

## **The power of forgiveness: An interview with Linda Biehl**

*In 1993, Amy Biehl, a 26-year-old Stanford University graduate, was a Fulbright scholar in South Africa, researching black South African women's struggle for equality in the new government that would replace apartheid. On August 25, she left her office to drive three colleagues home to Gugulethu, a township outside of Cape Town. En route, she was spotted by a mob marching through the township, shouting ONE SETTLER, ONE BULLET. The crowd turned its fury on Amy's car, smashing the windshield and windows with rocks, one of which struck Amy in the head. With blood gushing from her wound, Amy got out of the car and ran towards a garage across the road, pursued by her attackers. Although her colleagues tried valiantly to protect her, shouting that Amy was a comrade, the mob continued to stone and stab Amy, who died as a result of her injuries.*

*Amy's parents, Linda and Peter Biehl, responded to their daughter's death by taking up her work to support South Africa's transition to democracy. Unexpectedly thrust into the international spotlight, they struggled to say nothing that would jeopardize South Africa's pending elections—the first multi-party elections since apartheid. Later, they established the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust, a nonprofit organization that creates and runs after-school job-training, art, sports, nutrition, and other educational programs in townships surrounding Cape Town, including Gugulethu, where their daughter was killed.*

*Five years later, when the young men convicted of their daughter's death applied for amnesty through South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Biehls traveled to the hearing, met their daughter's killers and, to everyone's surprise, spoke on behalf of amnesty. Two of the men responsible for their daughter's death, Ntobeko Peni and Mzikhona "Easy" Nofemela, now work for the Amy Biehl Foundation. They often accompany Linda Biehl on her various speaking engagements around the world.*

*Although Peter Biehl died in 2002 at the age of 59, his wife of 38 years, Linda, continues to carry on the work Amy and Peter left behind. A vivacious blonde with large, expressive eyes and a quick smile, Linda's diminutive stature belies her strength. She spends a good part of every year in South Africa, administering the foundation named after her daughter, which, since 1994 has disbursed more than \$8 million in funds to desperately needy communities in South Africa. Moreover, thousands of children a day participate in Amy Biehl Foundation programs.*

*Because Linda is so infrequently home in Newport Beach, she lives with her son and daughter-in-law, Zach and Denise, and their daughter, Dalby, when she is in the States. That is where I met Linda one afternoon in May. To avoid being distracted by the baby, we drove to a coffee shop and talked for nearly three hours. We spoke at length by telephone on two additional occasions.*

**Goodman:** You've survived what most parents would describe as their worst nightmare: The violent death of a child. Yet you have turned this nightmare into an inspirational model of forgiveness, demonstrating what life *could* be like if we each responded to tragedy with an open heart, instead of a heart shut down by pain. Can you walk us through the process you took to get to that place of forgiveness?

**Biehl:** There wasn't hatred and bitterness at the beginning, fortunately, because of Amy's communication with us and because of who she was as a person. From the time she was very young, she always talked about issues that were important to her. She had made the struggle against apartheid in South Africa her academic work and life's passion, short as her life was, and she always told us her reasons for that.

In many ways, she prepared us for what happened to her. She often talked about South African blacks killed during the struggle years and how their deaths were reported as numbers, while whites were named, described, and even their pets mentioned. She always told us that if anything happened to her, she would rather be a number than a name.

We also knew that Amy was willing to do things that other people, even her colleagues, feared to do. Although she wasn't irresponsible--she knew the risks--other people might say she "crossed the line," that she was too much of a risk-taker.

But she had always challenged herself. As a national championship high diver and captain of the Stanford diving team her senior year, she always talked about challenging herself and overcoming pain. In her journals, she often used swim practice as a metaphor: You hit a wall and you're not sure you can make it, but once you break that pain barrier it's exhilarating, and you want to do it again and again.

Therefore, when we heard the news, I don't think we had a choice about our response. If we were going to honor Amy as the human being we loved, we would be expected by Amy herself to understand the situation as she would understand it: that the young people who had killed her were oppressed people; that they were freedom fighters, fighting for the liberation of their families, their people, and themselves. They were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their liberation, and Amy just happened to get caught in the crossfire.

