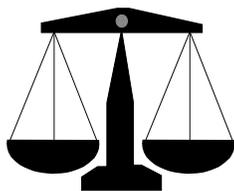


VOCAL NEWSLETTER

July 2012



Volume 12, Number 1

Victims of Crime and Leniency

A NOTE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MIRIAM SHEHANE

By the time you get this newsletter we will all have celebrated "Independence Day". I'm looking forward to having my daughter and her family at the lake house in Eufaula. Hope your day was a good one.

As many of you have already heard, I am stepping down as Executive Director of VOCAL and leaving this position in the capable hands of Janette Grantham. I can't wait to see her get this office organized like I have wanted to but have not had the stamina to do so for many years now. I would like to thank Doug Valeska, Houston & Henry County District Attorney, for his support in making this possible. Also, District Attorney Kirke Adams, from Dale & Geneva County and District Attorney Ben Reeves, from my neck of the woods, Barbour & Bullock County, have both pledged their support in any way they can.

We will be celebrating our 30th anniversary this November and I don't think anyone can dispute the fact that VOCAL has been a force to be reckoned with. But as former Montgomery County District Attorney, Jimmy Evans, said back in 1982, crime victims can make huge changes if they unite and focus on making the path through the Judicial System smoother than it was for them. I ask you to support Janette and help us with our fundraising endeavors in order for her to continue this journey. We're open to any suggestions.

I will always be a part of VOCAL and work in any capacity I can because our cause is so vital. Thank you for your support of me and my family all these years.

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Independence Day was a time of relaxation, a day off from work, barbecues, fireworks, and get-togethers for many families and friends. The "net" and other media were flooded with Happy July 4th or Happy Independence Day messages. Independence Day is a special day in our Nation's history and it is good to celebrate this great achievement. Everyone has their favorite ways to celebrate and, thankfully, we are still able to choose, to a large extent and within certain limitations, how we do so.

The very freedoms we enjoy as American citizens or as residents of our Great Nation, however, are under continuing and continual assault and abuse from both outside our borders and within. Responsible and reasonable people are doing their best to nurture and make our respective communities (and on a larger scale, our country) better and safer places to live. Freedom does not come without costs. Most agree it is reasonable to sacrifice some personal resources and freedoms for the greater safety and good of our families and communities.

Others, however, and for whatever reasons, approach life with varying degrees of disregard for their fellow members of family and community - some to the extent of near or total disregard. On one end of the continuum, we have responsible and reasonable people; on the other, we have irresponsible, unreasonable people. Where does criminal behavior start and where do most criminal acts start to cluster more and more densely on this continuum?

As responsible and reasonable parents, citizens and guardians of our freedom and values, we must not let irresponsible, unreasonable and, yes, criminally-minded people continue ripping the very fabric of our soul apart. Not without consequence. We need checks and balances that protect those who are responsible and reasonable. The more irresponsible, unreasonable, and criminal a person becomes, the more checks we need to impose to restrict their negative impact on our families, communities and ultimately, our Nation.

As a counselor, I respectfully commend all of you - victims and families and friends of victims - for your brave and courageous actions and efforts to make changes to accomplish this task. Don't ever give up! You are a very important part of what makes our Nation great. You are what makes VOCAL work. If we are to continue to live and raise our families in a truly free and independent Nation, we must continue the work begun over two centuries ago.

Eddie Sammons, Counselor; VOCAL Angel House

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

We had sad news in June. Connie Walrond, a long time loyal member, passed away. Connie was very involved in VOCAL and cared about victims. We will miss her.

We traveled to Montgomery for the signing of the income tax bill by Governor Bentley. This bill will really be a help to VOCAL. When people file their taxes, they can take the option of donating a dollar to VOCAL. We also attended the parole hearing of Joseph Ward Gentry for the murder of Kimberly Barlow Hill. Margie Caslin and her sons Steve Barlow, Rick Barlow and Stephanie Barlow appreciated the support they were given. We thank the parole board for denying his parole for five years. We wish thank Marie and Tyler Crew, Miriam Shehane, Darlene Hutchinson Biehl, David and Mona Lee, and Pat Jones for attending the hearing. District Attorney Mike Anderton and Clay Crenshaw from the Attorney General's office did a great job.

