

# Manhole Cover Project: A Gun Legacy 1996

## Testimonial Sequence B: Parents

### FELICIA HALL

He was shot on November 25th, Thanksgiving Day 1993. He was 17 and a half, his birthday would have been December. A drive by shooting, gang violence. He was playing tag football across the street from where we lived, the Solids and a Latin King had a beef going on and he happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. You know, he had nothing to do with anything. My son really died for nothing and it's kind of hard. It would have been three years later when I knelt down to pray at my daughter's grave I had a horrible experience. It was like I was receiving the shots because it was all in my head and I was in a great deal of pain. You know what it is to conceive a child, seeing it grow, and you never expect for your child to go first, and then you just lose it, like that, for no reason. Nobody understands it unless they go through this pain, no one.

It's not just the victim being killed, you know. It makes the whole family a victim. If you can take a life like that, something is seriously wrong. Find a way to get around the violence. It's not worth taking anybody's life. It's just too much. There's too much pain at stake for everybody.

### FRANCISCA RIVERA

My grandson asked me, when this happened, he asked me, Grandma, did they catch the guy that killed my mommy? I would say, No. And he asked me, 'What is going to happen to this man?' and I said, 'I don't know.' This is what my grandson said to me, 'I'll never forget those words: 'I don't want anybody to touch him. I want to put bullet holes in his head like he did my mommy.' And my only response to my grandson was, 'You can't act like other people act.'

### FELICIA HALL

I have a younger daughter that's, nineteen months, and she'll never know her brother. She'll never know what he was about. My other two, you know, my daughters, Tiffany, and Eleanor, you know, they have their scars. You know, my daughter really holds on, like to cope, at first. To cope with her brother's death she used to, like, put in her mind that he was in the service, you know, just to get by day-by-day. My younger daughter, you know, she kind of like, you know, she asked me, you know, why people, you know, go around killing good people. You know, 'Why would people wanna kill people mommy? I don't understand. My brother was good.' You know, 'Why would they wanna take my brother from me?' You know that's a question I really can't answer because I don't know what was in that person's mind that pulled the trigger, you know.

### MARIE PELLEGRINI

My son was murdered in Hartford, on October 8, 1995. They said they wanted to rob him. One shot went through the driver's side window and out the passenger side window. The second second bullet shot hit him in the shoulder, and went into the heart. He was almost dead immediately but when the hospital called me up - of course they won't tell you that. All the way down to the hospital we were praying, praying, praying that he would be okay. It's been three years later today, and it's no easier, you know. I just wished that the gangbangers really

thought about what their doing. Taking lives for no reason. To me it's standing for nothing absolutely nothing! I don't know! For nothing , absolutely nothing. Somebody asks you to put a gun in your hand to join a gang tell them,'NO!' Because it's not worth the pain.

### **FRANCISCA RIVERA**

I went to the cemetery; I can't remember the day they just gonna show it and make believe? No, they used it, and that's what happens when you use it. Someone gets killed. Ultimately someone gets killed.

### **FELICIA HALL**

I have anger, but I don't have hate. I just want that person that took my son away from me. I don't want him to die or get hurt; I just want him to serve his time, you know, and maybe some day think about what he did, you know.

### **MARIE PELLEGRINI**

I can't hold grief forever. I can't hold hatred against them forever, because if I do, then these two killers have got another victim -- me and my family have got another victim. Sometimes I don't even think about them. It's like I don't even know it; but I don't even think about them. I know somebody is out there that did that to my son, but I would rather see them suffer in jail. To me that's more of a punishment, never knowing that your gonna go outside, never knowing that your gonna see life again, do anything. That's more of a punishment. I don't believe in killing someone for a crime. I'd rather see them spend the rest of their life in jail.

### **FELICIA HALL**

If you pull the trigger and you don't have conscience then you're just a menace to society. That's it, you know. That's the only way I can wrap you up. If you commit a crime and you do your time and have some kind of remorse and you can learn from the mistake that you made, you know. Then you have a chance to turn it all around, you know. But if you just continue to do things to hurt people and you just don't care, you really need to be locked up forever.

