STATE CANDLELIGHT VIGIL

The Annual State Candlelight Vigil for the victims of homicide was held on the lawn of the Attorney General’s Office April 23, 2010. There were over 270 in attendance (count was lost as the rain started). Each person attending passed a sea of white crosses placed on the lawn in memory of each homicide victim in Alabama this year. Officer Stough of D.O.C. and Carter Papke of the Montgomery County District Attorney’s office are the volunteers that place and removed the crosses each year. The Montgomery Police Department’s Honor Guard started the program with the presentation of flags (did you know the city of Montgomery has its own flag?) Brenda Riley was the guest vocalist and Angel House presented the slide presentation of pictures to honor the victims. Each person was presented with candles they lit in memory of their loved ones and balloons to release in their honor. The State Trooper Honor Guard Bag Piper and Bugler ended the program with Amazing Grace and Taps as the balloons were released. A Special Thank You to Vicki Brown, VSO, Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office for the extra effort in notifying victims and DA Ellen Brooks for her support.

STATE VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Denny Kimbrel was presented the State Volunteer of the Year award at VOCAL’s state candlelight vigil, held in Montgomery on April 23rd. Denny has volunteered hundreds of hours to victims across Alabama to bring awareness to homicide. “I didn’t do it for recognition. I do it to try and help others to make it a little easier for them.” Denny Kimbrel said. He is truly deserving of this award.
AG TROY KING AND VOCAL SUPPORT NEIL GRANTHAM FAMILY AT U.S. SUPREME COURT

Coffee County Sheriff, Neil Grantham, was gunned down as he was getting out of his car to go into the jail on March 1, 1979 in Elba. He was one of five whose name was on Billy Joe Magwood’s hit list. After 31 years this family is still waiting for justice. On March 24, 2010 the U. S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., questioned whether Billy Joe Magwood, an Alabama death row inmate can challenge his second death sentence with an argument state officials said he didn’t use when he was first sentenced to die for shooting Neil Grantham. The family hopes the Court will rule soon on this hearing. They normally will rule by the end of June before session ends for summer break. Assistant Attorney General Corey Maze assisted by AAG Beth Hughes represented the State and argued for justice before the highest court. AAG Corey Maze is awesome. We are so blessed to have someone with his abilities. Also, Kevin Blackburn from the Alabama Attorney General’s Office took the oath that day to be able to present cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. We thank the Shoals VOCAL Chapter (Florence), Bobby Riley (Dothan), Mark Biehl and Darlene Hutchinson-Biehl (Wetumpka) for donations to help with some of the expenses of the trip for the VOCAL members attending.

Front row L to R: Miriam Shehane, Janette Grantham, Neil’s sister, Pat Jones, Tilly Wuolukka
Back row: Rob Hudson, nephew of Neil Grantham, Attorney General Troy King, Doris Hancock, and Darlene Hutchinson-Biehl.

CHAPTER NEWS

JEFFERSON COUNTY CHAPTER 2200 8th Ave. N, Sheriff’s Dept. Training Room, 2nd Floor, 1st Thursday, 6 p.m.
Chapter President: Carol Melton, (205) 841-1465
Email carolmeltonb@bellsouth.net
Chapter Mailing Address: 4162 51st Avenue North, Birmingham, AL 35217

April was very busy getting ready for the candlelight vigil; special thanks to Judy and Cheryl of the victim assistance at Jefferson County District Attorney’s office. The candlelight vigil was held on April 22, 2010 with a large crowd in attendance. The homicide victims’ pictures were presented on large slides to honor their memory. District Attorney Brandon Falls and Sheriff Mike Hale addressed the crowd, followed by Attorney General Troy King as keynote speaker. Each family member lit a candle in remembrance of their loved one. Special thanks to Jefferson County Commission and Jefferson County Honor Guard.

We appreciate the continued support and compassion we receive from our District Attorney Brandon Falls, and Jefferson County Sheriff Mike Hale. We were blessed to receive a generous donation of $1,000 from Houston County District Attorney Douglas Valeska.

