



Interview with Billy Tracy – How can I apologize for something like that?

The questions were asked by Ines Aubert

Billy, I came across your writings some time ago and what struck me the most were the similarities of your case to that of Robert Pruett, my long-term pen friend on Death Row in Texas who was executed in 2017. Like Robert, you took the life of a prison guard and were dishonest about the crime.

What is it that you were dishonest about?

I was infuriated at the state for illegally garnishing my Inmate Trust Fund account. They garnished my trust fund more than they legally could have and there was nothing I could do to get the funds reimbursed. My mentality at that point in my life was that the state of Texas was my enemy. Having spent most of my life incarcerated, I've experienced countless injustices perpetuated by the justice system. They often behave as if they are in a gang and it's them against us inmates. With that warped mentality, I decided I was justified in attacking ANY state employee for the theft of my money. At the same time, I felt justified in this way of thinking; I knew that explaining this to a jury would not go well, as well as trying to explain this to the love of my life. I took the coward's way out and created a fictitious story in which Mr. Davison, the victim, was a dirty guard who had taken cash from me with the promise to bring me a cell phone.

Already after your first answer, my heart goes out to Timothy Davison and his family and friends. Your action was truly mean and cruel, and I wonder how you were able to live with it, and how they were able to live with their loss.

What happened in January of 2022 to cause you to confess your lie?

I gave my life to God. While I was confessing my sins that cold January day, asking God to forgive me from a truly repentant heart, the Holy Spirit placed upon my heart that I could not be repentant or forgiven if I continued to slander Mr. Davison and continue to lie to everyone about this crime. Right then I just knew if I was going to walk with God, I had to trust Him and I had to do what was right, no matter the consequences. I wrote this prison's Head Warden and told him the truth, as well as the Office of Inspector General, which polices over the prison, and told them the truth. Through them, the courts and the victim's family would be notified. I'm not permitted to write the victim's family, or I'd have told them myself. Along with a sincere apology. And finally, I wrote to the woman I love and several friends I'd lied to and told them the truth, too.

I have many questions. But let me start with this: What were the circumstances that made you give your life to God? I assume you knew about God before and knew others who believe in God. So, what was it?

First, I have long held extremely antagonistic views towards Christianity and had vowed to never EVER be "one of THOSE people". I had the idea in my mind that Jesus was weak and to follow him I'd be weak. I was agnostic and felt it was illogical to believe or disbelieve in God which you could never prove. Shortly before the experience that led me to believe there was a God, I'd just completed a 2-year Bible study course that I'd done specifically to challenge my views and make sure I wasn't missing anything or being closed-minded about at least the possible existence of a God. At the end of the course, my views against Christianity were even more firmly entrenched and I still didn't believe in any God.

Then one random day, I was just listening to our prison's radio station and our DJ, Mega Mind, talk about a story he'd just seen on the news about a young girl who was at the Batman movie premiere in Colorado when a gunman shot up the crowd. This girl was born with a small round hole that went through one hemisphere of her brain from the frontal lobe through the back. It caused her developmental issues, but she was doing pretty good with her life.

She got shot right in the head and was found in a pool of blood with a wound from the front of her head to the back of her head. She was not given any priority and basically just taken to the hospital and set aside. That is, until she sat up.

It turns out the bullet traveled through the hole which already existed in her brain and caused no damage at all other than the obvious holes in her skull.

When I heard this story, I was covered in goose bumps, tears were cascading down my face, and I could barely breathe. I knew in my heart that this story was impossible. That just could not ever happen. Ever. And considering my own organic brain damage, it felt personal. I felt like God was talking to me through this story. I can't explain it any better than that. I couldn't prove God was real after this, but I believed. However, I still didn't have any religion, and nothing really changed within me for well over a year.

Then two major things occurred almost simultaneously. I was about to leave my cell to go to a media interview with a company doing a documentary about the relationship between Yolanda and me. As I was getting ready, it hit me hard that the only reason Yolanda, who's very private, was doing the documentary was because once I'm killed, she would have the video to watch of me when she was lonely and missing me. I thought about how terrible I am at showing emotion, especially around strangers, and became afraid I'd give the interview in my prison monotone with the prisoner mask on my face and Yolanda would not be able to FEEL how much I loved her. Without even it being a conscious decision, I said a little prayer and I didn't pray – ever – that God would help me show emotion. I literally just meant help with being articulate. At the interview, I was asked to read the marriage vows I wrote for Yolanda when we got married during a visit in 2018. After I read the vows, Elena, the interviewer, stopped me and asked me to read the vows again with more emotion. When I got to the second vow, I was overwhelmed with every emotion I'd ever felt in my whole life and everything I'd ever felt for Yolanda, and I could barely even speak. Tears were streaming and my throat was so tight words could barely escape. At the time, I had no idea what was going on. Anyone

who has ever known me knows I'm just not capable of being that vulnerable or emotional. It just wasn't in me. It wasn't until I got back to my cell that I recalled the offhanded prayer I'd made, everything clicked into place, and I knew what had just happened to me. God had answered my prayer in a spectacular fashion. I'd made the prayer just thinking in small terms of expressing my heart with words for Yolanda and God gave a better gift of SHOWING her my heart. I was a mess for days. Just raw.

