

NEW HOPE HOUSE

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



SPRING 2018

ON THE ROAD TO JUSTICE IN GEORGIA

By Mary Catherine Johnson

I spend a lot of time burning up the roads throughout Georgia in the Toyota Sienna minivan that was gifted to New Hope House last year by the Open Door Community. My primary destinations – prisons and courthouses – are places that most people would rather avoid, but I go there willingly, with as much hope and joy in my heart as I can muster, because that's where I find the beloved people served by New Hope House.



Scotty Morrow's family after his hearing at the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta

I remain in constant awe of the courage and strength I witness among the death row families I meet on my trips. They have so much to deal with on an emotional level by having a loved one on death row, especially when they have to confront the daunting and inhospitable court and prison systems. Therefore if I am able to step in and make things easier for them – perhaps helping them navigate Atlanta traffic, or paying for their parking in downtown Atlanta, or giving their old car a break while they ride with me, or taking them out for a meal after a hearing to process what they just heard, or just simply holding their hand during a hearing – then it is my great honor to do so.

Some of my trips include visits to prisons other than death row. There are currently 53 men on Georgia's death row, which is almost half of what it was when I started doing this work ten years ago. Executions account for some of the decline, but many men have had their sentences reduced and have moved to other prisons. One such man is Norris Speed, whose gifted and passionate lawyer Susan Casey, a member of the New Hope House board of directors, worked tirelessly on Norris's behalf to get him off of death row. Susan helped me realize how men like Norris – and their families – can so easily become isolated and forgotten once they leave death row. So now I am doing my best to include prisoners like Norris and their families as part of this ministry, whether it be through visits, cards, letters or emails to the prisoners, or helping their family members get to visitation, or inviting the families to stay at our guesthouse. Recently I was honored to be able to bring Norris's mother, who is in a wheelchair and cannot drive, to see him after many years apart.



Mary Catherine with Norris Speed's mother

I also try to stay in touch with the families I have met through death penalty trials. Since none of the trials I've attended have resulted in a death sentence, these families are instead left to navigate the other maximum-security prisons in Georgia on their own. Recently I drove to Macon to have lunch with one of the

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trial families, and it was so nice to be able to have time together without the stress of the trial surrounding us. A mother of one of the defendants of a trial I attended last year calls me frequently with questions about the prison where her son is located, which I am happy to try to answer.

Perhaps the hardest road I travel in Georgia is the short distance between New Hope House and the prison where death row is located, on the nights of executions. On March 15th I made that drive on behalf of Carlton “Mike” Gary, to lead the vigil at the prison in his honor. The news outlets were out in full force that night, clamoring for salacious details about the crimes that Mike was accused of. I no longer grant interviews to reporters after being burned a few times by my comments being taken out of context. Besides, I wasn’t there to talk to the media, I was there for Mike Gary, to offer a picture of his face and a picture of the fullness of his humanity, of his status as a beloved child of God. I was there to demonstrate my opposition to his execution, and to offer directions to a different road we could all be taking, one that leads to peace and healing and justice for all concerned, instead of this current road of violence and revenge.



Don Plummer

Mary Catherine holding a picture of Mike Gary the night of his execution on March 15, 2018



Happy volunteers at the Fall 2017 Work Day

New Hope House Spring Work Days

Saturday, April 28, 2018

10 am – 3 pm

Saturday, May 12, 2018

10 am – 3 pm

Lunch, snacks and sparkling conversation provided!

Come out for one or both days to work alongside cool people as we make our grounds and houses beautiful for our death row families. Featuring both indoor and outdoor projects for all skill levels.

RVSP (So I know how much fried chicken to order!)

Mary Catherine, 404-273-0621; mcjohnson78@yahoo.com

Or if you can’t make it for one of the official Work Days but would like to come another time to help out, or if you just want to visit and enjoy some retreat time in the woods, please call or email me!

2018 Spring Appeal

Dear Friends of New Hope House,

With your help this past year I have transformed the guesthouse into a beautiful and tranquil environment for our death row families, and I have begun to transform the way New Hope House exists in the greater world by moving us toward 501c3 nonprofit status with the IRS.

Now I have turned my attention to the aging infrastructures of the land and houses here, and I am asking for your help once again. Recently I've had a crash course in septic tanks, plumbing fixtures, and well water systems, and the costs to repair or replace these systems are considerable. I would very much appreciate donations this spring to assist with these repairs, which I expect will need to occur in phases over the next year. And of course a portion of your donation will always go toward the primary activities of this ministry that directly impact the men on death row and their families.

Thank you for your ongoing kindness and generosity, which have allowed this important ministry to thrive.

With peace and gratitude, Mary Catherine

ELOIS WELLONS JONES, ¡PRESENTE!

I'll always remember the first time I saw Elois, in the visitation room on Georgia's death row. I looked up, and there she was: a fabulously regal woman dressed in a gorgeous bright purple suit. Everyone watched her as she made her way through the crowded visitation room, calling out loudly to her son Marcus, "There's my baby! There's my sweet baby!"

God called Elois home last December, but that same joy, exuberance and power that she exhibited that first time I saw her, and that she maintained throughout her life – even in times of great struggle and darkness – remains as her legacy that will live on forever in the hearts of those who loved her. New Hope House was blessed to be able to host Elois and her family many times over the years, and they will always be a part of our extended family. Rest in peace and power, Elois!



Murphy Davis

Mary Catherine with Elois Wellons Jones at New Hope House, the night Elois's son Marcus was executed on June 17, 2014.

POSSUM TROT MINISTRIES
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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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).

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MEET ME IN D.C.

Want to hang out with awesome death penalty abolitionists from all over the world? Well then I hope you'll meet me in Washington, D.C. from June 29-July 2, 2018 for *Starvin' For Justice: The Annual Fast & Vigil to Abolish the Death Penalty* at the U.S. Supreme Court. It's a fun and inspirational event, and includes affordable housing. Check it out at <http://abolition.org>.