



The Execution

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The first heavy part of the day was over at noon: the farewell from Cliff Boggess at the end of our last visit, a farewell not without tears, but even without the possibility to touch hands. There are no contact visits for condemned persons in Texas. There has always been Plexiglas and bars between us. Only after days or weeks at home I had the thought as to whether I should have gone to the funeral home after Cliff's execution. It would have been my only chance to see Cliff once without metal mesh and Plexiglas between us.

The prison chaplain who oversees executions, Chaplain Brazzil, visited us in the afternoon. He first told us that Cliff was well and that Cliff sent his greetings to us together with "Remember: TODAY I'll be with Jesus in paradise". Then the chaplain explained in details to us what we would face as witnesses to the execution. I'm sure it was important for us to be prepared as much as possible, though in this place inside of me a feeling started, which didn't leave me during the whole thing until the end: Everything seemed to work like a ritual, every step was planned ahead to the smallest detail. It was the feeling that this situation has to be absolutely unreal, and at the same time the clear consciousness of knowing very well that this really happens and is not a bad dream.

A few minutes after 5:00 p.m. we drove up at the rear side of the administration building, as instructed. We were taken into reception by two bodyguards, who did not leave us until the end. We were led into a room and spent the largest portion of the time there with waiting. We were led into another room by female officials for a pat-search (search by scan), though it seemed that to them their task was not particularly pleasant and they were relatively superficial. We learned that on the floor above us were two family members of Cliff's victims to attend the execution as witnesses. It was most carefully prepared that the two "parties" (witnesses for victim and prisoner) couldn't cross each other's paths.

It must have been around 6:00 p.m., as they escorted us for the short path across the road - passing a couple of TV cameras and few demonstrators - to the opposite building, the Walls Unit, where the executions take place. We had to wait five or ten minutes in an office room once more and we finally were led into the witness room. I don't know whether only my knees trembled in fear, or if it was my heart beating. The witness room is so small that there are no chairs. The relatives of the victims are next to us, separated on the left by a wall. The four of us, three friends of Cliff and his Spiritual Advisor, a Franciscan priest, (no one of Cliff's family was there), are standing close to each other directly in front of the glass window. Behind us are the bodyguards and a few reporters, which I was not aware of at all. In front of us there is the execution chamber with walls painted blue. We have seen it repeatedly on pictures or television but in reality it is much smaller than it seems on the pictures. Cliff is laying there on the gurney, strapped with numerous belts, if it wasn't for the glass we could reach for him. The arms with the IV's are stretched out, the hands are totally wrapped, he is able only to turn his head slightly. He is ready

for the deathly injection, ready to be put to sleep like you put to sleep an old or sick dog. The prison chaplain is standing by Cliff's feet, one hand on Cliff's leg. At this moment I feel mankind as unbelievable arrogant, because people are here in the full consciousness of what they are doing, and are killing another man. Of course, Cliff had done this also and this was worst wrong. But that this shall happen in the name of law and order!? What good will this death do anyone? It takes away a person from me that became an inestimable worthy friend in short time. And who of us all watching how Cliff is being killed, would go into death with such strength, confidence and dignity as he does?

When we've entered the witness room and Cliff sees us, he welcomes us, whereupon smiles extended over his whole face. I am somehow surprised. I don't know what I have expected; this actually matches exactly to him, is typical, and maybe his extended smile is just so incomprehensible to me, because my face feels frozen in this death serious situation. The next day I learned from a newspaper, that his smile and his positive attitude were judged by the victim's relatives who said he didn't take it seriously, and everything had been much too easy. I doubt that Cliff's wish his execution should bring the longed-for peace to the relatives of his victims, has been fulfilled.

Cliff starts with his last words and turns to the relatives of his victims first, professing that he is sorry for the pain he had caused them. Then he looks at us and says: "To my friends, I'd like to say that I love you and I'm glad you've been a part of my life. I will miss you. Remember that TODAY, I'll be with Jesus in paradise and I'll see you again." While he speaks to us this way, his smile has disappeared and the corners of mouth twitch as he fights back the tears. Then he looks up, says a prayer, and looks in our direction one last time. He whispers: "I love you", turns his head, and the poison streams into his veins. Things happen quickly, and he is unconscious, he does not move any more. After seconds we hear the weighted noise similar to a snoring a single time, when the lungs collapse and the air escapes, which the prison chaplain has demonstrated to us in the afternoon. Then nothing happens for an eternity. As we were informed before, after the injection they wait for four minutes. For four minutes that seem endless, we stare at the lifeless body before us, till a doctor enters the room, examines Cliff, states the death and announces the time of death at 6:21 p.m.

They escort us out of the witness room. We have to wait at some place to give the other group, the relatives of the victims, some distance. We again cross the road, pass the cameras, and finally be dismissed in the lower floor of the administration building. It is over.