

# 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

Newsletter 6 • Spring /Summer 2008

## How the Death Penalty Harms Children in Cases of Domestic Violence

The four Syriani siblings were children when their father was sentenced to death for the murder of their mother. Ten-year-old John had witnessed the crime, and he and his older sisters testified against their father during the trial. They were afraid, and angry, and for years they didn't even refer to their father by name. "I hated my father for what he did, for taking our mother away from us," recalls Sarah, the second oldest.

By the Brook Films



Rose Syriani, standing with her siblings, answers reporters' questions after Elias Syriani's clemency hearing.

The years passed; the children grew up without a mother and with a father whom they never saw. Then in 2004, fourteen years after their mother's murder, the grown Syriani children decided to visit their father on North Carolina's death row, hoping to confront him, get some answers, and maybe

begin to come to terms with who he was and what had happened. To their surprise, they found that that visit was their first step toward reconciling with their father and fighting to stop his execution.

A new film by Linda Booker, *Love Lived on Death Row*, tells this family's story and, in doing so, introduces audiences simultaneously to the idea of victim opposition to the death penalty and to the effect of executions on surviving family members.

Through extensive interviews, the four Syriani children offer articulate and moving accounts of their own internal journeys. The film chronicles the children's effort to seek clemency for their father; we see them speaking out on television, making other public appearances, and finally being granted

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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

### Article 3

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## How the Death Penalty Harms Children in Cases of Domestic Violence *continued from page 1*

a personal meeting with the governor, during which they beg him to commute their father's death sentence to life without the possibility of parole so that they won't have to lose their only remaining parent just when they've found him again.

"I wanted to let him know how far we've come," Sarah says of the meeting. "And [to say] please don't take that away from us, don't bring us back to that dark place, because what we're doing is putting the pieces back together."

Despite the family's efforts and hopes, the governor refused to grant clemency, and Elias Syriani was executed in November 2005.

*Love Lived on Death Row* offers several perspectives on the harm that this execution caused. Toward the end of the film the children's attorney, Russell Sizemore, says, "The harm being inflicted on these children by this incredibly slow, deliberate government process was just horrific." At another point, Deborah Weissman, former chair of the North Carolina Commission on Domestic Violence, discusses the therapeutic value, for children in a domestic violence case, of reconnecting with the parent responsible for the violence. Deborah Weissman observes that for the Syriani children, this healing process was cut short by their father's execution, which "could not but help to harm them further."

Speaking for themselves, the Syrianis articulate the film's central question. Rose, the oldest of the four children, points out that "We're the ones who are living with this, not the governor ... nobody's thinking about *this* story." Her sister Sarah adds, "You have to think about the families that are going to be affected by the death penalty. They're the innocent ones. Why should they live the rest of their lives in agony?"

*A DVD of Love Lived on Death Row can be purchased with public screening rights for non-profit and educational use. Write info@lovelivedondeathrow.com, and for more information, visit www.lovelivedondeathrow.com*

# Images of MVFHR in Action

*These photos show a sampling of MVFHR work over the past few months*

MVFHR participated in the annual steering committee meeting of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, whose members come from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the United States



Scott Langley

MVFHR member Robert Meeropol spoke at an event commemorating the 80th anniversary of the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti



Scott Langley

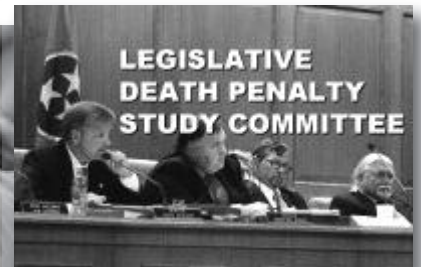


Photo courtesy of TCASK

In June, a Tennessee law created a Committee to Study the Death Penalty and stipulated that one of the 16 committee members be from MVFHR

Robert Curley was one of six victims' family members on an MVFHR panel that kicked off the day's testimony about a bill that would have reinstated the death penalty in Massachusetts



Abe Bonowitz

Backed by a row of victims' family members, MVFHR member Vicki Schieber testified before New Jersey lawmakers just before they voted to repeal the state's death penalty



Bud Welch and Toshi Kazama brought the MVFHR message to audiences at universities, churches, and community centers in Taiwan and Japan.



