

Our children:

I am loathe to write about the situation regarding three year old Madeline because I find it so disturbing. The tragic circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the little girl is almost too much to bear thinking about. Every single parent knows the ever-present anxiety that accompanies parenting a child and the dread that something awful like this could happen to them.

You will be familiar with the fright you get when you reach out to hold the hand of your little child in a busy street and to suddenly, for a moment, lose touch with them. Instantly, without thinking, your body responds with a dreadful alarming feeling.

In most cases this is stopped in its tracks when you find your little child standing behind you. You put your hand on your heart and give momentary thanks - at times even scolding your innocent child with "Don't do that to me, you need to stay close to Mommy".

It is as if your body is in this constant state of alertness regarding your child's safety. Because of how we have evolved over thousands of years, our body already has the knowledge that something like what happened to Madeline could happen to any child. Your body is already hard-wired to respond instantly, without thought, when you sense your child is in danger.

I was always amazed at how primal and immediate was this responsiveness when my children were in my care, particularly when walking in foreign public areas where they could easily get lost. This primal bond, this physical protectiveness is extraordinary in its intensity. It lasts for life. Parents of adult children often feel the same sense of concern and worry for their offspring.

We can therefore get a taste of the awful distress now being experienced by the parents, Kate & Jerry. Not only have they lost their child, they feel they failed to protect her. This is the unbearable distress they experience. Not only that, their on-going desperate helplessness to do anything at the moment heightens their terror. There is nothing worse for any parent than to feel that your child is being harmed and there is nothing you can do about it. It is more unbearable than any physical torture one could endure.

For all these kinds of reasons our heart breaks in sympathy and empathy for these parents. The debate about what they should have done differently to prevent this outcome is a separate one and it is interesting that I have heard more talk about the failure of the parents than the brutality of the kidnapper.

The chilling probability about that beautiful little three year old that has disappeared is that she was probably stalked by a predatory paedophile for some time. The impression most people have about child sex abusers is that they are strange unkempt men in long coats, their knuckles dragging in the dust, who see a child and then strike. We prefer to see them as monsters rather than as intelligent, tactical, devious, and calculated predators. We would prefer to think that the kidnapper was some mentally deficient loner who did not know what he was doing.

The other myth regarding abusers is that they have poor impulse control and that they act-out, or abuse children, on a whim or urge that is beyond their control. This also is not the case because we know that most offenders are forensically deliberate about how they stalk, groom, and capture their victims in a prison of secrecy or in an actual prison, like poor Madeline.

My own hunch is that the kidnapper was watching this child and family for some time. I would guess that it was not someone who happened to just pass the apartment of the child but was someone who had been stalking and observing the family very closely and that the predator had the kidnapping planned to the second having closely observed times the behaviour of the parents.

Most of you who go on summer holidays, particularly in the sun, will be aware of how much people-watching you do. You notice everybody and what they are doing and who they are with. However, while you are watching other people you rarely get a sense of the degree to which you are being watched and observed yourself. As you stare at some people across the pool, someone else is staring at you.

Predatory paedophiles do this all the time. They watch and notice children, who they are with, when they are in particular places. They identify the unsupervised child instantly. It is all desperately chilling and has all parents pulling their children closer these days. May the God of Compassion pull dear Madeline closer to his loving heart this lonely days and nights.