March brought one of our members, Lela Edwards, to trial where the case was pled. Tia Davis was sentenced to life without parole for the capital murders of Lela’s son, Michael Edwards, and Ulesha Stoner in April 2006. Members attended a parole hearing on a sex abuse case which was denied for five years. Members also attended the sentencing for the murder of Jerry Marcrum and the defendant received 20 years. We will also be supporting the family of Kayla Fenaci who was a student at UAB. This will be the third trial, the first two ending in hung jury. A person of interest has been picked up for the disappearance of Nadia Kersh. Please keep her parents, Nancy and Kevin, in your prayers.
SHELBY COUNTY CHAPTER

The Shelby County Chapter held its candlelight vigil on April 19 at Shelby Christian Fellowship in Columbiana. Chapter members appreciate Pastor Rod Davidson and Carissa for their assistance in preparing for the vigil and for allowing us to use their beautiful sanctuary. Crosses were placed on the front lawn in memory of crime victims. Attorney General Troy King was an inspiration to the victims in attendance as the Keynote Speaker. Miriam Shehane shared greetings from the state chapter and Chapter President Johnnie Page and Diane Clark blessed us in song. Chapter members Cecilia Hilyer and Donnie Spears shared inspirational thoughts and Mitzi Wheat prepared and presented the pictorial tribute to victims. Family members of victims and survivors of crime shared their feelings, lit candles, and released balloons in memory of those lost to crime. Several expressed their appreciation to AG Troy King for his assistance in prosecuting their cases.

Members attended the capital murder trial of Tia Davis who murdered Michael Edwards and Ulesha Stoner in April 2006. Davis was sentenced to life without parole. Chapter members also attended the State Candlelight Vigil in Montgomery on April 23.

SHOALS CHAPTER

Members went to a rape trial to support Rape Response in the case of a young UNA student from Jamaica. The jury came back with a conviction of attempted rape. Thanks to Lauderdale County District Attorney Chris Connolly and Florence Investigator Sue Ann Taylor. Members went to a capital murder hearing of Johnthan Cossey from Waterloo who is charged with the double murder of Sylvia Mitchell and Ricky Waller from Florence. Members also attended a hearing for Christopher Rich (31) of Florence who murdered Hollie Newbury (24) of Florence in front of her two small children.

Shoals Chapter had a very good candlelight vigil. Thanks to Attorney General Troy King, Janette Grantham, Dothan Chapter President Pat Jones, and Miriam Shehane for attending. As always, thanks to Lauderdale County DA Chris Connolly, Florence Police Chief Rick Singleton, Sheriff Ronnie Willis, and Florence Mayor Bobby Irons for their support. Kathryn Burks and Gina Cox did a good job with the songs. Members from the Shoals Chapter attended the vigil in Montgomery. We enjoyed seeing old friends and meeting new friends. It was a very nice vigil and was the first time for Patsy Michaels and Debra Gray to attend. After the vigil we went to show them the Angel House. Thanks so much to Houston/Henry County District Attorney Douglas Valeska for the donation to our chapter; we will use it wisely.
Chapter President Denny Kimbrel was shocked and surprised, but honored to receive The Volunteer of The Year Award! He would like to share it with all the members of the Shoals Chapter for their hard work and assistance. Denny states, “We each as victims work in whatever way we can to honor our love ones. I am grateful to be retired because it allows me to do things most can't do. Thanks to Johnnie, my wife of 45 years and the mother of Darryl; she supports me in whatever I try to do and helps in her own way.”

SOUTHEAST CHAPTER

Wiregrass Angel House, 105 N. Bell, Dothan, 3rd Tuesday monthly, 6:30 p.m.
Chapter President: Pat Jones, (334) 585-2684; Email patandgary@centurytel.net
Chapter Mailing Address: 406 Hickory Grove Road, Abbeville, Alabama 36310

The Southeast Chapter supported Pat Jones and her family at the parole hearing of Olin Grimsley on April 6. DA Doug Valeska also went and provided transportation for them to go. Members from other chapters, VOCAL/Angel House, a representative from the Governor’s Office and Attorney General Troy King were there to protest his release. It was denied for five years. VOCAL is so blessed to have a networking support of so many people.