**Goodman:** Yes, but she was your daughter. It seems to me that the emotional pain of that loss would override any intellectual explanation for it.

**Biehl:** You know, you can look back over 26 years and you can see character evolve. We could all say about Amy that how she died was in keeping with her character and who she was.

My husband also said something very early on when people were asking us this type of question, particularly when we were preparing to attend the amnesty hearings at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He said, "You can't espouse values for others, and not live them yourself. If you do, you're morally corrupt."

I'm not saying isn't painful! Physically, the pain just grips you. But I don't believe people can predict their reaction to something like this until it actually happens. And, as time goes on, I do meet more and more incredible people who have reacted positively to tragedy. In fact, I think it happens more often than people think.

For example, if you lose a child to leukemia, what do you do? You go out and raise money for leukemia research. If you lose a child to a drunk driver, you go out and start MADD. Doing something to help others is a very powerful response to tragedy.

I think it has something to do with psychologically carrying on your child's legacy. Plus, it allows you a certain degree of liberation in your own soul.

I remember the very first trip we made to South Africa, six weeks after Amy was killed, my husband in particular was abused by so many people saying, “You’re not going to take your family over there, are you? You’ll all be killed!” If we had listened to that, we *would* have drowned. We would have been mired down in a situation where we *could* have lost our way.

**Goodman:** You went to South Africa six weeks after Amy’s death?

**Biehl:** People wanted us to come immediately! We got faxes and phone calls and letters saying “When are you coming?” I’m talking about people from the black community where she was killed. People who were colleagues of Amy’s. They wanted us to come and see the conditions they lived in, the work Amy was doing. They wanted us to know how they—from all levels of South African society—had met each other through Amy. She had been a facilitator, bringing together people from human rights groups, women’s coalition groups, township groups, university groups. They wanted to share with us their experience of her.

So we went to South Africa, and we didn’t go see the fancy white houses in Cape Town or eat in the fancy restaurants, or do all the things that tourists do. We went into black communities where kids went to school in dumpsters. Where families had no running water and no electricity.

Seeing that firsthand—the trauma of a violent life—gave us a degree of empathy. And that empathy got us through.

You also must remember that Amy’s death was not personal. She was not killed because she was Amy, but because she had the white face of the oppressor. By the same token, the young men who were arrested and convicted and sentenced could have been any of a hundred thousand oppressed young men who were part of a group that had been trained in military fashion to kill—for a reason. We never saw them guilty as individuals. We saw them as having acted as part of a group, a mob. It wasn’t until the Truth and Reconciliation process that they became individuals to us, which was five years after it happened.

**Goodman:** You never held the young men convicted of her murder responsible for Amy’s death?

**Biehl:** I held the white apartheid government responsible for Amy’s death! There’s no doubt about that! Over generations they had created a system of oppression that created monsters. They had taken the land and the country away from people who rightfully belonged there. I liken it a lot to our Native American issues.

Our family lived in New Mexico for six years, you know. Amy went to junior and senior high school there. She learned what it was like to be in the minority. Our New Mexico experience also helped prepare us to understand what it might be like when you’ve been the rightful owner of land that has been taken away from you and you now live in a system of apartheid, where people are separated. It creates a climate of fear. In fact, I think that’s why so many white people are still so fearful today. They don’t have an opportunity to interact with people of other cultures other than perhaps their domestic workers. People fear what they don’t understand.

**Goodman:** Do you want to say anything more about the process of how you got from grief to something else?

**Biehl:** The other main factor was the amazing number of people who entered our lives. South Africans came to our home to sit vigil and sing freedom songs at Amy's memorial service. We had the media here at every turn of our heads. We had to talk and tell Amy's story from the very beginning, and I think that made us realize that the story was bigger than we were.

Part of the whole Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa was to give common people a chance to tell their stories. Although that can be painful, in our case it also helped us to realize that we had some power in our voice. We weren't left powerless. There were a lot of things still happening in South Africa as they headed towards their elections, and even people in the U.S. State Department were nervous that what we said might derail the elections, which of course would have been the opposite of all that Amy worked for.

