



Andrew Young



Maurine Young



Mario Ramos



Father Robert Oldershaw

***A Justice That Heals* is a story of murder, faith, and forgiveness.**

ABOUT THE FILM

THE CRIME

On June 9, 1996, Mario Ramos graduated from high school. The next day, he murdered Andrew Young. It was one of 90 homicides in Chicago that month and, in many ways, it was nothing unusual – an 18-year-old gang member shot and killed a 19-year-old male on a street corner in broad daylight. But, the events that followed were anything but typical.

The murderer was a parishioner at a nearby church; his victim lived in the neighborhood. The parish priest and members of the community rallied around the murderer and his family – not to defend what he had done, but to defend his *humanity*. They also reached out to the victim’s family, determined to arrive at a form of justice that would heal all concerned.

Their actions brought together the families of the murderer and his victim, started the murderer on his road to rehabilitation and, ultimately, led to a rare – and controversial – bond between the victim’s mother, Maurine Young, and the man who killed her son. Their extraordinary story offers an approach to justice that moves beyond confrontation – and attempts to restore harmony to the lives shattered by a terrible crime.

A one-hour documentary film, ***A Justice That Heals***, originally aired on WTTW in Chicago in April 2000. Produced by Jay Shefsky, ***A Justice That Heals*** opens with Mario, in prison, recounting a dream he had before the crime: blood on his hands, police, a murder. He knew it was coming, he says, yet he did nothing to stop it. Then, Mario and his victim’s twin brother recount Andrew’s murder. Andrew’s parents enter the story, then Mario’s parents. Finally, we meet Father Robert Oldershaw, a priest with the courage to “love the sinner” while he “hated the sin.”

“What interested me so much about this story was that it showed people taking justice into their own hands in a positive way,” said Shefsky. “Initially I wanted to make a

program that focused on the family of an inmate, but when I spoke to Father Oldershaw, I realized that this was the story of two families, two sons,” said Shefsky.

HEALING

In ***A Justice That Heals***, Robert Oldershaw, pastor of St. Nicholas Parish in Evanston, said the first time he heard about the murder, which was committed in the summer of 1996, his first thought was to “lock up the kid and throw away the key.” But his opinion changed when he learned that the murderer was “a son of our parish.” Oldershaw told *The Catholic New World* that, “My initial reaction was to demonize. He’s the shooter. Lock him up. But there’s something good in this young man. “Knowing Mario, a kid who used to serve [as an altar server] with Mass here, helped me to see that he was an ordinary kid, a gentle kid, who committed a very violent act.”

Later, in a statement at Mario’s trial, Father Oldershaw said, “I am here because of two families and two sons. The Ramos Family are members of my parish. The Young Family are members of my community. Even as I grieve the devastating loss of Andrew Young, I firmly believe that Mario Ramos’ life need not be lost. It can be saved. It is being saved. I can’t imagine anything worse than taking someone’s life, but I still love Mario. Faith asks more. That we believe that redemption is possible, that a person can change, and that there is *a justice that heals*.” For Mario Ramos and the family of the victim, Andrew Young, these tragic events were just the beginning of an unusual journey of Christian faith and reconciliation initiated by a Catholic priest and parish who chose to get involved.

In this story, the truly remarkable step was taken by the victim’s mother. After months of depression and struggling to help her family cope with this terrible tragedy, Maurine Young decided that she needed to forgive Mario. She didn’t *feel* forgiving, she says, but she knew that she needed to forgive him for her own sake, and for the sake of her family. She began by writing him a letter.

On July 3, 1997, Mario was sentenced to 40 years in prison. By that time, his correspondence with Maurine had gone on for several months. Soon after the sentencing, Maurine decided to visit Mario in prison, accompanied by Father Oldershaw and St. Nicholas parishioner Arlene Bozek, who had also been corresponding with Mario. Although it was tense and awkward, at first, for everyone, the group used prayer to come together. Maurine then opened up to her son’s killer. “I looked at him squarely and I said, ‘You caused this mess. So now you have a responsibility to hold us up in prayer. You’re part of this family, whether you wanted to be or not, you are. You’re like my own son.’”

Maurine continued to visit Mario in prison. “She told me that, as a follower of Christ, she had no choice but to forgive Mario,” said Oldershaw. The parishioners of St. Nicholas have also accepted Mario as their son. Volunteers from the parish have vowed to write and visit Mario regularly in prison to help him get through his sentence, which won’t be until 2036 when he’ll be 58.

