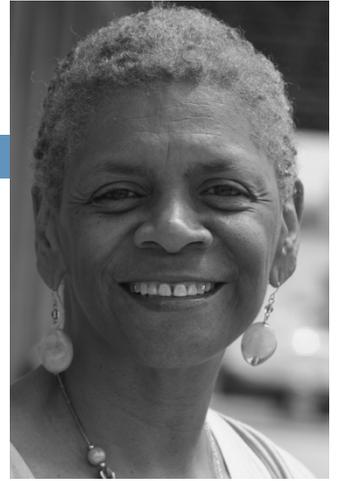


Voices of Texas: Diane Allen



HOUSTON, TX - Diane Allen was in the hospital comforting her daughter when she got the call on her cell phone that her cousin, Jimmy, had been murdered.

They found his body near his parents' house, not far from an elementary school. He was hit in the head with a brick and left on the side of the road to die. His killer was located, and he is still in prison for murder. Jimmy was in his mid- to late-20s when he was killed.

Diane, a former peace officer, was going through a divorce when Jimmy was murdered. "There was a lot of pain in my life. There were a lot of mental and physical challenges. It just added extra pain and pressure. I became more open to things that had happened in my life."

Diane suggests that friends call family members who have had a loved one taken. Many people who have been through murder just need to hear "I love you." It's good to check up on them instead of waiting for them to call you for help, she said.

"If you can't handle the pain, pray for them. Put your arms around them and say you love them and God loves them." Even after the funeral, it's a good idea to bring family members food and offer to help with chores around the house. "Sometimes during that situation people forget to eat." Washing their dishes or taking them for a walk is a good way to help a hurting friend or family member. "Just be there," Diane said. "Just show up. People honor that."

Despite everything Diane has been through, she is against the death penalty and believes the state should work harder to rehabilitate inmates.

For her, the death penalty would not bring closure. "I can't speak for people who are proponents of the death penalty, but I believe it just prolongs the pain. It would not bring closure for me." Bringing the end to another person's life would not give her peace.

"I have always felt that the death penalty in this country was not fair. I believe that innocent people have died. Even the guilty – I don't think that killing them is the answer," Diane said. "The process is so long and tedious and it costs so much to put a person to death. It would be cheaper to put that person in prison for life (without parole)."

Like many police chiefs and law enforcement officials, Diane doesn't believe the death penalty deters crime.

"I don't think the death penalty keeps people from killing or doing harm to other people. I think there is a lot of mental illness in this world. More money should be spent on making people healthy. It (mental illness) plagues this country – we should focus on that. If people love themselves it is difficult to hurt someone else," she said.

Now, Diane is a more compassionate person. "I have compassion for others whether they are the victim or the perpetrator. I feel like the perpetrator is also a victim. So I have compassion for everybody involved. I believe that there are lessons to be learned in every situation." In the end, no two experiences are alike.

"Everybody's path is different. I suggest that people who have experienced murder be gentle to themselves. The sooner you can let go of the vengeance the better. Also, develop a relationship with God. Feast on the love and compassion that God has for you. Be gentle to yourself and others."

Diane Allen is a former peace officer. She has a bachelor's degree in business and a master's in radio, television and film. She is the mother of four and the grandmother of five. She published the book "Surround Yourself with Love" and is working on several other manuscripts. She attends Trinity Gardens Church of Christ in Houston.

This profile was originally developed by Chris Castillo for the Spring 2013 Seizing the Momentum newsletter.