

# The **Victim's Informer**

TEXAS CRIME VICTIM CLEARINGHOUSE

VOL. 14, N. 1 – MAR/APR 2009

## **TAKING CONTROL**

### **Victims and the Mediation/Dialogue Process**

**Susan Leinweber & Mike Jones**

*TDCJ-Victim Services Division*

What would you say if you were given the chance to go into a Texas prison to confront the person who had devastated your life—the person responsible for the pain and anger you've harbored for years? Would you do it? You may be wondering: why would anyone ever choose to take such a step?

THE REASONS THAT MOTIVATE VICTIMS of violent crime to seek out the Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue process can be bewildering even for those who work in the criminal justice system. We can understand a person seeking restoration or restitution from someone who burglarized their home or robbed them on the street. But what about the woman disabled by an angry gunman? Or the father who wants to speak to the person who raped and murdered his daughter? Or the daughter molested by someone she trusted beyond question?

Some of the reasons victims choose to face the offenders responsible for their immeasurable pain and sorrow are common. They may want to tell them how devastated they are and how they so often cannot eat or sleep. They may want the offenders to know that, on the nights that they are lucky enough to catch a few winks, the same recurring nightmare seems to always show up. They may want the offenders to look into their eyes and listen—really listen—to what they have to say. They may want the offenders to see how much they hurt and try to understand the depth of their pain. Or they may simply want the offender to say he or she is sorry.

Sometimes the reasons for meeting offenders are as unique and personal as the victimization itself. They have questions for

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## **TDCJ** victim services

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THE VICTIM'S INFORMER is published quarterly and distributed to over 4,000 individuals, state, and national organizations. Articles, meeting notices, and other submissions should be sent to TDCJ-Victim Services Division, Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse, Attn: Editor, P. O. Box 13401, Capitol Station, Austin, Texas 78711-3401; faxed to 512-452-1025; emailed to [tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov); or call us at 800/848-4284 or 512-406-5931.



Please Note . . .

Texas law requires that TDCJ-Victim Services Division request readers to notify us annually, in writing, that they wish to continue receiving The Victim's Informer. See page 4 for a convenient subscription form.



# Offender Telephone System

**Janice Harris Lord**

*Texas Board of Criminal Justice Board Member*



## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE NEW OFFENDER TELEPHONE SYSTEM

for those housed in our correctional system. Perhaps like you, this whole idea scared me at first. My primary question was, "Will offenders be able to call their victims or their families?" After spending a lot of time on this issue, I believe I can assure you that TDCJ will do everything possible to prevent this from happening. Here's why.

- By being the 50th state in the nation to install a phone system for offender use, the four Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) divisions who developed the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the system were able to pull the most stringent safety requirements from the RFPs of other states to demand the most secure system possible.
- Proposals were received from three of the largest vendors in the industry. The TDCJ Inspector General, John Moriarty, was especially concerned about victim safety. He also wanted the phone monitoring system to catch offenders who attempt to misuse it as well as to collect evidence for solving unsolved crimes.
- Reference checks were made with many states that use all three vendors.
- The Victim Services Directors of the Department of Corrections in California, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, and Michigan were called to inquire about victim safety under the phone programs and policies in their states and to compare their programs with what was being proposed in Texas. While few problems were identified by these five states, most of the victim advocates contacted said that the Texas plan sounded superior to theirs in assuring victim safety.
- Embarq/Securus was the vendor selected. Although they did not offer the lowest telephone rates, they

offered superior technology and the highest level of security.

- Offenders may only call persons on their approved visitors lists who have been verified and validated by the vendor and have agreed to receive calls from that offender. Each individual call will also be announced as coming from the offender and must be accepted by the recipient.
- Calls can be made only to landlines.
- All non-attorney calls may be monitored and will be recorded both locally and centrally.