So we realized we did have power. We could choose to respond in ways that would support Amy's life and work, or we could have let our grief overwhelm us and say things we'd perhaps regret.

My point is that the process of grief does vary according to each individual's circumstances. I can't tell someone else how to get through their grief. I can't give you 10 steps. I can just say what happened in ours.

**Goodman:** Was Peter instrumental in how you dealt with Amy's death?

**Biehl:** Oh yeah. But see, through nearly 40 years of marriage, we almost always had similar responses. We grew up together in the same town outside of Chicago. We went to the same church. We grew up with very similar sets of values and expectations.

The night we heard about Amy, everyone came home. Peter got home from Salem, Oregon, where he'd been working; Amy's sister Molly got home from D.C., where she'd been working. Kim and Zach were already here in Newport Beach.

Anyway, we all got together and we were all on the same page in terms of our response. Zach was probably the most physically upset, but still he was amazing. Although he was only in high school, he answered the phone and became the press secretary. But as I said, Amy's death was bigger than us, and we each had our jobs to do.

Don't get me wrong: I would never want to go back through those first couple of weeks. When I see other parents having to go through it, I feel so sorry for them. I met Rachel Cory's parents—she's the girl who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza—at the University of Washington, where I was speaking. I asked them if they would like to come up and talk about Rachel. And they got right up on the stage and started telling about their daughter. Because telling your story helps.

**Goodman:** Marshall Rosenberg, who is an advocate for restorative justice, recommends that victims not forgive too readily; nor should the perpetrator merely be required to say "I'm sorry," without truly empathizing with the pain he has caused another.

**Biehl:** What, white people should not too readily forgive black people for what they did to win their freedom? I'm surprised that black South Africans forgave the white people as readily as they did! But they were fortunate to have their moral leaders—from Nelson Mandela to Desmond Tutu and others—advocating a return to the spirit of *ubuntu*, which is a spirit of restoring harmony.

See, what I'm saying is that there was really never anything to forgive because we understood the situation. Why would we have to forgive people who were fighting for their own lives and freedom?

Nonetheless, forgiveness IS liberating. It's liberating for yourself *and* for the perpetrator. At the amnesty hearing, Easy and Ntobeko originally thought we were all about propaganda for South Africa, until they looked into our eyes and saw that we did not harbor bitterness. That's when they were liberated.

But you must understand that Amy's killers didn't see themselves as murderers. They saw themselves as soldiers. And as soldiers, they could forgive themselves. It was when they tried to return to the civilian world, when they tried to return to their families and their community, that they had to reconcile within themselves what they had done. And that's when our forgiveness gave them their freedom and the right to go on with their lives.

**Goodman:** That's very interesting, because it has such huge implications for returning soldiers, or veterans from any war.

**Biehl:** Oh, it does! And not all four of the men who killed Amy are doing as well as Easy and Ntobeko—because not all of them have been able to return peacefully to civilian life. Even though they received amnesty, it didn't change their hearts. Nor were the hearts changed of other members of the mob that killed Amy. They've become part of the crime problem in South Africa. They're back in prison because the only skills they've been trained in are violence.

I get hate mail from people who say, 'You support crime in South Africa!' No, I don't support crime in South Africa. Look, no one was there to return those people properly to their communities. Easy and Ntobeko had the ability in their hearts to meet us. They were very courageous, even though they were called sell-outs for coming to work with us, taking a paycheck, getting training.

They basically adopted my husband and me, giving us the Xhosa names for grandparents. I've become "Makhulu," grandmother, part of their family, part of their community. I think that may be the most unexplainable part of this whole thing for me—that they have welcomed me into their families, that they *want* me to be part of their lives.

The only rationale I can come up with goes back to *ubuntu*, the concept of restoring harmony, both in the internal and external sense. By welcoming me into their community, by becoming family, they are helping to restore what I lost, and my presence helps to restore their humanity to them.

**Goodman:** What is *ubuntu*?

**Biehl:** *Ubuntu* is a concept I learned through (Archbishop) Desmond Tutu. It refers to the traditional justice system of the indigenous people. It means, basically, that “a person is a person through other persons.” That no man is an island.

