

After years guiding others, family faces own grief

When their son was killed in February, the Daleys had to teach themselves to cope

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Death is a familiar topic for the Rev. Ruth Daley and her husband, Raymond. For almost 10 years, the Daleys have run Hope for the Hopeless, a nonprofit Christian ministry that assists the elderly, people with terminal illnesses, and their loved ones through the dying and grieving process. They have made it their mission to guide others through their darkest hours.

But this winter it was the Daleys who needed that support.

Shortly before 4 a.m. on Feb. 27, their younger son, 22-year-old Ramone, was shot just steps from the front door of their Dorchester home while on his way to work at Logan Airport. His parents heard the gunshots. Raymond ran outside while Ruth frantically dialed Ramone's number to ask if he was OK. "No, mommy," he said, according to Ruth. "I got hit." Ramone died that afternoon at Boston Medical Center.

While other parents might have waited months or even years to return to work after such an event, the Daleys found comfort in the responsibilities of their ministry, resuming their practice five weeks after their son's death. They say their faith and commitment to their work has helped them endure the death of a child and continue to provide aid and assistance to others in need.

"What has happened to us is not unique," Ruth said. "It has happened to other people, and it will happen again. We could have been in so much depression that we missed the opportunity to reach out to somebody else who was in need. It's our faith in God that made us what we are, and we were able to get through."

After taking a break from the ministry in March to handle the funeral proceedings, host relatives, and begin their grieving process, the Daleys returned to Goddard House, a nursing home in Jamaica Plain, on April 2. At the home, one of several they visit regularly, they attended the Good Friday service and saw a few residents, to pray, talk, or simply sit by their beds.

"We still go out and encourage people, and wherever there's a crisis, wherever there's a need, we've still got to go, because our needs are not the only needs," said Ruth. "While you're helping people, you realize people have been through worse than what you've been through, and they're still making it."

The Rev. Lucy Sanders, director of pastoral care at Sherrill House, a nursing and rehabilitation center in Jamaica Plain, says the Daleys' example has touched many residents and their families.

"Ministers are not very good at being taken care of, but [the Daleys] have been very open and let other people care for them," said Sanders, who has worked with the Daleys since they began visiting Sherrill House nine years ago. "They have been an inspiration for people on how to grieve, not hold back, and at the same time show that there is hope, that you will not always feel this badly."

Caring for others has been a lifelong calling for both of the Daleys, who met at a convention on the Caribbean island of Anguilla and married in Ruth's home country of Antigua and Barbuda in 1980. They moved to the United States that same year. Ruth served as a pastor at a Pentecostal church on Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester for 18 years before returning to Antigua to serve as an interim minister in 1999. When she came back to Boston in 2001, she and Raymond, a native of the British territory of Montserrat, founded Hope for the Hopeless to connect more directly with the people they felt needed the most assistance.

"I'm grateful the Lord gave me this opportunity to move from within the walls to outside with these people," said Ruth, who is 58. "Sometimes they don't remember your name, and sometimes they have nothing to give you but a smile and

'God bless you.' Those are the payments that we get."

That community repaid them in the weeks and months following Ramone's death. Families whose loved ones had spent their last moments with the Daleys sent cards and flowers, called, or stopped by with food. For the Daleys, the response was a testament to the years they have spent cultivating relationships with countless people, many of whom they now consider part of their family.

"We go to the nursing homes so we get connections," said Raymond, 69. "One person will lead us to another. I don't think we could ever come up with a number."

Hope Lewis met Ruth and Raymond in 2002 when they began caring for her grandmother, Edith, who had moved to Goddard House. The couple visited Edith several times a week, and they became so close that Edith began to call Raymond her "boyfriend." Lewis fondly remembers their relationship and its importance in her grandmother's life.

"They don't just do it out of a sense of obligation," Lewis said. "They bring joy. Nursing homes are not always pleasant places to be, and they really lift the spirits of the people they're visiting."

Though Edith died several years ago at age 103, Lewis has kept in touch with the Daleys, and was shocked to hear about Ramone's death.

"We consider them friends, not just people who happened to be in the community," she said. "To see how they've handled everything with such grace and courage, and still helping people - I just think they're my heroes."

Long after the funeral, Raymond and Ruth still kept mental notes of their son's schedule: At 2:58 a.m. - he always set his alarm for exactly 2:58 - Ramone would have been waking up for work. During the afternoon, he would have been at the airport. When it rains, Ruth half-expects him to call from the bus stop. She struggles to cook black beans without thinking of Ramone, who loved to eat them, but she says she has learned how to cope with the sudden memories.

"You learn," she said. "If you have to cry, you cry, and then you move on, because life has to go on."

Ramone remains a presence in their home. The living room, dotted with family portraits and photos of their two sons, spills over with cards and gifts from family, friends, and Ramone's acquaintances. They have kept the handwritten birthday cards he gave them, and his room, with its organized collection of baseball hats, remains untouched, except for new bed linens.

Ruth and Raymond worry about Christmas, when their oldest son, 28-year-old Rahsheed, will return to a home where, for the first time, he will be an only child. More than anything, they hope for closure in Ramone's case. They have offered a \$10,000 reward for information about the crime, but, as far as they know, there have been no leads. A spokesman the Boston Police Department would only say the investigation is ongoing.

Still, the Daleys plan to keep reaching out in their community, offering guidance wherever they can - now with their own experience as an example.

"You have to go on," Ruth said. "We're built to go on, in spite of our pain. You learn to go on. You can't stop helping. You can't stop reaching out."

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Credit: Natalie Southwick, Globe Correspondent

[Illustration]

Caption: The Rev. Ruth Daley, with her husband, Raymond, looked at cards and writings from and about their son. Cards and flowers flowed in from the families they have helped. Photos by Pat Greenhouse/Globe Staff; Ramone Daley, 22, was shot outside the door of the family's home. Photos by Pat Greenhouse/Globe Staff; Photos by Pat Greenhouse/Globe Staff; Ruth Daley is learning to cope with her son's death. "You learn," she said. "If you have to cry, you cry, and then you move on, because life has to go on." The Daleys have kept Ramone's room (right) untouched. Matching "You Light Up My Life" posters show Ruth with Ramone (above dresser) and with his brother, Rahsheed. Photos by Pat Greenhouse/Globe Staff

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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