If you have kept up with the news for the last several months, you know that TDCJ has experienced difficulty with cell phone contraband being smuggled into a few of its units. This resulted in a lockdown for all of the units. It is possible when many offenders know the requirements for phone privileges and choose to earn that privilege, the cell phone contraband issue will decrease. In addition, by some estimates, the state could earn millions annually in commissions from offender calls, and the first \$10 million each year is slated to go into the Crime Victims' Compensation fund as well as half of all commissions over the \$10 million. The roll-out for the phone system will begin on some units in March 2009 with full installation system wide anticipated to be complete by fall 2009. In the meantime, if you have any concerns, don't hesitate to contact me through the TBCJ-Board Office at 512-475-3250.

# From A Mother's Heart: "Letting Go To Hold On"

by Phyllis J. Bedford, DeSoto Texas



Leslie K. Bedford

**On September 11, 1992, a random act of violence tore my only daughter from my arms. The violence she helped to combat as a 911 Emergency Operator for the City of Dallas took her life.**

A MOTHER'S GRIEF for her child is strong, sometimes silent, and felt deep within her soul. I feel deep sorrow for all the mothers who have lost children and offer my support for their painful journey, one that may be made a little easier with helpful words from another mother who, though our stories may be different, has walked the same path and share the common bond of love for her children.

Memories of the past can trigger painful reminders of our loss and escalate feelings of loneliness, sadness and related stress on special days such as a birthday, holiday seasons, memorable vacations, anniversaries, etc. These feelings are not necessarily a setback in the grieving process, but are most likely reflections validating that the life of our children are important to us and that we still miss them.

Even though these emotions are strong, we gain hope through the healing process that "this too shall pass." It is helpful to understand that although we learn to manage the pain, it may never completely go away.

Before these special days arrive, be proactive and prepare for the moments of grief and look for ways in advance to manage your painful memories and emotions. My book, *A Personal*

*Journey—Finding Wings With Shattered Pieces* provides empowering strategies to help find a personal path to move forward and manage loss, grief and stress.

Letting go is not synonymous with forgetting; letting go helps us move forward in a healthy way. Although I could never leave Leslie behind, I could not spend the rest of my days emotionally stuck at September 11, 1992, looking backward. Nothing would ever change, a continuous cycle of regrets, reliving the same years over and over, not fully present in my today, without any hope of living in my future. Tears swelled up in my eyes: tears for the days, months and years that I had lived without Leslie, for the memories that will always remain, and for the memories that would be created without her.

These reflections and realizations are all a part of the letting go process. I hope to shed insight and awareness into the deepening mother/child relationship that can be built when we make peace with our dealt hand and find our own path to "letting go to hold on."

**Remembering Realistically. Loss and guilt can create inaccurate memories of the relationship.**

The sudden and tragic nature of Les-

lie's death shocked the innermost core of my soul, triggering an unrealistic view of Leslie's and my life together. Filled with guilt for not being able to keep her safe, I shed tears of unworthiness, "If I was a good mother, why is Leslie dead?" I reminisced about our relationship from her birth to her death, how much I loved her, the things we did together and how we believed in each other. My sons helped to dispel the myth. "You and Leslie had a close loving relationship, and you are responsible for molding her into the remarkable young woman that she became."

**Release through Writing. Find a way to communicate unfinished emotions.**

Robbed of the last chance to say things I wish I had said, I wrote letters to Leslie in my diary reminding her of my love, "...I love you... I hope you're happy and at peace, and that you still have that beautiful smile... Love always, Mama." To expel the pain of not being able to say good-bye before she died, I rewrote the script for the last few moments in the hospital. In our scripted conversation, we both found emotional fulfillment in comforting one another to prepare for her home-going.

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From the Clearinghouse . . .



AT THE START OF 2009, the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse got a new state coordinator. Let me introduce myself.

I'm Mike Jones. I've worked for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for 16 years, 11 of those have been with the Victim Services Division. If you've been to a Clearinghouse conference, you may have seen me, although I could have been running by you to help someone with his or her workshop A/V setup. I am looking forward to working with victims, victim advocates, and criminal justice professionals across the state.

