

On Wings of Hope

Volume 27 Issue 2

Apr. - Jun. 2023

*Execute
Justice
Not
People*

REJECTION

People have often told me that I should write a book but as I feel that there are already too many words flying around in the world I see no need to add to the pile already there. But then the thought came that maybe 40 years around the prison systems of 3 states, many of them with death row perhaps it might be of interest if I found that there was a recurring theme. And yes, I did find that while of course there are always exceptions to any rule and keeping in mind that we are all different there did seem to be a frequent answer to what I like to call the question behind the question.

However before I tell you what I so often found I also found that our so called justice system is terribly remiss in asking those questions behind the question. Lack of training in basic psychology or might we say, as I most probably would, a desire to pander to the mob which Christians might remember as the mob shouting: crucify him! Then and now definitely a vote getter!

So what did I find you ask? Drug addiction? Certainly, but the question behind that answer and in digging a little deeper I found rejection. Rejection inflicted in early childhood and continued through adolescence into adulthood. If you have not had that experience it will be hard for you to imagine how deep and incurable a wound rejection inflicts making one vulnerable to ways of life that all too often end in prison. The terrible fact is that it is a wound that never heals and sets you up again and again. And yes, some it spurs on to greatness but I am talking about the others who fall through the cracks of our society.

At this point I am hoping that you will not ask who is rejecting who? If you are honest you know. It is us, us right here in the land of the free or the land of second class citizens with a history we are unwilling to face, so much so that we have to ban books so that we can forget our history of rejection.

And so that is what I have to tell you after 40 years and no, you cannot heal the wounds we inflicted but at least lets have the courage to own what we did instead of judging those who fell through the cracks of our society. And if you think I am making excuses, absolutely not! All I am asking is that we ask the questions behind the questions where among other answers we will all too often also find rejection, the wound that never heals.

Esther



**PROJECT HOPE TO ABOLISH
THE DEATH PENALTY (phadp)**
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MISSION STATEMENT:

Working together with friends, supporters and other advocates to educate the public and bring about the abolition of Capital Punishment in Alabama.

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**THIS NEWSLETTER WAS WRITTEN,
TYPED AND FORMATTED ON DEATH
ROW AT HOLMAN PRISON**

Hello Everyone,

As our fearless leader is dealing with a death in the family, I will attempt to fill his shoes with a 2nd quarter editorial.

Now, what would Ant want y'all to know?

He would definitely want y'all to have a summer filled with all the good memories y'all have of us, to stay positive and remember that he isn't having to continually deal with/talk about the heat since we have AC now :)

He would probably point out the fact that they've just set an execution date (July 20-21) for James Barber, and already have violated their own protocol, and that if they can't be trusted to notify the condemned before releasing it to the media, something so simple!, how can they be trusted to carry out the ultimate punishment in a fair and just way?

He might also want y'all to know about the nature and power of forgiveness. The story that Liz Bruenig wrote about so eloquently in the Atlantic about how Sarah Gregory was able to extend forgiveness to James Barber, the man who killed her grandmother. The letters between the two, which James has shared with his friends here show a crushing humanity. A humanity impossible for a government entity to feel, but possible for the individuals who represent these agencies and offices to feel.

He'd want y'all to know how frustrated it makes him knowing that these government representatives can know and feel these truths and still hide behind their respective offices to carry out these atrocities.

If you share in that frustration, now is the time to let them know. Remind them that they represent you, and you don't want them to kill in your name.

I know he has a lot more that he wants to share with y'all, and I hope and pray that his burden of grief is relieved in knowing how much y'all (and we) love and support him.

**Execute
Justice
Not
People**

From the Chairman's Desk
Not the Chairman, PHADP
Bart Johnson

Alabama News
Second Quarter 2023

* On May 3, 2023 the Alabama Supreme Court issued an order which constitutes a death warrant for James Barber. On May 30, 2023 in a letter to the DOC, Governor Ivey's office set a time frame for the execution beginning July 20, 2023 and extending until 6:00 am Friday July 21, 2023. The 30 hour window is designed to give executioners more time after the two most recent botched execution attempts were called off due to trouble with intravenous lines.

* The US Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit has upheld the Federal District Court ruling that Alabama death row prisoner Joseph Clifton Smith is ineligible for the death penalty due to his intellectual disability.

* US Supreme Court denies the state of Alabama's petition arguing against nitrogen as an alternative execution method, and in doing so revived Kenneth Smith's pre-botched execution attempt lawsuit challenging lethal injection on the grounds that it would violate his constitutional protection against cruel and unusual punishment.

