

# 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 9 • Fall 2009/Winter 2010

## Changing One's Mind About the Death Penalty

**B**rian MacQuarrie's new book *The Ride: A Shocking Murder and a Bereaved Father's Journey from Rage to Redemption* tells the story of Robert Curley, whose 10-year-old son Jeffrey was murdered in Massachusetts in 1997. In the period after Jeffrey's murder, Bob became an outspoken advocate for bringing the death penalty back to Massachusetts. We spoke with Bob Curley this past August about the process of changing his mind on the issue.

*Why was the idea of the death penalty attractive to you in the time right after Jeffrey's murder?*

I knew that if we did get the death penalty reinstated in Massachusetts, it wouldn't apply to the men who killed Jeffrey, but I thought maybe if we had the death penalty, people would think twice before doing this kind of thing to some other child. My main thing was that I wanted to pre-

vent this from happening to someone else. And I think at some level, working for the death penalty offered me a kind of distraction from my own pain. It gave me something else to focus on, a goal, an idea that I might be able to do something good.



Photo by Scott Langley

Robert Curley testifies against reinstatement of the death penalty in Massachusetts, 2007

*About a year and a half after the murder, you were invited to be on a television show with Bud Welch, whose daughter had been killed in the Oklahoma City bombing. You knew Bud was against the death penalty. How did you feel about going on the show with him?*

I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if he would try to convince me to be against the death penalty. What I found was a regular guy like myself who had suffered a similar tragedy. By the time I went on that show, I had had a chance to take a step back and really start to mull it over. I wanted to put some distance

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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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### Article 3

Angela Mark & Red Sun Press  
Design and Production

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights  
2161 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge MA 02140 USA  
617-491-9600  
www.murdervictimsfamilies.org  
info@murdervictimsfamilies.org

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## Changing One's Mind About the Death Penalty

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between myself and the issue of the death penalty. But at the same time, the death penalty gave me a platform to speak out on the things I really wanted to speak about: child safety, violence prevention.

*So you were already starting to mull over the issue of the death penalty by then, even though no one knew it? Changing one's mind is really a gradual process.*

Right, there was no one profound moment. Meeting Bud had a big impact on me. And, as it says in the book, learning about Manny Babbitt's story. [Manny Babbitt, a Vietnam veter-

an, was facing execution in California at this time.] And the way I grew up – we were kind of poor, to be honest, and it dawned on me that I'm closer to the guy who gets wrongly executed than to the guy who can afford a dream team of lawyers.

There was a long period of time when I actually had changed my view on the death penalty and decided it wasn't right, but I didn't say that publicly. When people came up to me, the first thing they wanted to talk about was the death penalty, and I got tired of that and I stopped speaking out at all. But after a while I felt like a cow-

*continued on next page*

**W**hen I met Bob Curley on the cable television show, I felt that I had been through what he was going through. I knew what it was to be so angry that you wanted to see the killers dead. I've said many times that I understand why they make someone like Tim McVeigh wear a bullet-proof vest. In those days right after Julie was killed, I was so full of rage that I not only wanted McVeigh executed, I would have done it with my bare hands.

I think sometimes when the anti-death penalty movement tells the stories of victims' families who oppose the death penalty, there isn't enough attention given

to the anger that we have felt. It's normal to feel that way, and it's not like people who have gotten through it are better than people who haven't. I was finally able to dump that desire for revenge. I was able to realize that the death penalty wouldn't give me what I needed. But we have to give ourselves time.

I didn't try to make Bob feel bad, and I didn't try to pressure him to change his mind. I let him know that I understood what he was going through, and he came to change his mind in his own way and his own time.

– Bud Welch

*continued from page 2*

ard; I felt like I wasn't being honest. I said, "That's it; I'm not going to be a phony. I'm going to say what I feel, and if people don't like it ..."

