

August 2014

I believe that every person, no matter what they have thought or done in their life, has a purpose in this world. By ending a life, one is taking away someone humanity can and should learn from. I am not saying that everything we learn will be nice, or fun. I'm definitely not saying that the person has to be free of fault. What I am saying is that, whether or not a person is fighting for the "enemy", has committed a terrible crime, or holds a belief that we cannot condone, that person exists on this earth for a reason and should not be taken from it. These beliefs cause me to request status as a conscientious objector from all war.

I came to these beliefs throughout my life. I have always been peaceful. When I was small, I could not stand to kill anything, even bugs. I became vegetarian at the age of 9 because I could not stand to eat an animal I had seen grazing in a field. I never fought in school, or verbally abused other children. Once when I accidentally hurt my brother, I spent the next hour crying because I felt so badly about it. I learned a foundation for my beliefs within my community at the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting, where I attended with my family throughout my childhood. Quakerism is one of the traditional peace churches, and growing up in Meeting I gained a deep connection to the peace testimony. I also learned much of my nonviolence from the Quaker testimonies "equality". If I view all others as equal, how can one person deserve to live and another not? On that basis, how can killing another human being ever be okay?

I have been actively supporting groups that support nonviolence for most of my life. In middle school I supported People of Faith Against the Death Penalty during the fundraiser that takes place at my Meeting every Christmas. I had the sad opportunity to confirm how I felt about the death penalty when a close friend was killed in an accident with a drunk driver during high school. While her family initially tried to get the harshest penalties against the driver who killed their daughter, I forgave him and hoped that the court would help him redeem himself and become a fruitful part of society.

I had the opportunity to work directly with people with similar stories to the man who killed my friend the year after I graduated from college, when I spent a year working at the Durham Economic Resource Center. DERC is a non-profit organization in Durham, North Carolina that does job training and placement for people with criminal records, substance abuse history, and mental illness. One of the biggest things I learned from my year there was that a person can do unequivocally terrible things in his/her life and still have worth as a human being. I worked with people who redeemed themselves.

I am unwilling to participate in a system that does not give the "enemy" an opportunity for redemption, assuming they need to be redeemed at all. I have experienced loss and anger in my life. I know what it is like to desire retribution. However, I do not feel that I have the right to determine whether someone lives or dies. Human beings are so complex. I cannot possibly know all the reasons for why a soldier is participating in war. Even if I did know, I do not believe any human is capable of single minded killing. There are too many underlying reasons for every action. I do not believe that anyone is truly unforgivable, and therefore no one is worthy of death. Please accept this letter as my written statement of this belief.

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