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Families of slaying victims discuss fears, hopes at forum

By Jennifer Brevorka, staff writer
April 27, 2003 10:39 p.m.

ASHEVILLE - When Rodney Waugh first finished talking about his daughter Sunday, he stared straight ahead, shuddered and exhaled in a slow deep breath.

Sometimes, he said, it was an OK day to talk about how Angela Dawn Waugh had disappeared and was eventually found dead in 1988. And sometimes, he told the audience of 35 people at Beth Israel Synagogue, it was not.

At the forum hosted by at People of Faith Against the Death Penalty and Western Carolinians for Criminal Justice, Waugh was one of five people sharing their stories about family members lost to violent deaths.

Moderated by Flat Rock counselor Rose Sierra, the forum allowed panel members and the audience to talk about law enforcement, the justice system and the death penalty.

While Waugh said he always liked to talk about his daughter and her prized yellow Toyota, it was difficult for him to recall how three months after he reported the 18-year-old girl missing from their Statesville home, Dawn's skeletal remains were found.

It was difficult for him to watch the justice system convict a man of manslaughter when, Waugh said, he thought the punishment should have been harsher. And it was difficult to think about the convicted killer who had verbally threatened the lives of his family.

What wasn't difficult for Waugh was explaining his stance on the death penalty as he said that after his daughter's killer had twice escaped from jail and been found near his home, he saw the death penalty as the "ultimate punishment for the ultimate crime."

Others on the panel, like Carol Dreiling, held a different view about capital punishment. The Asheville resident, who lost her mother and father to a "crazed" gunman, said after 15 years, she learned that she needed to release her anger and begin forgiving those who had killed her parents.

The panel also provided a means of healing for those traumatized by the sorrow, anger and fear that came from losing a loved one to a violent death, grief counselor Sierra said.

"When your daughter is murdered there is no closure until you die," Sierra said.



photo: John Fletcher
4-27-03 Laura Wells, right, talks with panelist Judith Toy during a break in the panel discussion about murder victims at Beth Isreal Synagogue.

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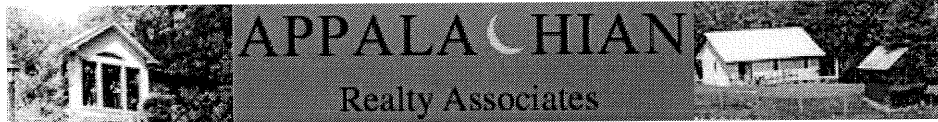
"Rather, it is how do you learn to live your life with this?"

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