

In Solidarity

The Newsletter of the Coalition of Arizonans to Abolish the Death Penalty

www.azabolitionist.org ~ P.O. Box 42465 ~ Tucson, Arizona 85733

Tucson Education Committee Brings Award-Winning Film to The Loft on October 20

Laura Conover, Chair, Tucson Education Committee

What would you do if you discovered that 13 people slated for execution had been found innocent? Picture this: you are the governor of Illinois, and you alone are left with the decision of whether the remaining 167 inmates on your state's death row live or die. Do you dare bring the system to a standstill? The film *Deadline*, an official 2004 Sundance selection, documents the gripping tale of Governor Ryan's final days in office. The Tucson Education Committee of CAADP is delighted to announce the Tucson premiere of *Deadline* at The Loft this coming October 20th at 7 p.m., with a panel discussion immediately following.

Arrangements have been made with The Loft and with Big Mouth Productions, the filmmakers of *Deadline*, but some details remain in the works for this exciting program. If you haven't had an opportunity lately to put into action your passion for the abolition movement, this is the time. CAADP member

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Letter from the President

Dennis Seavers, President, CAADP Steering Committee



At its August 29, 2005, meeting, the CAADP Steering Committee elected me as its president. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to *In Solidarity's* readers.

I have been a member of CAADP since shortly after I moved to Arizona in September 2000. I succeeded Ron Prince as administrator of the Web site, a role I still fulfill, and joined the Steering Committee soon afterward. For the past two years, I have been Vice President.

Apart from my involvement in CAADP, I am Executive Director for the Arizona Board of Fingerprinting, a position I was appointed to in January 2003. I also devote a substantial amount of time to the labor movement as an officer in the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Before moving

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Tucson Education Committee Film at The Loft, continued from previous page

Michael Moore is engineering the design of the publicity for the premiere, and Claudia Ellquist is working to produce a literature booklet for the evening. Sponsors are being sought to place their business card or other advertisement within the booklet; if you know anyone who might be interested, please pass on the information to the committee (see e-mail address below).

This is not an event to be missed. Though we are meant to already know the outcome of the story of Illinois' criminal justice system, *Deadline* manages to keep you on the edge of your seat until the ultimate moment. You'll find yourself filled with questions, ideas, and inspiration after watching this provocative film, and we anticipate a dynamic panel ready to engage in discussion.

To volunteer, offer advice, or gain more information, please contact the Tucson Education Committee through e-mail at education_tucson@azabolitionist.org. For more information on the film, you may visit www.deadlinethemovie.com, but I recommend attending and watching the events unfold before your very eyes. You won't be disappointed.



Letter from the President, continued from previous page

to Arizona, I was a seminarian for the Diocese of Charlotte and studied theology at The Catholic University of America. I was also assigned as a chaplain at the Washington, D.C., Commission on Mental Health Services, St. Elizabeths (*sic*) Hospital, where I offered pastoral counseling to individuals with mental illnesses.

Publication of *In Solidarity* has been on hiatus, yielding to the competing, various demands that an election year brings, particularly for a membership that largely consists of political activists. As you will see, however, CAADP's death penalty activism has retained its vigor and vitality, visible in past accomplishments and upcoming activities and captured in these pages.

I invite readers to enjoy the diversity that you will find in these pages. All authors, like all CAADP members, share a common commitment to ending the death penalty. But that commonality does not preclude diversity in opinion or style. Feel free to write to the Editorial Committee at publications@azabolitionist.org. I also welcome your comments, ideas, and questions; you can write to me at president@azabolitionist.org.

Finally, I offer a special word of promise to Arizona's death penalty inmates: we will continue to fight for an end to capital punishment, for you and for the salvation of our society. I had the privilege of reviewing Arizona death row inmate Richard Michael Rossi's book, *Waiting to Die*, earlier this year. From it, I learned of inmates' daily struggle to kindle hope and safeguard faith in life's value. This toil surely is the lifeblood of the abolitionist movement, and I hope this newsletter chronicles efforts worthy of your struggle.