Our chapter kicked off of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week in Dothan on April 18. The vigil was held at First Presbyterian Church with 150 in attendance. Attorney General Troy King was the guest speaker. The awards ceremony was conducted by Chuck Linderman with presentation by The Honorable Troy King. Shelly Linderman did the picture memorial with candles being lit afterwards. As the family members lit their candles and said the name of their loved ones, a long stem red rose, donated by Ann Kasler, was given to each family member. Dothan Police Chief Greg Benton sang two wonderful songs. We ended the vigil by releasing balloons outside. Goody bags and stuffed animals were given to the children as they came into the vigil. We had three of the DA’s from the Southeast present: DA Doug Valeska, DA Kirk Adams, and DA Ben Reeves. Also present were: Judge Brad Mendheim, Sheriff Andy Hughes (Houston) and Sheriff Will Maddox (Henry), Houston County Commissioner Mark Culver, Senator Harri Anne Smith, Representative Benjamin Lewis, representatives for Warren Beck, and Miriam and Edward Shehane. We had employees from the DA’s Office and many other law enforcement officers. Our most important guests were the victims and their families. Our chapter thanks Janette Grantham and Doris Hancock (VSO’s for Attorney General’s Office), Jeanette Phillips, Tilly Wuoluka, Beckie Schuler, Gary Jones, Kim Leverette, and Ann Kasler for helping us set up for the vigil. Ann Kasler also provided lunch.

The Southeast VOCAL Chapter would like to express their appreciation for those that recently retired in Houston County: Judge Lawson Little, Judge Edward Jackson, Judge John Steensland, and Chief Assistant DA Gary Maxwell. You will be missed. Thanks for the many years of service and may God bless you as you enjoy your retirement.
10th Annual Governor’s Conference

Vocal Angel House’s Annual Governor’s Conference for law enforcement training held on April 21st was a tremendous success. 275 law enforcement officers registered for the conference and reported the speakers were awesome. The morning training was conducted by Stan Walters “the Lie Guy”, instructing on kinesics interview and interrogations--invaluable training for all law enforcement. The afternoon session was conducted by Sgt. Terry Hall on interviewing skills for sexually abused children. This was an excellent training for all law enforcement officers; obtaining and keeping the child’s trust are key to convictions. Both of these instructors are to be commended for their dedication to victims and law enforcement. Without their agreeing to the donation of their time and talent, 275 law enforcement officers would not be as prepared as they are today. Sgt. Terry Hall works with the Indianapolis Police Department and has developed a valuable manual for use in child sex abuse cases. Stan Walters has a very informative CD for use in determining who is lying. His research is obvious when critiquing this work.
The State Awards ceremony was conducted by Captain Keith Barnett of the Montgomery Police Department with the Honorable Attorney General presenting each state award to the recipient.

2010 State Victim Service Officer of the Year

The State Victim Service Officer Award goes to the person that commonly invokes the victims’ rights... to speak, to attend hearings, and to treat victims with dignity and respect through all phases of the criminal justice system. This recipient exemplifies the qualities of an excellent Victims Service Officer; a passionate advocate, a caring friend; knowledgeable of the court system, and attentive care to the victims and their families.

This recipient works in a circuit where victims are given an important status in the criminal justice system and she is consistent in connecting with victim’s; letting them know she will be there for them.

It requires a special person to impact the lives of victims in the magnitude that this recipient does. Her demeanor and quick smile reassures the smallest victims, the children that come through the system. She has earned the respect and undying gratitude of hundreds of parents by providing the trust they needed and the protection their child needed. The recipient of the 2010-2011 Victims Service Officer of the Year Award was Laura Johnson Culberson of the Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office.
The State Law Enforcement Officer Award is presented to an outstanding officer that has made a substantial contribution to victims, law enforcement, or the community. This law enforcement officer demonstrates personal integrity, leadership, dedication, commitment, and involvement. He is a pacesetter with his compassion for victims. He inspires the confidence of victims and their families to trust the system for justice. This person has been known to drop whatever he is doing to accommodate the victim’s family when they call, regardless of how many times they call. He investigates the most horrendous crime against victims and yet maintains his compassion. His professionalism has always been apparent even when notifying a family that their daughter had been murdered. He never acted as if this was just another case to him. One mother could not have endured the homicide of her daughter without this officer’s help. While following leads in this case he missed his own son’s graduation. This officer has shown more compassion to the victim’s family than their close friends. The 2010-2011 State Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award was presented to Deputy Chris McLean of the Mobile County Sheriff’s Office.
The best prosecutor is the one who knows he is speaking for the victim and does so with passion. This year’s recipient has the ability to instill trust in a child victim for successful testimony at trial. He assures the victim he is their friend and is there to protect them and keep them safe while pursuing justice for them. While working diligently on the case he takes time to acknowledge the victims’ emotional state and need for justice. His tireless work ethic, compassion, and confidence result in convicting the perpetrator and restoring trust to victims and their families. The dignity and respect accorded the victims and witnesses’ is truly refreshing and reflects his genuine concern and compassion. When pursuing justice for the homicide of an out of state family, he proceeded in the same manner resulting in new attitudes about Alabama and the criminal justice system; even calling the family months later to check on them.

