

Preface

Toward a New Vision of Justice for Victims of Crime

IN 1977, I SPENT A YEAR TEACHING SELF-DEFENSE to rape crisis counselors at Women Organized Against Rape in Philadelphia, one of the first rape crisis organizations in the country. Three times a week we turned a small meeting room into a dojo, and practiced techniques that often reminded the students of the assaults they had survived. On the mats, holding, throwing, and encouraging these women, most of whom had been raped or abused, I learned that some could not bear to have hands near their necks, some cried whenever they were on their backs, some couldn't control anger that erupted without warning.

I saw how traumatic and destructive the impact of violence can be. Despite the fact that these women wanted to end the secrecy and shame attached to sexual assault, most of them had told no one, not even each other, that they had been victims. One by one they identified fears and vulnerabilities and pushed through them. While these women understood that rape was not their fault, they did not want to be told they were safe, that it would never happen again. They wouldn't have believed me. They knew this was a guarantee no one could make. Instead, they wanted to do as much as they could to heal

their wounds, take control of their lives, and learn how to reduce the likelihood they would be raped again.

I wanted to help them get their lives back on track. I also knew that each of them deserved justice, something they all hoped to gain for the women and girls they spoke with on hotlines and saw in emergency rooms and courts every day, but something few of them could imagine for themselves.

This book was inspired by these women and countless other people who have been victims of crime. I have been a victim advocate, in one form or another, for over thirty years. In addition to teaching self-defense to rape crisis counselors, I have established shelters, emergency daycare, and detox programs for battered women, and have overseen the development of the New York City Police Department's policies on domestic violence and child abuse. I have mediated disputes involving victims who experienced a range of misdemeanors and felonies, and have counseled survivors of the September 11 attacks.

In every case, I came to a profoundly disturbing conclusion: While the trauma and harm experienced by many victims of crime is deep, debilitating, and long-lasting, our treatment of crime victims at every level—individual, community, and governmental—is ineffective, fragmented, and dismissive. This woefully inadequate response reinforces victims' sense of shame and isolation, and a misguided belief that recovery is a private matter.

Given the extent of the harm caused by crime, and the millions of walking wounded who live far less than happy and healthy lives, our collective failure to respond to their needs is a national disgrace. We understood better how to respond to the victims of the September 11 attacks. We rallied for them as soon as possible, offering emotional support and an unprecedented range of resources and assistance. But every year crime wreaks havoc on millions of Americans' lives, and we have yet to respond with comparable compassion and creativity.

Surely justice requires more than holding offenders accountable. Yet we minimize victims' pain and suffering, and pretend that criminal convictions are a sufficient balm. We ask crime victims to adjust,

to move on with their lives, or worse, to live in secrecy, and to individually manage what may be their greatest emotional, psychological, and financial needs, at a time when some assistance could make all the difference. We know the consequences of crime and violence. We know that crime destroys the sense of trust and safety that keeps people and communities healthy and thriving. But we don't connect the dots, and our failure to respond to victims of crime is a daily injustice.

During the seven and a half years I served as the executive director of the National Center for Victims of Crime, I began to imagine a separate pathway to justice for victims. I called this new framework Parallel Justice to emphasize that our obligations to victims exist apart from our separate commitments to hold offenders accountable. I imagined a world in which we articulated a set of principles that guided our interactions with victims. I imagined new ways for our criminal justice agencies, our healthcare and social service providers, our businesses, and our neighbors, to all contribute to justice for victims of crime.

Since 2000, when I received a wonderful invitation to showcase Parallel Justice at the National Press Club, I have had the opportunity to introduce this new concept at conferences all over the world. I'm pleased to say that the idea has begun to take hold in several communities. People in a wide variety of positions, including police chiefs, corrections officials, and victim advocates, have led Parallel Justice initiatives. From Vermont to California, and Germany to New Zealand, the idea that victims deserve justice, a communal commitment to keep them safe and help them rebuild their lives — regardless of whether an offender is ever identified or prosecuted — has been well received.

This book is for victims of crime, as well as victim advocates, criminal justice and social service practitioners, policymakers, academics, government and community-based leaders, and anyone else who wants to understand how we might achieve justice for victims of crime. I hope that the chapters that follow lead readers to two conclusions: First, that we have failed to provide justice to crime victims, and that this

failure has profound and lasting consequences for them, their families, and their communities; and second, that Parallel Justice offers a vision that can lead our country to a new reality in which victims of crime are afforded justice.

