

NEW HOPE HOUSE

Support for People on Georgia's Death Row and Their Families



Summer/Fall 2019

WHEN JOY COMES IN THE MOURNING

By Mary Catherine Johnson

It's been a rough summer. Two executions and record heat in Georgia brought days of sorrow and lethargy to my life in ways I had not experienced before. For the first time since coming to New Hope House in 2016, I began to question if I have what it takes to sustain this ministry. Every time I got in my car that had been baking in the sun for hours, a deep sadness would come over me as I recalled the men on death row describing to me what it's like to live in a concrete box with no air conditioning during the hottest July on record. The execution of my dear friend Scotty Morrow on May 2nd brought the challenge of managing my own heartache as well as his family's grief. Then the weeks leading up to Marion Wilson's execution on June 20th ushered in a different set of challenges that gave me a front row seat to the trauma and devastation caused by the death penalty. In the aftermath of all of this sorrow, I made the decision not to attend Marion Wilson's memorial service in July. But the Holy Spirit had a different plan for me, lining up a beach trip with my mother that would put me within 20 minutes of the church where the memorial would be held.



Scotty Morrow

That beach trip did me a world of good. The waters of the gorgeous ocean, rivers and marshes, and the taste of fresh shrimp and hushpuppies, reminded me of what it feels like to take part in the beauty and joy of God's world. My grandfather used to say that the ocean was the cure for what ails you, but he was only partly right, because it was only when I reunited with Marion's family in that small church in south Georgia that I truly felt the healing of what was ailing me take hold. We sang, we clapped, and we danced as we gave thanks for Marion's life and rejoiced in his freedom with Jesus. The preacher, who was a childhood friend of Marion's, had us chanting Marion's nickname, Murdock, and proclaiming victory over the darkness of death row.

I cried tears of joy as I danced in my pew that day, and I continued singing the whole way back to New Hope House, recalling the many moments of grace and joy that had occurred in the preceding months... of watching Scotty Morrow's family gathered around the kitchen counter at the guesthouse with Scotty on speaker-phone, joking around and laughing uproariously... of shopping with Marion's mother to buy a outfit to help her feel beautiful and confident when she asked the parole board to spare her son's life... of watching in awe and chanting "Go Scotty, Go Scotty" while driving with Scotty's sister as the Atlanta police stopped a wall of traffic on I-75 to allow our funeral procession to pass, on our way to the Muslim burial that was so important to Scotty.



Marion Wilson's Memorial Service
(video still)

I made some videos of Marion's memorial service that have become a major part of my healing and ability to move forward. I've probably watched the one of the choir singing "I Still Have Joy" over 100 times. Every time I see Marion's preacher dancing and singing with the choir, offering his joy to all of the mourners, I gladly accept it, and then do my best to pass that joy along. Yesterday I caught myself singing that song aloud as I moved through the guesthouse, preparing it for the next family to arrive.



Former New Hope House Board member Amy Vosburg-Casey (far left) brought her students from Cristo Rey High School in California to learn about this ministry and hear the testimony of former Georgia death row prisoner Jimmie Lee Horton (center in baseball cap). The students also sent encouraging cards to Scotty Morrow, who was facing an imminent execution date at the time of their visit. Scotty was blown away by the students' beautiful messages of love and hope.



Brad Smith of Comer, Georgia (above) didn't let the brutal summer heat keep him from working for 3 days at New Hope House in July, devoting his expert handyman skills toward the ongoing repairs list around here.

Scotty Morrow's family and friends (above and right) blessed our guesthouse with their presence in the days preceding Scotty's execution. Despite the deep sadness of the occasion, they were able to find moments of joy and experience the grace that comes with being together.



Michael Nance's brother (above) has become a regular visitor at our guesthouse, driving all the way from Kansas to visit his brother (and also have the best barbecue in Georgia).



Marion Wilson's friend from the UK, Lynda (far left), took a break from visiting Marion to have sweet tea and barbecue at the Whistle Stop Café, where her favorite movie was filmed. Marion's family (above) showed great courage through joy at Marion's memorial service in July.

Adrian Hargrove got visits from his family (far right) and from Susanne (pictured right with Mary Catherine), who came all the way from Switzerland.



FALL 2019 WORK DAY

Saturday, November 16, 2019 10 am – 3 pm Lunch provided!

Come out to work alongside cool people as we make our grounds and houses beautiful for our death row families. Featuring projects for all skill levels.

**RSVP: Mary Catherine, 404-273-0621;
mcjohnson78@yahoo.com**

Or if you can't make it for the official Work Day but would like to come another time to help out, or if you just want to visit and enjoy some retreat time in the woods, please call or email me!



Volunteers from Jubilee Partners at a recent Work Day

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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OUR MINISTRY

New Hope House is a Christian community offering hospitality to families of people on Georgia's death row and support to people whose family members are involved in death penalty trials. We also visit people on death row and work to replace the death penalty with just alternatives.

New Hope House is part of Possum Trot Ministries, a nonprofit (501c4) organization. We are financially dependent on gifts (not tax deductible).

Contact New Hope House:
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LORA WEIR IS 80 YEARS YOUNG!

Friends and family gathered in Athens, Georgia in August to celebrate Lora Weir's 80th birthday. Lora (above, center), who lived at New Hope House for over 25 years, was all smiles as she was surrounded by so many people who love her. She asked Mary Catherine to relay her greetings and messages of love to the men on death row she once visited, exclaiming, "Tell them I'm blessed to have such a nice place to live and a family that spoils me! And tell them I'm 80 YEARS YOUNG!"