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Reaching Out

VOICES FROM DEATH ROW

Greetings to one and all,

Once again, I would like to say thank you to all who are assisting us to reach out and spread out thoughts and feelings. We truly appreciate everyone's help and would love to hear any and all feedback that you, the readers, have.

We also would invite anyone who has a loved one or a friend on death row to submit their thoughts to be included in upcoming issues! We want to offer the opportunity to allow you all to voice yourself on how you feel by having a loved one / friend on death row.

In "Reaching Out" your voice counts just as much as our own. Because without you, we have no one to reach out to!

As always, enjoy this issue and those to come!
R.I.P Jermaine "Big K" Herron.

The struggle continues,

Christopher Coleman

If you would like to share how having a relative or friend on death row has affected your life, please contact us via email at:

voicesfromdr@yahoo.com

All Death Row inmates at Polunsky Unit are kept in solitary confinement in their individual cell 23 hours a day, except for one hour of recreation, 5 times a week, spent alone in a day room or an outside courtyard. They are not allowed to participate in any work program and thus have no means of sustaining themselves, except through donations. If you would like to make a donation, please address it to:

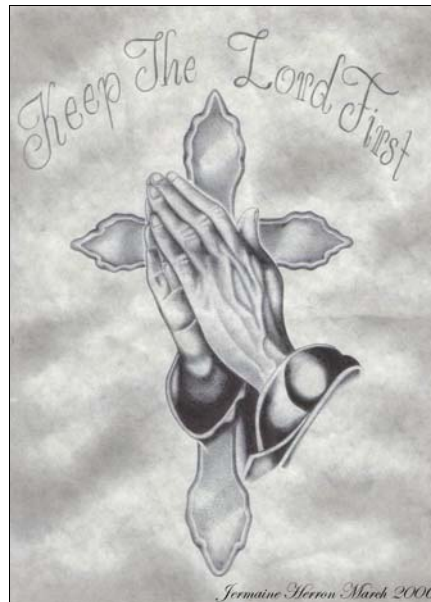
Trace' Bell
P.O. Box 690336
Killeen, TX 76549-0336
USA

Challenging the Texas Law of Parties

Ask family & friends to sign the *Challenging the Texas Law of Parties* Petition:

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/940972895>

Or go to: thepetitionsite.com, at the bottom under *Categories*, choose *Human Rights*, then click on *Death Penalty*. Under *Death Penalty* will be the *Challenging the Texas Law of Parties* petition.



Drawing by Jermaine Herron.

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In loving memory of Jermaine Herron, † May 17th 2006



Jermaine,

It's already been 35 days that you had to leave this world, but nevertheless you are still part of my presence. Ever since I met you, we had a tight bond and you grew into someone very special in my life. That hasn't changed one bit. Although it's very tough for me not to read your thoughts and emotions anymore, nevertheless I feel very close to you. Through all of your letters you brought sunshine into my life and put a big smile on my face; over and over again. Jermaine, I really thank you for this. Whenever I received a letter from you, I had to respond to it immediately to show you my support, how much you meant to me and that I would be by your side no matter what. As soon as I mailed my letters out to you, I already became so impatient waiting for your response although I knew it would always take at least one week before I would hear from you again. It's such a wonderful memory to read your written thoughts and emotions as many times as I want to and every time it feels like I read the letter for the very first time. Then I am still excited and happy to know about your deep inner self. During the last few weeks I have been going through all your letters, cards and poems you ever sent to me and through them you are still alive, because all of your letters are as profound, honest, full of humor, sincere and emotional as you are.

With one of your letters you really touched me in a positive way. Right after my first visit you wrote "Today when

Under Pressure

By Jermaine Herron; April 2004

They got me subjected to a cell makin' an attempt on my life. Will I prevail or will I fail as da pressure to survive reaches its ultimate height? At times I don't understand why I've been dealt such a life-threatening hand. Never have I been a threat to society in this devilish land. I'm just a young man to find his way. Always believing in himself and lookin' for a finer day. But, when da times become hard and da pressure unique, all my thoughts are under siege by death and defeat. So relentless it be to where I'm feelin' its touch. It starts my heart to really racing from fearing its clutch. It's almost too much, but I gotta stay strong. Reach deep within myself and find da strength that will carry me on. For some years long it's been a hectic battle for me. Often wonderin' how do I survive the pressure and still keep my sanity. Is it my fate to be in such a predicament as this? Only God knows that answer, so who am I to question this. As I continue to live my life and do all I can to save it, maybe some day I'll be embraced by freedom again and finally say the words 'I made it'. Only time will tell if the pressure from my situation will begin to take its toll. And even the strongest of men would struggle against the attempts to make me fold. Who I am is me, a fighter and a believer. But how long can I withstand da pressure in order to become the achiever?