Victims and their families have used words to describe him such as Dedicated, Respectful, Prepared, and Leadership. 100% focused on prosecution! As one family said, “Search the world and you couldn’t find a better prosecutor.” But the most important words were “He gave us hope.” It was our honor to present the 2010-2011 State Prosecutor of the Year Award to the Honorable Kirke Adams of the 33rd Judicial Circuit.
2010 State Miriam Shehane Award

The Miriam Shehane Award is presented annually to one whose work is outstanding and exceptional for victims and victim’s rights. The nominees through the years include law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, senators, and representatives. Miriam Shehane became the constant voice for thousands of families who were too devastated and too frightened to stand alone. During the Samson Massacre this recipient was on the scene with families within the hour, staying into the early morning, and was there daily for weeks, attending and helping the devastated families, calling on every resource available. One victim’s pregnant wife, with 2 other small children, was left destitute and social security was dragging their feet. When the husband was killed, the paycheck stopped immediately. This became a priority for her and she had the family’s social security within 3 days. This recipient has been instrumental in implementing the pre-trial diversion program in her counties in order to help provide funding for victims’ programs. She initiated and walked the “Execution Attendance Bill” through in order to accommodate a victim’s family. Even with her car under 4 feet of water that day, she proceeded on with the passage of this bill. No one speaks for victims with greater passion and concern…with a strong sense of duty to protect the interest of victims and their families in the legislature, as shown in her voting record on laws to protect victims of crime. We are indeed blessed to have Senator Harri-Anne Smith as the recipient of the 2010-2011 State Miriam Shehane Award.
2010 King Solomon Award for Judicial Excellence

The King Solomon Award for judicial excellence is presented to one Alabama judge that demonstrates a deep commitment and dedication to the highest ideals of the profession and the administration of justice--one who performs with competence and ability. “One who conducts himself with unquestionable integrity, fairness, courtesy, and abiding sense of responsibility.

From the first recipient, Judge Jerry White, to the last year’s recipient, Judge Thomas Jones, all of our recipients have demonstrated one common trait—justice for all. The King Solomon Award is displayed in the entry at the Attorney General’s Office and an engrave plate bearing the name of this year’s recipient will be added.

The recipient of this year’s award has experience with victims and their families as an assistant district attorney. The close relationship she experienced with victims contributed to making an excellent judge.

This judge controls her courtroom, rules on the law with a commanding presence and at the same time showed respect and understanding to the victim’s family. Victims have nicknamed her the “3 Point Judge.”

“Sit Down, Over-ruled, and Answer the Question.”

The King Solomon Award for Judicial Excellence was presented to the Honorable Judge Karen Hall, Madison County Circuit Judge.
The first time I met this recipient he knelt down on the concrete to comfort a 10 year old little girl whose father was murdered. This was very unusual that he showed such compassion. But I thought to myself “he’s new, that won’t last long.” But seven years later, he still kneels down to comfort a child that has lost a parent to homicide. He kneels to reassure that child that justice will be done and all the resources of his office will be utilized for their benefit. The victims in Alabama have the very best advocate for their rights, for new laws, for compassion, and a best friend in this recipient. This state award was established in 2005 in honor of President Reagan who saw the need to establish victim’s rights across America. **Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of National Crime Victims Rights Week, the Ronald Reagan Award was presented to the Honorable Troy King, Alabama’s Attorney General.**
Every year Wiregrass Angel House recognizes those who have gone out of their way to assist victims of violent crime and thank them for the extraordinary job they have done. This year we have honored some locally as well as far away. Awards were presented by Attorney General Troy King.

**Back Row:** Kirke Adams, Special Recognition for the golf tournament, Dale County DA; Sgt. Tim Ingram, Abbeville PD; Cpl. Will Glover, Dothan PD; Cpl. John Crawford, Dothan PD; Douglas Valeska, Pat Riley Jones Award; Ben Reeves, Special Recognition for the golf tournament, Barbour County DA; Cpl. Clark Allums, Dothan PD; Noel Vandlandingham, Abbeville PD.

