



HARRIS COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE CENTER

1201 FRANKLIN



**SOCIAL ACTIVIST**  
**Opposing the  
Death Penalty**

**LIFE LESSONS:** Retired oil company executive David Atwood '63 is helping lead efforts to abolish the death penalty in Texas (Story, page 34).



# Defying Death

A former chemical engineer and oil company executive, David Atwood '63 is leading efforts to abolish the death penalty in Texas.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Men Walking*, has called him “an inspiration.” Supporters of the Texas victims’ rights group Justice for All have called him “a murderer lover.”

**David Atwood '63**, a self-described “death penalty abolitionist,” provokes strong reactions for a man often described as soft-spoken. A longtime activist in Catholic peace and social justice organizations, he launched the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty 15 years ago in Houston.

Today, as he travels around the state speaking to church, school, and civic groups, he finds Texans are more receptive to the coalition’s message: that the death penalty is not a deterrent, that it’s administered unfairly, and that it has sent people to death row who later were exonerated and released.

“Most people are wanting to get more information and are wanting to learn,” says Atwood. “They may say initially that they’re for the death penalty. But many times when they get more information, they’ll change their minds.”

In 2005, the national group with which the Texas coalition is affiliated honored Atwood with its Lighting the Torch of Conscience Award, citing his role as lead organizer of the Texas Journey of Hope. The journey is a statewide anti-death penalty speaking tour by family members of murder victims, death row inmates, and exonerated inmates designed to “touch hearts and change minds.”

Getting people to think more deeply about the death penalty was the goal of Atwood’s 2008 book, *Detour to Death Row* (PeaceCenter Books), in which he recounted his interaction with inmates, their circumstances, and the relationships he has developed with them, their families, and the families of their victims.



Allan Turner, a reporter for the *Houston Chronicle* who has observed Atwood for years, calls Atwood’s approach “low key.”

“Dave is highly respected as a sober, thoughtful person. He’s not going to be engaging in verbal street theater,” Turner says.

There is arguably no anti-death penalty activist with a more daunting task than Atwood’s. In the past quarter century, more than one third of all prisoner executions in the United States have taken place in Texas. Of those executions, one quarter have taken place in a single county: Harris County, home of Houston, where Atwood and his wife, **Priscilla McKendrick Atwood '63N**, have lived since the early 1970s, and where they have raised six children.

Atwood attributes those statistics in large part to powerful and well-funded district attorneys who are virtually unanimous in their support for the death penalty.

But he also believes their days of power are numbered. “People are moving into this state, and it’s changing.”

In 2005, for example, the Texas legislature passed a law granting juries the option of life imprisonment without parole—over the objections of Harris County’s district attorney.

Atwood was at the cusp of that transformation. A chemical engineer, he began working for the Shell oil company

▲ **ALTERED STATE:** The population of Texas is changing, and with that, so are attitudes about the death penalty, Atwood says.

in Trenton, N.J., and relocated when the company moved its headquarters to Houston in 1971. Atwood describes Houston in those days as “an old southern city.” To ease his adjustment, he turned to his church and its social causes.

His transformation was radical. In 1974, his family abandoned their suburban home to live close to the city’s impoverished Fourth Ward, near the free health clinic where the Atwoods volunteered.

In 1991, David retired from Shell and began to research the death penalty. “There was a real vacuum,” he says, “of leadership and action against it.”

He acknowledges the inmates’ crimes are often brutal. “I have struggled sometimes just in reading about them. Most guys on death row have committed an atrocious crime.”

Another struggle comes after he talks with inmates and their families. “You go in and you start talking with a person, and he seems like a normal human being.”

“One of the hardest things for a person like me, when there’s an execution, is being there with the family of the person being executed.” Atwood has stood vigil with family members over 100 times and has witnessed three executions.

In 2009, Texas handed down nine death sentences, a historic low. Citing polls showing Texans are cooling to the death penalty, Atwood says, “politicians have used the death penalty to get a political advantage. I think that advantage is disappearing.”