*After you gave that amazing speech in 2001, when you explained publicly that you had changed your mind about the death penalty, you could have stopped – now people knew how you felt. What made you decide to keep actively speaking about the death penalty, testifying when there was a reinstatement bill in Massachusetts in 2007, for example?*

I feel like I have a perspective that most people don't have regarding the death penalty, and I have a voice, so I should use it.

*What do you think victims' families actually need? What helps?*

I wish there was one formula you could come up with for how to heal, but the best advice I ever got was, "Jaynes and Sicari killed Jeffrey; don't let them kill you." You can't be afraid to move forward. It's OK to be OK – you want to live your life and try to remember your loved one in a dignified way by living your life and carrying their spirit forward.

I originally supported the death penalty because I wanted to prevent something like this from happening again, and that's still what motivates me today – like other victims' families I know who are working for child safety and violence prevention, trying to make the world a better place.

*Oregon MVFHR member Aba Gayle's 19-year-old daughter Catherine was shot and killed in California in 1980. Douglas Mickey was convicted of the murder and sentenced to death; he is currently on death row in California.*

*Aba Gayle has spoken out against the death penalty in a variety of venues throughout the U.S. and Europe, but initially, after her daughter's murder, she was a supporter of the death penalty. She says:*

**T**he 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. A number of factors contributed to my clinging to this assurance that the death penalty would be healing for me. At the time, I had no religious affiliation or spiritual belief system, and no community of people to guide me through the grieving process. In fact, I didn't know that there *was* a process; I thought it would never get any better than it was right at the start.

The DA was the only one who seemed to want to talk to me about Catherine's murder. I went to a psychiatrist that a friend recommended, and he was a good guy but he said, "I've never experienced anything like this and I have no idea what to tell you."

Since that time, there has been a great deal of improvement: more people are trained to counsel survivors, and there are support groups with others who have had the same experience, and victims' compensation laws through which the state pays for counseling. But in 1980, it was a desert.

I wish the psychiatrist had known to say to me, "It's normal to cry so much you can't function. It's normal to be so angry you can barely breathe." I don't think we talk about the anger enough; victims' families need to know that the anger is OK, that we have to go through it.

It was expected by everyone that I would want the death penalty. Not a single person ever sat down and talked with me about other options. I remember that at the sentencing, it seemed to me that so few people were there. There was one member of the jury present, the DA, the sheriff who was in charge of the case, a psychiatrist who testified for the prosecution, and my husband and me. I was in favor of the death penalty, but I remember thinking, "Wow, they're going to give someone a judgment of death and no one cares."

Looking back, I think that was my first inkling that there was something wrong with this picture. Afterward, the DA wanted me to go have lunch with him and celebrate, but to me it didn't seem like a moment to celebrate. I was very shaken, and still grieving.

The process of changing my mind about the death penalty, and forgiving the person responsible for Catherine's murder, did not start for eight years and then took me another four years. The healing process takes as long as it takes. People are very vulnerable in the throes of grief, and when you're in that state, if a DA is looking for the death penalty and holds out the promise that this is what will help, it can be very hard to resist.

## Parallel Justice: An Interview with Susan Herman



*Susan Herman was Executive Director of the National Center for Victims of Crime from 1997-*

*2004 and is now an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Pace University in New York. She is recognized internationally for her work on behalf of crime victims and specifically for the new paradigm that she has termed "parallel justice." We spoke with Susan Herman by telephone in August.*



*You have written that the concept of parallel justice separates justice for victims from justice for offenders. Specifically, you've said, "When we consider justice for victims, we must always begin and end by asking what victims need to rebuild their lives and what society owes them. We should not start with the criminal justice system as our point of reference." Can you say more about that interesting distinction?*

The traditional vision of justice is focused on the offender: identifying, prosecuting, convicting, sentencing, and, if possible, reintegrating offenders into society. To the extent that we think of the victim at all, we usually think that if the offender was identified, convicted and appropriately sentenced, then the victim got justice.