This year the Clearinghouse will be revising the Victim Impact Statement, as required by state law. Our goal is make sure that the VIS contains everything it needs but also be a less overwhelming document. After the VIS revision is complete, the Clearinghouse will be traveling around the state to provide training for everyone who needs it. As we put together a revision committee, we will seek more input from victim assistance coordinators from different regions across Texas. If you'd like to be a part of the revision committee, call or email us. We hope to make the VIS a useful and welcome tool for all victims and criminal justice professionals alike.

Another Clearinghouse goal is to ramp up the Victim Resource Directory and get the word out that it is available. The new and improved Directory is now so easy to use! But we need to spread the word to the people who can use it and to the organizations that could benefit by being a part of it.

Also in 2009 the Clearinghouse will be organizing a conference committee. At the last Clearinghouse Conference in Austin 2007, Victim Services announced that the next conference would be held in 2010. So, pretty soon we will be seeking

folks who would like be a part of the committee and plan out the next Clearinghouse Conference. When and where the next conference is still up in the air, but keep an eye on upcoming *Victim's Informer* newsletters for announcements.

Finally, The Victim's Informer itself will undergo some refinement. Look for regular columns from Texas Board of Criminal Justice members, particularly Janice Harris Lord, Chair of the Victim Services Committee. We also will be requesting regular submissions from victims, victim assistance coordinators, and victim advocates from around Texas. Look for submission details in upcoming Informer issues. We also will be highlighting some of the issues facing the TDCJ-Victim Service Division and what the staff is doing.

Over the next several months, we hope the Clearinghouse will continue to be what the name implies: a place where anyone can readily go to find pertinent, relevant information about victim- and victim services-related issues and solutions.

Use this form to tell us you want to continue receiving *The Victim's Informer*.  
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# SPOTLIGHT on Victim Services Division



## The Amazing **LINDA STARNES**

### 25 Years of Dedicated Service to the People of Texas

by Libby Hamilton

WE IN VICTIM SERVICES work hard to provide victims and their families the information and notification afforded to them in the Crime Victim Bill of Rights. Among us is a woman who commits countless hours to ensuring the accuracy of our work, and she is about to celebrate a very important landmark within our agency.

Linda Starnes will mark her 25th anniversary with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in March 2009. Having received a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Radford University in Virginia, Linda and her family moved to Austin, and she began working as a file clerk in the Parole Division in 1984. It didn't take long for her superiors to realize how hard of a worker she was, so the promotions began. First as a clerical supervisor, then up to Administrative Assistant, and next she became an analyst in the

Review & Release Processing section.

In August 2000 Linda was hired as an analyst with the Victim Services Division. Her commitment and dedication as an analyst led to a promotion as a Program Specialist III, focusing on the Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) system in the Notification Section. She has also been involved with the Bridges to Life program.

During her time at Victim Services, Linda has seen a large increase in the number of victims registered on our Victim Notification System, and has worked tirelessly to make certain that each person receives the most accurate and updated information possible. Mrs. Starnes arrives at work early each

morning, stays late each evening, and is highly respected by each of us in Victim Services. Mark Odom, Deputy Director of VSD, said, "Linda Starnes has always placed a high priority on loyalty and dedication. More importantly, she has the heart and commitment to serve crime victims. She has been a critical part of the success of our division's goal to involve victims in the criminal justice process."



# Men in the Movement

by Jitin Hingorani

*Austin Woman Magazine*

Reprinted with permission

IT ALL BEGAN AROUND an oval wooden kitchen table in 1977. A small group of Austin women gathered around to blueprint the creation of a safe haven for abused women. Those meetings marked the beginning of a movement – known for more than 30 years now as the battered women’s movement. In fact, the first domestic violence shelter in Texas was formed in Austin. Called The Center for Battered Women (now SafePlace), the program was one of 13 in the country that helped protect battered women and children from abusive spouses.