Gloria Turner from the Sheriff's Department is still out with a broken ankle. We hope she is doing better and will be able to come back soon. She is a great help to our chapter. Please keep Margie Zales in your thoughts and prayers. She has been very sick for the past year and will be having surgery on July 28.

Wanda Jones Miller and I will be going to California on July 10 to be interviewed for the show "I Survived." We will be gone for three days. They will fly us out and take care of everything. I know this will help a lot of women. Wanda has done so much for victims.

Our June meeting went well with about nine attending. We would like to thank Sergeant Mike House of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department for allowing Wanda Miller, Gloria Turner and Deputy Billy Jack Logan to help with VOCAL. He goes the extra mile for victims and we appreciate his support.

NORTH CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER Chapter Coordinator: Teresa Lindsey, (205) 466-5777
Chapter Mailing Address: 132 Mt. Carmel Road, Altoona, AL 35952; Email dlindsay@hopper.net

RIVER REGION CHAPTER VOCAL office, 422 South Court Street, Montgomery, 1st Sunday monthly, 2 p.m.
Chapter President: Darlene Hutchinson Biehl (334) 450-5851, Email DFWeditor@aol.com
Chapter Mailing Address: P.O. Box 240624, Montgomery, AL 36124

Our chapter's monthly meetings continue to be a gathering of veteran victims helping those who have been affected by crime recently. So many of the River Region members recall how important VOCAL was to their healing process, and we want to support those in need.

We have quite a few folks coming to meetings who are still awaiting trial. This week we'll be in court with one family whose 21-year-old son was murdered last year; cases are still pending against the other two co-defendants. And this month we'll accompany the family of Earmon L. Pickett Sr. to a parole hearing for one of Mr. Pickett's killers. This inmate received a 15-year split sentence for manslaughter and the victim's family did not even know the defendant was in prison until they were notified by the Parole Board about the upcoming hearing. Even if parole is denied this month, the inmate will only serve about 8 years for this awful crime, and the other 2 co-defendants have never been prosecuted. It is so unfortunate that Olivia, Irene and their family have received so little justice.



The Legislature adjourned in mid-May and we joined Gov. Robert Bentley in June for a couple of bill-signings: Sponsored by Rep. Paul DeMarco, HB 73 will allow for Alabamians to donate to VOCAL through an income tax check-off system; and SB 266 (sponsored by Rep. Arthur Payne and Sen. Jimmy Holley) amends the Youthful Offender law. VOCAL member Carol Stanley worked diligently for 3 years to get this measure enacted. (Pictured are Darlene Hutchison Biehl, Carol Stanley, Kathy King, Governor Robert Bentley, Representative Mike Jones, and Pat Jones.)

In May, Darlene also accompanied an out-of-state domestic violence victim to court in Montgomery; that day, the defendant ended up pleading guilty and was sentenced the same day. A few days later, we received a really nice note from the victim, "Thank you so much for everything. Dad and I really appreciated the use of the VOCAL House. We enjoyed our stay, considering our circumstances. Y'all have a beautiful place and I know y'all have put a lot of work into victims'

rights. Thank you for all your help.” It was great to witness how well the Montgomery DA’s office took care of this victim.

We were thrilled to see so many of our friends from other VOCAL chapters at the statewide meeting on June 23, and we loved sharing ideas about how our chapter works and hearing about other chapters’ activities.

River Region members regularly keep the Angel House ready for out-of-town visitors, vacuuming, washing and changing bed linens, etc. We have many dedicated workers in the River Region, and we’ve enjoyed having VOCAL Angel House counselor Eddie Sammons at many of our chapter meetings.

SHELBY COUNTY CHAPTER

Owens House, Columbiana, 2 p.m., 2nd Saturday in Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct, Dec
Chapter President: Johnnie Doss Page, (205) 669-4238, Email mwheat@bellsouth.net
Chapter Mailing Address: P. O. Box 32, Columbiana, Alabama 35051

The Shelby County Chapter met on June 9 and we were so pleased to have twelve people in attendance. Many of them were family members of murder victims who have been assisted in some way by the chapter. Several joined VOCAL and expressed their appreciation for the efforts of all who assist crime victims. Some also agreed to serve as officers. The chapter has desperately needed new members who can participate in the activities of the chapter. Many members are not in good health and are not able to work as they have in the past.

