

# The Angel of Freedom

by Margaret Billington Greenspan

*This letter, written by Mike Billington's sister Margaret to her brother and his wife Gail on the eve of Mike's return to prison in 1992, captures the spirit which Mike and Gail shared with their political associates, and which, as a couple, they represented for many people around the world.*

*Florestan is the hero in Beethoven's opera "Fidelio," which portrays his wife Leonora as she puts her life at risk to try to rescue her husband from an unjust, cruel imprisonment in a brutal dungeon, where he is now near death. In his aria, sung in a dark dungeon, he wrestles with despair, but, with a vision of his wife Leonora before him, then triumphantly asserts his faith that he has served God and justice. Soon afterward, Leonora appears to rescue him.*

Dearest Mike and Gail,

You are so much more than a family to me! What could I say in words that could compare to Florestan's aria! How profound is the faith of Beethoven's Florestan. In the most desperate despair imaginable to man, he cries out from the depth of his soul, "God's

will is just!" Then, as in a prayer, he contemplates his dedication to truth, his humiliation, and his sweet consolation that his duty was done. And then—a sudden leap, a transformation—an angel appears!

What is an angel? An angel is the spirit of God coming to you in a real form, a physical result of deep spiritual contemplation of love of God, of truth, and of doing one's duty—which I think must include the sacrifice of self and acceptance of earthly humiliation. The angel is the metaphor for the mind's creative spark, born of true love of God and his divine justice.

Is there anything more physically powerful than Florestan's outpouring of joy at the presence of his angel Leonora?

And is not the angel Leonora the physical embodiment of God's perfect love, leading not only Florestan, but subsequently all the people to freedom—the heavenly realm—through her equal devotion to duty and her perfect love for Florestan?

She appears to him, not as he is thinking about her, or despairing of his fate, but in his deepest devotion to God.

So I think that our angels don't come to us unless we truly love God's justice more than our own selves! And your equal sacrifices are a beautiful example of that divine love. So I am very happy that you both are angels for each other!

You are both angels to me.



Courtesy of Michael Billington

*Mike's sister, Margaret Billington Greenspan, and Gail visit Mike in Nottoway prison, July 1995.*