

THE LETTER SEASON 1, EPISODE 7: DELIVERED

Amy Donaldson: A warning to listeners. This podcast includes descriptions of gun violence and associated trauma. Please take care when listening.

Lianne Bell: I didn't hear about the shooting until Sunday morning when my parents did call my home.

Amy Donaldson: It was the morning of Sept. 1st, 1996 when Lianne Bell's mother called and asked for a most unusual favor.

A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Lianne was busy getting her five children ready for Sunday morning service. Her mother asked her if she'd take a friend to church with her. Lianne knew the friend, a woman named Nelida. Her parents met the single mother of three when they were serving a church mission in New York in the early nineties.

Lianne Bell: And she said Nelida's son has committed a horrible crime. And all that Nelida wants to do this morning is be in a place where she can partake of the sacrament to bring peace and comfort to her soul.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne agreed to her mother's request, but she also wondered if she was equipped to deal with the kind of pain this woman must be feeling. She asked her husband to help her, and they left their 14-year-old son in charge of his siblings, while they drove to Nelida's apartment, just a few minutes from their Salt Lake City home.

Lianne Bell: I helped her basically from her apartment to her car. I knew at the moment, seeing her, that it was very sad. Real pain. Real intense pain. And I have questioned since, I don't know how she moved about really. I don't know how she physically was able to leave her apartment and get in our car and go to church after hearing and knowing the intensity, the severity of what had just happened with her son, what he had done.

[THEME MUSIC]

Amy Donaldson: Sometimes in life we are unaware of the ways in which we're connected to other people. We may have a mutual friend, a common experience, or maybe we witness something from different vantage points. Most of the time, those 'six degrees of separation' are never revealed to us. But in this episode, they are. A woman who was acquainted with the family of Jorge Benvenuto finds herself playing a critical role in a story that took two decades to unfold.

From KSL Podcasts: I'm Amy Donaldson, and this is The Letter. Episode 7: Delivered

Amy Donaldson: Lianne's parents served a mission for the Latter Day Saints in the Bronx and Queens from 1992 until 1994. Part of their assignment as missionaries, or what members refer to as "a calling" was to help families like the Benvenutos.

[MUSIC]

Lianne Bell: Part of their calling was to befriend and seek out and support members of the church who were recently baptized, or they were referred to as new members.

Amy Donaldson: In this way, Lianne's parents met Nelida.

Lianne Bell: They developed a really close relationship. Nelida had left Uruguay with her three children, to come to the States, right after a divorce. So she was this mother who is trying to make this quality life for her children in the States. Her three children were her life. And she served them and was dedicated to the church. And there is just so much love for her children.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne's parents told her stories about Nelida's devotion to her new-found faith.

Lianne Bell: My parents would offer these lessons in their home. Nelida would take the subway, change lines here and there and then walk a pretty far distance to my parents apartment. (Crying) Really, in hopes of bettering herself and finding strength and learning more about the gospel of Jesus Christ that she knew that this avenue, that, this place of worship and learning was something that could bring her comfort and stability in her family's lives. All of her children. That was her goal. So she made great sacrifices in attending these meetings. Just like a pilgrim, just forge ahead.

Amy Donaldson: When the 18-month mission was complete, Lianne's parents said an emotional goodbye to the people they were serving in New York, and came home to Provo, Utah. Not too long after they left, they heard from Nelida. She told them she wanted to move her family to Utah as well.

Lianne Bell: The explanation was that she wanted to give her children even a better opportunity in Utah, where the church flourished and, in her mind, would be more of a safe haven than the city of New York.

Amy Donaldson: When her mom called her on that Sunday morning, Lianne knew very little about the crime Nelida's son committed just a few days earlier at Little Dell Reservoir. She didn't know that the 18-year-old boy he'd murdered, Zachary Snarr, and the 18-year-old girl who'd survived, Yvette Rodier, actually lived in her Salt Lake City neighborhood. She didn't know that many of those teenagers who attended her local Latter Day Saint congregation also went to school with Zach and Yvette. The same school that her oldest child would attend a year later.