I witnessed your beauty for the first time ever in person, my soul heard your beauty speak, causing me to realize that inspiring and sublime truth don't always come by way of written words or words of tongue. Often they use the hollow silence of the living void as a path to travel from one soul to another. I believe that's why my soul chooses the silence of the night, for the calm breeze will be the messenger, which carries my message more tender and loving than those of which I write on paper. Perhaps because of the time difference between us you choose the hour of day, for it is often when I'm under the spell of slumber that thoughts of you cross over the threshold of my mind like doves passing in flight, coming to soothe my anxiety with the softness of their wings while quietly whispering 'patience' to the yearning within my beating heart. Especially on days such as this is when I look forward to the arrival of your letters, for they bring a sweet fragrance which is like a breath of fresh air needed to revive a suffocating young man as me. Your words are the soothing wind before the fall of a gentle rain and their warmth is the rising of the sun within the darkness of my living hell. They also make me feel like a butterfly

stumbling through the air intoxicated by the nectar of a flourishing flower. But, it's when I look into those beautiful eyes of yours in person and your pictures that your outer beauty makes my heart flutter like the beating wings of a hummingbird as he hovers over a beautiful rose in full bloom."

Jermaine, you are truly one of a kind and will always be remembered. You had a big impact on my life and although we also had our tough times, nothing or no one could ever destroy our strong friendship. Since you know for yourself and the matter of fact that I can be stubborn if I want to be, there was never a point when I wanted to give up on our friendship. As you know, we are all angels who make a difference in someone's life and leave special footprints in someone's heart; and so did you.

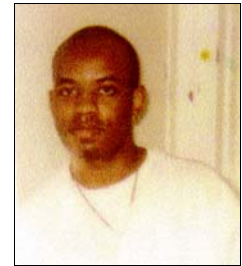
Remember: Death can't take away what we carry in our hearts!

Your friend and angel, forever and ever,

Nina

Dying without You

By Ray Jasper



Everyone starts out with sweet dreams and aspirations when they are new to the world and naively believe the old saying: "You can be whatever you want to be in life." Probably 95% of us on earth are not even close to who, what and where we wanted to be. We are more like cigarette butts in the wind.

Like the average American these days, I wanted to go back to school for a degree that would allow me to move up in the world. I had a daughter to support. When having Navy credential, finding a job was like playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey after being spun around a dozen times. As a young woman, I had no sense of direction but I had bills. Temp agencies and telemarketing got old fast. I ended being referred to work for TOCJ, the Texas prison system.

My initial thought was that I'd rather work at Disneyworld with a Winnie the Pooh suite on. I seen "Oz" on TV and the penitentiary was the last place I could imagine myself being.

Death row was the last place I could imagine myself being. I was 22 years old and sentenced to die by lethal injection for killing a cop I never came across in my life. These people were crazy. They wanted me to die. The police lied, the prosecutor manipulated the witnesses, my attorneys let me get found guilty and had the audacity to ask me: "Can you cry for the jury?" like it was a Hollywood script. I had heard attorneys take drama classes, but this was unbelievable.

I yelled at my attorneys...
Told the entire courtroom I didn't kill anyone...
Mocked the D.A. while the judge was bangin' the gravel yelling at me.

Now, I'm on death row... where my voice goes unheard like a lion roaring in the jungle no one in the city can hear. The youngest man on my section of death row, but I felt like the oldest. Everyday, I thought only of freedom. I wasn't incarcerated, I was waiting... inside I was screaming... but never showed much emotion. I'd often exercise off my frustration, tearing my muscles hard like a bodybuilder in training.

After 5 weeks of training to be a correction officer, I was shipped to the Allred unit, a men's prison in a rural area called Iowa Park Texas. I was Stephanie Myers, with a name tag and an American flag patched on my shoulder. I had never been more scared in my life. Around other guards, I felt safe. Trained to trust as far as I could throw a bus. The good guys. I had pepper spray. I would've felt better with a glock.
Prison was always busy like New York City streets. The

inmates, predominantly Black and Mexican, then white, came in all shapes and sizes. Everywhere I turned, men were either working, eating or getting naked. It was prison, a place of survival, full of gangs, gays and pervert. Some had sentences beyond 100 years. Most were institutionalized, basically slaves broken down enough to call correction officers "boss".