### **JOHN CLUNY**

My wife of twenty-five years was a French and Spanish teacher at Grizwald High School. My son was fourteen. He was a math wiz at Norwich Free Academy. They were murdered on May 24, 1993 by a fifteen year-old neighbor who broke into our house. [He] Skipped school on that Monday. Broke into the house, ransacked our bedroom, found the keys that unlocked a set of guns that I have, in particular a .357-Magnum. Spent all day in the house shooting in the backyard periodically with the guns. Shot my canoe, shot my van, sat at the TV playing video games, ate, shot the console by the TV, blew the head off the dog. He proceeded to stay in the house. My son and wife came home from school about three-o-five. She comes into the house, TV is on. She puts her books on the dining room table, walks down the hallway to tell her son that she has a meeting downtown, walks to his bedroom door and home from school at two-thirty, he was in my son's bedroom closet. When my son came in the house and went upstairs to put his books in his room, he was hiding in the closet and shot him in the back of the head. Then he proceeded to push his body up have had a few seconds of unbelievable fright seeing her son lying on the floor in a pool of blood. Bends down to help him, and he's behind the bedroom door and puts a bullet in the back of her head. I found her on top of my son with her

head slumped underneath the desk with her right eye blown out hanging down to her mouth, lead fragments coming out above her right ear. He hung around for another half hour, and waited for the next person.

When I first arrived home I was home for over an hour and a half before I found them. When I first walked in I couldn't believe what I saw. I ran to the phone, and I didn't even pick it up because I ran back to the room to see if I really saw what I thought I saw. I even reached out and touched my wife's head and to make sure it wasn't some kind of illusion or something. I mean, I just couldn't believe it. I ran back to the phone and called the police. They kept me on the phone for about fifteen minutes while they were getting there. In the meantime, the boy's father showed up at the house looking for his son and I pointed to the bedroom. He came up and he went to the bedroom and he saw them and he didn't -- at that time I don't believe he knew it was his son that did it.

### **FRANCISCA RIVERA**

This man, he approached her. I guess he knew her. He said that he had seen her, whatever. He never said that he knew her. I guess he conned her into going to his car and she left with him. Some say he grabbed her from the street so I don't know what happened, only she knows. He said that he was so mad because his girlfriend had broken up with him; that he was going to kill the first person that he found. He was going to kill and that's exactly what he did. He knew exactly what he was doing and had it all planned out. Why didn't he go and kill himself or kill his girlfriend? He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to sixty years with no parole and no appeals. However, he is eligible for good time which can amount to a total of twelve years off his sentence. So he could see the outside of a prison at sixty-one, sixty-two my daughter, innocent, five months pregnant and kill her just because he was pissed off.

### **MARIE PELLEGRINI**

If they walk, I can't get myself upset about it. If they happen to get off on a technicality in front a jury, I can't get myself upset about it. Because I have to go on with life. If it meant my son coming back from the dead, I would go to the ends of the earth to make sure they got convicted. It's not going to bring him back. I would like to see them get jail time - sixty years. But if they do walk, then I'm just going to live with it. Because I can't let it destroy me, or my family.

### **JOHN CLUNY**

He pleaded innocent in January of ninety-five. I think he should be a hundred and twenty years, should be minimums and preferably the death penalty. The law was grossly inadequate. In trying juveniles for murder they would be allowed to go to the juvenile system. At best they would stay there till they were twenty-one, if convicted of murder, and be out on the street with a suppressed record. They go on to college and have a nice life while you went to the cemetery. I found this an unbelievable situation so I started a campaign to try juveniles as adults. Coupled with the amount of juvenile violence at the time I think the timing was right to convince legislators that something had to be done in this area. As a result of it, juveniles are now, in Connecticut, and in many other states as well, are now being prosecuted as adults at age 14.

**FELICIA HALL**

What did I want to do when my son first got shot? I wanted to die. I was so hurt. I was so angry. Oh gosh, I was a victim myself you know. I'm a victim now. I'll be a victim for life. I want that person to be locked up forever, because I feel like, you know, you're not going to learn anything by going to jail and doing a couple of years, you know what I'm saying? Because you have to watch out when you come out again because somebody else is gonna have tears.

**MABEL YOUNG**

I would like to say a few things about my son Wilbert Young, who was murdered April 26th, and he died April 28th. Well, we never know how our children are going or how we ourself is going, but he died in a tragic way which was very, very bad, and it hurt me to me heart, and I didn't get over it yet.

