

Hospitality and Support
for People on
Georgia's Death Row
and Their Families



HOLIDAY EDITION 2023

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**THEN SINGS MY SOUL: FINDING COMFORT AND JOY IN MUSIC ON DEATH ROW...
AND AT THE BIG PEACH CAR WASH**

By Mary Catherine Johnson

*I just wanted you to comfort me
When I called you late last night, you see...
Oh, of all the words you sang to me
About life, the truth and being free
Yeah, you sang to me, oh, how you sang to me...
—"You Sang to Me" by Marc Anthony*

Every Sunday I attend church with one of the men on Georgia's death row. In my imagination we are sitting next to one another in a beautiful sanctuary, making a joyful noise unto God with the help of a powerful organ. In reality, we are on a monitored 20-minute phone call, through a prison vendor called Securus, and my friend on death row is offering a prayer for our troubled world, followed by as many as ten hymns, sung *a cappella*, such as "How Great Thou Art"

(my favorite), "It Is Well With My Soul," "Blessed Assurance," "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder" and "That Old Rugged Cross" (his favorite). The words of these old hymns that we both sang while growing up in our respective churches take on new meaning during these church sessions on a prison phone, and I am filled with the comfort and joy of God's presence that the songs promise. On a recent Sunday, I was taking the ministry's minivan through the Big Peach Car Wash in Jackson when the church call came from my friend on death row. We laughed about the odd location to hold church, and decided to proceed anyway as the minivan moved through the swooshing, soapy brushes in the neon-infused tunnel of the automatic car wash. I am a frequent customer at that car wash because I want the minivan to sparkle when I give rides to our death row families, but now when I am there I get much more than a clean car and a peach-scented air freshener – the cleansing waters also flood my day with a beautiful memory of a man on death row reminding me through prayers and hymns that God's "Amazing Grace" is everywhere.



As part of my ministry at New Hope House, I serve on the board of directors of Georgians For Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GFADP) in an effort to serve those impacted by the death penalty in Georgia while simultaneously working to dismantle the system that oppresses them. For GFADP's annual *Mary Ruth Weir BBQ & Awards Celebration*, named for one of the beloved founders of New Hope House, I created a playlist* of songs that were suggested by the men on Georgia's death row and their families, as well as by activists working to end the death penalty in Georgia. I had the best time gathering the songs from my friends on death row and their families, through conversations that inspired deep reflections on which songs would best represent them. I told them that they could submit anything they wanted... something inspirational, something meaningful, a call to action, or perhaps just something fun. The result was a group of songs that expressed joy, sadness, love, light, loss, hope, longing, anger, revolution, and the desire to be free in every sense of the word. As I listen to the playlist while driving around Georgia, I think of my friends who suggested the songs, and I feel closer to them, and to the best parts of who they are. One of the guys on death row submitted "Dante's Prayer" by Loreena McKennitt, and these lyrics always make me stop to follow their instructions: "When the dark night seems endless / Please remember me." And through remembering I access the comfort and joy I need to keep driving.

***You can listen to the playlist "THEN SINGS MY SOUL: Songs of the Movement to End the Death Penalty in Georgia" on Spotify – search for GFADP PLAYLIST 2023.**

PICTURING HOPE: NEW HOPE HOUSE IN 2023

It brings me a great deal of joy to share these pictures from the past year with all of you – the loving community that surrounds and supports the ministry of New Hope House. It was the first full year at the new location in Jackson, Georgia, and our death row families brought so much light and love to our beautiful duplex. All of these occasions, and so many more, were made possible by your loving prayers and generous donations of time and money.

***Thank you for considering a year-end donation
to help me continue this important work in 2024.***



Above and left: Our guests love to relax and watch life go by in Jackson on one of our three porches.



Below: Sharing a delicious meal at Fresh Air BBQ or chilling out with popcorn and a movie are just two ways we unwind with our death row families after visitation.



Right: Al Lawler of Jubilee Partners gets the 2023 award for MOST FREQUENT VISITOR! He uses New Hope House as a central location from which to drive to prisons all over Georgia, where he visits former death row prisoners. Sometimes Al and Mary Catherine take field trips together, like to the Georgia Supreme Court in Atlanta (pictured) to attend a hearing for one of the men they visit on death row.



Far left, clockwise: The ministry's awesome minivan takes death row families to many different places, like to a Cherokee PowWow in south Georgia, and to Atlanta for a "girls day" of pampering, and to and from South Carolina so a mother can visit her son on death row.



Right: Mary Catherine's father, Wayne Johnson, makes prayer-grip crosses for our death row families in his wood shop.



HOW TO DONATE TO NEW HOPE HOUSE

You can use the enclosed envelope to send a CHECK PAYABLE TO NEW HOPE HOUSE, or donate online through our website and these applications:

www.newhopehousega.org

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OUR MINISTRY

New Hope House is a Christian community offering hospitality to families of people on Georgia's death row and support to people whose family members are involved in death penalty trials. We also visit people on death row and work to replace the death penalty with just alternatives.

New Hope House is part of Possum Trot Ministries, a nonprofit (501c4) organization. We are financially dependent on gifts (not tax deductible).

CONTACT NEW HOPE HOUSE:

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COME SEE US IN JACKSON!

We love visitors at New Hope House, like these lovely people who came from St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Blairsville, Georgia, and brought some supplies for the guesthouse and quarters for death row visitation, as well as lots of questions about how New Hope House accompanies death row prisoners and their families.