



## Merciful Like The Father

At 9:00 in the morning of 19 April 1995 Bud Welch's home shook to its foundations as windows cracked twenty-five miles away. He stared in amazement as TV news cameras zoomed in on an all-too-familiar site. "You could see that on the north side . . . there was nothing there. It was just gone." There and then he "pretty much gave up all hope." For the Murrah Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City was the workplace of his only daughter, Julie Marie. "She was killed on the Wednesday morning. Her body was found on the Saturday." Three days after the bombing Bud watched as the accused bomber, Timothy McVeigh, was led out of the courthouse. "I hoped someone in a high building with a rifle would shoot him dead," he remembers. "I wanted him to fry. In fact, I'd have killed him myself if I'd had the chance."

Bud visited the bomb site every day and heavily "self-medicated" his grief with alcohol during a ten-month period of "wanting retribution." One day, in January 1996, his head splitting from the previous night's drinking and every muscle in his body aching, he realized that he had not moved one step forward since the blast. "I have to do something different," he thought, "because what I'm doing isn't working."

Over several weeks of intensive reflection Bud came to see that his daughter and the other 167 victims had been killed by hatred and revenge.

The Murrah Building explosion was Timothy McVeigh's and Terry Nichols' retaliation for the Government's violent suppression of the Branch Davidian sect at Waco, Texas, in 1993. To Bud the trajectory of violence was clear. "Seeing what they'd done with their vengeance, I knew I had to send mine in a different direction." He began to speak out against the death penalty.

After Timothy McVeigh was sentenced to death, Bud arranged to meet his father, Bill, in Buffalo, New York, to show him that he did not blame him for Julie Marie's death. As it happened, Bill's daughter, Jennifer, joined them. "I can't cry," Bill said as they walked in the garden, "even though I've got a lot to cry about." Inside, looking up at Tim's graduation picture over the kitchen table, Bud remarked, "God, what a good-looking kid." Bill looked up too, and "a big tear rolled down his face. It was the love of a father for a son."

There was to be more. "When I got ready to leave, I shook Bill's hand, then extended it to Jennifer, but she just grabbed me and threw her arms around me. She was the same sort of age as Julie . . . I don't know which one of us started crying first. Then I held her face in my hands and said, 'Look, honey, the three of us are in this for the rest of our lives. I don't want your brother to die and I'll do everything I can to prevent it.'"

"As I walked away from the house, I realized that until that moment I had walked alone, but now a tremendous weight had lifted from my shoulders. I had found someone who was a bigger victim of the Oklahoma bombing than I was, because while I can speak in front of thousands of people . . . about Julie, if Bill

McVeigh meets a stranger he probably doesn't even say he had a son." Perhaps this is why Bud Welch takes time each year to renew his friendship with the father of the man who killed his daughter.

Something happened to give Bud the strength to bridge this divide. "About a year before the execution I found it in my heart to forgive Tim McVeigh. It was a release for me, rather than for him."