



small actions = **BIG CHANGES**

EARTH.F FOUNDATION. 

In memory of Michelle Gardner Quinn (1985-

Michelle's Earth Foundation: Small Actions = Big Changes

Check out new Michelle's Earth video

youtube.com/results?search_query=Michellesearch

[web.me.com/mesunola/Site/Michelles Earth Sunflowers in New Orleans.html](http://web.me.com/mesunola/Site/Michelles_Earth_Sunflowers_in_New_Orleans.html)

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On Friday, October 17, in Burlington, VT District Court Judge Michael Kupersmith sentenced Brian Rooney to a mandatory life term in prison with no chance for parole. A jury found Rooney guilty on May 22, 2008 of sexually assaulting, beating and strangling Michelle Gardner-Quinn to death after they met by chance in downtown Burlington, VT while she was a senior majoring in Environmental Studies. Her body was found near Huntington Gorge in Richmond, VT on Friday, October 13, 2006.

The only punishment under state law for aggravated murder is life in prison without chance of parole. Judge Michael Kupersmith wrote in recent court papers he intends to impose that sentence October 17 during a morning hearing in Vermont District Court in Burlington. A gag order prevents family members and those involved in the case from commenting.

Following Michelle's death, several of her close friends from her childhood home of Arlington,VA and her sister Yasmine Rassam formed the environmental organization Michelle's Earth Foundation in her memory. MEF mission is to facilitate the role of youth, especially girls and minorities who are vastly underrepresented in the sciences, in community-level efforts towards creating a healthy sustainable habitat for humans and nature.

During the past two years, committed environmentalists, friends and family have taken up Michelle's charge: "Small Actions = Big Changes." "Michelle's Earth Foundation was created as a tribute to Michelle's caring attributes—self-integrity, kindness, beauty (inner and outer) and compassion for all living things—qualities that we all in aspire to," says Board Member Gail Fendley. "MEF is the living embodiment of everything Michelle stood for. MEF both immortalizes her in our hearts and minds and pledges to accomplish her life's dream to be an environmentalist. Future generations and your

children deserve a healthy habitat and we are responsible for ensuring they get it and know how to protect it.”

These programs and activities conducted by MEF add up to thousands of lives that have been touched by Michelle. Examples of Michelle's Earth Foundation's recent work include:

Michelle's Earth Sunflowers in New Orleans (MESUNOLA):

- MESUNOLA is a phytoremediation project in New Orleans, Louisiana. MEF volunteers are planting sunflowers to remediate soil contaminated by lead that was present before Hurricane Katrina and exacerbated by the flooding.
- MESUNOLA's all volunteer staff initiated its own scientific, labor-intensive experiments by planting over 41 plots of land throughout the city of New Orleans.
- MESUNOLA is currently preparing contaminated plots for more extensive study using plants other than sunflowers in cooperation with Louisiana State University. MESUNOLA concluded after almost a year of sunflower plantings and soil testing by Dr. Ed Bush, LSU professor of Agronomy at LSU, that sunflowers have been effective in reducing the soil toxicity of many contaminated lots.
- Michelle's sister Yasmine Rassam is living in New Orleans as our on-site fund raiser, supervisor, coordinator of volunteers and partnership builder.
- MESUNOLA's Project Director, Ian Willson, along with Vash Williams and Gail Fendley, continue planting on contaminated lots that will eventually become home sites for affordable housing that's being built by Jericho Housing and the Episcopal Diocese of New Orleans.
- The MESUNOLA project is currently seeking funding to allow it to continue its soil remediation efforts and education of the New Orleans community about the risks of lead poisoning.

As an extension of the MESUNOLA project, Michelle's Earth Foundation also leads programs to engage students from elementary to high school, to college and beyond:

Taylor School Elementary School, Arlington, VA: Diane Gardner-Quinn and Gail Fendley explained dangers of lead in the soil and helped students plant sunflower seeds in cups to be transplanted in New Orleans for MESUNOLA.

H-B Woodlawn, Arlington, VA: Michelle's High School in Arlington, VA: Dave Soles led field trip to New Orleans of Environmental Club to clear lots, till and plant sunflower seeds on contaminated lots for MESUNOLA.

Earth Day 2008 in Washington, DC and at Salisbury University in MD: MEF displayed a hands-on, interactive exhibit explaining MESUNOLA's mission in New Orleans.

Coral Reef Conservation Research and Outreach in Quintana Roo, Mexico:

MEF volunteer Heather Spence created an educational program and book entitled '*Marine Life of the Mexican Caribbean*' to inform tourists about local coastal floral and fauna. A main part of her project is the preservation of coral reefs there and educating children about the ecosystems in the coral reefs, which are being destroyed. Spence makes weekly presentations of the book at hotels in the Acapulco resort region. Spence has also teamed up with the head of the education department of the Parks expand these presentations.

Green-Collar Environmental Jobs Training, Cairo, Egypt:

MEF Board Member Thomas Henry Culhane, a professional Sustainable Development Consultant

and the co-founder of Solar CITIES, works on environmental training programs in Cairo, Egypt. Culhane's work includes teaching the urban poor how to build carbon-reducing solar hot water systems out of local and recycled materials.

"Going Local in Arlington" event and "Eating Local initiative:"

As part of MEF's initiative to educate its members about the growing environmental movement towards eating locally grown food, MEF cosponsored a program with H-B Woodlawn school, bringing H-B Woodlawn graduate Nathan Lyon, now chef of the Discovery Health channel's cooking show '*A Lyon in the Kitchen*', to demonstrate preparation of a meal in midwinter from foods found in local farmers' markets.

"This I Believe" Essay:

A video of Michelle's essay "This I Believe," read by Tipper Gore, Sarah Ferguson the Duchess of York, Goldie Hawn, Kate Hudson, Sheryl Crow, Meg Ryan, Emily Proctor and Michelle's Mother Diane Gardner Quinn, was aired at Live Earth Concerts around the world in July 2007. More than 38,000 viewers have sought out the video on YouTube, available at: youtube.com/watch?v=zctmNe0t-wU.

Michelle found her love for nature at an early age. As she wrote in her diary:

"As a child I found joy digging in the dirt, examining the miracle of life... This was where I felt a strong connection to the natural cycles of creation. This connection has inspired me to this day. It is a feeling deep with in me that has inspired my passions and pursuits as an environmentalist."

If you would like to support Michelle's Earth Foundation, please go to www.facebook.com and become a member, if you're not already. Go to CAUSES and search for Michelle's Earth Foundation. If you want to help plant sunflowers in NOLA, please designate MESUNOLA. We encourage you not only to donate, but also to share our CAUSE with all your friends.

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