

Remarks

BY JULIE ERFLE

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It would have been easy to cling to hate when my husband was killed last September. I was certainly angry. Angry that my husband—a good man, a wonderful father, a two-time cancer survivor, a highly decorated officer—was killed by a street thug with a record almost as long as his life. It would have been easy to say, “Deport his family, deport them all!” They killed my husband, and they deserve no mercy. They showed no mercy for Nick, no mercy for me or my children, or the hundreds of other family members and friends and fellow officers left to pick up the pieces of their lives.

Except, “they” didn’t kill Nick. A felon named Eric Martinez killed my husband, and Eric Martinez isn’t a “they.” But he certainly is a powerful example of a failed immigration policy, isn’t he?

When Nick was killed, I knew deep in my heart that there had to be some greater purpose, some deeper meaning for his senseless death. I found that reason when just hours later, the media focus turned to the immigration status of his killer. It was then that the cries for deportation began, the lines were drawn, the political pundits on their game. They all had an opinion and they also had a great deal of anger and hate to go with it.

In some ways, I wished I could have joined in the yelling matches, screamed my way out of my pain, and found reasons as to why simple deportation was the answer. Except it wasn’t that easy for me, and I knew better. I wanted the answer, the solution. So I did my research, read about the issue, talked to the real experts in the field like immigration attorneys and law enforcement officers—those dealing with this issue every day—and I listened to others like me who lived with the consequences of a failed system. And that’s when I realized that it’s a little more complex than some of our politicians and media would have us believe.

But I also realized that there were and are solutions out there. This issue has been researched very thoughtfully by people who are not seeking political office or hyped-up listeners to bolster their ratings. It isn’t just a pro- or anti-immigration or Republican or Democratic solution. There *is* middle ground. We’ve just failed in our efforts to make that the focus of our discussions.

And so that’s why I’m here today, to work with individuals, like Mayor Gordon, who have decided the time to move this discussion forward is now. I have asked the mayor and others to join me in supporting a comprehensive immigration policy outline put forth by the Western Conference of Governors. The mayor will address this policy in more detail shortly but know that this policy outline addresses all major areas of concern within the immigration debate. I hope you will join us in pushing this policy forward.

I will not stand idly by and wait for the day when our legislators finally decide, “Now is the time for action.” That time has passed and, sadly, some of us have paid dearly because of it. Let’s not wait any longer for a solution. The lives of our officers and their families are far, far too precious to just stand by and wait.

Julie Erfle is an advocate for immigration reform. The widow of Phoenix police officer Nick Erfle, she lives in Phoenix with her two children.