

ARTICLE 3

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

- Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948



Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights

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Rethinking "Closure"

In this issue of *Article 3*, law professor Susan Bandes explains that only in the past twenty years or so has the death penalty been linked with the idea of closure for victims' families. And although the idea quickly became quite entrenched in people's thinking, it has also been repeatedly questioned.

For example, a 2003 article in the online magazine *Salon* by Michelle Goldberg is titled "The Closure Myth." It quotes several victims' families, including MVFHR member *Aba Gayle's* comment, "The district attorneys are very careful to let you know they're there for you. They tell you, 'We're going to convict him, and when he is executed, everything's going to be OK.' It's a magic bullet they're offering to all of these victims' families."

Courtesy of Oklahoma City National Memorial



The Field of Empty Chairs commemorates the lives lost in the Oklahoma City bombing. Bud Welch, whose daughter was killed that day, questions the idea that an execution gives closure to victims' families.

The article continues:

"Yet families who've actually been through the tortuously long emotional and legal process from one death to another say there are no magic bullets — and anyone expecting one is just setting himself up for more pain. Of course, some families celebrate the deaths of their loved ones' killers. But few find relief in it, and often the waiting and the appeals and the eerie anticlimax of an execution can only serve to rekindle the pain."

The article also quotes MVFHR board member Bud Welch, whose daughter was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing and who initially supported the execution of Timothy McVeigh: "McVeigh was executed on June 11, 2001. Since then, Welch says, 'Not a single

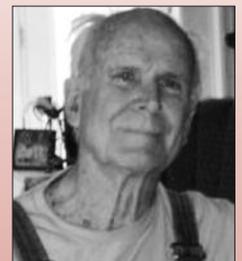
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Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights is an international, non-governmental organization of family members of victims of criminal murder, terrorist killings, state executions, extrajudicial assassinations, and "disappearances" working to oppose the death penalty from a human rights perspective.

Membership is open to all victims' family members who oppose the death penalty in all cases. "Friend of MVFHR" membership is open to all those interested in joining our efforts.

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Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights is a member of the World Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the U.S. Human Rights Network, Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network and the National Organization for Victim Assistance

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person has told me they benefited from it. I've had about five people tell me that it really didn't help them any."

Later, the article quotes Sharon Tewksbury, whose husband was murdered in 1984; the man responsible for the murder was executed in 2002. From the article: "... now Tewksbury speaks of the execution with surprising ambivalence. 'None of us felt elation. None of us felt overjoyed. I don't have strong feelings about the death penalty one way or the other now. My goal is to get all of the media to understand that "closure" is a bad word, a word survivors don't understand. "Transition" is the word we use. That doesn't mean everything is OK. Never will it be OK, and no execution, no jail sentence, nothing, will help in that process.' ... Today, Tewksbury works as national volunteer coordinator for Parents of Murdered Children. She agrees that victims are frequently disappointed after a long-awaited execution. 'Sometimes it doesn't come to them right away, because they're all caught up in the moment,' she says. 'But further down the road you wake up thinking, "I'm still missing the person that I loved, nothing's changed, and I don't feel any better.'" It's a long hard struggle to work through grief."

How to help families in that struggle? In an amicus brief written in 2004, Kate Lowenstein and Michael Avery argued that the legal system is not the best arena in which to work through grief. They wrote:

"Healing and recovery require an intimate focus on the particular needs of an individual survivor, a focus that it is neither appropriate nor practical to expect the legal system to provide. Vik Kanwar has noted that 'individual requirements for closure are so personal that it would be difficult to conceive of any generalized remedy that could be properly tailored to this purpose.' Of necessity murder survivors must look outside the court system for their principal sources of support."

Because questioning the idea of closure, and the connection between closure and executions, is so important to our members and to any discussion of the death penalty, we are devoting this special issue of *Article 3* to the topic. You'll find some regular updates about MVFHR's recent work and about how victim opposition to the death penalty has lately been covered in the news, and then you'll come to the interview and members' reflections about closure, the death penalty, and victims' actual experiences and desires.

MVFHR in Action

A sampling of MVFHR's work over the past few months

Working in Asia.

MVFHR is an organizational member of the Asia Death Penalty Abolition Network (ADPAN), and we participated in the network's annual meeting in Hong Kong in June. In July, MVFHR's Japanese affiliate, Ocean, held its first annual conference, and a Japanese version of our Gallery of Victims' Stories will be published in September.