**Middle Row:** Investigator Harvey Mathis, Dale Co. Sheriff’s Office; Deputy Steve Culbreth, Henry Co. Sheriff’s Office; Deputy Clyde Hornsby, Henry Co. Sheriff’s Office.

**Front Row:** Donald Valenza, Houston Co. Sheriff’s Office; Stephen Smith, Douglas Valeska Award; H.G. Hayes for late Warren Beck, Miriam Shehane Award; Inv. James Brazier, Houston CO. Sheriff’s Office; Sgt. Jackie Smith, Houston Co. Sheriff’s Office; Inv. Bill Rafferty, Houston Co. Sheriff’s Office; Inv. Anthony Hatcher, Houston Co. Sheriff’s Office; Attorney General Troy King; Dr. Nelson Handle, Humanitarian Award; Amarylis Benefield, 33rd Judicial Circuit; Shannon Hall, Geneva Co. DHR; and Kristin Atwell, Hartford PD. (Not pictured are: Gary Maxwell of the 20th judicial circuit for his outstanding leadership for our annual golf tournament and Judge Brad Mendheim of the 20th judicial circuit as recipient of the Judge Jerry M. White Award for judicial excellence in Southeast Alabama.)
3rd ANNUAL CHARITY GOLF CLASSIC

The 3rd Annual Charity Golf Classic was held April 16th at the Highland Oaks Golf Course in Dothan, Alabama. There were over 100 golfers that participated. We raised over $52,000. A great big thank you to Gary Maxwell, Chief Assistant District Attorney, for all of his hard work putting this tournament together and all that it entails!

A Special Thank You to our Sponsors!
Kirke Adams  33rd Judicial Circuit District Attorney
Doug Valeska  20th Judicial Circuit District Attorney
Ben Reeves    3rd Judicial Circuit District Attorney
TRE Services
Flowers Insurance
Gary Maxwell, Chief Asst. District Attorney
Compass Bank
SCC Management
Dove Foundation
Outlet Rental Car Sales
Cochran, Cherry, Givens, and Smith
Jim Whaley Tires
ScreenTech
Southeast Vein and Laser Ctr
Regions Bank
Lewis, Brackin, Flowers, and Johnson
Hathcock Roofing and Remodeling
Southern Heritage Funeral Home
Wally Hinesly Attorney at Law
G. David Johnston, Attorney at Law
Bondy's Ford

DISTRICT ATTORNEY SUPPORTS FAMILY FOR 20 years

District Attorney Doug Valeska has supported the family of Ella Foy Riley for 20 years. On May 22, 1990, this family met DA Valeska for the first time, the morning after their mother was murdered. He was with them through 5 murder trials in less than 4 years plus the preliminary hearing, grand jury, and all the appeals. He was there for the execution of one of the co-defendants in Atmore. He has been with them at 2 parole hearings for the other co-defendant. He provided transportation for others to attend the parole hearings. This family has been blessed to have DA Doug Valeska as the District Attorney through their victimization.
COUNSELOR’S CORNER

If you are a recent victim of a loved one being murdered, you may not believe you have rights, but you do. Knowledge is power so please read your rights. If there is something in them you don’t understand please call us. Things have really changed for victims in the criminal justice system. I am printing an excerpt from a victim’s letter that you might see the difference between the 1997 criminal justice system and the 2010 criminal justice system.

In February 2007, our sister Ruby Harbin, was murdered while attending a dance at the American Legion in Huntsville, Alabama. She was murdered simply for refusing to dance with a man named William Koller. He went to his truck, retrieved a gun, and while she was sitting at a table with her niece, fatally shot her twice in the back of the head. Although she lived for several hours, her injuries were too great and she died the next day. The murder trial took place in September 2009. Throughout the trial, the judge exemplified professionalism as she oversaw the proceedings. She controlled the courtroom and ruled on the law with a commanding presence. But at the same time, she showed us respect and understanding. During the sentencing phase, she allowed us to talk about Ruby—about who she was and how much she meant to us. She allowed us to address Mr. Koller directly so that he could see our pain. She spoke “to us” not “at us” with feeling. She took the time to explain the reasoning behind the sentence and what it meant for his possibility of parole. It was clear that she was just and fair.