I think that's problematic for several reasons. First, only half of the total number of victims of crime ever report to the police. Of those reports, only 20 percent result in an arrest. Even fewer than that end in a conviction. So to rely solely on the criminal justice system as a way to provide jus-

tice for victims will exclude most victims.

Second, the criminal justice system simply isn't designed to deal with the needs and concerns of victims. It's designed to prosecute offenders. Even when there is a conviction, many victims feel that something's missing. They may be asked to provide testimony as needed, but they're not there to talk about what they need to move forward. Their needs and concerns in the aftermath of the crime are rarely addressed.

So, while victims absolutely deserve a good and respectful experience within the criminal justice system, I think we need to go beyond that to ask, "What do victims need, how can we as a society acknowledge that what happened to them was wrong, and how can we help them?"

*What are some of the kinds of needs you're thinking of?*

There are so many possible examples depending on the nature of the crime, but suppose a survivor of a homicide victim has lost the sole breadwinner in the family, has never worked before, and now needs help with job training and financial planning. The criminal justice system is not designed to help with this, or with the many other short and long-term needs that a victim may have.

*In a parallel justice paradigm, how might those kinds of needs get addressed?*

If we honored a societal obligation to help victims rebuild their lives, if we said that that is an essential ingredient of justice, then I think we would

start to redesign our response to crime so that there would be one path to justice that is offender-oriented, where we hold offenders accountable, and another path to justice that is designed to help victims get back on track and reintegrate them into productive community life.

The reason I call this parallel justice is that I wanted to emphasize that there should be a set of responses to victims that are independent of and can be contemporaneous with the criminal justice response. The prosecution may be happening but at the same time that victim should be given a range of services that have nothing to do with how the prosecution is going. Victims shouldn't have to feel like their access to services is contingent on whether the offender is identified or the prosecution is successful. And assistance certainly shouldn't end when a trial is over.

These two paths can interact with each other: victims can testify in court, victims should have participatory rights, there should be an option for victim-offender dialogue. But at the same time, the separate path to justice for victims should have victim-oriented objectives that have to do with providing safety, helping victims recover from the trauma of the crime, and helping them regain control over their lives.

That might mean making special allowances for victims and giving them priority access to certain kinds of help. And I don't think it should be solely the responsibility of offenders through fines and penalties to pay for everything victims need. There's some-



thing wrong when every aspect of our criminal justice system is paid for by the public *except* for assistance to victims. It's fine to have offenders contribute, but I think helping victims rebuild their lives is a societal obligation.

*Right now, some victims seem to try - or are encouraged to try - to get some of these needs met through the criminal justice system. You hear things like, "Testifying will be helpful to your healing process."*

In fact some victims do find that kind of participation helpful. Some don't. I think the point is that no one is offering anything else, and the criminal justice process ought not to be all that is available.

*This has come up in some of our members' reflections on delivering victim impact statements. One member wrote about how much she wanted to be able to receive recognition, in an official forum, for what had happened, and making an impact statement offered that. It's interesting to speculate about how society might provide that opportunity apart from the criminal justice proceedings.*

I believe that victims do need a forum, an opportunity to explain what happened to them and what their needs are, and in turn we need to respond with official acknowledgment – and that means a government official saying “What happened to you is wrong and we're going to do everything we can to assist you.”

I believe in restorative justice practices like victim-offender dialogues for those who want them, but I think they are limited in that many needs can't be met by offenders. You may get more information about the crime,

you might see an expression of remorse or hear an apology, and through larger convenings you might get more support from your local community. Many victims value these things highly, and they should be available. But I don't want to let the government off the hook. I believe that the government has a responsibility to provide justice to victims. An official acknowledgment from the government followed by assistance is very meaningful.

I think these forums should operate at two levels. At the immediate-response level, I think criminal justice officials and health care and social service providers should be listening to victims, giving this message of acknowledgment and doing everything they can to help victims. And then at the level of trying to create systemic change, I think a good model is the Parallel Justice Commission that Burlington, Vermont has created. This Commission has state and local officials, as well as some non-profit leaders. Commissioners listen to victims and, on that basis, first consider how to improve the city's response to those individual victims, and then determine how to alter policies and practices to benefit all victims.

