

Too Close to Home

On a chilly Friday night in mid-May, I walked upstairs and got ready for bed. The house felt quiet. My three children were over at their mother's house and my fiancé Lynn had just gone home. My dog, a boxer named Knock Out, stretched and then crept behind me up the stairs like a shadow. In the midst of that quiet, my mind moved restlessly from here to there: work was hectic as usual, Lynn and I were planning our August wedding, and my teenage kids, with their sports and activities and jobs, had me hustling just to keep up.

But something happened later that night, after I fell asleep, something that would change my life and shatter the serenity of our small community.

It started when someone eased their way through the back door of a house at the top of a small hill. Large, mature trees lined that tranquil street, and the house's backyard ran right up against the backyards of other houses, which faced other streets. Even from the outside of the gray and white house, you could tell the family who lived there led well-kept, organized, peaceful lives.

The intruder must have known where to go, because, in spite of the close proximity of the surrounding homes, no one reported anything out of the ordinary. There was no forced entry. There didn't have to be, since the family in the gray stone house left their doors unlocked – just an example of the kind of neighborhood they lived in. Lynn, my fiancé, had just gotten on my case for leaving the doors to my own house unlocked, but to be honest I didn't take her warnings very seriously. Nothing that bad ever happened.

But on that night, someone snuck inside that house and stabbed 16-year-old Kevin Haines and his parents, 50-year-old Thomas, a salesman at a local industrial supply store, and 47-year-old Lisa, a pre-school teacher. The Haines' 20-year-old daughter, home a few days earlier than expected from college, slept in her room and was left untouched. She woke up in the middle of the night and smelled blood. She found her parents. Her mother told her to run for help, so she did, but it was too late.

Hours earlier, as I prepared for sleep, I had no sense of foreboding. I brushed my teeth and crawled into bed. I read for a few minutes; then, I turned off the light. It was the last night I ever went to bed in that house without locking the doors.

The place where I lived, Manheim Township, Pennsylvania, has a population of around 30,000 and is a suburban area between the town of Lititz and Lancaster City. Manheim Township is one of the more upscale, suburban neighborhoods in the county, always maintaining one of the finest school districts. It's a quiet, middle- to upper-middle class place where the biggest concerns most kids have are whether or not they'll make the varsity soccer team or who they'll go with to the prom.

Of course, it's not completely ideal, and our kids face the same issues all kids face: peer pressure and partying and dealing with parents' expectations. But the crime rate stays low, and if the police get a call, it seems like it's usually a minor car accident or some of the locals causing mischief.

Sometimes, it's so quiet it can seem downright boring – most of the neighborhoods have few, if any, through streets, so the traffic stays on the main roads. It's unusual for a car that I don't recognize to drive past my house, and there's this friendly peer-pressure: if one neighbor mows their grass, everyone else

feels like they have to as well. There have been a few isolated incidents, tragic stories that take your breath away with their horror and leave you shaking your head, looking for answers. But nothing close to home.

Until that chilly night in May.

The person who killed Kevin and his parents walked out the rear sliding-glass door of their house, leaving it partially open and vanishing into the darkness. Only a few bloody footprints remained. No one knew this at the time, but the killer fled to a home less than half a mile from the Haines' residence.

This is the story of what followed, the story of the weeks that came after the Haines family was murdered, during which the crime went unsolved. Most of us had trouble falling asleep. I was concerned for my daughter, my two sons, Lynn, and my ex-wife. The person or people who had done this were still out there. Where were they? Would they strike again? I lay in bed, and my heart raced at every small sound.

Was that someone messing with the locks...or was it just my imagination?

Did I just hear a door open?

Was that one of my kids going to the bathroom in the middle of the night...or is someone sneaking up the stairway?

No motive? Nothing stolen? We all wondered who could have done it. We all hoped they would be found quickly.

But I had no idea how the discovery of the identity of this particular criminal would change my life.