Traditionally, in the early days when there were village elders, the indigenous tribal justice process was intended to be restorative and healing, rather than retributive. Our criminal justice system is retributive, for the most part, based on meting out punishment. But in *ubuntu*, restorative justice meant restoring harmony to the community.

A lot of people think that restorative justice is about letting people off scot-free, that there’s no accountability in it, but that’s not true. It’s about holding people accountable in constructive ways.

Restorative justice is also about dealing with root causes. Root causes should guide our response to a crime. Although restorative justice cannot eliminate systemic wrongs, it can take them into account. In South Africa, apartheid oppressed 80% of the population and reduced them to the level of animals. Restorative justice seeks to restore their humanity. And it can promote healing on the personal level.

Restorative justice is about hope, while retributive justice is about hate. Putting someone in jail, or even giving them the death penalty, won’t restore anything the victim lost, and it doesn’t address the root cause that created the problem in the first place. Retributive justice may hope to make the problem go away, but history has shown that it’s not very effective. I think the retributive approach holds you back--as an individual, and as a society. Retributive justice is about maintaining yourself as a victim your whole life. It’s the idea that “two wrongs make a right.” But they don’t, really. Restorative justice takes more of a problem-solving approach.

It was Desmond Tutu’s belief that *ubuntu*, was the nation’s best chance for avoiding a bloodbath in the aftermath of apartheid. President Mandela shared his belief.

You see, Mandela had come out of prison ready to forgive. He had studied world history enough to know that the best thing for South Africa would be the coming together of blacks and whites, not a retributive approach against the whites. Plus, Mandela and Tutu also knew that the South African indigenous people had that spirit of *ubuntu* within them. So they, and others, worked to convince those who were more militant that they would be doing a disservice to their people if they destroyed the country’s infrastructure, or went on mass murders of white oppressors. The Truth and Reconciliation process was established as a middle road—a way to allow for reconciliation without a blanket amnesty.

**Goodman:** Did white Africans also take part in the Truth and Reconciliation process, confessing and acknowledging accountability?

**Biehl:** Some, although most of the top leadership didn’t. But yes, there were white people who came before the TRC and asked for amnesty—over crimes they had committed and were already in prison for, or might have known that they could be tried for and imprisoned for. They were typically police and military people; not many civilians came forward. There is a film called *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, which follows a few of these amnesty stories, both black and white.

At any rate, the amnesty process involved far more blacks than whites. Still, because it was a public process, it helped to inform the white population of the oppression and the suffering that had gone on under apartheid.

A lot of whites used to say they didn't know. Why didn't they know? They were all separated. They didn't have television until 1976, and it was censored. They basically had no curiosity, or were fearful. They knew they had a black cleaning lady, but they didn't know what was going on in the community where she lived. We, in the west, knew more, because footage was smuggled out and our media wasn't censored.

Could you be that ignorant? I don't know, I guess we put our blinders on. After Katrina, what did we see people saying about New Orleans? "Oh, I didn't know."

At any rate, the TRC stories were broadcast every Sunday night. White people had an opportunity to learn what had been going on, and it made them see themselves a little bit differently. They realized there had been great suffering and great pain—and that it was still continuing.

How does this relate to Amy and to where I am at this time? It's been an amazing journey to be involved with South Africa at the level I've been able to. To sit in community councils, to go to traditional events, like weddings, or rites of passage, to really have this understanding of how these cultures work. Amy gave that as a gift to me.

I've also learned so much about humanity through *ubuntu*. I know I am who I am today, not only because of Amy, but because of Easy and Ntobeko, and because of all the other people I've met along the way. They have become a part of me and I have become a part of them. I think of myself less as an individual now. I don't feel that it's "me, me, me," all the time. I feel part of a whole. If I'd closed myself off and become bitter after Amy's death, none of that would have been available to me.