“Around the same time, a woman named Del Martin wrote a book called *Battered Wives*,” recalls Karen Wilson, community educator at SafePlace, survivor of several abusive relationships, and a 25-year veteran of the movement. “She was the first to connect sexism to domestic violence, and her ideas were so revolutionary that they blew the top right off this issue.”

Never did Wilson imagine that a few years later, men, identified in Martin’s book as the primary perpetrators of violence, would be working side-by-side with women to create awareness and understanding about this movement. In



## A LOT OF US, MEN, HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY AFFECTED BY THIS ISSUE OF VIOLENCE

the early '80s, male advocates began to surface, as Batterer Intervention and Prevention Programs (BIPPs) were created to address violence in males.

“If men wanted to do anything in this movement, they had to go work for a BIPP,” asserts Wilson. “It was only in the late '90s that men started working in domestic violence programs and shelters, and I was very afraid that if men began to do this work, they would take it away from us.”

But one man made Wilson question her own sexism. His name is Emiliano Diaz de Leon, and he has been working with battered women and children for 10 years now.

“He was the first male children’s advocate at the shelter, and I had a really hard time with that,” admits Wilson. “But once I got to know his passion and the impact he was having on those children, I really

began to evaluate my own ideals.”

Diaz de Leon says even though it took a while for some women to come around, a vast majority of them realize the value of men being involved in this work. “When women see that these men are not abusive like the men in their lives have been, it gives them a glimpse into the nurturing, loving, and compassionate side that all men possess.”

A primary prevention specialist at the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA), Diaz de Leon has witnessed a huge increase in male involvement in the past decade. “A lot of us, men, have been personally affected by this issue of violence, whether as survivors ourselves or by knowing friends or family members who have

[www.responsiblemen.net](http://www.responsiblemen.net)

Safeplace - 512-267-SAFE  
[www.safeplace.org](http://www.safeplace.org)

TAASA - 1-800-656-HOPE  
[www.taasa.org](http://www.taasa.org)

experienced domestic violence or sexual assault. It is time for us to stand with women in solidarity and publicly speak out against family violence.”

In order to prevent violence against women, Diaz de Leon argues that we must rely on the majority of men. “There are so many men who have committed violent acts already, but we have to focus on the larger group of nonviolent men who want to have healthy relationships. We need to support those men.”

An Austin group called Responsible Men has made this idea its mission. Founded by improvisation actor and former schoolteacher Ted Rutherford, Responsible Men espouses that since men are doing most of the damage, they need to be part of the solution.

“Guys don’t understand how they’re contributing to sexism, which ultimately leads to violence against women,” reveals Rutherford. “A lot of guys don’t mean to be sexist, but they do it often out of ignorance.” Male privilege, defined as the idea that there are rights granted to the male population in society on the basis of their biological sex that the female population is usually denied, asserts Rutherford, is something that all men should realize they innately possess. “If you look at men’s

salaries as those compared to women’s or if you look at men’s incarceration rates for sexual assault or domestic violence, you will see that both sexes are not treated equal.”

Rutherford remembers his upbringing – “around the barbeque pit,” he calls it. “That’s where I learned how men are supposed to act. All the women went to another part of the house, and my male family members stood around talking about women. It’s time to rewrite the script on interactions among men. They need to be more gender-respectful, remove the sexist jokes, and talk about women having value for more than just their bodies. If young boys hear their fathers having respectful conversations about women with other men, it will have a huge impact on how they behave as adults.”

Already an official group with 106 members on the popular social networking website, [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), Responsible Men hopes to spread its message virally. “I want men to talk to other men,” says Rutherford. “We need to redefine masculinity so that future generations learn that the way to respect a woman is not to hurt her.” Rutherford takes his message to fathers, coaches and religious leaders through

workshops and interactive training. For more information about his group and how to join, visit [www.responsiblemen.net](http://www.responsiblemen.net).