MVFHR members Aba Gayle and Bill Babbitt (not shown) participated in California's 800-mile Walk to Stop Executions



MVFHR was one of many organizations that signed the Resolution in Support of the Victims and Families at Virginia Tech. Jennifer Bishop-Jenkins represented MVFHR at the on-campus ceremony

## Speaking Out All Over

*Victims' voices against the death penalty are heard in a wide variety of venues and forums. Here's a sampling of excerpts from op-eds, letters, and testimony in recent months:*

**I**t is impossible to overstate the pain and rage that I felt when my son Scott was shot to death twenty years ago. Losing a child to murder is a singular horror that I would not wish on anyone. People say all kinds of things to grieving parents in the aftermath of a loss like mine. One of the most misguided is "The death penalty will give you closure." It's simply not true. I know it from my own experience and from the experiences of hundreds of family members of murder victims that I've come to know over the past twenty years. Having had my son's life taken from me, I find no sense of peace or healing in the idea of another life being taken, and least of all in the idea of a life being taken in Scott's name.

– WALT EVERETT, op-ed, *Pennsylvania Daily Item*

I had never thought much about the death penalty until the day the District Attorney asked me about it. I told him that I couldn't imagine what could bring me comfort or lessen my pain and despair, but I knew it wasn't that. I knew that another killing would not help me in my grief. I knew for myself, and I have since come to

see in the experience of other victims' families, that the death penalty would keep us frozen in a kind of psychological prison, waiting years for the promise of closure while the focus remained on the murderer rather than on the victim or on our own anguish as surviving family members.

– MARIE VERZULLI, statement at an MVFHR press conference urging the United Nations General Assembly to pass a resolution calling for a global moratorium on executions

As survivors with a direct stake in the death penalty debate, and as people who believe in the value of basic human rights principles, we join today in the call for a worldwide moratorium on executions.

The most basic of human rights, the right to life, is violated both by homicide and by execution. We call today for a consistent human rights ethic in response to violence: let us not respond to one human rights violation with another human rights violation. Let us recognize that justice for victims is not achieved by taking another life.

– MVFHR statement on World Day Against the Death Penalty

A serial killer ripped Deirdre away from us in 1982. My family had no idea, then, that our ordeal was just beginning. All we knew was that the worst of the worst had happened, and the person who did it should pay the ultimate

price – the death penalty. From 1982 until 1990 I lived day to day, appeal to appeal, decision to decision. We woke up every day wondering what might happen that day. Will there be another appeal? Another motion? What new decision might come down? The toll it took on me and my family was horrendous. ... Eight years of trials and retrials changed my mind about the death penalty. I learned the hard way that the death penalty is an albatross over the heads of victims' families.

– JIM O'BRIEN, op-ed, *New Jersey Daily Record*

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. But 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, testimony before the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice

On this 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sacco and Vanzetti's execution it is past time to realize that every execution creates more victims – the children and family members of those who are executed. It is past time to recognize the damage to Sacco and Vanzetti's families. And it is past time to realize that such

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“collateral damage” is yet another powerful reason to keep the death penalty out of Massachusetts, to abolish it nationwide and throughout the world.

– ROBERT MEEROPOL, *statement at an event organized by Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty*

I have struggled for years with my feelings on capital punishment. All the hatred and anger I felt as a result of my brother's murder was eating me up inside. Eventually, I found out my brother's murderer had died in prison. His death didn't make me feel any better, as I once thought it would. I realized that there are some wrongs that just can't be made right again.

– SHANE TRUETT, *op-ed, The Tennessean*

The death penalty offers a false promise of closure to victims' families, who are led to believe that an execution will bring relief. While families wait through the lengthy, roller-coaster appeals process, reliving our original pain again and again, the focus remains on the murderer rather than on the victims or on our own anguish as surviving family members. The death penalty is a distraction from victims' real needs, not a solution.

– RENNY CUSHING, *letter to the editor in newspapers in Missouri, North Carolina, and Ohio*

We'd known death, but not like this. I'd never been in favor of

the death penalty, but I wanted that man to hurt, the way he'd hurt [my daughter]. I wanted him to hurt the way I was hurting. But after a while I wanted to know who it was, what kind of a monster would do a thing like this. I learned a little bit about Ivan Simpson. ... [My wife] Susie and I both went to the District Attorney's office and he was quite upset when we told him that we did not want this man killed.