Abolition, he says, “is on its way.” **R**

# An Influential Voice in a Toxic Debate

Toxicologist Deborah Rice '77M (PhD) earns national recognition for her work to identify potential toxins.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

**Deborah Rice** '77M (PhD) recognizes that harmful chemicals “have really captured the imagination of the general public in the last few years.” And she says that while the media may have fed that interest, the concern reflects sound science. Exposure to toxins, at potentially harmful levels, is not only the curse of certain occupations or regions. Increasingly, it's part of everyday life.

“We're exposed not only through the environment, through lakes and rivers and the air,” she says, “but through the products that we're actually bringing into our homes and using every day.” Those products include things from cosmetics to the lining of aluminum cans—“things that even five years ago, no one was thinking about.”

A former risk assessor for the Environmental Protection Agency, Rice is now a toxicologist with the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Last fall, she was one of 10 people nationwide selected by the Heinz Family Foundation to receive the annual Heinz award.

Established in 1993 in memory of the late Pennsylvania senator John Heinz, the awards recognize individuals who demonstrate a combination of vision, creativity, and “gritty determination” in work that has led to enduring improvements for humankind. Rice is the second Rochester alumna to receive the award in the past three years.

**Susan Seacrest** '78W (Mas) was recognized in 2007 for spearheading a national campaign for safe drinking water. While the awards usually honor individuals across fields, this year the foundation focused on champions of environmental protection.

Rice made her initial mark researching the effects of PCBs, lead, and modest levels of methylmercury—a toxin that forms when mercury released into the air combines with organic compounds—on the developing fetus. Her research, which linked even small amounts of methylmercury to cognitive, sensory, and developmental impairments, is used by many states to establish guidelines for the consumption of fish, in which methylmercury accumulates.

From there, Rice began researching

synthetic chemicals. About 80,000 new chemicals have been developed since the end of World War II. And most, she says, “have undergone no testing whatsoever.”

Unlike new drugs, which undergo rigorous testing by the Food and Drug Administration before they can be made available to the public, “there's absolutely no requirement to test a non-pesticide chemical before it goes out into the environment or into household products,” says Rice.



Chemicals are regulated under the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act, which places the onus on the federal government to determine which chemicals already in use are potentially harmful. States can regulate chemicals according to stricter standards, and several have.

In 2007, the Maine legislature banned the use of the chemical decaBDE—a flame retardant used in furniture and electronics—a decision based in part on Rice's research demonstrating that the chemical is a toxic agent that accumulates in the environment, wildlife, and in human tissues.

▲ **STANDARD BEARER:** Rice's research on methylmercury and other toxins is used by many states to set standards for exposure to potential health hazards.

Later that year, Rice was dismissed from an EPA panel that was reviewing the safety of deca. While industry groups, such as the American Chemistry Council, question many of the scientific claims against small doses of deca and similar chemicals, Rice has a long list of supporters, such as Herbert Needleman, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh who pioneered research into the toxic effects of low doses of lead. In May 2008, he published “The Case of Deborah Rice: Who Is the Environmental Protection Agency Protecting?” in *PLOS Biology*, a peer-reviewed journal of the Public Library of Science.

“Deborah's not afraid of controversy,” says Bernard Weiss, a professor of environmental medicine and pediatrics at Rochester, with whom Rice worked when she was a doctoral candidate. And “grit” is a quality Rice has in abundance, he says, adding that although a horseback riding accident left her partially paralyzed in a wheelchair nearly 25 years ago, “ever since she gets around the world, to conferences, giving talks, and just being as active as you possibly can be.”

Rice's dismissal did spur a congressional inquiry. And she says, “it put the focus on the way the agency chooses these panels.”

Today, she says, the process “is not perfect, but it's improved. And to the extent that that was triggered by my experience, I'm very happy.”