You couldn't trust the inmates and you couldn't trust the guards. The ranking officers would try to get the cutest female to work close to them. Guards got fired right and left for bringing drugs and cigarettes in, and for having sex with inmates and other guards.

After 6 months, I was shipped to the Polunsky Unit because it was understaffed. The difference was they housed Death Row. 450 men convicted of the worst crimes in Texas. Serial killers, murder rapists and bloody thieves all waiting to die by lethal injection.

I was specifically assigned to Death Row. Despite its inhabitants, it was really the safest place in the prison. Every man had his own cell. Here I wouldn't have to almost throw up coming across two nasty men kissing or finding two men doing foul smelling sex exchanges during the night security checks. The guys were dead men walking, hated, condemned, unworthy to breathe. Death was their reality. Some seemed like they didn't care.

I never cared too much for the guards on Death Row. They came and went like the penitentiary was a cheap motel. We were cordial with the guards as long as they were cordial with us. I knew at any given moment I could tell the guys to get rowdy and the whole place would erupt like a volcano. Ironically, most guards on Death Row were women which kept it from being the dangerous environment it could've been.

Despite circumstances, we often taught each other to be better men. Young guys and fools wasted their times cussing about guards. Some would get gassed and beat up. None would win in the end holding their pride too high, but any guard who thought they had authority over us would eventually get ran off.

I didn't pay much mind to the guards but there was one who caught my attention...

Most guys either craved attention or hated to be disturbed. Bitterness was as thick as Heinz ketchup. I maintained my ways of population, but no one here would call me "boss lady". It was more cordial, more personal. They immediately wanted to know my name. I did the best to

stay away from the pervert who would masturbate on any woman they seen or talk nasty for cheap thrills. I kept my guard up but at times, I did feel compassion for a few individuals. I was never for or against the death penalty. I really didn't know too much about capital punishment. The whole issue was too controversial for me, but the wind blew a cigarette butt my way that I never thought I'd develop feelings for, Grant Pearson.

Grant was young, but he wasn't wild. At times, another officer and I would escort him to a visit, medical or a phone call. His aura gave me a tangible joy I tried to deny. Early in his 20's, he had a baby face and a comforting smile. Nothing about him was untrustworthy. His presence made me feel safe. He looked like a deep thinker, a dreamer, like he didn't belong. I never seen him talk much with the other guys. He didn't make the wise cracks most did to amuse themselves. Instead of pictures of bikini-clad women pinned up on his cell, he only had pictures of his daughter on his desk. After a few conversations, I could tell she was his heart.

Officer Stephanie Myers was the only one who got close to my heart. She stood out like a rose, too cute. Sometimes I couldn't stand to look at her, at other times I'd gaze. I didn't know her story, but I developed a love for her. The kind of love that makes you look at someone and deeply desire the best for them. To me, that was greater than any temporary pleasure some guys out there could give her. One day, out of the blue, she bluntly asked me: "Do you think you'll get out of here?" The hope in her eyes for me told me she wanted to hear something positive. "I don't know," I said, "I didn't think I'd be here to begin with."

I wanted to pour out my heart to her, tell her my life story, how I didn't kill anyone, how I couldn't take being trapped in a cell all alone, year after year, how I wanted to live a good life, how I wanted to die to get away, how she was my only source of joy and that I loved her.

"Have you ever been to Disneyworld?" I asked.

She smiled at the unexpectancy, "No, why?"

"I know most guys want to take you to bed, but I'd take you to Disneyworld."

She couldn't hold back her laugh. "You know, I used to tell myself I'd rather be at Disneyworld than in prison."

"It's not hard to tell you don't belong here."

"Feel the same for you."

"Why are you?"

"No prince charming, my daughter has to be fed, clothed and tucked in at night."

"Understandable" I said.

"It's not permanent, though." She said.



The Anomie by Misty Morris

Photograph selected for the Death Penalty Art Show (www.deathpenaltyartshow.org) sponsored by Texas Moratorium Network (www.texasmoratorium.org).

"Nothing in life is."

I stopped by Grant's cell one day to handle some paperwork. This day he asked me, if I ever quit and move on, would I write him a letter from time to time to let him know how I was doing? I told him I couldn't make any promises and he accepted that.

