

The Hawk and the Dove

A collection of texts by various authors talking about the death penalty, death row prisoners and their supporters

Collected and set up by Ines Aubert

April 2017

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“Sometimes, in weak moments, I agree with the proponents of the death penalty in the support of capital punishment. But these are short moments when I try to imagine those absolutely brutal crimes mentioned in the interview. But thinking of it in an overall and general way, I know that hate, anger and revenge can never solve anything or make anything even better.”

By Alex Reinert, pen pal of a death row prisoner, 47, Air Traffic Controller, Frankfurt, Germany, March 2017

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“If all societies on the planet abolished execution and several generations could enjoy a time without capital punishment, then hardly no one would develop the belief or views that murder could be acceptable, even within the law.”

By José Moreno, former death row prisoner for 22 years, Texas, March 2017

Preface

I Am a Hawk, You Are a Dove – it's good that we can listen to each other

About: Hawk and dove – these are the symbols Jeff used, referring to his and my positions. Jeff is a strong proponent of the death penalty and, as a complete stranger, contacted me by e-mail to tell me “Always the same pattern with you Euro women, who adopt these killers and ignore the innocents whom your dear pals have executed.”

After his first message, a long e-mail talk followed in which Jeff and I explained our positions with regards to capital punishment. Jeff agreed that I share parts of this first e-mail exchange in direct quote after removing names of persons and social media pages.

The long “Talk with Jeff” – see next page – was followed by an interview with him several weeks later. I believe that both pieces of writing are worth being read as they show how differently people can look at the death penalty. With Jeff's words I will say: “It's good that we can listen to each other.”

Together with a couple of other texts they make the beginning of this collection.

In time, more articles will be added. I invite you to listen to other people elaborating on their opinion and how they formed it.

For feedback or for instructions for contributions please contact me at aubert.ines@gmail.com

“Always the same pattern with you Euro women” – A talk between Jeff who is pro death penalty and Ines Aubert

Jeff, as a stranger and proponent of the death penalty, contacted Ines by e-mail while she was visiting her pen pals in prison. The talk consists of the original e-mail exchange between them.

By Jeff and Ines Aubert, August 2016

Jeff: So, I understand that you have tender feelings about your friend on death row and are full of compassion for him.

Where is your compassion for the victim and his family? Always the same pattern with you Euro women, who adopt these killers and ignore the innocents whom your dear pals have executed. Yes, I did read your couple sentences of regret about his victims. You say you are not concerned with the details of your pen friend’s crime, as it would not bring back the victim. And the facts would not fit with the hopeful image in your mind of an innocent man being put to death by an evil state. It is indeed regretful that his life’s path led him to that bad act, and his poor upbringing is part of it all, but the fact is that many many people have lives that are not all sunshine and roses who don’t do the things he has done.

Sometime in the future the State of Texas will give him that which he so justly deserves, and it is a tragedy for all involved. But justice will finally be served.

It will be interesting to see if, in his last statement, he finally stands up like the man he claims to be, to take responsibility and apologize to the victim’s family. THAT would be evidence that he truly has changed. My guess is he will leave this world secretly clinging to darkness and hatred. He will express sympathy to the victim’s family for the “loss of their loved one”, but he will stop short of the truth, which would have been proof that he had truly changed. And another Euro woman will have been duped. We will see.

Jeff

Ines: Hi Jeff, thank you for your message. I appreciate that you took the time to elaborate what you think. I will try to answer the best I can.

I don’t know if I match a pattern of European women as sometimes I feel quite unique. I am very grateful for everything that I was given in my life without deserving or having earned it. The understanding not to make bad choices in difficult situations I consider a gift as well and not an accomplishment. Like you, I believe though that people should be made responsible for their choices and actions no matter what their upbringing was like.

My gratitude has led me to all kinds of voluntary work since I was a juvenile because I consider solidarity one of the biggest values in life. I have several pen pals in prison because I love to write and to be in contact with human beings. Most of my pen pals admit to their crimes so I’m aware of the tremendous guilt a person can carry with them.

I care a lot more about the victims than the two sentences probably suggest. If I have the chance, I will always talk to them. I talked to the son and father of the victim of the crime my pen pal was convicted of. I met both of them personally.

In the case of another pen pal I had, Robert Power/Casper, I met one of the women whom he raped when she was a juvenile. An interview with her and with the above mention son of the victim are available.

I wish there was something I could do for the victim's family. I grew up without my father, too, and I know firsthand how it feels having only one parent. So, I have a lot of empathy with these children. Usually, the family members of crime victims aren't looking for contact with strangers though.

Jeff, I agree with you. If it was indeed my pen friend who killed this man, it would be good if he admitted to it. It would be very healing for the victim's family and also for the offender. Although I've been caring for my friend for many years, I'm still not him. I don't know whether what I think is right or wrong, and I especially can't influence his actions. I started as a pen pal, and I see my role as that of just standing by someone's side and being a person to talk to.

Contrary to what you think, I don't believe that putting someone to death will serve justice. In my opinion, death is not a punishment, as we will all die one day. Also, it stops the maturation and growing of the person which, in my eyes, would be the purpose of prison sentences. Plus, it might indeed be an innocent person who is executed. If they execute my friend on death row, I can only hope that the victim's family sees this as justice and not as an additional burden.

Take care
Ines

Jeff: Hi Ines, thank you for your reply. I found it thoughtful and insightful. I completely understand you standing beside someone who has admitted to their crimes. Such a person deserves some measure of consideration and respect for taking responsibility and expressing remorse. I do believe some of them actually do change. But it is phony if they do not take responsibility and apologize. Then they are eligible (in my eyes) to ask for forgiveness.

If you communicate with your pen friend, I hope you are able to convince him that further denial will do absolutely nothing to benefit his legal situation and only furthers the harm to the victim's family, and to himself. By doing so, he denies them the closure they might have had, and he denies himself any forgiveness he might have received from them. He will fail in his responsibility to stand up and be a true man. A man that has done great wrong, but will ignore the opportunity to produce some measure of right. Not to mention the risk of living the lie to the very end and then standing before God (who cannot be lied to), and risking eternal damnation for his soul. I will read his final statement and I hope takes this final opportunity to bring something good from all the bad.

