



Death penalty attorney says she's had enough

BY PATRICK O'NEILL

After almost a decade of visiting her friend and client Steve Van McHone on Central Prison's death row, defense lawyer Cindy Adcock had to make a trip to the prison she never wanted to make. Last Friday, Adcock sat behind a large double-paned glass window and watched McHone, 35, die by lethal injection for the 1990 murders of his mother, Mildred Adams, and his stepfather, Wesley Adams.

November 16, 2005
TRIANGLES McHone's death, which came after Gov. Mike Easley denied clemency late Thursday night, marked the fifth time Adcock, a Duke Law graduate, has lost a client to execution in North Carolina. She has sat through four executions since she witnessed the Aug. 14, 1998, execution of another client, Zane Hill. As she walked up the Central Prison driveway early Friday morning after watching the 2 a.m. execution, Adcock said she was not going to take on any new death penalty appellate cases from now on.

- SECTION
- NEWS & TRIANGLE
- FRONT PORCH
- COLUMNS
- FOOD & WINE
- ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT
- MUSIC
- MOVIES
- BEST BETS
- CALENDARS
- BACKTALK
- CLASSIFIEDS
- PERSONALS
- STAFF
- SEARCH
- HOME



Photo By Scott Langley

Sarah Anthony is comforted as Department of Corrections spokesperson Pam Walker (in background) announces Steven McHone's execution Friday.

Ads by Goooooogle

Cary Real Estate

View over 500 Cary homes, condos, and real estate listings.

www.raleighhomes4sale.com

\$300/Hr in Wilmington?

21 Side-by-side Comparisons of Fun Jobs Paying Up to \$300/Hour. FunJobsReview.com

Cary NC Real Estate

View over 500 Cary, NC homes, condos, and real estate listings. www.sharonsellsrtp.com

Campaign Director Salary

Get Government Salary Stats at Info, Search Job Listings & More! www.hotjobs.com

"It's just too much," said Adcock, who spent some of her time after the execution comforting her friend, Sarah Anthony, an attorney who assisted on the case, and McHone's family members, most of whom had petitioned Easley to spare McHone's life.

Adcock and her co-counsel, Ken Rose of the Center for Death Penalty Litigation, had remained hopeful that a stay McHone received Nov. 9 would hold up, but both the state and U.S. Supreme Courts refused to hear arguments, and McHone became the 37th person to be executed in the state since 1984 and the third this year. Elias Syriani, 67, is scheduled to be executed this Friday morning.

In the weeks leading up to McHone's execution, it was Adcock who worked hard to bring McHone's family together to help her plan a clemency petition to Easley, who denied clemency for the 22nd time.

With five clients dead, Adcock says she has lost what little faith she had in the U.S. legal system.

"In the end you get your hopes up and not only are you traumatized, but you see everybody else traumatized," she said.

Adcock said her "consolation prize" in the midst of her grief came as she watched McHone interact and laugh and be joyful with his family members as he received his only contact visit with them in the last 15 years.

"Steve told me tonight, he said: 'Nobody was able to bring my family together but you.' A couple of weeks ago they hardly knew each other. They hadn't seen each other in years. ... It's what gets you through it."

Anthony said it was Adcock who played the role of comforter as the execution came and passed. "She was a tremendous support for me," said Anthony, who sobbed heavily in a prison waiting area as the execution was carried out. "He [McHone] knew he was loved in the end."

Adcock watched McHone's execution alongside Wes Adams Jr., McHone's half-brother who was present during the murders and who backed the execution.

Adcock said Adams was cheated if he expected to see a "monster" laying there on the gurney.

"He smiled the whole time," Adcock said of McHone. "We communicated our love to him, and he communicated his love to

us."

Another thing McHone did was look at his brother and say "I'm so sorry" as tears rolled down his face. Because he was strapped onto the gurney, McHone was unable to wipe away the tears, which led to a lighter moment as McHone struggled to wipe his tears on the pillow under his head, Adcock said.

Adams and his wife, Wendy Adams, did not speak to reporters after the execution. In a signed, handwritten statement they released afterward, the Adamses wrote: "We hope that the fulfillment of this sentence might deter others from following such a destructive path, and spare other lives the suffering such as we have experienced these 15-plus years."

On Thursday, Easley is expected to announce his decision on clemency for Syriani, who killed his wife, Teresa Syriani, in 1990. On Nov. 10, Syriani's family members met with Easley at his Capitol office.

"We're just so glad that Gov. Easley gave us the opportunity to meet with him," said Rose Syriani, the eldest of Elias' four children. "I think we were able to tell him what was on our minds and what we've been feeling, and we're hoping that he listens to our plea, and we thank him for the opportunity to meet with us."

The case has gained attention because last year his three daughters visited him for the first time after 14 years and decided to forgive their father and welcome him back into their lives-- though he killed their mother. ("Children plead for father's life," Nov. 2, 2005, indyweek.com/durham/2005-11-02/triangles4.html). A son had already resumed contact with him, and the four have said they want his death sentence commuted to life in prison.

"We are here on behalf of our mother," Teresa Syriani said. "She was a very loving and forgiving person. We just want to be able to remember those memories, the past that we've shared with both my mother and father."

RECENTLY:

- **The question no one asked Colin Powell** - He says war "couldn't be avoided," but isn't pressed about whether intelligence was misused - Mosi Secret (*November 9, 2005*)
- **An open window for reform** - Lottery fiasco just one intersection of money and politics - Chris Fitzsimon (*November 9, 2005*)
- **When protesters show, cops lock the doors** - Police