Doing Human Rights Work. In June, Renny Cushing joined representatives



photo by Abe Bonowitz

from several other U.S. anti-death penalty groups at a meeting with Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions. In July, Renny represented MVFHR at the World Human Rights Forum, held in France. In April, at the U.S. Human Rights Network conference in Chicago, MVFHR members presented a panel on "Reframing the Death Penalty."

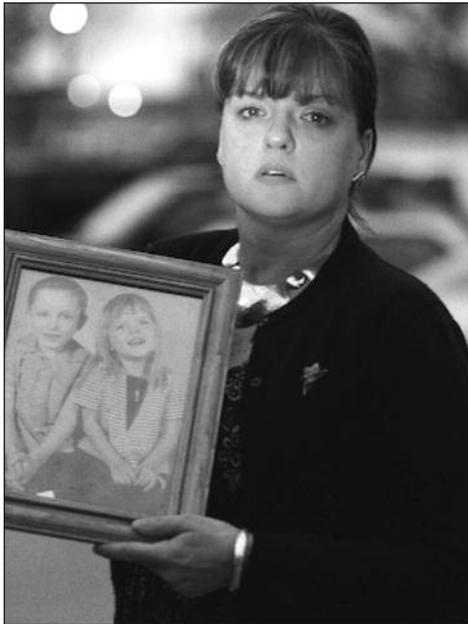


photo by Fabian Blasio

Launching Mental Illness Project.

In the spring, MVFHR joined forces with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to launch a project focusing on the

intersection of the death penalty and mental illness from the victims' perspective. We have been working to reach out to family members of victims killed by persons with severe mental illness and family members of persons with severe mental illness who have been executed (like Tina Duroy, pictured here, whose brother was executed in Texas). We'll hold a gathering and public event in San Antonio in October, and will release a published report next July.



photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor

Giving Public Testimony. In July, the Maryland Governor appointed Vicki Schieber to the state's new Commission on Capital Punishment, making her the second MVFHR member to be asked to serve on a state's death penalty study commission. In addition to testifying before state commissions, in recent weeks MVFHR members have spoken in a variety of venues, from university classrooms to the steps of the Supreme Court.

Victim Opposition to the Death Penalty in the News

A sampling of recent news stories and opinion pieces

Susanna Miller, "Bali Bombings: A sister's search for justice," The (UK) Independent, April 2, 2008

Before Dan was killed, I had always believed that capital punishment was an ineffective deterrent to murder. I believed that the convicted murderer should instead be put through some moral journey, to see the error of their actions, and with luck be rehabilitated. If repentance and rehabilitation is too much for some individuals, then so be it, I thought – they can at least provide a resource for understanding the criminal mind. I agreed with the premise that the death penalty violates a fundamental human right to life, and is therefore morally unjustified.

My view has not changed. One of my strongest memories is of standing beside that bomb crater in Bali, with my eyes closed, trying to block out the destruction and sense Dan in it all. Although I could not block out the smell of murder, and the sheer enormity of the carnage, I did feel his presence there, just beyond living reach.

My brother was a lawyer, deeply versed in the moral and practical arguments surrounding law and its role in society. As we grew up, Dan and I sparred happily over numerous family suppers. As far as I remember, Dan also thought that the arguments, both moral and practical, against capital punishment were compelling and conclusive.

That day was one of the saddest moments of my life, and one that reinforced to me the sanctity of

human life, and the appalling effects of taking it. Yet capital punishment seemed even more inappropriate then than before. I felt, and still strongly feel, that there is never justification for another human being to willfully end another's life.

"Victim's Widow Testifies for bill on moratorium," Columbia (MO) Tribune, April 3, 2008

Ginger Masters said she had just an hour of sleep the night before testifying yesterday in front of the House Crime Prevention & Public Safety Committee.

Her late husband, former Macon County Prosecuting Attorney David Masters, was found dead in 2005 with a cocaine dosage that was some 40 times a lethal dose. Prosecutors have sought the death penalty for at least two people accused in the murder in southwest Missouri.

Masters of Columbia said her decision whether to support or oppose the death penalty was not easily made. But she said her husband was a Buddhist who didn't believe the death penalty was a fair application of justice. She favors enacting a two-year moratorium to study capital punishment in Missouri.