I will read your attached interviews. I agree you are not the usual European woman who seeks out the condemned men. I believe most are on a fantasy search for love and naively believe they are all innocent. You are different.

Jeff

Ines: My guilty pen friend Casper was on a long journey and was ready to admit to his crimes only after years on death row. To me, that shows that positive dynamics sometimes develop slowly and we should not give up on those who aren't there yet. Isn't it the "lost ones" – if you want to use that term – who need our care most?

My pen friend, whether he is guilty or not, is on his own journey. If there is something left to reconcile when one day he stands before God, I believe God will show him a way to do it. The same goes for those who probably execute an innocent man.

The purpose and reason for a particular journey is beyond what I can grasp. I don't know why my pen friend is on that particular journey and why things develop the way they do. My "being there to listen" is the best I can offer and so that's what I'm doing.

Take care

Ines

Jeff: I am willing to admit that the possibility of executing an innocent person may be reason enough to abolish it. But when it happens correctly (which is true in the overwhelming majority of cases) and the guilty are executed for the horrendous things done to innocent people, then it is true justice and richly deserved. I have no doubt that capital punishment in the US is going away, it's just a matter of time.

Yes, if Casper changed and took responsibility, then he would deserve a measure of higher regard. And thereby deserve more "care." But don't the victims and their family deserve our care the most? You are one of the few opponents of capital punishment who even acknowledge the victims. You have spoken to them and shown you care. You are the exception to the usual death row groupie. The victims and their families receive far less "care" than those poor killers, for whom naïve people cry their hearts out for, while fantasizing that they are innocent. Yes, I do believe that some have truly changed from the person they were when they committed their crimes. Years of time on their hands to read, study, receive counseling, etc. has often made sincere change in them. Others fake their change, and others don't bother to change or bother to fake it.

As to those who execute an innocent person having to face God's wrath just as the guilty will.....no. Yes, if they KNEW the condemned was innocent and executed them anyway. But when done unknowingly, the God I believe in will understand and know they are not the same.

If you have ever read about Karla Faye Tucker.... most everyone (including me) believe she had become a totally different person by the time she was executed in Texas. A good case could be made that she should have been incarcerated for her natural life instead. But as the

warden himself said (who also believed she did have a changed heart) they were not going to execute her for the person she is now, they were going to execute her for what she had done. I don't believe most people who commit murder should be executed. Most should receive imprisonment based on the degree of the crime. That is mostly the way it works here. If you get mad and kill someone because of a sudden fight, it is punished much less severely than someone who plans and plots, and takes someone's life. This is why "capital" punishment is reserved for the worst of the worst. I live in Arizona, and there are more than one on death row for raping and murdering a little baby or an infant. These types of predators who do the most brutal heartless things like that deserve no less than death. And in those worst cases, I wish the execution could be violent as in the past, like they imposed on their victims. When the state imposes it on them, they still have it better than their victims. So even capital punishment does not deliver complete justice. I can only hope that if there is a hell, those who are guilty of the worst things will receive final justice there. Those who take responsibility, apologize, and stop all the lies, their souls deserve something better. Hopefully God will know what to do with them, whatever that is.

Jeff

Ines: Hi Jeff, I might be an exception, but you are, too. Many who speak out for the death penalty towards anti-death penalty activists don't even care to listen or communicate.

How old are you and what do you do for a living? It is easy to find out more about me but I don't know with whom I am speaking.

I said before that many inmates admit to their crimes, but you won't hear often about them. Many are on a journey and while they might not admit to it today, they probably do tomorrow. I believe they should be given the time to do so. Human beings are constantly changing, and there is hope for everyone. Some might not change in a visible way, but they should be given the chance to do so and for that they need interaction.

I've heard of former officers of the execution team or even wardens or chaplains who came to deeply regret their presence or involvement in executions before they even stood before God. So, God will probably have to comfort them if they indeed hadn't done any wrong by killing one of his children.

My personal insight into my pen friends' lives showed me that some people receive punishment before they commit their crimes. Many people on death row tell about horrible childhoods that probably come close to the violent punishment you wish to be handed out. So, they have received it, just in a different order. I know that is cynical to say, but this might satisfy those who think they should be punished more severely.

Jeff, would you allow me to share our conversation with people in my organization? You can come up with additional messages that you want us to know or consider. I'm open for that. This interaction has provided me with greater insight, and I hope it has done the same for you.

Take care

Ines

Jeff: Hi Ines, yes, I will tell you about myself, as it is only fair to know who you are speaking to. I am 61, a long-time resident of Arizona. I live alone, and have 2 brothers in the same part of Arizona (Phoenix). I have been employed for 31 years as a worker for electric utility co. Before that, 6 years in the Navy. And before that, 3 years at the Texas Dept. of Corrections. Back then (76-79), it was TDC instead of the present name. I was briefly a guard at the Ellis Unit, before moving on to driving trucks at the Wynne Unit. In those years, I entered the Walls unit in Huntsville a few times to eat a meal while my truck waited around the back. While at Ellis, I worked maybe a dozen shifts on death row, as it was located there before Polunsky. At that time, there were about 40 or so inmates on the row, if I recall. I worked night shift while there, so I never interacted with any on the row, just a count every 2 hours. So yes, those few years when I was very young helped form my views about criminal justice and capital punishment. I met many good men who had made a mistake and were quietly and honorably trying to do their time and go home. And I met some others who were horrible human beings at Ellis, whom I hope never saw the light of freedom again. Ellis was maximum security. Wynne was medium security and a whole lot better quality of incarcerated people. I met the Asst Warden at Wynne (Mr. Wallace Pack), who later had become the head Warden at Ellis. He and the farm manager were murdered by an inmate at Ellis long after I left the TDC. A female officer was also later murdered at Ellis. It was (and I imagine still is) a very dangerous place. As a young person, I don't think me and my co-workers really understood the danger there. But even at Wynne, a female officer riding a horse outside was run down by an inmate who stole a truck during an escape attempt. He has had his date with the needle, and I hope it was a very "cruel and unusual" experience, similar to the cruelty he inflicted on that fine woman when he drove the truck over her and the horse. But I think he still had it a lot easier than she did. And she was an innocent person

I have seen a documentary where a former warden did seem to have regrets about the death penalty. I am sure seeing a constant parade of death could affect even the more hawkish believers in cap. punishment. I think God will understand since He will know they had no way of knowing if the condemned was guilty or innocent. It is like in World War II, when the Allies were bombing Germany to stop Hitler from taking over and enslaving the entire world, which he surely would have done if not for those brave men and women who stood in his way. Bomber pilots knew some of their bombs would kill innocent people, and I am sure felt bad for it, but they knew if they did not accept the mistakes and go on, they could not have done the job to help save the world. I think God did not hold them accountable for the innocents they harmed and He will understand the Warden and his staff.