**HELEN WILLIAMS**

My son, Walter Thomas Williams, a police officer, was murdered in Waterbury while he was working. On December eighteenth my son was doing his rounds in a patrol car, alone. Of course, we went through the trial and all of that and the gentleman received the death penalty, which I am grateful for. The only thing I don't appreciate is how long it will take before he will be sentenced to death.

**MABEL YOUNG**

My detective told me that he went into the hospital at 9:18 [P.M., Friday]. He saw him laying on the street, he said this guy was white that brought him into the hospital. Up there on Woodland and Homestead. That's where this guy saw him laying, so he picked him up, I guess, and took him to the hospital. After they got him to the hospital, he went into emergency with him. Wilbert was alert when he went into the hospital. I didn't know anything about this incident until 11:30 Saturday morning. I lay here in my bed all night not knowing what happened to my son. He never saw his assailant, that's what the detective told me.

**HELEN WILLIAMS**

He knew what he was doing when he shot him in the head, nevertheless. It'll haunt me till the day I die.

**MABEL YOUNG**

I want to see the face who did it. Not that I'm going to do anything because I wouldn't attempt. I just want to see his face.

**JOHN CLUNY**

I have not been able to talk with him. They keep me a mile away from him. This is one thing I would like to know, motivation, which you may or may never find out. I would like to confront him. I would like him to have to confront me.

**MARIE PELLEGRINI**

They admitted to robbing my son, wanting to rob him. I said, 'Why didn't they ask me? I would have given them the money. We work hard for our money. Don't you think you should work hard for your money? Is anybody's life worth it, for money? Don't go out and kill someone for money.'

**FELICIA HALL**

To me, the gangbangers just don't have no kind of respect. Yeah, I live with this every day. I have one tragedy. It's like I just live with it everyday because I got three more to look out for. I just can't stop even though I want to lay down sometime, I can't. I lost one; I have three more.

**MARIE PELLIGRINI**

You go on. You exist. You get up in the morning. You eat. You go to work. But it's always there, the heartache, the memories. Sometimes you think you're doing pretty good. You think you're getting along okay, and then, bam, the smell of a food that he liked. Anything, so many little things just bring everything back to day one. We're getting along. That's all you do is get along. You don't forget that the hurt will never go away.

**FELICIA HALL**

I know spiritually he is with me. It's just I can't touch, feel, or talk to him. That space in my heart is still there. You know that never gets any better. I wouldn't say it doesn't get any better, but it never leaves. I lost my son, but I gained some kind of strength.

**MARIE PELLIGRINI**

Your heart is actually ripped out your chest. There's a constant pain. We can go on laughing and talking, but when you are home alone and with your own thoughts, you know, I could see my son laughing and giggling. He wanted to go on a cruise with his brother. He says to his brother. 'Michael, let's go on a single's cruise.' Meanwhile my son was attacked, but he said to him, 'All right Joe. I'll go on a cruise with you,' You know, its like you got ten fingers and one of your fingers is missing. Always, always, always and it's always that pain in your heart. I can't even explain it. Its like somebody came in and took from my sister's husband. We were out on the golf course and he tees off with a three wood and the end of the club comes off and the ball goes about six feet and the club goes about ten feet. So I says, 'You know, David, your heart out of your chest. It hurts so bad.'

**FRANCISCA RIVERA**

She would say, 'Mommy, one of these days I'm going to buy you a house and a rocking chair and I'm going to take a lot of pictures of you on the porch rocking yourself, and I'll never let you go.'

**JOHN CLUNY**

I remember one time we were flying a radio controlled plane and we were across the field and we flew the plane and the plane goes off into the distance and it's not coming back and it hit a tree about a half mile down the road. He looks at me and he says, 'Dad I forgot to turn the transmitter on,' I said, 'Well that would be nice, you know.' We went golfing three days before he was murdered, I got him a set of golf clubs. The funeral was at the Mount Olive Baptist Church, a church that I belongs to for 48 years. Me, I was kind of out of it, because I really don't remember nothing. They told me everything I couldn't remember. That was one of the worst days of my whole life, and I mean the real object of the game is to hit the ball further than the club,' We laugh. Those were the kinds of things that went on all the time.