Brandon Samra will have a hearing in August 2012 for a reduction in his sentence. He was sentenced to the death penalty for his role in the capital murders of Randy Duke and Dedra, Chelsea, and Chelisa Hunt. Michael Ellison and David Collums are serving 15-year sentences for their part in these murders and have not had a parole hearing since 2004. The retrial for Jimmy Lamar Killingsworth is scheduled to begin on July 16, 2012 in Bibb County. He was found guilty of murder in the death of Steven Spears in 2004, but was granted a new trial last year.

SHOALS CHAPTER

Christian Faith Church, 640 County Road 323, Florence, 2nd Tuesday monthly, 6:30 p.m.
Chapter President: Denny Kimbrel (256) 757-1354, Email bamafnatk@aol.com
Chapter Mailing Address: 442 County Road 111, Killen, Alabama 35645

Three were arrested and charged with capital murder in the death of a wheelchair-confined, disabled man in May of 2011. They stabbed David Pennington, age 50, over 100 times. Tiffany (age 21), and her twin sister, Jessica Nunley and boyfriend, John Minton (age 30) had a hearing last week. Judge Self ruled the capital murder charge will stand. Some Shoals VOCAL members have been going to the hearings to support the Pennington family.

The Shoals Chapter has a few capital murder trials coming up: Victims are Tammy Woods, Chris Stanback, Keith Barnett, Amanda Taylor (Colbert County), and Betty and Bailey Nichols (Lawrence County). Manslaughter cases: Victims James Campbell and David Andrasik (Franklin County). We will keep these families in our prayers and support them throughout the judicial process.

Charles and Rebecca Condrey, and Denny and Johnnie Kimbrel attended the VOCAL statewide meeting in Montgomery; it was a good meeting.

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA CHAPTER

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

Chapter members attended the parole hearing in May for the family of James Dozier. He was murdered in Henry County by Terrence Lagarld Hollins and Gerald Brown. This hearing was for Hollins and it was denied for five years. His daughter, Jazzmon, was five years old when this happened. She will be a senior this year. She spoke at the hearing and told how she has missed her father in her life and always will. We also attended two more hearings that day and supported the families of those whose loved ones were murdered by Henry Arthur Burton and Artis Vandarian. Their parole was also denied for five years. We also protested parole of Nathaniel McDonald who murdered Paul and Dodie Herrins’s son, David, from Mobile. His parole was also denied. Pat Jones visited State Legislature and talked with Rep. Paul DeMarco and thanked him for his support of VOCAL. A trip to Montgomery for parole hearings is a way to support not only victims from our area, but others who are there for hearings. It also provides an opportunity to visit the State House, Attorney General’s Office, Governor’s Office, or the VOCAL office. Pat spoke at the Bowen Home Extension Club of Abbeville on May 15. She shared about VOCAL and about her mother’s murder.

May 15th was the 17th anniversary of the Southeast Alabama VOCAL Chapter. The chapter was organized by Pat Jones. Pat’s mother, Ella Foy Riley, was murdered May 21, 1990 and Pat started the chapter on May 15, 1995 in her honor. Miriam Shehane and Darlene Hutchinson Biehl came for two months; meeting with us and guiding us in starting a chapter. Rev. Ernest Small was our guest speaker for the celebration. He spoke on the topic “Giving Up Is Not An

Option.” He shared with us the terrible tragedy where he lost his wife and two of his children in an automobile accident. He was ahead of them going on vacation. He saw in the rear view mirror the vehicle carrying his wife and four children hydroplane, killing her and two of the children. Rev. Small (pictured right with Pat Jones) has supported VOCAL for many years by being on the Candlelight Vigil Program each year. He was given an appreciation award at this meeting.

In June, we attended two bill signings with Gov. Robert Bentley. HB73 added VOCAL to the list of organizations that donations can be made to on Alabama Income Tax Forms.