– HECTOR BLACK *on National Public Radio, through StoryCorps*

My family and I would have liked nothing better than to have Mohammed Atta and the other terrorists from Flight 11 brought to an open trial and given 92 life sentences; one sentence for each person aboard that flight. But they and the other terrorists also killed themselves on that day. What kind of a world do we want for future generations? For our children and grandchildren? We must stop the cycle of violence. We can see from the present course we are following that violence only begets more violence and killing only leads to more killing. It is possible to have justice without revenge and hate. Revenge is not the answer. The death penalty is not the answer.

– LORETTA FILIPOV, *testimony before Massachusetts lawmakers*

We don't know who killed our son; there's no name, no fingerprints, not even a clear description since it happened so fast in the dim light of evening. But we do know why he died. And we do know that the young man who

killed him was as much a product of our society as the gun he used. Having lost our only child to murder and having lived with that horror for 12 years, we deeply understand the heartbreak and even the rage of others who have experienced similar loss. We hear their cries for justice. We, too, want justice, but a justice that excludes vengeance, more killing — and more injustice.

– DERREL MYERS AND NAOMI WHITE, *op-ed, San Jose Mercury News*

We desperately miss the parents, children, siblings, and spouses we have lost. We live with the pain and heartbreak of their absence every day and would do anything to have them back. We have been touched by the criminal justice system in ways we never imagined and would never wish on anyone. Our experience compels us to speak out for change. Though we share different perspectives on the death penalty, every one of us agrees that New Jersey's capital punishment system doesn't work, and that our state is better off without it.

– Dozens of victims' family members in a joint letter to the New Jersey legislature

## “We’re Left to Wonder”: How Unsolved Murders Affect Victims’ Families

A year ago in *Article 3*, we wrote about a Colorado bill that would have repealed the state’s death penalty and diverted those funds to investigating the state’s backlog of unsolved murders. The thirteen victims’ family members who testified in support of the bill argued that solving cold cases was a greater priority for them, and ought to be a greater priority for the state, than carrying out the death penalty.

The problem of unsolved murders isn’t much discussed in anti-death penalty literature, perhaps because in such cases the fate of the offender is not yet in question. But an unsolved case is the reality for many victims’ families, and failing to consider their experience leads to an incomplete understanding of what victims’ families may go through in the aftermath of a murder.

U.S. Department of Justice statistics report that in 2005, 62.1% of murders nationwide were “cleared” (that is, resulted in an arrest). Although the Department notes that homicide has the highest clearance rate of all serious crimes, it’s obvious from this statistic that a lot of families are left with the wondering, the fear, and the anger that an unsolved murder engenders.

Several MVFHR members who are active in their opposition to the death penalty have relatives whose murders remain unsolved. Here, we look at how they have

been affected by that experience and how they see intersections between the issue of unsolved murders and the issue of the death penalty.

“I’ve always wondered about the person responsible,” says Delaware member Anne Coleman, whose daughter Frances was murdered in California in 1985. “I’ve wondered whether they carried on killing people or whether it was a



James Staub

one-time thing. Without knowing the story of what happened, we’re left to wonder how much pain was inflicted, and whether there was any sorrow, any remorse in the offender. I’d still like to see justice done, and I’d like to know why the crime was committed.”

Without a factual story, families like Anne’s are left to fill in the unknowns with their own theories about what might have happened. Tennessee member James Staub, who was 12 years old when his mother, Patricia Staub, was murdered in Georgia, found himself inventing all kinds of unlikely theories about who might be responsible – including the impossible idea that he had done it himself without being aware of it. The families

carry the idea of the murderer in their imaginations, never being able to fill in the abstract outline with real information.



Judy Kerr

Oregon member Liv Klassen was 11 years old when she came home from school and found the murdered body of her mother, Helen Klassen, in their home in Indiana. After almost four decades, Liv says she no longer really expects to learn who was responsible. A few years ago, reading about a grown daughter of a murder victim who had the opportunity to deliver a victim impact statement in court, Liv remembers envying that daughter’s chance to address the murderer directly. “I sometimes thought about what I would say to [my mother’s] murderer if I had a chance,” Liv says. “I would talk to the murderer in my head, as if in court, at his sentencing. Each time it came out a little differently, but I would always tell him how his supreme act of selfishness destroyed my mother, how he robbed her of everything, robbed us of her, how he blasted apart the worlds of everyone who loved her ...”

