



Talk about the topic execution with Robert Pruett on death row in Texas

By Ines Aubert and Robert Pruett, July 2014

Robert, you have been given an execution date twice already. And both times you received a stay. Can you tell us when the dates were given and when you received a stay and why?

The first date I got was issued on February 13, 2013 for May 21st of 2013. The second date was issued on March 12th 2014 for May 21st 2014. Both times the judge in the case actually held a hearing to set the date, so I at least had a heads up and knew what was coming. So many people here are given execution dates without even knowing about it until the administration moves them to death watch.

Both of my stays were a result of my request for additional DNA testing. Back when this case happened DNA technology was still in its infancy so the hope was that some of the DNA found on the torn disciplinary report could be analyzed and matched the person who committed the murder. Also, there was an unknown palm print on the disciplinary report and we thought it might be matched to someone in the new database created in 2009. Unfortunately, there was no match for the palm print and there just wasn't enough DNA extracted from the report to be tested; the results were inconclusive.

Now there is a specific question I'd like to ask you. Most people never are in the situation to be given an execution date. Only one who is or was in that situation knows how it feels.

What did it mean to you to have an execution date?

The first time I received an execution date I was highly optimistic that I'd get a stay because Texas had recently passed laws enabling people to have DNA testing done when a person's guilt is in question using new technology. I knew that I met the criteria, so it was all a matter of presenting the issue properly to the courts. Thankfully, David Dow and Jeff Newberry are very proficient at what they do.

It was somewhat similar with the second execution date. Even though the district judge denied me relief after the DNA results were determined inconclusive, I knew that I had the right to appeal his decision to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals (CCA) and that there simply wasn't enough time to do that with another May 21st execution date. I knew that once my attorneys filed our notice of appeals to the CCA, the judge would remove the date or withdraw it completely.

That being said, there are never any guarantees that things will ever progress as they are supposed to here in the Texas system. Nothing is ever certain until a judge signs an order, and even that can be appealed in most instances. So there remained a threat on my life until the dates were officially removed...

The truth is I didn't think or feel much different when I had either execution date. When I first moved into death watch with a camera in my cell, the guys already there said it might take a few days before the weight of the situation would hit me.

It never did. There were minor adjustments to living in a cell with 24/7 video observation, but I was able to maintain equanimity and peace of mind. I've been practicing living in the moment for some time now, trusting that whatever experience I'm currently having is the one the universe wants me to have. Rather than resist the flow of each moment, I try to coast with it. I believe there's purpose and meaning to every experience, so I tried to stay open to learning from the experience of having a date and possibly releasing this form soon...

See, I perceive reality through mystical lenses. Death and separation are illusions of the senses. We're all eternal energy incorporating matter, participating in the perpetual cycles of the space-time continuum, dancing the cosmic dance in the realm of form. I'm not afraid of losing this body since everything on the physical plane is in a constant state of decay and change. It's futile to become attached and cling to the physical; it's a total waste of energy. I know that the essence of all being is infinite, so there was never any fear of relinquishing my form and I even felt, intuitively, that there was more here for me to learn, but I wasn't clinging to it. I tried to stay open to whatever would happen, and I tried to stay centered and not allow fear to grip me.

Hm. Many people use the expression “rollercoaster” when they think of a friend’s scheduled execution. Yet, you, as a person in a similar situation, take it easy. What are they missing or lacking that you have?

No one is missing or lacking anything; it's inside each of us, we just have to rediscover... Listen, being on death watch and knowing you could be soon executed is intense and there are ups and downs to it, but you don't have to be overwhelmed by it all. Staying present is the key. It's undoubtedly an emotional experience, and I believe we should feel our emotions. The problem arises when we become attached to them or this form. My attitude is that each of us has come here for certain lessons. Once those lessons have been experienced, it's time to relinquish the form. We can't possibly know when that time will be, even if you have a state sanctioned execution date. Some get last second stays. But, it's futile to worry about when our time might be up. My suggestion is to stay aware and present in each moment and make the best of it. Let the future worry about itself.

I have heard many people say things like, they think it's torture to know about the exact date and time of death and to see time passing by until then.

Like I said, no one knows for sure when their time is up. If you sit around worrying about it and being afraid of death you will suffer. Attachment to form causes suffering. Awareness in the moment without holding the pain of the past or fearing the future releases you from it.

What do you think about the fact that there are so many appeals possible that it can't be told when the execution date will in fact be carried out? Isn't that very cruel in some ways? You never know what you're dealing with...

It's all about perspective. If you want to fight for your life then you ask your attorneys to attack your conviction at every corner. Some get to death watch and say, "Okay, I'm done here." They ask their attorneys to not file and their fate is sealed. If you fight there is that uncertainty, that rollercoaster ride you speak of. For some it is cruel and torturous, and no doubt in many cases it's worse for the family members of the condemned...

Regardless, I still think there's something to be learned from every experience, no matter how tumultuous the ride! If we're gripped by the fear of what "might" happen we'll likely miss the lesson....

