

OPINION

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Remember

Lost futures make tragedy even worse

The bedroom of brothers Chase and Colton Smith will remain untouched for now.

Their beds, a few feet from each other, will remain made. Their toys tucked away. Their clothes folded in their dresser and hung in the closet.

Three-year-old Chase and 2-year-old Colton shared the same room. Played together. They would have grown up together.

Wednesday, Chase and Colton died together.

The heart-wrenching stories emerging from Oklahoma City only become worse when one thinks of the futures lost in the rubble of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building.

Relatives, co-workers, funeral homes and other officials have provided a list of 12 of the at least 13 children who have been confirmed dead, including Chase and Colton.

Baylee Almon, 1.

Danielle Bell, 1 1/2.

Zackary Chavez, 3.

Anthony C. Cooper III, 2.

Antonio Cooper Jr., infant

Elijah Coverdale, 2.

Aaron Coverdale, 5.

Ashley Eckles, 4.

Garrett, Tevin 1.

Domonique London Johnson, 2.

Losing these children makes the tragedy even more hard to take. They were innocent.

We saw Baylee as rescue workers tried to save her. We saw the photograph in newspapers of Sgt. John Avera clutching Baylee's limp body as he handed her to firefighter Chris Fields.

Baylee died before she reached the hospital. We will never see Baylee again. Her parents will never see their daughter again. No one will know what she could have achieved.

At least her parents know their daughter was well-cared for after the bombing.

"We never would have known she was treated so good if you didn't take those pictures," Aren Almon, 22, said to Charles Porter, the bank employee who took the photograph of her rescue.

Children we didn't even know will forever remain in our minds and our hearts.

We also will remember the image of Chase and Colton's mother at Sunday's memorial service. She stayed composed through most of the ceremony, clutching a photograph of her children, two teddy bears that symbolized her loss and two yellow flowers.

Rescue workers will find more children as they are able to search the second floor day care. We will hear about other futures that are now lost.

Life will be hard for the parents of these children, not only today but when the children should have entered grade school. They will remember when their children should have graduated and when they should have started their own families.

"Those who are lost now belong to God. Someday we will be with them. But until that happens, their legacy must be our lives," President Bill Clinton said as he stood before Oklahoma City mourners Sunday.

The country will remember with those parents. We should always stand with them.

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Murder leaves eternal stain

What it comes down to is the nature of forgiveness, redemption or maybe rehabilitation is a better word when we talk about crime and punishment. Do we really believe in clean slates? Are there some dues that are never fully paid?

For more than a week now, the talk of Boston has been a Cambridge high school senior named Gina Grant. On April 2, this 19-year-old appeared in The Boston Globe as a model of how resilient kids can be. She was an all-A student, the captain of the tennis team, a devoted tutor for disadvantaged kids.

Gina Grant had succeeded, despite the fact that she was an orphan. At 11, she'd lost her dad to cancer. At 14, she'd lost her mom to circumstances that, she said, were too painful to describe. But she'd won acceptance to Harvard.

Within days, however, we learned about the death that was too painful to describe. In 1990, Gina Grant had murdered her mother. The model student had committed matricide. She'd done time — six months in a South Carolina juvenile facility — before being allowed to come here, to start again.

Maybe Harvard has been impressed by what one source called "the orphan angle" on this applicant. But now they had second thoughts. The statement reversing their offer said (vaguely) that admission could be rescinded if students lied on their application or if they behave in ways that "bring into question honesty, maturity or moral character."

Since then, the debate from Harvard Yard to "Nightline" has been about the rights of a juvenile offender and the behavior of the university — about unsealed records and second chances.

Those who take Gina Grant's side talk about the "exemplary life" she has led since the "mistake" that



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resulted in "the tragic death" of her mother. Those who do not talk about the mother's crushed skull, about the repeated blows from a candlestick, about the blood.

Defenders criticize the 14-year-old as an emotionally battered girl who finally struck out against her alcoholic mother. Detractors dismiss this Menendez-sister defense and portray her as a rebellious teen who with her boyfriend tried to concoct a suicide story by sticking a knife in the dead mother's throat.

There are people, at her new school in Cambridge, Mass., who talk of her as strong, a survivor. There are people in her old town in Lexington, S.C., who talk of her as hard, remorseless.

In the same dialectic, some see Harvard as "arrogant," intent on imposing its own, second punishment on a 19-year-old. Others see the university as stung by the orphan, wary of explaining Grant's past to her future roommate's mother.

But underlying this noisy argument is a quieter, more complex question: Is there any such thing as a truly fresh start?

Most of us believe in rehabilitation, the idea that people, like houses, can be stripped down to the walls and rebuilt. But we also believe that the old structure may remain intact under the new wallpaper.

When Mike Tyson was freed from jail, we said he paid his dues. But many recoil from his renewed celebrity. When a sex offender is

released, he's done his time. But more than one family would want to know if he moved onto the block. What student wouldn't want to know if a convicted rapist was on her dormitory floor?

The juvenile justice system is built on the premise that a child deserves a second chance. It promises to seal the records, wipe out the past. But it can't wipe out a community's memory. In this celebrated case, Grant was never more than a Nexis search away from revelation. The people protesting Harvard's arrogance today might have had a lot to say about its ignorance tomorrow.

Gina Grant was not, after all, convicted of shoplifting. She is guilty of murder. I have no idea what is in her mind or in her nightmares. Not even the people who wish her a clean slate would, I imagine, wish her a clean conscience.

No matter what the protesting students believe, being denied admission to Harvard is not one of life's cruelest blows. It's not reneging on the world's promise that a juvenile offender can lead a full life. Ask the other high school seniors who applied to Harvard — nine out of 10 who got rejection notices last week. In the case of Gina Grant, Harvard was well within the boundaries of fairness when it acted on its doubt.

This enormously bright and, yes, resilient young woman has the respect of her teachers and all those who have watched her survive and help others these last years. She will make her way. But I suspect she already knows that there are acts in life that are simply irrevocable, utterly irreversible. Murder is one of them. Afterward, the slate is never again quite clean.

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