At the same time, I started to read a book an inmate field minister gave me titled "The Jesus I Never Knew" by Phillip Yancey. It blew me away. The beatitudes particularly touched my soul. Jesus taught the exact opposite philosophy I'd lived my life by, and in my broken crusty old soul I knew Jesus was right. Love and forgiveness and generosity and meekness were the right way, and my way of revenge, selfishness and holding grudges was wrong. Sometimes you'll never know the truth in your heart until you have lived the wrong path.

I did a lot of praying over several days until I finally gave my life to God. And since then, God has been healing me bit by bit, and transforming me.

That's truly amazing. Coming to understand God seems to be linked to emotions and showing your heart in your case. This is wonderful, I think.

I assume you received positive and negative reactions on your change of course and on your admission. Please tell me about that.

The negative reactions: Yolanda was so mad at me that there is no way I can explain it. She was hurt so deeply and so mad that I thought I'd lost her. It took us months to work things out enough that she decided to stay with me. And a year later, we're just now getting back to the smooth groove we'd had all these years.

Another friend with whom I work closely and who trusted me fully was also very hurt. However, she more easily forgave me and understood why I'd lied in the first place.

The positive responses came from everyone, even including those who were also mad. Even they were complimentary of me putting everything on the line for my new faith. My fellow Christians were very happy to see God working in me like that. They knew that there was NO chance I'd have ever had the courage to do this without God.

I don't have the words to convey how sorry I am for lying to everyone initially and more importantly, for taking the life of an innocent man who was just trying to earn a living.

You made this already horrific killing worse by claiming Davison mistreated you and by pretending that there was a legitimation to take revenge and kill someone. You basically gave Davison's family a life sentence of loss and suffering. I feel for them.

In your text on Solitary watch 2019, Voices from Solitary Watch – Living on death watch you talk about your severe organic brain damage and impulse/aggression

problems. Do you think that they were the reason for your attack or for being dishonest about it? Or for both?

I'm not going to make any excuses here for what I did. In the past I have made the claim that the organic brain damage played a part, but I will not make that claim anymore.

How much of the violent man who you used to be is still present in you? What would trigger you to attack someone again?

Not very much at all. Even before I became a Christian, I was sick of violence, but I'd still get upset and feel that rage. Now even when I'm mad, I'm not thinking about harming anyone, I'm thinking about how to let the anger go as quickly as I can and praying until it's gone. It works. Now when I am mad, it's nothing compared to how I was. It's like a shadow. My anger doesn't scare me anymore. And the only thing that would trigger me to attack someone is if they attacked me first and I needed to defend myself. I'm not saying I don't still have violent thoughts from time to time. Those thoughts still zip along through my head now and then, but they are fleeting thoughts that take no root and I've put much effort into kicking them on their way immediately, and now they are growing less and less as each day passes.

I wonder: What do you think kept Robert Pruett or any other prisoner, for that matter, from telling the truth as you did?

I doubt any one set reason would fit every situation. I can see there being many reasons why some wouldn't tell the truth after lying for a long time. The obvious reason for a Death Row guy to lie about innocence would be the hope to beat the death penalty. Then there could be shame. Many of the guys I've met on DR had never been in any trouble prior to the crime that landed them on DR, and to admit to such a terrible crime would let people down who love them and believe in them. Lying is easy. Then you have the guys with crimes against kids and they never want to admit to that kind of crime for fear of their safety and of being ostracized.

From what I understand, you assume full responsibility now for what you did. In your above-mentioned text on Solitary Watch, you wrote about being tortured in a customized and modified cell – a “psychological torture chamber” – where you are housed in the “Death Watch” section. In that section are housed all the prisoners who have received an execution date and who are living out their last days. As you frequently become friends with men who will soon later be executed, you describe this to be a “mourning that starts over and over, with layer upon layer added and I know it will never end.”

What do you suggest would be a justified punishment for your action without the above-mentioned torture elements?

My punishment is to be killed. That was the sentence the jury gave me. All this other stuff is TDCJ getting their revenge. To answer this question more clearly, I should have

been put in a cell with a secure door like the one on a regular section, with a table and locker box and no plates over the air vents and would be allowed recreation time with other inmates in the SEPARATED cage on the outside rec yard like everyone else is, instead of being alone. There are even more “BILLY TRACY only” rules they’ve set up just to harass me.

You wrote in the above-mentioned article that you “have been tormented with guilt for killing Davison” and that “guilt seems to grow each day and not fade”. Obviously, this is another side of your suffering. Do you see any solution or comfort in that aspect?

I know God has forgiven me and there is comfort in that. I just don’t deserve it.

Between God and you, you feel that things are fine. What about Davison’s family? What would you say to Davison’s family if you could address them?

To forgive someone for what I did would be incredibly difficult. During my trial, several family members were in the courtroom, and I wanted to call out to them and tell them I was sorry. But I didn’t because I felt that they’d think I was only saying that because I was facing a death sentence, and to say “I’m sorry” for such a crime seems puny and inadequate. How can I apologize for something like that? How could anyone even believe I’m sincere?

From what I see through this interview, you are now taking responsibility and feel terrible guilt over your actions. I wish all of that would not have happened. I truly hope that Davison’s family will find peace and that you do, too.

Thank you for answering the questions. I wish you all the best!