All she knew was that her mother's dear friend was desperate for a few minutes of peace. And Nelida believed that she would find them in what Latter Day Saints call a Sacrament meeting, a one-hour, weekly meeting, in which members partake of bread and water that represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

That particular meeting that Lianne escorted Nelida to was unique for another reason. On the first Sunday of each month, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints participate in what is called - Fast and Testimony meeting. They skip meals and donate what they would have spent on food to a fund that helps the poor. And - on that day - anyone can share their 'testimony' of the gospel with their fellow congregants. It's basically open mic for Sunday sermons.

Lianne says they drove from Nelida's apartment to Lianne's home in silence. Before they left for the Church service, she and her husband gathered their children, and knelt in their living room for a prayer.

Lianne Bell: Just asked for comfort, and that peace would be found somehow in the meeting. And then we got in the car and drove to church, but just, she just shook her head a lot, just tears flowed, just very easily, she wore sunglasses

You know I just wonder if the heavens felt a little closed to her at the time.

[Piano Music]

Amy Donaldson: Lianne says she felt the weight of Nelida's pain as they took their seats on the wooden pew. Her children seemed to intuitively know the adults around them were fragile.

Lianne Bell: The kids were surprisingly really well behaved. They were very quiet, very subdued. They just sat very, very quietly, and Nelida sat right by me. Next to me on my right, and just saying the opening hymn and the prayer. And I was just praying, hoping that there would be something in this meeting that would bring her some comfort, I just didn't even know where to begin in a prayer.

It's just too huge. You don't ever think that you're going to even be associated with something so large as this and someone who is just so good, so good as a mother. I was just so sorry for her. And what could I say that would even bring her peace at that moment? Nothing.

Amy Donaldson: After every member of the congregation had been offered the sacrament, those in attendance were invited to the pulpit.

Lianne Bell: Whoever wants to. Whoever feels inclined or strongly about something or want to bear witness to their faith can walk up to the microphone and, and tell us, speak to us. And that's always been very, you know, mostly uplifting.

Amy Donaldson: But instead of the usual discussions of doctrine or faith, a succession of teenage congregants had something else they wanted to share - grief - over the killing of their friend, Zachary Snarr.

They had no idea that the killer's mother was sitting amongst them in the pews.

Lianne Bell: And so a few of these youth felt the need to stand up. Mostly they were standing to just shed their emotions of grief. One by one, these youth stood up crying and crying and expressing emotions of I can't understand why this happened. Who is this person? And why do we have to endure this in our lives, we're kids. Just heavy, heavy emotional testimonies.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne and Nelida couldn't have been prepared for what happened that morning. Of all the churches Nelida could have gone to, it seemed almost cruel that she ended up in this one.

Lianne Bell: The mother of this killer, which the youth had no idea was sitting right next to me on the bench, listening to how her son had changed these youths' lives forever.

And she started squeezing in my hand, and just saying, "I can't do this, I can't do this." as one more youth would walk up, she would look and just, I can't, I gotta leave. I can't go through this anymore. Maybe 5-6-7-8 youth, one after another. But she didn't want to get up and leave, because that would bring attention to herself. And I would have to pack up everything of mine and take her home early. So she endured, I don't know how she did that. She endured an hour meeting, at least, of hearing of the grief that her son had just caused this student body almost, of kids.

I took her home alone, just Nelida and I in the car, nothing was said, much. I did remember saying Nelida, I know that you will find a purpose in this someday. And you will find comfort eventually in your life. And, of course, she couldn't respond. I don't even know if words were heard at that point. She just wanted to get home really quickly.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne says she's contemplated the lessons of that Sunday morning often. She never hears about these kinds of tragedies without wondering, what pain might be hidden? Who else might be hurting?

Lianne Bell: I always think of family members. I always think of mothers, when I hear statements from them later of apologies, or we just don't know how this happened. We are so sorry. I just, I feel like they don't even have the adequate words to express their pain for the pain their child caused, and watching Nelida that day and seeing her barely able to physically transport herself from one place to another. The pain was as severe as any pain experienced on earth.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne's parents told her that Nelida's pain persisted, long after the court hearings ended.