"After having spent more time, according to my children, than anyone should spend in studying the death penalty and the way that's adjudicated across the country and in the state of Missouri, it seems to me that it's not fair," Masters said. "In cases, you have jurors being

struck for the color of their skin. You have jurors being struck because they don't favor the death penalty."

"Killer spared death sentence; gets life in prison. District attorney honors family's wishes," Pennsylvania Daily Item, June 20, 2008

It was [Bonnie] Smith - mother of Tina Curran, whom Curran shot to death in Shamokin - who Friday asked Northumberland County District Attorney Anthony Rosini to spare her son-in-law from the death penalty in favor of life in prison without parole....

Following Smith's statements, [District Attorney] Rosini asked her whether everyone in the family was in agreement over Curran's spending his life in prison. Yes, she said. Hearing that, Rosini said he no longer would be pursuing the aggravating circumstances on which he would have based his argument in seeking the death penalty.

It would have been impossible to convince the 12 jurors who Thursday found Curran guilty of first-degree murder to give the death penalty when the family was unanimously against it, Rosini said.

Aundre Herron, "The Death Penalty is not civilized," Sacramento Bee, April 20, 2008

[My brother's] murder was a devastating blow to my family and to everyone who knew him.

Even though I was working as a death penalty defense lawyer at the time, I was shocked at my impulse

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to hunt down and kill the perpetrators myself. Eventually, they were caught, but legal technicalities led to dismissal of the case. The cold, cruel reality I had to face was that no one was going to be held responsible for my brother's murder. But even if the case could have gone forward, nothing could replace what my family had lost. Nothing – not the death penalty, not the worse punishment I could imagine for his killers – would ever bring him back. There was no “closure” to be had.

Having served on both sides of the criminal justice system, the experience of losing my brother in this unforgettably tragic way, without recourse or retribution, forced me to re-examine the way “execution” and “closure” are joined in contrived alliance, recited by death penalty advocates to justify their point of view. But having survived my brother's murder without the “benefit” of the death penalty, it is clear to me that the death penalty cannot do what its proponents claim.

*“Murder victims' families say death penalty exacts toll on their lives,”
Catholic News Service, March 12, 2008*

... Family members of murder victims also testified at the March 6 [Maryland] Judiciary Committee hearing, outlining how the death penalty has exacted a painful toll on their lives. ... Loved ones of family members who have been murdered said the money spent on death penalty cases would be better used to provide counseling and other support to survivors.

Kathy Garcia, whose nephew was murdered 20 years ago in New

Jersey, said she philosophically favors the death penalty but believes it devastates families. Garcia was a member of a New Jersey commission that advised that state to abolish capital punishment.

“I've watched too many families go through this to make me believe the system will ever work,” she said. “The death penalty divides families at the very time they need each other the most.”

While some death penalty proponents suggest that the death penalty brings a sense of closure, “there is no such thing as closure,” according to Garcia.

“My real life experience has taught me as long as the death penalty is still on the books, it would continue to harm families,” she said.

Vicki Schieber, whose daughter was murdered in Philadelphia in 1998, told the committee that years of death penalty appeals are excruciating to families.

“The system is just too painful,” she said.

Judy Kerr, “Perspectives” commentary, California radio station KQED:

If the circumstances of my brother's murder prove as horrific as I imagine them to be, then I want the perpetrator to go to prison and die there. But I don't want the state to take that life. I had always opposed the death penalty in principle. Then, after my brother's death, I became tortured by the fact that somebody could be executed because my brother had been killed. People ask me if I'm angry, and I am. I'm angry that my brother's killer hasn't been found, and I'm

angry that instead of investing more in solving murders and preventing crime, the system is wasting money prosecuting people who are then exonerated, or conducting long appeals processes.

“Victims' families meet to hear proposal; group wants to redirect death penalty funding,” Colorado Springs Gazette, July 25, 2008

Family members of homicide victims with unsolved cases met Thursday night to hear a once-failed proposal to abolish capital punishment in Colorado and redirect money used for that purpose toward solving cold murders.

The proposal is the agenda of Families of Homicide Victims and Missing Persons, a nonprofit organization dedicated to seeing solved as many of the 1,300 unsolved murders in Colorado as possible.