I worked Death Row for two years. I began different assignments so I would see Grant as work brought me across his path. During my third year, I put my two-week notice. I found a job at a Merrill Lunch Bank sitting behind a computer, helping people open accounts.

From time to time, I thought about my old job. It was hard for some people to believe that I actually worked on Texas Death Row. One guy I dated said he could never work in a place full of killers. For the first time I realized I didn't actually see the guys as "killers". They were guys I knew by name. Of course, there were bad apples in the bunch, but not enough to throw out the whole basket.

I thought about Grant Pearson. One night I looked up his information on computer and I typed him a letter...

One letter turned into two...

For a year and half I kept in touch with him. He would send me cards, pictures and artwork... even buy me books and CD's On Valentine's Day, he had bought me a diamond bracelet. I didn't want to admit I was in love with a guy locked up on Death Row... but I was. I could never tell him, though.

At work, one morning, a co-worker announced generally, "they're going to execute another one in Huntsville."

"Who?" I asked wondering if I'd remember a name.

His eyes never left the Houston Chronicle he was reading.

"Grant Pearson."

“Grant Pearson, you have been issued an execution date...”
The voice drowned away as my heartbeat grew louder and louder. 26 years of my life were down to 90 days. I was totally innocent and the State was ready to kill me without a second thought and no one in the world would loose sleep behind it.

I couldn't sleep thinking about Grant's execution date. A few days after I found out, I received a letter from him telling me he had a date and he had to go through it alone. That was his last letter.

It's a shame when your own attorney can't even write you a letter to let you know what's going on. My court-appointed attorney went three years without contacting me. I wanted to fight now. The world had failed me. I thought about my daughter always asking me when I am coming home. There's no way I could endure this.

After working Death Row for three years when almost 100 guys were executed, I felt I could endure this. I decided if Grant died, I wanted to be there, but counting the days like a NASA shuttle for takeoff was leaving me uneasy. I couldn't sit down one minute in peace, constantly imagining what Grant was thinking. Praying God help him through it. Inside I just knew he'd get a stay.

I honestly believed I'd get a stay. It happens all the time. Guys get down to the wire and some attorney brings up something crucial to stop the execution. I wasn't guilty, yet they're saying if there were no constitutional violations in my trial, it's irrelevant.

“How can they say it does not matter?”

My new attorney spoke clearly. “If there's no newly discovered evidence, all I can do is file for clemency.”

“This is ridiculous, I didn't kill anybody.”

“It's Texas, Grant.”

“Filing for clemency is like going for mercy. It doesn't work.”

“Grant, your previous attorneys screwed you. All they had to do was file insufficient evidence in your direct appeals. I've reviewed your case. There were no facts whatsoever. They said you did it and put a theory behind it, but at this point, if there is no new evidence, it won't matter.”

“So I'm going to die because a prosecutor said I did it.”

“Without newly discovered evidence, nothing we say matters.”

Grant's execution date taught me what matters in life. Mercy matters; love matters. I realized I loved him and so many pretences kept me guarded from him. As if he didn't deserve all the love I could give him because he was on Death Row.

Three days away from his execution, I found myself crying, imagining the look in his eyes, the anxiety in his heart. I wanted to stop this. I wanted to hug him, to tell him he was going home to his little girl.

Tears fell...

Sometimes, all I could see in my mind was his body being dragged off the gurney, dead. My friend dead.

I had to see him

“Stephanie, why are you here?”

“Because...” she paused like she had to remind herself this could be our last conversation. Tears welled up in her eyes.

“I want to be here for you.”

“Seeing you makes this hard for me.”

“Grant, I love you.”

He took a deep breath and looked away from me. I could see him fighting his eyes not to cry.

“Leave me, Stephanie. Please go. I have to deal with this alone.”

“What about Melissa?”

“I pushed her and my family away after my federal writ was denied, just in case this would happen.”

“She needs to know how much her Dad loves her.”

“She's young. I think it's better if she doesn't remember me.”

I was losing my emotions. He couldn't even look at me.

Deeply, he was my friend. Though he was, his love wasn't locked up. I could always feel it.

“I'm not ready to die.” He said it with pain. It was hurting him to talk. Even to breathe.

The night before his date... I found myself crying... imagining myself in his cell... sitting on the concrete floor ... watching him sleep... stopping the guards from coming to get him... taking him home with me.

I couldn't take it. I wasn't as strong as I'd thought I would be. It felt like he was going to be murdered and I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't scream for help. I couldn't call the Police.

I was helpless.