* HB 14 or the "unanimous jury" bill would have addressed the fact that Alabama allows judges to sentence individuals to death with less than a unanimous verdict from the jury. Speaking in favor of the bill Jefferson County Judge David Carpenter highlighted all the problems with the existing process and how election politics drives judges to issue overly harsh sentences. He was joined by our Executive Director Esther Brown who spoke about forgiveness. Mae Puckett, a juror who regrets reluctantly voting to convict a man (Robin Myers) who she felt was innocent. Toni Hall, daughter of Faith Hall, who was killed by Joe Nathan James in 1994, had asked the state to spare his life said "It only makes sense to listen to every voice on the jury and only enact a death sentence in unanimous cases." We are grateful for Rep. Chris England for sponsoring this legislation and for all who came to speak to the House Judiciary Committee in support of this bill. While it did not get a vote this term, we are hopeful that legislators in the future will see this for what it is, a chance to right a wrong that exists in the majority of capital cases in the state.

Nearly 90% of Alabamians are religious. For people of faith concerned about the death penalty in Alabama, some national, state, and local organizations are partnering to have a regular Zoom call for anyone of any faith interested in engaging specific death penalty cases and working and organizing toward death penalty repeal. For anyone interested, please reach out to Sam Heath (samh@ejusa.org).

-Sam

THOUGHTS ON FORGIVENESS

A couple of years ago Antoinette Bosco, the mother of murder victims who in her book *Choosing Mercy* pleads to end the death penalty, asked me whether I would be interested in writing a piece on forgiveness. I am honored to call Toni my sister, but somehow, at the time, the task seemed overwhelming. There is so much to say on this issue!

It was not that I didn't have some very definite ideas about forgiveness, but rather the question was how to express them coherently. There is the issue of closure, which can only come from within; the issue that not to forgive pollutes the love and memory of the one we lost; the issue that not to forgive allows the one who hurt us power over us; all in of themselves compelling reasons to forgive and all ones which have helped me along my path. But then there is also the question of justice, which is the hardest but also the most persuasive reason of all.

A little while back, whilst out on a walk and thinking about forgiveness, I suddenly had an insight that the words: *forgive them for they know not what they do* were the answer I was looking for. It made forgiveness a question of justice. If the one who offends us did not know what he did, how can I possibly in all fairness not forgive him? I fully understand that many would disagree with me about whether someone knew what they did or not. I am convinced that no one does, not fully. How can I be so sure? Because I know that I can never know fully what prompts my own actions, and that at least I do understand with absolute certainty.

Do I think the Governor, the Attorney General, the warden really understand fully what they are doing when they pursue executions? Absolutely not! They are trapped in their limiting cultural ignorance, in their need to please the voter, in their sense of self-righteousness, in short, in their ignorance. The old saying of not being able to understand someone until one has walked a mile in his moccasins holds true in this case, as well as in all others. Not only can we not fully understand someone else's actions, but also, we can be sure that he does not really comprehend why he does what he does either, not with a really deep knowing. Again, I know that from myself.

And that is why forgiveness is a justice issue for me. If someone does not really know what he or she is doing, my response cannot be hate. Obviously those words, *forgive them, for they know not what they do*, are not mine and date back over 2,000 years. For me they make forgiveness possible.



Esther Brown
2010

Acorn

The oak tree is filled with acorns and most of them strive to keep their shell clean and polished, this is what they were taught to do generation after generation. Until one day an acorn appeared that had a shell unclean and polished to the standard of society that it is revealed to people that it is not the shell that they should put all their focus on, but what lies underneath it. This sounded strange to them, and he also taught them that one day they would fall from the tree and become what is holding them, he taught them that they have within them something that can make them larger than what they appear to be. The words that he was preaching reached the chiefs of the acorn society and they sought to silence him because some acorns started to listen to him and effected their economy because some acorns stopped going to the acorn parlor to get polished. One day that acorn fell and the chiefs were proud but the ones who took heed continued her teachings. In that very spot where he fell as time passed by a tree began to grow and everyone witnessed it.

What is the moral of this story???



