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SEPTEMBER 1997

A Grief Like No Other

Americans are fascinated by murders and murderers but not by the families of the people who are killed -- an amazingly numerous group, whose members can turn only to one another for sympathy and understanding

by [Eric Schlosser](#)

ON the first Friday evening of every month thirty to forty men and women gather at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Kansas City, Missouri. They meet in the parish hall, a low modern building not far from the headquarters of the Hallmark Cards corporation. They bring cookies and sodas, newsletters, notebooks, and photographs of their children. They sit in folding chairs around two large banquet tables. They are white, African-American, and Latino, middle-class and working-class, a cross-section of midwesterners. From all appearances this could be a session of the local PTA or of a church group planning its next book fair. The meeting opens with everybody explaining, one by one, why he or she has come. Each story seems more poignant and more horrific than the last. This is the monthly gathering of [Parents of Murdered Children](#), Kansas City chapter, a support group for the relatives and friends of homicide victims. A hand-stitched quilt on the wall has the photographic image of a different face in every square -- mostly young men and women, innocent, full of promise, unaware of their impending fate. The quilt seems as American in its own way as the violence that brought these families to this room.

The fear of murder has grown so enormous in the United States that it leaves a taint, like the mark of Cain, on everyone murder touches. One might expect that the families of murder victims would be showered with sympathy and support, embraced by their communities. But in reality they are far more likely to feel isolated, fearful, and ashamed, overwhelmed by grief and guilt, angry at the criminal-justice system, and shunned by their old friends. America's fascination with murder has not yet extended to its aftermath. As a result, the victims' survivors must seek comfort from one another. Throughout

the country hundreds of support groups like the one in Kansas City meet every month. The amount of bloodshed in the United States is difficult to comprehend, like the carnage of a shadowy, undeclared civil war. During the past two decades nearly half a million Americans have been murdered, and an additional 2.5 million have been wounded by gunfire -- more casualties than the U.S. military has suffered in all the wars of the past 200 years.



Terri Smith (left), shot to death at age 23,
Kansas City, Missouri, 1987

The murder rate in the United States (the number of people killed each year per 100,000) has been declining since 1993, most dramatically in New York City. Nevertheless, it is still extraordinarily high compared with the rate in Western Europe or even in the United States of just a generation ago. After years of diminishing violence in the 1950s, a murder wave began to engulf the United States around 1960. By the late 1970s the U.S. murder rate had doubled, reaching an all-time high in 1980. Since then it has fallen slightly, climbed a bit, and dropped again. The U.S. murder rate today is roughly the same as it was in 1989 -- eight homicides per 100,000. About 70 percent of the murders in America are committed with a firearm. About 90 percent are committed by men. The murder rate among men of all ages in the United States is approximately five times as high as the rate among men in Canada, eleven times as high as the rate among men in Germany, and twenty times as high as the rate among men in Ireland or Japan. The murder rate among young men in the United States, aged fifteen to twenty-four, has roughly tripled since 1960. It is now about thirty-five times as high as the murder rate among men of the same age in England.

From the archives:

- ["The Crisis of](#)

The increase in the U.S. murder rate has been accompanied over the past few decades by a rising incidence of crimes once considered rare. Mass murders, serial murders, and

Public Order," by Adam Walinsky (July, 1995)

"The Department of Justice now says that 'stranger murders' have become four times as common as family killings, and that the chances of getting away with one exceed 80 percent. Scholars say the nation's murder rate may soon double."

murders committed by strangers have become more commonplace. A mass murderer kills a number of victims at one time and often then commits suicide. A serial murderer kills a number of victims over an extended period and tries to avoid capture. After studying old newspaper articles and police reports, Ronald M. Holmes, a professor of justice administration at the University of Louisville, concluded that there were fewer than twenty mass murders in the United States from 1950 to 1960. Holmes says that three or four mass murders are now committed every month. Eric W. Hickey is a professor of criminology at California State University at Fresno, and an expert on serial murder. According to his count, there were about nineteen serial killers in the United States during the 1950s -- and about 114 during the 1980s. Various estimates place the number of serial killers at large in the United States today at thirty-five to 200.

Instead of producing widespread revulsion toward violence, or mass demonstrations, or an "anti-war" movement against the daily slaughter, America's murder rate has inspired an altogether different response: a culture of murder, with the murderer at its core. Edgar Allan Poe invented the detective story more than 150 years ago, with the publication of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and tabloids have always relied on crime stories to lure readers. But only in recent years has the serial killer become a national icon, endlessly portrayed in movies, books, and popular music. The first mainstream Hollywood "slasher" film, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, was released in 1960, as America's murder rate began to climb. Six years later *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote's nonfiction tale of murder, was published to great acclaim. Both works were inspired by real murderers; both created whole new genres; and both continue to be widely imitated by lesser talents. The slasher film and the nonfiction murder tale share a fundamental premise: the killer is the protagonist.

Since 1966 hundreds of books have been published that follow murderers along their paths of destruction. Every serial killer, it seems, now has a biographer or two. And yet just a handful of books have looked at murder from the victim's perspective. Slasher films are even less likely than their literary counterparts to address the plight of the victim. Indeed, a slasher film's plot, characterization, and internal logic are far less important to the audience than the methods and choreography of its murders. Comedy plays a large role in the genre, with humorous crime-scene details and serial killers tossing off one-liners.

Even academic elites are drawn to the figure of the murderer, which has long been a focus of attention for psychiatrists, sociologists, and criminologists. A vast

amount of research has been conducted on murderers in order to predict their violent behavior, understand their social context, restrain them, rehabilitate them, and promote their moral and spiritual reform. During the past twenty-five years hundreds of articles in psychiatric journals have examined the homicidal mind. Fewer than a dozen have explored how a homicide affects the victim's family.

In a study of murder in Romantic literature the theater scholar Laurence Senelick used a phrase, "the prestige of evil," that goes a long way toward explaining why our culture has become obsessed with the murderer while ignoring the victim. The murderer is a powerful figure who dares to violate the central tenet of almost every human society: Thou shalt not kill. "There's no greater feeling of power on earth," a former gang member once confided, "than what it feels like to take another person's life." Most serial killers are impelled by a craving for power, by a desire for the sort of control over life and death that is usually attributed to God. When the murderer is the protagonist of a story, we can vicariously experience that power. The victim is a defeated soul, a loser in this contest of strength. Perhaps it is easier to identify with the murderer. To do otherwise means choosing the side of the powerless -- and confronting some unsettling truths.

Almost twenty years ago Lucy N. Friedman, the director of the Victim Services Agency, in New York City, helped to organize one of the nation's first support groups for the families of murder victims. Friedman says that the survivors of murder victims are often treated like pariahs, avoided like a source of bad luck. They feel cursed. Even the counselors who work with survivors come to feel stigmatized by their jobs. What they have learned contradicts the way the rest of us would like to view the world. We want to maintain an illusion of safety, Friedman says; we want to believe that the children of good parents will never be harmed. Our refusal to acknowledge the plight of murder victims and their survivors is a dangerous form of denial -- a flight from reality that allows lethal violence to flourish.

More than anything else, the relatives of murder victims need to be heard. The stories of a few survivors in Kansas City give a sense of what murder in America really is and what it does. Kansas City is by no means the murder capital of the USA. It is a midsize city in the middle of the country with a level of violence comparable to that of many other urban areas. The aftermath of homicide in Kansas City is emblematic of what ordinary men and women are experiencing every day throughout the United States. A culture of murder now surrounds us, like a dark,

poisonous fog. By looking at the victims of murder and listening to their survivors, we may find a way out.

A Killing

WHEN Harriett Smith was born, her family lived in a granary. The year was 1929, and her father was a tenant farmer who grew winter wheat on a series of small farms in western and central Kansas. Harriett had twelve brothers and sisters, all of them healthy and strong. Her family was Catholic, and treated like second-class citizens wherever they settled. Every few years her parents loaded their children and their farm animals into cars and trucks and moved to new land. Harriett grew up outside small towns like Washington, Morrowville, and Linn, amid rolling green hills and beautiful old trees. None of the houses her father rented had central heating, indoor plumbing, or electricity. When Harriett turned twelve, she was sent off to live with another family and work as a hired girl. One day she overheard her employer say that girls like Harriett were "good for nothing besides making babies for the Pope." From then on Harriett was determined not to remain a servant all her life. She became one of the first in her family to go to high school.

While attending a nursing college in Lincoln, Nebraska, Harriett began to date a young man named Albert Smith. Harriett was small and sturdy; Al was tall and boisterous. He had grown up with five siblings on a truck farm in South Dakota, also without central heating, running water, or electricity. Al was the son of a laborer who dug basements with a pick and shovel, year-round, for a flat fee of \$24, and later worked as a railroad engineer. After serving in the Army during the Second World War and losing a brother at the Battle of the Bulge, Al expected to become a laborer like his father. Instead the G.I. Bill paid his tuition at the University of Nebraska, where he majored in business administration. Al and Harriett got married and moved to Kansas City after graduation. They bought a house in a brand-new subdivision rising from farmland south of town. Al wound up working for the Bendix Corporation, eventually becoming a superintendent in a plant that made components for nuclear warheads. Harriett worked as an elementary school nurse. The couple had five children -- three boys and two girls. Although Al and Harriett had faced many hardships in their youth, neither had witnessed any violent crime or had ever lived in fear of it. In their middle-class neighborhood, with its modest houses and its campers parked in driveways, what violence there was occurred in secret, within a family, behind closed doors.

On Christmas Day in 1986 Harriett prepared a big family dinner for their children and grandchildren, nineteen people in all. A week and a half later their daughter Terri turned twenty-three and their other daughter, Kathryn, turned thirty- one. Terri was the secretary to a dean at DeVry Institute of Technology; Kathryn worked at the post office. On Monday, January 19, 1987, Terri's boss called the Smiths to say that Terri hadn't shown up for work that day, and that nobody answered the phone at her house. Terri was reliable and conscientious; it was unlike her to miss work and not call. Harriett phoned Kathryn, who lived just a block from her sister. Kathryn walked over to Terri's house. The doors were locked, the curtains were drawn, and Terri's Plymouth was in the driveway, still covered with the weekend's snow. Al dropped by the house after work and found it dark. He left a note on the door.

Al and Harriett had spent most of Saturday with Terri. She had come over to do her laundry, and they had enjoyed a lazy day, chatting and watching television. Terri was their youngest child, the little girl who was going to keep them young forever. She was warm and nurturing but strong-willed -- just like her mother. She phoned her parents at least once a day, always with the same greeting: "Hi, it's me." She lived in a rented house a few blocks away. On Saturday, Terri had mentioned having some problems with her live-in boyfriend, Gary Rawlings Jr. He seemed depressed lately; the two weren't getting along, and she was thinking of moving out. Rawlings was shy, handsome, and intelligent, five years older than Terri, a carpenter and the son of a local bank executive. Al and Harriett liked him a great deal, thought he was a real gentleman. Rawlings had been at their Christmas dinner and told the Smiths afterward that it was his best Christmas in years. Harriett tried hard not to worry. She wondered if Terri and Rawlings had eloped.

Monday night Harriett worked the late shift; she was now a nurse in the cardiology ward of a local hospital. Tuesday morning Al's note was still stuck to Terri's door, and there were no fresh tracks in the snow around her house. Al called the police. An officer met the Smiths at Terri's house. While Harriett used a neighbor's phone to call the landlord for a key, the policeman removed a storm window and climbed into Terri's living room. He looked around the house. There were dirty dishes in the sink and on the kitchen counter. Two baskets of clean laundry sat in the hall. Bills and papers were scattered on a small desk in one room. In another the officer found Terri lying face down in bed, under a pile of blankets and a flowered quilt, shot once in the back of the head. A spent 9mm casing was on the bedside table. Terri's right arm extended from the bed,

as though she were asleep.

As homicide detectives searched for Gary Rawlings, a different picture of the young man emerged. Terri's friends and co-workers told the police that Rawlings had been acting strangely over the past few weeks. He had also been physically abusing Terri. During a recent fight he had thrown a knife that barely missed her and stuck in the wall. Terri had spoken about his hostile behavior with reluctance. She was by all accounts a lovely person, protective of her boyfriend. She was planning to break up with Rawlings, but she was afraid of him. Terri had never revealed the physical abuse to her parents or to her sister.

Gary Rawlings Sr. told detectives that his son had a history of mental problems and had suffered a nervous breakdown three years earlier, when his parents split up. The young man was married at the time and had two small children. He claimed to have developed clairvoyant powers. He said that airplanes were flying over him and taking pictures, that cartoons and comic strips were making fun of him, that people were following him and trying to control his mind. Rawlings was admitted to the psychiatric ward at the Shawnee Mission Medical Center, in Overland Park, Kansas, suffering from depression and paranoid delusions. His diagnosis was schizophrenia. While Rawlings was hospitalized, his wife left him. He was given a low dosage of an antipsychotic drug and discharged from the hospital. He was free of the paranoia and delusions and felt much better. But after a while Rawlings began to regard his medication as "poison" and stopped taking it. The strange and disordered thoughts returned. His father pleaded with him to take the medicine. The two fought bitterly over the issue, and at the time of Terri's murder they had not spoken for a couple of months.



