

10 Questions to a death inmate that you would never dare to ask

Are you afraid of death? What do you think about the death penalty? Is it worse to be sentenced to death or life imprisonment?

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Symbolic image: imago images | Rüdiger Wölk

In the United States, 25 people were executed last year. Although the death penalty is ethically, legally and morally controversial, 29 US states hold fast to it.

Instead of the electric chair, the execution is increasingly carried out by lethal injection. However, this supposedly "humane" execution has major shortcomings: fewer and fewer pharmaceutical companies want to provide the poison, many states refuse export permits to the US. Therefore, in the past, some states have sourced the poison from dodgy sources. For example, from a small London pharmaceutical company that is said to be in the backyard of a driving school. In 2005, the blood values of 49 executed persons were tested in one study. It emerged that the prisoners were in a state of consciousness in 21 of these executions. The feeling that is created here is as if someone is pumping fire into their veins.

The lethal injection is also used in Florida. There, Richard has been waiting on death row for over 33 years for his execution. He was convicted for the murder of an eleven-year-old girl. Richard states that he is innocent. Because he does not want his case back in the media, we changed his name.

We have questions:

VICE: Is it worse to be sentenced to death or life imprisonment?

Life imprisonment, with no chance of ever getting out, is much worse. Where the men are housed without a death sentence, it is very different. It is more dangerous. Because of the other inmates and also because of the guards, who do not care a lot and who like to spread hate. If you have a life sentence, you are also with those who will come out at some point. Young, wild

men. Who wants to spend the rest of his life in such conditions? There are even men who kill others to get on death row. To be alive with these young, wild, stubborn men was too much for them. That is understandable and regrettable at the same time.



Richard in prison

Are you afraid of death?

It's not that I'm never afraid of death. But I try not to think about it too often. I trust that there is a life after death. I believe and trust in YHWH / Y'husha (Jesus, editor's note). We have all sinned and failed according to Y'husha's standards. I accept that, acknowledge it, and try to be the man I should be after his teachings. That's repentance for me.

Do you notice anything when others are executed?

I know approximately when an execution will take place, but not when exactly. Death Row is in a different building than the execution chamber.

Are you on death row in gangs?

Among the men on death row, there are hardly any gang activities. Most of us accept that we are all in the same boat. But that does not mean that there is no violence. In the 33 years I've been here, I've seen some fights. I was also involved in some. But the last one was about ten years ago. There are people inside and outside who get along better and those who don't get on well together. If someone does not want to spend time with me, I do not take it personally. We mostly greet each other when we meet. If you ask an overseer with which detainees he has the least amount of stress and he honestly answers, he would have to point at death row.

What things in life would you have liked to do, but can not do it anymore?

Start a family.

What do you like on death row?

That I'm still alive and the friendships I've made here.

How did you make friends on death row?

Some of my pen pals are very close to me, some of them I even love. I have no contact with the people I knew before I came here. When I speak of friends on death row, I use the expression very easily. There are men here whom I know and whom I trust. This means that I can talk to them without them blabbing to others.

What will be your last meal?

I do not know yet and hope that I never have to decide that.

What do you think about the death penalty?

My views on the death penalty have changed over the years. Currently I believe that there are offenses for which people should be punished with death. But I believe that any system where people decide to kill others is vulnerable to mistakes, corruption, and power games. That's why it should be abolished. In our system, the requirements for reasoning in one process are too lenient. They leave enough room to blame someone for an act he has never committed. I think nobody should receive the death penalty unless two eyewitnesses were present at the scene and confirm with consistent statements. Sure, then almost nobody would be sentenced to death, but there would be other appropriate penalties for the crime. I also believe that no one should be in prison for more than 20 years, unless one can assume that the person would repeat the act. But my voice does not mean anything to anyone in a position of power anyway.

What would you do if you were free?

Try a Beyond Burger, be with someone I love, and see that I do not conflict with the law.

The correspondence with Richard was made by [connectdeathrow](http://connectdeathrow.com), a project that organizes penpals with inmates on death row.