

## Jerry Givens – Rest in Peace, Rest in Power

It is with great sadness that we share the news of Jerry Given's death. At one of our earliest screenings, at a Human Rights Film Festival in Los Angeles, an audience member asked, "What are among your biggest surprises filming this documentary?"

Without hesitation Maggie answered, "Never in my life did I imagine I'd be calling an executioner my friend."



And a friend Jerry Givens became, indeed.

Rick spent a whirlwind week with him in early March before the coronavirus turned the world upside down. Missourians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty had lined up a 3-city tour for the screening and discussion of *In the Executioner's Shadow*.

At each event, Jerry spoke from the heart about his transformation from "one who took a life to one who saved lives." No audience member, likely in any of his presentations, had ever heard the inside story of an execution. Jerry opened countless eyes to the anguish of carrying out state-sanctioned killing. He pointed out the death certificate of an executed inmate listed the cause of death as "homicide." Jerry lamented having to think of himself as one who committed 62 homicides. But he'll never know how many lives he saved through his courageous, ceaseless advocacy to abolish capital punishment.

Jerry radiated a warmth that encouraged audience members to approach him privately after panel discussions. With genuine and generous spirit, he'd answer every question. Only when there were no more hands to shake was he ready to leave a venue.



Jerry spoke philosophically of how we all live under a sentence of death, but unlike condemned prisoners we don't know when our time will be up. He spoke of life as divided into 24-hour chunks. And as the title of his book, *Another Day is Not Promised*, makes clear, we never know if the next 24-hour chunk will be our last. Make the most of each day was Jerry's message.

Jerry ended each conversation with, "Have a blessed day." His last blessed day was April 13, 2020, when he fell victim to Coronavirus. For a poor kid from

Richmond's housing projects he made a significant mark on the world. May Jerry's memory be for a blessing. May the day come soon when the state of Virginia honors Jerry Givens by dismantling its death penalty.

Jerry was a founding member of Death Penalty Action's Board of Advisors. If you would like to make a contribution in his memory, please donate to:  
<https://actionnetwork.org/fundraising/jerry-givens-legacy-tribute-gift>

May he rest in peace,

*Rick Stack and Maggie Burnette Stogner*

Producers, "In the Executioner's Shadow"  
<https://www.newday.com/film/executioner-s-shadow>