



## The Texas After Violence Project

# Listening for a Change

Fall 2009 Volume I

### A word from the director



Photo by Lydia Crafts

The Texas After Violence Project is an independent organization that studies the *effects of serious violence, including the death penalty*, in Texas, through qualitative research, primarily oral histories with people directly touched by these tragedies.

This organization *listens* — rather than advocate or lobby — *for a change*. For someone like me, who has spent all of my adult life as an advocate for social justice, transforming myself into someone who primarily listens rather than speaks out is a radical and difficult endeavor. Yet the premise of our project is the apparent paradox that listening may be a more effective way of achieving deep, substantive change than protesting or otherwise speaking truth to power. This is what we do:

#### ***1. We listen to stories.***

Thus far, we have conducted over sixty oral history interviews with people who have lost loved ones to murder and to state executions, law enforcement officials, lawyers, clergy, media witnesses to executions and others.

When someone tells us her or his story, and we listen, what takes place is a double act of witnessing.  
*(continued on pg. 2)*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### SAVE THE DATE:

Please join us on Thursday, September 10, 2009 for music, food and a few words about why the Texas After Violence Project matters. A short presentation will include remarks by Texas State Representative Elliott Naishtat  
Time: 6-8 p.m.

Presentation begins at 6:45 p.m.

Where: Mi Madre's Restaurant  
2201 Manor Road, Austin, 78722

### OCTOBER SERIES ON VIOLENCE:

The Texas After Violence Project will sponsor a series of conversations in October on violence in our communities (see our website for specific topics).

Dates: Oct. 7, 14, 21 and 28th.

Time: 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Where: Reverend Marvin C. Griffin Building  
1009 E 11th St. Austin, TX 78702

*(As of this writing, co-sponsors include La Voz de Austin, the Texas Inmate Families' Association (TIFA), the Texas Jail Project, the Texas Civil Rights Project, ALLGO: a queer people of color organization, and — at the University of Texas — the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS), the John L. Warfield Center for African & African American Studies (CAAAS), and the Community Engagement Center (CEC) of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement).*

The narrator is witness to an act, or multiple acts, of violence. The interviewer and videographer are witness to the effects of trauma on the narrator.

To borrow Shoshana Felman's insights from a very different context — the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem — the interview narrator is “human evidence.” Our oral history interviews, unlike judicial trials, “consciously embrace the vulnerability, the legal fallibility, and the fragility of the human witness. It is precisely the witness's fragility that paradoxically is called upon to testify and to bear witness” (*The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, Harvard U. Press, 2002, page 134).

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**“We hope that the act of storytelling empowers the narrator and allows her or him the opportunity to see her/himself as a survivor, an agent of the world, rather than simply a victim.”**

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We witness some of the *effects* of violence on the people who share their stories with us, and we witness their meaning-making, how they make sense of their lives, how they find and where they make meaning after deeply traumatic events.

We hope that the act of story telling empowers the narrator and allows her or him the opportunity to see her/himself as a *survivor*, an *agent* in the world, rather than simply a victim. We try not to interrupt – to recreate the trauma of a courtroom – but to allow the person to tell the story she or he wants and perhaps needs to tell. Although we design the project for utilitarian purposes (see 2&3), in the moment of the interview we need simply to be present, facilitating the story telling.

**2. *We share those stories as widely as possible, consistent with the desires and instructions of the interview narrators.***

Anyone with internet access can watch and listen to brief segments of eight of our interviews at our website (see pg. 3). We are also currently working with archivists at the University of Texas, to figure out the logistics of including our oral histories, the accompanying

transcripts, and supporting material to the UT Library System's Human Rights Digital Archive. We'll let you know more about this thrilling collaboration as it develops.

**3. *We promote dialogue; we spur collective, constructive and critical conversations about ways to more effectively prevent and respond to violence.***

These conversations are based on people speaking from our/their own experiences: pronouncements about what “others” — “they, they, they” are not terribly useful, because we can only change ourselves.

We will co-sponsor a series of community conversations on Wednesday evenings in October in Austin, on violence in our communities, policing, the juvenile justice system, and incarceration (see pg. 1).