Tragically, the murder trial of William Koller was not the first murder trial that involved our family. In 1995 our brother, Pat Reliford, Jr., was murdered near his home in Union Grove, Alabama. During that trial, the murderer testified he had pushed our brother to the ground, stepped on him, and when he tried to get up, shot him, execution style, in the back of the head. At the beginning of the trial, the judge pointed his finger directly at my 81 year old mother and said, “If I see one tear running down your face, I will declare a mistrial and he will walk. We were all astonished! How could a judge expect an elderly mother not to cry at her son’s murder trial? How differently we were treated by the judge of 1995 and the judge of 2007 who allowed us dignity and understood the realm of our emotions.

The latter judge understood the deep sadness and hurt still felt by our family. She knew the emotions we would have to endure throughout the course of the trial. She knew that we too were victims of a horrific crime.

Appeals Court Upholds Victim’s Rights to Speak at Sentencing—Crime Victims Rights Act

On January 20, 2006 the United State Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit issued an opinion upholding the right of crime victims to speak at the convicted criminals sentencing hearing.

The case involved a father and son who swindled dozens of victims. The two pled guilty to wire fraud and money laundering. Over 60 victims submitted impact statements. At the father’s sentencing, several victims spoke about the effects of the crimes--retirement savings lost, businesses bankrupted, and lives ruined. Unfortunately, at the son’s sentencing, the judge in the U.S. District Court for the District of California refused to allow the victims to speak. He said, “I listened to the victims the last time and quite frankly, I don’t think there’s anything that any victim could say that would have any impact whatsoever.” This attitude was shocking. President Bush spoke against this attitude toward crime victims when he addressed an audience at the Department of Justice in 2002. The President said, “Too often, the financial losses of victims are ignored. And too often, victims are not allowed to address the court at sentencing and explain their suffering.” The President went on to say, “When our criminal justice system treats victims as irrelevant bystanders, they are victimized for a second time.”

Fortunately, the Court of Appeals held that the District Judge had made a mistake. In its decision, the Court of Appeals made three important statements.

1. In passing the CVRA, it was the intent of Congress to allow crime victims to speak at sentencing hearings, not just submit victim impact statements.
2. Victims have a right to speak even if there is more than one criminal sentencing. This ruling is important in cases with multiple defendants. As the Court of Appeals noted, “The effects of a crime aren’t fixed forever once the crime is committed—physical injuries sometimes worsen, victims’ feelings change; secondary and tertiary effects such as broken families and lost jobs may not manifest themselves until much time has passed. The district court must consider the effects of the crime on the victims at the time it makes its decision with respect to punishment, not as they were at some point in the past.”

The remedy for a crime victim denied the right to speak at a sentencing hearing is to have the sentence vacated and a new sentencing hearing held in which the victims are allowed to speak. Again we can celebrate this decision as an important step in securing the rights of crime victims.
A SURVIVOR’S STORY
UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING OUR GRIEF

My name is Donnie Spears, and like almost each one of you, I, also, had a loved one taken from me by violent crime. My son, Steven Carlyle Spears, Jr., was murdered on December 10, 2004. So, I have in common with you the pain of tragic loss. While I would never want anyone else to ever even imagine the kind of pain we feel, there are some things I wish other people understood about our grief and how they could help us. I would like to share with you my personal thoughts along with recurring themes we’ve shared with each other.

