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# SURPRISE

STRASSENMAGAZIN

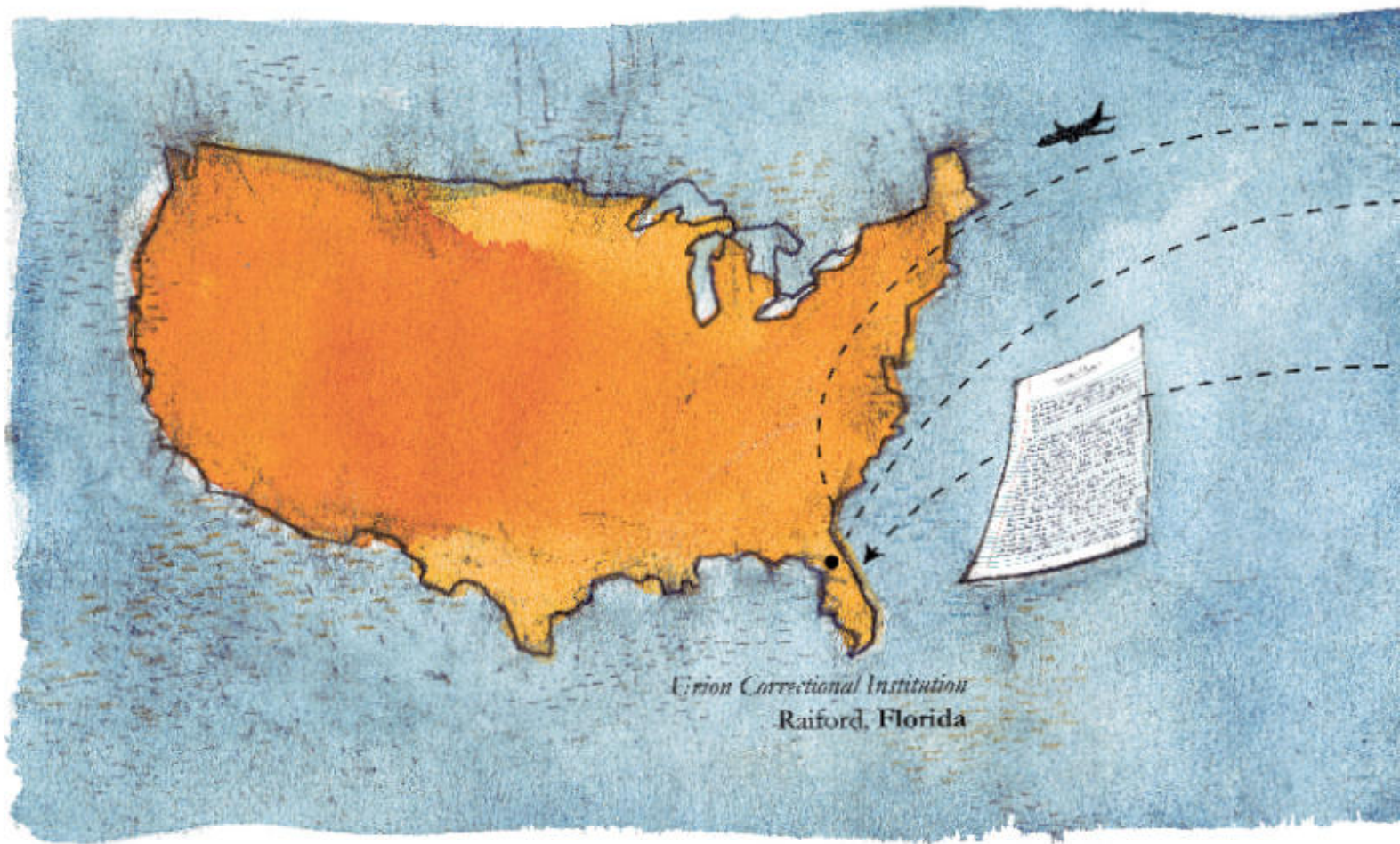


## Liebe Ines

Briefe aus dem Todestrakt

Dem IS-Terror entkommen: zu Besuch bei Kindern im Nordirak

Punks im Angriff – die Schweizer Strassenfussball-Nati am Homeless World Cup in Chile



