

Families remember two decades after day-care operator killed their babies

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COLUMBIA, SC - They are parents whose wretched loss cost them their faith in day cares, much of humanity and even God.

Davis Daniel, 61, and Lindy McClarrrie, 51, share the pangs of losing their babies 23 years ago to Irmo day care owner Gail Cutro.

Ashlan, Daniel's daughter, died Sept. 9, 1993, at age 4 months 18 days.

McClarrrie's son, Parker Colson, died at age 4 months, 29 days. Cutro is in the state's women's prison, serving a life sentence for killing them.

Daniel, a towering man who speaks softly and seldom, sat last week in his den in Irmo trying to capture the devastation Cutro brought to him and his family over the loss of their little girl.

"It was some rough times," said Daniel, who has had two heart attacks over the years. "I was real mad with God."

He lives within a couple of miles of where Cutro ran her day care in the New Friarsgate subdivision. Daniel's home also is a short drive from where Ashlan is buried.

Some of the children or grandchildren of Davis and his wife of 17 years, Cindy, went to day care but only after thorough background checks done by Cindy, who has a company that does that kind of work.

Cindy Daniel advises that any parent should have checks done on everyone who works in a child care facility before placing their children there.

Davis Daniel lamented that he and his then-wife were duped even after visiting Cutro's day care and talking to parents who had placed their children in her care.

Cindy Daniel's youngest son, Christopher Flynn, worked two jobs so that his children would not have to attend day care, the Daniels said.

The loss of Ashlan kept Davis Daniel from even cradling babies, especially little girls.

"He loves kids," Cindy Daniel said, "but he wouldn't hold a baby."

That finally changed when little Isabella was born to Flynn in 2006, she said.

"That was the first little girl he had held," Cindy Daniel said. And that moment was 13 years after Ashlan died.

"It turned my world around," Davis Daniel said, choking back tears. "I wanted to hold and protect her. I think my words to her were, 'I'll never let nothing happen to you.'"

Isabella and Cindy's love guided him back to Christianity, he said.

The couple attend Cutro's parole hearings. Usually, Davis Daniel labors over what he wants to say, sometimes writing himself a script so his words are just right, his wife said.

But at one hearing, words failed. "All he could do was hold up (Ashlan's) picture, and he sat down," Cindy Daniel said.

The Daniels usually visit Ashlan's grave twice a year: April 22, her birthday, and Sept. 9, the day she died.

But this year, he went every day during the week of her death. "I don't know what it was. I just felt the need to be there," he said. Daniel said he did not know at the time that a book about Cutro was being published online.

McClarrie was pregnant with her daughter, now 22, when investigators were about to arrest Cutro. Authorities and her husband at the time kept that from McClarrie out of concern the stress might cause a miscarriage.

McClarrie, asking that her daughter or grandson not be named in this article, said she, too, wouldn't use day care. Plus she wouldn't let her daughter stay with friends.

"She was never allowed to have overnight stays until she was in high school," McClarrie said. "She never understood why."

Just before her daughter became a teenager, McClarrie told her what really happened to Parker, who would be 24 now. Now his little sister understands. Another child, a son, bears a strong resemblance to Parker, McClarrie said.

Counseling helped her. McClarrie also tried helping others who had lost children. She quit.

"It was just too painful," she said.

Most people who know her today aren't aware of how Parker died and his connection to the Cutro case. "I just kind of kept most of it to myself."

The anguish and anger drove her from her faith. She stopped attending services. "I have never gotten back actively in the church."

She, like the Daniels, is convinced that Cutro was a serial killer who would have taken more babies' lives if police and prosecutors had not stopped her.

"If she were to pass away tomorrow, it wouldn't hurt my feelings," McClarrie said.

But she wants to convert her pain to help for other parents looking for day care.

"Before you leave your child there, you need to show up and walk in," McClarrie said. And "they should never delay you (from) seeing where your child is being kept."