- I wish you knew I like for you to say Steven’s name. He is still my son; he is still very important to me; and I still love him greatly. I’m thinking about him. I want and need to hear his name.
- I wish you knew that I appreciate it when you do not shy away from me or avoid me. Your smile, your kind words, and your care mean a lot to me. If I get emotional when we talk about Steven, please understand that you haven’t caused my tears. Steven’s death has caused my tears.
- I wish you knew that if I seem distant sometimes, it is just because my heart, my mind, and my soul are visiting in another world.
- I wish you knew that if I sometimes seem to withdraw from you, it is not because I do not like your company. It is because I feel that I am not good company for you. I am sad, and I do not want to make you sad.
- I wish you knew that although I do not want to burden you, I really do need you.
- I hope you remember that holidays, Steven’s birthday, and especially the anniversary of his death are difficult times for me. If I seem sad or you see tears in my eyes on those occasions, please don’t think I am being selfish. Instead, I wish you would talk about him with me. It helps me to remember funny stories, special memories, and good times, and it means a lot to me that you think about him too. That helps me to be able to be more cheerful with everyone and really makes those times better for me.
- I wish you wouldn’t think that if I’m having a bad day or if I’m crying that I definitely need anti-depressants or counseling, but please support me if I do need either or both. If I’m having a good day or if I’m laughing, please don’t think that my grief is gone.
- Please understand that loss changes people, and traumatic loss takes an especially dreadful toll. I am not the same person I was before Steven was murdered. I will never be that person again, and if you expect me to be, you will be disappointed. Then I will feel frustrated or hurt because you think I should be or ashamed because I can’t be.
- I wish you understood how badly my heart has been shattered. It now has a huge open wound and that wound will never completely heal during my lifetime. Right now my journey is difficult and more than likely I will experience setbacks, some minor, some more major. Trying to cope with the magnitude of this trauma has devastated me, wiping out my coping skills. Therefore, I have been made fragile and vulnerable to even the smallest emotionally painful experience having the ability to create substantial damage to me emotionally, physically, or both. For my own well-being, it may be necessary for me to retreat from stressful, painful situations, places, or people. Otherwise, I could plummet all of the way back to ground zero. I hope you will understand if I must retreat to my safest refuge. When I regain strength, I will emerge again.
- Please don’t tell me I need to get over it. I never will. And, please, please don’t tell me that if I had enough faith I would be okay. I do have faith. I trust God. I understand that God has a plan for my life, and because of His promise I know that I will be with Steven again one day in Heaven. Until then, though, I will miss Steven every day, and I will be sad sometimes, and I will cry. I am not ashamed of my tears. God understands my pain and my tears. After all, He made both me and my tears.
- No matter how well meaning, whatever you do, please don’t tell me “to just not think about what has happened” or “to just put it all out of my mind” or “to put it behind me.” While he is no longer here on earth with me, my beautiful, joyful, precious son Steven is still in my heart, my mind, and my soul, and he always will be. Please remember him and what happened to him. To me, for Steven and what happened to him to be forgotten “kills” him all over again.

One line at the end of the movie, “Australia,” an inspiring movie about justice, honor, and loss, beautifully summarizes the reason we have our vigils: Why we tell their stories – that’s how we keep those people belonging.

Donnie Spears, Mother of Steven Carlyle Spears, Jr.
DONATIONS

VOCAL appreciates the faithful contributors who support our efforts in assisting crime victims. Your donations make it possible for us to provide more services and support to victims and is tax deductible.

Memorial for Bill Holder
Louise Holder

Memorial for Joey Hutchins
Sandra Hutchins

Memorial for Clint Kuntz
Billy & Dodie Blue

Memorial for John Lewis
Shelby County Chapter VOCAL

Memorials for Conni McClenny
Cheryl Wood & Constance Walrond

Alaska Power

Beasley, Allen, Methvin, & Portis
Farmer Exchange Bank

Governor Riley’s Office

The Junior League of Montgomery
Montgomery County Commission
Gerald Penn
Shoals Chapter VOCAL
Mitchell Spears
District Attorney Douglas Valeska

VICTIM CONTACTS

Governor Bob Riley
State Capitol
Montgomery, AL 36130
Patricia C. Simpkins
Dir., Constituent Services
(334) 242-7100
1-800-591-4217

Attorney General’s Office of Victim Assistance
500 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130
VSO Janette Carr
VSO Doris Hancock
(334) 242-7339
1-800-626-7676
www.ago.state.al.us

Department of Corrections
Richard Allen, Commissioner
P.O. Box 301501
301 South Ripley Street
Montgomery, AL 36130
VSO Janet Findley LeJeune
(334) 353-3871
www.doc.state.al.us
State inmate parole info.
1-888-726-9799, Option 4

Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission
Dr. Cassie Jones
Director
P.O. Box 1548
Montgomery, AL 36102-1548
1-800-541-9388
www.acvcc.state.al.us

State of Alabama Board of Pardons & Paroles
Cynthia Dillard, Director
P.O. Box 302405
VSO Debra Bonds
Montgomery, AL 36130-2405
(334) 242-8050
Fax (334) 353-7701
www.paroles.state.al.us