

A murder transforms woman into criminal justice reformer

BY LAYLA GARMIS
THE CHRONICLE

It was a 2 a.m. phone call in 2003 that shattered Therese Bartholomew's life.

It would be years before the Charlotte resident could begin to push back against the crushing grief that accompanied the news that Steve Leone, her brother, confidant and best friend, had been murdered at a nightclub in South Carolina. The killer, Karl Staton, was apprehended immediately, but ultimately pleaded to a lesser charge, serving a sentence of just eight and half years. Ironically, the very person who inflicted the devastating loss upon Bartholomew and her family would play a vital role in her healing, an experience that has prompted Bartholomew to become one of the country's most outspoken advocates of restorative justice.

"I had no idea that there was anything called restorative justice. I just knew that I saw humanity in him," Bartholomew confesses in "The Final Gift," a documentary film she produced that chronicles her healing experience. "...The second I walked out of that prison (after meeting with Staton), I felt lighter, I felt like something had been lifted off my shoulders."

Today, Bartholomew and her husband Doug, a co-executive producer of the film, crisscross the nation, telling Bartholomew's deeply personal story — which she also recounts in the memoir "Coffee Shop God" — and extolling the virtues of restorative justice, which Bartholomew says has the power to heal by putting the control back into the hands of the victim.

"Restorative justice, in a tiny, tiny sound bite, really says that crime damages relationships," she told Winston-Salem State University Justice Studies students last week after they viewed the film. "It hurts people, right? And communities. So what can we do to come to a place of healing?"

For Bartholomew, the answer was the book, where she first began to pour out her pain, the film, which began as a series of video diaries and blossomed into a full fledged documentary, and sitting across the table from Staton in a South Carolina prison, where she laid bare



Photos by Layla Garmis

Therese Bartholomew speaks to students.



Saunders



Dr. Monell

the anguish that he had caused her family.

Though she says she had forgiven Staton long before she set foot in the prison, being able to look him in the eye and tell him how her life had been wrecked by his actions was therapeutic for her. While each case is unique, Bartholomew firmly believes that putting a human face on crime can be helpful for both the victim and the perpetrator.

"The problem with our criminal justice system is we create abstracts and adversaries. The victim becomes abstract to the offender — the offender really doesn't see what he or she has done," she stated. "...In my case, I really needed to sit in a room ... with this person who had hurt me so much, and my family. I needed to see that abstract turn into something real. For me, that was the critical piece."

The adversarial nature of the American justice system takes the focus

away from the victim in many cases, and robs both victim and perpetrator of the opportunity to heal and learn from the experience, Bartholomew said. When those who are adversely affected by a crime don't find adequate ways to understand and heal from the experience, they become what Bartholomew calls "forever victims," often living out the rest of their lives under the shadow of one horrific act. Bartholomew, who obtained a master's degree in criminal justice from UNC Charlotte after Leone's murder, said offenders who don't have to face the havoc that they have created are often desensitized to the true cost of their actions.

"It's really hard for people to understand that this is smart justice; it's not being soft on crime," she said. "It's being victim centered and looking at the true impact of crime."

Bartholomew will be the first to assert that nothing could repair the agony

she still feels at the loss of Leone, with whom Bartholomew was so close that she regarded him as a part of herself. Still, she said she is heartened that, through her grief, she is finding ways to help others who have suffered similar fates as an advocate of restorative justice.

"I would never choose for my brother to be shot in the chest. I would take him back any second of any day. I would trade him for every possible thing in my life," she declared. "... But there's something good coming out of all of this."

Joy Saunders, a senior justice studies major at WSSU, said she was impressed by Bartholomew's courageous quest to reclaim her life after the tragedy. Saunders, an aspiring prosecutor, said the concept of restorative justice makes a lot of sense to her.

"I think it's a great concept, something that we should continue to do, not even just with criminal matters, but just being able to forgive in general," remarked the 21 year-old. "That could stop a lot of crime in itself, if people weren't so vengeful."

Dr. Jack Monell, an assistant professor in the department, said he read Bartholomew's book "many moons ago," and was deeply impacted by her story.

"As a criminologist and as a social worker, it's emotional," he said of viewing the film. "In practice, this is what we hope and strive for, helping victims heal."

