



Don't Kill in Our Names: Families of Murder Victims Speak Out against the Death Penalty

By Rachel King

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Could you forgive the murderer of your husband? Your mother? Your son?

Families of murder victims are often ardent and very public supporters of the death penalty. But the people whose stories appear in this book have chosen instead to forgive their loved ones' murderers, and many have developed personal relationships with the killers and have even worked to save their lives. They have formed a nationwide group, Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation (MVFR), to oppose the death penalty.

MVFR members are often treated as either saints or lunatics, but the truth is that they are neither. They are ordinary people who have responded to an extraordinary and devastating tragedy with courage and faith, choosing reconciliation over retribution, healing over hatred. Believing that the death penalty is a form of social violence that only repeats and perpetuates the violence that claimed their loved one's lives, they hold out the hope of redemption even for those who have committed the most hideous crimes.

Weaving third-person narrative with wrenching first-hand accounts, King presents the stories of ten MVFR members. Each is a heartrending tale of grief, soul searching, and of the challenge to choose forgiveness instead of revenge. These stories, which King sets in the context of the national discussion over the death penalty debate and restorative versus retributive justice, will appeal not only to those who oppose the death penalty, but also to those who strive to understand how people can forgive the seemingly unforgivable.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

King, a lawyer with the ACLU and an anti-death-penalty activist, tells the haunting stories of families touched by murder. Instead of seeking the death penalty for the convicts, these family members forcefully and poignantly oppose it: they "reject the concept of retribution and believe that no one is beyond redemption," says King. The gruesome murders vary widely, but a number of threads link the survivors. In each case, he or she tries to understand the forces that might lead a person to commit murder. And in just about every case, grisly details emerge about the murderer's background-such as abandonment and abuse. Instead of focusing on their rage, the survivors strive to feel compassion for the murderers-and their families-and to communicate this compassion to them. Many of the survivors evoke God as a reason for their opposition to the death penalty. Says Marietta Jaeger, about her rapport with the man who savagely murdered her seven-year-old daughter: "I believe that God was loving him through me... desperately needed the love and compassion I felt for him." Says Ron Carlson, whose sister was axed to death, "I don't think the Son of God would destroy his own father's creation." Particularly disturbing are stories that involve the sentencing to death of retarded convicts and juveniles, as well as one man who was ultimately proven innocent. The testimony of families of murder victims is key to anti-death penalty campaigners, and these moving accounts might touch readers who are wavering on the issue. 18 b&w illus.

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From [Booklist](#)

King, a lawyer and anti-death-penalty lobbyist, spent more than a year interviewing people who lost family members to murder but managed to forgive the killers and oppose the death penalty. Contrary to widely broadcast images of the families of murder victims supporting the death penalty, these people have publicly declared their opposition, provoking anger in their families and among prosecutors. In their own words, the interview subjects recall the circumstances of the murder, memories of their loved ones, and their personal journeys to forgiveness of the murderers and their own public stance against capital punishment. King puts into context the controversy surrounding the death penalty, including the Illinois moratorium brought about by investigations exonerating 13 death-row inmates. These are heart-wrenching stories that tell of chilling encounters with murderers and kidnappers and heartbreakng struggles with other family members. King effectively explores both the personal and the public aspects of this controversial social issue and relates how a project focused on the death penalty evolved into an examination of forgiveness and healing in the wake of family tragedy. *Vanessa Bush*

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About the Author

Rachel King is a lawyer and anti-death lobbyist for the American Civil Liberties Union.

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