Thanks to Rep. Paul DeMarco. The other was a bill that Carol Stanley had worked so hard for the past three years. Carol’s son, Jason, was brutally assaulted five years ago. This bill strengthened penalties for juvenile offenders who cause serious physical injury, including TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) or death to their victims. It will allow judges to hear more evidence and a statement from crime victims before granting youthful offender status and handing down lenient sentences. The bill was co-sponsored by Representatives Mike Jones and Arthur Payne and Senator Jimmy Holley (SB 266).



In June, we also attended a parole hearing with Margie Caslin from Birmingham whose daughter, Kimberly Barlow Hill, was murdered by Joseph Ward Gentry. Parole was denied for five years. Other parole protests were made for: Christopher Jerome Jones (denied to 2017); Randall Chandler (denied Feb. 2015); Stanley Merchants (denied 2016) and a kidnap and rape case was denied to 2017. It is always a good feeling to leave the parole board knowing you have supported some victims who don’t even know about VOCAL.



Tilly Wuolukka, Sarah Kaye, Gary and Pat Jones attended the state VOCAL meeting on Saturday, June 23. We enjoyed visiting with victims from across the state and eating Denny Kimbrel’s famous BBQ. Denny is president of the Shoals VOCAL Chapter. (Pictured right are Darlene Hutchison Biehl and Eddie Sammons, VOCAL Angel House counselor, at the state meeting.)

After 17 years, Pat Jones is prayerfully considering giving up the presidency of the Southeast VOCAL chapter. If anyone in the area wants to serve in a leadership role in the chapter, please contact Pat.

VOCAL FUNDRAISER

The VOCAL Celerity Golf Classic will be held Thursday, September 27 at the Bonnie Crest Country Club in Montgomery. For more information contact Jerry Renfroe at 334-399-0900 or Janette Grantham at vigrantham@gmail.com or 334-224-0953.

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULES ON LIFE-WITHOUT-PAROLE SENTENCES FOR JUVENILES

On June 25, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision that prohibits judges from imposing *mandatory* life-without-parole sentences to offenders who commit murders before their 18th birthday. A juvenile can still receive a LWOP sentence for capital murder, but other sentencing options must be available.

The 5-4 decision came in the Miller v. Alabama case. In 2003, Cole Cannon was brutally murdered in Lawrence County by 2 offenders, including Evan Miller who was 14 at the time.

As a result of the High Court’s ruling, Miller will receive a new sentencing hearing but, according to the Alabama Attorney General’s office, “This decision should not affect the other juveniles serving this sentence either, especially if their convictions and sentences are already final. Going forward, these sentences will no longer be mandatory, but prosecutors will be able to seek this sentence in appropriate cases.” As VOCAL learns more about the ramifications of this decision, we will convey that information to members.

--Darlene Hutchinson Biehl

REFLECTING ON VOCAL'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In a few months, we will celebrate the 30th Anniversary of VOCAL. We need to step back a moment and reflect on all of VOCAL's accomplishments. It all began with a small group of dissatisfied victims with a spirit of determination and united by one common goal. I shudder to think where victims would be today if it had not been for Miriam Shehane and that small band of warriors. Now after thirty years, Miriam has decided to step back a little and devote more time to her family. We all know the sacrifices she has made all these years dedicating her life to victims, and she certainly deserves a little more free time to stop and smell the roses. Over the years, I have drawn strength and inspiration from Miriam as she has fiercely fought for justice for victims. I was deeply honored when Miriam asked me to come back to Montgomery and be her assistant. Not only am I deeply honored by the confidence Miriam has placed in me, but I am also proudly aware of the great responsibility she is entrusting to me. We all know there is only one Miriam Shehane, and one person cannot fill her shoes for even one day. Miriam has never asked for anything for herself until now. In order to give Miriam the time she so richly deserves, I need your help and support. The VOCAL road ahead continues to have many challenging twists and turns – maybe even some detours. But if we, like our founders, stand united with a spirit of determination, there is nothing that VOCAL cannot accomplish.