Yes, you can share anything I write as you would like.

Have you ever seen the documentary film, "The Thin Blue Line" by Errol Morris?

Very well done and resulted in Randall Adams being exonerated in Texas. He was believed to have murdered Dallas police officer Robert Wood in 1976, and had come within days or weeks of execution, but was innocent.

He was the victim of an overzealous Dallas County prosecutor who falsified evidence to make the conviction. I don't think it happens much, but I will concede to the fact that it happens at all is the only real reason I will agree the death penalty probably should be relegated

to the past. Although when the executed is guilty (which is in 99.9999% of cases) I believe it is morally correct and just. Yes, I will say that vengeance and retribution have value in a civilized society, which might leave you or your friends aghast.

I know that people are a product of their upbringing, conditions, etc. And no doubt many who do terrible things would never have gone that way had things been different for them. But the responsibility is ultimately theirs and they have to be held accountable. But it is only right to do so in humane and just ways. I say that, even though I previously said what I did about hoping the execution is not comfortable and that it is painful and I would rather that it be more violent than using drugs. Were it up to me, if the offender killed his victim without excessive brutality or cruelty, then use drugs that allow their life to be taken gently. (But usually “gentle” murderers do not even receive the death penalty in the US, especially in recent times as the country moves away from it). And for the really bad ones that were especially cruel and depraved, and caused their victims great suffering (in Arizona there is one on the row who poured gasoline over the head of his 4-year-old daughter, drenching her while she repeatedly cried “no, daddy, no” and burned her to death) then I would like them to receive old-time electrocution or hanging.

Yes, I am a hawk on this. You are a dove. It’s good that we can listen to each other.

Jeff

Ines: Hi Jeff, thank you for your long e-mail. I appreciate our conversation because it makes me reconsider both your arguments for and mine against the death penalty. I cannot take the time to listen to those who committed murder and then not listen to people who are pro death penalty, can I?

I would love to go on or make a written interview with you as I have made many in the past. I have always wanted to interview someone who works or worked for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice/TDCJ. However, right now, I’m visiting my pen pals and seeing some beautiful places.

So, I fear I will have to stop talking to you for the time being.

I wish you all the best!

Take care

Ines

Jeff: No problem. If you want to talk again, just send a note.

Best to you as well, Ines.

Jeff

Interview with Jeff, an advocate of the death penalty

Jeff, as a complete stranger, wrote Ines a message. They are on different sides: Jeff is an American proponent of the death penalty, and Ines a European woman who is strongly against it. Still, they listened and learned about the other's motives.

The questions were asked by Ines Aubert, pen pal of death row prisoners, 55 years old, teacher for children with special needs, Switzerland, September 2016

Jeff, in July we had an interesting e-mail exchange after you wrote me a message. We didn't know each other at that time, but it was obvious from the start that we are on different sides: you are an American proponent of the death penalty, and I am a European woman who is strongly against it.

In your first message you wrote, "So, I understand that you have tender feelings about your friend on death row and are full of compassion for him. Where is your compassion for the victim and his family? Always the same pattern with you Euro women, who adopt these killers and ignore the innocents whom your dear pals have executed."

From there, we wrote back and forth, and to me it was an enriching and fruitful exchange. I got to know you as someone who listens and who can express himself well. So, I want to make use of the opportunity and delve even deeper into some topics that are of concern to both of us. What did you think about the talk we had in July?

The talk we had in July was worthwhile to me, as I found you to be reasonable and not quite what I had expected.

I expected your views would be as I believe many opponents of capital punishment have, that states like Texas are the very definition of evil and most of the condemned are innocent good people who were railroaded and the state is intending to "murder" them. One particular website that is now closed was full of fairy tale nonsense that vilified Texas and celebrated all the fine boys on the row.

Gullible people who are duped by the slanted images the killers construct of themselves and their crimes in hopes of avoiding final justice. Most have no real remorse and only regret being caught and held accountable, and cling to their lies in the hopes of gaining a benefit like a reversal for a new trial, or a commutation to a reduced sentence such as life imprisonment. They become like celebrities, and women (many from Europe) come here and marry them for twisted reasons. The M. brothers in California doing life who gunned down their parents (because they could not wait for their eventual inheritances) have always had lots of women to romance, they line up to write and keep their commissary accounts stocked with money. One of them married a former playboy playmate while in prison. She divorced him when she found out he was romancing other women while married to her.

You do understand that there are real victims, whereas most death row groupies don't show any acknowledgement of that fact. So I don't actually place you in the groupie category. I find you more balanced and reasonable than those types.

The organization in which I am very active arranges pen pal-ships with death row inmates. However, we don't set up any ads for inmates, but match them on a first come first served basis. So, neither side can choose to whom to write. We consider it an interaction between two human beings and not a partnership arrangement. Additionally, we inform potential future members very carefully before they are given an address. We tell them that most inmates on death row are guilty.

You and I have already found out that we agree on a lot, but not on capital punishment. Do you have some understanding why someone would be against the death penalty?

Yes, I have heard the arguments....

Some people think it is cruel. I disagree. Cruel is what the inmates did to their victims. The victims were not murderers who deserved to have their lives taken.

Some people think it is too expensive. I am not convinced it is more expensive than keeping someone incarcerated for the rest of their life. And if it is more expensive to execute them, some things are just worth the extra cost.

Some people think the state should not be in the business of "murder." I agree. But the state is not in the business of murder. The state is (mostly) in the business of justice, and execution for deserving individuals is justice.