# Friendship

## Good and Evil

**Ines is a teacher, wife and mother and lives with her family in a house in the Zurich Oberland. Robert Power / Casper was a swindler, rapist and murderer and lived on Death Row in Raiford, Florida. These two connect the story of an unusual friendship.**

BY FLORIAN BLUMER (TEXT) AND PRISKA WENGER (ILLUSTRATIONS)  
TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH BY JANET BROT

Ines flew this past summer to the USA again to visit her friend. For twelve years she has travelled overseas once a year, and in the past few years her husband has accompanied her, as well. The 53-year-old teacher/remedial teacher from Zurich gladly took on these trips although each visit only lasted a few hours. And none of these men ever came to Switzerland because Ines' American pen pals sit behind bars on Death Row.

A very special friendship evolved with Casper, who was imprisoned in Union Correctional Institution in Raiford, Florida for robbery, fraud, rape and murder. Although it only lasted three years and consisted mainly of exchanging letters, it had everything that makes a deep friendship: sharing thoughts with each other, being there for each other, making conversation over deep themes and engaging in fierce debates.

Since childhood, Ines has loved exchanging letters, has always been interested in people and in humanness. In prisoners she found people who also wanted to regularly exchange letters. Casper looked for someone with whom he could share an in-depth exchange. These exchanges brought both of them to their human limits and beyond, and after Casper's death brought Ines the desired contact to one of his victims.

The story of an unusual friendship began in early 2008 when Casper contributed a text to a theater project about "Dead Man Walking", a Hollywood blockbuster about a man sentenced to death. He exchanged letters with Ines about this project, in which she participated. She is a member of Lifespark, an organization which coordinates letter exchange with prisoners on Death Row in the USA. Casper, who was on Lifespark's waiting list, asked Ines if she could write him regularly. Although Ines already had several pen pals in various prisons, she agreed.



On March 17, 2008 Casper wrote:

*Dear Ines*

*I appreciate your willingness to write to me on a regular basis, my terrible crimes notwithstanding.*

*As you can see from doing the math on the D.O.C.*

*(Department of Corrections) website I've spent about 29 of my 47 years in prison for robbery, auto-theft, and forgery – before the present charges. I went to prison at age 18 and other than three releases from prison I've spent almost my entire adult life behind bars. This is the gist of things, if you have any specific questions please feel free to ask. I have no problem speaking with someone on any aspect of myself or on any other subject, so speak your heart and mind.*

*Casper is my nickname. I'm quiet but friendly.*

The letter exchange suddenly became more intensive.

Casper taught Ines using theoretical treatises regarding the functioning of the human spirit, quoting and preaching from the Bible. Ines was challenged by his dominant manner, defended herself from and countered this indoctrination.

Ines and Casper wrote each other every week. Casper told a lot about himself, Ines explained about the challenges in her everyday life. Casper participated in her experiences and gave his opinion. In a difficult decision at her workplace, he encouraged her to follow her intuition. He asked her how she would define the meaning of life, but also what she had planted in her garden. He enjoyed the photographs of her everyday life which she sent him. He got to know her life more and more, and sent greetings through her to her other pen pals.

In October of 2008 Ines flew to the USA to visit her pen pals, and Casper for the first time. When he came into the visitor's room, she immediately recognized him. Through all of the letters they had exchanged, they felt comfortable with each other and it did not take long for them to continue their intensive exchange face-to-face. She would visit him two more times, the last time being in August of 2010, four months before his death. During these short face-to-face meetings, they philosophized and laughed, talked about what they were thinking about, and ate together. They played the strategy game "Connect Four", which Ines almost always won. This aggravated Casper, as he always described himself in his letters as an analytical person and Ines as an emotional type.

Casper's crimes were hardly a theme at the beginning of their friendship. This changed when Ines offered to assist him with the revision of his biography, in which she typed up his handwritten manuscripts. Casper also sent Ines police reports about his crime against the then-16-year-old Debbie and her twelve-year-old sister. In the report everything was described that he did to these two girls when they were victims of his violence: how he played with them, tortured them, and raped them. Ines was literally sickened upon reading it.

