

Not in Our Name



Dedication

As we interviewed and photographed family members who lost a loved one to murder, we appreciated the courage it took to share their stories. For some, it was distressing to go back over those memories. With others, their commitment to abolishing the death penalty was inspiring. This work is intended to honor them and the loved ones they lost.

Introduction: Sister Helen Prejean

Foreword: John Kitzhaber

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*Murder Victims' Families Speak Out
Against the Death Penalty*

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Sister Helen Prejean



Photo: Scott Langley

Helen Prejean, C.S.J. is a Roman Catholic nun and a leading advocate for abolishing the death penalty. She served as the Chairperson of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty from 1993 to 1995. She also founded SURVIVE, to help families of victims of murder and related crimes. Sister Helen helped establish The Moratorium Campaign, seeking an end to executions and conducting education on the death penalty. She is known for her best-selling book, *Dead Man Walking* (1993), based on her experiences with two convicts on death row for whom she served as spiritual advisor before their executions.

Introduction:

When the murder of a loved one rips one's life apart, some choose to react with vengeance. That's how the death penalty became so popular for so long. Victims' families believed that, somehow, the killer's death would free them from the traumatic, crippling anguish of loss.

The Oregonians featured within these covers may have begun their journey from that horrific place. Each, however, came to understand that killing others to satisfy personal grief had no end, not even after waiting decades to see justice done.

As you'll see, they found healing in their own time and by various means. What unites them is an experience of release from the emotional undertow of the crime, while never forgetting the one responsible, nor the person taken forever from their midst.

Whether crucial to recovering their life or not, each of these people has come to advocate for the repeal of the death penalty in our country, and in Oregon. If there is a lesson about believing in the sanctity of each life, it is that there are no exceptions. Without a death penalty, there is room for the murderer to fully repent, just as these people found room for peace.

Foreword:

John Kitzhaber, former Governor of Oregon

Much of my career has focused on healing. It's why I went into medicine in the first place. As an ER doctor, I had the opportunity to save people whose lives were threatened by medical emergencies or serious trauma. During my years in public office, I helped create the Oregon Health Plan and Oregon's coordinated care organizations through which nearly one million Oregonians receive quality, affordable health care.

In my first term as governor, it was an agonizing decision to allow the execution of two men on Oregon's death row who had given up their appeals in order to be executed. I felt conflicted between my own personal opposition to the death penalty and my oath to uphold the constitution, which allows capital punishment. Those two deaths have haunted me ever since. The executions created more victims, including the corrections staff that carried them out.

In my third term, I made a different decision when another inmate on death row requested to be put to death before completing all legal appeals. My conscience and my own moral conviction told me capital punishment was wrong. The constitution authorizes the death penalty, but it also grants the governor the power to stay an execution. In November 2011, I announced that as long as I held office, Oregon would have a moratorium on any further executions.

I support the work of Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, but not just to secure the repeal of capital punishment. This work is a metaphor for reforms that are needed in all sectors of our society. It's a great contradiction in public policy that we spend millions of dollars to execute people but don't make even modest investments in at-risk children. These investments could keep them in our school system, not our criminal justice system. The work of OADP can remedy that contradiction.



Photo: Caren Ann Jackson

“I still think about my decisions in 1996 and 1997. I believe those decisions were wrong. I find comfort in the stories of other Oregonians in this book, who have struggled to find a deeper moral truth.”

Aba Gayle, mother of murdered child



Photo: Nancy Hill

Wall Photo: Catherine Blount

“The District Attorney assured me that the execution of the man responsible for Catherine’s murder would help me heal, and for many years, I believed him. Now I know that having someone murdered by the government will not heal my pain. I beg the government not to kill in my name, and more importantly, not to tarnish the memory of my daughter with another senseless killing.”

Aba Gayle's 19-year-old daughter, Catherine Blount, was murdered in the fall of 1980. Douglas Mickey was convicted of the crime and sentenced to death. He is currently on death row in California. For eight years, Aba Gayle struggled with grief, rage, and a desire for revenge.

