

Most of us who are conscientious about rearing our children try to let them learn from small mistakes or small bad choices. However, it is difficult to know if a mistake is small or not, or if it will blight their lives forever. Three young people in the news have made large mistakes, and one of them died as a result.

The three are: Rachel Corrie, John Walker Lindh, and Pfc. Bradley Manning, all of whom were undone by fanatical attachment to extremist ideologies. Their mistakes were not small ones. All have been in the recent news, all of them in one or another justice system.

Corrie. A District Court in Haifa, Israel ruled in August that the horrible death of this young ideologue was an accident. Corrie was killed in Gaza in 2003 while kneeling in front of an Israeli Defense Force bulldozer that was clearing brush near the Rafah border to prevent illegal weapons smuggling by terrorists coming in from Egypt. Corrie's family has said that she was trying to protect Palestinian homes from being demolished by Israelis, something that sounds more principled than what she was actually doing. The bulldozer driver did not see her and ran her over. The Court said that she put herself in needless danger and her recklessness was the cause of her death. The US government had alerted Americans to stay out of conflict zones such as this one, advice she deliberately ignored.

Corrie was a US college student who belonged to a radical movement called the International Solidarity Movement, a pro-Palestinian group well funded by money from abroad, devoted to the divestment of Israel and active in many sordid operations. Her family's case in American courts was tossed out on the basis that Corrie defied US foreign policy and ruled that Israeli courts were fair and appropriate to try this case. Try it they did, and her family lost. It is too bad that Rachel Corrie did not make a smaller mistake.

Manning. This young army private may lose his freedom for the rest of his life as a result of his choice: encouraged by that Pied Piper of anarchism, Julian Assange, to hack thousands of American diplomatic files and publish them on the Internet. Spying has a long history, but rarely have classified documents been published for the world to see (the exception being the Pentagon Papers). While Manning rots in detention, Assange is defying trial in Sweden and has taken refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. He is much more comfortable than poor Manning. Equal villains in this piece are all of the journalists who have made use of these stolen documents. There is something wrong with this picture! Whatever happened to \223not benefiting from stolen property?\224

Lindh. When John Walker Lindh was picked up fighting for the Taliban in Afghanistan right after 9/11, I felt sorry for him and his hapless family. This young, privileged kid from Marin had been permitted by his family to \223find himself\224 by converting to Islam and going to the Middle East to \223study Arabic.\224 He may have learned Arabic, but was also training as a jihadi. He was tried and received a 20-year term in prison.

His conversion to Islam and his foolish activities could be seen as a big mistake had he decided in prison to drop all this zealotry and become his parents' child again. I once attributed his actions to misguided youth, but apparently they were not. He has not only become more fanatical, but has developed some Islamist leadership abilities.

He is suing in court that the prison system is not permitting daily Muslim group prayers (for obvious security reasons), forcing him to \223sin.\224 I don't think that one will go very far.

But we need to think about the consequences of his being released from prison in another decade. Will he become another poisonous Pied Piper? Are some prisons in danger of becoming Jihadi universities? European prisons, overflowing with both criminal and jihadi young Middle Easterners, have this very problem.

673 words

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