Wise Guy

A Poem by Gretchen Nielsen

How can I trust you when you play it smart?
You rip off our friends like you have no heart.
Call in your boys.
How can I tell you what's in my head?
If I make you mad, I could be dead.
Call in your boys.
You kiss up to buddies so they'll pay your bail;
You hide in a closet to stay out of jail.
Find a new way.
Look in the mirror – look deep inside –
Look as a child, without shame, without pride.
Let's change the world.
Look at yourself 'til you watch your rebirth –
It takes lotsa guts to find Heaven on Earth.
Let's change the world.
Call in your boys!
Find a new way!
Let's change the world!

Ron

George Mairs

I haven't written about Ron since I gave his eulogy four years ago. I rarely speak his name. But he is an undercurrent that runs through each day.

We parents expect to be accompanied by our children from their beginnings in the womb to the ending of our lives, not theirs. But Ron wasn't like that. He was the kid who came in to our home as a scruffy thirteen-year-old and who left us twenty-nine years later, an empty husk in a bed in intensive care.

Thirty-three years ago, I was working at a residential treatment center for troubled boys located in Tucson out west of the interstate. We used a behavior modification system there that gave kids points for good behavior. The system made smart kids cynical and slower ones confused. Ron was somewhere in the middle. Since he desired little, he easily earned the points he needed

to get by. He was as unwashed as the system would allow. He could sit quietly in my classroom and make me angry just by being. I had never understood the term "passive-aggressive" 'til Ron.

Nancy and I had lots of these "bad" boys home for short visits, but Ron was the one who came to stay. Before we asked him to be part of our family, he had spent many weekends sitting on our couch, only venturing to join the rest of us when ordered or cajoled. So much of him had been shut down by his chaotic past. Then one day he was released from the center, and he told us, with as much emotion as we'd ever seen, that he was going home.

It didn't take long for us to hear from him again. Ron found that the man who'd adopted him had moved away and left no forwarding address. There was no home to go back to. We knew Ron was devastated, and he was stuck! With us. The director of the center told me that if Nancy and I took Ron in, we'd ruin him – or he'd ruin us. But the director saw the kids as dollar signs, and his advice was easy to ignore.

So Ron came to live with Nancy and me and our two little children. For a teen with such a disrupted and dysfunctional background, he flourished. He knew little about being a son and nothing about being a big brother. Our children Anne and Matthew suffered bravely. We had no idea the little things he had never been exposed to. When he baked us brownies, we discovered

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The *Roper v. Simmons* Ruling

Joan M. Bundy

On March 1, 2005, the Supreme Court of the United States declared that the government could no longer execute anyone convicted of having committed a capital crime while under the age of 18.¹

It just so happened that March 1 also was International Death Penalty Abolition Day, an annual holiday marking the occasion in 1847 when the state of Michigan became the first English-speaking territory in the world to abolish capital punishment.

By further coincidence, the Law Students Against the Death Penalty at the University of Arizona had scheduled a meeting that day to drum up awareness of capital punishment and interest in its abolishment.

I like to think that the Court's landmark announcement had something to do with the unusually large turnout we had at that gathering. Finally, there was something positive and colossal to celebrate: the categorical removal of minors from eligibility for the death penalty nationwide. WOW!

When the Supreme Court announced its decision in a case called *Roper v. Simmons* (543 U.S. ___, 125 S.Ct. 1183 (March 1, 2005)), the 72 juvenile-offender inmates (all males, interestingly) who then sat on 19 states' death rows, including four on Arizona's, found themselves automatically resentenced, generally to life in prison without parole. While knowing you likely will never get out of prison is an extremely onerous burden, especially for a young person, it is much different than constantly facing the threat of being killed by the state.

Granted, this is only a drop in the bucket, as about 3,450 adult convicts still await execution in the United States, although only about two percent of those are executed in any given year, and

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Some new faces on the Supreme Court?

Joan M. Bundy

Abolitionists have been quaking in their boots as of late, wondering what some recent and impending departures on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States will bode for criminal justice in general and capital punishment in particular, especially with a conservative Republican in the White House and appointments being essentially for life.