Rutherford draws parallels of his group to those outraged Americans fighting segregation in the 1960s. “Not everyone was on board with racism, and there had to be a group of people who stood up and said, ‘that’s not okay.’ We are doing the same thing now with a different issue because all forms of oppression are connected.”

Currently, six of TAASA’s 21 staff members are men (approximately 29%), and SafePlace has 13 male advocates on its 140-person staff (approximately 9%). “If you would have asked me in 1985 if men should be working side-by-side with me, I would have adamantly said ‘no,’” reiterates Wilson. “Now, my answer is absolutely ‘yes.’ We need men and women doing this work together because it is about a human rights issue that knows no gender.”

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[www.austinwomanmagazine.com](http://www.austinwomanmagazine.com)



*It is with our judgments as with our watches: no two go just alike, yet each believes his own.” - Alexander Pope*

**Mediation;** *continued from front page*

which only the offender has answers. What were my son's last words? How long did it take for my daughter to die? What were you doing there? Why me?

Sometimes the objective sought by starting a mediation/dialogue with an offender isn't what the outcome brings. The victim who was shot in a bar by an angry drug dealer knew why he picked her. She didn't like him dealing in her bar and had run him out. Being embarrassed in front of his friends and clients, he returned to teach her a lesson even if it meant leaving her disabled or dead. She feared her offender constantly during the several years he was on the run. And even after he was caught and sent to prison, she knew it would be only a short time before he would be out again. What then?

She decided she needed to confront this man. Her reasons were simple enough. She wanted to show him the boxes of her medical records and bills. She wanted him to see how she struggled with her disability and that she would gladly trade his short prison sentence for her life sentence. She wanted to know if she should still be scared of him. She didn't care if he was sorry, and she certainly wasn't ready to forgive.

After the mediation, her fear was gone, completely. He wasn't the same man who she remembered—who she pictured in her mind day after day—shooting up her bar in an angry rampage. He hadn't till then ever really thought about what he had done to her

or how devastating her injuries were. He was sorry and got the rare opportunity to say he was. Her obsession with and fear of him became momentum for her recovery.

Often the answers that victims seek aren't wrapped in complex, philosophical mystery. But their simplicity is nonetheless profound and life-changing. A father's almost universal belief is that he must always protect his family, especially his children. While no more devastating for a mother whose child has been murdered, fathers whose kids are hurt or killed will almost always ask themselves: Why wasn't I able to protect them?

His daughter's body was found in a remote, desolate place. She had been alone. She must have been terrified. So many questions. Had her car broken down? Why was she there? How did she get abducted? Her car had been in need of a tune up; he had been too busy to get it done. He was going to get a new battery, new tires, new alternator for her car that weekend. He was never going to forgive the monster who did this or himself for allowing it to happen. But he needed to know why her? Why wasn't he able to protect her? He learned that she had just stopped at a particular store on a particular day for a Coke, a candy bar, and a few bucks worth of gas. The monster was at the store, too. The opportunity was there, so he took her. She was trusting. She was vulnerable. The boy who raped



**There is  
no closure;  
there is  
only the  
process of  
healing.**

and murdered her had become a man in prison. He was sorry and got the rare opportunity to say he was. The father's obsession with unanswered questions became a step toward

trying to forgive himself.

Sometimes a victim of violent crime doesn't need answers. She doesn't need to forgive. She just wants to tell the person who violated her trust and her young body that she was fine, even though she hadn't been fine for many, many years. But, in spite of what he had done to her, by golly she was in control now.

She can't remember how many years of shame and therapy she endured. She doesn't remember how many decent boys or men she had avoided because she couldn't trust any of them. She was angry for not having a father, and even a little bit jealous of her friends who did. What was it like to have a dad who helped you with your homework? Who taught you to ride a bike? Who would walk you down the aisle? Who would always be there to protect you? She can't count how many times she became nauseated and repulsed at the sight of a certain type of candy, and ice cream cone, or a doll? These had been some of the things used way back when to bribe her into compliance.

