

USA (North Carolina) Zane HILL, aged 62

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Zane Hill is scheduled to be executed in North Carolina on 14 August 1998. He was sentenced to death in 1991 for killing his 29-year-old son the previous year.

The killing took place when Zane Hill returned to the family home after a period of separation from his wife, Bonnie Hill. Their separation was prompted by a drinking binge, something he would reportedly do about once a year. Bonnie Hill later obtained a restraining order against her husband after he threatened her when he was drunk.

Zane telephoned Bonnie several times on the day of the killing. It was his understanding that she had agreed to his going to a trailer on their property. He drank beer there all afternoon, waiting for Bonnie to come home. When she returned, he went to the house, carrying his rifle with him, believing, he said, that he would be able to move back in.

When Zane entered the home, he, Bonnie, and their son, Randy, began arguing. Randy went to phone the police and allegedly held a pistol up to his father. Zane fired his rifle, killing Randy.

Zane Hill believes that he acted in self-defence. For this reason he did not plead guilty to the non-capital second degree murder charge he was initially offered by the prosecution.

According to reports, the jury at his subsequent capital trial for first degree murder did not hear mitigating evidence about Hill's own abusive father, and that Zane often used alcohol to deaden his chronic head and back pain. After the trial, some of the jurors reportedly stated that they had thought that, had they given Hill a life sentence, he would have been released after only a few years. In fact, Zane would not even have been eligible for parole for 20 years, by which stage he would have been 73 years old. Some jurors have since reportedly said that, had they known this, they would have considered life imprisonment sufficient punishment.

Each month, for the past seven years, Bonnie Hill has driven to visit her husband in Raleigh Central Prison, a long distance from the family home in Beaverdam, a small rural community near Asheville. While she still grieves for her son, she is said to have forgiven Zane for the killing.

Zane Hill also has support from friends within the Beaverdam community, some of whom also visit him in prison. It is reported that the general sentiment in the community is that he does not deserve the death sentence.

Zane Hill is reported to be a model prisoner.

The non-governmental group, Carolina Justice Policy Center, has said: *"The state of North Carolina cannot show genuine concern for her [Bonnie Hill] and other victims of family violence by killing the husband she has been visiting. Family tragedies such as this cry out for better prevention strategies. Family violence is far too common and preventive approaches - not executions - are desperately needed to reduce the level of violence. Zane Hill's wife did not have access to the family violence programs that work with victims and offenders*

*and help women develop plans for their safety when it is threatened. While it's impossible to know if these measures would have prevented the murder, it is certain that family violence programs and protocols are a far better solution than the death penalty to crimes of family violence."*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Governor of North Carolina has sole power to grant clemency to death row inmates in the state. The current governor, who has held office since 1992, has not yet granted clemency to any condemned prisoner, reportedly the only North Carolina governor this century not to have done so.

In April 1998 there were 199 prisoners on North Carolina's death row. Condemned inmates can choose between lethal injection and lethal gas for their execution. The most recent execution in North Carolina was that of Ricky Lee Sanderson, who went to the gas chamber on 30 January 1998 after waiving his appeals. Sanderson's was the ninth execution in the state since executions resumed in the USA in 1977. Since that date, 471 people have been executed nationwide, 39 this year. The most recent execution was that of Danny Lee King in Virginia on 23 July 1998.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters, in your own words, in English if possible, restricting appeals to the following guidelines. Please do not mention Amnesty International or general opposition to the death penalty in your appeals.**

- expressing deep concern that Zane Hill faces execution on 14 August 1998;
- saying that you do not condone the crime for which he was convicted, but noting that he was initially offered a second-degree murder charge, which suggests that the prosecution did not consider the crime deserving of the death penalty;
- noting reports that some of the jurors who sentenced him to death have since said that if the details of his parole eligibility had been known, they would have considered a life sentence sufficient punishment;
- noting that Zane Hill's wife regularly visits her husband in prison, and that he also has support from within his home community of Beaverdam, and expressing concern that Zane Hill's execution would compound the tragedy of Randy Hill's death;
- urging that the Governor exercise his authority to grant clemency to Zane Hill and commute his death sentence.

**APPEALS TO:**

The Honourable James Hunt, Office of the Governor,  
State Capitol, 116 West Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27603, USA

**Fax: +1 919 733 2120**

**Telegrams: Governor Hunt, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA**

**Salutation: Dear Governor**

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- *News and Observer*, 215 South McDowell St, PO Box 191, Raleigh, NC 27602, USA. **Fax: + 1 919 829 4529**

and to diplomatic representatives of USA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.**