

When Bad Things Happen To Other People

by Roz Warren

Years ago, I was involved in a freakish tragedy so startling and heartbreaking that it made the front page of not only my local newspaper, but “People” and “The National Enquirer.” I’m not going to tell you anything about it. This means that you won’t be able to Google the worst day of my life and read about it while sipping your morning coffee.

But you probably want to.

I’m guessing that at least a few of the people reading this have already plugged my name into a search engine, just to check.

I’ve never understood why people get a kick out of reading about the awful things that happen to others. All I know is that Schadenfreude is alive and well on the internet, and that somebody out there is making a mint off our collective morbid curiosity. I know this because of the teasers for tragic news stories that constantly turn up when I’m online.

Here are a few stories I didn’t read this month:

Seven year old falls from chairlift to death.
Mom does the unthinkable to her baby.
Tragic end to search for coach’s son.
Chainsaw attack caught on film.
Police make grisly find in storage unit.

What makes a person see a link like “Her young life was snuffed out” and think “I’ve got to know more about that!”

Don't tell me you're just keeping up with the news. This stuff isn't news. These are, for the most part, private tragedies. What you're doing is indulging in voyeurism, plain and simple. That's only human nature. I've felt the lure of those links myself. Maybe I'd be clicking up a storm too, if I didn't know what it actually feels like to be at the heart of one of those stories. I guess we're hard-wired to pay attention when bad things happen to other people. But that doesn't mean we have to.

Here some links I have clicked:

Dog saves own life by phoning police.

Fish get very romantic in tank.

Thirteen year old saves bus full of kids.

Lost Japanese parakeet tells police its home address.

I know -- this isn't news either. But, for a moment, these stories make the world seem a sweeter, brighter place. Thankfully, it's also human nature to want to share the good things.

I know a woman who clicks on tragedy links so she can offer up a prayer for the people affected. I respect this. But for the rest of us, can we have a little common decency and give those links a pass? If enough people boycotted them, nobody would profit from them, and maybe they'd go away.

Will tragedy itself go away if we only read stories about teens who save lives and ignore stories about children plunging to their deaths? Of course not. But we could make a small and positive change in ourselves, encouraging our better nature instead of letting our Schadenfreude run wild.

Will that make this world a better place? Try it and see.