## Q&amp;A

# Accounting for Success

Climbing the corporate ladder requires good mentors, communication, and risk-taking, says Kathy Waller '80, '83S (MBA)

Interview by Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

**Kathy Waller** '80, '83S (MBA), a University trustee who became the controller of Coca-Cola last August, has reached a level in the corporate hierarchy at which men vastly outnumber women and in which there are few African Americans. After joining the company in 1987 as a senior accountant, she worked in various roles, including principal accountant for the Northeast Europe/Africa Group, financial services manager for the Africa Group and the Minute Maid Co., and chief of internal audit, before her promotion to controller.

In an edited interview, Waller talks about her experience navigating the hierarchy of one of the world's most recognized global corporations.

## What are some of the most valuable lessons you've learned in your 20-plus-year career in business?

Nobody gets to be senior at an organization by themselves. Everybody gets help of one kind or another—whether you call it a mentor, a sponsor, or whatever you prefer to call it. I tell young people: Talk to people who've done it before you have. Talk to people who can help you navigate and understand how to interpret things that you might not interpret correctly. Sometimes we get upset about things, and we shouldn't. And other times we should. And you don't necessarily know how to make that distinction early on in your career.

## Who have been your mentors?

I believe in having mentors internally and externally. I would say, first of all, my sister, Audrey. She was my first mentor and she's been a consistent mentor throughout my career. She's not an accountant. So she comes at things from a different perspective. But she knows me better than anybody. She can say to me, "that was really stupid," or "why don't you go stick up for yourself." She can tell me things that other people might not be willing to tell me. Another person would be my chief financial officer, Gary Fayard. I got to know him when I first



joined the company and he was a partner at Ernst & Young on the Coke account. He knows me very well, and if I go to him and say, "this really bothered me," he'll say, nine times out of 10: 'OK. I got it. That would bother me too. But you need to get over it, and here's why you need to get over it.' You might not always agree with a mentor. But you need to respond in a way that keeps the lines of communication open.

## There aren't very many women—either white women or women of color—in senior positions in American corporations. Is it because most women have trouble finding good mentors?

Well, I don't think it's a grand conspiracy that's keeping us out. I think there are several factors. Access to information is very important. Men get information in a lot of different ways. They get it on the golf

course, or having drinks after work, or by debriefings in very casual settings. Women don't always have access to those casual settings. It's not necessarily that they aren't wanted, or wouldn't be invited. Sometimes they have to pick up the kids, or sometimes it's just not comfortable for women to go hang out at a bar with the guys. I don't think men think of what they're doing in these settings as mentoring, but it is. And I think that's what women are missing—that network which is outside of the day-to-day work itself. And that's one reason it's so important to make the connection with someone who is then going to be instrumental in helping you succeed.

## Do you think men of color can face a similar kind of exclusion?

Yes, to some extent, although the men still have better access to the informal network than women do.

## Do women face any other barriers?

Yes. I think women are very hard on themselves. I'll give you an example. I was reading some research the other day about men

▲ **IN CONTROL:** "Nobody gets to be senior at an organization by themselves," says Waller, who last year was named controller of Coca-Cola, the latest executive post in her two-decade career with the company.

and women who come out of the same graduate schools with the same type of grades and what happens to them after their first job. And the research suggests that men are further along in their careers than the women, even though they started out as equal. Part of the reason was that the woman was willing to start at an entry level job and the man wasn't; and when they both started at entry level jobs, the men took several jumps, whereas the women took a steady pace up. Why is that? Well, she thought she had to prove that she could do this particular job. So she thought, "OK, I'll start at entry level, I'll work my way up, and I'll prove myself." He said, "I don't need entry level to prove myself. I'm going to jump right in here at a higher level."


#### Would you say you've hesitated to take risks?

Absolutely. I've had the same conversations with myself that a lot of women do. But I've been fortunate enough to have people who have helped me work through my hesitation and go after challenges. I've become aware of negative internal conversations and now I stop them. But if you look back at my career, I, too, started at entry level. And I've worked my way up. I've been at Coca-Cola for 22 years.