On January 1, 2010 she sent Casper a dark card with a picture of monstrous-looking deep sea fish and the words: *I fell in a big hole and I want you to know that. There is no other way than that you go on sending me your bio pages, but know that right now I feel as if I would never want to go on working on our project or to invest more into it. And not even to write you again. That has never happened before, so I'm surprised myself. I don't know what else to say; - I just need peace and comfort.*



Casper reacted strongly. On January 10, 2010 he wrote:  
*I have loved you, do love you, and will continuously pray that peace returns to your heart and mind. Even so, you say you feel that you don't want to write to me again. I understand that, you see only my past without any true faith in my present spirit. I will not write again.*

He wrote again on the next day, January 11, 2010:  
*Was that card necessary? The specific words in it? We need to talk now about how you are feeling and what you are thinking concerning my former and present spirit.*

Due to the geographical distance, letters often crossed – shortly after sending one card, Ines wrote Casper her next letter, the exchange resumed its regular rhythm. Ines struggled with herself. She fought to again see the person in Casper whom she had grown to like. Her conviction was that there are no monsters, only people. But the description of Casper's criminal acts brought her to her limits. She did not want to show anyone the text because she did not want to involve anyone else in it. But she sensed that she must do something to protect herself from this negative energy. Although she did not share Casper's enthusiasm for the Bible and faith, she decided to go to church to be blessed.

And Ines feared becoming a victim herself. On January 17, 2010 she wrote Casper a long letter.  
*There is one single question that I need to ask you today, Casper. It is the main question with regards to our relationship. Your - often random - victims were forced to do and to endure whatever came to your mind. Mercilessly you forced everybody to perform exactly and in every detail what you desired. A thought about your victims' wellbeing or situation doesn't seem to have ever crossed your mind. You didn't*

*even consider them real persons with real feelings and enduring real pain. Shortly after it began weighing heavily on me to type out your many pages, I started wondering if the same manipulation was taking place again: A woman - me - has to endure all that you felt was due to happen.*

*This is my only question that I have for you right now and I ask you to please answer it as open as you talked about everything:  
Did it excite you to relive and put down your memories in such great detail and to have a woman being exposed to them?*

Casper wrote on February 28, 2010 that he wanted to confront her with the whole truth. And:  
*That did anger me, because it's a hurtful thing to say to someone who has had only love for you, and has neither thought to do or done any malicious thing to you. I don't see how you can truly say I'm "dear" to you and you believe I have a good spirit presently out of one side of your mouth while at the same time you say I victimized and manipulated you out of the other side of your mouth. Both cannot be true. If you think both can be true, please explain to me how.*

In a self-study over several years, Casper tried to explain how evil can take hold of a person, and this was what caused him to do what he did. He read the Bible and had long conversations with the prison chaplain and his successor, both of whom became his friends. With the analysis of the human spirit and Bible study, Casper found a way to bring closure to his past.



But Ines reacted emotionally to the details from Casper's past. She charged him with the fact that his victims were people with feelings, daughters of mothers like herself, that she herself could have been one of the women whom Casper raped.

On June 24, 2010, Casper wrote retrospectively:

*First, I will say, I agree with your impression that our connection has been good for my spirit – because it has caused me to feel and think deeper about serious things. I hope the same is true for you. I also agree that I am more “tender” and “open” for having been connected to you – because a couple of years ago and prior to that connection we have established I would not have tried to explain how someone had mistaken impressions of me. I would maybe have had the patience to explain it once, but certainly not multiple times.*

*Now though, I want to point out several things for your consideration. Seeing “remnants” of my former spirit in my current attitudes toward you is possible to “see” if you expect to see remnants of those attitudes. If you had experienced my former attitudes personally, you would not now believe you “saw” any remnant of my former spirit. You would be amazed at the difference you see between my former and present spirit. I am sometimes surprised by my present feelings and thoughts, and no one except God knows me better than I know me. Yes, I can still be aggressive – and even a smartass in some of my comments, but I value you very highly – as I do people in general, and this value I did not have in my previous spirit's estate.*

Casper wrote Ines that he was at that time totally disconnected from love, which has meaning in life above everything else. He wrote further that he was himself conceived by rape (letter from October 2010, exact date unknown):


*I believe the combination of Dad's unjust punishment in my childhood, his abandonment of our family, my neighbor Grady's sexual assault of me, and the other neighbor Gwyn's sexual molestation of me, my wife's cheating on me and the subsequent loss of my daughter in my life, then the armed robbery conviction, my wife's friend got me into – all contributed to a pattern of feeling and thinking which caused me to desire a destructive level of control over other people, and directly lead to my justification (on a subconscious level) of the patterns of behaviors which ultimately resulted in this death sentence.*