Lianne Bell: Years and years and years. My parents kind of played a role of trying to comfort although they didn't ever feel like they could create any kind of change or deep down comfort for Nelida. My mom was very, very sad for her friend, this Nelida friend (crying) who she once knew as a vivacious, hopeful mother. This is what I'm doing for my children. This is the life, this is my path, I'm going to reach it. This is all I want for my family. That went away very quickly and very forcefully. And I think my mom just ached for her so bad.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne's mother died in 2014 thinking that sorrow would always play a prominent role in her friend's life. But a few years after her mother's death, Nelida reached out to Lianne with a request.

Lianne Bell: Nelida emailed me one day and said that George had written a letter to the victims, and that he wanted someone to deliver, hand deliver this letter to the Snarr family, and would I be able to do that? Would I be the person that would hand deliver the letter?

And I really wanted to think about it because I, I wanted to imagine what this would look like. Just going to the Snarr's porch and ringing the doorbell with a letter for them from this criminal, the man who'd taken their son's life. I didn't know where they were at emotionally, spiritually, mentally, I had no idea. I didn't know the Snarr family at all. I'd never met them. And so I told Nelida, I would need to think about it.

So I thought about it, I thought about it, I prayed about it. I didn't feel like I had received any kind of reassurance or answer. So I told Nelida, I don't think I can do that. I want to watch out for the victims first. And that's great that George has a letter of repentance, but I'm not, I can't find a way yet.

And she was nice. She was kind and if you ever change your mind, please let me know. He really wants it to be hand delivered so that he can know they received it and have someone report back that it's in their hands.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne declined to deliver the letter, but she didn't just forget about it either. It was about a year later, when she realized she had a connection with Zachary's mom, Sy Snarr. Her cousin, Karen Fairbanks, was friends with Sy.

Lianne Bell: This thought just came to me that maybe I should ask my cousin ...if she's communicating with Sy, let Sy know that I have access to a letter from Jorge, if she's interested. And that's where this all unfolded.

Amy Donaldson: That's after the break.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

Amy Donaldson: It was Christmas of 2018 when Sy Snarr met her good friend Karen Fairbanks for their annual holiday dinner. And Sy could tell that Karen had something on her mind.

Sy Snarr: And we were sitting there, and she says, "I have something to tell you. And I'm a little nervous to tell you." And I said, "Well, is it about Jorge, because I figured why else would you be nervous to talk?" And she says, "Yeah." And I said, "Well, what?" And she says, "Well, he wants to give you a letter."

Amy Donaldson: Sy learned that Nelida hoped to have someone hand deliver the letter to the Snarrs more than a year earlier.

Sy Snarr: For some reason she told me that night and I just looked at and I said, "I've waited 22 years for that letter. Every August 28, every single August 28, I think, does he know what today is? You know, does he even think about Zach, you know, does he care? You know, that had always been in my mind. And so I said, I want the letter. I want it." And she said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah, I'm sure."

Amy Donaldson: When she got home, Sy called her oldest son Trent and told him about the letter.

Sy Snarr: And he says, "Well, I don't think you should read it. What if it's what if he says something that's upsetting is gonna make you sad or upset you." And I said, "Trent, he can't take any more from me than he already has. You know, he can't hurt me anymore. ... I really think it's got to be an apology. Why else would he send a letter?" And he says, "Well, what if he just want you to get him out? And I said, Well, that can't happen."

Amy Donaldson: Meanwhile, Karen called Lianne to report back about her conversation with Sy.

Lianne Bell: My cousin got back to me. She called me and she said, Sy's really interested in the letter. And would, would love to have that and I'm going to give you her number and you work it out with her, but she is interested in it.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne's first call was to Nelida.

Lianne Bell: And I said, I'll, I'll deliver the letter. It's wanted, and it's actually really anticipated. I mean, Sy wants the letter.

Amy Donaldson: So, In January of 2019, Nelida sent the letter overnight by registered mail. Lianne signed for it and contemplated what she held in her hands.

Lianne Bell: I think I just felt the power of (crying)...the power of a man in prison of his sorrow (sobbing) and his need and desire for relief, to offer relief to a family that he had hurt very badly

to families, to victims, friends, many people and so I of course, just kept it and called Sy and we made up a time to meet and then she would receive this letter.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne invited Sy to her home. In the same room where she knelt in prayer with Nelida all those years ago, Lianne handed Sy a letter from the man who killed her son.

