

Interview Transcript

Marietta Jaeger Lane - *Mother of murdered child*



Claire: How did you feel before...before your daughter was snatched away like that, how-, what-...did you have a view on the death penalty before that?

Marietta: No, I didn't. And it's because I lived in Michigan which has never had the death penalty and still does not, it's one, in fact it's, Michigan is the first English speaking government to constitutionally abolish the death penalty, way back when it became a state. So it never came up in my daily life, you know, I didn't pick up the paper and read somebody's gonna get the death penalty. It, and I was busy raising five kids, you know, and so I wasn't that much in tune with what was going out there in the world, but I knew that Michigan didn't have it. And it, so it really never, never crossed my mind. And it wasn't until Suzy was taken here, and I was told they had the death penalty. But it was clear that, you know, if they caught this...person who had taken her, that he would...if he had taken Suzy's life he would be liable for the death penalty. And so I...I knew that...I mean Montana is a...an amazing place, I knew that I would have some input on what happened to that person. And that may not have been true in a lot of other places, like in Detroit; I don't think it would have ever been true. But I just knew that I would have some input.

It was at the end of a day that was very, very difficult. We were at the camp ground still, and our tent was camped right and, and my folks' trailer was right next to the river. And that was the day that they were dragging the river for, they, the deputies had decided to drag the river to see. And all day long the boat was going up and down the river next to us, and, standing there watching it and when it would stop my heart would stop, you know, because I didn't want her to be found there. And they'd reel up the net and then I'd be relieved, you know, and then, they'd throw the net back in and then it would move again and then stop, and it was a very intense difficult day.

And it just, that day was a tough day for the rest of the kids, I mean, I could just see the toll that was being taken on them, with, you know, this horrible upheaval in our lives. And it was just, it was just very, very painful and that was the day that I allowed myself to get in touch with my rage. And I, you know, in that horrible kind of a situation. Cause my focus was – where is she? How can I get her back? What's she having to endure? You know, that was my focus, but, but that day was so intense on so many levels that, that's like my control was evaporated and my rage just came up, and roiling up. And it just, it just accelerated during the day and I began to imagine, you know, what would I do if the kidnapper, if the FBI found the kidnapper and put him in front of me and said, 'ok, Marietta. Have at him. Do what ever you want'. You know, what would you do? And, and I imaged it all day long over and over, I mean, I was just almost obsessed with it. And I, I knew that I could kill him with my bare hands, that was how, that was how furious I was. And just, well, you know, allowed myself to experience that rage, which I'd never done before. And I felt absolutely justified, and I didn't care what my mother or father said, I didn't care what God said. I, you know, that's the right way for me to feel, and, under the circumstances. And, so getting ready for bed that night I said to my husband because, for me it was a matter of

integrity, I felt like – this is where I am, I have to own this and I can't pretend that I'm anywhere else with it. And, so I said, 'even if the kidnapper were to bring Suzy back alive and well this moment, I could kill him for what he's done to my family', and turned over to go to sleep.

And, um, God initiated the wrestling match in the sense that I just heard God say, 'but that's not how I want you to feel'. I knew myself that I'm, I'm an 'all or nothing' kind of person and I knew if I were to give myself to that rage and that desire for revenge, that it would just obsess and consume me. And I'd be no good if, you know, if when we got Suzy back, which I was expecting to do, or for any of the rest of my kids, and so I knew that what God was asking of me was the best direction I could go. But I felt like one, two things that I struggled with were that I, to be willing to think of the offender with compassion would be to give up my control, which actually is just a reverse, I mean, it's what that person was doing that was in control of my emotions, but I didn't realise that then. And the other thing was – would I be betraying Suzy by being willing to forgive? And, but, you know, God was just persistent, and finally, because, just because I knew that, that if I were to go on filled with this hate and this desire for revenge then I would just destroy myself. And so, with some initial reluctance, I surrendered, and, but that was, that's not to say that I said, 'ok, I forgive him'. Because I couldn't deny where I was and the feelings I still had. So I did the only thing that I could do, and that was, you know, I said, 'ok God, that's how you want me to feel I'm putting the ball in your court. And, you make it happen, but I promise that I will try to co-operate.' And that was the best that I could do at that point in time.

So initially of course, all anybody knew was that...this person had taken Suzy. You know, but in the end it became clear that he was a very sick young man, and he, when he made his confession, only because we were not gonna press for the death penalty but the alternative, he confessed to four deaths, here, in just this county. And they, they felt that he was liable for the death of some of the other children who'd been killed in other counties here in Montana. But the prosecutors there were holding out for the death penalty, and so he would not confess to them.

Then, for me, the bottom line was – how do I best honour Suzy's life? Once I found out that it had been taken. And then in a most horrible way and there isn't anything you can think of that happened to her...that didn't happen to her either before she died, or after she died.

I felt that I couldn't deny him the opportunity for rehabilitation and restoration by participating in his death. And, by becoming somebody who wants to kill people, I was becoming that which I abhor, you know, somebody who had taken Suzy, the same mind set as had taken Suzy's life. And that wouldn't honour her memory, you know, I wanted to aspire to something that was more fitting for the goodness and sweetness and beauty of her life, for me, and so for me that meant aspiring to a higher moral principle than getting even. And that was to say that all of life is sacred, and all of life is worthy of preservation. And even somebody who's done something as terrible as what this young man, David, did. I had to tell myself over and over again that however I felt about him, in God's eyes he was just as precious as my little girl.