Some people think the death penalty is not a deterrent. I agree that many offenders don't think about the penalty before committing their crimes, but execution DOES deter future murders and other serious crimes. Offenders who are executed will never kill anyone else again. They won't ever get to kill a prison employee (which has happened). Or another inmate (which has happened). Or be released to kill again (this has happened when capital punishment was stopped in the U.S., some inmates were then commuted to life imprisonment, and with time served received parole and killed again when back on the outside).

Some people think execution does not give the offender's victim's family "closure" or justice. I disagree. It may not give it completely, but it gives them something as close to it as possible.

Some people think capital punishment should be abolished because an innocent person can be executed. I tend to agree now. Since there are rare instances where prosecutors willfully violate the law and manufacture false evidence (as in the Randall Adams case), it is probably time to move past capital punishment and impose life with no possibility of release ever for the worst of killers. I believe it is very rare when an innocent person is executed, and when deserving offenders are executed it is a very good thing for the victim's family and society. But since the risk is too great of it happening to an innocent person and can never be corrected, I agree that it should be abolished. This is the ONLY reason I would support abolishment.

As far as I know, it's the attorneys that death row inmates are appointed that raise the costs and not the execution.

The state does indeed consider an execution murder because they write "homicide" as reason of death on the death certificate.

I think that if people are executed to prevent them from committing murder in the future, as you suggest, you enter a slippery slope. It would be very difficult to define who is such a person.

Your understanding of homicide is not accurate. Homicide simply means causing the death of another. The law specifies different ways this happens, and in some very narrow circumstances homicide is legal. A policeman who acts legally to stop a terrorist or criminal who is engaged in life-threatening behavior (using deadly force unlawfully) and is killed by the policeman is a homicide. But this is not murder because it was done with legal justification. Execution is a homicide, but not murder, because it is the legal taking of a life, with legal justification. Big difference between homicide and murder.

I am not suggesting that offenders should be executed just to stop them from murder in the future. The purpose of execution is punishment for their crime. I am saying that it completely prevents that offender from ever murdering again. It is a side benefit to society and in particular any future victim who will not be murdered. Opponents will believe this is not a risk (future murders). It has already happened, as I have pointed out.

To the topic “closure”, I would like to say that in my eyes the best way is to forgive. This doesn’t mean that you condone the crime or disrespect the person who was murdered. It means to go through a process that finally sets us free from the bonds of hatred and revenge and allows us to go on with our lives whether the inmate – or any other person who did us wrong – has received their punishment or not. There are murder victim’s family members who campaign against the death penalty and I know that for many of them the execution doesn’t equal closure.

The prime personal reason why I’m against the death penalty is that I believe we are all on a spiritual journey and are supposed to learn and grow. The execution would stop that process and take away the chance that a prisoner comes to understand the extent of what he has done.

For you and others, I accept that forgiving is the best way for you. Not for myself and others. In my view, this again illustrates how most opponents make it all about the offender. Hug the killer and shun the victim. Yes, I know you are much more aware of the victim than other opponents, but I believe most give little thought to them while anguishing over and coddling the killer. This is what I refer to as naiveness. To me, the height of it is the European woman who travels to the U.S. to marry one of them. I wonder how many of the happy brides have done any real research and truly know what their new husband has done, not a whitewashed version from an anti-capital punishment web site? I would bet my next paycheck that most believe they are innocent, or at least have no idea about the extent of their crimes. I think the offenders are victimizing another person by taking advantage of their naiveness, just not killing their victim this time. The naiveness of the sheep to the wolf. I don’t find your views to be as naïve as the ones who seek out a killer to marry.

I wonder, how do you keep yourself updated on death penalty cases and where do you have your opinion about “Euro women” from?

I mostly read the Texas Department of Criminal Justice/ TDCJ web site, death row section. Also a local news web site here in Arizona sometimes carry stories about the death row inmates here, retelling the story of their crimes. I have read some on the Canadian Coalition against the Death Penalty/ CCADP site, with which I am sure you are familiar.

What triggered you to write me that first message?

I don't remember how I came across your name. I likely was reading about upcoming scheduled executions in Texas, and sometimes I will read other sources about the inmate's story, and I likely saw your name in relation to your pen pal. Very occasionally over the years, I have e-mailed people who appeared to be advocates of the killers. There is a woman on TX death row named B. Some years ago, there was a man from Scotland who was living in the US who had created a web site on her behalf showing horses running on the beach, creating this image of her as an innocent victim of Texas injustice. He and I exchanged a number of emails, and I asked him if he had really done any research about her, and would still be her advocate if she were not so physically attractive. Would he be running a web site for her if she was 5 feet tall and weighed 250 pounds? Maybe the fantasy of the beautiful innocent princess locked away in the dungeon awaiting the executioner would not fit so well if she were not so pretty? My suggestion that perhaps he had been duped by her and she was playing him for a sucker did not sit well with him, of course. I asked him to really read into and research her case and then see what you believe. Sometime later he took the web site down.

I posted a few messages on the site that I mentioned at the beginning of this interview before it was shut down. My few messages there were that they ought to be ashamed for portraying the monsters as poor innocent unfortunates and ignoring the true victims who had suffered horrible things at their hands. I truly believe that if advocates had lost someone they loved, they would have an entirely different view of their “friends” on the row.

In fact, I have thought about the motivation of us writers – myself included – before. Some years ago, I actually set up a provoking thesis for our internal newsletter that women might find satisfaction in putting men back on their feet, while some men find satisfaction in humiliating women. Several members then commented on that thesis which made an interesting read.

From what you write, I see that you feel Texas and its justice system has been done injustice. You seem to fight a battle either for or against something or someone to set this right. I sense a lot of anger inside of you. Am I right about this?

A lot? I am sure you would say it is a lot. Some of your friends will call me sick with hatred. I speak for the victims and believe when an extreme killer is executed that some measure of justice is achieved for the victims.

True example: Young woman gave a ride to two men who kidnapped her and forced her to drive to her apartment, raped her for hours, stole her money, then took her out of the city to a cliff, and while she begged for her life they shoved her off. Since she was in excellent health (before she met them) she was still alive after the fall. They climbed down to her, and while she continued to beg them not to kill her, they stood over her and smashed her head in with large rocks.

And there are many more examples. Forgive them? If God wants to forgive them, that is His business. Not me.