**4. *What is the ultimate point of the project?***

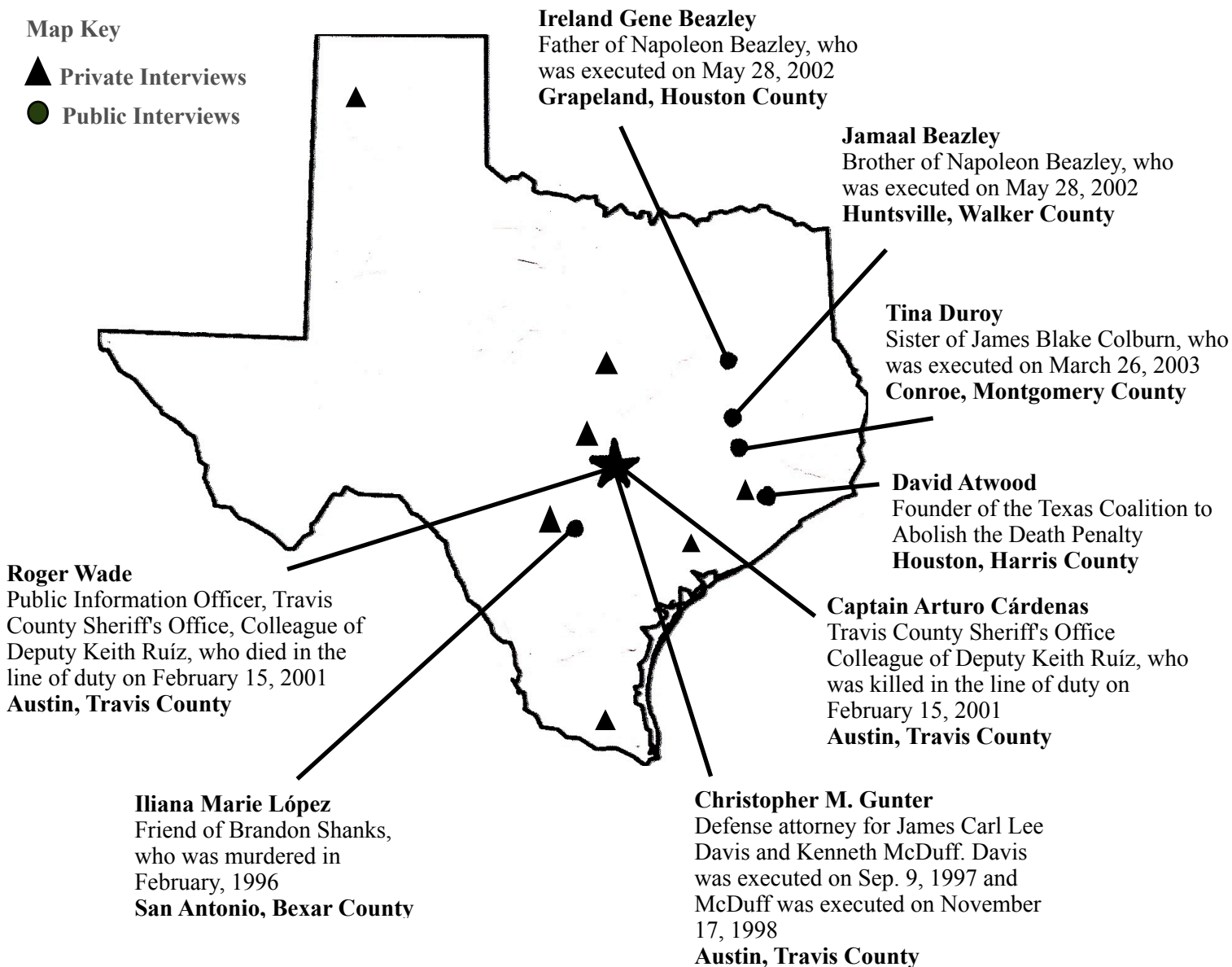
We undertake this work in service of a vision: a more just and less violent Texas, a place where the dignity and worth of each and every human being is affirmed. We work towards a time when “affirming worth” is not theory, philosophy, or theology, but daily practice.

