

March 15, 2012

Death Penalty Informational Hearing
House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

Representative Pat Colloton:

Although I now live in Kansas, I am originally from Texas. In August of 1986, my mother was shot and killed during a robbery of our house outside of Houston. The perpetrator was caught and charged with capital murder. At the time I was okay with the idea of the death penalty because the idea of a life for a life seemed fair to me. And in the incredible pain and grief I felt over the loss of my mother I wanted someone to pay. As the trial progressed, though, I actually began to change my mind. Not only did I come to see the humanity in the perpetrator but I also came to understand the loss and pain that his execution would have on his family. It began to look like a never ending cycle of violence and pain that could serve no useful purpose. This realization came to me when the trial was over and the death sentence had been announced and I saw the man's mother standing in the hallway outside the court room sobbing. My family and I had just heard that the man who killed our mother would die, but this woman had just heard that her son was going to die.

In the years following that incident I came to oppose the death penalty and to learn more about its application and implications in terms of law enforcement and the justice system. Though Texas is a state that sends more people to death row than most other states, it continues to have one of the highest murder rates in the country. I also realized that if this were supposed to be about justice for the victims, a life for a life, then why isn't the death penalty applied in every case. In my research I found that the race of the victim was more likely to get the murdered a death sentence than the anything else. Don't all murder victims deserve the same treatment? I believe that life without the possibility of parole is an both an appropriate punishment and an effective way to keep our society safe.

Finally, I had a general sense from most people's reactions that I was supposed to want the death penalty because it would help bring closure for me and my family. The man who killed my mother was executed in September of 2007, more than 25 years after the murder. I did not feel a sense of closure afterwards because this experience taught me that there is never closure after the loss of a loved one, no matter how they died. The healing process is not achieved by revenge but by working through your grief and coming to terms with and accepting your loss. I had done that long before the man who killed my mother was killed by the state of Texas. In my experience, waiting years for an execution often prolongs that grieving process and locks the family members into a perpetual feeling of anger.

Celeste Dixon
218 W. 9th
Larned, KS 67550

620-804-1965
celeste@gonetwothedogs.com

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