Anger toward those who do such things? Yes, of course, as any just person should have. Do I harbor more anger than most people? Probably do. It is just that I feel more for the victims than I do for these purveyors of evil. I just have an abiding sense of right and wrong, evil and good, justice and accountability.

You see, Jeff, in the course of writing these talks with you I came to care about you. Forgiving and not being angry mainly benefits the person who practices this, and not the person at whom it is aimed. If you can forgive your wrongdoer, you cut the bond to them and set yourself free.

If you stopped being angry, which I wish for you – you could, with a calm mind and heart, look for ways to help better the world. And I see that this is what you want. I believe you would find a way to contribute to the good.

I care about you as well, Ines. My feeling is that you are a good person. A world filled with peaceful doves like you would be a good world, indeed. Unfortunately, with this dangerous violent world, the hawks are still needed. Maybe someday humankind can move beyond where it is today. I am sure we agree about a lot and it's ok when people disagree civilly about other things.

The dove and hawk – this analogy would never have come to my mind. There would be so much to discuss but I guess we need to stop here now. Food for thoughts for our readers, right?

I enjoyed getting to know you, Jeff, and wish you all the best.

Hawk and Dove - I guess that I have been both!

I was a hawk until November 2, 1986 when I begged God to give me love and compassion and when He did I became a dove.

By Bill Pelke, murder victim family member, Alaska, October 2016

On July 11, 1986 I was a satisfied hawk when the death sentence was given to the person who killed my 78 year old grandmother. Today I am a dove and do not want to see any unnecessary taking of anyone's life.

I am convinced that God wants us to hate the sin, but love the sinner. I do hate the sin of murder; I hate it with a passion. I have seen lives and families destroyed by the act of murder. I hate it! But I have come to learn that we are to love the sinner. My Bible tells me in John 3:16 that God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son. I believe that if Jesus died for "this sinner" then who am I to say this person should die in a death chamber. Hate the sin, love the sinner. When Jesus says to love your enemies, I think He meant don't kill them.

I have come to learn that the answer is love and compassion or all of humanity. I have come to learn that if you have love and compassion for all of humanity you will not want anyone put into the death chamber and their life taken from them. It is impossible. In learning about love and compassion for all of humanity I came to understand the healing power of forgiveness. I learn I did not have to see someone die to heal from the death of my grandmother.

I also learned that closure is a death penalty myth, it doesn't bring any healing to the victim's families which is what the victim's family need. I also found that many want the death penalty as a matter of vengeance. Revenge is never, ever the answer. That belongs to God alone.

In 1998 I was at the Vatican when Pope John Paul II publically called for worldwide abolition of the death penalty. He gave two reasons. He said that that the death penalty is cruel and he said the death penalty was unnecessary. Those words continue to ring in my ears; because I have come to learn that the death penalty is not only cruel to the person we take out of their cage at a certain day and time but what we do to their family members is cruel & UNUSUAL punishment. The Pope also said it was unnecessary and it is. If we can send a man to the moon then surely we can take a person who has committed a terrible crime and put them in a situation where they can never hurt anyone else.

Society has a right to be safe from people who have killed and there has to be consequences for their crime but we don't have to kill them. In the worst cases I support Life Without Parole.

At least 156 people have been sentenced to death for crimes that they did not commit right here in the US since 1973. Randle Dale Adams was a good friend of mine from Texas. As long as human beings make the decision of who lives and who dies we will make mistakes. When it comes to the death penalty there is no room for mistakes.

I applaud the people from Europe who see the death penalty as a human rights abuse and have compassion for those on death row.

We all want Justice but everyone seems to have a difference of opinion of what justice is. To me TRUE justice will have an element of mercy. I see no mercy in the death penalty sentence.

The Bible says in Micah 6:8: He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. In Zachariah 7:9 we read “This is what the LORD Almighty said: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.”

Jesus taught forgiveness to the multitudes, the disciples and to us all when He died.

He told us to forgive for our well-being, not for the sake of the perpetrator. The answer is love and compassion for all of humanity.

It is not favoring the perpetrators life as more valuable than the victims, but realizing we are all God’s children. We need to stop the cycle of violence. Abolish the death penalty. Peace

I detest the deeds, but I do not detest my pen-friend as a human being

The penpalship definitely opened my eyes. I became aware that the state wants to kill a friend of mine. I am punished even though I am innocent.

By Patrik, pen pal of a death row prisoner and opponent of the death penalty, Switzerland, October 2016

I am against the death penalty because, in my opinion, no state has the right to kill human beings. By coincidence, I came across a Swiss organization which distributes addresses of death row prisoners to their members. Out of interest, curiosity, and because I am against the death penalty, I decided to start a penpalship with a death row prisoner. Of course, I do not approve of any of the crimes my penpal has committed. On the contrary, I detest these deeds, but I do not detest my penfriend as a human being. I am sorry for the victims and their families, but the death of the offender does not undo these deeds. No, it is only more disastrous. The offenders have families and friends as well and they are just as innocent as the victims.

Unfortunately, there are monsters on this planet. This raises the question if such human beings have a right to life? But do we have the right to decide this? Will we not become offenders as well when we kill other human beings? In my opinion, we would become offenders as well.

Honestly, I was not always against the death penalty. I thought for a long time that the death penalty is fine in some terrible cases. But when is it a terrible case? Is not every crime against people terrible? Yes, there are differences, but for the victims it is always awful. I am not sure if the death of the offender brings satisfaction. So what benefit do we draw from the death penalty?

The penpalship definitely opened my eyes. In this way, I realized that beyond a former criminal is a wonderful human being, who regrets his crime. I became aware that the state wants to kill a friend of mine. I am punished even though I am innocent. Of course, I knew what I was doing when I started the penpalship, and that this may one day unfortunately happen. Nevertheless, it is bad. In addition, my pen friend has other friends and relatives who haven't had the choice to start a penpalship with a death row prisoners.

We live in the 21st century. It is high time for us to wake up. Let us abolish the death penalty once and for all.

It's a Thin Line Between Love and Hate

“I do feel and believe that the Death Penalty should exist. Yes, it's true I feel there are certain crimes that are so heinous, so terrible that there is a lack of humanity in the person who commits them.”