Gretchen Mayer, stabbed to death

at age 27, Kentucky, 1989

From the archives:

• **"The Story of a Gun," by Erik Larson (January, 1993)**

"After 60,000 deaths from firearms use over the past two years, America is in a gun crisis. Yet gun laws remain weak, gunmakers continue to promote killing power, and gun dealers accept no responsibility for the criminal use of what they sell."

The Kansas City Police Department issued a nationwide WANTED notice, warning that Gary Rawlings should be considered armed and dangerous. He was a martial-arts enthusiast, a gun collector, and an expert marksman. He assembled his own bullets and customized the stocks of his rifles, inlaying them with gold. His attempts to join the armed forces had failed, but at Terri's house the police found dog tags stamped with Rawlings's name and Social Security number. Before the murder his fondness for guns had not seemed abnormal. Kathryn's two sons, Jason and Billy, thought Gary Rawlings was pretty cool. He seemed like a good guy; there was nothing scary about him. Rawlings obtained his weapons at local gun shops, at the Bullet Hole and the Second Amendment. The owner of the Bullseye Gun Works told investigators that Rawlings had recently traded a rifle for a Cobray M-11 pistol that could fire up to thirty-two 9mm rounds without a reload. In order to obtain this semi-automatic weapon Rawlings had signed a federal form swearing that he had never been "adjudicated mentally defective or ... committed to a mental institution." Rawlings had not lied: his admission to the psychiatric ward had been voluntary.

The day after Terri's body was discovered, Kathryn entered her sister's house and frantically started packing things up. Kathryn and Terri had been extremely close. Despite the eight-year difference in their ages, they liked to think of themselves as twins and best friends. Kathryn had introduced Terri to Rawlings the year before, and now she wanted to get Terri's things out of the house as quickly as possible. Part of her refused to believe that Terri was dead, despite a positive identification by the police, despite the blood that had seeped through the bedding and the mattress to the floor. And if Terri were still alive, somewhere, somehow, she would need her things. Kathryn was afraid that Rawlings would return and destroy everything that had belonged to Terri, everything she'd loved most. As Kathryn gathered her sister's clothes, pictures, and books, she was terrified that Rawlings might walk in the door at any moment. When the telephone rang, she couldn't answer it. Terri's cats were hiding somewhere in the house, completely spooked. The cats had been there at the time of the murder and had gone unfed and untended for days as Terri lay there. One of the cats fought bitterly to avoid capture, scratching and drawing blood. Kathryn's husband, one of her brothers, and some friends helped her clear the place out. Al Smith could not bear the thought of entering Terri's house. "I'd rather burn it down," he said.

About 600 people attended Terri's funeral, on a cold, windy morning. The priest gave a wonderful eulogy, even

though he hadn't known Terri. Kathryn's son Jason looked at his aunt in the open coffin and wished that he could kiss her and wake her up. Although it was bitterly cold at the cemetery, Al did not want the funeral to end. He asked the priest to read the Twenty-third Psalm one more time as a way to delay the burial. After the funeral Al found a note in his van that one of his grandsons had written at the cemetery. The note said, "Dad, I'm cold," and Al instantly imagined Terri lying in the ground, calling for him with those words. The phrase haunted him for years.

Al and Harriett's close relatives, 150 of them, gathered for supper at the church. When the Smiths got home, a detective called and said that Gary Rawlings had been arrested. He had been spotted the previous night at a shopping center in Lewisville, Texas, apparently casing the stores, wearing black clothing and gloves and a black ski mask rolled up like a cap. Inside his old Chevy pickup Lewisville police officers found a twelve-gauge sawed-off shotgun, a .45 pistol, a .308 Remington rifle with a scope and tripod, boxes of ammunition, an eight-inch commando knife hidden in the roof above the driver's-side door, and a ten-channel police scanner with a master list of frequencies used by the State of Kansas and the Kansas City police departments. This was the second time in three days that Rawlings had been stopped by the police. Just hours before Terri's body was discovered, a patrolman in Norman, Oklahoma, had found Rawlings asleep in his truck with a loaded handgun beside him. After bringing him back to the station, examining his various weapons, and finding he had no criminal record, the Norman police had allowed Rawlings to drive off.

Officer Scott Pedigo, of the Lewisville police, ran a check on Rawlings's Kansas license, found that he was wanted for homicide, read him his rights, and arrested him. Rawlings confessed to the murder. He explained that Terri was not just planning to leave him -- she was also out to "get him," drugging him and feeding him ground glass.

Rawlings had been suffering from insomnia lately. After Terri fell asleep, he had sat on the bed for hours, full of anger and distress. Then he had removed a gun from under the bed, shot Terri as she slept, waited several more hours, checked her pulse to make sure she was dead, locked up the house, and gone on the run. The murder weapon was not in his truck. Rawlings told the police it was now in a "safe" place.

Under Missouri law a charge of first-degree murder could bring the death penalty. Rawlings was more likely to face a charge of second-degree murder, which carried a maximum sentence of life in prison. A few days after the

arrest Harriett called the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, in Kansas City, and spoke to Matt Whitworth, the prosecutor who'd just been assigned to the case. Harriett had kept a journal since nursing school; she liked to think of it as "a poor man's psychiatrist." According to the journal entry she made that day, Matt Whitworth said that the evidence against Rawlings was compelling but that a trial was at least a year away. Rawlings might choose to plead guilty in return for a lesser sentence, or to plead not guilty by reason of insanity. Whitworth seemed to think that an insanity defense would never hold up in court. "Insanity" was a legal term that applied in very few cases, even when the killer was mentally ill. Rawlings had an all-too-familiar motive for killing Terri: she was going to leave him. And by fleeing the state Rawlings had demonstrated an awareness that killing his girlfriend was wrong. The defense might find psychiatrists to testify that Rawlings was moved by an "irresistible impulse" to commit the murder, but Whitworth told the Smiths that he would find psychiatrists to say exactly the opposite.

AS the months passed, Harriett called the prosecutor's office once or twice a week to keep track of the case. Rawlings had been charged with second-degree murder and armed criminal action. After an initial examination he was found incompetent to stand trial. He was sent to the Biggs Forensic Center, a maximum-security complex at the state hospital in Fulton, for further evaluation. In December, Harriett called the prosecutor's office and learned that Matt Whitworth was no longer employed there. His replacement, Charles McKeon, seemed friendly on the phone but less enthusiastic about the case. In the spring of 1988 Rawlings was found competent to stand trial. A trial date was set for early September, and then postponed for several weeks. McKeon told the Smiths that beating an insanity defense would be tough -- and that in any event he was leaving the prosecutor's office for a new job. On October 3 the Smiths called his replacement, Dale Close. Although Close had not yet examined the evidence in the case, he reassured the Smiths. "After all, anyone knowing he was facing prison will want to plead insanity," Close said, according to Harriett's journal. The Smiths felt good about Dale Close; he seemed to have a sincere interest in their daughter's murder.

Two days later a judge found Gary Rawlings not guilty by reason of insanity in the murder of Terri Smith. The Jackson County Prosecutor's Office had agreed to a plea bargain. The following week Al and Harriett called the prosecutor's office to learn if a trial date had been set. "Oh, we accepted the insanity defense," they were told. "It's all

over." Al and Harriett were stunned. Dale Close later told them that Gary Rawlings was a sick young man who would most likely spend the rest of his life locked away in a mental institution.

After giving the plea bargain more consideration, the Smiths felt satisfied. They knew a fair amount about paranoid schizophrenia. Harriett had worked as a nurse in a psychiatric ward -- and one of their own sons, Kenneth, was a paranoid schizophrenic. He lived nearby, unable to work, relying on powerful medication to keep the voices and hallucinations at bay. Harriett thought that the mentally ill were unfairly burdened with a reputation for violence, too often portrayed as "psycho killers" in movies and on television. The vast majority of paranoid schizophrenics never committed any violent crimes. But Gary Rawlings had crossed the line; he had killed in response to an imaginary threat. In the same situation most paranoid schizophrenics would have simply walked away. How great a threat could Terri have posed, fast asleep? Rawlings's mental illness was subtle enough that others, even the Smiths, had not noticed any warning signs until it was too late. Al and Harriett did not want to see Rawlings cruelly punished in a state prison; they just wanted him off the streets.

In the spring of 1990 Harriett called the prosecutor's office to learn where Rawlings was being held. On May 21 she was told that he was at a mental hospital in St. Joseph, Missouri, and that he had applied for a conditional release. His hearing was set to take place in three days.

A person found not guilty by reason of insanity in Missouri had the right to petition for release from the hospital. An unconditional release granted total freedom; a conditional release had to be renewed periodically and allowed varying degrees of freedom, according to its terms. A few months after being declared not guilty by reason of insanity, Rawlings had been transferred from the maximum-security complex at Fulton State Hospital to St. Joseph State Hospital, a minimum-security facility. For the past three months he had been assigned to the independent-living-skills (ILS) unit, the least restrictive form of housing -- an unlocked building on the hospital grounds. Rawlings was now applying to leave the hospital with his father.

The conditional-release hearing was held at a civil court in St. Joseph. This was no longer a criminal case; Gary Rawlings had been found not guilty of the murder. He was represented by a lawyer from the Missouri Attorney General's Office, acting on behalf of the Department of Mental Health. To oppose the release the Jackson County

Prosecutor's Office sent a young intern, a law-school student who had looked at some psychology textbooks.

Judge Bill Roberts opened the hearing by explaining that when a patient like Gary Rawlings is placed in the mental-health system, he is to be afforded treatment. And when that patient is no longer a danger to society, he is eligible for release from the hospital. Mario Decanini, a psychiatrist in the mental hospital's ILS unit, told the court that Rawlings seemed to be in good contact with reality. He had not exhibited any psychotic behavior, he regretted killing his girlfriend, and he understood the need to take his medicine regularly. The schizophrenia was in remission. Rawlings met all the department's requirements for a conditional release. A forensic caseworker and another psychiatrist from the Department of Mental Health supported this view, although both psychiatrists acknowledged that without his medication Rawlings might kill again.

Kathryn testified that she lived in constant fear of Gary Rawlings. Indeed, she was afraid even to testify as he sat there in the courtroom. Harriett read a prepared statement, arguing that paranoid schizophrenia can never be cured, that Rawlings needed to be carefully monitored for the rest of his life, and that without medical supervision he posed a threat to himself and to other people. She asked the court to keep him institutionalized. Judge Roberts denied Rawlings a conditional release, but asked the Smiths to face some unpleasant facts: Rawlings had a legal right to keep applying for release. If he remained free of delusions, made no threats, and committed no violent acts, it was just a matter of time before he left the mental hospital.

The Smiths drove back to Kansas City, and not long afterward Judge Roberts changed his ruling. Rawlings was granted the conditional release, though not under the terms he had requested. He was limited to day passes in St. Joseph under the supervision of his father.

From the archives:

• **"Coddling the Criminal," by Charles C. Nott (February, 1911)**

An argument that the framers of American criminal law, having made extravagant efforts to ensure that innocents brought to trial do not end up unjustly convicted, have actually pushed the law

Al and Harriett felt profoundly betrayed, not only by this judge but by the entire criminal-justice system. The Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, they felt, had at important times ignored and then misled them. The Missouri Department of Mental Health was now treating them with condescension, as though they had no right to interfere in this case. Gary Rawlings had never been in touch with the Smiths to express remorse. Nobody from the Rawlings family had attended Terri's funeral or sent condolences. Just three and a half years after Terri's death her murderer would be enjoying day passes with his father. In the eyes of the law no crime had been committed against the Smith family; a crime had been committed

too far in the opposite direction, making it excessively difficult to obtain convictions for those who truly are guilty.

against the state. Somehow the world had turned upside-down. Everyone seemed deeply concerned about the murderer and his rights. The victims of murder and their loved ones, Al and Harriett now believed, did not have any rights.

The Victim's Role

IN many societies throughout history a murder was avenged by the victim's family. If the killer's family offered resistance, the result was a blood feud -- a vendetta -- that might last for generations. As societies became more prosperous and more settled, they gained a strong incentive to resolve such conflicts peaceably. The victim's clan and the murderer's clan were encouraged to negotiate an equitable solution. Tribal elders served as mediators. If negotiations broke down, the blood feud resumed. The murderer's clan was responsible for carrying out the settlement -- for paying any fines and for ensuring good behavior in the future. A murderer who violated the terms of an agreement might be killed by his or her own family in order to keep the peace. Punishments for murder varied among tribes. In Morocco the Berbers forced the murderer into exile, although the victim's family might later permit his return. In California the Yurok Indians forced the murderer to compensate the victim's family; payment might include strings of seashells, red obsidian, a woodpecker-scalp headband, and a daughter. In East Africa the Jolou often required not only the death of a man's murderer but also the impregnation by a member of the victim's clan of a woman from the murderer's clan, so that the ghost of the victim might have a wife and children. A murderer's obligation to the victim's family, the need to appease the victim's ghost, and the threat of divine retribution are themes occurring so often in so many cultures that they seem to express some fundamental human loathing for murder and demand for justice.

