



“Your testimony could help save his life”

By Ines Aubert, 2026

During my many years of letter writing and being active in the field, I have encountered many different situations involving my penpals, their families, victims’ family members, and other concerned individuals. However, there is still room for a “first”.

I experienced one such “first” when a mitigation investigator of Jay’s, one of the connectdeathrow contributors, contacted me in February 2026. Jay has been a reliable contributor for over six years, and I value his work highly.

Jay had a resentencing trial ahead of him, and his lawyers were looking for proof that he had changed and has become a productive member of the prison community and even had a positive impact in the free world. They wanted to show that he deserved to live and that his death sentence should be commuted to life imprisonment.

For this reason, I was asked to send some of the letters that Jay had exchanged with students. For example, there were letters with Paul. Having read the various letters, the lawyers were enthusiastic, especially about those between Jay and Paul.

Then, the lawyer asked me if I would be willing to testify on Jay’s behalf at the trial, thereby helping to save his life. Wow! How could I turn down such a request?

But, to be honest, the prospect of having to speak at a trial, even only via Zoom, scared me. I did a run-through with the lawyer, who asked me all the questions she would ask at the trial. She also told me that they expected me to read Paul’s final letter to Jay, as this clearly demonstrates how much Paul valued their correspondence. I must admit, I was taken aback when I heard that. What? Reading someone else’s letter at a court trial?

Of course, I agreed. In an effort to calm me down, the lawyer said that she didn’t think my testimony would take more than an hour. This actually had the opposite effect on me. One hour?! I thought it would be fifteen minutes at most!

I remembered that Carmen who had been through the same thing and had spoken at her penpal’s trial, had written a text which I had published on my connectdeathrow blog. You can read Carmen’s text [here](#).

I started getting nervous as the day of my testimony at the trial drew closer. A friend and I did another run-through with all the questions I would be asked and figured out where to put the computer so that Jay would see an interesting part of my house. We found that the computer would capture the best view if positioned on a book. I chose a book from my shelf called *Roots and Visions*, which I thought would be a good omen for the trial. I practised reading out Paul’s letter and marked the parts that were difficult. I just wanted to make the best impression possible.

Trying to imagine me being portrayed on screen in a courtroom with a whole jury sitting there, was odd. Although I think I could talk about connectdeathrow easily, I was quite scared of this situation and what it represented.

Much to my disappointment, on the day it was supposed to happen, I was told that my testimony was no longer necessary, so I didn't get to speak out for Jay. All the preparation and the nervousness was in vain.

You might now be wondering about the outcome of this endeavour. Sadly, Jay was given the death sentence again.

About a week later, when he was able to write to me again, Jay thanked me profusely and wrote: "As for the outcome and all it implies. That is the sort of thing that does not trouble my mind in any way. The truth about me being on death row is that I am in the same place as the whole rest of the world, mortal."