By Joseph Douglas Martinez, 18 years in Prison with a Capital Life Sentence, Texas,
November 2016

Ah yes, Motown at its finest and a favorite tune of mine. I also thought it an appropriate title for this prose. Since when it comes to the Death Penalty it is a very thin line between those who love human life so much they don't want to see anyone put to death no matter what the circumstances are, and those who hate the ones who perpetrated terrible crime so much, they want them exterminated.

I guess you could say that I walk a delicate balance on that line. But before I get into this any further, I think it's best that I give you a few pertinent details about myself. First I'm currently incarcerated in the Texas Prison system. I was convicted of Capital Murder based on the Law of Parties. If you are not familiar with the Law of Parties, look up Texas Penal Code 7.02(b). On December 16th I will have 18 calendar years under my belt. And last but not least, as I mentioned before, I'm locked up in Texas, which is like the pseudo home of the Death Penalty. (Seven executions so far this year).

Now that that is out of the way let me explain where I stand on this subject. For starters I do feel and believe that the Death Penalty should exist. (GASP!!!) Yes, it's true I feel there are certain crimes that are so heinous, so terrible that there is a lack of humanity in the person who commits them. How can I feel compassion and empathy for someone who felt neither for the innocent life they took nor the life they've damaged forever because of their actions? For some perspective of what I mean let me give an example. When I hear or read a story about a child that has been abducted, sexually assaulted, and then murdered, well there is just nothing that can be said that would justify not putting to death the person who committed that act. I know, I know, there are some religious people who will say, "you can't play God, acting as a judge, jury, and executioner." And my answer to that is It's pretty funny that most of those same people have no problem passing judgement and condemning same sex couples who want to get married. Ironic no! Another subject, another time.....

Now for the flip side of the coin, I strongly feel that there needs to be serious changes made concerning the process in giving someone a death sentence (Surprised?) And therein lies my conflict. I totally subscribe to the belief that one innocent person put to death is one too many. There are many flaws with our criminal justice system. For example, take my case. Because of the Law of Parties, I could have faced the Death Penalty. As a matter of fact, there is a man named Jeff Woods who is currently on the Row in Texas because he was convicted under the Law of Parties. I truly hope he gets justice and that his conviction is reversed. This is just one example of the many men and women who should not be on death row.

But what is the solution? Sadly, I don't have that answer. I just have an opinion. Hell, I guess the best solution would be to stop committing crimes, but that's not reality. Nor is it realistic to not expect retribution. That's been part of human nature since the beginning of time. It's also easy to feel a certain way about something when you're on the outside looking in. It's hard to understand or feel what it's like to be a victim until you are the victim, or the victim is a loved one. It's those who are directly affected by tragedy that can give forgiveness to the one who perpetrated the tragedy that I give so much respect to, because I know I would not be able to do the same. I know evil exists. I have seen it many times over the past 18 years.

In closing I know that my stance on this topic will not be popular amongst many of those who will read this. But my hope is that I have been able to express myself clearly enough, so that even though you might not agree you will at least understand where I'm coming from. Peace and Blessings to all.....

What punishment, confinement or treatment is appropriate for one who has tried to escape?

“I have reached a level of comfort, mentally, which allows me to view this environment more in a neutral light. It could be better. It could be worse. My focus is on what I can control: being the best I can. So I am at peace.”

Interview with Daniel McDonald, 36 years old, 11 years a prisoner in Texas, serving a Life Sentence, December 2016

The questions were asked by Ines Aubert

Daniel, you have a life sentence but are in Administrative segregation in prison because you participated in an escape attempt. How would it have been possible to prevent the attempt?

The short answer: if the guards had performed their duties, the escape attempt would not have been possible. As part of the “plan”, all that was done amounted to exploiting how lazy the guards were. Or how inefficient their monitoring practices were. In here, there really isn’t an attempt to truly understand a person, to promote constructive rehabilitation. There are programs. But they don’t feel like they promote change. That, of course, is based on how each individual perceives their reality. Which is something that could be reviewed.

There are always underlying reasons why a person takes part in an escape attempt. And if, upon receiving the plan, there isn’t a reasonable chance for success, the plan will die.

That would’ve been true for me. Step by step we knew how the guards had conditioned themselves to act and react. As such, it was really easy to get around basic security. The goal was to avoid violence, and because of the careful planning, harming guards was avoided. At the end several of us were shot, but that was a direct consequence of a failed attempt.

What punishment, confinement or treatment do you think is appropriate for one who has tried to escape? In the beginning, it is appropriate for the person who attempted to escape to be confined in a more secure place. Then the administration should strive to understand what inspired the person to that action. Did threats exist? Irrational fears? These are concepts in line with basic anxiety that can be addressed.

Prison life can be harsh, especially for someone coming for the first time. Adapting isn’t always easy. Such an unstable reality can lead to extreme action. Punishment is purely an administrative thing, where, limited access to programs and such can have a truly negative effect long-term. So, secure housing, or more secure housing is appropriate, but denying access to schooling, other education, classes, and counselling should never happen. Then there should be a phase-based-system to monitor the person going forward with the goal of releasing them. Harsh, indefinite punishment is not the answer.

You also have a pending case that could put you on death row. What comes to your mind when you think of that happening?

In general, I don't really think that way. My beliefs call me to stay in the moment. The past is gone. Worrying about the future is a pointless task. Moment by moment, day by day, I strive to better myself moving forward. That is what I can control. In that way, I will be truly prepared to face what comes. What "could" happen is only a probability without certain direction. Even so, I can admit that I am, in a way, fortunate. Many are thrown into "the fire", completely at the mercy of the legal system. Such a destabilizing position truly makes them vulnerable. I, on the other hand, have been afforded the time to heal, cleansing my mind to learn how to defend myself in this environment. Ultimately, my goal is to fight through, facing and enduring difficulties as they come.

I wonder, wouldn't the death penalty also mean some kind of relief as then you wouldn't have to live that long in prison anymore?

