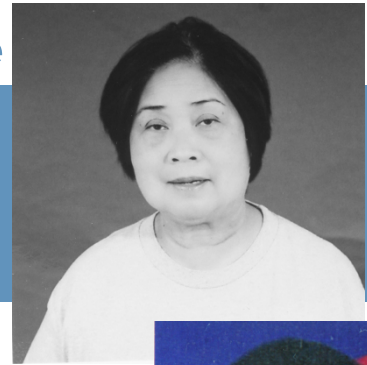


Voices of Texas: Lilly Gernale

*"It's one of the Ten Commandments - not to kill."
-Lilly Gernale*



Mother of peace officer grateful for life in prison

Conrad Gernale had been working as a Beaumont police officer for 12 years when he was murdered while on duty. In addition to being a dedicated police officer, Conrad was also a son, a brother, a father and a husband – only 34 years old.

On September 6, 2002, Conrad responded to a call and went to investigate a domestic dispute. A man fleeing the scene in a vehicle ran over Conrad and killed him.

Lilly Gernale, his mother, can't forget the day. She had heard an officer had been struck by a vehicle and was lying in the road. That night, she said a prayer for the family whose son was struck by a car. Hours later, she was awakened by her daughter-in-law, who told her that Conrad had been killed – run over during a domestic dispute.



The suspect was charged with capital murder and was sentenced to life in prison. He will be eligible for parole in 2033.

"I was relieved when the verdict came," Lilly Gernale said. Gernale, who is against the death penalty, didn't want to see another man die. "My son was one victim. I didn't want to see another loss for the (suspect's) parents."

Lilly Gernale's husband, Marino, who died two years ago, was for the death penalty. "He died grieving for his son," she said. "He would pass by the cemetery almost every day."

Gernale's faith and support from the community helped her get on with her life "My son, Conrad, died at 34. Our Lord died when he was 33. I say the Lord gave me one more year with my son."

Another death will not bring her son back, she said. There has been enough loss of life already. Gernale said she would rather the killer do life in prison. "To me, it's a very easy way out to give him death. I hope he can do good deeds for people when he gets out. I hope he comes out of prison reformed," she said.

A devout Catholic, Gernale said she has always been against the death penalty. "It's one of the Ten Commandments –not to kill," she said.

The Gernale family has been invited to many crime victim vigils over the years. Lilly no longer attends the vigils because it's too hard on her. "It's like it was yesterday," she said about her son's death.

In Conrad's death, so much was taken from his family – a son, a brother, a best friend, a husband and a father. Now, Gernale helps her daughter-in-law with her children. Plus, the 100 Club has assisted the family with financial and other support. Conrad had a twin brother, Gernale said. They were best friends. The loss has been very difficult for him.

After Conrad's death the family suffered with a lot of anger and bitterness. "I prayed for the softening of hearts and it helped," Gernale said.

Lilly Gernale retired from Christus St. Elizabeth Hospital after working in medical records for 25 years. Now, she volunteers 4 ½ hours a week as a greeter at the hospital's outpatient pavilion.

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