It's pretty easy to affirm each others' worth when we are happy and proud of members of our community; it's extremely hard when people act in ways that so outrage, disgust, disappoint and bewilder us — when they break our hearts – and when we want to believe that they can't even be human, not really.

That's our necessary and impossible task. Enormous? Of course, but we take heart from the advice of the second-century teacher, Rabbi Tarfon: “It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet, you are not free to desist from it.” -*Virginia Raymond*

# Watch and Listen to Interviews Online

We recently started to post clips of the interviews on our website. The process from interview to public access can take a long time, since we do not make any of the interviews public until each interviewer has had the opportunity to review a DVD and transcript of her interview and to donate the material to our organization. So far, we have posted eight interviews, and we hope to post many more interviews on our website in the coming months. The map below illustrates locations where we have traveled to conduct both our public and private interview. You may also watch the public interviews at [www.texasafterviolence.org/watch.and.listen](http://www.texasafterviolence.org/watch.and.listen).



*Note: The Texas After Violence Project has also traveled to New Mexico and Colorado to conduct interviews.  
 Map by Sabina Hinz-Foley*

## Featured Interview: Ireland Beazley



Photo by Kim Bacon

*Ireland Gene Beazley is the father of Napoleon Beazley, who was executed by the State of Texas on May 28, 2002. Napoleon Beazley was 17 years old on April 19, 1994, when he fatally shot Mr. John Luttig in Tyler, Texas. His execution stirred international protest over the practice of executing people who were juveniles at the time of their crimes. Three years after Napoleon Beazley's execution, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 vote in *Roper v. Simmons*. 543 U.S. 551 (2005) to ban the execution of juveniles. This is an excerpt of an interview TAVP conducted with Ireland Beazley at his home in Grapeland, Texas.*

We were just going along with our regular life, and then all of a sudden all of this just started unfolding right before our eyes. And seemed like once it started, it wasn't anything we could do to stop it— FBI come in. I was at work when my wife had called me and told me that the FBI had come and confiscated our car. And the first thing I did is I called Napoleon and said, "Napoleon, why are they taking— why are they doing that?" And he said he didn't know, so I stayed at work. And it wasn't until probably about seven o'clock that evening that my wife called me again and said that I needed to come home. And when I got home, that's when she told me the FBI was looking for him because they was accusing him in some case. And— and I mean, you really don't know where to turn, you don't know what to do.

Well the first thing Napoleon went home. He went to his grandma's to spend the night, so now we gotta go find— my first impression is I gotta go find him. And I get to Crockett and he's not at his grandmother's. And so I'm kinda panicking right about now. I gotta find him. I think I went to the police station and they says, "We need to find him before he hurt himself." Well, oh my goodness, what you mean 'before he hurt himself?' You know? So I don't know what's going on and they ain't giving me no information so I'm running around Crockett trying to find him. And by the time I find him I'm probably goin'— done just about lost my mind. But we go to the police station and they release him. And we think it's over. Everything's gone but it wasn't three or four hours later they come back again. It was just a whole whirlwind situation. And all that night up until, well, finally after all the trips up and down the road and everything, they decided they were gonna arrest him. And that's when we find out what they were accusing him of— and of course the other two boys have supposedly pointed the finger at him, and all this good stuff. And what can you do? Our lives— my wife isn't at home and I'm dealing with all this. And so I'm thinking, 'what can I do?' All I can do is follow them, they gonna take him to Tyler. So I say, "Well I'm going, too." I ain't got no game plan of what to do. I ain't got no lawyer. I ain't got— I don't know what's going on. But I'm following them to Tyler because they got my son. Cause I know my son ain't done nothing like that. I know they got the wrong person and— (sigh) — but they held us there all night and I didn't sleep at all that night. And they never did take him to jail.