Under Anglo-Saxon law a murderer paid a mandatory fine, called the wergeld, to the victim's family. The exact amount of the wergeld was determined through an elaborate calculation involving the social status of the victim. Everyone's life had a price, eventually codified in the *Dooms of Alfred*, a ninth-century handbook of criminal fines. If a murderer failed to pay the wergeld within a year, he or she was deemed an outlaw -- a person at war with the community, who could legally be killed by anyone. In addition to paying the victim's family, the murderer had to pay a fine, called the wite, to the local nobleman or to the King. By the twelfth century the wite had grown so much larger than the wergeld that the nobility took the murderer's entire payment, usurping the monetary claims

of the victim's family. The ancient relationship between the murderer's clan and the victim's clan was erased. A murder was now considered a breach of "the King's peace" -- a crime against the monarchy. The victim's family no longer had a protected legal status, or a right to compensation, or any authority to determine the murderer's punishment.

The Founding Fathers had little reason to be concerned about the legal status of crime victims and their families. As the criminologist William F. McDonald has noted, the machinery of law enforcement in Colonial America functioned without any police forces or public prosecutors. A private citizen could investigate a crime, obtain an arrest, and then hire an attorney to write an indictment and prosecute the case. In the absence of detectives, "thief-takers" pursued criminals for a bounty or a reward. Men were often obliged to go after a murderer; a New York law required them to be "ready and armed and accoutred" for the job.

This reliance on private prosecutions undoubtedly favored the rich, but it also placed the victim at the heart of the criminal-justice system. The authors of the Constitution, having recently battled the arbitrary power of the British monarchy, recognized the need to protect the rights of the accused. At the time, the rights of crime victims hardly seemed endangered.

From the archives:

• **Issues: Crime**

An index of Atlantic Monthly articles and features on crime in America.

The rise of American cities in the nineteenth century was accompanied by the development of police forces, prosecutors' offices, and departments of correction. Power to enforce the law was transferred from ordinary citizens to professionals. The state or federal government became the offended party in a criminal act and also the recipient of any fines. Crime victims were relegated to the sidelines, valued mainly for their testimony in court. The growing interest in rehabilitation as a correctional goal placed even greater emphasis on the criminal. Theorists strove to uncover the social forces responsible for crime, and penologists experimented with humane methods of reform. An individual victim's plight seemed less important in the grand scheme when a crime was not only committed against society but caused by it as well.

The victim was rarely considered by criminologists until a few years after the Second World War, when Hans von Hentig wrote his landmark study, *The Criminal & His Victim* (1948). Von Hentig was a German criminologist living in Kansas City. His work proved influential, helping to launch a new academic discipline: "victimology." According to Von Hentig, "the victim shapes and molds the criminal." Indeed, Von Hentig thought that the victim was often to blame for the crime. His theory was partly

inspired by a Franz Werfel novel, *The Murdered One Is Guilty*. Von Hentig argued that murder victims sometimes caused their own deaths, certain women encouraged rape, a large number of incest victims were willing participants, and "the cupidity of Negroes" tended to attract confidence men and swindlers. In explaining the behavior of many criminals, Von Hentig quoted King Lear: "I am a man/More sinn'd against than sinning."

During the 1950s the English penal reformer Margery Fry revived the long-forgotten idea that criminals should compensate their victims. The payment of restitution, Fry believed, would be of great moral benefit to the criminal; the victim's gain, though desirable, was of secondary concern. Fry later became a champion of state compensation for crime victims, and compensation schemes influenced by her views were established in England, New Zealand, and California. The first federal studies of crime victims in the United States were conducted in the late 1960s. They measured how many crimes were going unreported, and the federal programs based on them were designed to encourage victims to testify in court.

The "victims'-rights movement" began largely among feminists in the early 1970s, with the opening of the first rape-crisis centers. Outrage at the mistreatment of rape victims soon led to a reappraisal of how the criminal-justice system treated all crime victims. A grassroots movement in behalf of victims' rights attracted support from unlikely allies: women's groups and law-and-order Republicans. In 1982 President Ronald Reagan appointed a Task Force on Victims of Crime. Its report condemned the treatment of victims by the criminal-justice system and called for a constitutional amendment on victims' rights. Congress passed the Victims of Crime Act in 1984, using revenues from bail forfeitures and criminal fines to subsidize state programs for crime victims. Prosecutors began to hire victims' advocates; crisis centers for crime victims were opened; and a number of states amended their constitutions to protect victims' rights.



Pamela Lamoreaux (center), raped and strangled
at age 22, Michigan, 1987

The rights being demanded by crime victims and the families of murder victims were hardly revolutionary. State victims'-rights amendments usually guaranteed the right to be notified in advance of any court hearing in a case, the right to be consulted before a plea bargain, the right prior to sentencing to give a statement about the crime's impact, and the right to be notified of a criminal's parole hearing, release date, or escape from prison. Crime victims and their families also sought the right to remain in the courtroom throughout a trial. Defense attorneys often placed the victim's family members on the witness list, whether or not they might testify, in order to remove them from the jury's sight. Victims were not demanding the authority to select punishments or veto judicial decisions. According to Paul G. Cassell, a professor at the University of Utah College of Law and a leader in the victims'-rights movement, crime victims were simply asking "to be notified, to be present, and to be heard."

Opponents of the movement, such as Lynne N. Henderson, a professor of law at Indiana University School of Law at Bloomington, stressed "the wrongs of victims' rights," arguing that such proposals were merely a smokescreen for a conservative political agenda. Crime victims were being manipulated as an excuse to build more prisons and cut social programs. Henderson and others contended that none of the traditional goals of criminal law -- deterrence, retribution, rehabilitation, and incapacitation -- justified giving victims a larger role in the system. Nevertheless, the call for victims' rights struck a popular chord, appealing to common sense and gaining huge support at the polls.

From the archives:

- ["The Politics of](#)
- The strongest resistance to victims' rights came from within the criminal-justice system, not because such rights might harm defendants but because they threatened the

"Crime," by Richard Neely (August, 1982)

"Why have governments not done what they can to reduce violent crime? The answers are complicated, but chief among them is that for every proposal that might be made to reduce crime, there is a powerful, organized interest that opposes it. What's needed is an organized citizen lobby representing the interests -- and wielding the political clout -- of the middle class."

time-honored workings of the machinery. Perhaps nine of every ten criminal cases were settled through plea bargains. Angry confrontations between the prosecution and the defense were common only in fictional courtroom dramas. In real life defense attorneys, prosecutors, and judges routinely collaborated behind closed doors, disposing of cases and choosing punishments by mutual consent. Including the victim's opinion would complicate the equation, diminishing the prosecutor's freedom to strike a deal. Empowering the crime victim would place a limit on the power of the state.

IN the fall of 1990 the Smiths learned that Gary Rawlings wanted another conditional release. With support from the Department of Mental Health, Rawlings applied to leave St. Joseph State Hospital and move into a private boardinghouse. For both philosophical and fiscal reasons Missouri law encouraged the de-institutionalization of mental patients, requiring that they always be housed in the "least restrictive" environment practicable. Psychiatrists at the mental hospital felt that Rawlings was a good candidate for release. He had exhibited no psychotic symptoms and no dangerous behavior. He seemed to understand the nature of his illness and the importance of taking his medication. He denied having violent fantasies or uncontrollable impulses. The department's community-placement staff planned to meet with Rawlings at least once a month after his release. He would be forbidden to consume alcohol, use illicit drugs, or possess a gun. The owner of Smitty's Sit 'N Siesta boardinghouse, in St. Joseph, a private facility with about a dozen mentally ill residents, said in a letter that she'd be "glad to give Gary Rawlings a try."

The second conditional-release hearing was held on December 10, 1990, in the same courtroom and before the same judge as the first one. The Smiths were accompanied by an assistant prosecutor from Jackson County; Al and Harriett had informed the local media about the details of the case. Gary Rawlings was represented by Natalie Coe, an assistant attorney general. Before the hearing began, Gary Rawlings Sr. approached Kathryn and said that his son had always been very fond of her -- a comment intended, no doubt, to reassure Kathryn that the young man meant her no harm. But the words had the opposite effect, unnerving Kathryn even more. She did not want his affection. Rawlings had killed her sister, had never expressed remorse to her family, and now might go free. Kathryn testified again about her fear of him. For the rest of the hearing she was unable to look at Rawlings. Harriett told the court that a paranoid schizophrenic's behavior in the highly structured setting of a mental hospital offered

no reliable guide to his behavior outside the hospital. Someone needed to make sure that Gary Rawlings took his medicine every day. At the end of the hearing Judge Roberts granted Rawlings another conditional release and, as a courtesy, wished the young man good luck.

Al Smith later wrote to the judge, asking how Gary Rawlings could be allowed back into the community so soon after being found mentally incompetent. "This man is an admitted murderer," Al wrote. "Please, I beg of you, do not let him loose to kill again." In reply Judge Roberts explained that under Missouri law someone trying to block the release of a mental patient had to provide "clear and convincing" evidence of that patient's dangerousness. If the Department of Mental Health thought that Rawlings no longer posed a threat, then the burden of proof fell on the Smiths. Rawlings had not committed any violent acts since the murder; there was no sound legal basis for denying his release.

The Smiths had begun to meet other people in Kansas City who felt equally betrayed by the criminal-justice system. The insensitive treatment of crime victims and the families of murder victims seemed not the exception but the rule. A local chapter of Parents of Murdered Children had recently been formed. At the first POMC meeting Al and Harriett attended, a man named Mike Solaberry spoke about the injustices of the system. Solaberry's daughter Julie had been murdered by a friend, stabbed 163 times. The killer had received a life sentence but would be eligible for parole in eighteen years. Solaberry was a recent immigrant whose faith in the American dream had been shattered. His anger was eloquent and pure. It affected Al deeply; he felt the same outrage but had not yet been able to find the right words. During the meeting Al's anger was finally unleashed in public -- a scathing, Old Testament anger. He refused to accept the way things were in Missouri. Gary Rawlings would be seeking more freedom, and Al was determined to keep him off the streets. If the laws were unfair to victims, Al decided, then it was time to change the laws.

A Grief Like No Other

PARENTS of Murdered Children was founded by Charlotte and Robert Hullinger in 1978. She was a legal secretary and a teacher at the time; he was a Lutheran minister. The Hullingers had three children and lived in Cincinnati, Ohio. Their daughter Lisa, a junior in college, had been murdered by her ex-boyfriend while studying in Germany. She had broken up with him several months earlier. He killed her with a sledgehammer. His

father was a corporate vice-president in St. Louis. A defense attorney at the trial argued that the young man could not be held entirely responsible for the crime. A psychiatrist reported that the killer had "never learned how to tolerate rejection." Lisa's murderer was found guilty in a German court, given a prison sentence of three to five years, and released after spending less than a year and a half behind bars.

Charlotte went back to work in the fall of 1978, a couple of weeks after the murder. Many of her friends soon stopped asking how she was doing, stopped mentioning Lisa's name. Life began to seem surreal. Charlotte felt as though she were walking around with open wounds, bleeding, and yet few people seemed to notice. Cheerful Christmas cards arrived at the house without any acknowledgment of what had just happened to Lisa. Old friends who did not know what to say chose to say nothing at all. Bob Hullinger thought that people's response to the murder often seemed like "a conspiracy of silence." Desperate to find a book on the aftermath of murder, Charlotte visited local libraries, but found none. She needed to speak to other people who had experienced the same kind of loss. She heard about a Catholic priest who counseled grieving mothers. Although her husband was a Lutheran minister, as was her father, Charlotte did not hesitate to give Father Ken Czillinger a call.

Czillinger had been interested for years in how Americans deal with, or more often don't deal with, the issue of death. His interest was more than academic. The first funeral he performed as a priest, at the age of twenty-seven, was his younger brother's. Within five years Czillinger had also lost both his parents. Much was being written in the late 1960s and early 1970s about the "denial of death" in American society. Czillinger came to know the psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and many of the early pioneers in the study of bereavement. Subjects that had long been suppressed -- the realities of death and dying, the stages of grief and mourning -- were now being openly explored. Czillinger viewed his priesthood not as a stamp of authority for providing answers but as a means for joining the search.