Then she began a spiritual search and encountered a number of books and enlightened teachers that helped her learn about forgiveness. Aba Gayle's first "teacher" was Reverend Billie Blaine, who introduced her to *A Course in Miracles* and started her on a voyage of discovery and healing.

Twelve years after Catherine's death, Aba Gayle wrote a letter to Douglas telling him that she forgave him. "When I put that letter in the mailbox, all the anger, rage and deep ugliness that I had carried around in my body for twelve years, was instantly gone. In its place, I was filled with love and joy and inner peace. I then knew I did not need another human being killed by the state so that I could be healed."

Aba Gayle established a relationship with Douglas and considers him a friend. In the letter Aba Gayle initially received back from him, Douglas expressed deep remorse, and when she first visited him at San Quentin he wept openly.

Aba Gayle now devotes her life to teaching about the healing power of forgiveness. She has traveled extensively in the United States and abroad as a storyteller for *Journey of Hope*, an organization led by murder victim families that advocates for alternatives to the death penalty.

"All the work I do is how I honor Catherine's memory."

Gus Lamm, retired mental health counselor

In March 1980, Victoria and their 2-year-old daughter, Audrey, visited friends in Lincoln, Nebraska. Victoria's husband, Gus Lamm, stayed behind in Tillamook. An assailant broke into the Quaker meetinghouse where Victoria and her best friend Janet were sleeping, murdering them both. Audrey was asleep in another room. Randy Reeves, Janet's adopted cousin, committed the deadly assault during an alcohol induced blackout and remembered nothing.

Randy was convicted of capital murder and sentenced to death. Shortly before Randy's execution date in 1998, Gus told the Nebraska Legislature he opposed the death penalty and advocated for a commutation of Randy's death sentence. That sentence was commuted to life without the possibility of parole, and Randy recently died in prison hospice. Even before Victoria's murder, Gus opposed the death penalty. Although he wasn't particularly religious, he felt that the Biblical commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," was very clear and explicit.

Gus recognized that Randy's execution would cause other innocent people to suffer, including Randy's adoptive parents. They were part of a large, local family to which Victoria had been very close. Gus did not want others, including people Victoria cared about, to continue to grieve. "I had already suffered enough and didn't want that to happen to others," he said.

Gus grew up in a coastal Oregon logging family. Rather than following his father and uncles into the woods, Gus spent his career in behavioral health, the last 15 working with the chronically mentally ill. His career, and especially his work with people with mental illness, furthered his compassion for individuals who felt abandoned by their families and society. He sees the connection between the actions of Randy and the challenges of untreated mental illness. He continues to be troubled by the erratic and discriminatory application of the death penalty.



Photo: Greg Zurbrugg

“The death penalty is capricious and premeditated state murder. The scales of justice are out of balance when it comes to the death penalty. People of color, the poor, the mentally ill are much more likely to end up on death row.”

Floyd Prozanski, Oregon state senator



Photo: Greg Zurbrugg

“I was raised in a culture that favors the death penalty and as a prosecutor I never questioned that until I saw Sister Helen Prejean speak a couple of times. She challenged me to rethink whether state-sanctioned killing was appropriate or made any sense. The truth is, too many mistakes can be made, and we run the risk of allowing the state to put innocent people to death.”

Floyd was a senior in high school when his older sister, Vicki, was murdered by her boyfriend. By then a mother of a 2-year-old girl, Vicki realized she was being used to cover for his drug dealing enterprise. “She was killed because she knew too much,” Floyd said. To spare his parents the horror of seeing their 21-year-old daughter dead, shot in the face and point blank in the back, Floyd took it upon himself to identify Vicki’s body at the morgue.

Growing up in Texas and a gun owner, Floyd’s immediate instinct was revenge. Instead, he listened to family and friends’ pleas to wait for the criminal justice system to do its part. That didn’t happen. The police detectives bungled their investigation, and though he confessed to killing Vicki, her killer’s conviction was overturned.