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, 80, who went public last October about his battle with thyroid cancer but did not announce plans to retire, passed away Sept. 3, 2005. Nominated by President Nixon, Rehnquist had been on the Supreme Court since 1972 and was tapped by Reagan to lead the Court in 1986.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, 75, an Arizona native who became the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court on Sept 25, 1981, announced July 1, 2005, that she will be stepping down

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¹ Generally, capital crimes include first-degree and felony murder and, in some jurisdictions such as the federal government, things like treason, terrorism, kidnapping and drug trafficking.

United States Supreme Court and the Death Penalty

Roper v. Simmons, continued from *previous page*

the number in each jurisdiction varies wildly.² Thankfully, Arizona has not had an execution in five years (the state executed Donald Jay Miller by lethal injection on November 8, 2000), but there have been recent rumblings that more are imminent. Let's hope not.

I think *Roper* gives us yet one more reason to hope for total abolishment or at least a slowing down of capital punishment. The thing that gives me perhaps the most hope was the Court's public acknowledgment of the sea change, both domestically and internationally, in diminishing support for the death penalty, especially when it comes to defendants with lowered culpability, such as the mentally retarded, dementia suffering, mentally ill, and mentally immature (juveniles). Before *Roper*, the United States was one of only five countries in the world still executing juveniles, and we weren't exactly in the best of company for human rights reputations: China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, and Pakistan.

Maybe the death penalty isn't going to disappear from the American landscape anytime soon, either in Arizona or in the 30-plus other jurisdictions where it is meted out regularly or at least exists as a possible punishment. But it is definitely in a waning phase. Sure, there have been disappointing setbacks, but there have been just as many and perhaps more vigorous signs of success for the abolition movement since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in the mid-1970s (*Gregg v. Georgia*, 428 U.S. 153 (1976)).

Recent advances include:

- **2004** – The death penalty statutes of New York and Kansas were declared unconstitutional.
- **2002** – Capital punishment was abolished for the mentally retarded, with states defining such individuals as those with an IQ of 70 or below coupled with severe deficits in adaptive functioning (*Atkins v. Virginia*, 536 U.S. 304 (2002)).
- **2002** – Arizona's death penalty statute was found unconstitutional for its failure to have the jury determine any and all aggravating factors in capital cases. *Ring v. Arizona*, 536 U.S. 584 (2002).
- **2000** – Then-governor of Illinois George Ryan declares a moratorium on executions and appoints a Commission on Capital Punishment to study the issue.
- **1988** – Those 15 and younger could not receive a death-penalty sentence.

The moral of this story: don't give up when we are this close to winning the whole struggle! We may yet see the death penalty entirely abolished within our lifetimes!

² For example, Texas has executed nearly 400 people since 1976, while the federal government only 3 during the same four-decade period. Kansas, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, South Dakota, and the U.S. military have executed *none* since 1976 despite having the death penalty on the books, and Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia don't have a death-penalty law at all.

United States Supreme Court and the Death Penalty

New Faces on the Supreme Court, continued from page 4

from the bench, primarily to spend more time with her husband, John, who is suffering from Alzheimer's Disease. On July 19, President George W. Bush nominated his D.C. Circuit Judge John G. Roberts, Jr., as her replacement.

However, Bush – facing the quick approach of the fall term of the U.S. Supreme Court (October 3) and the possibility of the court's rather liberal-leaning senior justice, John Paul Stevens, temporarily taking over the chief's administrative duties – renominated Roberts for the chief justice position and withdrew his name for one of eight associate justice posts. O'Connor, who in her resignation letter apparently agreed to stay on until her replacement was confirmed, will have to do just that until Bush can find a second replacement to fill her spot.

While Rehnquist can only be described candidly as an inveterate conservative with little to no sympathy for death row convicts or capital punishment abolitionists, O'Connor, who was a Reagan appointee, may have been chosen for her perceived conservative political beliefs but since has shown herself to be much more of a moderate conservative or even a centrist on the death penalty and many other legal issues.

She has publicly stated that she tried to approach each case as an entity unto itself, exercising what appeared from her opinions to be generous doses of open-mindedness, independence and self-confidence. The results were often unpredictable. On many occasions she cast the "swing vote" that broke a tie – sometimes going to the left, sometimes to the right.