Next thing you know they got him up there in that court room the next morning and they're charging him, and all this good stuff, so it just— everything just went wrong all of a sudden. All that good life that we was— we been experiencing the years before, it went— just kinda went sour. And personally, why I say that because in '89, I was blessed because my job I had become line supervisor. So financially I was bringing in more money than I had ever brought in my life. Things were going good. Bills were no problem. Maria, she had already graduated so I was able to financially support her to get into Rice University in Houston. And now Napoleon, he's getting ready to graduate, he's decided he wants to go to the marines, he's gonna try to be a lawyer, all those good things. So that's why I say life was going good and then all of a sudden this— all of this comes up. So you know we're headed down a different road than I had prepared for— and just I don't know what to say. I can't remember. I just can't remember how— what I was thinking about. I really just didn't know which way to turn. I did not know what to do.

# Farewell to Gabe Solis



Photo by Kim Bacon

***Gabriel Solis came to the project in February 2008 through the University of Texas at Austin's Rapoport Service Scholars Program, which supports students interested in pursuing community work. Solis began working full-time with the project in June 2008. This fall, he will leave TAVP to pursue a Master's at University of Texas at Austin's Center for Mexican American Studies. This is an excerpt of an interview project member Lydia Crafts conducted with Solis in July 2009.***

**Can you talk about how you first came to the project?**

Eric Bowles, the advisor of the Rapoport Service Scholars Program, emailed me and said, "here's this new project and they need help." He knew at the time that I was interested in going to law school, so I almost immediately emailed Virginia [Raymond] and said I'm interested for these reasons and she invited me to meet with her. I totally didn't know what to expect. I thought it was a well-established project with several people and

a big office and I walked in and it was just Virginia in this little-bitty office.

**What made you decide to begin volunteering for the Texas After Violence Project?**

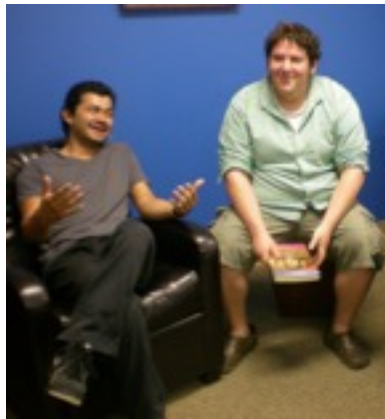
I had done research on the death penalty as an undergraduate in my Philosophy of Law class. I focused on capital punishment and I looked at it in a very different way than I do now. And I think that's because of the experience of coming in and listening to these people's stories and learning all the fundamental problems through the capital punishment process. I was looking at the death penalty in sort of a dreamy, philosophical way and that it's the absolute value of life and why nobody, under no circumstances, should take a life. The Texas After Violence Project's approach is radically different and a better way of understanding capital punishment, I think. When I first started volunteering, I did very little because I was still in school. But after I participated in the Ireland Beazley interview (*see page 3*), my commitment to the project changed because I had never experienced anything like that before.

**How did the interview with Ireland Beazley change your perspective?**

I know it sounds strange to say these people are real. It's kind of an empty term. But Ireland and Rena Beazley are sweet, genuine people who were thrown into this awful situation. They were very welcoming. They invited us into their home. I felt like I connected with Ireland. He was interested that I had studied philosophy, stuff that he and Napoleon had been interested in and talked about. It was just an all around good experience. You don't get a lot of experiences like that—to interact with people who have been through that kind of experience. After that I came back knowing that I wanted to continue working with the project in any capacity and at that time it was only volunteer.

**You started working full-time in June 2008, just after you graduated. What was it like to begin working for the project while it was still just getting off the ground?**

Virginia gave me a lot of freedom to study parts of the legal system that I was interested in and just to pursue certain aspects of the project because it wasn't developed. It was like, "what do you want to see done with this project? Well, go ahead and do it." And that's an amazing feeling to have someone tell you that. In the very beginning, there were discussions about having an archive developed. Virginia had done a lot of negotiating to have the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin take our tapes, which is great. But an archive is barely public and it became very apparent early on that wasn't sufficient. In fact, I think out of respect to people that were giving us the story, especially friends and family members, we have to do more with it. So this is the kind of freedom I'm talking about. I was there with Virginia the whole way. It was both of us throwing ideas off each other like, "what can we do with this amazing information?" We started discussing maybe donating the interviews to public educational institutions, high schools, community colleges, small and large libraries. And then we took it a little further by thinking about ways to put them online for free.