After college, Floyd was a paralegal for a prestigious Houston law firm and worked his way through law school. A couple of people along the way greatly influenced his career choice. One was a neighbor growing up, who went to law school and became a Texas state representative. This same neighbor got Floyd involved in community civics issues when Floyd was a teenager. Another was a professor, an immigrant from Cuba, who blunted students’ notion that they already knew enough, pushing them instead towards broader perspectives, critical thinking and greater analysis.

After law school, Floyd moved with his wife to Oregon. He worked as a municipal prosecutor and then for the Lane County District Attorney’s Office. He won a house seat in the Oregon Legislature in 1994 and has been a state senator since 2003. Among his legislative assignments, Floyd is chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. When he’s not in session, Floyd continues his law practice as a municipal prosecutor.

Barbara Healy, retired nurse

It is hard to capture all that Sali (Marcella Grace Healy) did in her 20 years of life. Among other things, she was a marathon social justice advocate, traveling between Tucson, Arizona and Oaxaca, Mexico. In Arizona, she organized volunteers to cache water along the most travelled routes for those fleeing Mexico through the Sonoran Desert. In Oaxaca, Sali lived and worked with the Oaxacan Popular Indigenous Council. She taught drawing and painting to children in their villages, incorporating themes about forests, the environment and land rights.

In 2008, Sali was murdered in a small Oaxacan village. Her mother, Barbara, was a single homeowner with a mortgage and other bills to pay. She needed to work, but was devastated, numb, and unable to concentrate. Fortunately, she worked for a company that allowed a gradual, supportive return to work.

Barbara had not thought about the death penalty before her daughter's death. She wondered what justice might look like for Sali's murderer. Eventually, she came to believe that "harm prevention" was preferable to putting someone to death. There is no death penalty in Mexico, but her killer could be put in prison so he couldn't hurt others. "If his death would bring Sali back to life, then I would probably agree that he should die. But with his death, they're both dead. It's better for him to live, as long as the public is safe with his imprisonment."

Although Sali's murderer had a history of violent crimes, he had never been arrested. When it appeared that this case would also escape legal intervention, Sali's friends stepped in. They identified the murderer, Omar Yoguez Singu, tracked him down and turned him over to the police. Participating in the court proceedings was long, expensive and difficult. It involved travel costs, hiring a Mexican attorney, translators for legal documents, meetings with government officials, and confrontation with Omar at the trial. He was found guilty of Sali's murder and sentenced to 34 years. A subsequent appeal reduced his sentence to 17 years.



Photo: Greg Zurbrugg

"I only wish the dream of a state fund for murder victims' families might be a reality.

We spend millions to keep someone on death row; why not spend \$10,000 to help pay the mortgage for the victim's family? We need teams who can provide for a family's practical needs - counseling, clean the house, take the kids for a while or go grocery shopping for them."

Frank Thompson, former superintendent of the Oregon State Penitentiary



Photo: Nancy Hill

“The average citizen will never find themselves looking a death row prisoner in the eye, administering a lethal injection and stating the time of death in front of observers and reporters. But we all share the burden of a policy that has not been shown to make the public any safer, and that endures despite the availability of reasonable alternatives.”

Frank lost a close cousin, an Arkansas state trooper, killed while pursuing a fleeing murderer, who was later executed by the state. When he learned about the man's death, Frank believed justice was served. Because of Frank's long career in law enforcement and corrections, he accepted the death penalty as not only a just punishment, but also a deterrent to crime.

Shortly after being hired as superintendent of the Oregon State Penitentiary, two prisoners stopped their appeals and requested to be executed. These were the first executions in more than 30 years, and Frank was in charge of them. In his role, he trained staff and attended to all the details necessary to kill legally. This included standing beside the gurney and giving the signal to begin the lethal drip of drugs into the condemned man's veins.

These two executions, one in 1996, and one the following year, forced Frank to rethink his beliefs and feelings about capital punishment. He saw how the work adversely affected his staff. Many spoke of being unable to sleep or of feeling haunted. Some quietly left the Department of Corrections or made it clear they could not involve themselves in another execution. Frank questioned if his actions had done anything to benefit society or keep it safer.