She confronted the person who took advantage of her vulnerability and trust. But, through hard work and per-

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# Forgiveness

by Cheryl Hunter

*Forgiveness is typically defined as the process of concluding resentment, indignation or anger as a result of a perceived offense, difference or mistake, and ceasing to demand punishment or restitution. The Oxford English Dictionary defines forgiveness as 'to grant free pardon and to give up all claim on account of an offense or debt'.*

I MUST ADMIT that this concept has never been a strong point with me. However, as I age, I learn more and these lessons have definitely changed my perspective. Last year, I wrote an article for our newsletter about Parasailing. The changes that parasailing made in my life were positive following the death of my beloved daughter Misty Dawn Hunter and her friend. This past year has been a good year for me. My health has improved, I am active in my community as a volunteer for MADD, Friends of the Family (Sexual Assault Team assisting those who are victims of sexual assault), and recently taking care of the newborn babies who come to my church--what fun--a couple of days a week. Life is better. But, I still had one last hurdle to get over--the hardest hurdle of all. And that had to do with forgiveness.

Anger is a funny thing. It never hurts the person with whom you are angry, but it does take a great personal toll on the one who is angry. I have been angry at the man who made the choice to drink and then get behind the wheel of his ¾ ton pick-up, killing my daughter and her best friend. He brought such

blinding pain to me that I truly believed I would never have a real life again. I turned my back on God and also my faith as a result of the injustice served upon these two beautiful young women. I must have asked a million times "WHY" and I will understand someday, but I do not have to understand today.

On February 20, 2009, I had a face to face meeting with the man who killed my daughter. I have been preparing for this moment for the past eight months with the assistance of the State of Texas-Criminal Justice Division Victim Services Mediator. This process is in place for the benefit of those victims who have lost family members to violent crimes. It is strictly voluntary for both parties. I had to request mediation and it took a year for CJD just to get to me to start the process. I met with the mediator and he gave me some forms to fill out. He asked me why I wanted to do this. I told him that this man had never told me he was sorry. Also, I had said some things that I wished I had not said to him during the trial. I also said that I wanted to know what he remembered about the crash and see if he had any remorse for his actions. I met with the mediator each month for eight months, and each time we met we discussed the why's, how's and when's of the program. The offender had to agree to meet with me, and he could

withdraw his consent at any point in the process even after our personal meeting had started.

It was during this preparation time that I realized how much damage I had done to myself by harboring this anger and resentment I had toward the offender. He did not get sick from my hate, but I did. I was hospitalized 13 times in the first year after her death all due to stress-related illnesses. I really had a desire to die. But I had made a promise to Misty that, if she ever died before me, I would not give up on living. I went through the motions of living, putting one foot in front of the other day after day with no meaning or joy. I could not sleep so I ate to keep up my energy, gaining 75 pounds over a five year period. I felt alone in a crowd and hopeless most of the time. I cut out celebrating anything except at work with my CIGNA family. I am sure that I was not always pleasant, but somehow they all managed to love me through the pain in spite of myself.

My daughter-in-law accompanied me to the state prison facility where the offender is incarcerated. He is just about to complete the first of two six year sentences that he received for the drunk driving fatalities. I did not know what feelings to expect when I saw the offender again. I had asked everyone I know to lift me up in prayer to God on that day. I was very surprised when I

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**Mediation; continued from page 8**

severance, she had regained what she needed: power and control of her life. He may never figure out or admit to how much damage he caused, and he let the rare opportunity to really say he was sorry slip by. She got to show him that she had gained the strength to overcome what he had done. She was strong and in control. Her obsession with her violation became another phase of reclaiming her life.

