



It was a healing process for both of us - Interview with Rodney Bowser

The questions were asked by Ines Aubert, 2007

With a contribution by Hilary Hughes, Ireland

In 1985 and 1986 Glenn L. Benner II - called Bimbo - killed two young women: Cindy Sedgwick, 26 and Trina Bowser, 21
He was executed at the Lucasville prison in Ohio on Feb. 7 2006.

Rodney is the youngest of Trina's four older brothers. He talked to Glenn on the day of his execution. Shortly before the execution was carried out, Rodney told his sister's murderer that he forgave him.

Hilary Hughes from Ireland was Glenn's closest friend. She witnessed his execution.

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Rodney, you're the relative of a murder victim. Can you tell us very briefly what happened to one of your family members and when?

As far as my sister, who was one of Glenn Benner's victims, it goes like this. It was New Years Eve 1986 and my sister didn't return home from a friend's house. We received a phone call from a trucker who was driving down the expressway and noticed a car on the side of the road on fire. He put out the fire and called my parents from a check stub he found with her phone number on it. My parents called me and I drove right to their house where we proceeded to drive to Trina's car. We saw footprints in the snow so we assumed she was walking through yards to get home the back way. We decided to check the trunk to see what she took with her. We kept an emergency supply in there at all times for her. We opened the trunk and there she was. She was partially naked with her fur coat thrown over her. Her feet were tied together and she had items tied around her neck. She was cold and lifeless. We were in shock and couldn't even move. We didn't cry, scream or anything. We just stood there. The police finally showed up and removed us from the crime scene. No one knew for 20 years that I was there. It wasn't until the police chief revealed that information in his letter to the parole board at his clemency hearing that I was present that night. My baby sister was taken from me in a way that has scarred me for life.

It touched me very much to read what happened to your family and I'm sure it will touch everybody who reads it, too. How do you feel about all of that today? Does it still affect you in your everyday life?

Yes, but in a completely different manner. My life is no longer filled with hate and revenge. I spoke with Bimbo the night before on the phone and in person the day of the execution. I gave up my seat to be a witness. My three brothers witnessed the execution. I no longer wished to be a part of it. My brothers haven't spoken to me for

over a year now. The relationship I had with my mother is different.

The one person who I least expected to understand was the person who completely understood, my father. He told me the day I walked through the door after returning home from the execution that he knew I was different. My whole family didn't want me to talk to Bimbo because they were afraid it would screw me up more. My dad knew something happened to me but it wasn't bad. We didn't discuss it for some time.

The conversations and meeting with Bimbo have definitely changed my life. Some see it as for the worst (because they don't understand), but my daughters and I see it as something wonderful. They told me they were never as proud of me as they are now.

How did you feel when your life was still filled with hate and revenge?

It's hard to explain, but I'll give it a try. I guess the biggest thing was the fact that my sister and I were so close. The anger I had was because the one sibling in the family that I got along with was not there anymore. My brothers and I have never been close so I felt like I was on my own. Going through the trial was very difficult because of hearing all the gory details that came out. Watching all the politics being played and learning how our legal system works, was overwhelming. I was given the role of family spokesman so I had to make sure I knew everything so I could relay it back to the family. Explain what was going on and go over it again and again. Well, that all was burned into my memory so there really wasn't a chance to forget it. No sooner would you get a break from it than something would come up in the court system and you would have to start all over and relive it all over. This went on for 20 years. I wanted to talk to Bimbo since day one and he never would. Even at the end, his lawyer was against him speaking to me and the victims' advocates, who had their own agenda and did nothing to see that our meeting would happen.

Then finally, on January 30, 2006, we were to meet. I was scared to death, yet in a way relieved. The night before the meeting it was cancelled. The anger and hate continues but now it's directed towards the people that are trying to stop this meeting. My time is running out.

The victims' advocates wanted us to speak to each other by writing questions and him writing answers. He did not want to do this nor did I. What were they all scared of? It was to be a private conversation between Bimbo and me. It was none of their business. I was the one that had everything to lose. I was told over and over again that he might go off and start screaming things I didn't want to hear. It was a risk I was willing to take, so why were they determined to not let us meet? We had to fight all his appeals and all the other legal issues and then on top of it sit back and get screwed over by our own legal system.