*Even so, I was fully responsible for every single hurtful thing I did to myself and other people.*

*I do have much to apologize for, and many to apologize to. Yes, I would like to contact everyone I have ever offended and apologize for the offense – but most of them are impossible to contact, because I don't know their names.*

Ines concluded to support Casper in his long-standing wish to apologize to his victims – for her own healing, as well. In her letter of January 17 she wrote:

*The prospect of having a chance to possibly help some of the victims to heal is like balm for my own heart and mind. It would relieve me immensely if some of them would react and talk about how they are by connecting with us or; with me.*



Hi my dear Casper,  
thank you for your letter of 21st.

The search for victims turned out to be almost hopeless. It was only successful in one case: the woman who, as a 12-year-old, he used as a prostitute for himself. He did not know the names of the other victims, as they were not given. The sources of information for contact information blocked it in his case. After several unsuccessful efforts, Ines encouraged Casper to write his apology in order to publish it on the Lifespark website.

On October 18, 2010 Casper reported that he had stomach problems.

On November 6, 2010 he wrote:

*I got back from the hospital Jacksonville Memorial yesterday and this won't go out until Sunday evening. I left so quickly I couldn't give anyone your e-mail address. They just walked up and said get dressed, after I showed the nurse my stomach – swollen, big time. I looked eight months pregnant (according to what the nurses were saying.)*

*It seems like some of our long range plans to help victims will be up to you. Actually, they wouldn't/couldn't tell me how much time I have left. They say it's cancer, because there are dark spots on my liver images, but it didn't sound like they knew what was causing it.*

*God is in control of all things, so we will do what we can while we can do it, then leave the rest to our loving creator.*

After that, it went very quickly. On November 9, 2010 Casper wrote:

*I just don't know how many days I have left, so we can't lose any time. I will probably pass away not by lethal injection, but natural causes – you have my permission to put anything I've written into any medium you want to.*

On November 21, 2010:

*You are the last person alive on earth who truly cares about me, and I don't like seeing you unhappy or frowning. Sometimes no pain at all, at other times I have pain like you can't imagine – nearly unbearable.*

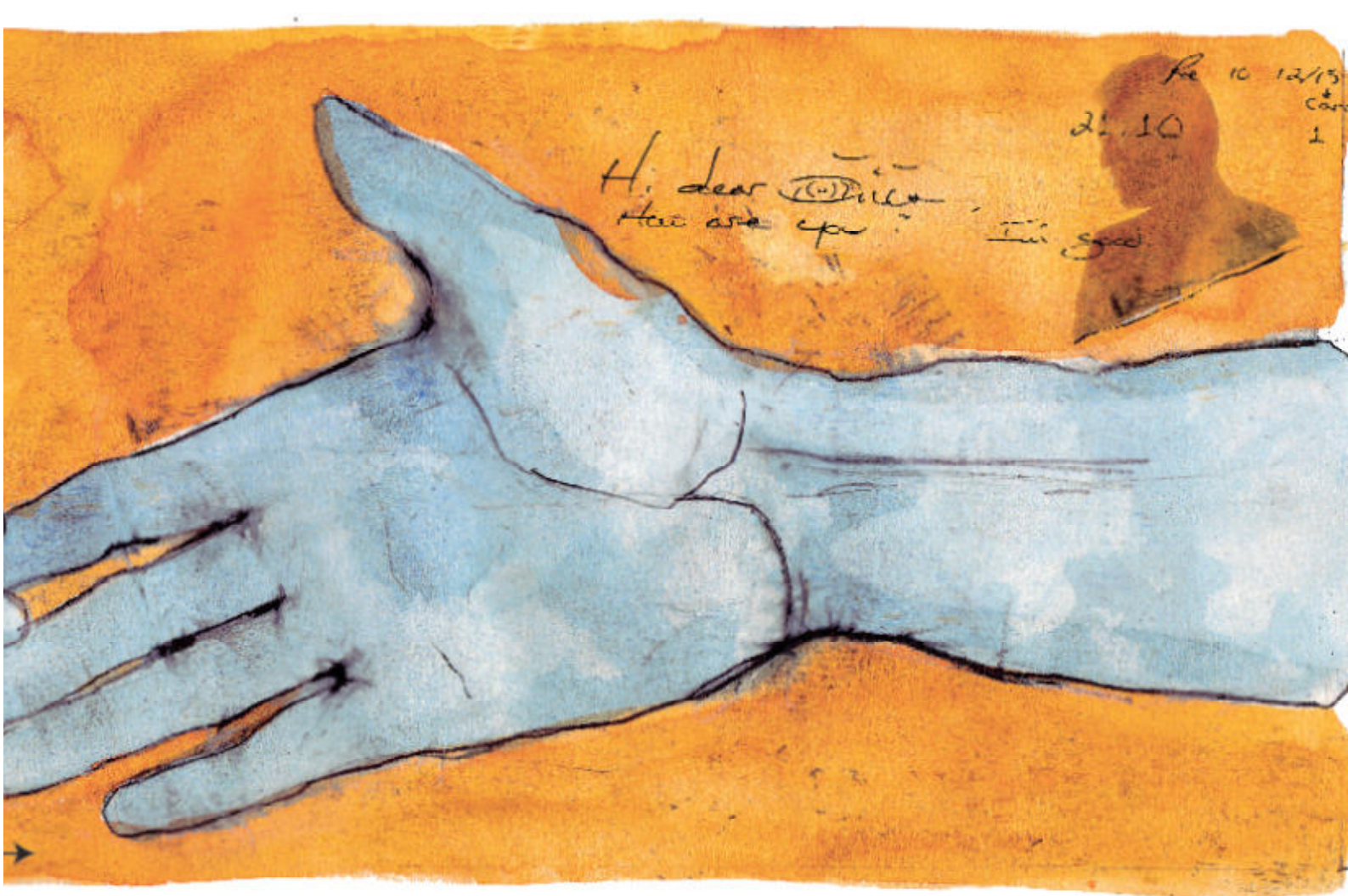
On November 23, 2010 Ines received the last letter from Casper:

