

About Sheila

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

I only have a few friends I consider family. Sheila is one of them. Today she's dealing with a tragedy of unthinkable proportions, and while I'm relieved that most of the incoming she's taking at the moment is supportive, it's clear from the removed messages in comments that there have been a few assholes who have leapt in to pass judgment on her for the actions of her son.

Unlike those assholes, I actually know Sheila, and have for quite a few years. We've sat across cafe tables from each other, alternately tearing each other's chapters apart and worrying about our families; we've shared lunches and dinners and stories of our past; we've helped each other through hard times.

So, from the perspective of having shared hard times with her before, let me say that Sheila is one of the best people I've ever known. She isn't a quitter – not in any aspect of her life. She will move mountains for the people she loves, she will sacrifice her time and her energy, her money, her attention, to rescue someone in trouble. She is the person for whom the phrase “good people” was invented.

So when she says she did everything she could for her son, believe, and understand that she tried everything – that she went farther and tried harder than all but a handful of parents would have been willing to go to save their children. That when she stepped back, it was because she had exhausted every possible option. If she could not move the mountain, it was a mountain that could not be moved.

I know she loves her kid. I know she worried about him.

Sometimes she would talk about him; mostly he was the silent place in our conversations, and that in itself speaks volumes.

As a mother with two adult children, I also know that kids don't come with a remote control; as parents we do everything we can to show them how to live their lives well. We hope and pray that we have given them the right tools, showed them how to use those tools. We guide, we suggest, we cajole, we occasionally nag. But they grow up, and go on to live their own lives, and they make their own choices – and we can hope the choices they make will make us proud. But we cannot make a single one of those choices for them. Not one. And in the end, our children are who they choose to be, and must bear the responsibility for the lives they live. We are lucky if we can be proud, because for every right thing we did in raising them, we also did something wrong, and it is by the strength of their own characters that they succeed, sometimes in spite of us. It is by the failure of their own characters that they fail.

Sheila found out yesterday what her son did, and posted everything she knew after she had a chance to make sure that what she'd been told was true. She didn't have to do that. She faced a nightmare that most people would have tried to hide from, and she did it publicly and voluntarily, and with courage and grace. The smugly self-righteous will have their words to say about her, the childless who are so sure they could have done better, the lucky whose children turned out well as much in spite of their parenting as because of it. They'll offer their opinions, but they don't know her.

I do.

She's good people, and if she could not turn her kid around, it was because he could not be turned.

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