

WBUR Story: Those Caught In Bulger's Trail Look For Peace

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By **Martha Bebinger**

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BOSTON — The arrest of James “Whitey” Bulger gives families of his alleged victims hope that they will soon have answers to questions that have been lingering for decades. For one family, it’s a step towards peace with a husband and father’s death.

“Now that Whitey’s captured, that’s what we’re hoping, we’re hoping finally my father will be able to rest in peace,” said Shawn Donahue.

Donahue was 12 in 1982 when his father Michael Donahue was gunned down, allegedly by Bulger, or an associate with Bulger at the time. Michael, who was known for giving anyone a ride, was driving a man on Bulger’s hit list home.

Donahue’s family gathered Sunday at Boston’s Garden of Peace on Beacon Hill to celebrate Bulger’s arrest. They brought candles and flowers.

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—Shawn Donahue, son of Michael Donahue, who was allegedly killed by Bulger or one of Bulger’s associates

“I’m really glad Mike knows we’re all here today,” said Pat Donahue, Michael’s wife, as she looked at her three sons, her daughter-in-law, grandchildren and family friends.

The Garden of Peace looks like a river of stones, many etched with the names of victims of violent crime in Boston. Donahue is next to the stones of two family friends: Mark Charbonnier, a state police trooper killed as he approached a van in 1994 and Ricky Dever, a corrections officer who was killed trying to break up a knife fight in 2006.

Donahue’s youngest son Tommy, who was eight years old when his father died, said he feels a powerful sense of community here, “‘cause we’re not alone. Everybody here has died tragically. Sometimes you come down here and share your feelings with other people, they feel the same pain,” he said.

“I get all upset when I come here,” Pat said. The visit brings a mix of relief and sadness.

"We're glad in one sense that they have him," Pat said, "but it brings back a lot of memories, so it's bittersweet."

Still, this is a step for Pat towards closing a wound left open for almost 30 years.

"It was always that feeling of nobody being responsible, like he didn't exist," she said. "Nobody apologizes for what happened and nobody gives you a phone call to let you know what's going on. They just keep saying, 'Well, we need to catch Whitey Bulger.'"

The Donahues say they haven't been able to mourn their father's death because they've spent so many years fighting a civil case against the FBI's role in the Bulger cover-up that is still pending and trying to find out what really happened the night Bulger allegedly ordered the death of Michael Donahue's passenger.

"There was another shooter in the car," Shawn said. "We have no idea who it was. But Whitey obviously knows who it was, and if there were other agents involved, which I'm sure there were, we'll find out about it. I think he's going to bring everybody down, everybody," Shawn said, laughing. "I can't wait."

The Donahues lapsed into a familiar disagreement: What is the right "justice" for Whitey Bulger?

"I'd like to see him go to Oklahoma or Florida," said Michael Donahue, his father's namesake, referring to states where Bulger could face the death penalty in pending murder cases. "I think we'll get some real justice down there."

Pat Donahue would prefer to see Bulger die in prison.

"Yeah, she's old school," Michael said.

Family members drifted back to the garden to look for small rocks to place as a cairn on their father and grandfather's name stone. Pat reached over the garden, with her grandson spotting her, to place a rock on which she'd written, "I love you."

"Cute, isn't that cute?" she asked, looking around at the family.

These small moments are helping the Donahues get through what they all describe as an overwhelming experience — a roller coaster ride that may go on for months if not years to come.