THE TWO FAMILIES

After the murder, Father Oldershaw first visited Manuel and Maria Ramos, St. Nicholas parishioners, who were shocked and ashamed by their son's action. "Something in me, probably our parish's sense of justice and reconciliation, said that to go to the Ramoses was not enough," said Oldershaw. "What about the other family?" The consequences of reaching out to Steve and Maurine Young – at the time, two strangers – were uncertain at best. "If Steve had been there the day I visited the Young family, he might have taken a swing at me," said Oldershaw of Andrew's father, a man whom he now considers to be a friend.

Over the next seven to eight months, Father Oldershaw got to know Maurine, whom he said was already moving on her own course toward reconciliation. "I was surprised by the depth of their reaction. I didn't know them. All I knew was I had a sense that things weren't complete and that I had to feel their grief and anger. That anger, especially on the part of Steve, led to a change in his whole life and opened a door to his new vocation," said the Evanston priest. Steve, said Oldershaw, became consumed with the question of where Mario, and an accomplice, got the gun. He has since become a staunch advocate for handgun control and strict enforcement of existing laws.

CARRYING FORTH

The Youngs now attend St. Nicholas as much as they do their Bible church, the priest said. Over the years that he's visited Mario, Oldershaw said he has noticed a change in the young man. "He's been on a spiritual journey that's more than a 'here today, gone tomorrow' experience, but has lasted for 4 years," said Oldershaw. Both the priest and the documentary producer said that this story has permanently affected their lives.

Maurine Young truly illustrates "faith into action." Her low-key, but heroic embrace of the young man who took her son's life, is an exemplary demonstration of everyday people who live extraordinary acts of faith. Maurine humanizes the complex issues surrounding our criminal justice system; the role of faith in modern society; gun control; youth gangs and violence; forgiveness, and ultimately, redemption.

"Talking to the Youngs and the Ramoses has made me think a lot about forgiveness," said Shesky. "But forgiveness doesn't mean you let someone off the hook. Maurine holds Andrew's murder up to him [Mario] but still forgives him. I'm not sure if I could do that. I don't know how many of us could do that." For Oldershaw, this painful episode is an example of the power of prayer and faith. "If there are lessons to be learned, it is how it serves as another powerful reminder that God's grace is everywhere, even in the most horrible situations, and in those places we least expect to find it."

REENTRY

Mario Ramos has been sentenced to 40 years in prison. By the end of the film, Mario had already changed his worldview. As the film's narrator said, "Meanwhile, the people who were helping Mario were seeing what seemed to be a genuine transformation. As

his cellmate had predicted, he did leave the gang and, instead, affiliated himself with other Christians in the jail. Maurine Young has positive expectations for him: "I see a good student. I see someone...who is wanting to turn his life around, and I don't want to waste that." The faith community has a long history of interaction with incarcerated populations. Prison chaplains, like Deacon Ron DeRose in the film, have long been available to inmates for spiritual guidance. From the perspective of prison administration, officials see religious programming as critical to maintaining an orderly environment and managing the idle time of prisoners. Some research has linked participation in prison religious programming with improved behavior while incarcerated. Still other sources have linked in-prison religion with improved outcomes upon release. Mario already has a high school diploma. His chances for successful reentry will also be improved through prison educational and employment opportunities.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Jay Shefsky



Jay Shefsky
Producer, WTTW

Jay Shefsky has been with WTTW since 1986. His 1999 documentary, *To Live Until I Die*, recently won a CINE Golden Eagle, and was broadcast nationally on PBS in January 2001. *A Justice That Heals* was broadcast on the *ABC News Nightline* program in October 2000. His work has also been awarded with an Ohio State Award, a Peter Lisagor Award for Broadcast Journalism, three regional Emmy Awards, a National Media OWL Award, and other honors. Shefsky's documentaries most often tell intimate stories of everyday people rising above difficult circumstances.

To Live Until I Die profiles six remarkable people as they approached their own deaths. *A Justice That Heals* tells a story of murder and forgiveness in a Chicago suburb. Earlier documentaries include *The Cost of Racism*, which examined the financial toll of racial bias, and *Just Plain Hardworking* – stories of unsung heroism among Chicago elders. In 2000, Shefsky created a new weekly series of historical documentaries for WTTW entitled *Chicago Stories*. Shefsky was born in Chicago and lives there with his wife and their two daughters.