Sometimes she came down on the side favoring abolition – or at least showing compassion for human rights and concern for fairness and justice in the application of capital punishment laws – and sometimes on the side of the death penalty in all its cruelty and arbitrariness. She helped *Atkins v. Virginia* over the top in abolishing the death penalty for the mentally retarded yet a couple years later dissented to the no-death-penalty-for-juveniles ruling of *Roper v. Simmons*.

It is hard to know exactly what the future will bring, but we can be sure that things are likely to continue changing in the capital punishment arena.



CAADP Annual Meeting

Claudia Ellquist

The annual meeting for CAADP was postponed this year from its usual date in late January to an early March date so that we could combine it with an action. On Friday, March 4, approximately 50 people stood at one of the busiest intersections in Tucson, holding signs for the passing rush hour traffic, in commemoration of the International Day to Abolish the Death Penalty. The hour-long vigil was sponsored by both CAADP and Women in Black, an international group that usually protests war and occupations but was making its first statement against the death penalty.

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After the vigil, participants retired to the fellowship hall of nearby First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for a potluck and the meeting. The keynote speaker was Dr Vera Lander, national vice-president of CAADP organizational member Church Women United and a longtime local leader in the African American community.

Attendees offered reports on abolitionist activities in 2004, whether done as individual members or as members of organizations that belong to CAADP. CAADP committees also identified their efforts during the previous year. The biggest accomplishment was the abolition of the death penalty for juvenile offenders, which happened with such swiftness as to both gratify and take us by surprise. The state of Arizona is still reeling from our earlier successes in the abolition of executions of low-IQ offenders, as well as court rulings that changed the role of juries in death penalty cases. Just the week before we met, the United States Supreme Court, in *Roper v. Simmons*, had outlawed capital punishment for juveniles; the ruling noted this country's "evolving sense of decency" as a key factor for abolition. When groups like CAADP continue to force public discussion about capital punishment, we press that evolution of morality forward.

In celebration of this progress, individual appreciations were extended to the Steering

Anti-death Penalty Candidates Get 25% of Votes for Pima County Attorney

In 2004, two anti-death penalty candidates ran against the incumbent Pima County Attorney. The two anti-death penalty candidates, Green Party candidate Claudia Ellquist (a member of CAADP's Steering Committee) and Libertarian candidate David Euchner, together got 25% of the votes.

Committee members who served us this past year, and elections were held, per our Bylaws, to available positions on the Steering Committee. Dennis Seavers, Andy Silverman, and Kathy Norgard will continue on the Steering Committee, with terms expiring in 2007. Claudia Ellquist will continue with a term expiring in 2006. Re-elected to the Steering Committee were Ann Nichols, Sherrie Jo Christensen, George Mairs, James Hamm, and Joan Bundy. Newly elected were Laura Conover and Rod McLeod.

The Bylaws require that the Steering Committee then elects officers from its membership at the first meeting. By acclamation, the following officers were subsequently elected: President, Dennis Seavers; Vice President, Ann Nichols; Secretary, Kathy Norgard; and Treasurer, George Mairs.

More than 3,400 persons remain on death row in the 38 states that execute people. More than 120 are on Arizona's death row, and executions will resume after the state feels it has worked the "bugs" out of the system. Other states are already starting to kill folks again, and some paused only briefly. We have a big job yet to do.

704 Words Against the Death Penalty, or One Word: Decency

Claudia Ellquist

(The following editorial appeared in the *Arizona Daily Star* on April 23, 2005. It is reproduced as it originally appeared.)

The US Supreme Court recently ended executions for death row inmates with very low IQs and for juvenile inmates, saying such executions offend an evolving sense of decency in America. We Americans believe in decency, but we are ambivalent about just what decency requires.

After all, a horrible murder remains horrible, regardless of the physical or mental age of the person who kills. And the family of the victim grieve no less. Whose decency are they talking about?

Our decency, yours and mine. Increasingly, Americans are uncomfortable with being part of killing, and the more we hear about how our system selects people for execution, the less it feels decent. Sure, we must protect ourselves, but we have prisons and natural life sentencing to keep inmates locked up. It is not self defense, and every reputable study shows that it does not deter and that it costs more than life imprisonment. In the end, its proponents are left with saying that it somehow hallows the person murdered if we respond in kind to a horrible crime.