Do you see now where all the anger and hate came from? The biggest thing was the fact that because of all this I couldn't remember my sister anymore. She was just now a news item that brought back bad memories.

I'm deeply touched by what you've told me. I feel how hard it must have been for you. There's one hope in my heart: did you finally manage to find the good memories of your sister?

Yes, I remember her like she was before. It is a feeling that I'm glad I have back. It is wonderful to be able to talk about her again. Her name wasn't mentioned much or talked about because the subject brought so much pain. That was all part of the anger.

My daughters have finally learned about their aunt. They now know who was in all the pictures. About a week after the execution, my daughters went to my mom's and asked her about Trina. What a joy that was for her. She pulled out the albums she had made of Trina and sat down and told them all about their aunt.

Finally, after 20 years, my mom was able to begin the healing process. Trina is talked about all the time now. I knew I was given a gift when I could talk about Trina without breaking down. This was part of the gift Bimbo gave me. I know that may seem strange, but after meeting him Trina was back in my heart in a good way and I knew she would be there to stay. I've seen photos of my sister that I didn't even know were around. It's a feeling that I never want to lose again.

Your comment about how you hope people around me support my forgiving Bimbo; well, that doesn't exist here. Like I told you my daughters told me how proud they were of me and would have been disappointed had it turned out differently, but as for my family they are not and haven't spoken to me since that day. My dad was proud of me but kept his opinion from my brothers.

I'm not sure honestly how my mom feels. She is upset because the family is torn apart but deep down I don't know how she feels about what I did. I love my sister Trina and miss her dearly, but I am thankful that I can now remember her for who she was.

Hilary Hughes will be coming to the states next month (May 07) and we will finally get to meet each other. My girls are looking forward to meeting her also. This is another good thing that came from Bimbo, he put her in contact with me and we have helped each other through the healing process.

What made you turn to forgiving Glenn after all those years?

Sorry it has taken so long to get this answered, but I needed to review all my notes from the night before and the morning of the execution. I hope I can put it into words that you can understand. This is not how I expected things to turn out. I knew for several weeks that something was guiding me to push for this meeting even though everyone was telling me it was not a good idea. I began to believe they were right and maybe I should just settle for watching the execution.

Still things were happening that I couldn't explain. I got lost driving and ended up driving past where my sister was murdered. I heard the song we played at my sister's funeral on the radio four times in one week, a song I haven't heard in 20 years. I was at work and my sister-in-law called to say a meeting was set up for me and Bimbo to talk. I left work and on the way home the song came on the radio yet again. Too many coincidences to overlook. I knew my sister was leading me to do this, to meet Bimbo. I had to go with my gut feeling and do this. This was what I wanted for 20 years.

Finally, he called me and we began to talk. I knew after speaking to Bimbo on the phone the first time that there was something different in me, but didn't know how to deal with it. I was calm and not scared by what we had already discussed. I spoke with a man

who I hated more than anything else and yet felt no desire to yell and scream and call him names. I didn't understand what was happening to me. I'm sure he expected it and I was waiting for him to do the same, yet neither of us did. Why? That's the big question I had to ask myself.

During our second talk that night it was becoming more obvious as to why. We both needed this for our own reasons. I was looking for answers to questions that had haunted me and he was looking for a way to do something good for someone since he had done so much wrong in his life. We met in the morning before the execution and he finished answering my questions. It was the scariest thing I ever had to do, but when I walked up to his cell and was face to face with him it was like I was there for a completely different reason. We spoke quietly to each other. There was no anger or hatred. He put his hand on my arm and there was no reaction from me. I didn't jerk it away or even flinch. There was such calmness about him that I knew he wasn't scared to die.

He told me he wanted to die and had for a long time. He didn't want to stay in prison anymore; he wanted to go on to bigger and better things. My time was up and he told me he hoped that this would make me better again and that he was sorry for what he had done. I thanked him for talking with me and shook his hand when I left.