*You mentioned earlier that victims do of course deserve respectful treatment within the criminal justice system. At MVFHR we've talked about the problems that can arise when a victim disagrees with the prosecutor's goal – in seeking the death penalty, for example.*

We passed hundreds and thousands of victims' rights laws at the state and federal level and somehow forgot enforcement mechanisms; victims' rights to be notified of proceed-

ings, to be present, and to be heard, are really enforced right now almost exclusively through the good graces of prosecutors.

An important principle of parallel justice is that victims' rights should be enforced. I think there is a horrible kind of cynicism and alienation from the government when victims discover that they have these rights, but that they are not being enforced, whether it's because of victims' views about the death penalty, or because of any other inappropriate reason.

*Burlington is one community that has actually been able to put the idea of parallel justice into practice. Over the years, what kinds of responses have you gotten as you've spoken about the concept?*

I find that most people are unsatisfied with our current system of justice, and frustrated about the lack of response to victims. When I speak about parallel justice, I provide a new framework for how government and communities can work together to help victims rebuild their lives. Most people appreciate that there are very real, concrete ways every sector of society can join parallel justice initiatives.

I've just finished writing a book about parallel justice, which will be published by the National Center for Victims of Crime by the end of the year. It's for victims of crime and anyone who interacts with victims. My hope is that the principles of parallel justice will inform our national conversation about crime and justice, enhance public safety, and promote justice for all individuals and communities harmed by crime.

## Crime Victims Equality Act Passes in NH

One of the pieces of legislation that MVFHR Executive Director Renny Cushing sponsored during his recent term as a New Hampshire state representative was the Crime Victims Equality Act, which provides that crime victims shall be treated equally under the law regardless of their position on the death penalty. Specifically, the bill ensures "The right to all federal and state constitutional rights guaranteed to all victims of crime on an equal basis, and notwithstanding the provisions of any laws on capital punishment, the right not to be discriminated against or have their rights as a victim denied, diminished, expanded, or enhanced on the basis of the victim's support for, opposition to, or neutrality on the death penalty."

The idea for this bill - the first of its kind in the United States to become law - took hold in Renny's mind a decade ago, when he began encountering victims whose rights were denied because of their opposition to the death penalty.

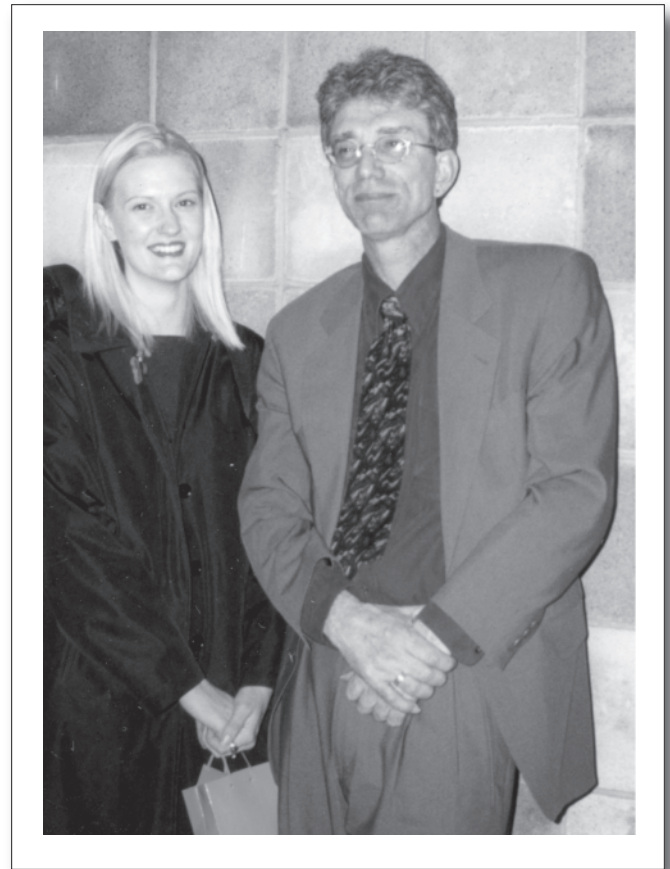
"I had supported victims' rights and victims' compensation legislation in my state," Renny remembers, "but it wasn't until I started working against the death penalty that I realized there was also a need for another kind of victims' law. I worked directly with some families - and heard stories about others - who were denied the right to speak, or to get information, or to receive assistance from the court-appointed victims' advocate, because they were against the death penalty. I realized