Finally, Frank came to believe the consequences of capital punishment were not just the ultimate price for those who murder but also distress for those assigned to punish them. It crossed an ethical and moral boundary that wounded more people than it ever would heal.

Since his retirement, Frank's mission has been to tell people why capital punishment is a failed policy, and one that has significant negative impacts on those who must carry it out.

Reverend Dan Bryant

Betty Joy Bryant lost her life doing respite care for a brother-in-law, Matt, who had Alzheimer's and her nephew, Forrest, who had a severe mental illness. She agreed to stay with them one night while her sister Marie got some relief with another relative.

Forrest came from his bedroom in the middle of the night because he heard voices. He came upon someone with arms wrapped around his father and became alarmed. Betty had been trying to comfort Matt, who was disoriented and upset. Forrest hit her over the head with a Pyrex dish, then stabbed her numerous times with a kitchen knife. Forrest fled and Matt wandered the neighborhood mumbling about a dead woman in his house. Forrest was arrested the next day after showing up for an appointment at Lane County Mental Health. Investigators thought for a time they had a death penalty case, because Betty's purse was missing.

Dan struggled with anger at his mother for putting herself at risk with Forrest, who had previously struck her and who had also spent a decade in the state hospital for shooting a policeman. Dan felt guilt for not being forceful with his doubts about her decision. But he never believed Forrest should be condemned to death for the crime. "She loved Forrest and she wouldn't have wanted him executed," he said.

Even before becoming a minister, Dan believed capital punishment was wrong, philosophically and morally. "God works with persuasion (love), not force (capital punishment). Forgiveness is a natural companion to love. And while I have forgiven Forrest for taking my mother's life, I still have trouble forgiving him for deciding to quit taking his medications."



Photo: Greg Zurbrugg

Artwork: Betty Joy Bryant

“A few religious leaders met with Governor Kitzhaber two years before my mother was killed, asking him to commute the sentence of a death row inmate scheduled for execution. For the half hour we spoke to him, he didn’t say a word, but on his face, I could see the pain of his decision.”

Reid Noel, retired special education teacher



Photo: Greg Zurbrugg

“Over the years, I saw problems with the death penalty but also questioned whether, in some horrific cases, it may be justified. After hearing from Sister Helen Prejean, former prison superintendent Frank Thompson and other experts, I gained a clearer picture of the ineffectiveness, inequity, cost, and damage wrought by the death penalty.”

Reid's brother, Clint Allen Noel, was 25 years old when a Vietnam veteran stabbed him during an argument. At the hospital, Clint's chest wound was sutured but a perforation of his heart was detected too late. He coded, slipped into a coma and died weeks later.

Despite his unrepentant admission to the stabbing, Clint's assailant was not convicted. Miranda rights violations and efforts to disparage Clint played a role in the trial. Clint's hospital testimony was deemed inadmissible.

The trial was very hard on the entire family. Initially, Reid was filled with anger and wanted vengeance. Over time, his perspective began to shift. He realized justice wouldn't be served through revenge and that violence only leads to more violence. "Who knows what that veteran had been exposed to. Maybe PTSD triggered him," Reid said. He recognized endless appeals and executions are traumatic for many, including families of both victims and offenders.

Reid described Clint as friendly, caring and helpful. He loved kids, wrote poetry and was very artistic. In remembering Clint's kindness to others, Reid felt the best way to honor his brother was to embrace understanding and compassion.

Reid worked with people with disabilities for over 40 years, most of that as a special education teacher. In retirement, he has published a book of poetry.

The Clint Noel Trauma Foundation was founded in 1989 using funds from a settlement with the hospital. The Foundation provided grants for trauma medical training for many years. The family was also involved in legislative efforts that led to major innovations and improvements in how trauma care is provided in Oregon.

Randy Geer, retired Inmate Services Director

Lieutenant Robert Geer, age 42, died while on duty at Salem's maximum security prison. He was killed with an inmate's improvised knife. The dead man's son, Randy, was 21 at the time. He quit college and spiraled destructively for years, calling the sickness "a poverty of spirit."