*Photo by Kim Bacon*

***Solis exchanges jokes with Mark Evans, one of the project's most committed volunteers.***



*Photo by Kim Bacon*

***Solis with Director Virginia Raymond on his last day with TAVP.***

**What effect do you think TAVP's work could have on communities and people in Texas?**

I genuinely believe that if people, and not necessarily professors and legislators, I'm talking about the public—the people who are most affected by this—would listen and learn from the individual experiences of others, I don't think we can really comprehend what that could do for people trying to understand policing, litigation and punishment in Texas. When all you have to assess the past and present is the

official interpretation, then that's what guides the future. If the public doesn't have in their capacity a different understanding based on what happened to the people, well then they're not in control of the future, because they don't have a different interpretation of what happened in the past.

**What will you take away from your experience with the project?**

The process of becoming aware of shared or not shared social problems, and how people can come together, whether it being virtually or physically, to organize around those problems. So I think what I'll take away is a more solidified understanding of that process, whereas before I had come to work here I didn't really have any of that understanding at all.

**Any thoughts about what you'll be researching at the Center for Mexican American Studies?**

I don't feel that I can move away from the death penalty and be completely done with it. I think there still needs to be something, further researching and writing, to supplement what I've done this past year. This has been an amazing year. I want to supplement all these ideas and problems, things that I've personally learned and go back to follow up with some people who I've met.

# Welcoming New Colleagues and Friends

## Parish Jefferson, M.A.



*Photo by Lydia Crafts*

Parish will be interning for the project this fall. He is a second year graduate student at the University of Texas School of Social Work. During his first year, he was selected as a Dean's Ambassador and recipient of the Dean's Scholarship. His primary areas of study are criminal and juvenile justice systems, youth delinquency prevention programs, community re-entry, and policy and legislation related to these issues. During the 2009 Texas Legislature session, he worked at the Legislative Budget Board analyzing and identifying the cost-effectiveness of state and local funds in criminal justice system by recommending means to improve deterrent and rehabilitative capabilities within the Texas criminal justice system. Parish has additional experience working with Travis County Juvenile Probation's Deferred Prosecution Unit, where juveniles are informally processed for misdemeanor offenses, and mediation and community service restitution services are used to hold the juvenile accountable for his or her offense. Originally from California, Parish came to Austin to pursue a graduate degree. His education includes a Masters of Arts in Education from the University of Michigan and Bachelor of Science in Managerial Economics from the University of California, Davis.

## Carlos M. Loredo, Ph.D



*Photo by Virginia Raymond*

Carlos M. Loredo will be serving as a consultant for TAVP and helping to train interviewers, videographers and volunteers. He is a psychologist who has been in private practice for about thirty years in Austin. He consults, evaluates, and treats children adults, couples and families. Dr. Loredo received his M.Ed. in Program Evaluation in 1974 and his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology in 1977, both from the University of Texas at Austin. He became a Texas licensed psychologist in 1978 and is also a trained mediator. He has consulted and presented at the city, state, and national agencies on a variety of issues, including abuse and violence, especially dealing with disenfranchised persons or groups of people. He has authored chapters and articles (some involving cultural diversity issues), and has been invited to write several editorials and book reviews. He has been a contributor to the two reports published by The National Task Force on Juvenile Sexual Offending (1988 & 1993) and the Texas Attorney General (et al) 2001 report Sexual Assault in Texas: From Outcry to Sex Offender Management and Community Healing.