And we've wanted to stand by the family of the murder victim, to somehow build a shrine for them, by giving them the grim satisfaction of being present at the execution. That turns out to be a bitter shrine indeed. The American Psychological Association tells us that there is no closure, no healing, in this drawn out revenge. Indeed, if we really felt that it healed, wouldn't we want it for all homicides, not a mere 4%. Isn't one family's grief as good as another's?

Instead of honoring their loved one's life, we tie these families forever to how that person died, and to our own societal decision about revenge. Pro-death letters-to-the-editor show that revenge figures big for certain individuals. But reading some of those letters makes the rest of us cringe.

What's changed in America, to make us feel this way?

For one thing, death row inmates aren't always guilty. Last week the people of Maricopa County gave a settlement to Ray Krone, trying to make it right, and feel decent, that police and prosecutors took a nice young man, with no criminal record, no evidence that wasn't twisted for effect, and convinced two juries of his guilt, and then robbed him of twelve years of his life, with two on death row, trying to kill him. In our name.

Ray met guys on death row, most of them guilty, but he says at least half a dozen are innocent, like him, but without DNA evidence to prove it. Somehow, it feels indecent to kill that innocent handful in order to get a problematic satisfaction from killing the guilty. Ask Ray Krone.

Police and prosecutors didn't set out to "get" innocent men. But, gosh, we've seen scandals enough: prosecutors disbarred for letting policemen lie, or telling lies themselves, or holding back evidence, or twisting it around, because they come to think that cutting corners is okay in murder cases. Not for their own ambitions, of course, but for The Victims. We read about it, and it doesn't feel decent any more.

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Proponents, especially overworked prosecutors and “tough on crime” politicians, tell us that the death penalty is reserved for the “worst of the worst.” But we read about crimes that seem plenty “worst” to us, and no death penalty is sought. The sad reality is that when prosecutors worry about getting a conviction, death comes off the table. Death has become a bargaining chip, to induce a confession and a deal. And, like torture, it is a lousy tool, because scared people will tell you anything, true or not. Its use is dumb, and it doesn't feel decent.

Death comes off the table in shaky cases because juries are less likely to convict when death is demanded. We let guilty people walk, because once death is carried out, mistakes can't be fixed. Ironically, our inherent decency, when faced with the indecent demand for death, trips us up.

Take death off the bargaining table – permanently, evenhandedly, and now. It is fallible, it is dumb, it is expensive, it is racist, it is unhelpful, and it is not what decent people, like me and you, are willing to do.



Send Holiday Cards to Death Row Inmates

For anyone who would like to send holiday (or winter) greeting cards, Ann Nichols will make a set of labels with the names and addresses of all 106 persons on Arizona's Death Row. She can send it as a list rather than labels if you prefer to hand-address the cards. Contact her at ann.nichols@asu.edu or (520) 884-5507, x12. If you do not wish to use your own return address, feel free to ask for a set of labels with CAADP's return address to use. You may wish to send nonreligious cards, since not all inmates hold the same convictions.

Looking for a Presentation on the Death Penalty?

Do you know a group that would like a presentation on the death penalty? This could be a high school or community college class, a church group, a civic club, a student group at the university, or any other gathering, small or large. We can offer a session using a PowerPoint presentation and a speaker from our Education Committee. The PowerPoint, developed by the Arizona Death Penalty Forum with a foundation grant, addresses many of the most common questions about the death penalty, with a focus on Arizona. The speaker will be a CAADP member who can tailor the talk to the special interests of your organization.

If you are interested in scheduling a presentation or volunteering to be trained to give such presentations, contact Ann Nichols at (520) 884-5507 x12 (daytime) or (520) 299-3758 (evening and weekends). Her e-mail is ann.nichols@asu.edu.

Tucson Education Committee

Jana Grove Johnson, Former Chair

Being on the Tucson Education Committee of CAADP requires a commitment. Our members take every opportunity to get the word out to the general public about capital punishment. As long as the death penalty is abstract, people tend to think it is a just and fitting punishment in retribution for heinous crimes. The Tucson Education Committee works hard to personalize it and bring the dirty secrets of the death penalty into consciousness and into view.

