

Journey of Hope Speakers



Bill Babbitt

Brother of Executed Man

Bill's brother, Manny, was a Purple Heart recipient in Vietnam who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and PTSD. After an elderly woman died of a heart attack when Manny broke into her house and beat her, Bill contacted police to arrest his brother, but was assured that Manny would not receive the death penalty due to his mental illness. Unfortunately, due to bias in the criminal justice system and an inability to afford a good lawyer, Manny wound up getting the death penalty and was executed in 1999. Bill has since become an anti-death penalty advocate, bringing awareness to the many flaws of our country's criminal justice system.



SueZann Bosler

Daughter of murder victim

Co-founder Journey of Hope from Violence to Healing

SueZann Bosler watched her father, Reverend Billy Bosler, die in front of her after they were both stabbed by an intruder in his church. In honor of her father and his moral opposition to capital punishment, SueZann spent years fighting against a death penalty sentence for her father's killer. She first met Bill Pelke in 1988

and helped him start Journey of Hope a decade later. Her favorite lyric is "let there be peace on Earth, and let it begin with me."

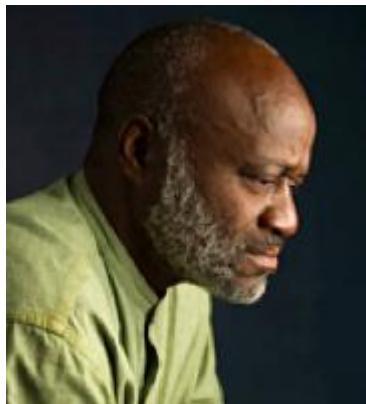


Randy Gardner

Brother of Executed Man

Randy's brother, Ronnie Lee, was executed by a firing squad in Utah. Disturbed by what he saw as the barbaric execution of his brother, Randy has become an anti-death penalty advocate. Besides his work with Journey of Hope, he has also started a farm and ranch to teach young people about farming, ranching and organic gardening, activities Ronnie Lee had become deeply interested in while in

prison. Randy's goal is to help young people give back to their communities and gain dignity and self worth—hoping to provide them with a better childhood than Randy and Ronnie Lee experienced.



Shujaa Graham
Death Row Exoneree

Shujaa grew up in the segregated South of the 1950s and later lived in southern California during the Watts Riots and an era of police occupation in his community. He spent his adolescence in and out of trouble, and educated himself on how to read and write, as well as on history and world affairs, while in prison. After becoming a prominent prison leader and Black Panther activist, Shujaa was framed for the 1973 murder of a prison guard and was sentenced to die. His death sentence was overturned in 1979 and he was found innocent in 1981, but a recognition of racial biases that still permeate the justice system

have motivated him to fight the death penalty and advocate for reform of the criminal justice system, declaring that, "I may never enjoy the fruits of this labor, but our children will."



Derrick Jamison
Death Row Exoneree

After a 1985 robbery and murder of a Cincinnati bartender, witnesses identified two suspects, but neither was Derrick. Despite this, and other contradictions between his appearance and descriptions of those actually involved, Derrick was convicted and sentenced to death, largely based on the testimony of another defendant whose sentence was reduced in exchange for his testimony against Derrick. In 2005, all charges against Derrick were dismissed and since being exonerated, he remains upset about the inequalities in our criminal justice system and of his own unjust imprisonment, but also expresses daily gratitude for his release and believes he can make a difference as an activist for change from the outside.



Marietta Jaeger Lane
Mother of murder victim

Marietta's 7-year-old daughter, Susie, was raped, killed and dismembered by a serial killer in 1973. A year later, the then-unidentified murderer called Marietta to taunt her, but was caught off guard by Marietta's sincere nature, and wound up breaking down and confessing to the crimes. Marietta has since been an advocate for forgiveness and maintaining the higher ground, reminding us that "the death penalty only creates more

victims and more grieving families. By becoming that which we deplore – people who kill people – we insult the sacred memory of all our precious victims."



Bess Klassen Landis
Daughter of murder victim

Bess' mother, Helen Klassen was beat, striped, raped, strangled and shot 4 times in their rural home in Elkhart, Indiana while her three sisters and she were at school and her father was out of state. The murder happened on March 14, 1969, before DNA testing was a reality. There was never a conviction. At thirteen years old, Bess learned that her home and community were not safe, and neither was it safe to be a woman.

In 2005, she learned of the Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing and joined them in Texas. Bess met for the first time, peers who had lost a loved one to murder and some who had forgiven the murderer. By publicly telling her story, she was able to expose and release all the ugly feelings of fear and shame that had filled the hidden spaces of her being, and she forgave herself for her failures. She believes that we are all instruments in healing the hatred in this world and that we will never do it with violence (the death penalty), but only by eradicating hunger, poverty and disease and by reaching out again and again in love to our enemies.



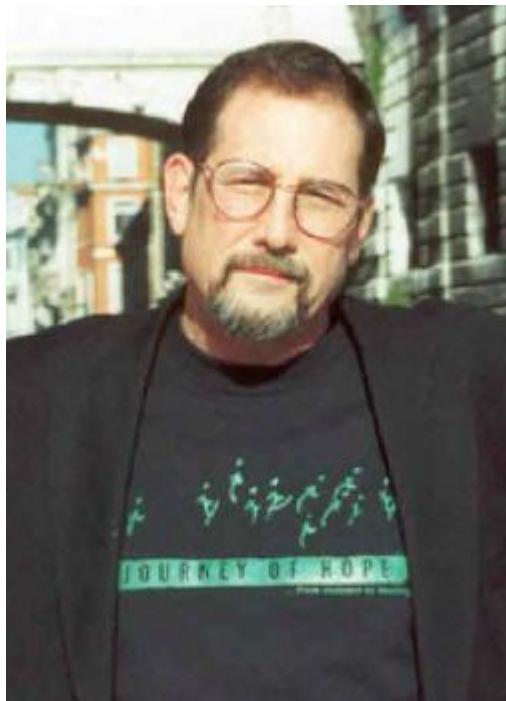
Bill Pelke
Grandson of murder victim
Co-founder Journey of Hope from Violence to Healing

Bill's grandma was murdered in 1985 by a group of four teenage girls. While originally supporting the death penalty sentence given to the ringleader, 15-year-old Paula Cooper, he underwent a spiritual transformation in 1986 and began praying for love and compassion for Paula and her family. He led an international crusade on her behalf that led to her sentence being commuted to sixty years in prison in 1989. A retired steelworker, he has now dedicated his life to fighting for the abolition of the death penalty, having traveled to over forty states and fifteen countries spreading

his story. He has also published his story in book form and serves as President of Journey of Hope.



Sandrine Ageorges Skinner
Sandrine, from Paris, France, has spent decades fighting the death penalty. She began communicating with Texas death row inmate Hank Skinner in 1996, began visiting him in 2000 and married him in 2008. She is described by Bill Pelke as “the most active person [he has] met internationally” and her unique perspective greatly enhances Journey of Hope’s time in Nebraska.



George White
Husband of murder victim, Wrongfully convicted of murder
Co-founder Journey of Hope from Violence to Healing

In 1985, George witnessed his wife Charlene’s murder, leaving George widowed and their two children without a mother. A little over a year later, George was charged with the murder and was found guilty, with the death penalty sought as his sentence. After seven years, he was found innocent beyond all doubt, and despite his tribulations, explains that vengeance is not the answer to violence. He helped co-found Journey of Hope with Bill Pelke, SueZann Bosler and Marietta Jaeger-Lane in 1997.