Czillinger introduced Bob and Charlotte to a few other people whose children had been murdered. The meeting took place in the Hullingers' living room. These grieving parents immediately felt a close connection. They could easily express and understand feelings that were considered awkward or inappropriate or disturbing by the rest of society. Hearing that others felt the same way relieved the sense of isolation. Charlotte decided to form a support group for the families of murder victims. "If life

experiences are not used," she maintained, "they are wasted." She began to seek out the relatives of murder victims, convinced that many others felt alienated and alone. Whenever she read about a murder in the newspaper, she would get in touch with the victim's family, sometimes driving at night for miles to pick up people at their homes and bring them to the meetings. A group begun out of a desperate personal need assumed a larger importance, as the Hullingers learned how many other devastated parents needed help. At first the Hullingers' living room served as the group's meeting place, Lisa's old bedroom as its office. Chapters were soon formed in other cities and states. Although the group welcomed grieving siblings, spouses, and friends, most of its members had lost a child to murder. Bob and Charlotte wanted a name for the organization that was direct and to the point, not sugarcoated. "Parents of Murdered Children" said it all. This was a group no one ever hoped to join.

The Hullingers learned that the grief caused by murder does not follow a predictable course. It does not neatly unfold in stages. When a person dies after a long illness, his or her family has time to prepare emotionally for the death, to feel an anticipatory grief. When someone is murdered, the death usually comes without warning. A parent might have breakfast with a child on an ordinary morning -- and then never see or hold or speak to that child again. The period of mourning after a natural death lasts one, two, perhaps three years. The much more complicated mourning that follows a homicide may be prolonged by the legal system, the attitudes of society, the nature of the crime, and the final disposition of the case. A murder is an unnatural death; no ordinary rules apply. The intense grief experienced by survivors can last four years, five years, a decade, even a lifetime.

In the days and weeks right after a murder the victim's family is often in a state of shock, feeling numb, sometimes unable to cry. The murder of a loved one seems almost impossible to comprehend. Life feels unreal, like a dream. Survivors may need to go over the details of the crime again and again, discussing them endlessly, as though trying to put together the pieces of a puzzle, struggling to make sense of it all. They tell themselves, "This can't be true." After other kinds of crimes the victim lives to tell how it happened and to describe how it felt. A murder often forces the victim's family to reconstruct events. They ask, How did this take place? Why? Did my loved one suffer? The police usually try to shield family members, keeping them away from the crime scene and from gruesome photographs of the victim. Nevertheless, many survivors demand to see these things. They want to confront the reality of the murder and to know the worst.

Denied access to the facts by the authorities or by a lack of information about the crime, the relatives of murder victims are frequently tormented by their imaginations and by questions that can never be answered.

After a natural death the family of the deceased can begin the process of mourning. After a murder the criminal-justice system usually delays and disrupts the grieving of the victim's loved ones. If the murderer is never found, the death lacks a sense of closure; if the murderer is apprehended, the victim's family may face years of legal proceedings and a resolution that is disappointing. Insufficient evidence may lead the prosecution to drop charges or to reduce them from murder to manslaughter. Co-defendants may be given a lesser punishment, despite a role in the murder, in order to obtain their cooperation. Each new hearing may stir up feelings that were seemingly laid to rest. "You never bury a loved one who's been murdered," one survivor has explained, "because the justice system keeps digging them up." The sense of powerlessness that a murder inspires in a victim's family is frequently reinforced by the courts. When the victim's family is barred from the courtroom during a trial (while the murderer's family is allowed to attend, looking somber and well dressed), it seems that the murderer still somehow has the upper hand, still exerts more power. Even when a trial ends in a verdict of guilty and a sentence that seems appropriate, the family of a murder victim may be left with a hollow feeling. They may realize for the first time that no amount of punishment given to the murderer can relieve their sorrow or bring the victim back to life.

The long duration and repetitive nature of the grief following a homicide can become a source of frustration to old friends. With the best of intentions, friends may want the survivor to "get over it." They may not see the point of discussing the same details of the crime again and again. The desire that survivors end their mourning also has a selfish component: the magnitude of their loss and pain is not easy to accept. People search for ways to distance themselves from such tragedy. One way is to assume that the victim was somehow responsible for his or her death. Blaming the victim has a strong intrinsic appeal. It preserves the illusion that the world is rational and just, that things happen for a reason. It sustains the American belief that a person can control his or her own destiny. And it gets everybody else -- at times even the murderer -- off the hook. If the victim is somehow to blame, according to this logic, then the rest of us are still safe.

Although others frequently put the blame for a murder on the victim, the families of murder victims are often plagued by their own guilt. A sudden, unexpected death

may leave all sorts of issues between the victim and his or her family unresolved. The victim's family may feel regret about words that were said or left unsaid. Siblings may feel guilty about surviving. Parents may be torn by self-doubts. Parents are supposed to keep their children safe from harm, at any cost. The murder of a child looms as a profound failure of parental responsibility, regardless of whether or not that murder could have been prevented. The parents of a murder victim wonder what their child might have become someday. The murder of a child violates the natural order, destroying a parent's stake in the future.

Each member of a family is likely to grieve differently, creating great potential for conflict. Siblings of the victim may feel neglected by their parents or suddenly overprotected. Spouses may be unable to give each other support when it is needed most. One may be having a good day while the other feels down; the discrepancy in moods often breeds resentment. Women tend to be more demonstrative in their grief, crying more readily and putting their thoughts into words. Traditional notions of masculinity often complicate a father's grief. As the putative head of the household, a father may feel an added burden of responsibility for the murder, for failing in his role as protector. Men who do not show emotion are sometimes accused of being distant and unfeeling; those who cry openly may be thought weak. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the stresses of losing a child are responsible for an extremely high rate of divorce among grieving parents. Events that once brought a family together -- holidays, birthdays, anniversaries -- become reminders of loss. The internalized grief felt by most men, and many women, may precipitate a variety of serious illnesses. Some parents of murder victims soon follow them to the grave.

From the archives:

• **"Growing Up Scared," by Karl Zinsmeister (June, 1990)**

"Spurred on by family instability, violent crime now touches millions of young lives. The control of crime in the streets, in the schools, and in the home ought to be the pre-eminent 'children's issue.'"

Children suffer perhaps the most of all. Rachel Burrell is the founder and director of Fernside, in Cincinnati, one of the nation's first centers for grieving children. Burrell says it is a myth that children bounce back after a tragedy -- a sign of wishful thinking among adults. A child's grief tends to be cyclical, coming and going amid intervals of play. Children whose parents have been murdered exhibit a wide range of behavioral and developmental problems. They may suffer from psychosomatic ailments, such as headaches, stomachaches, dizziness, and uncontrollable trembling. They may be teased or avoided at school. Their self-esteem may plummet, and also their trust in authority. Many studies have shown that children who are directly exposed to violence are much more likely to commit violent acts as adults. Millions of children in America are now particularly at risk. A study in one Chicago neighborhood found that 33 percent of its schoolchildren had witnessed a murder. A study in Washington, D.C.,

found that 31 percent of the city's first- and second-graders had witnessed shootings, and 39 percent had seen dead bodies. The children of murder victims often lack the language skills or even the proper frame of reference to express their grief. Rachel Burrell encourages them to put their feelings into their art. The walls at Fernside are covered with children's paintings and drawings. In crude but powerful works parents float in heaven, killers are punished, and bright-orange jack-o'-lanterns shed tears.

The emotional and psychological distress suffered by the relatives of murder victims in many ways resembles that of rape victims, combat veterans, and prisoners who have been tortured. During the 1970s researchers showed a renewed interest in the long-term effects of trauma. The women's movement was encouraging rape victims to speak out about their experiences, and soldiers returning from Vietnam were exhibiting an array of psychiatric illnesses. A syndrome previously labeled "battle fatigue" or "shell shock" was renamed "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD). Some of its common symptoms are recurring nightmares and flashbacks, insomnia, memory loss, difficulty concentrating, feelings of alienation, hypervigilance, and an exaggerated startle reaction. A severe trauma like the murder of a loved one can also induce depression, phobias, changes in personality, and substance abuse. The British psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes has observed that trauma victims sometimes develop obsessive-compulsive disorders. One of his patients was a ten-year-old girl whose sister had been abducted and murdered. The young girl developed the habit of constantly glancing over her shoulder to make sure nobody was sneaking up behind her, a habit that turned into a nervous tic.

Anyone can fall prey to mental disorders after a traumatic event. A prior history of psychological problems is by no means necessary for the development of PTSD. Studies of soldiers in combat have found that even the healthiest people will crack if the trauma is severe and unrelenting. The meaning of a trauma, or its absence of meaning, is an important contributing factor. During the Vietnam War, U.S. Army mortuary workers who handled the personal effects of the dead -- the photographs of girlfriends, the cards and letters from back home -- were more traumatized than the workers who handled the bodies.

Post-traumatic stress disorder stems from physiological changes in the central nervous system, according to Bessel van der Kolk, a professor of psychiatry at Boston University. A person's stress response becomes fixed in a heightened state of alert, preparing the body to fight, freeze, or flee at the slightest provocation. When the

traumatic event is something that cannot be undone, the heightened stress response becomes both useless and destructive. People suffering from PTSD become "stuck": they constantly relive the trauma in powerful detail and then organize their lives around avoiding anything that might provoke these terrible memories. They swing between vivid, almost lifelike re-creations of the trauma and total denial of it. Van der Kolk helps his patients to move beyond the traumatic memories and develop a broader perspective, one that finds meanings in life that will counter the feelings of loss and sheer terror. "Sometimes a little bit of denial," he says, "can be a beautiful thing."

If a family member actually witnessed the murder, the nightmares and flashbacks often revolve around details of the killing. For other survivors, the moment when they first learned about the murder becomes the traumatic event, relived again and again. The means of death notification can influence a survivor's development of PTSD. Hearing about the murder over the phone or from a reporter adds significantly to the trauma. Concerns of Police Survivors, an organization serving the family members of police officers killed in the line of duty, recommends that the families of victims always be notified in person. The message should be straightforward, compassionate, and direct. Ideally, at least two people should conduct the death notification. They should be prepared for all sorts of behavior. Survivors may try to harm themselves, to run away, or to attack the person bringing the bad news.

Nearly a decade ago Dean G. Kilpatrick, the director of the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, at the Medical University of South Carolina, led the only large-scale study of homicide's effects on surviving family members that has ever been conducted. Kilpatrick found that about a quarter of the people who lose an immediate family member to murder subsequently develop full-blown PTSD. About half develop several symptoms of PTSD. About five percent of the survivors in his study were still suffering from full-blown PTSD more than ten years after the murder, and 22 percent were still experiencing one or more of its symptoms. Kilpatrick estimates that perhaps 10 million Americans have endured the murder of a family member or a close friend.

The relatives of murder victims often lose not only their faith in society, the legal system, and old friends but also their faith in God. The sense of personal invulnerability that allows someone to lead a normal life -- to leave the house, drive a car, say good-bye to loved ones before a mundane errand, confident of seeing them again -- may be

utterly destroyed. A murder can provoke an existential despair completely at odds with a person's lifelong beliefs. The anger many survivors feel, along with often violent fantasies of revenge, may conflict with religious traditions that stress mercy and forgiveness. Ministers and priests may alienate the families of murder victims with comments like "The Lord knows best," "Everything happens for a reason," and "It's all part of His plan." The murder of a child is difficult to reconcile with belief in a just, all-powerful God. A congregation may react insensitively to the persistence of a survivor's grief. Ken Czillinger thinks that America's religious institutions tend to promote a male-oriented approach to grief, stressing both repression and denial of feelings. The families of murder victims often find themselves pulling away from churches that have long been the focus of their lives.

In 1985 Bob Hullinger decided to start a ministry for crime victims and survivors, one that would reach out to them and educate others about their plight. Hullinger had learned that the United States had more than sixty prison ministries devoted to the spiritual needs of criminals -- but no ministries designed to meet the needs of their victims. Saving a murderer's soul seemed a more interesting challenge, perhaps, than looking after a murder victim's family. Hullinger spent a year assembling a proposal. After some debate his proposal was narrowly rejected by a majority of the Lutheran ministers in Cincinnati. More than a decade later the United States has only a handful of national Christian ministries devoted to helping crime victims and their families. One of the largest is Neighbors Who Care, founded in 1993 by Lisa Barnes Lampman, which serves more than 5,000 victims and survivors each year. Its parent organization, Prison Fellowship Ministries, serves 200,000 inmates each year.

Not Forgetting

WHEN Terri Smith's body was discovered, Harriett was next door at a neighbor's house, trying to reach Terri's landlord on the phone. Harriett heard Al yell "Harrie!" from the street, and she knew from the tone of his voice that something terrible had happened. She came out of the neighbor's house and asked, "Is she dead?" Al said, "Yes," and Harriett blacked out. Moments later she heard horrible screaming and wailing, like the sounds of a wounded animal way off in the distance, and then she suddenly realized that the sounds were coming from her, that she was screaming and wailing and pounding on Al's chest. In an instant she came to, and saw that Al was sobbing, and regained her composure, and decided that her family needed her to be strong. It was her duty to be

strong. And for almost a decade afterward Harriett never lost her composure again in public, never fell apart.