The group told a room of about 30 people gathered at the East Library, 5550 N. Union Blvd., the most effective way of achieving that is to reallocate the \$3 million the state pays annually to “maintain” the death penalty, most of which goes toward the expensive and lengthy appeals process, to a cold case division of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation with an “ample” travel budget.

“We are certain the greatest deterrent to murder is the certainty of apprehension,” said Howard Morton, the organization's director, whose own son's 33-year-old murder case remains unsolved in Arizona.

A Closer Look at Victims, Closure, and the Death Penalty: An Interview with Susan Bandes



Susan Bandes, a law professor at DePaul University, has been writing about victims and the death penalty for twelve years.

We spoke with

Susan in July to explore our areas of common interest.

In your recent article, "Victims, 'Closure,' and the Sociology of Emotion" you point out that the emphasis on "closure" is actually a fairly recent phenomenon.*

Yes, the whole idea of closure is relatively new, and the link between closure and the death penalty is particularly new. If you ran a search for the terms "closure" and "the death penalty," you'd find that the terms were not mentioned together until 1989. But just twelve years later in 2001, a national poll asked whether the death penalty is fair because it gives closure to the families of murder victims. Sixty percent of the respondents agreed with that statement.

How do you think those respondents came to believe that idea?

People had by then been repeatedly told, through the media, that the death penalty offers closure to victims' families, so then they gave that answer when asked by the media. It's a feed-

back loop that we see all the time.

Part of the problem is that we think we're having a national conversation about the death penalty, but in large part we're really just answering pollsters' questions. We're not given free rein to express our deepest thoughts, our most complex thoughts. So it's hard to know what people mean when they give a yes or no answer, because they weren't asked to explain. We can only guess.

I do think there's also something about the idea of closure that really seized people's imaginations. It rang a bell: of course victims must need closure, must need to move on. The idea seems to touch something deep in people, something that they want to believe.

What does closure actually mean?

The claim of my recent article is that we really don't know what we're talking about when we use the term closure. On a societal level, we need to be clearer about what we might mean, and then even if we do succeed at defining closure, we have to ask whether the legal system is the right place to get it.

The most common assumption is that giving closure means giving people a sense of finality or a sense that they have been heard, that their loss has been respected. That probably does have roots in what people truly need, but what gets problematic is the next part: "so that then they can leave the problem behind." We need to ask how victims might feel when

others suggest that any kind of permanent "leaving it behind" is possible. Is it truly helpful to victims' families to be made promises like that?

For some victims, closure might mean getting answers to questions that they have, whether by actually speaking with the defendant or by trying to understand, in some other way, how someone could do a thing like this. For some victims, seeing or hearing that the person has come to take responsibility or feel remorse might be very helpful.

You said a moment ago that even if we could come to a common agreement about what closure means psychologically, we need to ask whether the criminal justice system is the best place to seek it.

Prosecutors have fought victims' rights when those rights might dilute their own discretion. Part of me thinks that arguing for "closure" is a way for prosecutors to seem to be advocating for victims but actually to be advocating for death sentences. It's a very good argument to put forth when seeking a death sentence: "You, the jury, need to do this for the victim's family; you need to show how much society values this victim and you do that by imposing a death sentence."

A problem, of course, has been that victims are not monolithic. They need different things, and at different times. When victims don't want to sign on to the prosecutor's agenda, the prosecutor in many cases silences them. In the prosecution of Timothy

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* Bandes, Susan A. "Victims, 'Closure,' and the Sociology of Emotion." Law and Contemporary Problems, Forthcoming. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1112140>

McVeigh, for example, Marilyn Knight had lost her daughter in the bombing and she did not believe in the death penalty, and the prosecutor would not allow her to give a victim impact statement.

Can the criminal justice system have therapeutic goals? Is that even a good way to think about it?

It's a good question, one that I think the current system is rather confused about. I believe that by discussing anything that happens in the courtroom as though it is therapeutic, we're having a dangerously misleading discussion. The courtroom's goal is not primarily to be a safe and therapeutic place for the people who speak there. But if we determine that the courtroom ought to be a therapeutic place, we need to think more seriously about how to make it one. For example, if we're concerned with the well-being of people within the criminal justice system, how about training judges in how to treat and react to people who are opening themselves up, giving incredibly painful testimony in a very emotionally unsafe place?