there was a need for laws that ban this kind of discrimination. It seemed that if you were opposed to the death penalty, you were, in some eyes, forfeiting your identity as a crime victim."

Gus and Audrey Lamm's case was one particularly explicit example of victims being denied their rights and their identity as victims under the law. Gus's wife, Victoria Zessin, had been murdered in 1980, when their daughter Audrey was only 2. Randy Reeves was convicted of the murders of Vicki and her friend Janet Mesner and was sentenced to death.

Years later, when the state Pardon Board was considering Reeves's request for a commutation of his death sentence, three victims' family members asked to present testimony but only one was allowed to do so - Victoria's sister, who supported the death sentence.

"I remember that as I stood up to speak, all I was told was that I was not allowed to speak," says Gus now. "I was told to sit back down. The Attorney General read the letter from Vicki's sister saying that she supported the death penalty."



Audrey and Gus Lamm

Gus and Audrey were stunned and upset but were determined not to accept the situation without protest. "When I was told I couldn't speak, I started speaking!" Gus explains. In the years since his wife's murder, he had dealt with the experience privately and focused on raising their young daughter. But when he learned that the execution was pending, he had felt he had to speak out, and being denied that right in the context of the Pardon Board hearing only increased his sense of outrage.

"I felt that what was happening didn't have anything to do with justice, it had to do with politics," he

says, "and I knew that if this execution took place, more people would be traumatized, most especially Randy's parents. I just wanted to stop the suffering. And I knew that I was only one of many people who had experienced this."

Gus filed suit against the Nebraska Pardon Board, charging that he and his daughter Audrey had been unfairly denied the right to be heard at a commutation proceeding (one of the rights enumerated in the state's victims' rights law). The judge ruled that because they wanted to speak in opposition to the perpetrator's death sentence, Gus and Audrey were "not victims, as that term is commonly understood."

"It was like they were able to pick and choose who was a victim and who wasn't," Gus recalls now. "It was an attempt to marginalize us and even to negate us entirely: as though, because we opposed the death penalty, we could only be 'agents of Randy Reeves' – that was the term the judge used – and not relatives of the murder victim, who had a right to testify at the pardon board hearing just like the other relatives."

Gus recognizes that his case is one of those that gave rise to the Crime Victims Equality Act that just passed in New Hampshire. "The

passage of the bill is wonderful," Gus says. "People are generally unfamiliar with discrimination against victims' families who oppose the death penalty, it's rarely talked about, so this legislation shines a light on the issue."

### STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

*In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Nine*

AN ACT relative to equality of treatment of victims of crime.

*Be it Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court convened:*

312:1 New Subparagraph; Rights of Crime Victims. Amend RSA 21-M:8-k, II by inserting after subparagraph (t) the following new subparagraph:

(u) The right to all federal and state constitutional rights guaranteed to all victims of crime on an equal basis, and notwithstanding the provisions of any laws on capital punishment, the right not to be discriminated against or have their rights as a victim denied, diminished, expanded, or enhanced on the basis of the victim's support for, opposition to, or neutrality on the death penalty.

312:2 Effective Date. This act shall take effect 60 days after its passage.

