

COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCES

"Thank you for your dignity. You made humanity impossible to deny. God bless you"

"Thank you for this performance. I feel as though I have a lot of thinking to do. There was so much beauty and pure humanity in your writing despite the apparent despair of the situation. Thank you for having the courage to share that with me and with the world. You have my prayers."

"I have worked as a psychologist for 20 years. If all my clients wrote as you have, they would not need to talk with me. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and allowing us a glimpse into your lives."

"It's God's work to give voice to the voiceless."

"I was moved by your stories. It was a very much needed reminder that everyone, whether behind bars or walking the streets, is a human being."

"Performances like this are what change hearts about the 'justice' of the death penalty. The reflections about facing your true selves make us, the audience, feel the need to do the same in our lives. Thank you."

"Your words were so powerful. No one, regardless of their situation, deserves to have their life and worth reduced to any single event or aspect of who they are, and your stories remind everyone who has the privilege of hearing them to be kind and compassionate to each other."

"Now I know why the caged bird sings. The man can imprison everything but the soul and spirit of a human being. Voicing your experience liberates you and me."

HOW WE CAME TO ARKANSAS' DEATH ROW

In 2015 and 2016 the Prison Story Project took the stories of incarcerated women we were working with in Fayetteville, Arkansas to incarcerated men at Randall L. Williams Correction Center in Pine Bluff, Arkansas as a staged reading. Afterwards we provided a creative writing intensive for 24 men at RL Williams over two days. We then began a storytelling exchange between incarcerated men in Pine Bluff and incarcerated women in Fayetteville with both prison and public performances of those exchanges.

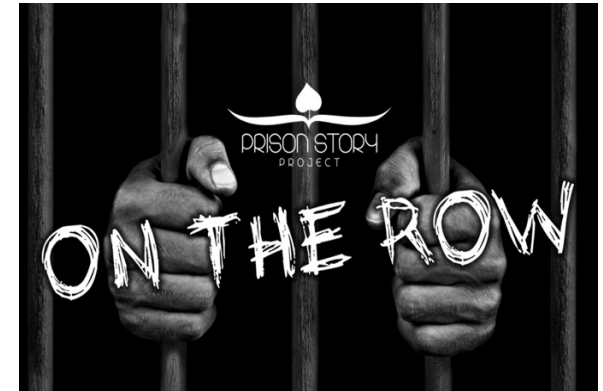
At each of the staged readings in Randall L. Williams Prison, we invited the warden of Varner Prison's death row to attend. It was his witness of those staged readings that allowed us to gain unprecedented access to the men on the row. Eleven of the thirty-four men on death row at the time agreed to participate.

From May — October 2016, we were allowed to meet with the men on the row in person once a month using poetry, personal story and writing prompts that were then edited into a staged reading. We followed up between visits by US Mail.

The stories and poems the death row inmates wrote were curated into a script and presented to the men on the row October 8, 2016 as a staged reading by professional actors and a musician in a cramped aisle between cages that held the men - and then to public audiences in Northwest Arkansas. Six months later the state of Arkansas resumed executions.

Since the 2017 executions, *On the Row* has toured to communities, high schools, and college campuses across Arkansas, Denver, North Carolina, Notre Dame, and West Virginia. In 2019 we toured *On the Row* to Episcopal churches in Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas. *On the Row* was filmed before a live audience at St. James Episcopal Church in Wichita, Kansas.

Please visit our website to view a video excerpt of *On the Row* and to learn more about the Prison Story Project. www.prisonstoryproject.com



Bringing Darkness Into Light:

Sharing Stories of Redemption from Men On Arkansas' Death Row

Founded in 2012 as a ministry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas by storyteller Kathy McGregor, the Prison Story Project benefits incarcerated women and men. They explore their truths through poetry, creative writing, literature, song-writing, and visual art.

Their work is then curated into a staged reading – *On the Row* - performed by actors.

The goal of the Prison Story Project is to enable those whose voices have been locked away to tell their stories, allowing communities to witness the humanity and redemption of the incarcerated through their own words.

To book a Zoom video presentation of *On the Row* at no cost, please contact Kathy McGregor, Project Director

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Why Are We Visiting Episcopal Churches?

Arkansas' decision to schedule eight executions in 10 days, just after Easter 2017, drew intense national scrutiny, sparked a sudden re-examination of the death penalty, and served as a catalyst to a resolution put before the 79th General Convention seeking to build on the Episcopal longtime advocacy on abolition of the death penalty.

The staged reading of *On the Row* is a call to action that supports longstanding Episcopal resolutions for parishes and dioceses to *Explore and understand the reasons for our opposition; the inequity as applied to minorities, the poor, and those who cannot afford adequate legal representation, the contribution to continued violence, and the violation of our Baptismal Covenant.*

The men we served on Arkansas' death row didn't dwell on their pasts or blame others for their crimes. Some of them had found an immense peace that eludes many of us in the free world, and they wanted to share it purely out of gratitude for having found it. By facing their crimes, enduring their sentences, and accepting their impending deaths, they each found ways to survive, seek self-forgiveness, experience God's redemption and retain their humanity.

We didn't know how they would react to our presentation of their writing. When the performance started, we fell to silence and listened deeply. As one of the men wrote us afterwards in a thank you letter, we were all transformed by the writing we heard that day: inmates, teachers, and actors. The writing, he said, culminated in something that's bigger than all of us.

Four of the men we served were on the list of eight to be Executed.

Don Davis and Stacey Johnson received last minute stays of execution.

Jack Jones was executed on April 24 at 7:06pm, pronounced dead at 7:20pm.

Minister Kenneth Williams was executed on April 27 at 10:52pm, pronounced dead at 11:05pm.

Kenneth was proud to know that while he was on death watch the night before his execution, we were holding a community poetry reading of his work at St. Paul's Church (video on our website). He requested that we read his poetry at his funeral in Pine Bluff after his execution. We were honored to do so.

FUNDING FOR 2021 ZOOM TOUR of *Bringing Darkness into Light: Sharing Stories of Redemption from Men on Arkansas' Death Row*

Funding for this project was generously provided by:



Funding for the making of the filmed version of *On the Row* in front of a live audience at St. James Episcopal Church in Wichita, Kansas was generously provided in 2019 by:



Presenting the film, *On the Row*, To Your Congregation & Community

The staged reading is suitable for mature audiences.

It runs 1 hour and 10 minutes with an opportunity for Q&A afterwards.

Kathy McGregor, project director and founder will create and host the Zoom showing and create press releases for you to share with your parish and wider community.

There is no charge for the Zoom showing. We will share information with viewers on how to donate a suggested \$10 to the ministry of the Prison Story Project.

For questions and more information, please contact Kathy at 479-871-4875 or prisonstoryproject@gmail.com