Robert's widow died of the same poverty of spirit at age 55, after a dozen years of eroding mental and physical health. She could hardly go out in public for fear of that dreaded question: "How are you doing?"

"When Dad died, it seemed like grace and blessings were ripped from my life as if with pliers. Healing couldn't happen until blessings and grace were possible again and that took time," Randy said. Falling in love and having children helped, as did reading books by Loren Eiseley, Gary Snyder, and others. "They helped me discover what it's like to be human, and to step outside of my own experience."

Randy retired 31 years after taking a job as a correctional officer in the same institution as his father. During his tenure, he accompanied two convicted killers to the death chamber where they were executed. At one, he represented a family victim member; at the other, he provided emotional support for the man's attorney. For years, he managed the department's inmate services, providing the means for convicts to step outside their experience and find new appreciation in being human.

When Randy retired, inmates presented him with a hand-crafted, leather bound notebook filled with photos and writings. Carved into the cover was a favorite quote from poet John Donne: "No man is an island."



Photo: Greg Zurbrugg

"I have been very opposed to the death penalty for many years. It is too expensive and has shown no effect on lowering the incidence of capital crime. The death penalty does not provide 'closure.' Closure is a political idea promoted by those who seemingly want to bring the survivor some sort of relief. Neither the death penalty, nor the death of the perpetrator brings closure. The victim is no less dead. And the surviving family member is no less alone."

Becky O'Neil McBrayer, Director of Community Programs at St. Andre Bessette

Becky was raised with four brothers in Corbett, a small town nestled in the Columbia River Gorge. The five O'Neil kids ran together in the woods and played year-round sports. The youngest, Joey, showed increasingly erratic behavior as a young teen. "My family didn't know much about mental illness. We didn't really know how to help Joey, even though we were trying," Becky said.

Becky recalls nearly every detail of April 7, 2006. She and another brother went to check on their mother and stepfather, who had taken Joey in. They discovered their parents dead, each stabbed 17 times. Police later found Joey at a hospital, where he was taken after attempting suicide.

After losing her parents, Becky watched as prosecutors argued for Joey's execution. "My brothers and I were threatened or tempted (I'm not sure which) with the death penalty," she said. "One prosecutor told us our brother was exactly the kind of person the death penalty was designed for."

Becky opposed the death penalty while her brothers wanted vengeance. Now they think differently. "My brothers and I would have no opportunity for forgiveness or reconciliation with our brother if he were put to death." She appealed to the judge to spare Joey's life. He is currently serving a life sentence without possibility of parole after pleading guilty to two counts of aggravated murder, a sentence Becky and her brothers support.

Becky provides hospitality and basic services to people experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty at St. Andre Bessette Catholic Church. She continues to grieve for Joey. Becky recalls something Sister Helen Prejean said, "We are worth more than the worst thing we have ever done in our lives."



Photo: Nancy Hill

“There isn’t closure for murder family victims. Killing the killer doesn’t bring anybody back. It doesn’t solve anything. It protects no one. What it does do is create more victims.”

Joey’s prison sentence was resolution in terms of judicial justice. I still relive the experience every day, but I never have to step foot in a courtroom again. Let’s turn our attention to healing and growth. We can direct pain into meaningful activities, learn to smile again and love life again. Killing the killer won’t achieve any of those things. Let’s be one of the next states to say, ‘Not in our name.’”

A Thank You and an Invitation

Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty wishes to thank these family members for opening their hearts and sharing their thoughts about a tragic and painful experience. We are providing this collection of intimate, touching stories told by Oregonians who had the terrible experience of losing a loved one to murder in the hope that it will inspire others to support repeal of the death penalty.

Though each person's story is different in detail, common themes of coping, grieving and reconciling their loss are reminders of the long journey that surviving family members have taken and how important it is to embrace them with our most loving and compassionate responses.