Approved: August 7, 2009

Effective Date: October 6, 2009

Renny agrees that the CVEA can be a vehicle for drawing attention to the discrimination that occurs. "It struck lawmakers in New Hampshire when they learned that this was not about one isolated example. I was able to describe many different kinds of stories that I had learned about over the years that all pointed to the need for this legislation."

Rather than singling out one group, the law is worded so as to

ban discrimination against any victims on the basis of their position on the death penalty. "It's a matter of equality," Renny explains. "We can't allow there to be hierarchies of victims. The legislation is about the right of everybody to hold their own

position on the death penalty and not be denied victims' rights because of it."

In New Hampshire, the CVEA received support from a range of groups, including members of law enforcement and victims' advocates. "For people who are on the front lines of victims' services," Renny says, "a law like this allows them to provide support to all victims, even those who take a different position from the one the state may be taking."

The bill is also a good vehicle for both supporters and opponents of the death penalty to come together in favor of upholding victims' rights. "Victims' rights

laws are supposed to protect victims from being re-victimized by the criminal justice process," says Renny, "and that ought to be something that everyone can support."

## MVFHR in Action

### *A sampling of MVFHR's work in recent months*

#### **Giving testimony**

MVFHR member testimony combines an anti-death penalty message with a focus on what victims' families truly need in the aftermath of a murder. Testifying in support of a death penalty repeal bill in New Hampshire this past April, Bess Klassen-Landis said, "When a horrible crime is committed, society is left with two big jobs: First, to find a way to help lessen the pain, fear, and loss of the victim family members, to help them regain a sense of safety, normalcy and peace in their lives. To provide them counseling, support groups, financial support, whatever it is that they need. And second, to figure out what to do with the murderer/how to keep society safe. Our society errs when we try to address both of these issues with one action, the death penalty."

In recent months, MVFHR members have delivered anti-death penalty, pro-victim testimony before lawmakers in Colorado, Connecticut, and (as just mentioned) New Hampshire, and members have participated in public education events in these states and many others around the U.S.

In June, we worked with Death Penalty Focus and the ACLU of Northern California to provide testimony from MVFHR board members on the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's proposed regulations on lethal injection procedures. Here are brief excerpts

showing the range of issues that MVFHR testimony addressed:

the cost of implementing the regulations ("I am concerned that the full fiscal impact of California's proposed lethal injection regulations is not being calculated or disclosed" – Vicki Schieber); the effect on families of those being executed ("I am concerned that the families of those facing execution are singled out in the regulations for disparate second class treatment" – Robert Meeropol, and "Families of the executed are innocent people going through an intensely traumatic experience and ought to be treated as such" – Bill Babbitt); media access ("I am concerned that the proposed lethal injection regulations in California limit the media's access more than is necessary, and so deprive all of us of the right to know exactly what is being done in our names" – Bud Welch); religious freedom ("As a United Methodist Minister, I am concerned that these proposed regulations deny a condemned inmate full access to their chosen religious advisors at a time when an individual is arguably most in need of this kind of support" – Walt Everett); the rights of prisoners with mental disabilities ("The proposed regulations do not provide an inmate's attorneys with any opportunity to contest a sanity finding that may be made just prior to the pending execution" – Renny Cushing).

#### **Double Tragedies report released**

At the annual convention of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in early July, we released the report *Double Tragedies: Victims Speak*



Photo by Michael Ciesielski

Amanda Wilcox speaking at the NAMI convention.

*Out on the Death Penalty for People with Severe Mental Illness.* This report represents a major focus of our work over the past months, and is based on inter-

views with families of victims killed by people with severe mental illness and families of people with severe mental illness who have been executed. Since its release we have been working with a variety of colleague organizations to distribute the report to lawmakers, mental health advocates, members of law enforcement, attorneys, and others.

Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty director Kristin Houle, who has worked extensively on the issue of mental illness and the death penalty, says, "With its focus on victims' notions of accountability and justice, *Double Tragedies* offers a critical new perspective on the intersection of mental illness and the death



Photo by Michael Ciesielski



The "Prevention, Not Execution" panel at the NAMI convention: (left to right) Ron Honberg, Joe Bruce, Carla Jacobs, Nick Wilcox, Amanda Wilcox, Renny Cushing, Susannah Sheffer, Bill Babbitt.

penalty. This report represents a tremendous contribution to the dialogue about our nation's mounting mental health crisis and the consequences of inaction."

At the NAMI convention, we presented a panel with some of the family members featured in the report: Amanda and Nick Wilcox, Carla Jacobs, Bill Babbitt, and Joe Bruce, joined by Ron Honberg, NAMI's Director of Policy and Legal Affairs, and Renny Cushing, MVFHR's Executive Director, and moderated by the report's author Susannah Sheffer. Response to the panel was very positive; several audience members told us afterward that they supported the death penalty when they arrived at the presentation and had changed their minds by the time they left.

We have very much appreciated the chance to collaborate with NAMI on this project and to reach both new members and new audiences.

**Toward Worldwide Abolition**

In June, Toshi Kazama spent three weeks in Japan, where he gave

several public presentations, met with members of Ocean (MVFHR's Japanese affiliate) and with new victim's family members, and worked with local and national organizers to plan an

MVFHR speaking tour in Japan in 2010. A meeting of Ocean's board of directors was filmed by the Japanese public broadcasting station, and public presentations at universities and other venues received very positive media coverage.

Toshi says, "When I give these presentations, I think many members of the audience arrive feeling that they are in favor of the death

penalty and then have that belief challenged. Even the people who have helped to organize the events, and who are already opposed to the death penalty, tell me that they need to keep hearing it again and again, because they learn something and think something new each time."

Renny Cushing represented MVFHR, and also served as the only representative from the United States, at a seminar titled "Towards a universal moratorium on the death penalty: The case of Arab Countries," held in Madrid in July. The seminar was a joint project of the Human Rights Office of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Casa Arabe, a Spanish institution that promotes analysis and research on Arab and Islamic countries.

Our work was featured in the March issue of the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) newsletter, and in June Renny Cushing represented MVFHR at the

General Assembly meeting of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty in Rome. We are working closely with the World Coalition to plan sessions of the Fourth World Congress Against the Death Penalty, to be held in Geneva, Switzerland next February.



Toshi Kazama (left) at Doshisha University with Masaharu Harada (founder of Ocean) and Kenichi Asano (member of Ocean's board)

## Victim Opposition to the Death Penalty in the News

*A recent sampling of words from or about victims' families in articles and opinion pieces*

*From the Hartford (CT) Courant, 5/23/09:*

Anne Stone of Farmington, whose son, Ralph, was murdered in Washington, D.C., in 1997, echoed a theme shared by the families when she said that capital trials and the seemingly endless appeal process provide no closure to the survivors, even if an execution were to take place. [Victim's family member Gail] Canzano, who works with trauma victims, said that the death penalty offers false hope to people at a time when they are experiencing crushing grief.

"There is no trauma like murder and no grief like homicide grief," said Canzano. "But we err as a society if we believe ... the death penalty helps the survivors."

She said that capital punishment appears to promise "that something will be made right, but truth be told, this is something that can never be rectified no matter what we do. The notion of balancing the scales is ludicrous – it simply doesn't happen."

*From the Palm Beach (FL) Post, 5/22/09:*

Little has been done to study the effect of an execution on an inmate's children, but some say the combination of the loss of the parent, shame about the crime for which he or she is convicted, and conflicted feelings about the government often come together to inflict deep emotional and psychological trauma that follows them into adulthood.

