

Murder Victim Families Lead Anti-Death Penalty Campaign in Texas

*Award Winning Film Premiere to Kick Off Texas Forgiveness Tour in Houston
Victim Families Call Death Penalty a Distraction*

HOUSTON, TEXAS, UNITED STATES, October 13, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- EDITORS/PRODUCERS: Tour speakers are immediately available for advance interviews and live programs. Tour dates, public event details, speaker bios, and additional information: www.DeathPenaltyAction.org/JourneyofHope.



Bill Pelke originally supported the death penalty for the girls who killed his grandmother. His path to forgiveness led to start the Journey of Hope ...From Violence to Healing

Houston – As new death sentences and executions continue at record lows in Texas, a group of murder victim family members will kick off a two-week tour of the state with the Texas premiere of an award winning documentary film at 7pm on October 14, 2017 at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory in Houston.

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Ami Lyn White

“[The Gathering](#)” is a film about exonerated death row survivors who become warriors against the death penalty. Award-winning filmmaker, Micki Dickoff, will be at this special screening for the Texas premiere. Admission is free.

Following the film, the Journey of Hope ...From Violence to Healing will host a panel discussion featuring exonerated death row survivors and murder victim family members who oppose the death penalty. This will be the first of dozens of such events in schools, colleges and faith communities in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin over the following two weeks.

The [Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing](#) is led by murder victim family members who oppose the death penalty, joined by the families of prisoners on death row and exonerated death row survivors who share their voices of experience with the aftermath of murder. This will be the sixth time the Journey of Hope will tour Texas since 1998.

“We can be safe from dangerous offenders and hold them accountable without killing them,” said Ami

Lyn White, whose pregnant mother was murdered in Alvin in 1986. "I can't speak for everyone who struggles with the aftermath of murder, but our experience is that having to wait a decade or more for an execution that may never come is not conducive to healing. I have no problem with a sentence of death by incarceration, which is what most killers get these days anyway."

In addition to Texans, the two week series of public events features speakers with compelling stories from across the United States.

"We feel that our message that the death penalty prevents healing and only creates more victims has helped reduce the desire for executions in Texas," said Bill Pelke, founder of the Journey of Hope ...From Violence to Healing. "The first time we came here in 1998, executions we're at an all-time high, with nearly 100 each year. Dozens were in Texas, and many of those cases were from Harris County. Now, the vast majority of killers in Texas get the alternative sentence of life without parole. One thing we know from experience is that when there is no death sentence in your case, the healing process begins a lot sooner."

"The death penalty is a distraction from the real needs of victim families," continued Pelke. "Most cases are not eligible for execution, but anyone with a relative who has been murdered wants the right person to be caught and held accountable. We include exonerated death row survivors on our tours because wrongful convictions are a real problem. It hurts victim family members even more when we learn that all this time we were focusing our anger on the wrong person. And to think they might have been killed in our names? That's unacceptable."

Pelke supported the death penalty for the girl who killed his grandmother, but then he came to understand the healing power of forgiveness. This experience and that of others on the Journey of Hope tour provide the opportunity for the public to look at crime and punishment from different perspectives, including that of the families of killers.

"I also recognize that those in prison or on death row and those who have been executed have families too," said White. "Those family members, especially those who were children when their loved one was arrested, experience pain and devastation similar to that which I felt. They, like me, didn't do anything wrong, but society need not make it worse by making them homicide survivors too."



The Texas Journey of Hope ...From Violence to Healing includes speakers like Terri Steinberg, whose son was sentenced to death in Virginia. Bill Babbitt is also featured on the tour. Bill's brother Manny was a decorated Viet Nam veteran before he committed



The Texas Journey of Hope ...From Violence to Healing will conclude with a march to the Capitol in Austin at 2pm on October 28, 2017

Three speakers on the tour have brothers who faced execution, including David Kaczynski who helped the FBI determine his brother Ted Kaczynski was the Unibomber, resulting in his apprehension. The juxtaposition of Kaczynski with Bill Babbitt exposes issues of racism in the system which remain pervasive. Babbitt realized his brother Manny, a Vietnam veteran with diagnosed mental illnesses including PTSD, had killed a woman. He helped the police apprehend Manny on the promise of treatment. Instead, Manny was executed. The Babbitts are African American. Also on the tour is Randy Gardner, whose brother was the most recent person executed by firing squad in the United States.

The arts have been incorporated into some of the events. A photo display by Texas native Scott Langley will travel with the tour, and several of the events feature award-winning films. The Texas premiere of "The Gathering" is on October 14th. On Oct 18th, the award-winning film "Last Day of Freedom," will tell the story of Bill Babbitt and his Vietnam veteran brother Manny, who was executed after Bill turned him in on the promise that Manny would be treated, not killed. Discussion with Bill Babbitt & David Kaczynski exonerated death row survivors and others follows.

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www.DeathPenaltyAction.org/JourneyofHope.

Details about "The Gathering": <https://www.witnesstoinnocence.org/the-gathering-film>

Abraham Bonowitz

Journey of Hope From Violence to Healing

561-371-5204

email us here

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