Understand that not all family members express similar feelings about those who have killed their loved ones. Regardless of their stance on the death penalty, we need to support the family members of murder victims. Generally, they do not ask for or expect sympathy. Rather, they appreciate our acknowledgment that their loss can be felt by all of us, and our efforts to provide resources that support them through the most difficult times of their lives. Talk to them. Give them the empathy and understanding often missing at a time of great need. Silence only adds to the hurt.

What can we do?

Join with OADP to learn about, talk about and think about the death penalty as a failed public policy. Join our non-profit organization by going to www.oadp.org. We have no dues, but we have many ways you can join our storytellers and others committed to abolishing the death penalty.

Please share this booklet and its stories with others. Talk to family and friends about joining the OADP's "Million Conversations" project. Copies of this booklet and information about the project are available on the website.

We need a vote of the people to abolish the death penalty in Oregon. Join with OADP and help make that happen. Revenge and more violence are not the answer.

Ron Steiner, OADP Board Chair

Four Reasons to Oppose the Death Penalty

HARM TO VICTIM

- The death penalty traps victims' families in a decades-long cycle of uncertainty, court hearings, and waiting. In contrast, a sentence of life without parole is a swift and certain punishment that begins immediately and avoids the delays and media circus that come with a death sentence - allowing victims' families to move on rather than forcing them to endure years of waiting for an execution that may never come.
- By replacing the death penalty with life without parole, we could free up millions of dollars that could be redirected to programs that will actually help victims, such as compensation for lost income, grief counseling, and other much-needed services.

COST

- Study after study shows that the death penalty is significantly more expensive than life in prison without parole. Death penalty cases are expensive because of long court delays and the added protections that are constitutionally mandated when execution is on the table; trying to make the death penalty less expensive will only make the process even slower and increase the risk of executing an innocent person.
- Death penalty cases cost taxpayers far more than locking up prisoners for the rest of their lives, while providing no additional benefit to society. By replacing the death penalty with life without parole, we could free up millions of dollars that could be redirected to other public safety needs (solving cold cases, rape kits, etc.).

UNFAIRNESS

- Our criminal justice system should treat all people equally regardless of how much money they make, where they live, or the color of their skin. In reality, Oregon's death penalty is applied unevenly and unfairly, even for similar crimes. Some people are sentenced to die because they could not afford a better lawyer, or because they live in a county that seeks the death penalty a lot. A system that is so arbitrary should not be allowed to choose who lives and who dies.
- Oregon's death penalty isn't working. No one has been executed in more than 18 years, yet we continue to spend money on a death penalty that exists in name only. It's time to stop the waste on lawyers and special death row housing and replace the death penalty with life in prison with no possibility of parole.

INNOCENCE

- The execution of an innocent person is an intolerable injustice, and it can be avoided by condemning the worst of the worst to prison for the rest of their natural lives.
- Replacing the death penalty with life in prison without the possibility of parole means we'll never execute an innocent person. More than 159 people have been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death in the U.S., and some innocent people have even been executed.

Stand With Me

Don't speak to me of justice
For that which has been done
Our loss will be forever
Forever there will be none

Don't ask me to find solace
In the executioner's song
There is no peace in vengeance
No way to right the wrong

Just stand with me with empathy
Help me find a way
To live with loss and honor life
And make it through each day

Reid Noel

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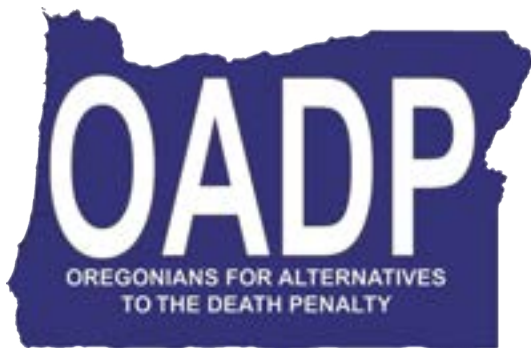
Written in honor of his brother after hearing Sister Prejean speak

“If we believe that murder is wrong and not admissible in our society, then it has to be wrong for everyone, not just individuals but governments as well.”

SISTER HELEN PREJEAN

“There is no justice in killing in the name of justice.”

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU



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