

Testimony of

# Reverend Steve Strickland

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TESTIMONY OF REVEREND STEVE STRICKLAND TO CONSTITUTION SUBCOMMITTEE OF U.S. SENATE  
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, 3/29/06

Mr. Chairman and Other Distinguished Members of this Committee:

My name is Steve Strickland. I am one of three brothers of Arnold Strickland, who was a Fayette, Alabama Police Officer, who was murdered by a teenager on June 7, 2003. I was asked to come and testify by Senator Brownback's office on how my brother's murder has affected me and our family, the two other families who also lost their loved ones, and our entire community. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to do so today.

The best way to start is to start on that Saturday morning, a morning that changed all of our families' lives. Arnold and I had plans for fishing that day. I was so looking forward to spending that time with him. We did not get to share as much time together as we would have liked because of my work as a minister. There was always something going on to keep us apart but not on that day. I was already on the water at daylight and waiting on him to get off work to come join me. It was going to be a fun day for the both of us. It was about 6:30 when that beautiful Saturday morning turned into one of the darkest days of my life.

My nephew Shane, one of Arnold's three sons, called and asked if I had seen Dad. I said "No," that I was waiting on his phone call to tell him how to get where I was. He was supposed to get off at six a.m. and should be here any minute. Shane said something had happened in Fayette and when he found out he would call me back. It was not 15 minutes when my phone rang again, and he said with tears in his voice, "You need to come home quick."

I knew at that moment I would never see my brother alive again. Our fishing days together were over. I sat there and wept bitterly because I loved my brother deeply. As I got to the house there were family members already there along with police officers. It was total shock and confusion as to what had happened and what was going on. Being a minister I deal with death on a regular basis, but I had not experienced such trauma as I did that day. In the days ahead, we learned that Arnold along with two other men, one being James Crump, a fellow officer and the other Ace Mealer who was the dispatcher that night were also murdered. A young teenage boy named Devin Moore was responsible for the brutal execution of the three men that morning.

As days passed and then weeks, months and now years, our family is still trying to put our lives back together. No Saturday will ever be the same for me. No holidays will we enjoy as much as when Arnold was there. But what hurts the most is to see his grandchildren and knowing how much he loved them. They will never get to see him again. They will only hear stories and see pictures of their granddad. How do you explain to a child that just last week granddad was here and now he is gone and then the parents get to try to explain when asked, How did he die and why did he die?

The total impact on our families behind these senseless killings will never be over. This is the reason I accepted your invitation to come and speak today - so that maybe other families will not have to answer those hard questions and go through what our families are still going through to this day, trying to sort it all out. That brings me to the point of why I am here.

"Video Games": What are they and how are they being used? The statement I made earlier about Arnold and the two others being executed was a very true statement. You see, they were not just shot; all three received a bullet to the

head after they were on the floor. You have to ask the question what would bring a young teenage boy like Devin to this point.

Devin made a statement in a local newspaper one day that made no sense to me whatsoever, until it got in the hands of one of our attorneys, Jack Thompson, who knows all about what that statement meant: "Life is like a video game, everyone has to die sometime." As a minister I deal with a lot of different issues and try to stay up and become educated on them but Jack opened up a whole other world to me that I did not even know existed. This is the violent video game world -- a world that, as far as I am concerned, is straight from the pits of Hell.

As I gather more information on the games and the people who call themselves "gamers," I could see how someone like Devin, who at one minute did not put up any resistance when arrested for stealing a car or when being booked, to the next minute, getting my brother's gun from him in the police station shooting him and then killing two other men in a matter of less than two minutes. A game such as Grand Theft Auto: Vice City could and did teach him how to do this. As I watched this game being played on CBS's 60 Minutes, I could not believe my eyes as to how close in comparison this game was to the actual slaughter of my brother, along with James and Ace.

I had to ask myself the question: Why would someone put such games on the market and into the hands of teenagers? In Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, the people we put our faith and trust in to protect us from harm - the police officers - are the ones being targeted as the bad guys. Devin Moore practiced on this game hour after hour to kill our loved ones. It made him a more effective killer.

In this game, if you kill the police and other innocent people you win points. You get extra points for shots to their heads. When a society gets to the point to where law enforcement are the bad guys and the thugs and murderers are the good guys, our society will take a turn for the worse. Some have taken that turn. I do not believe most of us are ready for that. We have an opportunity to do something about this problem. Why don't we? I am a man of facts. I try to live my life by them. Jack Thompson and others have facts and experts to back up what these games are: they are cop-killing simulators and they will bring more deaths in the future. Our loved ones in Fayette are not the only ones to die at the hands of teens who trained on this game to kill.

Let me remind you if I may: It could be one of your family members next. I ask that we put all the true facts on the table about how dangerous all of these murder simulation video games are.

The primary motivation for what these video game companies do in making and marketing violent games to kids is this: MONEY. Why would these companies want to change things? One day, we will all stand before the Almighty GOD and give an account for what we have done and what we have accomplished, both good and bad on this Earth.

I ask all of you Senators that we take a good hard look at the impact these games have on our teenagers and hold everyone accountable for their part. These games in the wrong hands played long enough are detrimental to our families, our friends, and our entire society.

Thank you for allowing me to share our grief, as well as our hope for a safer America.