

Remembering Paula Bohovesky ~ April 19, 2015

Community invited to honor Paula Bohovesky's memory

With her killers once again about to seek their freedom, the community is invited on April 19 to celebrate the life of Paula Bohovesky, a 16-year-old Pearl River High School honor student, who was brutally murdered in 1980.

The one-hour program at Pearl River Library – where the aspiring actress, musician and artist spent the last hours of her life – kicks off the effort to keep her convicted killers behind bars.

During the program, Paula's mother Lois and others who hold her daughter's memory dear, will share remembrances. Appropriately, student musicians will perform who are about the same age as Paula at the time of her murder.

The Pearl River High School Orchestra will perform "Air on the G String," by Bach and "Canon in D" by Pachelbel.

The high school chorus will sing "Still I Rise," and "Stars I Shall Find."

Richard LaBarbera, who grew up in Blauvelt, and Robert McCain were convicted of Paula Bohovesky's murder and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.

Since 2005, both men have been eligible every two years in April to apply for parole, usually with LaBarbera appearing before a state panel in May and McCain appearing one month later.

Both men have been denied their freedom following hearings in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013.

LaBarbera managed late last year to have his 2013 parole board denial overturned by a court, which ordered a new hearing in December. That panel, like all the others, rejected his request for freedom.

This month both will request to be heard again and just as she has done since 2005, Lois Bohovesky will visit parole authorities in Manhattan to make a victim's impact statement on behalf of her daughter. She will argue that the men who beat and stabbed her and then left her to die, with her clothes in disarray just blocks from her home, should never be allowed to walk the streets again.

Her daughter would have been 51 last New Year's Day. Lois Bohovesky believes that if she had not had her life stolen from her, Paula likely would be a mother,

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perhaps now having a 16-year-old daughter of her own. She's left to wonder what career path her daughter may have chosen and what her life might be like now, almost 35 years later.

On April 17, just two days before the 3 p.m. "Remembering Paula Bohovesky" program at the library, Lois Bohovesky will relive for the Parole Board the horror of her daughter's final hours and the terror that gripped her family when Paula didn't arrive home from her afterschool job at the library.

Paula, a popular young woman who many believe had boundless career possibilities and limitless talent in theater, music and art, left the library for the short walk home at 7 p.m. on October 28, 1980.

According to police and testimony at their trial, McCain followed Paula after she passed close to a bar where he and LaBarbera had spent the day drinking. After a short distance, McCain hit the young woman on the head with a chunk of concrete. At the end of a nearby driveway he beat her. After he attempted a sexual assault, LaBarbera, who watched close by without coming to her aid, then took his turn. He, too, attempted a sexual assault and then stabbed Paula repeatedly.

A short time later, LaBarbera returned to the High Wheeler Bar where he had a conversation with a barmaid while Paula Bohovesky lay dying in the driveway of a vacant home just blocks from where her parents and brother waited, thinking she was working until 9 p.m. LaBarbera eventually went to the police booth in downtown Pearl River and reported seeing a man and woman having an argument up the street.

When Paula didn't arrive just after 9 p.m., the Bohovesky family notified police and began a search of their own. Although a police officer checked the area of Main Street described by LaBarbera, Paula's body wasn't found until after sunrise the next morning.

The murder, just days before Halloween, rocked Pearl River and all of Rockland.

Within a matter of a few days, McCain was located in Arkansas, where his family lived, and LaBarbera was arrested locally.

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Although sexual assault charges were either dropped or resulted in acquittals because of lack of forensic evidence, both men were convicted of murdering the promising young woman.

To this day, neither man has accepted responsibility for the murder, instead point blame solely at the other.

Paula's father, architect Basil Bohovesky, became ill and died after seeing his daughter's killers convicted and shipped to state prison for at least 25 years. At the Library remembrance, Lois Bohovesky will read the letter her husband wrote to the judge at the time of their sentencing.

In 2005 and 2007, Lois Bohovesky and Paula's brother Peter, conducted petition drives in Pearl River, asking the community to sign on to request that parole authorities deny LaBarbera and McCain's bids for freedom.

Realizing the burden that placed on her family, in 2008 County Legislator and Pearl River activist John Murphy, along with a group of local parents, created a not-for-profit corporation called Petition for Paula to take over the process of gathering community support to keep the killers behind bars.

Through the use of traditional paper petitions and an on-line petition, the organization has gathered more than 20,000 signatures and other expressions of support for keeping the killers jailed.

The celebration of Paula Bohovesky's life on April 19 marks the start of this year's effort to build on that support before LaBarbera appears in May and McCain has his hearing in June. By then, Petition For Paula volunteers, who include a number of Paula's classmates from Pearl River High School, will have turned new petitions over to parole officials for consideration. Her classmates, many of whom are now parents, have harnessed social media to raise awareness of the petition effort, generating a new level of support.

If anyone doubts the value of the petitions and letters of support, the December 2014 parole board ruling informed LaBarbera: "You were on parole at the time of the offense. Of concern is the vulnerability of the young, innocent victim. The crime was the continuation and severe escalation of a pattern of illegal conduct. Moreover, there is significant community opposition to your release."

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Lois Bohovesky, who is now 80, banks on that continued community opposition keeping her daughter's killers behind bars for the rest of their lives and sparing her the risk of one day meeting one of them on the street in the community she still calls home.

The author of this letter, Bob Baird, was managing editor of The Journal-News when Paula Bohovesky was murdered and has written about her ever since. He is now a member of the board of Petition for Paula.

The Event

"Remembering Paula Bohovesky"

Pearl River Library

Sunday, April 19, 2015, 3 p.m.

A program of music and remembrances to celebrate the life of Paula Bohovesky and begin this year's effort to keep her killers behind bars.

To learn more, to sign the petition or to make a donation to help the cause, visit www.petitionforpaula.org