Lianne Bell: And she just kept it in her lap and said, "I'll wait to open it with Ron. We've been through all this from the beginning together and we'll read it together." And then we just talked about life, my parents, events, just so many things.

Sy Snarr: And she explained, you know, that she was nervous about it too and really didn't want any part of it. And then she told me a story that just blew me out of the water.

Amy Donaldson: The story was about that painful church meeting.

Sy Snarr: .And every single testimony that made in that meeting was about that, about Zach and Yvette. And that poor woman had to sit there and listen to it. And I can't imagine what that was like for her. I just, what are the chances you know? I can't imagine how hard that was for her and Lianne said she was just shaking and had her sunglasses on just shaking. My heart really went out to her at that point. You know how awful for her.

Amy Donaldson: As they talked, Sy and Lianne forged an immediate bond.

Lianne Bell: I felt very close to Sy; it was it was a very strong, I'll just describe it as a warmth in the room. A feeling of relief. I hate to use the term loosely of closure but it really was kind of a moment of just relief.

Sy Snarr: I said, "I don't want to read it now. I want to read it with Ron." When I got home, he wasn't home of course, but I still didn't look at it. I thought - I've waited this long. I can wait till he gets home.

Amy Donaldson (Talking with Sy Snarr): What did it feel what did it feel like to carry it? To hold it?

Sy Snarr: Oh, it was just like this is? It was like surreal to me. Like I, cuz I used to think I wonder if he'd ever even write a letter or something you know, would ever, never thought it would happen. And here it is 22 and a half years later. But anyway, when Ron got home, we sat and read it together and I just wept. I could not believe that letter. I felt the sincerity. I knew... it was handwritten, and I knew it was his signature. I'd seen his signature before and he does this big loop around his name and it was there. I remembered it. And it just I could not believe how that letter made me feel.

Amy Donaldson: Empathy washed over Ron. All he could think about was his own prayers a couple of years earlier, where he pleaded for forgiveness as he tried to exorcize the hateful demons that had haunted him for nearly two decades.

Ron Snarr: I thought to myself, well, everybody makes a mistake, you know, and he made a terrible mistake. I just kept thinking of Jesus, forgive them for they don't know what they do. He wasn't, he didn't know what he was doing. And so that's the answer to the question.

Amy Donaldson: When Ron read the words carefully written on lined notebook paper, he knew it was time to make his son proud.

Ron Snarr: I'm trying to have the Spirit of Christ in me, you know, and forgive one another as you'd have them forgive you, you know, and I'm feeling the tap on my shoulder is what I'm feeling.

Amy Donaldson: Even from beyond the grave, Ron could feel Zach tapping him on the shoulder, reminding him of what was right.

Ron Snarr: He's all over it. He was just an exceptional human being, he was.

Amy Donaldson: Lianne says she never wondered what Jorge had written to the Snarrs. But she did hope the letter would bring them some peace. Still, she could not imagine how the letter would change their lives and the life of her friend, Nelida.

Shortly after Lianne delivered the letter, Sy called her.

Lianne Bell: She was so joyful. She just almost didn't have words to convey her feelings of lightness and happiness. I don't even know if those are the right words, just rightness. Things are right, things feel good. And I felt that through her expressions.

Amy Donaldson: Jorge's letter created a beautiful but fragile refuge for Sy and Ron. And Sy, especially, became fiercely protective of this new and unique relationship. For many weeks, they were exceedingly careful who they told about the letter and the transformation that it had wrought in their lives. The one exception, their children. Sy said they told them the next day. Both Syd and Trent had worried that allowing the man who stole Zachary from them to re-enter their lives, even through a letter, would re-open wounds they'd all worked so hard to heal.

Sy Snarr: I called Sydney and I said, "I want to read you this letter." And she said, "Well, I don't know if I want to hear it." And I said, "You need to hear it."

Sydney Snarr: She's like, I want to read this letter from Jorge, from she called him George. Can I read you this? And I was like, at first I was kind of like, I don't know. But I thought, you know what, yeah, let me hear, let me hear. And I, she started reading it to me. And I was bawling. By the end of the first paragraph, like, crying and my hands were shaking and, and, she finished

the letter, and it was just silent for a minute. And I said to my mom, I'm like, I needed to hear that I can breathe for the first time, in 24 years. Like, I could take a deep breath and not feel that crack in my heart.