*I know it isn't easy for you to hear / consider – I love you and greatly value our connection – always.*

*I can't keep my eyes open any longer. Sorry. You will come out good Ines because you give sincere love.*

*Love and prayers  
Casper*

Ines was informed of Casper's death by a telephone call from a prison employee, who was prohibited from giving out information, but pursuant to Ines' suggestion, she was able to give "yes" and "no" answers Ines' questions. In this manner, Ines found out that Casper died on December 3, 2010 at 4am Florida time, at the exact time that she was cutting out stars with her students for a window decoration.



On the same day Ines found a report about Casper on the website of the daily newspaper "Orlando Sentinel". She scrolled down to the commentaries where most of them copiously welcomed Casper's death. In the midst of these commentaries, though, she found one person's entry entitled "Forgiveness". She wrote that she was one of Casper's victims and that she had forgiven him. Ines responded with a commentary: She does not know why Casper committed these crimes, but she did know how he lived with them because she had known him. She mentioned Lifespark and the website of the organization. "Forgiveness" followed the trail: on the Lifespark website she found Casper's apology and Ines' e-mail address.

An e-mail from Debbie a short while later took Ines' breath away. The name Debbie is for her a kind of symbol for all of Casper's victims. A brisk e-mail exchange ensued, and Ines interviewed Debbie for the Lifespark website. As summer drew near, Ines wrote that she would be travelling again to the US, and asked if Debbie would like to meet with her. Debbie agreed. Ines and her husband drove to a restaurant in a small town in Mississippi to meet Debbie. Ines was tense, afraid of her own feelings.

This fear was unfounded. The two women greeted each other with a hug. In the following days, they spent a lot of time together, went on a boat tour, laughed and talked a lot. Debbie wanted to know what kind of a person Casper was. She said that she was glad that he had someone to talk to. And that he had found faith. She, too, had turned to faith; in her local church she had found comfort and support. Debbie explained to Ines that she had attempted many times to

write Casper to let him know that she had forgiven him. When she did not find the energy herself to do this, she turned to several pastors, but they advised against it.

"I learned from Casper what a person is capable of", said Ines retrospectively. "I do not know if he was healed at the end. But Casper made enormous progress, which is not possible without a counterpart. I received a lot of support and caring suggestions from him. I miss him."



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This article was first published in German in the Swiss street magazine Surprise, member of the international network of street magazines INSP.

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