Liv also describes the fear that she and her sisters grew up feeling: “From that point on I would

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always have a sense of fear, and had three emergency escape routes choreographed in my head in case the murderer returned. I needed to blame someone – someone I could direct my anger towards. No one had been caught, and what seemed logical at the time was to blame God. ... Not having a real person to direct this overwhelming anger at, and knowing he was still out in the world, meant growing up in fear.”

Judy Kerr, the Victim Outreach Liaison for California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, was an adult when her brother, Robert, was murdered in Washington State five years ago, but she too understands the fear that an unsolved murder causes. “The thought of the murderer on the streets is terrifying,” Judy says. “I very much want to know what happened and I would like to know that public safety has been addressed.”

It’s hard for victims’ families not to view an unsolved murder as a failure of effort and an indication that solving this particular murder is not a high priority for the police or the state. Bonnita Spikes’s husband Michael was killed in 1994 during a robbery of a New York convenience store where he was a customer. “I thought the detectives did not put effort into bringing his killer to justice,” Bonnita recalls. “It sounds corny, but we were raised to believe and respect the law. I was angry and really harassed the detectives for years.”

Anne Coleman similarly



Anne Coleman

recalls, “It made me very, very angry that nothing was being done, or that four days [of investigation] was all that my daughter justified. My feeling is that if we can’t afford to solve cold cases, we can’t afford the death penalty.” James Staub echoes Anne’s point about priorities, saying, “Victims’ families want to know the truth, and if you can’t even do that for so many of us, you can’t afford the death penalty.” And Judy Kerr, in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, urged her district attorney to use funds earmarked for death penalty prosecutions to fund the investigations of the cold case unit instead. “Let’s get our priorities right,” Judy wrote.

California member Derrel Myers would like to know exactly who was responsible for the murder of his son JoJo in 1996, but even more than that, Derrel wants to see public safety in a larger sense addressed more comprehensively. “Our highest priority should be prevention,” he says. “How do we lessen the violence in our country, in our world? How can we lessen poverty, abuse, the con-

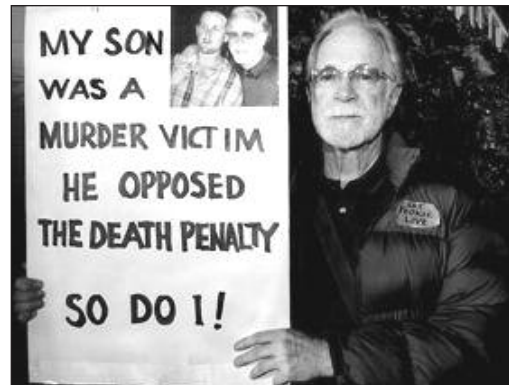
ditions that create violence? To me the unsolved crime is that we have a society that is at war with itself.”

Living without basic answers to questions about who was responsible for their loved one’s death and without a basic assurance that the killer is not still at large, families in unsolved murder cases demand a re-evaluation of priorities. They also offer a reminder that the question of how to punish the killer is not the only question in the aftermath of a murder. As much as these survivors wish they could know what happened and that the responsible person could be brought to justice, they also acknowledge that being deprived

of these opportunities has forced them to find a way to go forward that puts their own healing, rather than the

fate of the offender, at the center.

Says James Staub, “When you don’t have an offender to focus on, you have to figure out much more quickly what else to focus on.” That “what else” is at the heart of any victim-centered examination of homicide and its aftermath – how families find ways to heal from the trauma of murder, and what society can do to help.



Derrel Myers

## What We Need to Know: An Interview with Researcher Margaret Vandiver



Margaret Vandiver

*Margaret Vandiver, a criminology professor at the University of Memphis, has been studying the death penal-*

*ty for thirty years; one of her areas of interest is the effect of the death penalty on victims' families and families of the offenders. Article 3 spoke with Margaret Vandiver in February to explore some of our areas of common interest.*

*What do we know about the effect of executions on victims' family members?*

Let me quote from a book called *Capital Punishment: The Defining Issues for the Next Generation* (Charles S. Lanier, William J. Bowers, and James R. Acker, eds.; Carolina Academic Press, forthcoming), "The simple answer to the question, 'What research remains to be done on the effect of executions on victims' family members?' is: all of it."