I've known you for more than 12 years now. When I got to know you I couldn't have imagined you would handle an execution date the way you did. How did you become the spiritual man you are today?

It's been a rather long, yet exciting journey that has helped open my mind to the spiritual, yet I know I'm still learning and growing. I think we all are or our time here would be done.... Being in this situation, having spent over half of my life behind bars, has often compelled me to think about the mysteries of existence. Why am I here? Is there a purpose to suffering? What's the point? I sought answers and understanding to such questions with diligence. I don't pretend to have all the answers and I certainly can't communicate the ineffable, but I intuitively perceive layers of existence far beyond the physical. Ultimately, the peace and joy I now experience isn't really about what I believe but how I live life: in the moment, without reaching for what's not already present or trying to hold onto the ephemeral. I just try to flow with the energy of the universe....

Is there something you would advise friends of death row inmates to tell their pen pals what they can do to help them remain peaceful in prison?

I would recommend that they try to keep things as normal as possible. Keep writing as always and don't panic. Also, don't be afraid to express yourself, whatever that might be. Whatever you do, don't allow fear to determine your actions. Always allow love (light) to guide you... Humor helps, too. Comedy helps our conscious selves transcend the physical: It's a reminder that life is all about living and enjoying our moments....

You have been on death watch and know how it feels to be there. Do you have any advice for the inmates on death row?

Yes, I would encourage anyone with a date to not procrastinate! Don't put off till tomorrow what can be done today. I've seen guys get over there and bullshit around and the next thing they know, BAMM! It's time to go. They left so much unfinished. Go through your property and be sure to organize what goes where. Write and express

yourself to everyone you care about. This seems logical and you'd think everyone's aware of it, but I've seen dudes regret so much those last few days because they never got around to doing everything they wanted to do...

Oh, and never forget that you're eternal and the state cannot kill what it did not create.

In lifespark we have a so-called "candle message", a service for our members whose pen pal has an execution date. We can send a message to all the members, telling them about the pen friend and his date and asking them to light a candle at the time of the execution together with them. Subsequently, some members connect with the person who sent the candle message and show their support.

Can you imagine that this ritual would mean something to you as well if it ever came to happen?

That's a beautiful thing you all do. It would mean a lot to me. Because every candle lit represents consciousness unified, the light of your souls pouring love into your loved one as well as into the hearts of our loved ones.

The Innocence Network is working hard to prove your innocence and you might get a new trial which could lead to another sentence or an even brighter future.

However, there is no way that the two men who lost their lives – Ray Yarbrough and Daniel Nagle – can come back into life.

I know that some people are awaiting your execution in order to see "justice served" as they put it. Do you have some understanding for their point of view?

Hmm.... To begin, I have empathy for people. Death is one of the greatest lessons in life. It's never easy to deal with, even for the most spiritually evolved amongst us. I wish peace and healing to everyone struggling with this painful lesson...

That said, I don't think the death penalty offers anyone healing. It's revenge, and it doesn't change what has happened. I don't think anyone's going to magically feel better after the state kills the person that murdered their loved one. I understand that's what they hope for, but I doubt that's what happens. I think release from their pain must come from an introspective journey within and through the act of forgiveness. Causing others pain isn't going to cure our own, it only perpetuates negative states of being and binds us to the flesh. My hope is that each of us can be freed of this vicious cycle of anger, hate and pain.

Do you ever think of them and their families as individuals?

Of course, I do. I wish them peace and healing. I hope that one day they can release any negative energy that they might be holding in because it's only hurting and hindering their spirit.

I wonder if some people don't really gain comfort from the fact that the offender of their loved one has been executed.

Some might mistake the feeling of revenge as comforting and think that heals them... But I believe it only perpetuates the cycle of hate and anger and it doesn't resolve the internal pain caused by holding such negativity in... Jesus said, "Love thy enemies as yourself." Because the spirit is within each of us, and Jesus understood that only love and forgiveness heal. He wanted people to see themselves, the spirit, in others and for people to be empathetic, which is the highest state of spiritual union.

My friend Bill Pelke of the Journey Of Hope www.journeyofhope.org welcomes anybody who would like to talk to him about forgiveness. Bill is the relative of a murder victim and he's gone through the journey himself. He can probably help to make the first step towards forgiveness. Bill@JourneyOfHope.org*

What is the legacy you would like to leave behind in case your execution can't be avoided?

In the early parts of my life I contributed so much pain and negativity to the world. Today, right this moment, I just want to be a conduit for the light and love of the universe. I'd like to help as many people as possible realize that we're all eternal energy, only here for a brief flash in these forms, and the key is opening ourselves up to that energy and elevating our consciousness to a state of awareness and oneness, with love as the guide. It's not about "my" legacy, it's about "our" legacy as evolving consciousnesses.

Thank you very much for answering these questions, Robert! I wish you all the best for your future lessons.

* Bill Pelke died on November 12, 2020