We staff tables at public events, handing out literature and talking to passers-by. This provides an opportunity to expose the myth that it is less expensive to kill people than to keep them in prison for life. We demonstrate at public events, often political in nature. Taking on both sides of the political spectrum, CAADP members demonstrated at the Michael Moore appearance at McKale Center and also at the Ann Coulter appearance in Centennial Hall (both on the University of Arizona campus) this past year. These, again, were good opportunities to bring the death penalty into public view.

The Education Committee continues to work hard on its banner project. Member Mike Moore designed two banners which we display at houses of worship around Tucson for a month or two at a time. When our banner at Southside Presbyterian was defaced, we held a news conference to bring attention to the vandalism, and the news conference in turn brought attention to the death penalty.

In July, active members of the committee elected a new chair when Jana Grove Johnson decided to step down after several years in the position. Laura Winsky Conover was unanimously elected. Laura brings new ideas and energy to the group, and we look forward to her able leadership.

We have a major event planned for this October: a showing of the film *Deadline* at the Loft Theatre in Tucson. This film documents the incredible journey of Illinois Governor George Ryan, who, in January 2003, commuted the sentences of everyone on death row in his state. We are inviting professors at the university to assign the film as a special project or as a topic for classroom discussion. There will be a panel discussion following the film.

The members of the Education Committee would like to invite you to join us. You can contact us at education_tucson@azabolitionist.org. We are always interested in new ideas and new members. Help us spread the word!



Send Postcards to Help Stop Executions

By the end of this year, the United States will be on track to have executed 1,000 human beings since the reinstatement of the death penalty. If you would like to be part of the CAADP Card Writers, contact us at ellquist.co.atty@juno.com, or CAADP, Attn: Claudia, P.O. Box 42465, Tucson, Arizona 85733, to receive regular updates so that you can protest scheduled executions.

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Postcards, continued from *previous page*

Please buy 20 plain postcards from the post office, and keep them by your computer. Each month, we will e-mail you a list of scheduled executions and the address to write to in order to protest each. Brief, handwritten messages are the most likely to be noted.

For the month of October

On October 6, Ronald Howard is scheduled to be killed by the people of Texas in revenge for the murder of Bill Davidson. Write to:

Governor Rick Perry, P.O. Box 12428, Austin, Texas 78711-2428
Fax: (512) 463-1849
Phone: (512) 463-1782

On October 20, Luis Ramirez is scheduled to be killed by the people of Texas in revenge for the murder of Nemicio Nandin. Write to Governor Rick Perry at the above address.

On October 25, William Williams is scheduled to be killed by the people of Ohio in revenge for the murders of Alfonda Madison, William Dent, and Eric Howard. Write to:

Governor Bob Taft, 30th Floor, 77 South High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-6117
Phone: (614) 466-3555

On October 25 Pedro Sosa is scheduled to be killed by the people of Texas in revenge for the murder of Ollie Childress. Write to Governor Rick Perry at the above Texas address.

JOIN US IN OUR EFFORTS TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

We rely on your financial generosity for public education and activist work. Your financial contributions are welcome and will be put to good use. CAADP is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, and financial contributions are tax-deductible.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-mail (for our e-mail list) _____

Please make checks out to CAADP and send to P.O. Box 42465, Tucson, AZ 85733

he couldn't read directions. The brownies crawled out of the pan and crusted on the bottom of the oven. We entrusted him with the map when we set off for a camping trip to the Chiricahuas and found he didn't know north from south. But we all learned and grew. Ron made friends. He graduated from Salpointe High School. He enlisted in the Navy, where he met his wife. They had two boys and stayed with the Navy for seventeen years. Nancy and I were proud, and I think Anne and Matthew appreciated what their big brother had accomplished.

In the Navy, Ron had become an expert in surveillance, and so when he got out and moved his family back to Tucson, he found a good job at one of our local casinos, and he and his wife and kids settled in a mobile home on Tucson's Southside. The boys grew up and moved out. Ron and his wife relaxed into a comfortable and stable life. Then late one night four years ago he was murdered.

