

“A mother speaks out”  
Kate’s remarks at Domestic Violence Vigil, October 1, 2007

During the first several months after my remarkable daughter, Claire Cucchiari-Loring, was murdered by her ex-boyfriend this past December, I seemed unable to stop blurting out that fact to strangers, in stores or doctors’ offices or wherever I went. “My daughter was murdered by her ex-boyfriend.” It defined me, and defined her, and I needed people to know.

In those early months, I began dealing—through retelling and reliving and reading and therapy—with the fact of her death and the manner of her death. But meanwhile, too, I was almost frantically collecting and seeking out not only information about how she died, but also other people’s memories and anecdotes about Claire. And I was writing it all down, saving it, saving her.

The Claire I was saving—the Claire who *was* and who *is*—is the Claire I and others know. She is a strong, competent, confident, and hilariously sarcastic young woman. She is smart, physically beautiful, and beautiful too in the way she takes care of and looks out for others. She is a jazz singer, and as her voice teacher said, she sings with “a beautiful, natural voice, a wonderful gift.” She is the person we have all begun calling—because of a funny story I don’t have time to tell you here—“Claire the Magnificent.”

So as I saved and remembered and learned even more about Claire, I began to feel that how she died DIDN’T define her. Slowly working through my own trauma, I began to focus less on how she died than on how she had lived. She wasn’t a “stereotypical” victim of domestic violence, I thought—not realizing how incomplete and inaccurate my own stereotypes were. I was reluctant even to use the words “domestic violence”—partly because I don’t think they are descriptive enough, but also because I didn’t want to define Claire that way. I felt like it was almost disloyal to her to present her to the world as a “domestic violence” victim. She had been in a relationship that at times was psychologically abusive, but there was no physical abuse until the last two days—when he held her at gunpoint overnight on Wednesday, and when he shot and killed her on

Friday. Those last two days of her life were not really a part of who she was. I was with her for 10 hours on the last day of her life, and even then, she was determined and feisty. She was not a victim, not my Claire, and I didn't want people to think of her that way. I began to focus on the happy, healthy, living Claire of all our memories, not the Claire who had been killed by Rob.

On balance, I think that focus is a good thing. But over more months my reactions have gone through yet another shift. She was a victim; she was strong, but she was a victim. Lately on several occasions, for one reason or another, I have revealed to someone I've just met that my daughter Claire died, and how she died. It's not the same helpless blurting out that it was in the beginning, but more of a sad retelling, sharing something important about me and about Claire with a stranger. Sometimes they remember hearing her story on the TV or in the newspaper, sometimes not. And several times, then, they have revealed to me that they are in a troubled or potentially violent situation, and I have been able to point them towards some of the programs and resources that are represented here today.

When I first heard that my remarks were to be titled "A mother speaks out," I wasn't sure how I liked that. Speaking out sounds so..."in your face." But I've realized that I DO want to speak out. Claire was like that—one of the things people remember about her is how she spoke out and spoke up. She wasn't afraid to ask a question or tell you what she thought; not in an ugly way, she was just a very direct person.

So yes, I want to speak out about my daughter, who was both Claire the Magnificent and a victim of domestic violence—or violence against women by a man who had been her intimate partner. I want to speak out to honor all the other women whose names you will be hearing, who all were magnificent in their own ways, who all did not deserve what happened to them. And now I want to speak out so that other women who are being victimized, or men who can sense that their attitudes or their behavior is unhealthy, will hear me, and come up and talk about it, and maybe let me point them towards help.

Let me end with a little more about Claire the Magnificent. There is a lovely story about her in the latest October issue of Tidewater Women newspaper, so I hope you'll look at that. Our family has established a scholarship in Claire's memory at Old Dominion University, to help other music students. Some of Claire's friends and I are planning an event that will raise funds for that scholarship, but also will celebrate Claire by having fun. We're calling it "Her Melody Lingers On," and it will be on November 9<sup>th</sup>, any time between 7 and 11 p.m., at the Perfect Blend, a musical café on Bonney Road in Virginia Beach, right near the Rosemont Road exit of I-264. There will be performances of jazz and other music, belly dancing and comedy; a self-defense demonstration; plus a silent auction, food, and good coffee. And admission is free. I've brought flyers and little reminder cards about that event, as well as brochures about Claire's scholarship, and you are all invited to come to what we think will be a wonderful evening. Thank you.