It actually took me a couple of days to even talk to my husband about it, because I couldn't stop crying.

But it was, it was beautiful. And my mom, I remember when I was talking to my mom about it. She's like, I know, I feel the same way. She's like, we It's so beautiful. And and I and it's such a weird word to describe it. But it's true. It's, It was beautiful. And it was just, it was so sincere.

You know, when we're not, I wouldn't consider ourselves gullible people. It's not like I you know, there's, there's a chance that this was a scam or him trying to, you know, it was so sincere and so heartfelt. And for the very first time, since, I mean, for the first time in 24 years, I was like, he's a person. He is a human being. And he regrets, and he is so saddened. And his heart was broken, too.

Sy Snarr: I called Trent and I said, I want to read you this letter. And he said, You know, I wasn't gonna, I wasn't saying anything I was just gonna read it. And I waited and waited and waited, and he didn't say anything. And I finally said, "Trent?" And he was emotional, too. And he says, "The whole thing is just so incredibly sad to me."

But that letter was so, I felt his sincerity. He made no excuses. He didn't ask for forgiveness. Nothing. He just, it was a beautiful letter that changed everything.

Amy Donaldson: The Snarrs were not sure they wanted to share this letter with the world. Because he wrote the letter for them, it felt like a betrayal to share it publicly. But eventually, they came to the conclusion that, if we're going to tell this story, it's important for listeners who've gone on this journey to hear the words that transformed their lives.

That's after the break.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

Amy Donaldson: As Sy reads the letter aloud, I would just like listeners to consider, that we cannot ever completely understand what these words would mean to someone whose son was murdered.

Sy Snarr (reading the letter): To the Snarr family, I want to begin by saying that I wrote this letter because I thought that it would be the right thing to do for the people that I have affected and not because I wanted anyone to relive painful memories. I hope that I was right in making this decision. I should have written this letter of apology many years ago. But the truth is that I had to do a lot of growing, maturing and reflecting first. For a very long time I lived in denial about what I had done, my responsibility and guilt. The seriousness of my crime, and how

profoundly it affected so many people. Now that I'm older, I can better imagine how furious and hurt I would feel if someone took the life of one of my loved ones. I have been very cruel and evil to your family as well as to others. Please don't blame my family for what I did. I'm the the only one that bears responsibility for your son's death. What I did was not because of the upbringing that my family provided me. I committed my evil crime in spite of the values that they tried to teach me. They are good people who feel a deep regret and sadness for your loss and suffering. I want to apologize to everyone that I hurt by taking Zachary away from his parents, family, friends, church members, schoolmates, as well as anyone else who knew and loved him. Every day I regret taking Zachary's life from him and denying him the journey and destiny that his Heavenly Father had planned for him. I apologize for taking away from him his right to pursue his goals, dreams and happiness. I'm sorry for taking away from him and the people that loved him the time that you would have spent together. I wish that I could undo what I did, the suffering I caused and the emptiness I left behind in so many lives. I'm sorry that I put all of you through this living hell. Sincerely, Jorge Benvenuto.

Sy Snarr: I feel, I feel his sincerity in that apology. And, you know, it means more, because he didn't write it right away, because it wouldn't have been sincere. The fact that he admits that and he said he had to realize and what he had done.

I just think it was so eloquent. I don't think he just sat and wrote it out. I think he put a lot of thought into it. Probably rewrote it many times. You know, Karen, my friend said, he not only gave you your greatest pain, he has given you your greatest gift. And it's so true.

Amy Donaldson: Sy has likened her grief and anger to a backpack full of rocks that weighed her down for years. The decision to forgive lightened the load, but the letter freed her from weight she didn't even realize she was still carrying.

Sy Snarr: When I read that, every last little rock, pebble is gone. It's gone. And I feel nothing but gratitude for him, to him for giving us this gift. You know, I don't know what his life has been like. I don't know what caused him to do it. But I know that he has sincere regret about what he did. And he's taken full responsibility, it really impresses me that he didn't put the blame on anyone else or something that happened to him. He didn't ask me to forgive him. He just said, you know, I'm so sorry. What I did was wrong. And don't, please don't blame my family. And that, that really touched my heart right there, that touched my heart.