**Goodman:** You've said that you don't believe in closure. Why do you say that? What have you experienced instead?

**Biehl:** Apart from seeing Amy's body and recognizing that she is physically dead, why would I want closure? We can never bring Amy back, but on the other hand, do I really want to "close" her—which would mean wiping out her memory and all that she meant to us? It's not even possible. *Ubuntu* says that a person is a person through other persons...it doesn't necessarily mean that those other persons are alive.

And then, far from providing closure, Amy's death *opened* a lot of doors for me, and for others, in ways that didn't seem possible before her death. I met people and communities, and found out that, even people who might have been involved in her murder, were human beings. Both Easy and Ntobeko consider Amy a comrade in their youth group. Amy's death involved opening my heart, instead of closing it.

For me, the key to this whole thing is not so much personal forgiveness; it is the energizing work of a more proactive verb, which is *to reconcile*. Reconciliation is the work that has given me so much energy and joy. It goes beyond me saying, "I forgive you," and you saying, "Fine," and we go our separate ways. Through reconciliation we are actually dealing with the very issues that caused our loss and working together to change them.

People who go to prisons and confront perpetrators, getting them to apologize and the victim to forgive, that work doesn't appeal much to me. Maybe it can help put the

past behind you. Maybe it helps you find closure, which you can see I don't necessarily believe in. But it has no amazing excitement like the ability to work together and see results. Even though it's not easy—in fact it can be overwhelmingly difficult—the strength of the work is when opponents come together and live to see a better day.

It's like Amy said about breaking through the pain barrier. Reconciliation is the work that will get you there—through the pain and into the exhilaration. For me to be able to be a small part of a bigger picture, like South Africa healing itself, that's exhilarating. And that's reconciliation.

**Goodman:** Do you think restorative justice can work on a national level?

**Biehl:** People have asked me if I thought the U.S. should have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. My reaction is that there is no way that it can work in our country on a national level because we're too large and diverse. But I do think people can take ownership of issues that need reconciling within their own communities.

Realistically, is the world going to change overnight? No. But, on the other hand, if it started at a grassroots level, where people said, "Enough. We're not solving anything with violence. We have to find another way. We have to start listening to each other and understanding that we've all been hurt by the way we've done things in the past," I think it could be possible. It's almost like there has to be a groundswell. It has to come from the people themselves. Top to bottom, or pushing it on people, is not going to work, at least in a country as large and complicated as ours. I think smaller countries might be able to do better.

**Goodman:** When you think about it happening in this country, which issue do you see it being centered around? Immigration? Slavery?

**Biehl:** All of them, really. There are still black people feeling they haven't had any resolution of racism, or any reconciliation of the harm it has done them. I personally see it more around the injustices inflicted on the Native American population. I think the key to a lot of the issues that divide us is more dialogue. If we could set up some kind of institutional process that would allow for dialogue, that would be constructive.

What Tutu always said of the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa was that it *promoted* national healing. It could not perform the national healing itself; that was up to individuals. That's a key point: it's up to individuals themselves to do the work of forgiving and reconciling. There's no magic process that's going to do it for you.

**Goodman:** When you encounter hostility from people, what are they angry about?

**Biehl:** Race. Most of the hostility I get is people saying, you're helping black people, and you're helping terror, and you're helping people who are criminals. Then there are people who just can't understand the idea of forgiveness.

**Goodman:** And it makes them angry that you would be forgiving?

**Goodman:** That is so bizarre to me.

**Biehl:** Well, it is bizarre. But I also feel that the media creates a lot of it. I tell you, look at the killings in the Amish community, and look how quickly that story ended, because there wasn't anger, there wasn't bitterness. Forgiveness was part of their life, and they lived it, and I think the media couldn't deal with that. There was no story there.

I actually think there are elements in our society that just thrive on confrontation, instead of letting people think "from their hearts," as Desmond Tutu says. Sometimes we may be angry, but how do we really use our mind and our hearts together, use the human values we say we have, in those instances? Religions share a lot of the same basic tenets – respect people, turn the other cheek, and take the high road. In the long run, it's beneficial for yourself, as well as the person you're angry with.

**Goodman:** What can you tell us about the current situation in South Africa? Are they making progress in healing the scars of their past and building a truly unified country?