Kathryn was at home, having worked the night shift at the post office, when Al called and told her to get down to Terri's. Kathryn had been worried about her sister, and now she knew from her father's voice that the worst had happened. When she got to the house, she wanted to go inside and see Terri. She could not believe that her sister was dead -- she needed to see for herself. But her parents wouldn't let her go inside. The rest of the Smith family soon arrived, except Kenny, who was much too sensitive to handle this kind of stress. Al sat in his van talking to one of the homicide detectives, an older man who was visibly affected by the crime scene and fighting back tears. A television-news crew shot footage of Terri's house but kept a respectful distance, never trying to interview members of the family.

Harriett had been around death for many years. She spent most of her twelve-hour nursing shifts at the bedsides of dying patients. Perhaps it was her maternal instinct; whereas some nurses avoided the terminally ill, Harriett felt a strong need to make sure that none of her patients died alone. Death was no stranger to her, but murder seemed an entirely different thing, evil and unknown. Harriett did not understand how anyone could choose to take another life, especially Terri's life. Within an hour of hearing about the murder Harriett instinctively felt surrounded by Terri's presence. She said a prayer for Terri -- "Eternal rest grant upon her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her, and may her soul rest in peace, amen" -- and silently repeated the prayer over and over again in the following weeks and months. She prayed that God would have mercy on her daughter's soul and would accept her into heaven; she refused to believe that Terri's murder was part of any divine plan. As a nurse, she had been trained to switch off her emotions and hide them until she was alone. Whenever Harriett felt the grief become unbearable, she would lock herself in the bathroom and weep.

Al felt numb for almost two years after the murder, keeping his feelings tightly shut inside. Every now and then Harriett would try to use her nurse's training in bereavement, subtly asking Al questions that might prompt him to share his thoughts. When he finally realized what she was doing, he said, "Don't give me any of that Goddamn psychology." Al felt drawn to the cemetery, visiting Terri's grave about once a week without telling anybody. Harriett's twelve siblings and Al's three sisters were a tremendous source of support, and old friends of the Smith family stood by them. Al's co-workers and

Harriett's fellow nurses were sympathetic, but not a single doctor at the hospital where Harriett had worked for years offered condolences or even mentioned the fact that Terri had died. Harriett finally walked up to a cardiologist and said, "Did you know that my daughter was murdered?" The doctor's deeply embarrassed reaction made Harriett regret her bluntness. The Smiths were determined to keep Terri's memory alive, to consider her part of their family forever, regardless of what other people might think. When the time came for a new family portrait, Al and Harriett decided to include a framed picture of Terri in it.

Kathryn had great difficulty believing that her sister was dead. At the wake and at the funeral the person in the casket did not look like Terri. Kathryn often blamed herself for the murder. She had hired Gary Rawlings to install new windows at her house. She had introduced him to Terri. If she'd just hired someone else, maybe Terri would still be alive. Kathryn regretted not having spent more time with her sister in the weeks before the murder. She had recently started a new job at the post office, working nights, and she had let slide a number of chances to get together with Terri. Kathryn had suspected that her sister and Rawlings were having some problems. Perhaps if she'd spent more time with Terri, then Terri would have spoken about the physical abuse, and her murder could have been prevented. Kathryn thought about the murder constantly, wondering how much pain Terri had suffered. Night after night Kathryn had the same vivid dream: Somebody would be at the front door, knocking. She'd go to the door and open it, and a person would be standing there, dressed in a black cape and a black hat, looking down. Suddenly the person would look up, and it would be Terri, and she'd smile and say, "Don't worry, Sis, I'm not really dead."

Kathryn's friends began to lose patience with her. Whenever she started talking about Terri's death, they would abruptly change the subject. A co-worker at the post office once cut her short, saying, "Aren't you over that yet?" Kathryn began to have trouble eating and sleeping. She would sit by the window for hours holding one of her sister's cats, as though the pet were a tangible link to Terri. She was terrified that Rawlings would return and kill the rest of her family. She was always alert, awaiting his arrival, afraid to sleep, afraid to close her eyes in the shower. She developed a serious respiratory illness. She cried and cried and could not stop. Everyone seemed fake and artificial, like actors in a bad play. "Why do people rush around doing this and rush around doing that," she wondered, "when they could be dead tomorrow?"

A few months before the first anniversary of Terri's death

Kathryn was admitted to the psychiatric ward at a local hospital. She was convinced that there was a secret plan, that Terri was alive and in hiding. She became obsessed with true-crime magazines, reading anything she could about actual murders, trying to make sense of what had happened to her sister. During her hospitalization the post office tried to fire Kathryn for missing work. Her union blocked the dismissal. After thirty days of treatment her insurance coverage ran out. Kathryn was discharged from the hospital, still mired in a severe depression. If she had murdered Terri instead of mourning her, Kathryn thought, all the psychiatric help in the world would have been provided free.

This article continues in [Part Two](#)

The photographs that appear throughout this article were provided by the families of murder victims. We are grateful for their generous cooperation.

Eric Schlosser is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*. His articles on marijuana and the law that *The Atlantic* published in August and September of 1994 won the 1995 National Magazine Award for reporting.

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SEPTEMBER 1997

(Continued from [Part One](#) of "A Grief Like No Other," by Eric Schlosser)

Speaking about the Unspeakable

IN January of 1991 Al and Harriett began writing letters to members of the Missouri state legislature. The Smiths wanted to change the law governing the release of forensic patients from state mental hospitals. Harriett sat at a desk in one of their bedrooms; Al worked at the kitchen table; together they wrote 197 letters by hand, sending one to each state legislator. They argued that the burden of proof in forensic cases should be shifted from the person trying to block a release to the patient trying to gain freedom. Under the law Al and Harriett were proposing, the Department of Mental Health would have to provide "clear and convincing evidence" that a forensic patient no longer posed a threat to the community. The Smiths thought it would be hard for any psychiatrist to prove that Gary Rawlings was not dangerous. Their friends worried about the letter-writing campaign, concerned that Rawlings might feel persecuted by the Smiths and might one day try to harm them.

Harriett had retired from her job at the hospital a few months after Terri's death. She devoted herself to family matters and, increasingly, to the cause of victims' rights. She worked part-time as a volunteer at the newly revamped victim-services department of the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office, counseling crime victims and guiding them through the intricacies of the criminal-justice system. Al retired from Bendix and threw his energies into the victims'-rights movement as well. He became a familiar face at the statehouse. He grew a beard so that people would remember him -- a white beard that, with his booming voice, added a biblical touch to his message. Al also spent a great deal of time in the criminal courts. Whenever the family of a murder victim was barred by defense attorneys from the courtroom, Al would make a point of attending the trial, sitting in court day after day so that someone would be there to represent the victim. Kathryn had introduced her parents to the local chapter of Parents of Murdered Children. Before long Al was writing its monthly newsletter and Harriett was the head of the

chapter, taking phone calls at all hours of the day and night.

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Once a month the little parish hall at Our Lady of Sorrows Church was filled with tales of human cruelty and a depth of sadness that words could never fully convey. The Smiths formed close bonds there with people from every walk of life. Barriers of race, class, and religion that might otherwise have kept these men and women from ever speaking to one another were broken down by the force of a common tragedy. "We all bleed red blood" was Harriett's way of explaining the unlikely friendships made in that room. The violence of American society was not an abstraction to these people: for each of them murder now had a name and a face.

Syndi Bierman -- lovely and blonde, an honor student and a member of her high school drill team, a loving daughter - - was murdered at the age of seventeen by several people, including her adopted sister. Barbara and Leonard Bierman had to live not only with the death of one child but also with the vile deeds and imprisonment of their only other child. The Biermans adored their grandchildren and found consolation in these little boys, though they were the offspring of the killer.

Trent Crane was a nineteen-year-old architecture student who worked nights at a gas station to save money for his upcoming wedding. One night five young men kidnapped him as he left work, took him to Swope Park, shot him many times, stole his customized pickup truck, and drove around aimlessly. The truck was so distinctive that the police captured the murderers within hours. One of them was a thirteen-year-old psychopath who showed no remorse about having pulled the trigger. This young killer faced a maximum of eight years in detention. Trent's father, Earl J. Crane, his mother, Barbara Amet, and his stepfather, Ray Amet, were left embittered by the workings of the criminal-justice system and by the pointless slaughter of their hardworking son.

Donald V. Pierce Jr., a successful young lawyer in downtown Kansas City, was murdered by one of his employees, a secretary who had stolen office equipment from the firm. Don had been an Eagle Scout when Al Smith was scoutmaster of the troop. Murder brought the Pierces and the Smiths together again. At the trial of Don's killer the defense tried hard to blame the victim, promoting a story about an office romance gone wrong. The murderer was convicted and sent to prison for life. News coverage of the trial, however, spread the defense's lurid accusations far and wide. The victim's parents, Donald and Virginia Pierce, felt that the killer had robbed their son not only of his life but also of his good name.

Karen Keeton, twenty-two and beautiful, was kidnapped by a biker, given to another biker as a "gift," and then raped many times and killed. Both murderers were apprehended. One of them was executed. Although a jury gave the other a life sentence with no possible parole for fifty years, the verdict was overturned on appeal, owing to a technical error. He later pleaded guilty to a lesser offense. Helen Cotter, Karen's mother, now had to face this killer every two years at a parole hearing.

Kimberly Rash was nineteen years old when she was killed, mutilated, and dumped into the Missouri River. Her mother, Suzann M. Larson, was outraged by how local media reported the crime. News accounts emphasized that Kimberly was a prostitute -- not that she was the mother of two young children. Janel and Bob Harrison's daughter Ann had just turned fifteen when she was kidnapped one morning while awaiting her school bus. She was raped and tortured for hours, murdered, and left in the trunk of a stolen car.

Edward C. Hobson's thirteen-year-old son, Chris, was forced to dig his own grave in a field and then killed with a shotgun by his stepbrother and another young man, at the urging of his stepmother.

Betty and Larry Gearheart's son Kyle was eighteen when he gave a ride to a young man he'd met working at the Price Chopper supermarket. Kyle's passenger killed him, took his car, and then went to a party, where he bragged about the murder.

Margaret and Bob Chase's son Gary was held up at gunpoint in a parking lot a few weeks before his wedding. The robbers took his wallet, made him lie face down on the ground, and then shot him. Gary bled to death in the parking lot. His wallet contained one dollar.

Pat Foster's son, Sam, was a young father of two. On Halloween, Sam intervened in a dispute between two children over candy and was shot to death by a friend of one child's older brother.

For a few hours every month the families of these murder victims could rage against the injustice of the system, vent their anger at God, describe wild fantasies of revenge, share nightmares and panics, enjoy moments of black humor, and say whatever was on their minds without fear of being judged. The meetings allowed new members and old members to compare notes and put their grief into some perspective. New members got to see firsthand that others had suffered the same loss and kept on living.

Longtime members were reminded, by the tumultuous grief after a recent murder, of just how far they had managed to come. And all of them found it odd that so much compassion, empathy, and giving could arise from the murderousness and ignorance outside the church walls.

CHARLIE Mae Bills attended her first POMC meeting six months after the murder of her only son, Oscar. She went to the meeting because she felt she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She was crying for hours every day. Friends kept telling her to let go, to stop thinking about Oscar, but she could not understand what they meant. How could she let go of Oscar's memory? How could she ever forget her son? She would not even try. At her first POMC meeting Charlie Mae heard that other mothers were still crying ten years after a child's murder. Somehow that made her feel better -- not completely out of her mind. Charlie Mae and Harriett Smith immediately took to each other and became dear friends. Both were nurses, more accustomed to taking care of other people than to looking after themselves.

Charlie Mae Bills was African-American, born and raised in Muskogee, Oklahoma. She and her husband, Oscar Bills Sr., met when they were in the sixth grade. They fell in love and got married in their early twenties. They moved to Kansas City in 1967 and bought a small house with a back yard extending to the wooded edge of a local park. Charlie Mae's husband worked as a maintenance man at the Lipton Tea factory. The couple had five children, four girls and a boy. Their neighbors were African-American working people, proud of their community, and for years nobody owned a burglar alarm or put metal bars on the windows. On November 4, 1991, Oscar Bills Jr. was cleaning the windshield of his car at eight-thirty in the morning, getting ready to drop his wife off at school. She was studying to become an emergency-services medical technician. Oscar was twenty-one, recently married, and still living with his parents. As Oscar's wife stood at the front door, a car with four men inside it stopped near the house. The men wore ski masks. One of them pointed a semi-automatic handgun at Oscar and fired sixteen rounds in a matter of seconds. Oscar died instantly, and the car sped off.

The four men were neighborhood drug dealers. They believed that Oscar had snitched on them to the police. The police found the murder weapon and the getaway car but never made an arrest in the case. The drug dealer thought to have ordered Oscar's murder -- who lived just a few blocks away -- later sent word to the Bills family that the whole thing had been a mistake.