Maybe part of the problem is that there is such a poverty of other alternatives: where else can victims' family members get their loss publicly recognized and addressed?

Yes, I think we have seen in victims' accounts of why they chose to deliver a victim impact statement that there is a real desire to remember and honor the victim in a ritualized way, in a venerated public venue, and to have the sense that people in positions of authority, in respected public institutions, recognize and care about

the loss. That might be one of the things that people mean by closure. So, what if there were other opportunities for this besides courtroom testimony? How else might a society offer this to victims?

And then, thinking along these same lines, there are also not many options available to the jury. In your article you say, "A capital jury faced with pain and grief, overcome with anger, does not have many social options at its disposal. If it wishes to take action on its empathy toward the survivor, its grief at the loss of the victim and its anger toward the defendant, its only apparent option is to vote for a sentence of death."

Yes. In effect, we have said to the jury, "We expect some kind of help from you with healing the victims' pain. You're not just here to decide the appropriate sentence based on the circumstances of the crime; you're here to deal with this pain, *but* you're deprived of most of the tools that we usually have for dealing with pain."

What if we said, instead, "You the jury have to do this and only this specific legal task; we have other arenas, other ways, of helping victims' families?"

Right. That would be something very different. If you are on a jury and you don't think it's a case in which the death penalty should be imposed, but you have been told that the death penalty is what we owe to the victim and this is what we do for victims who are valued, you're in a terrible dilemma.

Meanwhile, it's also important to remember that we don't execute everyone who has committed a murder; we don't even charge everyone capitally. So if the death penalty

promises closure, this is a promise we cannot keep and are not keeping for everyone.

Taking it out of the courtroom, can you speak a bit about how the idea of closure has changed the debate publicly, politically?

In the Supreme Court's recent lethal injection decision, Justice Stevens said we're never going to know whether the death penalty deters future murderers; the evidence is inconclusive. That has been one major argument for the death penalty; without it, we're left with retribution. But some people are uncomfortable with retribution; maybe it sounds too much like revenge, and we don't want to be the kinds of people who take revenge. So now an idea has been introduced that is somewhat different: the idea that by supporting the death penalty, you're helping the victims attain closure. I think this has given people permission to support the death penalty – but based, again, on an idea that has no empirical grounding.

How might we challenge all this and give people a better and more in-depth understanding of these issues?

I fear that people don't like complexity and don't want to hear that there's no way to make it all better when someone has suffered a terrible loss. I think that what the members of your organization are doing is absolutely crucial: saying we've been through this experience and the idea of closure, as it's generally being used, does not match how many of us feel. Making it clear that victims are complex, and victims' needs are complex.

What Closure Means (Or Doesn't Mean)

MVFHR members speak out

Death penalty proponents often promise “closure” for families. But, from my experience, I am certain of this: executions do not and cannot deliver closure. Capital punishment does not heal or put an end to the grief that comes from losing a loved one. Nor perhaps should it. Why? Because that kind of grief never ends. As the culmination of sweet memories and the bitter loss of possibility, grief lives on, as it should. My grief over [my sister] Nancy’s murder is not “closed”; it dwells within me today, albeit differently than in those first few months after her death. At first grief numbed and paralyzed me. Today grief energizes me



to love more passionately; to share more generously; to live more fearlessly; to work to prevent the violence that could inflict upon another family the suffering that mine has endured.

Grief also instructs me. I have learned not to hold back love, because I understand, in the core of my being, that those whom we cherish can be snatched from us at any moment. You don’t waste time being afraid when you realize how brief life is. Every day that I have lived since Nancy and Richard’s murder is one day they never enjoyed. So I try to live in a way that honors them and the God who gives the gifts of life and love.

In the play *Shadowlands*, the writer C.S. Lewis tries to avoid the painful prospect of life without his wife, Joy Gresham, who is dying of cancer. Yet she forces him to confront the imminent reality: “Pain, then, is part of the happiness now. That’s the deal.” So it is with Nancy and me. The pain now is part of the happiness of when she lived. Why would I “close” that, even if I could? The notion that killing another human being – no matter how despicable his act – could somehow honor someone’s memory, or heal someone else’s grief, is untrue.

– JEANNE BISHOP in *A Call to Reckoning: Religion and the Death Penalty*

I have suffered two sudden, traumatic losses in my family, one a natural death and the other a murder.