**FRANCISCA RIVERA**

She said to me, 'Mommy I have a surprise for you. I'm coming from the hospital, I had an ultrasound, and she said, I'm having a baby girl. And, Mommy, it's going to change my whole life. Will you help?' And I said, 'Yes I will,' And she said, 'I'm going to name the baby after you.'

**MABEL YOUNG**

I never had a day like that in my whole life. It was just like I wasn't there, you know. I was clean out of it. I was the mother of eleven children, you know, and they're still going to say eleven, because it doesn't seem like he's gone.

**FRANCISCA RIVERA**

My body was there, but I don't remember anything. It was a closed casket because the shots that she received were in the face and the head. And he said to me, 'Do you remember when you had your daughter. You remember the last time you saw her?' I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'Carry that picture in your mind because not even any money in the world you could have given me I could have fixed her.'

**MARIE PELLEGRINI**

I am religious. I am Catholic and I do believe there is a hereafter, and my son is in a better place, though I don't want him there. But nobody, nobody can ever hurt him again. No one.

**FELICIA HALL**

Why do you keep letting these kinds of people come out and commit that same crime, over and over and over? Just give them life. Either you learn from it, or you never get a chance to come back out and hurt somebody else. You are not put here for that. God did not put you here to take another life.

**HELEN WILLIAMS**

My son was shot with a thirty eight automatic, I understand. These automatics that are made, if I understand, I may be wrong, but just to kill humans. If you take five of them off the street that - those are five guns that won't shoot at a human being.

**FELICIA HALL**

It's not the gun. The gun can't do nothin' to you. It's the person behind the gun. It's not that gun's fault, because, you know, it's the way it's used. It's the person behind the gun and what's in that person's heart. The gun doesn't shoot by it's self. It takes a person to pull the trigger. Before you pull the trigger, you ought to think about, 'whatcha' pullin' it for?'

**FRANCISCA RIVERA**

It's horrifying. I don't like guns; I can't since I lost my daughter. I hear a firecracker or I'm watching TV. I jump. I start crying. I hate guns. I hate violence.

**MABEL YOUNG**

Jesus Christ, I can't even go out there and sit on my front porch. I won't. I don't even go out there in the summer time. When it starts to get night time, I'm in here. That does effect me because I'm so used to sitting on the porch. You know when it starts to get cool in the

nighttime, you sit out there and have a good time, with your neighbors, with your friends, your husband. I won't go out there and sit no more, and that's inconvenience. If we could do something to stop this gun violence it would be great. It would be real good, and not because my son passed away; I said that before he even passed away.

### **FELICIA HALL**

It takes a good person to deal with life on life's terms. Contribute something good and something solid to the community, because killing us off one by one, pretty soon there's gonna be nobody else to kill. What do you do then? There's nobody else to fight, What do you do then? Where do you go then? There's no where to go.

### **MABEL YOUNG**

Every week it's something - somebody's dying. Somebody's dying from drugs, or from handling drugs, or they're being taken to jail in droves.

### **FELICIA HALL**

I have 26 of them...26 grandchildren, I haven't had any tragedy among them yet. As I said, these kids, they don't work, that includes my grand kids too. They got this way of living, but it's the wrong way to live. They need a job, you know, they need their education. You need more parents advice, you need the parents to look after their children, because nowadays, they don't look after they kids. The kids are up and down all night long. Coming in, don't even care about it.

### **JOHN CLUNY**

When you're fourteen years old and you don't even know what the world is like, and your basic life is home, church, and school, and you have no outside contributing factors, you only have one source to look at, and that is the home. I don't think the boy was happy himself and I don't think any boy who commits murder at 14 has good self esteem at all.

### **MARIE PELLEGRINI**

Well, I don't know that it's really changed. I was always against guns, always against gun violence. I don't know that it's changed. I still feel the same way. I still feel that guns should not be as available as they are.

### **JOHN CLUNY**

He stood in court and he admitted guilt. He admitted that he intended to inflict death. The judge said, 'The fact that you fired a high powered 357 magnum six inches from someone's head is evidence enough that your intention was death.'

### **FRANCISCA RIVERA**

My children are going crazy. Everybody has gone different directions. This man when he decided to take my daughter's life, he took our lives. He took all of us. We died too. We don't know how to enjoy ourselves.