



Death rows are not built to rehabilitate or salvage any redeemable quality one may possess

M., 48 years old, 26 years on death row in Florida

If the circumstances of your life are suddenly, dramatically changed, you become someone or something else. It is not a question of whether you will change, only a matter of what you will become.

See, death rows are not built to rehabilitate or salvage any redeemable quality one may possess. These are warehouses, kennels, built to extinguish any sign of redemption, built to dehumanize.

Think of it from the officials' point of view; you want to put me to death, you want public support for it. So you have to create a perception, you want the public to see a rabid dog, not a man. If the public should see an educated man, an eloquent man, an artistic man, a family man, a man of faith or some such thing, well, what then? Because it is easy to kill a rabid dog, but another matter altogether to kill a redeemable man. So they condemn you, secret you away in a box. They offer no education, no counselling, no spiritual guidance, no means to grow or evolve, no means to overcome that which brought you to this.

They allow you a T.V., radio, canteen, exercise yard, even visits with family and friends, not to enhance your quality of life but to pacify you, to keep you subdued, submissive as you wait for death. That is their goal, to remove every aspect of hope, every ambition, to try and convince you that silent resignation is the only life for you. Many buy into that, they accept the officials' view of them, and once someone convinces you that you are a lost cause it is easy to stop looking for something better.

Many are content with this, but not all. Some of us are unsatisfied with our lives, disappointed or ashamed of our actions, we have hoped to do better but not found a way before coming here. And, here, we are determined to become more than we were, better. Whatever you choose in life, to be better or worse, to be faithful or faithless, you must have a reason. Since we are not given reasons to improve here, we are compelled to find our own. We are determined to learn from any and every source, books, documentaries, from the experience of others, from the presence and absence of things life is made of. We learn to be eloquent, artistic, faithful, we learn the value of family and friends, the value of love. Things that many take for granted, things we wish we had learned long ago but had no one to teach us. We are surrounded by despair and death, but we believe our lives can be meaningful, we hope that, though condemned for one act, we can build a record of actions that speak to who we truly are. We believe our lives can be meaningful, purposeful, and we live moving towards that.

You ask about those I love? I love only a few family members and friends, but what I feel for them is the most profoundly motivating force I've experienced. Love and trust and the family bond were not given to me as they are to some, so what motivated me for a long time was anger and mistrust. Most of what I learned about love I learned in the void, in the absence of love, an outsider looking in. But even an outsider can see how love works in the lives of others, see how

necessary it is. And seeing that, work to become worthy of it, able to give it without reserve or restraint.

Yes, I do believe love will prevail, over all things. I believe it is the strongest force in existence, that it was the voice that called forth life and all creation.

I guess for me there are two aspects of hope, two reasons to go on. First, in the here and now, if there is ever anything I can do for a loved one, my encouragement, my support, any expression of love I want to be ready to give it. Second, I believe in more than this life, I expect other opportunities, so I prepare myself now with the hope of getting right all the things I got wrong this time.

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