**Biehl:** Conditions in South Africa have changed in a legal sense. There's a great new constitution, and everyone is now legally equal and free. But are people equal economically? No. Educationally? No. Conditions in the native communities have not changed very much. So the ability to work together to create positive change in these communities is very exciting. It's definitely what's motivating me, and has been for the last 10 years or so.

I do think South Africa's story is very compelling. I'm still just amazed at the suffering its people have endured and their resiliency. They're so familiar with death, and they've taught me so much about life.

You know, as Americans, our sense of who we are is very different from a lot of other cultures. I'm struck by how much pain other people routinely bear, and how little pain I've had to bear in my life, and how people in other cultures keep going under circumstances that I would find crushing. No housing, no running water, yet you see these women walking out in starched white dresses with dignity and pride. I think South Africa could have been a huge bloodbath, and they avoided that. I marvel at people's ability to withstand suffering, and the depth of character that comes from that. Whereas we Americans can be so shaken by even minor problems.

**Goodman:** Tell us about the Amy Biehl Foundation.

**Biehl:** When Amy died all sorts of people—people we didn't even know—sent flowers, and a lot of them wanted to know if there was a memorial. Amy's passion was South Africa, so we opened a bank account, and a lawyer friend offered to set up a nonprofit corporation here in the U.S. People contributed to it, and when we went to South Africa, we'd donate the money to worthy projects we'd see over there. At first I figured that's what we'd do: we'd go to South Africa every so often, see a project, give money, and leave it at that. But then, from the very first trip, South Africans just kept asking us,

“come, come see,” and then “come, come help.” Our response was, “Well, we’ll do what we can, but we’re not experts in development work, or anything.”

In 1997, Brian Atwood was the head of US Agency for International Development (US AID) under the Clinton administration, and he had been Amy’s boss at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. He offered us an unsolicited US AID grant to go to South Africa and do development work.

It was a blessing in some ways, but it was also very difficult because of the strings attached—what we were supposed to do and how we were supposed to do it—none of which came from us, or from the people in South Africa, but from US AID. But it did get us going to Africa and doing a lot of research, and setting up the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust as a nonprofit in South Africa. That occurred in September of ‘97, which was right after the amnesty.

When we arrived, the first thing we did was to meet with people in the communities and ask what they needed. We sat in on many community groups and met with people from various government departments. Most told us that despite the anti-apartheid elections, the youth energy was still going into the struggle. There was still a lot of violence against white people and also against each other in their own communities—violence that stemmed from a lack of opportunities. So we decided to develop programs that would help ensure that people in the townships had better education; that they had after-school programs, safe places to go after school, and exposure to opportunities that white kids had; that they had HIV-prevention education; and that there were job opportunities. For a while we had a small business enterprise--Amy’s Bread, the Bread of Hope and Peace. But the delivery driver was killed, and our bakery was burned down, so now we just license the bread to other bakeries and a portion of the proceeds benefits our programs. Still, it has been quite successful, and is now sold at the Pick ‘n Pay Supermarkets, the largest grocery chain in Cape Town, along with Amy’s Milk and Amy’s Rice.

We have tried to work within the existing government infrastructure, but we’ve also tried to be a catalyst to get things done in the grassroots arena. So we work in the schools, providing after-school programs that begin at 2:00 p.m. We’ve worked to create community/school vegetable gardens with indigenous crops. These not only provide food, they provide teaching opportunities about the environment, where food comes from, nutrition, and they also enhance the physical environment. We’ve also been trying to get the parents involved with the schools and to turn the schools into a community resource. This goes against the trend of the last 50 years, which discouraged parents from school involvement. In fact there was a law passed in the 1950s that once you got your kid to school, the teacher’s authority took precedence over the parents’ authority.

We’ve also trained thousands of community people in first aid – there’s a huge need for that, and they’ve requested first-aid kits and basic first-aid training in the schools. Our after-school programs include art, music, and sports programs, and we also offer art and music to juveniles in the prisons.