I have worked really hard to cultivate a great appreciation for life, no matter where I am. Seeking "relief" in death is a delusional release. When I was outside of these walls, I lived in another kind of prison – a mental cage of manic depression that led me down dark roads. My physical freedom was overshadowed by mental shackles. Now my body is in prison and my mind is free. Because I have known the draw of suicidal depression, I actually feel more "whole" despite the circumstances. Having the ability to do whatever I wanted did not mean I knew how to live. I was, more often than not, adrift without direction. When I learned how to address my mental instabilities, and overall perspective, I began to understand where I failed in the past. A period of time that was a living hell, because I kept getting caught in destructive cycles that I didn't know how to control. But it was never about control. Rather, I needed to let go. To not take things so personal. Death is natural. It will come, in whatever form, when the time is right. I do not fear death, nor will I chase it. True relief for me is to remain actively engaged as I keep my mind in order.

What would you fear most if you got the death penalty and do you think that would be enough punishment?

I don't know what I would "fear" to be honest, because I've come to terms with death and dying. Or "what will be, will be". To say fear might also imply anxiety, worry, concern, and yet, when I think about the prospect of possibly receiving the death penalty, I am not greatly moved.

A better way to explain this, perhaps: the future is unknown. All I have is today. This moment is what I live within, trying to be the best version of myself. Receiving the death penalty is only a "possible outcome", not a certainty. And from what I know of the impropriety on behalf of the authorities, the chance of receiving such a harsh sentence just doesn't seem probable.

What is enough punishment? For me, now, in truth, this transcends "punishment". Meaning: I have reached a level of comfort, mentally, which allows me to view this environment more in a neutral light. It could be better. It could be worse. My focus is on what I can control: being

the best I can. So I am at peace. And so, the idea of “enough punishment” is an abstract concept, because I don’t think it is really possible to assign any “appropriate” punishment. I’ve stopped worrying about it.

As a Father, I really don't know if I would have had thoughts like a Hawk or a Dove in some cases

“Sometimes, in weak moments, I agree with the proponents of the death penalty in the support of capital punishment. But these are short moments when I try to imagine those absolutely brutal crimes mentioned in the interview. But thinking of it in an overall and general way, I know that hate, anger and revenge can never solve anything or make anything even better.”

By Alex Reinert, pen pal of a death row prisoner, 47, Air Traffic Controller, Frankfurt, Germany, March 2017

The Interview entitled “The Hawk and the Dove” made me think. I found it to be a very interesting conversation because of its controversial and objective nature.

I have written letters to my pen pal Bill for about 5 years now, and have always been a strong opponent of the death penalty. Jeff (the Hawk) did not change that completely, but what he said changed my way of thinking about some aspects.

First, I must say that I'm glad that my pen pal Bill doesn't claim to be innocent like many other DR inmates do. He accepts total responsibility for his crime. He killed three people in an act of rage caused by jealousy and anger. We never had to discuss the justification of his punishment. He killed his parents-in-law and his brother-in-law with a gun. I can't imagine how I would have felt at the beginning of our pen pal ship if he would have been one of those “Monsters” who committed such horrifying things that Jeff mentioned in the interview. “Burning your own children”. “Raping small kids”. As a father, I really don't know if I would have had thoughts like a Hawk or a Dove in such a case. The Lifespark -organization does not choose your pen pal according to preferences, you simply receive the next inmate on the list. So, before I started as a pen pal back then, there was the possibility of receiving the address of a child-rapist or something similar. I remember how grateful I was when I “got Bill” (reading this sentence leaves a surreal feeling).

One thing that always makes me wonder while reading the arguments of opponents and advocates of the death penalty is that both sides refer to God just as if he would provide answers to all of our questions and actions! God does not support any kind of brutalism. He may serve as a guide for doing the right things and for living a righteous life in common, but he does not give any clear answer to the question if killing could be legal or if killing could be good at all, whoever does it, whether it be a state or a person. In asfar as I interpret the Bible, God and Jesus talked about love, and nothing but love. Advocates of the DP could argue that there are some chapters about justice and so on in the Bible. We all – advocates and opponents – interpret the words of the Bible the way it suits our arguments the best, which is a foolish self-deception. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” This sentence can't truly serve as a justification for any violence. If that were so, wars would never end and revenge would rule the world. I decided differently. My decision to write to a Death Row inmate was

driven by my inner feelings of humanity. I cannot explain this further, sorry. I just don't know what to say, it's in me. As a Hawk, some would find this to be very unilateral. Yes, it is. I just don't have any contact with the victims. I would love to start conversations with the relatives of the victims, too. Maybe I will start to do that now (thanks Jeff!).

The bad thing is the way capital punishment is practiced: solitary confinement, years of not being treated as a human being, little to no health care, all of the inhumane treatment on DR – that can't be moral. My pen pal Bill has been on DR for more than 25 years now. He is fighting to get his sentence commuted to a life sentence. My own (European) country handles cases like Bill's very differently. There would have been sophisticated efforts made to resocialize him in the community. I like that principle and find it to be the best thing to do. But after reading the interview with Jeff, I must admit that some people could not have been helped by that. Once I visited Bill in the unit in Texas where he lives a life that is far away of being called a "life". We were sitting there in the visitor's room and talking to each other through telephones. Other inmates and visitors came from time to time to begin their conversations. Then the guard led an inmate into a cabin some meters away from ours on the other side of the room. Bill looked at him and suddenly he was deeply frightened. He told me that this guy is a very, very evil man and that he would kill anybody for no reason. Social rehabilitation for that guy would certainly be nearly impossible, even in my country. But still, if that were so, he would stay in the pen his entire life, which would be the right thing to do. Bill is different. I'm convinced that he would have had the chance to reflect and to express remorse his surroundings had been more positive and supportive. Now – after 25 years on DR – he probably would not be able to lead a normal life outside the Pen.