... For Misty McWee of South Carolina, the death sentence and 2004 execution of her father, Jerry, fueled a downward spiral that included years of drug and alcohol abuse, a violent marriage and a suicide attempt. She was 14 and living with her father, a former police officer, when he was charged in the murder of a convenience store clerk in 1991. She was 28 when he was executed. Now in her early 30s, McWee says she is just now regrouping from the toll of her father's execution.

*From the Portland (ME) Press-Herald, 7/6/09:*

Few people can understand the anguish that Joe Bruce has felt, not only over the murder of his wife, Amy, but also the knowledge that his son William was the killer. ... Now Joe Bruce is part of a new effort in which relatives of murder victims are joining forces with families of mentally ill people who have killed and been executed. Their goal: to oppose the death penalty in such cases in favor of better access to treatment.

*From the Pennsylvania Daily Item, 3/22/09:*

[op-ed by Walt Everett:] On March 18, Gov. Bill Richardson, of New Mexico, signed into law a bill that abolishes the death penalty in that state. Importantly, the repeal package, which includes other bills currently working their way through the New Mexico Legislature, places

emphasis where it belongs: on murder victims' families.

When my 24-year-old son, Scott, was murdered in 1987, I was devastated. Losing a loved one to murder tears apart the lives of victims' family members. There are no easy answers. But I know that government policy must be redirected to programs that help those victims' family members heal. ...

*From the Stockton (CA) Record, 7/1/09:*

One by one, a line of capital punishment opponents stepped up to a podium Tuesday, making impassioned arguments against California's newly proposed lethal injection procedure. ... Much of Tuesday's hearing focused not on the procedure but on the emotional effect of capital punishment. It drew comments from foreign governments and speakers from hundreds of miles away.

Bill Babbitt of Sacramento described watching the 1999 execution of his brother, who, having returned home from the Vietnam War with mental illness, murdered an elderly woman during a flashback. As a relative of an executed inmate, Babbitt said he was treated like a second-class citizen. He wants to make sure others like him – including the relatives of murder victims – don't endure the same pain. "Killing is wrong," he said. "There's nothing healthy about watching a perpetrator die."

## Help Us Reach New Audiences!

Sometimes we just *know* we're reaching our audience. When MVFHR members spoke to a packed room at the National Alliance on Mental Illness convention this past July, I could see right away what a powerful effect the stories were having. Tears filled the eyes of many of the audience members from the very first moments of the presentation. In the weeks following the event, email after email arrived in our mailboxes telling us that we had made an impact.



Photo by Scott Langley

I'll tell you what made these responses especially gratifying. They came from listeners who had never before heard victims speak out against the death penalty. They told us that we had created a space in which it was possible to evaluate the issue of the death penalty in a new way. "I now must admit that I was wrong for supporting the death penalty," wrote one. "Execution is not the only way to protect the public; in fact it creates ever more harm to a very bad situation."

In our work at MVFHR, it's critically important to us to find ways to expand our reach and to enter into new discussions and new collaborations. We want to get our message out to people who aren't already familiar with our stories and our ideas about policy change. We want to show that it's possible to be both anti-death penalty and pro-victim. In the United States and around the world, we want to join with others who care, as we do, about preventing further violence, and who see opposition to the death penalty as inextricably linked to working to help victims.

But to achieve this tremendous dream, we urgently need your support. Financial contributions from our members and friends help us keep coming up with new initiatives and new approaches to the work that we all care about so deeply. Won't you please help us to raise an additional \$5,000 now so that we can continue to reach out to new audiences?

Please help by completing the form below or the enclosed return envelope and sending us your check today.

In gratitude and solidarity,

Renny Cushing  
Executive Director

**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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## One of the top 50 Human Rights Blogs!



In January, e-justice selected MVFHR's blog, "For Victims, Against the Death Penalty," as one of the top 50 human rights blogs. Come visit us at <http://www.mvfhr.blogspot.com> for news, updates, stories, and statements from families of murder victims and families of the executed throughout the United States and around the world. Checking the blog regularly will let you

know how MVFHR and its members are making a difference week after week – and be sure to browse the archives, too!