For more information about Bartholomew and her work, visit www.theresebartholomew.com.

YouthBuild

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Lessons in leadership and life skills are woven into the program, said McKoy, who likes that the program allows participants to put the skills they'll learn to use by transforming a rundown house into someone's new home.

"The work you do matters," he said. "You're not going to build a model house; you're not going to build a dog house; you're building real houses that people are going to live in and people have dreamed about living in."

YouthBuild participants will be City employees during their six months of training, as such, they will have first dibs applying for City jobs. But, as McKoy told interested applicants, the skills taught in the program can be used at construction sites throughout the state and beyond.

"The skills you learn on that construction site, they translate into wherever you go," McKoy said.

Anthony "TC" Cannon conducts the construction training. He formerly taught the City's Section 3 Construction Training Program Initiative, a similar program for 18-35 year-olds with high school diplomas or GEDs that YouthBuild replaced. Cannon said most of his former students hold a variety of City positions and some have even started their own businesses. He said he sees potential

in the initial YouthBuild class, which began in late August.

"They're really turning their lives around. I have seen a change in two months," Cannon said. "I have some that didn't have it in themselves. Now, they have it in themselves, and they're sticking with it."

Daiquan Adams and Joe McCray are among those now receiving training in the first YouthBuild class. They attended the Sims Center session last week talk about the program. Both of the young men were seniors when they dropped out of high school last year. Adams said he fell behind in his work; McCray said he wasn't doing well and wasn't getting

along with his teachers. YouthBuild is providing them with a second chance, they said.

Adams said it's been a tremendous opportunity "because of the education you're getting and when the two weeks come, it's payday."

McCray gave the program high marks.

"It feels good to have this badge on," he said, holding his City employee ID.

The first YouthBuild program began in East Harlem, N.Y. in 1978. There are now 273 programs in 46 states, Washington, D.C. and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

YouthBuild's next enrollment period will be early next year. For more information, call 336-734-1283.



Cannon



McCray

Award

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"It places both Joseph and UNCSA Film School in a very positive light," said Ackerman, who has served as the director of photography on "Beetlejuice," "Jumanji" and more than 30 other feature films.

Murders

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elected officials and community leaders are working tirelessly to reduce the toll of domestic violence. Yet despite these efforts, the numbers remain unacceptably high. We need new policies in place from local communities to the federal government, to protect women from harm."

"Nine women each week are shot to death by their husband or intimate partner," said Shannon Watts, founder of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. "That's nearly 500 domestic gun violence deaths each year — more than twice the number of servicewomen killed in military conflicts since the Korean War. We urgently need better policies that protect women and their families from this senseless violence. No American, adult or

child, should live in a perpetual state of fear. It's inhumane."

Nationwide, a total of 1,707 females were murdered by males in single victim/single offender incidents in 2011, at a rate of 1.17 per 100,000.

The study also ranks each state based on the homicide rate for females murdered by males. In 2011, South Carolina led the nation

with a rate of 2.54 per 100,000. North Carolina was 22nd, with a rate of 1.23 homicides per 100,000 women. There were 61 female homicide victims in the Tarheel State in 2011.



Watts

To view the full report, visit <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2013.pdf>.

for Seniors only!

Available the first week of every month in

THE CHRONICLE

Answers for women of all ages

Generations of Hope: It Takes a Village To Raise a Child

Saturday, Nov. 9, registration 9:30 a.m. — program 10 a.m.-noon

Whether this is your first baby or your third grandchild, join us for a lively and informative discussion on this exciting new phase of your life. Learn how to successfully navigate your evolving role as a parent or grandparent. We'll also cover topics including health and nutrition for your changing body and the use of stress management techniques. Refreshments and giveaways will be provided.

What Our Mothers, Sisters and Girlfriends Never Told Us

Thursday, Nov. 14, 6-8 p.m.

Join obstetrician and gynecologist Deirdre Bland, MD, as she shares expert advice about pelvic floor disorder — including signs, symptoms and treatment options. This event is for women who may be experiencing urinary leakage or difficulty in bladder emptying, chronic constipation, aching or bulging sensations in the lower abdomen, and/or pelvic pain.

Both events are free and open to the public
Call 718-7000 for more information and to register

Novant Health Conference Center
3333 Silas Creek Parkway
Winston-Salem, NC

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