I returned to the family waiting area, but was only there for a short time. I asked to be removed and they put me in a holding area all by myself. I couldn't stand to be around everyone waiting for a person to die. I knew they had the right to feel the way they did, but I also knew I no longer felt that way. It all came to me while I was in that room because, you see, I went from hating Bimbo to hating where I was and why I was there. I knew it was time to do what I knew in my heart was right and what Trina would have expected me to do. I asked to make a phone call and they granted my request. I called over to Bimbo's cell, but couldn't speak with him because they were getting him ready for the execution. I spoke with the chaplain and told him who I was and asked if he would give Bimbo a message from me. He said he would. I told him to thank Bimbo again for me and to tell him, "I FORGIVE YOU." He said he would personally give Bimbo the message. I didn't know for weeks afterwards whether he got it or not, but found out that he did get it and how much it meant to him. I know this will be hard for some people to understand, but no matter what was said or what happened, nothing will ever change what he did. I know that and he knew that. My sister won't come back to life. What happened was he gave me her memory back and took away all that hate. I gave him what he wanted, but couldn't ask for. We both ended up better because we got what we searched for. No matter what anyone says or thinks, I will know for the rest of my life that even though the odds were completely against us, two things brought us together that day: GOD AND MY SISTER, TRINA.

What do you think it meant to Glenn that you talked to him shortly before his execution? How did he react?

Bimbo and I started our conversation on the phone the night before the execution. He called at about 8:30 pm. We talked for a while with a lot of strain between us, but we eventually got past that. He went very slow and was just as scared as I was. I asked why

and he said he was expecting me to go off on him and was not prepared to have a calm conversation like we were having. I told him I was expecting to have the same.

We talked about Trina and he would answer my questions as I put them to him. We would get off the subject and talk about other things in between. It kept him and me calm and let us both stay focused. He was very caring about the way he answered my questions and I thanked him many times for that. He never once was crude or vulgar about the way he answered my questions.

We took a pause halfway through and reminisced a little about our childhood. When we started talking again was when he made the statement that he knew he had screwed up by not talking to me years or even months earlier. He told me that it was in his best interest not to speak with anyone in the family and that even now he was going against his attorney's advice. He said it was something he knew he needed to do. He said he had a change of heart when he saw me on the news at his clemency hearing and felt he needed to try and do whatever he could to help me get past this.

He felt that after talking with me things might have turned out differently for him. He told me he would do everything he possibly could to talk with me in the morning at the prison. He told me to think of what other questions I had and he would answer them tomorrow. I told him I would be there and we hung up.

He called back a few hours later to tell me that our meeting might not come through. There were too many people that didn't want it to happen. He asked if we could continue with the questions now in case our meeting fell through. We did talk more about it that night and he was amazed at how much detail I could recall and basically knew a lot of the answers before he gave them. When he seemed to get lost I would walk him through the events. He asked me why the things I needed to know were so important when to him they weren't. I gave him the answer because it filled in the unknown questions and also told me if he was telling me the truth. He told me that tonight wasn't about him, it was about me and whatever he could do to help me get past this was something he needed to do. I believed him and knew he was telling me the truth about that night. He asked if there was anything else he could do and I said, "Would you tell me what you are going to say to the family tomorrow before the execution." He asked why and I told him it was because I wouldn't be in there to see it because I didn't need to watch him die anymore. He got all choked up and read me his statement to the family. He wanted to ask me something, but didn't feel he had the right to. He told me to get on my way and our meeting would take place tomorrow. We said goodbye and I left for Lucasville. Bimbo needed to talk to me just as much as I did to him. It was a healing process for both of us. I thanked him for talking with me and he'll never know how much it has helped me.

What do you think it meant to Glenn that you talked to him shortly before his execution? How did he react? (This same question is now answered by Hilary Hughes, Glenn's closest friend)

Bimbo shared with me over the years how devastated he was that he had caused so much pain to people by his actions. He never made excuses to me and took full responsibility for his actions, though he could not understand how he could have done the things he did. He never expected forgiveness from any man. He would say "Hil,

there are some things that cannot be forgiven. How can I make any excuses for what I did, and the lives I destroyed?" He accepted forgiveness from God, but found it so hard to forgive himself. We discussed him apologising to the families he had destroyed many times, but he was always advised against doing that, and he felt maybe people might think he had an ulterior motive and was looking for forgiveness, which, as I said, he never even imagined he would receive. He was also afraid that contacting the people whose lives he had destroyed might cause them even more pain.

