

'What have you done?' asked mum of tragic tot

A MOTHER who arrived at the house where her six-month-old had died turned to the boy's father and said: 'What have you done?' his murder trial heard yesterday.

Sergeant Alan Ryan told the court that when he arrived at John Tighe's home shortly after his son Joshua had been declared dead, the baby's mother arrived on the scene and said to him: 'What happened? What have you done?'

John Tighe, 40, of Lavallyroe, Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo, denies murdering Joshua Sussbier at his home on June 1, 2013. He has pleaded not guilty and is on trial at the Central Criminal Court.

By Eoin Reynolds

Joshua was found with a wad of tissue lodged in his throat.

Sergeant Ryan agreed with counsel for the defence that Mr Tighe was 'extremely forthcoming' and gave a lengthy and detailed voluntary statement.

The defendant maintains the his son swallowed the tissue after he left him briefly to go to the toilet.

The prosecution had told an earlier court sitting the incident occurred a day after Joshua's mother had posted on Facebook that she was in a new relationship.

Sergeant Ryan said Ms Suss-

bier arrived shortly after he had been called to the house and 'she was very distressed'.

He said she noticed blood in various places - the court has heard there was blood on the baby's clothes, Mr Tighe's pyjamas and on the floor.

The court also heard yesterday from Dr Hilary Stokes, a paediatrician, who said it 'would not be possible' for a baby of that age to compress the tissue into the wad that Dr Jaber found stuck in the baby's throat.

Dr Stokes will be cross examined by counsel for the defence tomorrow in front of Justice Patrick McCarthy and a jury of nine women and three men.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

A devastating trend where love is blocked off by screens

HOW can we love if we cannot cry? How can we ease someone's pain if we don't know what it feels like to suffer? How can we heal a broken heart if ours is made of stone?

When the world is too self-obsessed to care, the sad plight of many goes unnoticed. But people are not intentionally hard-hearted. There is good to be found in everyone, even if it takes a lifetime to unearth.

Goodness flows when life offers a glimpse of tragedy, of shattered love, of lives lost without a trace. Goodness flows when we hear the howl of the abandoned, when we see the torment of the abused, when we peer into the depths of someone's despair. Goodness flows because we cannot help sympathising with those for whom the world can only weep.

Digital distraction is worse than a disease because you can't be immunised against it. The screen robs children of their innocence and compromises their concentration. Quite rightly, this newspaper is calling for a ban on smartphones for the young.

But aren't we all at risk from this sinister plague? Aren't we at risk of drowning in a sea of distraction, to the point where we fail to notice the tears of those who silently plead for help? People cry, yet we do not hear; their tragedies unfold without a witness.

The human heart needs help to grow. Children who never see into the depths will grow up living solely on the surface. Blinded by distraction, how will they cope with the agonies to which all of us are vulnerable?

How, without the imagination, can they get beyond the next digital fix? Sympathy and love cannot survive the loss of imagination. For when I cannot imagine what it is like to suffer as you do, how could I ever empathise, love or help?

The age of the book is in rapid decline. We have neither time nor concentration to read anymore. But when we cease to read, we lose more than a useful skill: we lose touch with the heart.

I have just finished reading Charles Dickens's novel Bleak House. The fact that you can get it for free on Kindle reveals something very sad about what we value as a society. It seems we no longer

want to know its noble heroes and evil villains.

Bleak House is a long book that demands effort and perseverance. You can always get a quick fix on the internet, but that would be to miss out on the joy of becoming acquainted with characters who can change your perception. Indeed, I thought I knew the measure of true human goodness until I met the owner of Bleak House, John Jarndyce.

Jarndyce is a man of immense virtue whose compassion is without limits. As I journeyed with him through the pages of Bleak House, I found myself laughing, weeping and crying out at the unjust plight of those who deserved far better. In Jarndyce, there is unwavering good, but I also came face to face with evil, desolation and abject misery.

Of course, we can travel through life without ever encountering those like Jarndyce, or the novel's leading villain, Mr Tulkinghorn. We can live out our days in blissful ignorance of those who exist only in the imagination, but who can, nevertheless, change our lives forever. We can do so, but only at the expense of learning how to water the wellsprings of compassion.

WHEN the heart is moved by a sad and emotional story, it beats with a more tender love. When it is stirred by examples of courage or sacrifice, we see what is required of us all when answering an appeal for mercy. When we peer into the eyes of evil, we know what to avoid and to resist.

Is it too much to say that the world is becoming more cold and hostile because we have ceased to read such stories? Is it too much to say that, when the dust finally settles on books such as Bleak House, we shall have lost touch with the human heart?

Either way, life goes on. We may be distracted and detached, consumed by our screens until we no longer see what exists on the other side. But life still goes on, and on until the last breath.

And then, as always, there will be time for weeping and mourning, for responding to the pain of loss with love.

But how can we love if we have never seen its face?

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Paddy's Night

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