I don’t think that one ever closes the book on the situation. I grew up in Southern California and I used to look at the mountains and then reflect on the huge cataclysmic forces that had pushed them into existence. Anyone on the ground during one of those earthquakes knows how scary they can be. But, eventually one gets used to the evidence of the quake in the landscape.

The missing holes caused by the violent death of loved ones are always there. They never close. What happens is that one remembers it because it is part of the landscape of one’s life. It isn’t as aching or jarring or desperately sad as it was at first, but it is always going to be there.

The murderer of my sister is dead. What I feel years later is hardly closure. His death didn’t solve a thing, make it easier to bear or swifter to heal. It, too, is part of the landscape. Both will always be there.

– CATHERINE CRINO



I was only seven years old when my father was murdered – a little too young to grasp the concept of closure. As I got older, I came to believe that my fate was in no way connected to the punishment of the man that killed my dad. He was responsible for him, and I was responsible for me. The criminal justice system did what it was supposed to do. Justice was served. But I still had a whole life ahead of me, and I just went about living it.

– ROBERT HOELSCHER

Closure implies to me that whatever it is that happened is somehow finished, completed. That it will no longer be troubling. This is certainly not the case with murder of a loved one. Yes, the pain gets less with time, but we never "get over it."



It is always there. Another human being deliberately took the life of someone I love. The criminal justice system seeks to justify legalized murder, revenge, a life for a life, and they use the term "closure" to try to persuade people that this act will lessen their pain, perhaps end it. No way. There is just no way to end the pain, and certainly not by taking the life of another human being, thereby causing more pain. (Even the most deprived of us humans have those who love us.)

– HECTOR BLACK



After [my daughter's] death, life seemed meaningless. I felt great despair. I felt I had seen humanity at its worst. In the following months I heard comments such as "fry the bastard" or "I hope he gets what he deserves." These statements did nothing to restore my faith in the goodness in people. Those who expressed

hatred and revenge did not comfort me. Those who thought execution would bring justice did not realize that there is no justice. Justice would be to have Laura alive again.

The death penalty is frequently justified in the name of the victims; it is said it is needed for them to find "closure." The lengthy process of trials, appeals, and anticipated execution would only impede coming to terms with a horrible loss. If closure means healing, that healing must come from within, not from the fate of the murderer.

– AMANDA WILCOX, *Testimony before the California Senate Special Session on the Death Penalty, April 2003.*

One of the reasons given for the imposition of the death penalty in cases such as ours is that it brings "closure" to the survivors. There is no such thing as closure when a violent crime rips away the life of someone dear to you. As we wander through the normal things that we all do in our daily lives, we see constant reminders of Shannon and what we have lost. We are reminded of her when we see a tall, dark haired, attractive woman in almost any setting. We think of what we have been denied when we enter our church and find that it has been decorated for a recent wedding. It becomes even more poignant when we see young couples of her age going about their daily lives with their young children. Killing Shannon's murderer cannot stop the unfolding of the world around us with its constant reminders of unfulfilled hopes and dreams.



– VICKI AND SYLVESTER SCHIEBER, *testimony before Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee March 16, 2005*

Talking About It

photo by Ted Corvette



*An essay by North Carolina
MVFHR member Charisse Coleman*

In the summer of 1995, my older brother, Russell, was shot to death in a robbery at the liquor store in Shreveport, Louisiana where he worked as a stock clerk. Nearly a year after his death, I began to notice that, in general, colleagues, friends, perfect strangers seemed to feel that a year's grief was just about enough. No one ever said this. They simply behaved it. There were all sorts of kinetically perceived guidelines. I could talk about it, but not at a social event. I could comment on it, refer to it, even mention the ongoing nature of the pain. It was best if I could be articulate and insightful about it. (Incoherence upsets almost everyone.) But I was not supposed to *dwell*.

Yet I rarely had the strength to allay someone's unease or to barrel past it. I looked into people's faces and watched them disappear as I spoke, heading off to wherever they needed to go inside themselves to stay protected. It's like standing on a road watching a pair of tail lights recede into the dark, and it has made me feel ashamed and angry, as if my desire to do anything more than touch on the fact of Russell's murder were unforgivably gauche, or pathetic, or just plain selfish.