I Need You All To Listen

Take a seat and please listen to me. The time has come where we as a people must come together. I know it seems like a difficult thing to do since we've been divided for so long, but guess what, "I think it's possible." All we have to do is lay out our differences. There has to be a common ground that we can stand on. It doesn't matter what political party you represent or what religion you claim nor does it matter the color of your skin, we are all "the people." We are the ones that put legislatures, governors, AGs, Judges, etc. in office. But they're not listening to us. Therefore it's time for a change. What do you all think about a "voters for change" organization? We could set up a place for voters from every state to meet and discuss their differences and try to find common ground on their views. Then we can discuss the next candidate to support this common ground view and we put them in office. It doesn't matter if they're an Independent, Republican, or a Democrat as long as they are for "the people." If we want change this is how we get it. No more division amongst the people. After all the division is what got here today. Togetherness Matters. Love thy neighbor. United we stand, divided we fall. Thank you all for listening!

wrong turn

falling down,
 or falling apart,
 dying,
 or cocooning,
 awaiting a re-start,
 not a replay,
 hurting is the theme,
 of that wrong way,
 walking in the midst of millions,
 feeling like a stray,
 as at the moon, I bay,
 head tilted listening for a reply,
 maybe it'll come today,
 maybe not,
 once flourishing gardens,
 are now empty plots,
 love lacking hearts,
 needing adrenaline shots,
 the lanes of life are so coagulated,
 the doc can't find a spot,
 so everything is called to a stop,
 falling down,
 or falling apart,
 dying,
 or cocooning,
 awaiting a re-start..

Execute
 JUSTICE
 For
 People

wrong turn

Omen, A.K.A. Tony Barksdale
 Z - 611 / M - 5



Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty
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Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty is an Interfaith 501 C 3 organization whose mission is to educate and mobilize communities to act to abolish the death penalty in Alabama. PHADP relies on YOU for support. Suggested donations: \$25/individual, \$40/household, and \$100/congregation, or whatever amount is affordable. Checks should be made out to "PHADP" and sent to the above address.



Condemn the Wrong Act On What's Right

Instead of passing legislation prohibiting the teachings of African influence here in America and Alabama, the legislature of this state should focus on drafting and passing legislation that restores integrity and confidence in Alabama's justice system.

Many have fallen victim to the systematic abuse of power by the rogue prosecutor's and judges which have led to innocent men and women to be wrongfully convicted and even executed for crimes they did not commit.

Toforest Johnson has languished on death row for 25 years because of the misconduct of trial prosecutor and head district attorney of the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office.

Not only Toforest Johnson suffers this injustice on Alabama's death row.

The opinions of the Alabama courts denying Mr. Johnson's relief went so far beyond the scope of the law that governs Mr. Johnson's case that the courts opted to rewrite the law just to deny Mr. Johnson.

Now it would be sweet if the state legislators would convene, draft, and pass a bill that prohibits the prolonged incarceration of one who is actually innocent of the crimes they are jailed for. Passing a law that condemns the misconduct of prosecutors who withholds exculpatory and impeachment evidence that aids the defendant in the presentation of his defense of innocence, by whatever means that are necessary.

Let not another be a victim of the injustice in Alabama.

Randy Lewis



How Many Ways?

How many ways does the state of Alabama want to torture a person? It was the Governor's good idea to do away with the midnight deadline on execution nights, trying to say they were running out of time. What she failed to mention is that they had plenty of time to do what they needed to do, but due to their own IV team that was and is the real problem.

Now they want to let the Governor have all the power in choosing the date and time frame to attempt to carry out a state sanctioned murder. There is no safeguards to protect the inmate from the real issue-how long do they have to poke on an inmate before they find a vein? Who would be in the room to make sure they follow all the guidelines? You can't truly ask the state to regulate their own actions. We need a person that is unbiased with no ties to either side who would tell the truth about what goes on behind the curtain and has the power to stop things if the state goes overboard. Which we all know they will and try to cover it up.

Once again, "How many ways does the state want to torture a person?"

Darryl Turner

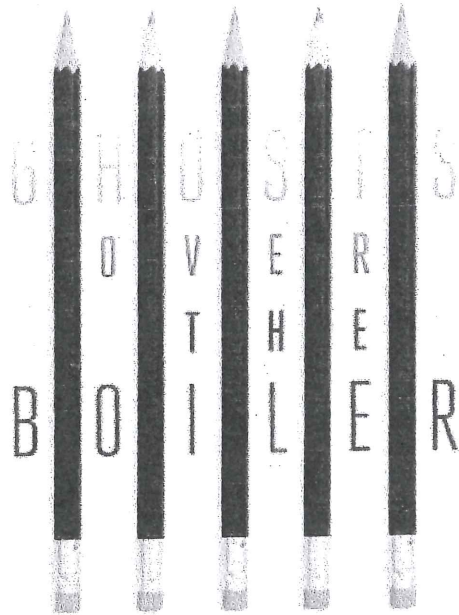
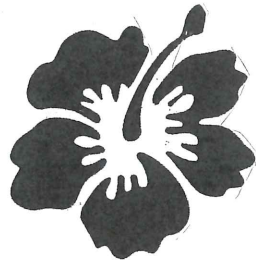
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Voices from Alabama's Death Row