Charlie Mae was at the hospital, about to give medicine to a patient in the intensive-care unit, when her neighbor, Dora Downs, called her on the phone. "Mom," Dora said, calling Charlie Mae by her nickname, "Mom, you got to come home. Oscar's been shot." Charlie Mae said, "What?" and Dora started screaming, "He's dead, he's dead!" Charlie Mae threw down the phone and started to run. Staff members at the hospital grabbed her and restrained her. If they hadn't, she might have run all the way home -- run for miles in her nurse's uniform. Another nurse, a good friend, drove Charlie Mae home. When they pulled up to the house, Oscar was still lying in the driveway. Charlie Mae got out of the car and ran toward him, wanting to hold him, but the police stopped her. They would not let her touch him. They pulled her from the driveway and led her into the house. She stood in the kitchen, pressed up against the window, and stared at her son's body. Oscar was just lying there, alone on the pavement. No one had even bothered to cover him up.

Charlie Mae got angry. She went outside again and told the police she wanted to be with her son. This was her child, her only son, and she wanted to be with him. The officers allowed her past the yellow crime-scene tape, and then Charlie Mae sat on the ground, holding Oscar in her arms.

For weeks afterward Charlie Mae could not stop crying. The doctors gave her a cabinetful of pills, but she would not take them. She relived Dora's phone call to the intensive-care unit over and over again. Charlie Mae had to transfer to another wing of the hospital; being in the ICU made her think about that call. For the first time in her life she found herself questioning God. Her family had always been religious. How could God take away her only son? She had never prayed for selfish things; she had prayed only for the Lord to watch over her children. Oscar had just gotten married and had returned to their church. He was on the right track. She could not understand why God had done this. Despite her anger, Charlie Mae still got up every Sunday and went to church. But Oscar's wife could not forgive God. She had always been a good Christian; her uncle and both her grandfathers were ministers. After the murder Oscar's widow lost her faith in the Lord, left her church, dropped out of school, and became a crack addict.

Charlie Mae heard about POMC from Dora Downs. Dora's son had been murdered two years before. Dora still kept his truck in the driveway, as though the young man might return for it any day. Charlie Mae knew that feeling. She still expected, somehow, to hear Oscar's footsteps in the

house, and to see his chubby legs running up the stairs. Right after the murder she would walk into a room, think of Oscar in it, and want to scream. Old friends told her to move, but she refused. The sadness was inside her; it would go wherever she did. This house was full of good memories. Oscar had died there, but he had also grown up there, playing happily for years in that same driveway.

Charlie Mae found it hard to spend time with Oscar's old friends, as they raised children and had weekend barbecues on their front lawns -- things he would be doing now. For years after the murder she could not prepare holiday dinners, despite the pleas of her other children. She had always loved to cook, and then Oscar was murdered a few weeks before Thanksgiving. Charlie Mae's mother understood; she had made Oscar's favorite dish right before the murder, and she could not bear to make it ever again.

Charlie Mae became a corresponding secretary for the local POMC chapter. It was her job to mail special cards to members of the group, commemorating the anniversaries of their children's deaths. Oscar Bills Sr. did not like to speak about the murder and did not attend any POMC meetings with his wife. Indeed, Charlie Mae had never seen him cry. About a year after the murder she got angry at her husband and asked if he ever thought about Oscar. "There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about my boy," he answered. Recently he'd gone to the cemetery and gotten lost among the graves, unable to see clearly through his tears.

ALTHOUGH most of the murder victims in Kansas City were black, most of the people at the POMC meetings every month were white. Charlie Mae encouraged survivors from the African-American community to join POMC, but some preferred a support group that was based in the inner city. Others were simply afraid to go out at night. The racial disparity among Kansas City's murder victims was in keeping with the disproportionate effects of violence in the United States.

Although only a twelfth of the nation's population is African-American, more than half its murder victims are black. Perhaps one out of every twenty-five African-American men will eventually be murdered. A black man in America today is much more likely to die violently than a U.S. serviceman was during the Second World War. The high murder rate among African-Americans is not a recent phenomenon. Throughout this century it has been anywhere from eight to fifteen times as high as the murder rate among whites.

The long-term effects of poverty and racism are responsible for the carnage in black communities. During the first half of this century, however, many criminologists suggested that murder had a racial component -- that blacks were inherently more murderous than whites. H. C. Brearley, the author of *Homicide in the United States* (1932), believed that the high murder rate among American blacks was due to traits peculiar to the race, claiming that in Africa "a lack of regard for the person and personality seems to have been almost characteristic." In the late 1950s the anthropologist Paul Bohannan decided to investigate whether there was any link between a person's race and the propensity to kill. He and a team of researchers examined the incidence of murder among tribal societies in East Africa that had not yet been severely disrupted by colonialism. Bohannan found that the murder rate in East Africa was not only lower than the murder rate in the United States but also comparable to the extremely low rates in Western Europe. The lethal violence in American society was caused by many complex factors -- and innate racial characteristics were not among them.

Weighing the Threat

IN March of 1991 Gary Rawlings started to feel some of the old symptoms of his illness returning: depression, insomnia, lapses of memory. Rawlings thought that something was wrong with his medicine, and he complained to the owner of Smitty's Sit 'N Siesta. He was feeling "spacy," making stupid mistakes, wandering into the street in front of oncoming cars. She dismissed his concerns, as did the doctor used by the boardinghouse. The symptoms became worse.

Al and Harriett Smith continued to lobby hard for changes in Missouri law. Harry Wiggins, a Democratic state senator from Kansas City, introduced a bill incorporating their proposals, shifting the burden of proof in forensic cases to the patient seeking a release. The Department of Mental Health fought the bill, claiming that its passage would increase housing and staff costs by at least \$3 million a year. "If we have dangerous people in custody, we need to keep them off the street," Wiggins told *The Kansas City Star*. "If it's going to cost us money, it's going to cost us money." Charlie Shields, a Republican state representative from St. Joseph, threw his support behind the bill. The state senate passed the legislation at 11:00 P.M. on May 16, the next to last night of its session; the house approved the bill the next day. The Smiths were ecstatic, hugging and dancing at the news. For the first time since Terri's murder the system had done something

for them. They felt a sense of relief, as though a heavy burden were lifting. Gary Rawlings was scheduled to have another release hearing in July. The Smiths would finally head to the courtroom in St. Joseph with the law on their side.

On June 20 a caseworker at a Department of Mental Health workshop noticed that Gary Rawlings looked unwell. He had lost a lot of weight. Rawlings agreed to see the forensic psychiatrist who had first treated him at St. Joseph State Hospital. The psychiatrist quickly discovered that Rawlings was taking the wrong medicine. The doctor hired by Smitty's Sit 'N Siesta was a general practitioner. He had switched Rawlings's prescription in order to save money. For three months Rawlings had been fighting to keep hold of his sanity, taking ten milligrams -- hardly a pediatric dose -- of the wrong anti-psychotic drug every day.

The Smiths learned in July that Rawlings had been readmitted, voluntarily, to the forensic unit of St. Joseph State Hospital. The news seemed to confirm what they had been saying all along: this young man's treatment needed to be carefully supervised. Al and Harriett thought it was a blessing that the mistake had been discovered before anyone was hurt.

In December, Gary Rawlings applied for another conditional release. The Department of Mental Health supported his application, proposing that Rawlings be returned to Smitty's Sit 'N Siesta or placed in another private boardinghouse. The chief psychiatrist of the forensic unit at St. Joseph State Hospital submitted a report arguing forcefully that the young man should be released. Rawlings had shown great insight into his own illness, according to the psychiatrist. Rawlings had spotted the warning signs of psychosis and had immediately sought help. He felt remorse for the crime, exhibited no dangerous behavior, and deserved another chance to live outside the hospital. The psychiatric report was long and rambling. It attributed great significance to Rawlings's hairstyle and grooming in old family photographs. It failed to mention his extensive gun collection but noted with approval that as a young boy Rawlings had taken "pride in his pet." It praised the Department of Mental Health's role in Rawlings's recent recovery: "His mood brightened ... because he knew he was in the hands of several professional trained social workers, psychologists, chaplains, nurses and psychiatrists all making correct decisions."

The conditional-release hearing was scheduled for February of 1992 and then postponed. The Jackson County

Prosecutor's Office hired an independent forensic psychologist to examine Gary Rawlings. The Department of Mental Health sent a psychiatrist from the Biggs Forensic Center, at Fulton State, to interview Rawlings and write a new evaluation. The chief psychiatrist of the forensic unit at St. Joseph State Hospital had been given a medical leave: his report on Gary Rawlings was withdrawn. Both the new evaluations found that Rawlings was not delusional, thanks to the proper medication. His thinking was clear. He seemed free of any hostility or volatility. Gerald H. Vandenberg, the psychologist hired by the prosecutor's office, noted that Rawlings had responded evasively and deceptively to a number of questions, in an attempt to appear healthy and sane. This was interpreted as a good sign. "He has to have it somewhat together," Vandenberg observed, "to be able to lie that well."

The conditional-release hearing was held on April 21, 1992, with Judge Bill Roberts again presiding. Harriett testified about the need to keep Rawlings in a structured, supervised environment. Al acknowledged that by opposing this release the Smiths might provoke a violent response from Gary Rawlings. "We are old enough that we don't care if he does murder us," Al said. "He has already done so much to us, it could hardly be worse." After their testimony the Smiths were ushered out of the courtroom. Local newspapers had become interested in their story, and Karen King, the assistant attorney general representing Gary Rawlings and the Department of Mental Health, requested that the hearing be closed to the public. Judge Roberts felt obligated to close the courtroom; Missouri law guaranteed a mental patient's right to privacy. For the remainder of the hearing Al and Harriett sat on a bench in the hall.

Gary Rawlings's ex-wife, Maureen, testified for the first time in the case. She said that Rawlings had been calm and reserved during most of their marriage. Then he began to act strangely. He accused their dentist, a woman, of planting microphones in his teeth. He later threatened his ex-wife, the dentist, and others. Maureen said that she and her two children, who lived in Kansas, were terrified of Rawlings. He had recently sued for monthly visitation rights, and had won. She asked the court to deny his conditional release, fearing that he might try to harm her children. "I have no guarantees of their safety," she said.

At the end of the hearing Judge Roberts granted the conditional release. The young man's behavior prior to the murder was no longer relevant. The judge could take into account only what Rawlings had done, or had not done, since being committed to the mental hospital. The Department of Mental Health asserted that in the five years

since the murder Rawlings had not made any threats, committed assault, tried to escape, set any fires, thrown objects, or displayed inappropriate sexual behavior. The Department of Mental Health's forensic psychiatrist and the prosecutor's forensic psychologist agreed that Rawlings did not seem likely in the near future to pose a threat to himself or to others. He could not be regarded as dangerous because of old threats and one violent act.

The Smiths were dejected. Despite all their hard work, Gary Rawlings was not just being released; he was moving closer to them. The Department of Mental Health was placing him in a state-run boardinghouse in Kansas City. His medication would be provided daily by the staff. He would be forbidden to drive a car or to own a weapon. Although the conditions of his release specified that Rawlings be kept under twenty-four-hour supervision, that requirement offered the Smiths little peace of mind. "Twenty-four-hour supervision" did not mean that someone would always be keeping an eye on him. It meant that Rawlings would always have to sign in and out of the building.

Tim's Mother

PATTY Walters worked the late shift at the Hallmark Cards factory, making penny valentines. She was a single mother who adored her only child, Tim. On December 6, 1993, Tim left their house in Leavenworth, Kansas, about an hour outside Kansas City, to apply for a job at a meat-packing plant in Emporia. He was twenty years old, tall and handsome, a nationally ranked volleyball player who had dropped out of community college to find work in the real world. Patty was upset that her son was finally leaving home. They spent a great deal of time together, but she knew he was ready to move on. She gave him a big hug good-bye. Tim called her from Emporia and said that everything looked great; he was going to get a company physical and come home the next day.

Just after midnight on December 10 Patty got a call at work. Tim was home, and had good news. He wanted to wait and tell his mother in person. They made plans to spend all of Saturday together. Patty got off work at eight o'clock on Friday morning, spent the day Christmas shopping in Kansas City, played a few rounds of the dice game Bunco with some friends, and then went to bed. In the middle of the night she awoke to the sound of scraping on her bedroom window. The front door suddenly opened. Frightened by the noise, Patty grabbed for a weapon of some kind, looked up, and realized that the person who

had entered her house was her mother. "What's wrong?" Patty asked. Her mother said, "I don't know how to tell you this." Patty instantly knew her son was dead and began to scream.

Tim had returned from Emporia, having gotten the meat-packing job, and had gone to a friend's house in Leavenworth to pick up a coat. When he arrived at his friend's house, two young men were breaking into a car parked on the street. The men jumped into their own car and sped off. Tim followed them for a few blocks, tried to get their license-plate number, couldn't read it, gave up, and returned to his friend's place. A young man emerged from behind the house. While Tim stood beside his car, the man walked over and started a friendly conversation; then, without any warning, he struck Tim in the head with a blunt object -- most likely a lead pipe or a tire iron. Tim said "Ah" and fell to the ground. The man struck him in the head again and again as he lay there. Tim never regained consciousness and died two hours later at the hospital.

