**Mitch Albom: Kids in freezer had no chance at life**

By Mitch Albom, Detroit Free Press Columnist 11:08 a.m. EDT March 29, 2015



Two children are murdered. They are hidden in a freezer. If that sounds like a movie, sadly it is not. The killer, according to a court document — and her own words to police — is the children's mother, a 35-year-old Detroiter named Mitchelle Blair, who allegedly abused her four children for years.

Two are now dead, Stephen Berry, who was 9, and Stoni Blair, who was 13. Their surviving older sister, now 17, allegedly was forced to put one of the bodies into the freezer. Their surviving younger brother, only 8, told officials he, too, knew about the frozen corpses.

They have been forced to carry this awful secret for more than two years, during which time they were kept out of school.

Meanwhile, the fathers of the dead children, neither of whom lived with Blair — both of whom owe huge sums in child support — claimed to officials that they weren't aware of any danger, that they were told the missing children were visiting a relative.

Oh. And Mitchelle Blair was babysitting a neighbor's infant when the police came to arrest her.

It is beyond horrific. Beyond disgusting.

It should be beyond belief.

But it isn't.

**A poor reflection of society**

On Friday night, there was a rally of about 150 people. Teddy bears. Balloons. Talk about "community." Where was the community before? The frozen corpses were discovered only because Blair was being evicted.

Don't blame poverty. The world is full of poor people who cherish their children. Don't blame race. Atrocity does not bow to skin color.

This is about a belief system. One that says that children are expendable. One that says violence is a way of life. One that says sex is more important than any consequences, that having it when you want it and how you want it far outweighs the children it can produce.

This is about believing family is nothing more than a word, about believing fatherhood is something you wholeheartedly avoid. It's about believing sociopathic behavior can go regularly unnoticed, that's just how it is. And, ultimately, it's about believing things are nobody's business, that we should leave each other alone, that asking questions is intrusive and being curious just can get you hurt.

In such a detached world, Mitchelle Blair allegedly was able to get away with years of abuse — in a townhouse development! Her dead children allegedly were beaten, tortured, whipped, burned and even strangled. Her surviving children allegedly suffered scarring, beatings and of course the unspeakable trauma of knowing they were living with murdered siblings in a freezer.

Yet apparently nobody missed those dead kids enough to take action. Not the school that they were pulled out of. Not Blair's family members. Not the social service agency that saw Blair twice. Certainly not the fathers.

And please don't tell me these men were interested in the babies they spawned but were somehow blocked by Blair. You don't ignore tens of thousands in child support if you want to see your kids. You don't go years without setting eyes on them.

It's more likely they weren't interested. If they had a shred of real fatherhood in them, they would have spotted the terror in their other kids' faces, and done something quickly.

**Living in our own shells**

And then there's the neighborhood.

Sometimes I think I was raised in the last safe community in history. It was nothing fancy, middle-class, but if I were even walking down the street by myself as a child, a car would pull up with someone I knew, and that person would ask whether everything was OK. Or a neighbor would yell that out a window or from a front porch.

Today, we teach our kids to run at the sound of an outsider's voice. That's because the only people who seem interested in other people's children are the ones who want to hurt them.

Think about the celebrated inventions of our day. Computers. Big screens. iPads. Cell phones. The Internet. Facebook. Wireless headphones. All things that let us disappear into our own worlds. Ignore real life. Watch reality TV instead.

In Blair's low-income housing complex, the Martin Luther King Apartments, the units are attached. You could certainly hear screaming through the walls. You could certainly notice a terrorized child.

No one did? For years?

What does that say?

Here's what it says. Before they could do autopsies, authorities had to wait days to defreeze the frozen corpses of Stephen and Stoni. Which means the world around them spent more time watching their dead bodies thaw than it ever spent protecting them.

**If you went missing, who would look for you?**