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VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK
 April 22-28

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JUSTICE COALITION'S VICTIMS' ADVOCATE

APRIL, 2007

WWW.JUSTICECOALITION.ORG

Volume 12 • Number 13 • FREE

Victims' Rights Laws DO Empower Victims



Answers from Janie
 by Janie Simpson, L.C.S.W.

This April, the nation will celebrate the 26th Annual Victims' Rights Week to bring attention to

crime victims and what their legal rights are as stated by both federal and state laws. The first Victims' Rights Week was proclaimed in April 1981 by Ronald Reagan.

Victims' rights were slowly making their way onto the national stage when in the late 70s the women's movement began addressing the issue of domestic violence. These spokespersons were vocal advocates for women who were victims of violence in their own homes and began a national conversation about victims that would stretch into other areas of victimization.

In the 80s, child abuse and child sexual abuse came to the public's attention. Mothers Against Drunk Driving was founded by Candy Lightner in 1980. Her 13-year-old daughter was killed by a drunk driver, and her story quickly ignited a national movement to stop drunk driving and help the victims of those crimes. By 1984, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) set aside funds obtained from federal criminal fines and penalties to support state victim compensation and service programs.

Florida was one of the first states to pass a constitutional amendment for a Crime Victims' Bill of Rights. Some of the rights covered in the bill include:

- the right to be protected from the accused;
- the right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any public court proceeding;
- the right to be heard at any public proceeding involving release, plea agreements, sentencing, or any parole proceedings;
- the right to be notified on the release or escape of the accused;
- and the right to give a victim impact statement in court at the time of sentencing.

These are just some of the basic rights of crime victims. Over the years, more rights have been passed pertaining to specific kinds of crimes. For instance, sexual assault victims have the right for their counseling records to remain confidential.

Rights of crime victims are not something the general public tends to think about until crime affects them or someone they love. However, when individuals are impacted by crime, they enter into the criminal justice system that has rules, language, and procedures that are often very unfamiliar to them. Before victims' rights were considered, the crime victim was often lost in the process; now victims are an integral part of the process with legal rights, advocates to help navigate the process, and compensation to help them recover.

Today's victims, while no less impacted by the trauma of the crime, are now empowered through the process.

"Why you wanna do that?" Young man shot in apartment parking lot

By Shirley Shaw

J. R. Jones arose in the early morning darkness, dressed and quietly left the apartment. It was four o'clock and he was on his way to Mayo Clinic where he had been employed since the first of the year.

Joyce Fisher always got up to say goodbye to her son and see him off to work, but for some reason on Sunday morning, Feb. 25, she didn't wake up. Her 16-year-old daughter, Kayla, got up to go to the bathroom and was startled by the sound of gunfire. She looked out the window and noticed that her brother's car trunk lid was raised.

About that time Kayla heard a woman screaming, "Someone's been shot!" Still looking out the bathroom window, she could see a form lying beside the car, and she, too, started screaming. Jarred abruptly from sleep, Joyce quickly ran outside to find her beloved son sitting on the ground, leaning against his car, his arms folded across his body, as if he were hugging himself.

Tears streaming from her eyes, this grieving mother recalled that "J. R.



J. R. Jones

kept saying, 'Why you wanna do that?' I was holding him and I could see where he had been shot in the head. He was getting agitated and I was trying to hold him and keep him still."

Rescue personnel transported him to the hospital where at first doctors thought the bullet had exited his head, leaving little damage, but when they operated on him, they saw how severely injured he was. There was nothing they could do but make him comfortable. He remained on life support for several days before he was pronounced dead on March 1, 2007.

Joyce and her family have lived 20 years in an area known for its high crime rate and abundance of drug dealers, but in the midst of this vice and lawlessness, J.R., 26, had emerged with a strong sense of integrity and purpose. A quiet, disciplined young man, he graduated from Raines High School and went to work. He never missed a day on the job, never called in sick, never even had a traffic ticket.

So how – why – does a fine young man such as J.R. end up gunned down in the parking lot for no apparent reason other than that he was there? His wallet containing about \$150 was not taken, so robbery wasn't the motive. Normal people are left shaking their heads in disbelief, wondering how on earth someone becomes so cowardly, so ruthless, soulless and dead to any semblance of rationality or conscience that he can walk up to a man, stick a gun to his head and cold-bloodedly pull the trigger.

Someone knows who murdered J. R. Do you? If so, then do what is right and call JSO Homicide at 630-2172. Let's get this criminal off the streets and bring him to justice.

Diann Gaymon: Missing, murdered, dumped in woods

By Shirley Shaw

Her family was accustomed to her coming and going, not always knowing exactly where she was, but she was never gone more than a day or two at a time. The sociable young woman would visit a friend or relative to hang out and have fun, but in October 2004 when Diann Gaymon, 26, didn't come home, they knew something was wrong and called police to report their loved one was missing.

Her sister, Angela Allen, remembers her as a joyful person, full of life and willing to help anyone who needed assistance. Diann had her share of problems in life and had recently developed symptoms of schizophrenia, but she was not yet being medicated. A survivor of an abusive marriage, she had given birth to a little girl just a few months prior to her disappearance.

JSO detectives began their search for Diann, but she was nowhere to be found. Then, as so often happens in missing persons cases, someone walking in a wooded area stumbled across her skeletal remains in May 2005. Detectives called Angela and told her of the discovery,

that Diann's ID was nearby so they were fairly sure it was her body; however, positive identification would come from the Medical Examiner's office.

A short time later, the ME confirmed Diann's identity, based on records of a pin inserted into her arm when she sustained a broken bone several years earlier. Sadly, her family knew they would never see her again.

Her daughters, now ages 3, 11 and 14, are being reared by Diann's aunt. They talk a lot about their mother, wondering who could have killed her and often asking