**Goodman:** You have 5,000 kids in these programs right now?

**Biehl:** Well, it varies, but yes.

**Goodman:** If people wanted to help the foundation, if they wanted to make a donation, what should they do?

**Biehl:** If they want a tax deduction, they can donate to the Amy Biehl Foundation here in the United States. The address is: P.O. Box 2926, Newport Beach, CA 92659. The U.S. website is [www.amybiehl.org](http://www.amybiehl.org).

The Amy Biehl Foundation Trust is a South African nonprofit, so people cannot get a U.S. tax deduction on donations made to it, but sometimes organizations don't need that. If people are interested in contacting us about internships, or they have something they particularly want to support, like a specific school, or sports program, for example, they can visit our South African website: [www.amybiehl.co.za](http://www.amybiehl.co.za).

**Goodman:** For a lot of people it would be very counterintuitive to embrace people who have killed your daughter, and yet you have obviously gotten a lot out of it. Could you summarize what you've gotten, and what you think would have been the outcome if you had taken the road of retributive justice, the road you did not take?

**Biehl:** Well, let me just give you an example. Easy and Ntobeko both have children now. Ntobeko's daughter will be five in October. On her first birthday, I took him and his wife and the girl shopping at the Waterfront, which is this amazing place to shop in Cape Town. I wanted them to select a birthday gift for her. His wife picked out something, and as we were walking out of the store, I looked up, and out of the corner of my eye saw Ntobeko going up to pay for something with a debit card, a birthday gift for his daughter. And it just hit me: he could have been in prison, he could've been dead, like so many others. But he had the courage to step up, to look at things differently, to change his attitude, to be open to possibilities, and his life now is radically different than what it had been. And not only is he a part of me, giving me the opportunity to be a part of his life, he's actually become a very productive member of South African society. Who could be a better example to others than Ntobeko, who was so angry and bitter about his lot in life that he was willing to commit murder, and who now has stepped back from the anger of his past and has created a new life for himself?

It's little things like that that make me so sure that those possibilities can transfigure people and society.

Easy and Ntobeko just amaze me in their powers of forgiveness too—their ability to deal with what happened, and also to talk about Amy. When they started their first support group in the beginning, they said “Amy is one of the co-founders.” They embraced her in the way they talked about her. When we do speaking engagements together, it's so funny. People will ask Ntobeko and Easy a question about South African issues, and the two of them will look at me and challenge me to answer it, and I'll just repeat what

they've told me. They'll watch me and nod. Then someone will ask a question about Amy, and Easy or Ntobeko will answer. They'll say, "I've never met Amy, but I think this is how she would think." It's amazing, that they have become that comfortable in talking about my daughter's life, as if she were a sister or a friend.

**Goodman:** Was there a time when they acknowledged the extent of your pain, and you acknowledged the extent of their pain?

**Biehl:** Yes, and this is how Easy put it. In the traditional cultures, the young men have these stick-fighting contests. I don't know if it's as prevalent today as it once was, but they would beat each other almost to death. Then, at the end, they would cleanse and heal each other's wounds. That's how Easy describes what has happened between his family and my family; between Africans and whites. We've harmed each other to these very great depths, but we also have the power to heal each other.

**Goodman:** It sounds like we have the responsibility, too.

**Biehl:** That's true. Another thing that I've gotten out of taking this path, of reconciling with the people and the country that were responsible for my daughter's death, is that, out of all pain and hardship, I have really enjoyed the humor that exists in people—from Desmond Tutu to the people in the townships. I've learned a lot from how joyful they can be. They can be at a very sad event, but they sing, they dance their way through it. Sometimes Easy and Ntobeko and I find ourselves in funny situations, and we just laugh. They've taught me that the power of laughter and fun can communicate with a lot more strength sometimes than the heaviness, the sadness, the tears.

**Goodman:** Do you think Amy would be proud of you for the strength that you've demonstrated in being willing to stand in the spotlight to take a stand on her behalf?

**Biehl:** Definitely I do. Because of her research and academic background, I think she would probably say, "I don't know why you did it *that way*," but nevertheless, I think she'd be proud. She always talked about the end of apartheid and bringing the races together with open and honest dialogue. That's what we've tried to do, and if we've achieved any part of it, I think she would approve. I feel that we've honored her in that way.