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Give us their names; tell us their stories

By Brooky Brown

I “knew” Susan Smith was lying when she said some black guy took off with her kids in 1994. She later confessed to strapping Michael, 4, and Alex, 14 months, into their car seats and then drowning them in a South Carolina lake.

I “knew” O.J. Simpson killed Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman in spite of what the criminal jury said and long before the civil verdict that agreed with my assessment.

And I “knew” the first time I saw Scott Peterson on TV that whatever had happened to his pregnant wife, he had done it. This time, the jurors agreed with me.

On Friday, Nov. 12, they convicted Peterson of first-degree murder in the death of his wife, Laci. They also convicted him of second-degree murder in the death of his unborn son, Conner.

The masses cheered – a point made against domestic violence.

Then a story appeared in USA TODAY berating the cable networks for giving nearly non-stop coverage to the story.

“How a domestic crime involving an ordinary middle-class couple became a long-running soap opera is a tale of circumstances elevating the mundane,” the Nov. 15 story stated.

Since when is domestic violence mundane? Is it mundane because it happens every day all across America?

That’s not mundane – that’s epidemic.

And if the Peterson’s level of domestic violence qualifies them as “an ordinary middle-class couple,” then there is no way the Peterson story received too much attention.

The USA TODAY story takes to task cable networks for giving such heightened coverage to “an arguably inconsequential case.”

The taking of a human life should never be considered inconsequential.

What the story should have done was chastise news organizations for failing to give more of that level of coverage to domestic violence until it is extinguished.

The story rightly points out that such coverage is given to celebrities and whites – Polly Klaas, JonBenet Ramsey and Elizabeth Smart – but not to the poor and minorities.

The USA TODAY story makes a good point here. However, it misses the big picture. There shouldn't be less coverage of domestic violence. There should be more regardless of race, color, ethnicity or the financial status of the victims and the abusers.

The networks should examine the Peterson coverage. When they do, perhaps they will realize that they should spend less time on blow-by-blow details of attorneys' actions and provide less speculation on the outcome of the verdict.

Maybe they'll realize that what they should do is give viewers more information about domestic violence – where to go for help and how to volunteer at shelters or hot lines.

Unfortunately, the networks put this information last on their importance scale – using it only when they apparently didn't have enough drama to fill the time left after the verdict was read.

If this information was provided, perhaps the abused might begin to understand that they can leave their abusers, they can file charges against them and they will be supported, because America doesn't tolerate domestic violence against anyone. Period.

The TV media should use the Peterson case to set new industry standards. They should report on domestic violence against any victim all of the time. And they should push for tougher laws that carry more weight than restraining orders, which often fail to stop fists, knives or bullets.

People have been touched by the death of Laci and Conner. Why? Because they knew about this story. Statistics show that 50 percent of all homeless women and children in this country are fleeing domestic violence. Yet there are nearly three times as many animal shelters in the U.S. as there are shelters for battered women. We should know all of their names and their stories.

The real tragedy in my mind is that news organizations fail to give every domestic violence trial the same kind of coverage they gave the Peterson case. If they did, perhaps we could annihilate domestic violence in America.

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