We know so little. We have learned a lot in the last few years about the effect of homicide, but we haven't gotten a lot of good information

about the effects of the criminal justice system on victims' families, and we have even less on the effect of the death penalty. What we do have are anecdotal stories, which you will very often see in newspapers at the time of the execution, when a reporter sticks a pad or a microphone in the family member's face and says "How do you feel?" Not surprisingly, people often express a great deal of relief at the moment of the execution. What's not clear is, are they expressing relief that the offender has been executed or that they will no longer have to deal with the criminal justice system? Another thing we don't know is how long those feelings last, because nobody, to my knowledge, has gone back a year or several years later and asked, "How do you feel now?" What we need are longitudinal studies that can track opinion over time.

In asking about the effect of the death penalty on victims' families, we often forget that in 99% of cases, there is no death sentence or execution. The potential for the death penalty, however, influences families even in cases in which it is not imposed. Victims' families may feel that their case should have resulted in the death penalty, and they may feel cheated or overlooked or not given the full attention or respect of the system. So you can't just look at the cases

where the death sentence was imposed; you also have to look at the cases where it *could* have been but was not. It's a tough thing to try to do, from a research standpoint.

*And families are affected by the existence of the death penalty even just in the sense that others ask them what they think of it, and expect a particular answer.*

Yes. If you're in a jurisdiction without the death penalty, you hear, "If only we had the death penalty here, then you could get some relief." So one of the difficulties in doing this research is that you can't really separate abolition from non-abolition jurisdictions because of course people are aware that the death penalty exists in other states.

It would be very interesting to interview family members of homicide victims in jurisdictions that have been without the death penalty for a long time, like Canada or England, and see if people still express the sense that there should be a death penalty, or if it kind of falls off the horizon and people are no longer thinking in those terms and are simply hoping for long prison sentences. Maybe that has the same kind of emotional resonance as a statement about the death penalty would have here. But that's very hard to research because there are



so many cultural differences to factor in.

So, because so much is unknown, I think a lot of academics interested in the death penalty have begun to say, this is an enormous gap in our knowledge. We know a lot about the effect of the death penalty in terms of deterrence and incapacitation and we know a tremendous amount about the administration of the death penalty, including racial bias and lack of procedural fairness, but we don't know much about the effect on the victims' families. Its benefit to victims' families has been one of the major arguments used to defend the use of the death penalty – in rather ruthless ways – and we have not had the research to assess the validity of that argument.

*You've talked about the challenge of researching some particularly tough issues, like what happens when family members are divided on the issue of the death penalty.*

When I was a child, a family member was murdered. She was not someone I was close to, but she was extremely close to my mother; they were first cousins and had grown up together. Her murder was the sort of crime that could have resulted in the death penalty. My parents were absolutely against the death penalty and the victim's parents were for it. I sometimes think it's interesting that this happened before the victims' rights movement, because nobody asked us what we wanted, and it just was

not talked about in the family. We managed to get through it without it causing a major rift, but if it had been a capital case, I think my family would have split on the issue.

So, when you have members of the family who have different opinions, it leads you to the hideous quandary of whose opinions are most important. Is the mother's opinion more important than the wife's? Does a child count more than a parent? Who wins? And the word *win* is important because you do win or lose in the criminal justice system. I suppose families could split if some wanted life without parole and some wanted a lesser sentence, but I don't think the rift would be as severe, as intense. And I don't think it would lead to the same potential for discrimination, with the DA favoring the family members who wanted the more severe, as now happens sometimes when some members want the death penalty and some do not. All of this causes so much struggle, so much potential for conflict, so much additional pain.

*Another tough issue you raise is the fact that sometimes the murderer and the victim are members of the same family.*

I always think back to an old case in Florida. Ernest Dobbert was executed in 1984 for killing one of his children. He had horribly abused his surviving children, one of them was legally blinded, but the surviving children reconciled with

him before his execution and begged the governor not to execute him. "This family has suffered enough already," they said. Here these children have already been maimed, and have lost their sibling, and the government, in its wisdom, wants to execute their father. Governor Bob Graham refused clemency, carried out the execution, and said, "This will deter child abuse."