From mediations conducted over the years, many participants have felt the layers of anger and fear, hatred and contempt peel away, sometimes in only a matter of hours. Seemingly unfillable gaps of uncertainty and confusion begin to close. Extraordinary transformations in attitude, confidence, courage, and demeanor occur. And, time and again, the bold steps these victims have taken are paying off.

Even after mediation/dialogue, victims of violent crime still grieve, still yearn, and still cry. There is no closure; there is only the process of healing. There is no getting over it, but there is moving forward.

*To protect the integrity of the Victim Offender Mediation/ Dialogue Program, the process is kept strictly confidential. The situations referred to in this article are fictitious, although they are based on actual mediation cases. To learn more about the VOM/D Program, contact us at 800-848-4284 or via email at victim.svc@tdcj.texas.gov.*

**Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue Pioneer Dies**

LONG-TIME ABILENE RESIDENT and Texas victim services pioneer, Cathy Phillips, died on February 28, 2009 in Abilene. She was 57.

Ms. Phillips was instrumental in the development of the TDCJ-Victim Services Division's Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue Program.

In 1990, her daughter, Brenda, was abducted, raped, and murdered by Anthony Yanez. Ms. Phillips had questions she needed answered, and Yanez was the only person who could supply the answers. At the time, programs like VOM/D were unheard of and few

could understand Ms. Phillips motivation. With Ms. Phillips guidance and perseverance, the VOM/D program began to take shape.

Despite her failing health, Ms. Phillips remained active with victim advocate programs in Texas such as Parents of Murdered Children. She was honored by Governor Bush in 1996 for her volunteer work with TDCJ. In 1999 she received the Governor's Volunteer Service Award, and in 2003, the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse conference was dedicated to her in honor of her work.

**Forgiveness; continued from page 9**

saw him come into the room as all I felt for him was compassion. I believe that the prayers of my friends brought me out of my human boundaries and placed me in my spiritual being where I was able to view him as a man who made a bad choice not simply as a bad man. I was able to forgive him in my heart of hearts. I know that was what I was supposed to do. As we talked, I felt the weight lift from my shoulders and experienced a new found freedom to live again.

I now have something to add to the story of loss that I tell when I do my speeches for MADD. I can now tell those in the audience who are court-ordered to be there that I have found forgiveness to a degree that I never knew existed. I feel that through speaking to them about the crash that forever changed my life--I have much to teach them. I have learned that anyone can find themselves making poor choices. I am not perfect but I am forgiven; so who am I to withhold forgiveness from anyone?

I know my sweet daughter would have wanted me to forgive him. She would understand that this in no way reduces our loss but increases the value of her life.

**TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE OFFENDER TELEPHONE SYSTEM**

A NEW LAW AUTHORIZED BY SB1580 of 80th Legislative Session expands prison inmates' access to phones. If you are a victim or concerned citizen who is registered on our confidential Victim Notification System and we have your current phone information, your phone number will be automatically screened out from inmate access. Look for more information in the June/July issue of *The Victim's Informer*.



**Letting Go; continued from page 3**

**Involve the Family. Help your family—they are grieving too.**

I came up with this idea of a family candlelight memorial to give my sons an opportunity to share their feelings. We sat in a circle holding our candles, adhering to rules of respect for any personal expressions of pain without asking questions. At each one's turn, their candle was lit. "...I didn't get to know Leslie very well because she died when I was 15. I'm glad that she was a part of my life. She was an inspiration to me," said Karlon. Corey added, "Leslie was my best friend. There used to be a void in my life but I filled that void with her memories." Together we comforted one another, confirming that family is very important in times of grief.

**Acceptance. Accept the reality of your loss.**

I was not with Leslie when she died, but I believe God and ministering angels were there to take her home. Maybe I will never fully understand why she had to go, but I love and trust God who knows the answer. Leslie is no longer lifelessly lying in the emergency room where I left her on September 11, 1992. Neither am I there, crying with *should have* and *could have*.

