



Friends with this animal, are you serious?

By Ines Aubert, 2019

By googling my name, my contact information is easy to find on the net. I also welcome being contacted by people who disagree with what I do. It has happened a couple of times already that I was addressed in an unfriendly way by people who are in favor of the death penalty. They actually affronted me for being a friend of a particular inmate. Yet, the communication, without exception, quickly changed into a respectful and friendly one after I responded in an understanding way. I have already personally met with three different family members of the victims of my pen friends in the past, and a meeting was planned for this trip, as well. A long time ago, Sarah* started her first message to me with “Friends with this animal, are you serious?”

I encourage all inmates’ pen pals not to shrink back when they receive such an e-mail, but consider it a chance. I would not ignore such an attack nor respond in any negative or cynical way. The sender is probably a person who is hurt and concerned about people murdering other people.

It’s the fourth time now that I experience just that: when I take the person seriously, they open up and talk about what is really on their mind, namely the grief over the loss of their loved one. Sarah mainly wanted to talk about her dead family member. She stated several times that she wanted me to know what a great person he had been and what a gap his death had left in their family.

When we had lunch together, Sarah told me about earlier days and how they grew up like siblings. She misses her dead family member greatly and said that he had been an important person who had kept the family together. The atmosphere at the meeting was very relaxed and even funny at times.

Sarah still thinks that my pen friend should be executed and she doesn’t accept any mitigating circumstances such as the lack of guidance or love in his upbringing. She says that everybody has choices no matter what childhood one had and that there is no excuse for killing someone. According to her, my pen friend deserves nothing but death. I told her I didn’t mind her having that opinion and that we didn’t have to agree on this to get along well. With this, she agreed.

In case you face a similar situation and think I can be of any help, don’t hesitate to contact me. It’s often easier to think about a course of action together.

* not her real name