Let me get back to my reason for writing Bill. I guess that the USA itself is a very violent society. I have often been there in different states: Ohio, NY, CA, TX, AZ, etc. The people are so friendly and helpful. I have almost never met such open-minded and friendly people. I really love the USA and its inhabitants. But I feel and know that there is another side of the coin. No other society so similar to my own is so violent, so full of weapons, so full of daily crimes, so full of hate and anger. Yes, free weapons are a problem, so is social and economic injustice. The chasm between the rich and the poor, loss of jobs and wealth, the low level of education, all are facts that create violence. But I'm not smart enough to elaborate upon all the reasons for this terrible situation. But the statistics speak for themselves: the more guns, the more crimes are committed; the more poor people, the more injustice. The US is destroying itself and it gets worse and worse. And the answers for these problems from the viewpoint of the US are even more weapons, more self-protection and more outlaw justice is practiced. And that cannot be righteous. With my pen pal ship, I want to serve as a counterbalance. My friend Bill tells me so much about love and forgiveness. He doesn't hope to get out again, so his arguing can't be egoistic. He teaches me that time is love and love is time. Time that we spend with our friends and family. Writing and helping Bill may not be a justified thing to do considering the crime he has committed. It is an altruistic action in order to simply make his life a little more worthwhile. And that – some Christians would say – is what Jesus would have done. But as I said before, I don't act because I'm a religious person. I'm doing it because I'm an empathic person. Just as Ines Aubert (the Dove), who conducted the interview with Jeff (the Hawk) I always helped other people since I was young. But not only people, let

me tell you this: Once I worked in an animal shelter as a volunteer. I just remembered that now, as I was thinking of my motivation to write to a DR inmate. There were many dogs, about 50. Some were nice and tame, some not. Some dogs were lying in the corner and would become aggressive if someone approached their area. Teaching them how to be a better boy or girl was the most interesting thing to do. I started by just sitting near them. I wanted them to accept my nearness. That required patience and daily repetition. Most of the dogs were curious about their new neighbor and started to come along. They smelled me cautiously and with time, they let me touch them. Some of them I managed to put on a leash and take them out for a walk. At a certain point they were ready to be given to their new owner: they were re-socialized, trusting humans again! You might wonder what I want to tell you with that? There are so many aspects to it - just think about it yourself.

As I said before, Jeff made me think about me and my motivation in writing Bill. Jeff is right about so many things he has said. Sometimes, in weak moments, I agree with him in support of capital punishment. But these are short moments when I try to imagine those absolutely brutal crimes Jeff mentioned. But thinking of it in an overall and general way, I know that hate, anger and revenge can never solve anything or make anything better. Only forgiveness and love can change things for the better. Hating people or being filled with wrath makes you a hateful person. I don't want to be a hateful person. And to be honest, neither Hawks nor Doves are the right animals to explain the situation. Both birds do not act with intention, greed, hate, pity, moral or otherwise. They just conduct themselves as their nature dictates. Talking about killing, murder or legal homicide is a discussion of love and hate. Nothing else. We can all choose which way we want to go.

I would like to thank Jeff for sharing his thoughts with the world. I think that I never read such valuable and reasonable words before from a supporter of CP, even I think differently in most aspects.

A dove's-eye view

“If all societies on the planet abolished execution and several generations could enjoy a time without capital punishment, then hardly no one would develop the belief or views that murder could be acceptable, even within the law.”

By José Moreno, former death row prisoner for 22 years, Texas, March 2017

Capital punishment is a controversial subject for a very good reason. American society is about evenly divided on the issue. You have those that are in favor of it and those that are against it.

What makes one person accept capital punishment so that they think it is okay to legally murder another human being – for whatever the reason may be – while the other person finds this practice deplorable?

While you are thinking about the above question, here is another related question to ponder that is just as baffling to understand: What makes one person decide to commit crime while the next person may think about it but never, ever actually carry it through?

Our brains are naturally hard-wired to have a conscience, develop morals, know right from wrong and eventually most people become law-abiding citizens. Both questions are related because we use the same built-in set of morals that allows one person to decide that execution is permissible while another person sees it as wrong. The difference between these two different mentalities is that one person has created a distinction between legal murder and illegal murder. The fact that execution is state-sanctioned makes it acceptable. When it comes to capital punishment, the issue gets blurred because it's done under the auspices of the law. After all, it's called legal execution.

When someone is executed, the coroner has no choice but to list the cause of death on the death certificate as homicide. It's only a matter of time before legislators create a policy that allows a coroner to write something like, legal execution. That would further blur the issue of murder – legal or otherwise.

Another contributing factor that desensitizes and facilitates an acceptance of legalized murder is when someone becomes the victim of crime themselves or crime affects one of their loved ones. When someone's loved one is victimized, the intense emotional response that follows – usually anger – blinds and hinders the person from applying the morals instilled in them. At this point, their fury demands revenge and punishment. Emotions are strong influences that keep us from making the proper decision and crime affects many people in society. Furthermore, when someone joins an organization or law enforcement agency, they are naturally indoctrinated to unquestionably embrace the law of the land and to see those that don't as enemies deserving of any punishment the government deems suitable, even murder. At this point they no longer see it as murder nor does it conflict with the morals that person may have learned growing up. Murder becomes acceptable.

Life is precious and murder should never be acceptable in any situation. Not even in war. However, aggressive countries have started wars and forced other nations to defend themselves. So aircraft pilots have killed innocent people in war.

This is wrong, but the fault is not the pilot's – it's the leaders and followers of the country that allowed their country to start a war. This example of self-defense that results in innocent killing has absolutely nothing to do with killing a criminal that is already in custody and is now harmless to society.

As a civilized society we need to define where life begins, appreciate it and protect it. When enough people have similar beliefs and views, then, our leaders in government won't be able to murder anyone in the name of the law because they will have to represent the interest of the majority. If all societies on the planet abolished execution and several generations could enjoy a time without capital punishment, then hardly no one would develop the belief or views that murder could be acceptable, even within the law. Our current acceptance of this practice is what generates new believers, generation after generation.

As someone who almost completed the execution process (I came within three hours of getting executed), I can tell you that putting someone to sleep permanently is not the same as euthanizing an old pet with a terminal illness. Even though I survived, coming so close gave me a glimpse of what one must go through those last few minutes. I can only compare it to a torture of the psyche because surviving the experience changes an individual. Not only was I affected, but many friends that also survived this ordeal also say that the experience had a profound effect on their outlook on life.

It could be related to the phenomena that also happens to heart-attack and other near-death survivors. If surviving this situation causes such a mental scar, imagine what someone that has to go through the whole process experiences? It's easy to wish this on someone that has killed one of your loved ones because your sense of justice or revenge is spurring it on. But what about the rest of society that hasn't been affected by the murder of their loved one? What if you experienced the execution process first hand, would you think that you would still find it as a justified punishment? These are all the questions that everyone must answer for themselves. I believe an advanced civilized society may come to the same answers.