

My name is Laura Strietmann, I am a resident of Hamilton County in the city of Cincinnati. I serve as Executive Director of Cincinnati Right to Life.

I have testified a few times in the Statehouse on behalf of the unborn, whom I work and serve to save and protect in Ohio. My life is spent proclaiming the dignity of the human person.

My parents raised me and my 2 siblings to be prolife, valuing each human person from conception until natural death. My childhood was spent in upstate New York and it is there I marched for life, passed out fliers, prayed and protested against the slaughter of such innocent victims through the violence of abortion.

My journey to defend all life began in Rochester and has me here today sharing how our state can better serve our citizens by getting rid of the death penalty.

I will never forget the night of February 17, 1977, when as a little girl I awoke in a dark night to the sound of my mother crying and screaming. My father was trying to calm her and our esteemed neighbor and dear friend from across the street, Dr. Nino Trunfio was in our home too. I learned later he had been called to help administer medicine to sedate my mother.

My mom, a native of Louisville, KY second born of my grandparent's nine children, had just learned her second youngest sibling, Mark Nelson, 21, was shot and killed in cold blood while working at a restaurant in downtown Louisville. The killers, former employees of the restaurant, The Fincastle Deli, were 16 and 17 years old.

Mark was a blonde haired, blue eyed all American young man of the 70s. He was hilarious and a total tease to the many of his nieces and nephews, children of his 7 older siblings. Even being the rascal he was, Mark was dearly loved and quite possibly, maybe the favorite child of my grandparents 9 children and 27 grandchildren.

The night of Mark's murder changed, scarred and traumatized my family forever. 45 years later, his murder and even the immediate 25 years after this violence, has caused so much pain and suffering that still impacts us all to this day.

On the night of February 17, 1977, when Mark was killed, my grandparents were sleeping and not answering their phone as police tried to reach them. The police and another uncle were able to reach my Aunt Donna, the first born of the 9

Nelson children. My Aunt Donna shares a memory that when she used her key and entered the home of my grandparents and woke my grandmother, my grandmother was told of Mark's killing, my saintly grandmother in her immediate shock was able to express mercy on the killers and express empathy for the mothers of the boys who would do something so terrible. I was raised by merciful family members.

Mark's funeral was jam-packed and received a ridiculous amount of publicity. My grandfather was a well-known and successful Louisville businessman and the case, due to the violent and shocking nature, gained much attention by the press and community. Even the Mayor of Louisville attended the funeral. Mark also received a full police escort in the procession of his body to be buried.

So why is my uncle dead? Bobby Green and William Forest, the killers had been employees of the Fincastle Deli and because they were caught red-handed stealing, they were fired by the owner of the restaurant, Jimmy Nelson, another brother of my mom. The violent criminals had come back to kill Jimmy but he had walked to the bank with the night deposit and because he was not there, they shot and killed Mark instead.

The boys were arrested the same night of the murder and because they were juveniles, were held in juvenile detention.

The first part of the trials and case were all about moving the 16- and 17-year-old boys to be tried as adults because of the cold-blooded nature of the murder. The boys had long records for their ages and while being held in juvenile detention awaiting the trial, even escaped at one point because of windows in the cell block not being locked. My grandmother was deathly frightened when this happened as these boys had screamed horrific things to her and the family as they were moved in hallways before legal hearings. These men were horrible people.

The case is a precedent setting case in Kentucky because these killers became the first juveniles tried as adults. There is much drama to the trial, postponement two times, and a mistrial due to the press mishandling private information.

What ended up happening was hundreds of painful hours spent in court for my family, days, months, weeks and years of the suffering and pending trial causing more trauma for everyone.

In the end a plea was struck because of all the mishandling, and my grandparents approved a 25-year sentence for Mr. Green, the man who pulled the trigger and a shorter sentence for Mr. Forest, the accomplice. They had been warned the boys would most likely receive a not-guilty conviction due to all of the bumbling by prosecutors and mishandling of publicity by the press.

This plea led to 25 years of driving to the prison in Eddyville, KY every time there was a parole hearing for Mr. Green. My grandparents would have to continually testify at how Mark's murder damaged our family and as to why this killer should never be on the streets again.

So with all of this, why am I against the death penalty? Why am I here before you today?

With all of the trauma induced to my family by this senseless act, my grandparents, in their pain and suffering acted with empathy and mercy as they sought justice for their beloved son. My mom tells a story that during one of the hearings, she was close enough to reach out and touch the killer, Mr. Green. Her father said to her, "as much as I despise them, I could never take their life."

I am a devout Catholic. I learned from example of my family. Natural law leads me to understand the sanctity of life, and my faith allows me to live boldly in defense of human dignity and understand that all life is a gift. As I shared earlier, I fight boldly and loudly for the unborn, because we all know in the heart of our hearts that unborn babies are human beings and abortion is legal murder. If I can fight defending human beings, then I should fight for all people, yes, even violent twisted people, even though my family and I have suffered so greatly.

The death penalty is inhumane. There are others that can share gory details of things going wrong with executions, of years of continued legal battles for families of victims even after the death penalty has been declared. Motions filed, requests to the Governor for a stop in execution, wrongful convictions and continuous motions even if there is a death penalty. All of these details cause trauma and pain for families of victims. I am here imploring that Ohio remove the death penalty and replace it with life in prison with no possibility of parole.

Yes, removing the death penalty will have practical earthly implications of saving time, money and heartache. But removing the death penalty is also an act of mercy and showing that Ohio respects life, even for criminals.

To be fully prolife, we must show we respect all life, every age, every stage, this even means for criminals. God is the author of life; he brings it and he must be the sole taker of life.

As one who fights for the unborn, I am often ridiculed and criticized for “only caring about the baby” not mothers or not people on death row. I am here today as an example of the lie this rhetoric shares. I fight for all life, even as someone from a family that has suffered greatly by the hands of a murderer.

In closing, I invite you to search the story of Claude Newman, a merciful criminal from Mississippi, who experienced a complete miraculous conversion and converted other serious criminals. This story may stir your soul and have you see how conversion is always possible. If we kill people before they repent, their lack of salvation may be on our souls.

Thank you for listening and considering my heart felt plea.

Laura Strietmann

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