

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



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PINKY AND THE PANDEMIC

By Mary Catherine Johnson

Like so many others, I have been struggling these past few months to cope with the many changes brought about by the global pandemic and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. What role should New Hope House play during this unprecedented time? Since so much of my work usually involves in-person contact with death row prisoners and their families, how should I spend my time now? And as a white woman of privilege, how can I do better, both in my personal relationships and in the movement to dismantle white supremacy?

New Hope House was founded over 30 years ago by people who listened to what the needs were among those facing the death penalty in Georgia, and then acted to form this ministry to meet those needs. I took my cue from those founders and did a lot of listening in the early days of the pandemic. When I called death row families to check in, I heard heartbreaking stories of fear and despair. While others were Zooming and baking bread (including me), many of these families were struggling to buy groceries, or having problems applying for unemployment, or living in fear of catching Covid-19 at work but more afraid of losing their jobs. The men on death row also shared their fears about the virus with me, and how it has reinforced their perception that no one cares about their health and safety.



Video still of me with my pink wig.

As I listened, it quickly became clear how my pandemic hospitality should take shape. My days have been consumed with phone calls with death row families, ranging from quick check-ins to hours of helping a death row mother apply for unemployment. Donations that were once used to buy groceries for the guesthouse here are now allocated for direct help for death row families in need. Less busyness in my life has meant more time for phone calls, emails and letters with the men on death row, and the result has been that I feel closer to many of them than I ever have before. Part of that closeness has come from my sharing some of the wackiness of my life in quarantine with them. I documented some of my activities through silly 30-second videos for the prisoners through JPay (their email, photo and video service) – videos of me pretending to be Julia Child making pineapple pizza, and of my living room solo dance parties, donning a pink wig (why not?), with a whisk for a microphone, lip-synching various '80s hits and Bob Marley songs. One of the prisoners told me that he purchased Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry" for his tablet after seeing my video, because hearing Marley sing "everything's gonna be all right" helps him believe that it will be.

My pink wig dance parties stopped the day I watched the video of George Floyd dying under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer. I no longer feel like dancing as the question of "How can I do better?" feels more urgent than ever. Once again I'm taking a cue from the New Hope House founders and am spending most of my time listening to the needs as I prepare for action. To start, I shared the titles of Black Lives Matter content from streaming platforms and reading lists with Black prisoners I know, and asked them what they would add. I'm listening to their experiences with white supremacy while resisting the urge to insert myself into their stories. I'm educating myself about the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement, particularly as pertain to criminal justice reform, so I can speak and act accordingly. I can see my pink wig hanging on a chair as I write this. Pinky the Lip-Syncer will surely return to my living room one day, but for now there's work to be done. Thank you for being with me on the road to justice.

CLEMENCY FOR JIMMY MEDERS!!!!!!

We broke out the champagne at New Hope House in January when the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles issued a rare order of clemency for Jimmy Meders (inset, above left). There are no adequate words to describe the joy in our hearts when we were given the opportunity to celebrate what we pray that all death row prisoners will receive: a chance to live!



We were honored to host the Meders family and members of Jimmy's legal team at New Hope House (above and right), and excited to drink a clemency toast to Jimmy's life and all those who fought for it.



Meet our new Director of Marketing and Property Maintenance, **Sarah Grace Allen (above, right)**, otherwise known as Mary Catherine's niece. It's family to the rescue when the quarantine prevents regular volunteers from visiting New Hope House, and Sarah Grace has really stepped up to help out before she heads to Smith College in the fall. She's been doing everything from raking leaves to organizing messy rooms to stuffing newsletters to designing our new website and Instagram account.
THANK YOU SARAH GRACE!



DONNIE LANCE, ¡PRESENTE!

On January 29, 2020 Mary Catherine (2nd from right) gathered with other activists at the prison where Georgia's death row is located to hold vigil for Donnie Lance (inset, left) and honor his life as the state prepared to execute him.



We want to connect with you!

www.newhopehousega.org

Visit our NEW WEBSITE to see more pictures, get updates on news and upcoming events, sign up for our email list or make a donation.



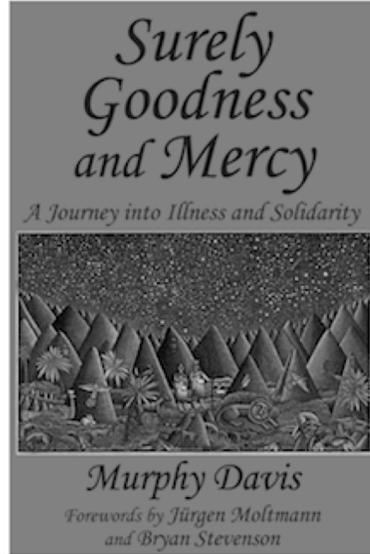
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SUMMER NEEDS @ NEW HOPE HOUSE

CASH DONATIONS

This is always our biggest need. Please help us continue to pay the monthly bills and stay in touch with our death row families and their loved ones in prison until visitation is restored. You can use the enclosed envelope to send a check payable to New Hope House or donate online:

PAYPAL: Look for Possum Trot Ministries or newhopehousega@yahoo.com

VENMO: @NewHopeHouseGA

CASH APP: \$NewHopeHouseGA



We always need help with yard work and other home improvement projects, especially now that our semi-annual Work Days are on hold during the pandemic. Call, text or email us to schedule a socially-distanced work day.



Please keep us in mind if you're looking to **DONATE A VEHICLE** this year. Our beloved Justice Minivan is still going strong but the repairs are getting more expensive and more frequent. Our ideal vehicle is a SUV, minivan or 4-door sedan with low miles and great gas mileage, because we are on the road a lot!

POSSUM TROT MINISTRIES
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SUMMER 2020

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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THE FRIED CHICKEN EUCHARIST AT BO THARPE'S HOMEGOING

Mary Catherine had the honor of speaking at Bo Tharpe's funeral on January 31, 2020, following his death from cancer on Georgia's death row.

Hundreds of friends and family members gathered to celebrate Bo's life with music, stories and Southern fried chicken. Bo's exuberant personality made an impression that will surely live on in everyone who loves him.