody. When the verdict happened, I was understanding and disappointed at the same time. So many conflicted emotions because the fellow that was responsible for Ariana's death was the same age as Ariana and his life is now never going to be the same. He has a criminal record. He went to jail for a short period of time. I'm so conflicted with how I feel. A part of me feels really genuinely sorry for him because I think what he did was not intentional and part of me is like how could you feel sorry for this person who took your daughter's life so it's I'm conflicted in that. I wish I

could be more one feeling than the other but I just don't know I'm glad he went to jail and I'm also sorry he went to jail. I'm frustrated that I don't think he really understood at the time that he was given his sentence the gravity of what he had done. I don't think he understood at the point that he was given his sentence that he killed a young woman. I think he was still under the impression that he killed a crack head and so big deal. I'll never understand that. I'll never understand any one person being less than another. Nobody knows the road that a person took to get them where they are. Nobody knows how strong Ariana was and how hard she worked to be the best person she could be.

He was going to school to become a tradesperson of some kind. He came from a fairly good background from a good community. Everybody that spoke on his behalf spoke about how caring he was and how he would do anything for a friend.

And I thought nobody asked about who Ariana was. Nobody asked how hard she worked to be sober. How hard she worked to keep her friends clean. Why she went on the street. And she went on the street because she was in addiction. She was in addiction because she was molested. And she was molested from the time she was four years old until she was eight years old. I didn't know. My husband and I didn't know. I don't think my husband has ever recovered from the knowledge that somebody we chose as a friend hurt our daughter so badly and I think the whole I don't even know how to... the tornado that happened as a result of us finding out about our children being molested wreaked havoc on all of us. It almost ended our marriage and then it made our marriage stronger because we had to pull together to make sure that our children were able to come through this healthy and it breaks my heart that we weren't successful.

Our daughter, Sheila, is now a crown prosecutor for the federal government so I'm very proud of her for that and our daughter Kelly lives in New Zealand and she's an amazing girl. She's a photographer, she's a hairdresser. She does stargazing trips. So we have two very different daughters that are living the lives that they choose that brings them joy, both very powerful and I know Ariana would be so much doing so much good if she were allowed to continue with her life. She would have been a social worker kind of person.

I would advise people to journal to write down what they are going through because I know I lost probably three or four years of my memories because I was just living and I lost it all. So to journal during those hard times, to find what brings you peace and make sure you do that whether it be meditation, being in nature, being with friends, do what brings you peace. Don't dwell on what brings you pain. Let yourself cry when you need to need to cry and then be in the next phase. Don't stay stuck.

I know for me it was I wanted to understand. I wanted to understand what had happened. I wanted to understand the whole situation from beginning to end. What put Ariana there at the time and what put those two men there at the time. And I wasn't ever coming from a place of anger or aggression. I was always coming from a

place of love and just wanting understanding. There's two things in my life all my life that I've tried to be away from and those two things are anger and judgement. Very hard some times but I find anger to be very rarely to be a good emotion and I find judgement to cause nothing but pain so when I was dealing with lawyers when I was dealing with police officers I was always coming from a place of love and thankful for them for being there and keeping me informed doing what they could to make it easy for me.

And I was surprized by that (asked about whether she had victim support workers) actually I should say sorry there were people who came to the court room to offer me support but by the time I was in the court room I had good friends with me. When our kids were abused we had victim services and they were amazing they were on the phone with me all the time making sure I was ok and probably pulled me through it more than anything else. I didn't have that as much with her death which is so strange I found as far as being a victim I had more support services offered to me when the kids were abused than when my daughter was murdered. It's strange. I don't know if it was a timing thing? And there was just more money in the system to offer support because the kids were all offered counselling. It would have been wonderful to be offered counselling because I suffered so much trying to keep myself in a good head space. I went back to work three weeks after Ariana was murdered because I couldn't stay at home and just look out the window and cry I had to do something to pick myself up and regain my life. I knew Ariana would not want me to dwell in the darkness so I tried to put myself in the light as much as possible and my job at that time was helping people. I was on a help desk so it was the perfect place to be to get out of my head and in a place that gave me fulfillment.

Cindy's message to other families:

I wish you peace. I wish you joy. I wish you positive memories of your loved one that is gone. I wish nothing but heaven to be surrounding you with its warmth and joy. I wish you peace.