PROJECT HOPE TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY
EDITED BY KATHLEEN OWENS MURPHY

A Christian Perspective

Produced By
Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty



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Greetings Friends and Family,

We are celebrating Memorial Day weekend as I write to ya'll. Remembering that men and women have been fighting and dying for this country since its inception gives a different perspective on death and knowing that this weekend also traditionally marks the beginning of summer, I find myself simultaneously looking back and towards the future with a renewed appreciation for those who came before us. To settle and explore this land, to found a nation, to shape its future, and yes, even the men who blazed a trail from death to life here at Holman. I'm humbled to walk in the footsteps of those who came before, who did so much with so little and I'm motivated to shine God's light in new and brighter ways. And to continue the fight to abolish the death penalty.

One of the beautiful things about writing this editorial is that God doesn't change. As much as the narrative surrounding the death penalty in Alabama shifts with every day, every ruling, and every debate, God's Hand is steady and supportive. So when there's news that may seem unfavorable at the time, we know that when God is for us, who can be against us. And that soon and very soon the victory belongs to the Father of all. And it is so much easier to be uplifted and motivated just knowing that what needs to be said and heard about the injustices inherent in the death penalty is being said and heard.

We just pray that those with the power to do something about it will hear it and be moved to do the right thing. Amen.

Yours in Christ

Bart Johnson
Vice-chairman, PHADP





Above the Law: Criminals vs Citizens!

The characteristics between citizens and criminals is more alike than you think. Most of us so called criminals have a good heart, but one mistake allowed you citizens to put us in chains. We have been classified as unforgivable, and unredeemable. Most of us the specifics of the crims we were accused of committing didn't warrant a death sentence. Some of us come from a broken family, some raised by single mothers that forced us to see the struggle to maintain a home firsthand. Some of us come from a home where the father was there yet we still was forced to see the struggle to maintain a home. Once we saw what looked like a better and easier way to live the choice was easy.

Most citizens grow up in a decent and often lavish lifestyle free from harm or danger. Dad and Mom was in the home, the college fund was started at birth. The teachings of who is good and who is evil was started. Their neighborhood was free from violence and drugs. The crime rate was low, the education was top-notch, the opportunities were abundant. The choices to start a decent career were much easier, and a lot of those citizens are the ones that are making, applying, and enforcing these biased laws that is destroying the other neighborhoods.

We have judges that used the affirmative action laws to excel and climb out of poverty to a place of prominence. The same judges chose to turn their backs on where they come from just to be classified as citizens. Now these judges that come from the criminal backgrounds is writing the laws to insure that the slavery prison system continue to thrive. So ask yourself one question. If I'm the one making the laws, shouldn't it be easier for me to know how to break the law and get away with it. Most of those offences is called "white-collar crimes."

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it." "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who finds it" So the life that is laid out for the criminal is glamorized and is shown to the public, sell dope, shoot up your neighborhood, kill your brother, drive a nice car with big rims. What you didn't see is the commercials showing you can receive federal aid and grants to go to college and get an education and live a life above the law, the way the citizens do, just know it's never too late!



Jeffery Lee
Sec / Treasurer
L - 12

What Is Truth?

What is truth in this land of lies we call AmeriKKKa?
The land of theives and the home of the Klan. The media is full of these individuals that will tell you anything to service their agendas. AmeriKKKa, the place where the rule of deception is the tool for governmental cover ups and conspiracy theories.

Who depicts what truth is?

They lead you to believe that it's a perfect justice system, but it's controlled by fallible people. The biggest criminals in AmeriKKKa are the ones who try to tell you what's right or what's wrong. The Declaration of Independence decreed that all men are created equal, but those who wrote it owned slaves!

What is truth I ask, because no one of color was even considered a man in those times, but ignorance has taught me that, to know nothing will lead you to believe anything.

There's No Losses In Life
Only Lessons Learned!

N.O.