## Benita Rubinett, LCSW



*Photo by Virginia Raymond*

Benita Rubinett will work with the project as a consultant and will lead trainings for project members and volunteers and on grief and trauma. She is a licensed clinical social worker who has practiced in Austin for over twenty years. She works with adolescents, adults, couples and families. Benita was the first social worker hired by the Austin Center for Battered Women, now Safeplace, in 1977. She was employed in several social service organizations and as Counseling Specialist and Assistant Dean at the University of Texas at Austin for twelve years. Benita has a special interest in issues relating to infertility, pregnancy loss and adoption. In addition to her therapy work, Benita prepares adoption home studies for prospective adoptive families. She has also done extensive public speaking, training and consultation of various adoption, family system and relationship topics. Benita's specialized training and experience includes marriage and family counseling, relational-model and cognitive therapy, mindfulness techniques in healing trauma and depression, family systems, attachment models, neurobiology and brain processes.

# Dialogue



Photo by Lydia Crafts

*Walter Long is an advisor to the project and also an attorney who has represented Texas death row inmates in their post-conviction appeals in state and federal court. He received recognition from inter alia, Amnesty International U.S.A., the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and the National Juvenile Defender Service for his work against the death penalty for child offenders in the U.S.A. This summer he participated for the second time in Eastern Mennonite University's Summer Peacebuilding Institute.*

## **You recently participated in a training program at Eastern Mennonite University?**

Yes, every year EMU has a unique and very valuable summer study program called the Summer Peacebuilding Institute. For about a month and a half in May and June, a globally diverse group of participants take weeklong courses in areas such as conflict transformation, peacemaking, human rights, social and economic development, restorative justice and trauma awareness and healing. The opportunity for networking with persons from around the world is amazing. This summer I took a course entitled "Dialogue Facilitator Training: Crimes of Severe Violence."

## **What drew you to participate in the program?**

A couple of years ago, I took the introductory S.T.A.R. program at EMU. (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience.) That week-long course was set up shortly after 9-11 to assist

responders such as therapists and clergy with a deeper understanding of the psychological trauma suffered by the victims they sought to help, their own self-care as they experienced secondary and cumulative trauma, and the social impact of large-scale traumatic events and traumatizing institutions. Restorative justice and conflict transformation training is built into the S.T.A.R. program.

The S.T.A.R. program gave me new perspectives on the ways public institutions can reinforce personal and societal trauma. By helping me to become better aware of traumatic systems, it had a direct influence on my contribution to the development of the Texas After Violence Project, which construes the death penalty in Texas as a traumatic system within more fundamental systems related to human needs. I was happy to have an opportunity a month ago to go back to EMU for more training.

## **This summer you signed up for "Dialogue Facilitator Training: Crimes of Severe Violence."**

### **Can you talk about why you decided to participate in this course in particular?**

I believe that the training I received this summer is similar to that provided in the Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue program run by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. TDCJ has not offered training recently, and it is something that I wished to have, or to know more about. So, I went to Virginia to take the class. The ground breaking character of the Texas program certainly was reflected in the materials we studied, which included a video of a mediation conducted by Ellen Halbert, victim services coordinator in the Travis County District Attorney's office, and work by Marilyn Armour, the University of Texas social work professor who has contributed much to the field of restorative justice and victim-related mediation procedures.

**In a nutshell, what is victim/offender dialogue about?**

Restorative justice takes the view that crime is a violation of people and interpersonal relationships. An offense has a systemic impact, touching first those who are its objects, but also greatly affecting the family members of offenders and victims, witnesses, law enforcement personnel, lawyers, jurors, and others. The community's response to the offense, in turn, profoundly affects the same webs of interpersonal relationships. It either facilitates victim healing and the cooling of trauma within those affected, or it does not.

The offense creates an obligation and a need for the offender to make things right as much as possible. At a minimum, that means taking responsibility for what happened and trying to make things right for the victims, who often have tremendous needs for the offender's accountability, as well as information (why did the offense happen?), validation (the offense wasn't their own fault), vindication (being heard in their anger and fear, even by the person responsible), and a sense of safety. Victim/offender dialogue attempts to set a stage for these needs to be met.

**How are the issues you explored in this summer's training class relevant, or potentially helpful to**

**the Texas After Violence Project's research/work on capital punishment and violent crime?**

I think it's within the purview of the Texas After Violence Project to investigate how the stories received from persons affected by death penalty cases may provide insight into ways that dialogues, like those presented in victim/offender mediation, might be facilitated which would serve to cool the trauma in the system, provide greater understanding, and promote less violent and more just solutions to crime in Texas. There are spaces for dialogue all throughout the system.