Amy Donaldson: I think it's important to let you know that we did reach out to Jorge and ask him if he wanted to participate in the podcast. We exchanged a few letters, and he shared some thoughts that you'll hear in a later episode, but he declined to be interviewed. He also asked us not to contact his family. We have respected that request. and that's why you won't hear from them in this podcast.

[music]

Amy Donaldson: Sy learned that Jorge had written a letter to Yvette, as well. And she reached out to Yvette and asked her if she wanted the letter he'd written to her.

Yvette Rodier: I hadn't talked to Sy in a bit. She called One Sunday, and I didn't answer the call. I had missed it. I thought, "Oh, I'm sure I'll talk to her in a minute or tomorrow or something." And then she called I think, two more times within the next couple of hours. And I realized she needs to talk to me. And we had guests over something that I couldn't answer right then. But I did call her back later. And we got caught up on everything and how everyone was doing. And then she told me about her letter first. She told me how beneficial it's been for her.

Amy Donaldson (interrupting): Were you surprised that she got a letter?

Yvette Rodier: Very, Very. I I would never think that she would want to hear from him. But I love that for her that that was her decision.

Amy Donaldson (interrupting): Were you surprised that he wrote one?

Yvette Rodier: Absolutely, Like he never showed any signs of remorse or interest in any of us. And so that he had a desire to write a letter, that was shocking.

Amy Donaldson (talking to Yvette): And so she's telling you how big it's been for her and you're happy for her, right?

Yvette Rodier: Absolutely. Oh, I love that. I could tell it had brought her a lot of I don't know if she used the word peace, but that's the that's the feeling I got is that she felt peace with it and that it has been very helpful for her. And she's so glad that she got it.

Amy Donaldson: Then Sy told Yvette there was a letter for her too.

Yvette Rodier: And I could tell she was nervous to ask me. And she prefaced I think several times with, "There isn't a wrong answer. And I don't, I love you and it won't matter what you choose." And I sobbed. I just started crying. I think it was partly because I don't think about him and that he was so forward in her thoughts. And then he was suddenly in my house. Essentially that's how I felt. I felt like he was in my house at that minute.

He was essentially putting forth a question for me to choose something for me to choose. It was so left field. So my reaction was to sob. And I had no idea what I felt, what I thought, what I would want, it just was beyond anything I've ever contemplated.

Amy Donaldson: Yvette says she was so overwhelmed that she told Sy she needed time to process what was being offered and how it might impact her life.

Yvette Rodier: I think I asked her for a couple of days that I wanted to talk to my husband. And to date, I have still not called her back about that issue. I know I've made a decision. But I haven't told her yet.

Amy Donaldson (talking with Yvette):What's your decision?

Yvette Rodier: I do not want a letter from him.

Amy Donaldson: The process of making that decision was so complex, Yvette says she has a hard time explaining it even to those who love her most. She took Sy's call alone, and she kept the question to herself for the first couple of days. It took her a while to even bring it up with her husband Dave.

Yvette Rodier: I tried to figure out how I was going to present it to him. Not because it was anything bad, but just I had to put the words to what it was and what I was feeling. When we did finally talk about it. He was intrigued. He had questions that I didn't have answers for. And then we just kind of went back and forth on pros and cons about why it would be good or bad. The end, for me, was I didn't want to give him that relief that he'd given something to me that maybe helped me. Which sounds really mean and a little bit vindictive. But he can write the letter. But I feel like my receipt of the letter would give him some sort of comfort that I don't feel he deserves.

Amy Donaldson: Yvette says she isn't consumed with anger at the man who shot her. Instead, her decision is aimed simply at preserving the life she's built without any shadow of him in it.

Yvette Rodier: The way I feel about him is very neutral. I've never been angry at him. I feel like probably because everyone around me was so angry at him. That it was easy for me to just let them be angry. I'll deal with my own stuff and they can be angry. So I don't have any extreme feelings about anything toward him? I guess except that I don't want him to feel comforted by something I'd do for him.