**Forgiveness. In letting go, forgiveness is essential.**

I forgave myself for not being able to save Leslie. However unrealistic, it was a mother's dilemma. Forgiven, I thanked God for putting up with me while asking Him hard questions about the providential care of His children. Mediation and conversations with one of Leslie's killers and the co-worker she was helping brought a measure of peace. No longer broken and incomplete, I embraced the strong legacy that Leslie left behind, and felt energized to create my own legacy.

**Heal - Grow - Rebuild. Healing promotes growth and rebuilding.**

My hope for all mothers is to eventually find some meaning for these sad happenings in our lives, and that we heal and grow. Leslie has gone back to the heavenly father that sent her to me, and is resting peacefully from her labor in His bosom. After making peace with her demise, I feel a deeper connection to her spirit that resonates every part of my being. I believe God left a piece of Leslie within me to continue the essence of who she was, and that He does the same for every mother who loses a child. I carry this essence with me every day as I reach out to others, helping to make their lives better.

**Forever Changed. We are forever changed by the experiences of loss and grief.**

With heaviness and thankfulness, saying good-bye to yesterday opened a whole new world of new possibilities. To bring Leslie into my future, I hold on to memories that are special and forever etched in my thoughts and heart. I encourage you to hold on to your memories, and when they bring laughter, let yourself smile, when they bring sadness, let yourself cry, but try not to linger in a depressed state of mind. Both joy and tears, I believe, are the body's way of communicating with the deep connection to our children's spirit.

I hope these words from a mother's heart will encourage and awaken you to let go of yesterday, so you can move forward, holding your child in your spirit in a healthy way, using your experience to help yourself and others. "*A Personal Journey—Finding Wings With Shattered Pieces* inspires hope that the human spirit is resilient enough to not only survive but to thrive after a devastating personal tragedy," says Jeannette LaFontaine, Trauma Support Services of North Texas, Inc.

Please visit the Leslie K. Bedford Memorial Foundation website at: [www.lesliekbedfordfoundation.org/](http://www.lesliekbedfordfoundation.org/)

**To learn more about Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue, Victim Impact Panels, or any other TDCJ-Victim Services Division program, contact us at 800-848-4284 or [victim.svc@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:victim.svc@tdcj.texas.gov)**



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## DATES OF INTEREST

*April 26-May 2, 2009*

*National Crime Victims' Rights Week*

*25 Years of Rebuilding Lives:*

*Celebrating the Victims of Crime Act*

*[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ncvrv/welcome.html](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ncvrv/welcome.html)*

*August 23-27, 2009*

*NOVA 35th Annual Victim Assistance Conference*

*Westin Kierland Resort & Spa*

*Scottsdale, Arizona*

*[www.trynova.org](http://www.trynova.org)*

*May 27 - 29, 2009*

*Fifth National Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)*

*Training Conference; Westin Hotel Seattle*

*Seattle, Washington*

*<http://www.sane-sart.com/>*

*October 13 - 19, 2009*

*National Association of Victim Service*

*Professionals in Corrections*

*3rd Annual National Conference*

*Renaissance Austin Hotel*

*Austin, Texas*

*[www.navspic.org](http://www.navspic.org)*

*June 22 - 24, 2009*

*2009 National Center for Victim's of Crime Organization*

*Hyatt Regency Washington Capitol Hill*

*Washington DC*

*<http://www.ncvc.org>*

*November 19 - 21, 2009*

*Office of the Attorney General of Texas*

*2009 Texas Crime Victims Services Conference*

*Renaissance Austin Hotel, Austin*

*[www.oag.state.tx.us/victims/victim\\_train.shtml](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/victims/victim_train.shtml)*

*(Reservations starting in early Spring 2009)*

*September 15-18, 2009*

*TVSA Conference; El Paso*

*[www.txvsa.org](http://www.txvsa.org)*