The Rest of the Problem

Let us have church, State of Alabama, who have hurted you to the point that your bitterness have defiled many? Hebrews 12:15 Your bitterness have put to silence the victim's families who want and support life and mercy, but YOU want to go beyond your protocol, for death and vengeance, Romans 12:19. Your bitterness have lead you to defile the courts and judges to believe the men you botched their executions, even their lawyers, were the reasons your death plan wasn't carried out, your root of bitterness have lead your decisions for life to be that of Pilate in Luke 23, given a chance to do right, he allowed the people to mae the decision for him, even though he found no fault in Jesus, verse 4, instead of following the pattern of Pharoahs's daughter, where she restored life to someone sentenced to death, to do great things for God. May the church say Amen.

Jimmy Davis Jr.



"By the Grace of God I Am What I Am"

I came across that quote from the Apostle Paul, who was in prison at that time writing to a body of believers at Corinth, that by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me was not in vain.

I wasn't aware that God's grace could be received in vain, because of a verse in Romans 5:20 Sin spread when the law was given, but where sin spread, God's grace spreads all the more so.

Then I read in the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, that we then as workers together with God also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

That statement caused me to ask myself a few questions. (1) What is grace? (2) What does it do? (3) Why do I need it? (4) Where is it found? (5) How much can I have? (6) How do you receive it?

Grace signifies unmerited favor, undeserved blessing, a freegift; It causes us to be justified by God's grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life; as through one man's offense, judgement came to all men, resulting in justification of life, for sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under God's grace;

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, even so this grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord; God is able to make all grace abound to you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things, man have an abundance for every good work;

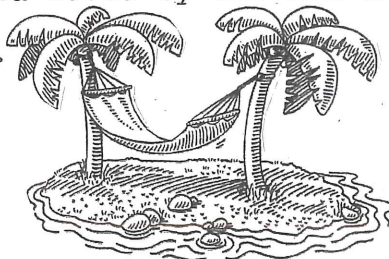
For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. He did this to show us through all the time to come the great riches of His grace, God has shown us His kindness through Christ Jesus.

Let me stop for now, I believe some of the questions I had has been answered.

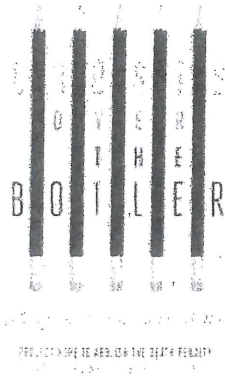
I'm reminded of the words from a song I enjoy singing entitled "Grace & Mercy" You grace and mercy, brought me through- I'm living this moment because of you, I want to thank you and praise you too- Your grace and mercy brought me through.

I am forgiven, redeemed, sanctified, and loved by the Father!!

Earl J. McGahee Sr.
Z - 466 / L - 24



We are grateful to all who went before, to all who contributed and to all who made it happen!



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Ghosts Over the Boiler – Vanderbilt University Press

From a donated typewriter that frequently breaks down, people on Alabama's death row have literally cut and pasted together a newsletter, On Wings of Hope, f..



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We appreciate everyone who has supported us over the years, and as time passes our mailing list needs to be updated. If we haven't heard from you in a while, and you still want to receive a paper copy of our newsletter, please let us know. You can simply mail this notice back to us in the envelope included with this newsletter.

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What's Fair

When you bring back painful memories for a family, is it fair? When you cause another family pain, is it fair? An execution is neither right nor fair. When a person sits on death row for so long. How would it be fair to cause both sides of the table pain would that be fair? When the victim's family doesn't want a person to be executed and the state moves and executes that person, is it fair? Is it fair to the victim's family? The same could be said about someone who is innocent and the state executes them anyway, is that fair that the state gets away with murder? Would that be fair that no one is held to answer for that? The state places a protocol on how they execute a person. If they don't go by that protocol is that fair? I will leave you with this: What is fair?

Brandon Sykes



Ghosts Over the Boiler

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Edited by Katie Owens-Murphy

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From a donated typewriter that frequently breaks down, people on Alabama's death row have literally cut and pasted together a newsletter, *On Wings of Hope*, for the last three decades to educate the public about the death penalty. This newsletter, a labor of love, documents decades of work, wisdom, activism, and lived experience of those who have been executed, or are scheduled to be executed, by the state of Alabama. The writings also chart the changing policy and practice of capital punishment in the state that sentences more people to death per capita than any other in the US.

Ghosts Over the Boiler is a curated collection of poetry, visual art, photographs, essays, creative writings, and other archival materials that have emerged from Alabama's death row from the organization Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty (PHADP). This group was founded at Holman Correctional Facility and has been operating autonomously since 1989 toward its mission to abolish the death penalty in Alabama and in the nation.