#### How can business schools help?

By making sure that women graduates immediately become competitive and don't immediately knock themselves out of the competition. Business schools should encourage women to go for the higher level job versus starting at an entry level.

#### You haven't mentioned the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities, which is so often assumed to be a reason why women lag in status and pay.

I think this is changing to some extent with more companies offering flexible work arrangements and recognizing the importance of diversity to their success. Younger men are also driving the change. Next-generation men want to be there for their families just as much as women do. Everybody wants to be there for the soccer game. Everybody wants to be there for Little League. So that's going to be interesting to watch. There's a huge generational difference. These men are going to make sacrifices that are going to help men and women. It's going to help level the playing field quite a bit. 

## In the News

### EASTMAN GRADS CLAIM GRAMMYS

Soprano **Renee Fleming** '83E (MM), tenor **Anthony Dean Griffey** '01E (MM), and jazz pianist and composer and arranger **Bill Cunliffe** '81E (MM) were winners at the 52nd annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles in January. Cunliffe's award—for Best Instrumental Arrangement for his "West Side Story Medley" on *Resonance Big Band Plays Tribute to Oscar Peterson* (Resonance Records)—was his first. Fleming and Griffey, who both have two awards, picked up two more. Fleming won Best Classical Vocal Performance for her album of arias, *Verismo* (Decca), and shared Best Classical Crossover Album, for her role on *Yo-Yo Ma & Friends: Songs of Joy and Peace* (Sony Classical). Griffey shared the Best Classical Album and Best Choral Performance for his role on *Mahler: Symphony No. 8; Adagio From Symphony No. 10* (SFS Media).



**FIRST GRAMMY: Bill Cunliffe '81E (MM) won for Best Instrumental Arrangement.**

### REVEREND PAUL MCDANIEL '59 (MA) APPOINTED TO RIGHTS COMMISSION

**Paul McDaniel** '59 (MA), a community activist and pastor of the Second Missionary Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn., has been appointed by the state's governor to the board of the Tennessee Human Rights Commission. The commission is a state agency charged with investigating and eradicating discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations. The board consists of 15 members, each of whom serves a six-year term.

### CELENA EVANS '96 IS ONE OF ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE'S '40 UNDER 40'

**Celena Evans** '96 is one of the top 40 business professionals in the Atlanta area under the age of 40. That's according to the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. Evans, who earned a degree in mechanical engineering at Rochester and a graduate business degree from Emory University, leads a team at the climate-control device company Heatcraft Refrigeration. She is also the vice president of a mentoring and networking group for executive-level women alumni of Emory's Goizueta School of Business and a board member of an organization that teaches high school and college students how to manage their finances.

### ALUMNA AWARDED LARGEST INDIVIDUAL GRANT IN ARIZONA STATE'S HISTORY

**Kimberly Sidora Arcoleo** '06M (PhD), an assistant professor at Arizona State University's College of Nursing and Health Innovation, has been awarded a \$2.5 million grant—the largest individual investigator award in Arizona State's history—by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, part of the National Institutes of Health. Arcoleo will lead an interdisciplinary study on asthma disparities in Latino children, investigating the similarities and differences between Mexican and Puerto Rican families regarding beliefs about asthma and management strategies.

### ROSALYN ENGELMAN '78 (MS) WINS GOLD MEDAL AT FLORENCE EXHIBITION

Exhibiting alongside more than 800 artists from 78 countries at the invitation-only 2009 Biennale Internazionale Dell'Arte Contemporanea di Firenze, New York City artist **Rosalyn Engelman** '78 (MS) was awarded the Lorenzo di Medici "Il Magnifico" Gold Medal for Career Achievement in Art. Held every two years in Florence's 16th-century fortress, Fortezza da Basso, the exhibition is judged by an international panel and sponsored by the Italian government, the United Nations, and various arts and civic organizations. Engelman displayed three paintings: *Fog*, *Emotion*, and *Bal Harbour Sunset*.