And that's, that's probably one of the main things is it wouldn't change how I feel because it's - I think it's easier for me, it was not personal. The shooting was not personal. He didn't know us. He wasn't angry at us. And so I've not made it personal. So it's not really toward me, it just whoever was there, it was gonna happen. And so he's not a person in my life, either.

Amy Donaldson: When Yvette told her family about her refusal to accept a letter from the man who shot her, they supported, and even admired, her decision. Despite their curiosity about what he might write to her.

Danielle: Drove me nuts because I wanted to know what it said.

Amy Donaldson: Yvette's sister Danielle was definitely among the curious.

Danielle: And she said she didn't want to read it. And she said she wasn't even gonna let Dave read it. And she just, that was her boundary. She's like, I'm not letting that into my world. It's like, oh, oh, and so I have very little information about what's going on.

Dave and I were both sitting there like, yeah, let Dave read it. Let Dave read it. Then, you can tell me, Dave. Yeah, so it's unbelievable to me. Well, it could be unbelievable that she wouldn't be curious about that in that way. But it also just speaks to her strength and to her resolve to not let these things into our lives. And I totally support her in that. And I wouldn't push her or expect her to do anything that she's not, not comfortable with.

Amy Donaldson: In discussing how she came to her decision, Yvette realized one important factor. This was the first time she'd made a major life decision without thinking, what would Zach do?

Yvette Rodier: No, that's been my decision on my own. And it feels really good.

Amy Donaldson: The Snarrs and Yvette continue to profess their affection for each other. But, for now at least, they are traveling different paths. Sydney understands why Yvette wouldn't want the letter, and says had the request not come from her own mother, she may not have opened herself up either.

Sydney Snarr: I can't imagine surviving the ordeal that Yvette went through. The fear that she must have felt and how terrifying it was for her to feel his breath on her face while he searched their pockets, you know, and the fact that she had to play dead. And I get why she doesn't want to see it.

Amy Donaldson: Yvette and Lianne have never met, but Lianne says, if there is anyone in this story to whom she relates, it's Yvette. And she is not surprised she doesn't want a letter from Jorge.

Lianne Bell: I do think of Yvette and I, I can see myself as Yvette. Yeah, I think of her often. And I do feel that we, as individuals personally, can gauge ourselves and our responses, our wishes and desires, we know ourselves really well. We know what actions will cause comfort and what actions may cause more grief. And we're tenuous, we're fragile. We're, we calculate things very carefully for our comfort. And so I understand completely, how that has to be a very careful guide for her just how I was, as this outsider to just a mere letter, delivering a letter, I couldn't do it. I don't even feel this amount of pain, yet I couldn't even go up to a porch and ring a doorbell until I knew I was very confident with the outcome. And that's a lot of times how we decide to live our lives, which is very natural and very careful.

Amy Donaldson: As for the Snarrs, they feel Zack's hand in what's taken place, and forgiving Jorge makes them closer to their son.

Sy Snarr: I think he's orchestrated it. He's been working his magic somehow, because it's happened. And I know that he's so happy about it. I believe in miracles. Sometimes I thought there are no miracles. Yeah, there are and this is a big one.

Amy Donaldson: And this is where the story might have ended. Instead, Sy decided to write her own letter.

Sy Snarr: I did write him back. And I told him without a doubt, I knew Zach had forgiven him immediately. And my, my forgiveness is sincere. I have totally, totally forgiven him.

Amy Donaldson: But as Sy will discover, forgiveness wasn't the end. It was the beginning of something else entirely.

Next time on the Letter, Sy sits down with the man who murdered her son.

Dru (crying): Sy walked up and embraced him, and he embraced her. And I was standing behind Sy, and he said, I'm so sorry I took him from you. And Sy said, I know you are.

CREDITS:

Andrea Smardon: If you're hungry to hear more about Sy Snarr's unfiltered experience, we have the content for you. I'm producer Andrea Smardon, and in this week's bonus episode, Sy recounts her story in full.

You can get ALL the bonus content by subscribing to Lemonada Premium. You can subscribe right now in the apple podcast app by clicking on our podcast logo and then click the subscribe button.

Amy Donaldson: The Letter is researched and reported by me, Amy Donaldson. It's written by myself and Andrea Smardon, who is also responsible for production and sound design. Mixing by Trent Sell.

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