"You think it's tough listening for half an hour?" I wanted to rage. "Try having to go to bed with it, and waking up to it every day, try eating breakfast around it, and then come talk to me about discomfort." Expecting them to imagine how I felt and then blaming them for the simple impossibility of that was unfair. But I wanted to be consoled, and so often instead, I was stuck with reassuring them, or teaching them how to be with me in my distress. It made me want to punish them.

Over time, I began to hear friends say they were reluctant to ask how I was doing, or mention Russell's name, for fear of "stirring it all up." Here's the truth: even now, 13 years later, while I talk about Russell, my memories and love for him, Russell lives – he is restored to me. How can I conjure my stolen brother if no one

will join in, or even listen to, the necessary incantations?

Several months after the murder, living in New York City and out Rollerblading in Central Park, I happened upon three policemen pulled over for a coffee break. As soon as I saw them, I knew that I wanted to talk about it with them, but I didn't know why, except I figured they wouldn't be afraid of the subject and, seeing them there, I suddenly understood what a relief that would be. I skated over. "Excuse me," I said, "do any of you know the difference between an autopsy and a coroner's report?" They all looked at me then, mildly curious. "A coroner's report," said one, "I think that might be the autopsy plus some other information..."

"Like toxicology results, maybe," offered another.

"Yeah, that could be, since those take awhile to come back," agreed the third.

"I'm not really sure, though, what the difference actually is," admitted the first. A little silence fell among us there in the sunshine. "If it's not too personal - I mean, if you don't mind my asking - what's your interest in coroners' reports?"

"Well," I said, "my brother was shot and killed not long ago, and we're waiting to see the coroner's report, and I wondered what would be in it."

Something shifted. Though no one had moved, I could feel myself drawn more closely into the little grouping by the curb. They asked questions, the where and when and how, and what the killers had been charged with. They looked glad to hear the words "first degree." A relief so intense it could have been mistaken for joy washed through me. I could talk straight facts, without self-consciousness, without having to soft pedal - I didn't have to pull any punches to protect three New York City cops from what they'd already seen. Which is how it came to be that three strangers knew me, for a passing moment, more accurately than every friend I had.

"Talking About It" is adapted from the Charisse's memoir, A Bad Goodbye: Reckoning the Aftermath of Murder, which is currently seeking publication.

Help Us Continue the Conversation!

Dear Friend,

In this issue of *Article 3*, Susan Bandes says that answering pollsters' questions isn't the same as having a real, in-depth national conversation about the death penalty, where we can be given free rein to express our deepest thoughts, our most complex thoughts. One of the things I love about MVFHR is the way gives me and other victims' families a real chance to express ourselves – in the most intimate of conversations and in the most public of forums. I firmly believe that MVFHR is helping to deepen the national conversation – in fact, the international conversation – about the death penalty in a way that will lead to real change.

Whenever I speak publicly about why I oppose the death penalty, I am speaking from the deepest, most personal place – the hole in my heart caused by the murder of my daughter Shannon. And yet as I speak from my personal loss, I know that I'm not alone. I know I'm part of an organization whose members have been through something like what I've been through and who believe that the death penalty is not the answer. I know that together we are reaching people and changing hearts and minds.

Three and a half years ago, my colleagues and I came together to create Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights; we signed a document saying, "In the name of victims, we pledge to end the death penalty around the world." I'm gratified when I look back and see how much we have accomplished so far.

But I know our work isn't finished. We have so much still to do, so many conversations still to have. To keep going, we urgently need your support. We're a small organization with big hopes and big goals, and without financial support we won't be able to do all the work we need to do. Please help by completing the form below or the enclosed return envelope and sending us your check today.

In gratitude and solidarity,



Vicki Schieber

Chair, MVFHR Board of Directors

YES, I want to support the work of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights. Enclosed is a check with my tax-deductible contribution of

\$250 \$100 \$50 \$25 Other amount \$_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

To donate with a credit card, please visit our website, www.murdervictimsfamilies.org

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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

For news, updates, stories, and statements from families of murder victims and families of the executed throughout the United States and around the world, we invite you to visit MVFHR's blog, "**For Victims, Against the Death Penalty**," at www.mvfhr.blogspot.com. Checking the blog regularly will let you know how MVFHR and its members are making a difference week after week. Be sure to browse the archives, too!



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