“God brought us together once, maybe he'll do it again some day.” I wrote in my last letter to him. I said it before I understood it in my heart, as if I knew it was goodbye. I understood why guys used to protest or refuse to eat the day of an execution. I thought it was rebellion, but now I see it was love. They lived with each other for years and in time became close friends. For one to die among them wasn't executing a murderer, it was taking a friend away. That's exactly what I felt. They were taking my friend.

Love isn't locked up. I guess the only way to explain it was those who wanted him to die didn't love him. Those who wanted him to live did.

I remember the poem “love thy neighbour” by Silas J. White. It became true to my heart. It read:

“I could not love him,
Until I got to know him,
I awoke to the revelation,
By not getting to know him,
I was hating him...”

I fell in love with Grant because I got to know him and he was worth it.

For years, he loved me.

It may not sound real but I wanted to be with him... wherever he was.



The Meeting by Farley Matchett.
Artwork selected for the Death
Penalty Art Show (www.deathpenaltyartshow.org)
sponsored by Texas Moratorium
Network (www.texasmoratorium.org).

**Farley Matchett has a pending
execution date of September 12.**

Dedicated to my death row family, friends and fellow peers in the struggle

By Obie Weathers

The measure of one's mind
The brightness of one's spirit
The depth of one's soul
Is what determines the greatness
Of their being.

I could care less of one's
Social and economical background
Or standing
I'm honored to be in the presence
Of such great individuals
Whether it's here or there (free
world)
Their friendship is the highlight of
my life.

Keeping the word... as I reflect

**By Christopher "K2"
Coleman**

Many nights as I find myself engulfed in the silence and darkness of this small cell, I reflect on the Brothers I've seen executed. It's a tormenting episode of thoughts because I hated to lose them, as their presence was what made being here not as bad as it has become and really always has been. With the realization I've awoken to the view that having certain people in your life can make life a lot more bearable, especially in harsh times.

When you have ones you can relate to and who can relate to you, it can provide you with the feeling that there's nothing you can't accomplish together. No matter the situation, because you know you will give your all. Even now, as I have seen the closest brother to me executed, I still hold onto the goals Southpark (R.I.P) and I shared. Not only do I hold these goals, but every brother does, as we continue to push to accomplish all we set out to do!

It's on these quiet nights I find myself being re-energized by the many talks and laughs I've shared with those brothers no longer here and it's through these times I find the strength to keep pushing! They're my motivation and I don't want to let them down!
Still struggling...

Difficult to explain

By James Jackson

In reality, it's a slow torturous death, but to me, it is still truly difficult to explain to someone outside of this environment (death row) what a sentence of death is like. To me, I guess the closest example is of someone who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness and the doctor gives them an estimated date of death. Now, if any person has studied the atrocities of African enslavement or the holocaust of the Jews, that person understands the mental, spiritual and physical torture a death sentenced prisoner experiences on a daily basis, as well as what a death sentence is.

I, myself, must admit that at times, I wonder and question the intentions and knowledge of the death penalty activists (abolitionists) who are horrified and oppose the killing of human beings, but who are not horrified at the very system in its totality, which renders such biased and unjust sentences upon its citizens. I say in turn that it's not just the death penalty, which must be overturned, but the whole institution of criminal justice, as we all know it must be overturned. Only, only then, shall the injustice associated with our

present day criminal *just-us* system be removed and the door open to true justice and democracy.

We must not allow the voices of temptation to trick us into believing that a life sentence rendered under the present system is imposed in fairness and is a mercy. The very arbitrary and political nature of such sentences are by far short-sighted solutions to the problem we face in today's society and prisons. The society of this country calls itself a Christian and democratic society unlike any other. The so-called leaders have God's name on their lips; it is printed on the money as well. But how many of those in power and authority seek his will? There, God is money and money determines how well you are able to defend yourself and a lot of times, even whether you will live or not.

Before I close this out, I must say today's society cannot be a Christian society and at the same time, cut short their neighbors' time of grace, because by doing so, they invalidate the effect of our savior's death on the cross where he made atonement for the sins of all men. To him, no one is a hopeless case and every one of us has a right to make a new start and no one, no one in the world has the authority to deprive any human being of this privilege.

Read previous issues, online at:

<http://www.abolition.fr/ecpm/french/article.php?ujet=166>

(Or go to www.abolition.fr and click on Reaching Out in the menu bar)

<http://www.initiative-gegen-die-todesstrafe.de/Todesstrafeusa.html#ro>