

Bios for MVFHR Board of Directors

Bill Pelke

Bill Pelke is president and co-founder of “Journey of Hope...from Violence to Healing,” an organization led by murder victim family members who oppose the death penalty. Bill is the chairman of the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and has been a board member since 1996. He is also a board member of Alaskans Against the Death Penalty. He has spoken against the death penalty across the U.S. and in 10 countries.

His book *Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing*, details the 1985 murder of his grandmother, Ruth Pelke, by four teenage girls. Paula Cooper, deemed to be the girls’ ringleader, was sentenced to die in the electric chair by the state of Indiana. She was 15 years-old at the time of the murder.

Bill originally supported Paula’s execution but underwent a spiritual transformation in 1996 and became involved in an international crusade on her behalf. In 1999 more than two million people signed petitions protesting her execution and Pope John Paul II asked for her life to be spared. Paula was taken off of death row and her life sentence commuted to 60 years.

His writing on the aftermath of the murder has appeared in several books and magazines. He has appeared on “Good Morning America,” the “Oprah Winfrey Show,” twice on the “Geraldo” show and on “Sally Jessy Raphael.” He has been interviewed on National Public Radio, Pacifica Radio and Vatican Radio. His story was the subject of articles in US Catholic, Parade Magazine, Woman’s Day, In These Times and The Witness and of three documentary films, “From Fury to Forgiveness,” “Murder Up Close,” and “Faith First.” For 10 years he has been an organizer and participant in the annual Four-Day Fast and Vigil to Abolish the Death Penalty at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Bill has served on the advisory board for Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty since 1996 and is the co-founder and a member of the ad hoc steering committee of the Abolitionist Action Committee. An Amnesty International USA member since 1990, he was its Indiana Death Penalty Abolition Coordinator from 1992 to 1996.

He has spoken at more than 5,000 events in schools, universities, conferences, churches, legislative sessions, rallies and other public forums and continually works to abolish the death penalty by sharing his story. He emphasizes that he does not need to see someone else die in order to heal from his grandmother’s death. He believes “MVFHR will become the world-leader of abolition of the death penalty.”