For the next few days there was great potential for racial conflict in Leavenworth. Tim was white; his killer was black. Dozens of Tim's friends armed themselves and went out into the night, driving around, looking for the murderer. Patty wanted them to stop, fearing that innocent people would get hurt. On the day of Tim's funeral, a gathering attended by hundreds, the police arrested the murderer -- a twenty-four-year-old man who had served a few years in a California prison for assault with a deadly weapon. The killer pleaded guilty to Tim's murder and received a life sentence, making him eligible for parole in fifteen years. During his court appearance the killer was arrogant and unrepentant, smiling and throwing kisses to his girlfriend. Patty sat in the courtroom and sobbed throughout the hearing.

For months after the murder Patty thought about suicide. Tim had meant everything to her. He was her joy. Hallmark offered Patty all the time off that she needed, but she soon returned to work, trying to keep busy. At first she operated a machine by herself, thinking about Tim the whole time and crying. Then Hallmark assigned an older woman to work beside her, someone who provided a great deal of emotional support. Patty felt more comfortable at work than at home. She dreaded returning to her empty house, with its memories and pictures of Tim on the wall. Every night she would drive around for hours to avoid going home, and then finally get into bed and fall asleep crying.

Patty was too scared to speak at her first POMC meeting.

But sitting there, listening to other survivors, made her feel better. It made her feel normal. She became a regular at the meetings. She found the nerve to join the conversation, welcoming the chance to say what was on her mind without fear of being criticized.

Patty also found consolation at her son's grave. During the first year after the murder she stopped by the cemetery two or three times a day. Usually she'd visit the grave for fifteen minutes or so. At other times, including his birthday, she would sit there all day. His birthday was in February, when the weather was harsh and cold. One thing she could not bear was the thought of snow covering Tim's body. Whenever it snowed, she had to visit the cemetery and clear off his grave. One day after a snowstorm she arrived and found that someone who knew how she felt had already removed the snow from Tim's grave.

Release

EVERY six months or so Al and Harriett Smith drove to St. Joseph for another conditional-release hearing, and at almost every hearing Gary Rawlings gained more freedom. He won the right to live in his own apartment at a state-owned complex in Kansas City, to enjoy overnight passes, and to enroll at a vocational school just several blocks from Kathryn's house. Al and Harriett bitterly opposed the Department of Mental Health's efforts to place Rawlings in an auto-repair course at the TAD Technical Institute. Kansas City had many other vocational schools, they argued: TAD Technical was not only near Kathryn's home, it was also expensive, and the state would be paying. Judge Roberts allowed Rawlings to enroll at TAD Technical, but prohibited him from making contact with the Smiths or entering their neighborhood for any reason other than to attend classes.

While losing one battle after another in court, Al and Harriett were more successful at lobbying the state legislature. They had become leaders in the victims'-rights movement in Missouri, gaining the respect of many legislators. Largely because of Al and Harriett's work, laws were enacted that forced the courts to keep forensic release hearings open to the public, that eliminated the concept of "irresistible impulse" from the insanity defense, and that required mental patients who had committed violent crimes to be housed in a secure facility until a court granted their release. The Smiths celebrated their greatest victory when the people of Missouri approved a victims'-rights amendment to the state constitution.

Over the years Gary Rawlings never harmed or threatened

anyone, although he did commit minor violations of the terms governing his conditional release. Kathryn's son Jason said he bumped into Rawlings in the automotive section of a store at about 1:30 A.M. -- long after Rawlings's curfew. A Department of Mental Health employee at Rawlings's apartment complex was fired for encouraging him to break rules. Gun literature was found in Rawlings's apartment and confiscated. At a deposition in May of 1994 Carol Kimball, his forensic caseworker, was asked if Rawlings fully understood the nature of his crime. "I believe that he knows intellectually that he did commit this crime and the other things surrounding it," Kimball replied. "I don't think he is -- I personally don't feel like he continues to realize the seriousness of it. The doctor, I think, has a different view." Nevertheless, Kimball did not consider Gary Rawlings dangerous, so long as he was properly supervised.

In April of last year Rawlings filed a request for an eighth conditional release. Its terms would have allowed him to live anywhere in the Kansas City, Missouri, area, to operate a motor vehicle anywhere in the state, and to assume responsibility for taking his own medication. At the release hearing, in May, Bronwyn Werner, an assistant prosecutor from Jackson County, read aloud some passages from a letter that Rawlings had recently sent to a woman at the Department of Mental Health. The letter was bizarre and largely incoherent. Judge Roberts recessed the hearing to allow further consideration of Rawlings's treatment.

A few weeks later the judge approved Rawlings's conditional release, having revised some of its terms. Rawlings was required to take his medicine every day in the presence of an employee at the state-run apartment complex. Failure to appear for the medication would be grounds for terminating his release. He was forbidden to leave the state of Missouri except to visit his children, in Kansas, and was required to meet with a forensic caseworker at least once a month. He was forbidden to get in touch with the Smiths or to enter their neighborhood. If these conditions were faithfully obeyed, after six months Gary Rawlings was free to live wherever he chose in the state of Missouri, as long as his forensic caseworker approved and the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office was kept informed of his address.

When Harriett heard the judge's decision, she said to herself, "Gary Rawlings is going home," and then she thought about how Terri could never go home, about the injustice of that simple fact, and for the first time since the morning when her daughter's body was discovered, Harriett broke down. The judge, the prosecutor, and

Rawlings's attorney appeared startled by her reaction. During almost a dozen hearings over the course of six years, Harriett had never let them see her cry. She had never lost control of her feelings. Now she sat in the courtroom and quietly wept, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

The Unglamorous

THE national headquarters of Parents of Murdered Children is located in a downtown-Cincinnati office building owned by the Catholic Church. POMC rents two small, windowless rooms in the basement. The rooms are crammed with filing cabinets and boxes of newsletters. The walls are decorated with photographs of the dead: wedding pictures, graduation pictures, vacation snapshots, glimpses of ordinary people from all over America, now murdered and gone. The telephones are constantly ringing. POMC has only three full-time staff members, who handle hundreds of murder-related calls a week, mainly from grieving family members. The group's occupancy of these rooms prevents the archdiocese from using them as storage space or for meetings. The POMC staff thinks that some members of the archdiocese consider the group's presence an inconvenience.

Ken Czillinger originally secured the office space for POMC, but he is no longer a Catholic priest. Frustrated by, among other things, the Church's resistance to change, Czillinger left the priesthood. He now works at a hospice in Cincinnati and looks after his younger brother, who suffers from Down syndrome.

Charlotte and Bob Hullinger both left POMC in 1986, having devoted eight years of their lives and much of their income to its establishment. Bob is still a Lutheran pastor. Charlotte went back to school, earned a master's degree, and started her own practice as a psychotherapist. On July 12 of this year the man who killed their daughter Lisa became the prime suspect in another murder case. Once again a woman who had rejected him was found beaten to death. As of this writing the killer remains at large.

For more than a decade Nancy Ruhe-Munch has served as POMC's executive director. Ruhe-Munch is tall and blonde and just turned fifty. She is a formidable woman with a quick mind, a firm handshake, an intense passion for her work, and a dark, exuberant sense of humor -- which allows her to hear about brutal murders every day and still maintain her sanity. As the executive director of an understaffed organization, Ruhe-Munch must play many roles. At various times during an average day she is a grief

counselor, a fundraiser, an activist, an office manager, even an amateur detective. Among other services, POMC provides survivors with an outside opinion on how well their case was handled by local authorities. Ruhe-Munch has assembled a group of law-enforcement experts, including medical examiners and homicide detectives, who scrutinize the evidence in a POMC member's case. She has gained a working knowledge not only of bereavement but also of ballistics, forensic pathology, and homicide-investigation techniques. Her daily mail contains grateful letters from victims' families, petitions seeking to block murderers' parole, snippets for the POMC newsletter, autopsy reports, and glossy full-color photographs of bloody crime scenes.

Parents of Murdered Children has about 200 local chapters. Roughly 15,000 friends and relatives of murder victims attend its meetings every year, free of charge. Raising money for POMC is a constant struggle. Last year the national office operated on a budget of less than \$200,000, most of it donated in small amounts by the membership. The group's leading benefactor is an anonymous businessman in Dayton, Ohio, who sends an annual check for \$7,500 in memory of a murdered family member. Helping America's grieving parents lacks the cachet of saving distant rain forests. Nancy Ruhe-Munch has tried, without success, to gain support from the Junior League and other organizations. The clients served by POMC are not easy to celebrate at a charity benefit. They are less likely to be glamorous than to be angry, distraught, and in pain. A few years ago, when Ruhe-Munch won an award for her work with crime victims, she donated the entire \$10,000 prize to POMC. Another POMC board member, Harry J. Bonnell, the chief deputy medical examiner of San Diego County, later won the same award and likewise gave the prize money to POMC.

Nancy Ruhe-Munch finds it a challenge to attract volunteers. Only seven people responded to a recent want ad in the newspaper, and none stayed at POMC for long. Ruhe-Munch knows firsthand how the job can take its toll: last year she suffered a minor stroke and developed heart problems. Counselors who work with the relatives of murder victims are at high risk for developing symptoms of PTSD. Many eventually burn out. Ruhe-Munch has lost a lot of old friends who don't want to hear about her work. Her husband is loving and supportive, but even he can't listen to her stories. They upset him too much. Thinking about murder all day has left its mark on Ruhe-Munch. She can no longer watch the news on television or read the newspaper. She listens to the news on the radio; for some reason it is less upsetting that way. She gets nervous in convenience stores and fast-food restaurants, where so

many murders take place. She always needs to know where the exits are. She worries about her children and her grandchildren, and she tries never to take anything for granted.

Although Ruhe-Munch finds her work immensely rewarding, many aspects are not easy. Speaking to the fathers of murder victims is one of her most difficult tasks. She senses an awful mixture of sadness and denial in their voices. "You hear them choking back the tears," she says, "and then you hear them say, 'I'm calling for my wife; she's not doing well ...' And I'll say, 'Well, how are you doing?' And they'll say, 'I'm doing just fine, but I'm concerned about her.'" Often that grieving father, that loving husband, is dead within a few years, killed by cancer or a heart attack.

The violent revenge movies made in Hollywood have little in common with what happens in real life. Ruhe-Munch cannot recall a single instance in which a POMC member has committed an act of violence against the murderer of a loved one. Almost every relative of a murder victim fantasizes about seeking vengeance. But the vast majority of Americans are unwilling to kill, no matter how great their anger and outrage. A number of POMC members have taken their own lives, however. One young mother went to the cemetery and committed suicide on her son's grave.

Nancy Ruhe-Munch is not the parent of a murdered child. Before joining POMC she worked for years at a rape-crisis and battered-women's center. She thinks the women's movement and the victims'-rights movement have much in common. "In the 1970s," she says, "the women's movement fought -- and I was one of those who fought -- to bring respect to the victims of rape and of sexual abuse. Those were crimes of power over women. Well, murder is the ultimate crime of power over women -- over all human beings. The victims of murder deserve respect too."

From the archives:

- **"The Man Who Counts the Killings,"** by Scott Stossel (May, 1997)

George Gerbner, who thirty years ago founded the Cultural Indicators project, which is best known for its estimate that the average American child will have watched 8,000 murders on television by the age of twelve, is

A few years ago POMC launched a project called Murder Is Not Entertainment, a letter-writing campaign aimed at businesses that exploit murder for profit. Ruhe-Munch is appalled by America's obsession with murder, by the false and insensitive depiction of violence in our popular culture. The murders manufactured by Hollywood tend to be scary, exciting, disgusting, ironic, or amusing -- but rarely tragic. Fictional serial killers have become popular movie heroes, and their fans have grown fascinated with the real thing. A number of companies produce serial-killer trading cards. Each card bears the picture of a real serial killer on one side and an account of the murders on the other. There are also victim trading cards. Serial killers now have several Web sites dedicated to them. Songs

so alarmed about the baneful effects of TV that he describes them in terms of 'fascism.'"

about serial killers are recorded by heavy-metal bands. The faces of serial killers appear on T-shirts sold through a mail-order catalogue devoted to murder memorabilia. Paintings and other artwork by serial killers are collected by Hollywood celebrities. One art dealer, who is also a funeral director, specializes in the work of serial killers.

The popularity of murder games and murder-mystery weekends infuriates Nancy Ruhe-Munch. She cannot view them as innocent amusements. "Can you imagine having a child-abuse game?" she asks. "Can you imagine having a rape mystery game? Everyone has to guess who's the serial rapist?" The families of murder victims, she argues, ought to be treated with more consideration and tact; society would never tolerate games and parties that trivialized other violent crimes. POMC has protested against games like *How to Host a Murder* and *How to Kill Your Boss*. It has sent angry letters to companies such as Safeway and Campbell Soup, which have used murder in a promotion. The culture of murder seems to have permeated every nook and cranny in America. "We even heard about a battered-women's center," Ruhe-Munch says, "that staged a murder game to raise money."

