

Voices of Texas

MURDER VICTIMS' FAMILIES SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

Elizabeth Stein, Gary's cousin

Houston

The last time I saw my cousin Gary was at our grandfather's funeral.

Gary was a freshman at Yale. I was still in high school. We talked about colleges, and Gary advised me to pursue a liberal arts education, saying, "It's good for your mind."

A couple of years later, Gary was walking from his girlfriend's apartment to his dorm when half a dozen youths surrounded him on quiet, residential street near the Yale campus.

They demanded his watch. When Gary refused, they killed him with a single blast from a shotgun.

Years later, the tragedy of Gary's 1974 death is undiminished. He was a brilliant student whose achievements led him to study at Yale on scholarship. The university now has a scholarship in his name, The Gary Stein Fellowship.

My family was fortunate in one sense: The people responsible for Gary's murder were apprehended, prosecuted and punished with prison time. One of his assailants became the first juvenile in modern Connecticut history to be tried as an adult.

Gary's murder was associated with an elite institution, so it attracted attention and resources. With the investigation proceeding, my family was able to focus on grieving Gary and beginning the process of healing.

Not all families of murder victims are as fortunate. Many struggle to afford funerals, counseling, time off from work, and the services of private investigators to motivate police and prosecutors to pursue justice.

Adding insult to injury, they watch as an extraordinary amount of time and resources are devoted to a handful of murder cases higher profile than their own.

My opposition to the death penalty was unshaken by Gary's murder. If anything, it was strengthened by my increased empathy for people who have lost loved ones, through the crime of murder or the legal homicide of execution.

Elizabeth Stein produces Execution Watch on KPFT FM Houston 90.1, executionwatch.org. Her short screenplay, *Leaving Death Row*, is slated for publication in 2012 by University of Iowa Press in the collection, [Demands of the Dead: Executions in U.S. Literature](#).

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Gary Stein

For more information or to become a member or donor of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation: contact Chris Castillo at ccastillo@mvfr.org or 877-482-9334, or go to: www.mvfr.org
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