Over many years he planned and we discussed what he would say on the day of his execution. He wanted to avoid the use of the word "I" for he would say, "this is not about me". He wanted to say he was sorry at the last possible minute, for he did not want anyone to think that he was looking for anything for himself in return for his apology. Every day, over many many years, he prayed for the people whose lives he had destroyed, and for many years we fasted together on a regular basis for their peace and healing. He felt that was the only thing he could do. We wrote his obituary together, and he wanted his last words in that also to be words of apology.

When he first heard that Rodney wanted to speak with him, he was a bit apprehensive for he was told that Rodney would probably shout hateful things at him though he said to me "there is nothing that Rodney could say to me that I have not said to myself." He wanted to speak with Rodney just the two of them, face to face, but this was not going to be allowed, and he also heard that their conversation would be recorded – he did not want this – he felt if this all got to the press they would just stir things up and make things even more painful not only for the Bowser family, but for his family and loved ones also. The face to face meeting planned in Ohio State Penitentiary did not take place because of the conditions attached to it.

The night before he was killed he had an opportunity to speak with Rodney by telephone. He spoke with me first, and I know how nervous he was about this, but he was really glad of the opportunity to talk with Rodney one on one. He felt this was a gift from God. They spoke for quite a long time on the phone, and Bimbo answered questions that had been torturing Rodney since Trina had been killed. Following their conversation, Bimbo and I spoke on the phone for about an hour and a half. The conversation with Rodney had a very emotional effect on him – the fact that Rodney had not spoken to him as a man full of hate really blew him away.

On the morning of Bimbo's execution, during my cell front visit with him, a Guard came and spoke to us both and said that it had been agreed that Rodney, who was in the prison, could speak with Bimbo face to face, if he agreed (this was the first time, and as far as I know, the only time this kind of meeting has happened in Ohio). We were told that we would have to cut our visit short by 15 minutes in order for this to happen. We agreed immediately, and Bimbo said that he would meet with Rodney as long as the conversation could be between just the two of them.

Following their meeting, Rodney called back and left a message with the Chaplain at the prison that he forgave Bimbo.

I did not speak to Bimbo again, though I watched him being killed. In the execution chamber he said his words of apology to the three of Trina's brothers who were there as witnesses (Rodney was not a witness). Later the Chaplain came and spoke to us in the family room, and said that Bimbo had asked him to tell us that he had been forgiven.

To be honest, I did not understand the significance of this until much later, when I read in a newspaper article that Rodney had forgiven Bimbo and left a message that he was told this. Some weeks later I contacted the Chaplain to confirm for both Rodney and myself that Bimbo had received this message, and I asked what his reaction had been. I was told that he had indeed received the message from Rodney and that “he had been tearful”. Bimbo and I were very close – soul friends, we would say – so I know that the greatest gift he ever received in his life, and one he had never imagined he would receive, was those words of forgiveness from Rodney.

So much healing has come out of this amazing gift of Rodney’s – all over the world people have been challenged by what he has done. When Bimbo and Rodney spoke on the Monday night, Bimbo asked Rodney to keep in contact with me, and he also asked me on the phone later to keep in contact with Rodney. We both said we would. I now consider Rodney a good friend, and he has helped me so much through these very difficult months since Bimbo was killed. I speak to him from the heart, I trust him, and I know he understands. He knows about grief, and he also knew Bimbo and recognized him as the person that God created him to be, rather than focusing only on the horror of what Bimbo had done to his sister. I will be visiting Ohio for the first time since Bimbo was killed in May 2007. Rodney and I will be meeting face to face for the first time. I am looking forward to getting to know Trina better through him. This is something that neither Bimbo nor I could ever have envisaged happening... as far as I am concerned, it is truly a miracle. Rodney’s unbelievable gift of forgiveness is bringing Hope and Healing out of the most horrific of tragedies.

Thank you, Hilary.

Rodney, I bow down before you. This interview started with a horrible crime and ended with a great gift of forgiveness and love, as it was in reality.

Thank you so much for sharing all of that with us! I wish you the best of luck in all that you do!