Hundreds of people from all over the United States gather every year for the POMC annual conference. Many are chapter leaders; some are survivors encountering POMC for the first time. The conference features grief workshops and lectures on the criminal-justice system. The highlight of the weekend is a memorial dinner held in a hotel ballroom. The tables are jammed with the mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, husbands, wives, and children of murder victims -- people from Battle Creek, Michigan, and Appleton, Minnesota, from Phoenix, Arizona, and Opa-Locka, Florida, from Beaverton, Oregon, and Brooklyn, New York. The sounds of laughter and loud conversation fill the room, members look for old friends at other tables, and waiters hurry to gather plates at the end of each course.

After dinner the lights are dimmed. A band plays the POMC theme song, "We Are the Survivors," and a slide show begins. One after another the faces of murder victims are projected onto a large screen -- hundreds of faces, most of them young. This could be a slide show at a college reunion, cheery and nostalgic, except all these young people are dead. The effect is overwhelming. The convivial spirit of a typical American convention gives way to the sorrows of a congregation of the damned. As the face of each murder victim appears, a family member lights a candle. Before long the ballroom is full of grown men and women who are crying, lit by flickering candlelight, in a modern ritual that oddly evokes the

ancient meaning of the word "victim": one who is sacrificed.

UNTIL recently Gary Rawlings lived with his father and worked as an automobile mechanic. The young man's mental illness and the murder he committed have greatly affected his family. "It's been devastation," Gary Rawlings Sr. says. "My family has fell all apart. I don't know where my wife is. She couldn't face it. Nobody's heard from her in probably five or six years." Gary was a bright boy; his parents had big hopes for him, and those hopes were "snuffed out." The young man's children have suffered terribly, caught in an ugly battle over visitation rights and taunted mercilessly by schoolmates. Media accounts of the crime and of the hearings forced the children to switch schools. Gary Rawlings Sr. worries about his grandchildren's future, about whether they will someday develop schizophrenia, which tends to run in families. "My worst nightmare that I could imagine has come true in my life," he says. "Hell is here on earth."

Gary Rawlings Jr. is no serial killer, according to his father, and poses no great threat to society: he is just a shy, "passive" young man. The murder was a tragedy, pure and simple. "In a nutshell, what I see are two gentle, quiet people who loved each other," Gary Rawlings Sr. says. "Unfortunately, one of them was sick. And one of them perished. It should never have happened. I feel the disease killed Terri. Maybe it's because I'm the father, but I just can't believe if my boy was [feeling] right, he'd do anything like that."

Like many paranoid schizophrenics, Gary Rawlings Jr. lives in constant fear of becoming sick again and of being kept in a mental hospital. "He's afraid of everything," his father claims. "He's afraid of the Smiths. Why, I think he's more afraid of them than they are of him. Who has the most fear? He does. And when he's sick, of course, he hallucinates that people are after him, that somebody's trying to hurt him." In the absence of proper medication, a psychotic state gradually descends on the young man, like a dream. The voices and delusions feel real to him at the time, but later, when he emerges from the psychosis, it feels like waking up from a strange, terrible dream.

Gary Rawlings Sr. shares the Smiths' anger at the Missouri Department of Mental Health. The treatment of his son's illness has in some ways been reminiscent of the Dark Ages. "Well, here's a perfect example of what happened," Gary Rawlings Sr. says. "They put him on the wrong medication. But when he complains about it, they tell him

he don't know nothing. In other words -- shut up. He gets sick and he readmits himself to the hospital. Then they treat him as if he tried to escape. They put him in the most secure place and overmedicate him, to where he can't even stand up. The whole system came down on him, when he readmitted himself! And instead of praising him, he was punished. I was furious at them."

When Rawlings becomes psychotic, he gets a certain look in his eyes. "I can see it right away," his father claims. If he'd known that his son might hurt Terri, he would have gone straight to her house and grabbed him. Gary Rawlings Sr. regrets his difficulty in communicating with the Smiths: "I'd like to, but I don't know what to say. What do you say? What do you say when something like this happens? I know where the Smiths are coming from. I might do the same thing they've done if it was my daughter."

CARL P. Malmquist is a prominent forensic psychiatrist. He is the author of *Homicide: A Psychiatric Perspective* (1996) and a professor of social psychiatry at the University of Minnesota. He teaches a course called Killing. Malmquist prefers not to comment on the Rawlings case. Nevertheless, he warns that the behavior of any paranoid schizophrenic outside a mental hospital is difficult to predict. Maintaining the proper medication does not guarantee nonviolent behavior. A Swedish study of schizophrenics found that only a third of their violent acts were committed during a psychotic episode. The "impaired interpersonal relations" of many schizophrenics -- their tendency, for example, to treat people as objects -- may be more responsible for their violence than any hallucinations or delusions. Malmquist believes that the United States is in the midst of a vast social experiment: little research has been conducted on the possible link between violence and mentally ill people who have been de-institutionalized. He warns that psychiatrists and other mental-health professionals are not very good at making long-term predictions about the behavior of mental patients who have committed violent crimes.

Indeed, statistical methods of predicting violent behavior over the long term are consistently more accurate than clinical methods. A recent survey of the academic literature concluded that psychiatrists and other clinicians can at best predict violence with only slightly more accuracy than mere chance. A number of studies have suggested that mental-health professionals have no proven ability to predict the long-term dangerousness of released mental patients.

Richard N. Gowdy is the director of forensic services for the Missouri Department of Mental Health. Confidentiality laws prevent him from discussing Gary Rawlings's case. Gowdy believes that the changes in state law gained by the Smiths merely codify what his department has been doing all along. In forensic cases, he says, "public safety is our top priority." When a patient found not guilty by reason of insanity applies for a conditional release, a review committee composed of psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and administrators collects extensive information on the case. The committee takes into account the nature of the crime, the patient's clinical response to treatment, behavior in the hospital setting, the response to medication, the response to nonmedical therapies, and any mitigating factors. If the patient has committed a dangerous act, the case receives an independent review at the department's central office. "It's important to note," Gowdy adds, "that we don't control conditional releases. That's entirely a judicial determination." Gowdy thinks that the mental-health system has certain advantages over the correctional system when it comes to supervising people who may prove dangerous. A convicted felon receives a finite punishment, whereas a forensic patient is committed indefinitely to the Department of Mental Health. A conditional release can always be revoked. According to Gowdy, the recidivism rate of forensic patients released by his department is lower than the recidivism rate nationwide for violent offenders released from prison.

The recidivism rate of America's violent offenders, however, is hardly a good measure of success. A convicted murderer in the United States is released after spending, on average, just six years in prison. A study by the Justice Department found that a fifth of all convicted murderers released from prison were arrested within three years for another violent crime. About a third of that group were arrested for another killing. A convicted murderer who has been released from prison is hundreds of times as likely to kill as an ordinary citizen. At the moment there are about 100,000 convicted murderers locked up in America's prisons -- and perhaps 800,000 murderers living free in American society. The United States has more murderers than doctors, more murderers than college professors. It has more murderers than police officers.

ON January 3 of this year the Kansas City chapter of Parents of Murdered Children met for the first time since 1993 without Harriett Smith as its leader. As the tenth anniversary of Terri's death approached, Harriett decided to step down. She felt that the group would be

invigorated by new leadership. Patty Walters was chosen for the job. Patty was making great progress; her grief had entered a new phase.

Patty now finds visiting her son's grave more painful than comforting. She goes there much less often and stays only briefly. Instead of visiting her son's grave, she speaks into a tape recorder every night, and it feels as if she is talking to Tim, telling him about her day.

Charlie Mae Bills recently gave up her post as a POMC corresponding secretary. The job had become oppressive. The sympathy cards were a constant reminder of other killings. Summers are still hard for her: everyone's kids are playing outside, laughing and having fun. They make her think about Oscar. But last November, for the first time since his murder, Charlie Mae cooked Thanksgiving dinner.

Al and Harriett still attend every POMC meeting. He still writes the newsletter. They still take phone calls at all hours of the day and night. They attend murder trials on behalf of the victims' families and lobby hard to change various laws. They believe that people found not guilty by reason of insanity should in some way be held accountable for their actions. In the psychiatric ward where Harriett once worked, patients who threw food in the cafeteria were reprimanded and asked to apologize; the Smiths think that murderers should be asked to do at least that much. Despite having killed Terri, Gary Rawlings Jr. does not have a criminal record.

Al and Harriett are strong supporters of the proposed Victims' Bill of Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Although thirty states have adopted some sort of victims'-rights amendment, these rights have proved difficult to enforce. A federal amendment would finally give victims' rights a constitutional basis. It would guarantee crime victims and the relatives of murder victims the right to be notified, to be present, and to be heard. The Victims' Bill of Rights Amendment has been endorsed by both political parties and by President Bill Clinton. But it has been stalled in the Senate Judiciary Committee for more than a year and has yet to reach Congress for a vote.

The Smiths vow to attend Gary Rawlings's conditional-release hearings for as long as they live. They feel obliged not only to honor their daughter's memory but also to try to prevent Rawlings from ever hurting anyone else. They do not trust the Missouri Department of Mental Health, nor do they believe that Rawlings is harmless. "His demeanor in the courtroom is one of absolute arrogance," Harriett says.

"He has never once spoken to any of us or even acknowledged that he killed a member of our family." The Smiths worry that Rawlings still has access to the likely murder weapon -- a sophisticated semi-automatic pistol. The Department of Mental Health has never demanded, as a condition of his release, that Rawlings hand over the murder weapon or reveal its whereabouts.

On June 4 of this year Rawlings failed to appear for his medication. It was the night before his latest release hearing, and a local television-news crew had parked outside his father's house, hoping to speak with him and interviewing the neighbors. Rawlings later claimed that the stress of the upcoming hearing and of the media attention caused him to forget about taking his medicine. He also claimed that his forensic caseworker had been "badgering" him for months. As of this writing Gary Rawlings Jr. is in a Kansas City mental hospital, seeking another conditional release.

During the first few years after Terri's murder Kathryn was hospitalized three times for depression and for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. She slowly regained her confidence and rebuilt her life. She left the post office, found a much better job, and started to work as a volunteer at Rose Brooks, a local shelter for battered women. Kathryn had hauled many of Terri's belongings out of her basement and donated them to the shelter. Rose Brooks felt like the right place for Terri's things. She had been a victim of domestic violence; now other victims might benefit from what she left behind.

Kathryn still desperately misses her sister. And she still lives in fear of Gary Rawlings. "I see him as a manipulator who's learned how to work the system," she says. Her older son, Jason, is not afraid of Rawlings. "If he tries anything," Jason warns, "he'll regret it." Her younger son, Billy, feels less confident. Thoughts of Rawlings are never far from his mind. "I'm still afraid that he's plotting our deaths right now," Billy says. "I'm afraid he blames my family for his problems. I keep thinking that he's going to kill us one by one, that I'll come home someday and my mom will be dead, and he'll be hiding in the shadows."

Without any warning, in a quiet moment, Harriett sometimes feels Terri's presence. "All of a sudden something will wash over me," she says, "and I can hear Terri say, 'It's going to be okay, Mom.'" Ten years after the murder Harriett still relives the scene in front of Terri's house that morning. "I replay it over and over and over and over," she says. "But the pain isn't as bad now. In grief you need to reach a point where it's just a reality. You need to face the reality. And that's how the scene plays out in my

mind now. It is a reality."

Harriett still thinks about Terri lying alone in that house for days while her family worried. Nobody knew where Terri was -- and she was only a few blocks away. Harriett woke up, got dressed, went to work at the hospital, ate meals, did errands, and spoke to friends while her daughter lay alone in that house. One of Harriett's greatest regrets is that she could not be with Terri when she died. Harriett had sat beside so many patients during their last hours, yet she could not be there for her daughter. "I so often wish that Gary would have just called me after he shot her," Harriett says. "I know that sounds stupid, but that's the way I feel. It's been real hard for me not knowing exactly when she died, not knowing if she suffered. That's part of life. Terri's death was a part of her life. I can remember when we brought Terri home from the hospital. I can remember when she took her first steps. I can remember her first day of school. I just wish I could have been there for her when she died."

[Return to Part One of this article.](#)

On the first Friday evening of every month, at 7:30 sharp, the group meets in the little parish hall at Our Lady of Sorrows. There are new faces at every meeting, sometimes five or six new faces. Like clockwork, the killing goes on, not just in Kansas City but in every city, north and south, east and west, all over the country. Young men and women are beaten, stabbed, strangled, and shot, relentlessly, day and night. Another murder is committed in America every twenty-four minutes or so, each one with its own explanation, yet all of them linked somehow, interconnected, part of the national condition. Every day brings more victims, more burials, more parents of murdered children -- an unending funeral procession, slow-moving and black lines, all over the country. Perhaps four or five Americans were murdered while you read this. As each life ends, another family's grief begins, and the killing goes on, like clockwork, and the blood flows.

The photographs that appear throughout this article were provided by the families of murder victims. We are grateful for their generous cooperation.

Eric Schlosser is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*. His articles on marijuana and the law that *The Atlantic* published in August and September of 1994 won the 1995 National Magazine Award for reporting.

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