To purchase your copy of ***A Justice That Heals***, please contact Jay at:
WTTW, 5400 North St. Louis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625
Tel: 773.509.5593; E-mail: jshefsky@wttw.com

DISCUSSION AND ACTION

The film focuses on the two families – Maurine and Stephen Young and their children, and Maria and Manuel Ramos. The frightening part is that each family could be our own – parents or siblings of perpetrator as well as victim. Fortunately, in this case, neither family had to suffer their burdens alone. The film skillfully plays out the role of the faith community in providing support to both families as well as to Mario Ramos. When he is released from prison, the faith community can provide meaningful assistance to support his successful reentry into the community.

A Justice That Heals is one more exemplary instance of a documentary film that can be used as a teaching or inspirational tool to help individuals and groups tackle some of life's extraordinary challenges. To support your discussion and action, we've provided suggestions for use by clergy, congregations, and community groups. Perhaps you can think of others who might benefit from such a media resource.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLERGY

- Consider topics on youth violence, gun control, grief, and forgiveness for religious education classes. Ask youth or adult students to research scriptural references as a basis for religious stances on these issues.
- Contemplate a spiritual retreat with other clergy or lay leaders to reflect on the successes and challenges of young people in your congregation and community.
- View ***A Justice That Heals*** with your peers. Discuss ways that church leadership can address some of the challenges.
- Think about establishing or expanding your faith organization's prison ministries, youth outreach activities, reentry support, or grief services.
- Reflect on joining a discussion group of local leaders seeking to address issues of violence in our communities.
- View "Faith and Criminal Justice" in the ***Faith Into Action*** video or read about this issue, and others, in the *Faith Into Action Resource Guide*. (www.faithintoaction.org.)

- ◆ Almost 11,000 attacks or fights with a weapon occurred in American schools during the 1996-97 school year.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics.
- ◆ Fully 78 percent of American schools have a formal violence-prevention or reduction program, according to a survey sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The goals are to help kids solve conflicts peaceably and to create a culture where weapons and violence are shunned, not considered cool.
- ◆ Ten percent of all public schools experienced one or more serious violent crimes (defined as murder, rape, or other type of sexual battery, suicide, physical attack, or fight with a weapon, or robbery) that were reported to police or other law enforcement officials during the 1996-97 school year.
Source: Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97, National Center for Education Statistics
- ◆ Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities, such as those offered in after-school programs, are 49 percent more likely to have used drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than are those students who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities
Source: National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center

Grief is a process that changes our relation from "presence" to "memory."

-- grief counselor Judy Koepl

- ◆ **The symptoms of grief overlap with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder – anxiety, depression, and avoidance.**
- ◆ **Loss and grief affect our spirits as well as our bodies and emotions. We do not fully come to terms with grief until it is acknowledged in all its aspects. Just as we use the skills of medical professionals and the tools of the intellect to cope with some aspects of grief, we turn to faith for others. Often, it is faith that returns us to wholeness**

Source: American Hospice Foundation

- Establish a local e-mail or telephone prayer circle with other pastors. Choose a different prayer topic each week, including children of incarcerated parents, parents of incarcerated children, or formerly incarcerated individuals re-entering our communities.
- Obtain a copy of ***A Justice That Heals*** for your congregation's video library.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS

- For a Women's Day or Youth worship day, consider hosting a screening of ***A Justice That Heals*** following the service. If your congregation has a fellowship meal, after worship services, consider showing the film during this repast, followed by a discussion of some of the implications of the film, perhaps led by a woman or youth worship leader from the earlier service.
- If your congregation has activist ministries on criminal justice issues, youth issues, community reentry following release from prison, or gun control, ponder holding an information fair on a Saturday afternoon, including a continuous screening of ***A Justice That Heals***. Invite local community leaders representing the court system, law enforcement, and education. Or, host a Friday night sleepover for your congregation's young men and show the film, followed by discussion.
- Informally "adopt" a family with a loved one in prison. In addition to visits to the incarcerated party, make sure that you're providing the family members with services and supports, including grief counseling, prayer circles, and fellowship.
- Invite other congregations, across ethnic, racial, political, or denominational lines, to your church, synagogue, mosque, or temple for a screening of the film, as well as a follow-up discussion. Make this the first in a series of cross-cultural dialogues. (Consider using other films in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign to support dialogue and action.)
- In a religious education class, singles ministry, or other forum, hold a discussion about the characteristics of modern-day saints. What, if any, of these characteristics does Maurine Young display?

SUGGESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Begin to establish relationships with faith organizations in your community that serve the same populations that your organization seeks to reach. Use ***A Justice That Heals*** as a starting point for finding common ground.
- Screen ***A Justice That Heals*** at a forum to discuss youth violence prevention.
- Invite members of your local Board of Education, teachers, parents, counselors, and principals to a screening of the film, followed by a discussion of the roles of educators in curbing youth violence.
- Brainstorm ways to engage your local law enforcement community in reducing youth violence after viewing the documentary.
- Show the film in classroom settings, particularly in religious high schools, seminaries, and college criminal justice programs.
- Use the film as a tool in a debate about gun control and/or the death penalty.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES ON YOUTH VIOLENCE

Print

Children Who Kill, Charles Ewing, Lexington Books, DC Heath and Co.,1990.

“Effectiveness of a Violence Prevention Curriculum Among Children in Elementary School,” David Grossman et al, *JAMA*, May 28, 1997, pp. 1605-11. See also editorial, pp. 1641-2.

“Incriminating Developments: Scientists Want to Reform the Study of How Kids Go Wrong,” Bruce Bower, *Science News*, September 5, 1998, pp. 153-5.

“Protecting Adolescents From Harm, Findings From the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health,” Michael Resnick et al, *JAMA*, September 10, 1997, pp. 823 ff.
AMA

Reducing Firearm Injury and Death, Trudy Karlson and Stephen Hargarten, Rutgers University Press, 1997.

“The Relationship Between Firearm Design and Firearm Violence,” Garen Wintemute, *JAMA*, June 12, 1996, pp 1749 ff. Note: this is a special issue devoted to firearms.

“School-Associated Violent Deaths in the United States, 1992 to 1994,” S. Patrick Kachur et al, *JAMA*, June 12, 1996, pp. 1729-33.

Internet

The PBS documentary series *Frontline* covered little criminals.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/little>

The National School Safety Center. <http://www.nssc1.org>

The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>

Handgun Control. <http://www.bradycampaign.org>

KidsPeace, a national center for hope and healing. <http://www.kidspeace.org>

SUGGESTED RESOURCES ON GRIEF

Print

Beyond Grief, a Practical Guide for Recovering from the Death of a Loved One, Carol Staudacher, New Harbinger Publication, 1987, Barnes & Noble books, 2000.

Grief and Faith: Spiritual Paths Through Loss, Published by the American Hospice Foundation, 2000.

I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One, Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair, Champion, 2000.

Speak to Me: Grief, Love and What Endures, Marcie Hershman, Beacon Press, Boston, 2001

Internet

Bereaved Families Online Support Group. www.bereavedfamilies.net

Journey of Hearts: A Healing Place in Cyberspace. www.journeyofhearts.org

Rainbow Faith – A Christian Grief Ministry.
<http://www.geocities.com/fernalea/index.html>

SUGGESTED RESOURCES ON FORGIVENESS

Print

A Little Book of Forgiveness, D. Patrick Miller, Fearless Books of Berkeley, CA, 1999

Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-By-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope, Robert D. Enright, American Psychological Association, September 2001

No Future Without Forgiveness, Desmond Mpilo Tutu, Doubleday, October 2000

"Radical Forgiveness: Making Room For The Miracle," Colin C. Tipping, *The Quest*, June 1998

Women Of Faith Bible Study: Embracing Forgiveness, Traci Mullins and Luci Swindoll, Zondervan Publishing House, 2001

Internet

"Forgiveness of crimes past," Emma Klein, Saturday, February 3, 2001, *The Guardian*.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0%2C3604%2C432743%2C00.html>

The Power of Forgiveness, by Kari Schneider as told to Kathy Pierce, Christianity Today.com, September 2000.
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2000/005/13.78.html>

SUGGESTED RESOURCES ON REENTRY

Internet

The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. (www.reentrymediaoutreach.org)

From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry by Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon, and Michelle Waul. 2001.
www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/from_prison_to_home.pdf

Background Paper: The Effect of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities (*Research Report*) by Michelle Waul, Jeremy Travis, and Amy Solomon. 2002. www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410632_HHSConferenceBackground.pdf

Video

Reentry Outreach Video, which highlights promising reentry practices in community and faith-based organizations. Available from Outreach Extensions, 7039 Dume Drive, Malibu, CA 90265. Tel: 310.589.5180. E-mail: outext@aol.com



A Justice That Heals is one of the public television programs showcased in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. All productions incorporate the theme of **reentry into family and community by individuals who were formerly incarcerated**. These and other programs are elements of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), an outreach project supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Launched in February 2001, MCMOI links public television stations to local stakeholders as a means to promote the Foundation's

Core Results for strong and connected neighborhoods for children and families.

MCMOI campaigns are managed by Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive, high-profile educational and community outreach campaigns for media projects. For more information on the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, please visit www.reentrymediaoutreach.org, or to request your complimentary copy of ***A Justice That Heals***, please contact:

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