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**Roar of Outrage for Cecil the Lion; Barely a Whimper for Rizwan, The Baby From Queens**

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For the past few weeks, I listened to the repeated news stories about the killing of Cecil the lion. There were also stories about the man who killed Cecil and the outrage about big game hunting. It was characterized as “a global outcry” and there was a rush for legislation. Everyone was talking about Cecil, everyone had an opinion. People were really upset.

During this time, Rizwan, a three-week-old infant, fell out of a fourth floor window of an apartment in Queens, New York. His young mother has been charged with his murder. I’m waiting for the outcry, the news stories, the rush for more legislation to protect children or to help parents in crisis. I’m waiting...

Sadly, no one that I spoke to even knew about the death of Rizwan. Was his death just a blip on the screen? It upsets me to think so. Have we become so accustomed to child fatality that we simply shake our heads and look the other way? Or, is it too painful to acknowledge — so we don’t?

My agency, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (The NYSPCC), was founded by the ASPCA; so believe me, I have a soft spot for animals. There were laws to protect animals before there were laws to protect children in the United States. In 1875, ASPCA attorneys rescued a little girl, Mary Ellen, from horrific child abuse and then developed laws based on their work for animals to protect children. They created The NYSPCC and our work in child protection and child abuse prevention continues to this day.

One of our key messages is that it’s everyone’s responsibility to protect children. That includes family and friends and neighbors. If you think something isn’t right, get help for that child and their family.

When a child is brought to the attention of the authorities charged with investigating these cases, the children and their parents can get the help that they need to prevent future abuse and strengthen their family unit. It can mean the difference between life and death for newborns and children under the age of four, where most fatalities occur.

So what is a concerned citizen to do? Perhaps you are not 100 percent sure about your concerns. Even if this is the case, you can and should take steps to help rescue the child. I counsel parents, that if they have “reasonable suspicion” to believe that a child is at risk, that’s enough to make a call to the state child abuse hotline. Much of child abuse occurs behind closed doors; therefore, it’s important for concerned friends, family members and neighbors to be familiar with the signs. And children, particularly younger ones, who may not be in school yet, will probably not tell you that they’ve been hurt, so concerned adults need to be their advocates if they have suspicions.

It’s not always easy to tell if a child was hurt while playing or roughhousing, or, if they were deliberately harmed by their caretakers. Here is a link to our website, [nyspcc.org](http://nyspcc.org), where people can find a guide to signs and symptoms.

So what are the steps in making a report? I recommend that all adults learn the basic steps and take action.

First of all, if you see an infant or a child being abused, or hear them screaming in pain, call 911. The police are trained to respond to these sensitive calls, and you may save a child’s life. If you have suspicions that a child is at risk, every state has a hotline number that you can call to “make a report.” They will ask for your name and number, but you can choose to remain anonymous. Even if you are not certain about all the specifics, make the call. It’s then up to the investigators to follow through.

While there were doubtless many factors at play in Rizwan’s short life, it’s also important to ask what resources could have possibly helped in this situation. One that I’d like to highlight is a very underutilized resource, the “safe haven.”

Every state in the United States has a law that allows an unharmed child to be relinquished to the proper authorities, no questions asked. It’s called the “Infant Safe Haven Law” It was first enacted in Texas, in 1999. It was developed as an incentive for mothers in crisis to safely give up their child to designated locations where the babies are protected. The laws generally allow the parent to remain anonymous and to be shielded from prosecution for abandonment or neglect in exchange for bringing the baby to a safe haven. You can access the law for each state through the Child Welfare Information Gateway. The locations that are designated Safe Havens vary by state, but they include: fire stations, police stations, hospitals, emergency medical provider by responding to a 911 call or a church. These providers then contact child protective services to let them know the infant has been relinquished. Perhaps this could have been a resource for this young mother, if someone had told her about it.

Rizwan could have lived, if someone knew enough to intervene. Let’s hope a spotlight on his death spurs the same type of action as what was done for Cecil. Child abuse is preventable. Everyone must be part of the solution.