



There is treasure everywhere!

By Claudia Dölker, Germany, February 2016

I first came in touch with the topic of death row when I started writing to an inmate. I've read an article in the Spiegel (German newspaper) about a journalist who had such a friendship. This article convinced me to be a pen-pal myself. I started in February 2012 to write to Michael Jackson in Florida. It is my true belief that we cannot throw people into prisons, leave them there for several decades and then kill them for what they did so many years ago. I don't want to pretend that I was not having any prejudices but I was willing to question them by getting in touch with an inmate.

The more I got to know MJ (that is how he wants to be called) the more I realized that he is a normal human being just like me. The only difference is that he never had a chance in his life. His childhood is characterized by abuse and neglect. He attempted suicide several times at the time he was 8 years old. In whoever care he was he was used by these persons to satisfy their sexual pleasure. A crappy childhood certainly does not excuse any crimes but it does show that an unloving environment most likely creates criminals. I consider myself lucky to be nurtured by loving parents who had always the best in mind when it came to my well-being and education.

He has become a dear and valuable friend to me in all these years. We shared some good laughs but also tears. We have discussed several books we were reading together. We talked through family problems and professional matters. He knows more about me and my family than most people around me do. He enjoys music very much. In every letter he asks me to send him some lyrics about specific songs. It is always fun for me to have such an exchange because often he requests songs I have never heard of but once I listen to them I come to love them. MJ is currently in jail awaiting his new trial and has access to a phone. Every now and then he calls me and I look for songs on youtube and let him listen to songs I like.

I often wonder if he and I would have ever been friends if we met in "real life".

Wherever I am I try to send him some postcards. He always makes fun about me when I visit a colder place because he does not like the cold. He stresses that I should visit warmer places like Florida or Hawaii more often. For him everything below 15°C is freezing cold. Of course I also remind him that there are actually a lot of people living at temperatures below 15°C.

Most of my friends do not support my friendship to MJ. They cannot understand why I would do such a thing. They think I could use my time more wisely on other people. I believe that this kind of thinking does not help anybody. Whatever you do there will always be a person that criticizes your decision. If you help animals they will say that you should help humans first because they matter more. I believe that we should first look at groups with the weakest lobby out there. Incarcerated offenders are certainly such a group. You can find treasure within the deepest pond of mud.

Surely we cannot change the past. But guilty or not we can help to change the future.