

Capital Consequences: Families of the Condemned Tell Their Stories

Rachel King

Rutgers University Press, 2005

Regardless of where you stand on the death penalty debate, Rachel King's book *Capital Consequences* will strike an emotional cord, as she combines a narrative voice with the passionate accounts of death row inmates' devastated family members. With each chapter dedicated to a different story, the book thoughtfully details the crime, the legal process, the family behind the convicted and the devastating pain and guilt they cannot escape. Each tale is told from a different perspective, focusing on different family members, different stages of the legal process, different outcomes and different types of families.

Among the most moving accounts are the chapters titled "A Mother's Love" and "It Could Happen to Anyone." In both, the horrible pain and helplessness of the families almost leaps from the pages, as one mother recounts her desperate, but unsuccessful, attempts to find help that might have changed her mentally ill son's life, and another struggles to understand a legal system that would ply her son with a last meal yet force her to say her goodbyes at the funeral home.

King, an attorney who works for the Capital Punishment Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, also wrote *Don't Kill in Our Names: Families of Murder Victims Speak Out Against the Death Penalty*. In both books she draws on extensive research begun in 1996, involving family members of both murder victims and those found guilty of killing them.

This latest volume dramatically illustrates the unique, "chronic grief" experienced by death row inmates' loved ones. As the author artfully illustrates, "because their pain tends to elicit less attention and empathy than that of crime victims' families, it becomes much more desperate and isolating." In King's skillful hands, their suffering becomes a testament to a class of victims most of us rarely consider.

Reviewed by Cheryl Baisden