For example, within weeks before attending the class, I heard from a mother whose child had been shot by an offender on the run from police. She had received a message from the offender's mother, who expressed great sympathy and wanted to talk and she was wondering whether and how to accept the other woman's offer. I wished mightily when I heard this that I could say, "I'm trained and experienced in the sort of mediation you need. I can help you make this come to pass, if it is what you truly wish."

On another occasion, I heard a relative of a homicide victim express sympathy for the relatives of the offender, but also add, "they could not possibly understand my

experience." That certainly may have been accurate. But I also think that within the web of relationships that develop around a crime — not merely the direct relationship between victim and offender — there are a lot of impasses and "could nots" that actually could be overcome. I would like to see structures developed that could facilitate understanding, if not compassion, between persons traumatized and separated by crime.

I think that those of us who want to see an end to the death penalty need to understand that, if it is to go, it must be replaced with a better policy. That better policy must have as a fundamental component the adequate and appropriate care of crime victims. (This is something we do not have now.) Furthermore, that better policy likely will fail if it does not mindfully incorporate the wisdom of crime victims and stakeholders in the present system who have believed the death penalty to be an appropriate solution. "Failure," again from a restorative justice perspective, means that interpersonal human needs are not met in a way that they should and could be. So, dialogue is absolutely essential. I went to EMU to learn more about dialogue.

*To learn more about EMU's Summer Peacebuilding Institute, visit its website at <http://www.emu.edu/ctp/spi>.*

# JOIN US

*The Texas After Violence Project is a small non-profit organization and we have many opportunities for you to help us accomplish our mission, which is: to listen empathetically, carefully, and without judgment to people directly touched by serious violence, the criminal justice system, incarceration, and executions in Texas; to share our findings widely, to the extent and in the manner consistent with individual interview narrators' express permission; and to promote collective, critical, and constructive conversations about effective ways to prevent and respond to violence. We work toward a more just and less violent Texas: a society that recognizes and affirms the dignity and value of every human being.*

## Volunteer

The Texas After Violence Project welcomes students and community members to help us in areas including interviewing, videography, transcribing and fundraising. We ask all our volunteers to complete our training, which will begin this fall on September 25, 2009, from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., and will take place over four Friday afternoons. We also require all potential volunteers to fill out an application, which is available at <http://www.texasafterviolence.org/join.us>. Thanks and we look forward to working with you!

Sep. 25-Introduction to the Project

Oct. 2-Anatomy of a Death Penalty Case

Oct. 9-Oral History Part 1

Oct. 16-Grief and Mourning

Oct. 23-Oral History Part 2

Oct 30: Trauma and Self-Care

Nov. 6 History and Practice of Texas Executions

## Other Ways to Help

-Lodging (either hospitality or discounted hotel/motel)

-Southwest Air credit, or use of cars

-Physical space for trainings

-Suggestions of people to interview, or introductions to your community or religious group

-Letters of support for our organization

-Donations of equipment including cameras, computers, editing and transcribing software, or smaller items such as batteries, DVDs, envelopes or writing pads. (Please call us at 512.916.1600, before donating items).

-Financial contributions. To make a financial donation to TAVP, please cut out the card below and send it to the Texas After Violence Project (address on card), or donate online at

[www.texasafterviolence.org/donate.today](http://www.texasafterviolence.org/donate.today).

We greatly appreciate contributions of any amount!



texas after violence project

Dear Texas After Violence Project:

Please set up a recurring TAVP donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ into the Texas After Violence Project checking account starting on the \_\_\_\_\_ (day) of \_\_\_\_\_ (month) \_\_\_\_\_ year and ending \_\_\_\_\_ (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (month) \_\_\_\_\_ (year) :

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Please email Lydia Crafts, editor, with comments at [crafts.lydia@gmail.com](mailto:crafts.lydia@gmail.com). Thanks!