Janette Grantham

SURVIVOR STORIES/MEMORIES

On July 29, 2003, Jason Murphy and others robbed, ransacked, terrorized and murdered Ronnie Holman at his home. They parked cars at the road and walked to his home. Jason Murphy and others killed for no reason except for money. For days before Ronnie's murder they were riding, stealing, doing drugs, and endangering the lives of others. Even a six-month-old baby was in the van; Jason Murphy was driving while trying to run from law enforcement.

I have heard over and over we cannot afford to keep violent people in jail. We cannot afford not to keep them in jail! On Ronnie's case they could build a new prison and employ many people. Not to mention the heartache and pain and it is still with us 24-7.

I see two grandsons of Ronnie's who have been living with his death. The older grandson talks about his last Sunday with his Granddaddy Ronnie. He remembers swimming and riding in the pasture on the 4-wheeler with him. I remember how they went into the pasture riding and making good memories of the last time together. Since Ronnie's death, there has been another grandson born and his first granddaughter! So many events Ronnie would have loved!

We have good memories but on July 29, 2003, Jason and others took Ronnie's life and his family's hopes and dreams of our future together. You do not have to go to another country to be terrorized, it can happen in the U.S.A. If a person wants to do what is right and legal and not hurt others then they should be free. For those who want to terrorize others they should be locked away where they cannot hurt other people. When Jason Murphy and others took Ronnie's life they sentenced his family for the rest of their lives. I have heard people say, "Go on with your life." Defense lawyers have said, "This is this boy's life." Excuse me, what about Ronnie's life???? Jason did not work and he stayed in jail most of the time. He stayed in trouble and it was a matter of time before something terrible was going to happen. Jason had already shot one man and got away with a "slap on the wrist". He was in jail the week before Ronnie was killed. Jason got out of jail on Friday and until the following Wednesday, they were riding and endangering lives of others.

Jason Murphy and others sentenced us for the rest of our lives. I think he should be sentenced for the rest of his life - no less. Anything else is not acceptable, not the American way, not the Christian thing to do. We cannot let Jason Murphy and others take over America and rule our lives!!!!

Sentencing letter - Betty Holman, Mother of Ronnie Holman, January 2010

In Loving Memory of Rusty Earnest - Murdered on May 2, 2007
11-21-59 – 5-2-07

Rusty, had a God-given gift of touching so many lives because his kind and loving heart for everyone. Always a smile, handshake or hug. Always ready to lend a helping hand. He would take the time to talk to people, making a positive impact on so many lives here on earth. He loved his family and we were blessed to have him in our lives. We are thankful for the 47 years God gave us to share with him. It will soon be five years, and at times seems almost as if it was yesterday, that such a senseless crime was committed and took him away. We know he is in his heavenly home safe now, secure and protected by God. Rusty will live in our hearts and memories forever.

*Dorothy Earnest (Mom), Grant Earnest (brother) and family,
Patsy Michael (sister) and family, nieces and nephew and family*

Visit our website at www.vocalonline.org
VOCAL/Angel House
422 South Court Street
P.O. Box 4449
Montgomery, AL 36103

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DA Kirke Adams

State of Alabama

Curtis & Peggy Eiland

DA Douglas Valeska

Memorial for Paul Little
Doris Little

Memorial for Connie Walrond
Mitzie Wheat

Memorials for Jon Shehane
Hope Bennett
Miriam Shehane
Mitzie Wheat

<p>VICTIM CONTACTS Governor Robert Bentley State Capitol Montgomery, AL 36130 Taylor Vice, Director Constituent Services (334) 242-7100 1-800-591-4217</p>	<p>Attorney General's Office of Victim Assistance 501 Washington Avenue Montgomery, AL 36130 Patricia S. DeBortoli Victim Services Director (334) 242-7300 1-800-626-7676 www.ago.state.al.us</p>	<p>Department of Corrections Kim T. Thomas, 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</p>	<p>Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission Dr. Cassie Jones Director P.O. Box 231267 Montgomery, AL 36123 1-800-541-9388 www.acvcc.state.al.us</p>	<p>State of Alabama Board of Pardons & Paroles Cynthia Dillard, Director P.O. Box 302405 Montgomery, AL 36130-2405 VSO Debra Bonds (334) 242-8050 Fax (334) 353-7701 www.pardoles.state.al.us</p>
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