*What do you think are the sources of pressure on victims' families to support the death penalty?*

I think a lot of it is public pressure: this terrible thing has happened to you and now you will feel this particular way. So it's important to point out that victims are individuals and have the right to decide for themselves what they want rather than being lumped together into one group. And then some pressure comes from the criminal justice system, specifically. Your report, *Dignity Denied*, does such a good job of pointing out how victims' families who don't want the death penalty can be marginalized and even abused within that system.

People's opinions can change over time, as can perspectives and experiences. One of the biggest mistakes we make is looking at things at one time, in a freeze frame. If you look back and forward, things are more fluid, and more complicated, than they seem at first.

## Preventing Violence, Helping Victims

*Many MVFHR members, in addition to working against the death penalty, devote themselves to violence prevention work and to providing support, information, and practical assistance to victims and their families. Here's a summary of several violence prevention and victim support efforts of MVFHR members around the United States:*

**T**he Renee Olubunmi Rondeau Peace Foundation, which Gordon and Elaine Rondeau established after their daughter's 1994 murder, offers victims a combination of direct service, advocacy, and edu-



Gordon and Elaine Rondeau

cation. The Rondeaus have initiated public meetings called "Community Cares" events, held in a variety of venues around the city of Atlanta and attended by law enforcement officers, legislators, judges, district attorneys, victims, and leaders from domestic violence and child welfare groups.

After she lost her son Kirk to gun violence on the streets of Milwaukee in 2003, Debra Fifer joined with the mothers of the

two other young men who were killed along with Kirk that night and founded a group called **Mothers Against Gun Violence**, which is now the Wisconsin chapter of the Million Mom March. Debra and her colleagues work to garner support for the state legislation that would require criminal background checks to be conducted as part of private citizen gun sales.

**The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute**, which Tina

Chery founded after the 1993 murder of her son in Massachusetts, offers a peace curriculum and a training for teachers, and innovative programs like the "Across the Generations Circles," which bring together young men who have participated in violence and their mothers, and "Truth and Reconciliation Circles," which bring together survivors of homicide victims with young people and families whose loved ones have been incarcerated or deported as a result of violent actions.

Regina Hockett, whose daughter Adriane was killed in 1995, is now president of **Victorious Mothers of Murder**, which provides support groups, retreats, and one-on-one counseling to families in the Nashville area.



Tina Chery

Clemmie Greenlee, whose son Rodriguez was killed in 2003, now works as an organizer for the **Nashville Homeless Power Project** and as outreach coordinator for an effort called the **Peacemaker Campaign**, through which Clemmie works to connect with gang members in the community and create events that promote non-violent solutions to conflict.

Azim Khamisa founded **The Tariq Khamisa Foundation** after his son's 1995 murder. The TKF works to end youth violence through a

variety of programs, materials, and activities, including **The Violence Impact Forum** for

students in 4th-9th grades. Azim's partner in the effort is Ples Felix, the grandfather of the young man responsible for the murder of Azim's son.

Jennifer Bishop-Jenkins and Bill Jenkins are regular participants in the Cook County (Illinois) Juvenile Justice System's **Victim Impact Panels**, through which victims of violence speak to audiences of juvenile offenders about how violence and loss have affected their lives.



Azim Khamisa (right) and Ples Felix

## We Need You

Dear Friend,

I felt all of you with me the day I testified before New Jersey lawmakers and told them about my daughter Shannon's murder and my opposition to the death penalty. You were with me because whenever I speak out against the death penalty, I know I'm not doing it 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.

Senator Ray Lesniak, lead sponsor of the bill that abolished New Jersey's death penalty, said after that historic victory that the testimony of victims' family members was most effective in reaching lawmakers. I'm not surprised, because I see it all the time when I speak to groups around the country: victims' voices make a difference. Whether we're talking to lawmakers, newspaper editors, church groups, or student audiences, our message never loses its power.

At MVFHR, we've been spreading that message where it is urgently needed, in locales ranging from Tennessee, where a new death penalty study committee includes a member of MVFHR, to Tokyo, where the new MVFHR affiliate is growing and gaining support. Now we have the opportunity to break new ground with two exciting projects: developing training materials and workshops for other activists to learn about victim opposition to the death penalty, and collaborating with our colleagues in the mental illness community to publish a report about mental illness and the death penalty from the victims' perspective.

To do all this, we urgently need your support. We're a small organization with big hopes and big goals, and without financial help 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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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To donate with a credit card, please visit our website, [www.murdervictimsfamilies.org](http://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](http://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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