That night Ron had gone to bed early, and his wife had fallen asleep in front of the TV. The door was unlocked. After midnight two young men pushed their way in, and one threw Ron's wife to the floor and held her down. The other went into the bedroom and shot Ron in the head as he lay in bed. Ron shouted as the bullet ricocheted off his skull, and he rose dazed and made his way into the bathroom. His killer followed and shot him in the base of the skull. This bullet killed Ron, though his body lay in an ICU until we family members agreed three days later that life support should be withdrawn.

Murder is something that only happens in someone else's family. It is stunning. My feelings are tumultuous as I write this now. Nancy and I and Ron's widow spent some time in a support group called Homicide Survivors. We learned that there is a large community of us who grieve for our homicide victims, and we've learned much from other survivors and from the murder itself.

We know now that time does not heal, nor, I think, is it supposed to. We age. Death and loss gain context. We see life through the lens of Ron's death, understanding more of ourselves and what endures and what does not.

We know now that many victims are murdered by someone close, a friend, relative, loved one. Most murders are spontaneous. Many murderers are caught quickly and tried. Most survivors endure trials during which they must sit silently as the murder is revisited, and they must show no emotion. Nancy and I have not been through this ordeal because Ron's murderers have not been caught.

We know that some survivors, speaking of their loved one's trial, have told us, "If we are not there, they are not there." These survivors believe it is necessary that they bear witness. They believe that this is what their loved one wants of them. They believe the dead desire justice. It is up to us to provide it for them.

Nancy and I believe that our Ron is far beyond any concern with justice as we can imagine it. He is no longer tied to anything remotely connected with his death – or, for that matter, his life. He is simply set free.

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Sitting on the sofa in Ron's living room two days after the murder, I leafed through a copy of a magazine devoted to guns and ammo. Ron had loved guns but had had second thoughts and had recently gotten rid of his, not wanting them in his home. Is there an irony here? Perhaps. But is there a clear moral lesson? I don't think so. Nancy and I don't keep guns. It's tempting to draw lessons from tragedy, but the causes of this death defy simple explanations.

We have learned the obvious fact that murders continue to happen. Ron's murder file, four years old, has hundreds of files piled on top of it now. It will not be solved. We are sorry because two young men succeeded in murdering our son, and I assume, with that success, they are a threat to murder others. We hope for their removal from the rest of us to a place where they and we will be safe.

We have heard the wishes of pained survivors as they have talked about what should be done to the murderers of their son or daughter. It is impossible for us to judge them. But we do not believe vengeance brings peace. We have decided that if we do not demand a death for a death, there is always a possibility of reconciliation.

CAADP Mission Statement

The Coalition of Arizonans to Abolish the Death Penalty is a group of organizations and individuals pledged to end the death penalty in Arizona. Among us are those who oppose the death penalty for spiritual, ethical, and practical reasons and who may choose variously to work for its abolition through prayer, self- and public education, dialogues, constitutional recourse, and public action.

We affirm the dignity and rights of victims and the right of communities to live in safety and harmony. We believe that the death penalty, by implicitly condoning killing, subverts these rights and contributes to a pervasive climate of violence.

The taking of human life is abhorrent and unacceptable to us; it assails each of us individually and diminishes us as a people. When the state takes a life, we are profoundly affected. We become participants in what we abhor. Moreover, we know that, being human, we are not above error. We would not commit irrevocable error. Our sense of shared humanity, our commitment to the creative and transforming spirit that links us, and our knowledge of our own fallibility call out for us to discover and use alternatives to capital punishment.

In pursuit of our common goal, we commit ourselves to nonviolence, civility of discourse, respect for those who hold opposite opinions, and faithful and persistent witness.

In Solidarity

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Dennis Seavers

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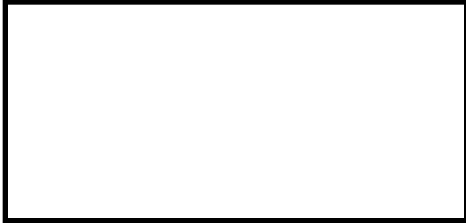
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