



Photo by Casper's friend Roy Albers

The Big Challenge – I appreciate you see the man I am today

By Ines Aubert

First published in the lifespark newsletter, August 2010

My closest pen pal Casper is the biggest challenge I've encountered in my life. By writing and sending me his biography for last year's book project – which, by the way, was cancelled, or rather delayed – he confronted me with a story that I had not imagined I would ever have to digest in my life.

During the past year, learning about Casper's past and his crimes, was one big struggle for a way to firstly staying sane myself and secondly not seeing the former man in Casper, but the man he is today.

There were times when I was looking for spiritual guidance which helped me to deal with the details of the heinous crimes that Casper committed.

There were also moments when I felt that my conviction against the death penalty was challenged. I've never been personally confronted with something as cruel as Casper's many crimes and my heart went out to the many surviving victims as well as to the dead victim and her family.

I believe that I now have the biggest part of the struggle behind me and I'm relieved about that. Never have I regretted, not even in the most difficult time, that I was confronted with Casper's past. Not knowing about it wouldn't have made any difference for its reality, but me having

gone through all of that makes me more understanding and knowledgeable of the healing process. I feel that I'm better prepared to talk to victims now.

Casper and I have always, in addition to the letters, written texts and dialogues which would help readers to understand better and to not judge too quickly. We have given them to all kinds of people but not yet to a bigger audience. During the difficult times when our friendship was really challenged, we still went on dialoguing and trying to not ignore what happened between us but to work on it and transform it.

Because Casper understands how important his apology could be for his victims' healing, he has already tried to find and contact them, yet all in vain. Still, we tried once more. It again turned out to be very difficult and the letters I wrote to various places, groups and offices remained unanswered or with no result.

Through additional Internet research, however, we found one involved person and she even started writing to Casper. That was an eye-opening experience for both of them.

We're still trying to find more of Casper's victims. I strongly believe that it could be of great help for some of them to hear Casper's apology, or to even contact him. Finding these without disturbing those who don't want to be reminded of the past is the big difficulty. The last thing we want is to cause more damage.

While I tended to hide Casper's identity in my former articles about him, he now wants to be named by his name.

.....

My name is Robert Parton. I was raised under the name Robert Power, my nickname is Casper and Ines has called me “Steve” or “S.” in some of her texts. I just turned fifty (born 7-23-60). I am now a Christian, believing The Holy Bible to be true and correct in all that it teaches by its examples and elaborations.

My past is both sordid and extensive, so suffice it here for me to just quote a recent open letter I wrote:

To All Victims:

My name is Robert Power.

I am at Union Correctional Institution, with multiple life sentences and a death sentence, on Florida’s death row. I have been here for twenty years now.

I lived twenty-seven years before I was arrested for murder.

In that time I offended a lot of people. Murder, rape, robbery, assault, adultery, burglary, auto theft, forgery, pandering – many people have been harmed by the things I have done. Looking back with great regret for the harm I have done, I would undo it all, and instead be the help I should have been.

Of course, no one can go back and change what has been done.

Now, I do apologize to all victims, some whose names I do not even know, for the harm my brutality caused you. Many victims will not care about this apology, and I understand that, but for those of you who feel you are owed that apology – at a minimum, I sincerely give it.

Anything you may want to say to your offender, I will hear you.

Sincerely, Robert Power

.....

In our many letters Casper – I’m calling him by his prison nickname – and I have covered many topics and I will provide a glimpse into our exchange by quoting some paragraphs from our dialogues.

Please note that all quotations are only small parts of our texts.

Casper explains why he wrote about his past in such detail:

Casper: Something else I want to point out to you. Without the detail of the evil I did - you wouldn't be able to see for yourself how bad my feelings, thoughts, and behaviors were at that time. Nor how that evil progressed. Nor understand the change between then and now. Thus, how far I have yet to go to get even close to right minded.

I wanted to be perfectly honest with you about my past, my present change in spirit, and my future hopes that some good could come of conveying an understanding of how sincere and unconditional love can transform lives.

In the many letters following my reading his biography I had a great need to talk about Casper's victims. This caused intense discussion.

Casper: You seem to be bogged down in the past and focused exclusively on victims. I'm focused on doing something positive in the present and addressing helpful influences to both future victims and offenders. I have no problem with apologies, because I am sincerely sorry that I have caused the pain I have caused.

You may "feel" I have no right to speak for victims. I was a victim long before I ever offended anyone. I know well what I speak of.

You are seemingly focused in my past, whereas I believe the good my story can do is in the present and future. Yes, the past must be dealt with rightly to move into the present and future in a way that brings people forward in understanding of love's transformative power - how do you propose to balance the past, present, and future?

Ines: Your letter was very emotional although you didn't talk about your feelings really. I see that you were very discontent with me and that you wanted me to know that. Okay, I understood.

You agreed in one of your last letters that I add the feelings to your past. However, I'm not caught in them, but try to transform them. I need you for that and I need a

discussion with you to reach that goal. Being caught in something would mean to become stiff and lifeless. I'm not that.

You feel that the victims get too much attention now and that I only look at them. And that you perceive as imbalance. Fact is that they, for the first time, get some attention. I don't write them, haven't supported them financially or by sending stamps, sent them photos or showed them I'm their friend in any ways.

I believe that in none of your correspondences they have ever been a real topic.

By the way, you being the victim in your childhood was only briefly mentioned in your biography and not elaborated too. You were treated very cruelly as a child and then you were abused by Grady. I believe it's important to hear more about that too.

Casper had tried to find and contact his victims before, with the help of his old friend Roy Albers, a former pastor who died last year at the age of 84. I wasn't aware of this and was under the impression that he hadn't really tried. This misconception caused me to write something that was not fully appropriate.

Casper: Sometimes I don't believe I did what I did. It is "offensive" to you, I don't know what you want to call it, but it definitely offends your sense of justice to know of such things. It was an offense against all that is good and right. The question is what in your heart and mind can/should be done to constitute a just resolution. What do you feel/think I can do to contribute to a real and significant resolution?

What if what you feel/think it just isn't possible - no matter what effort is placed into achieving that resolution?

Ines, there came a time when I found myself completely disconnected from everyone and everything. A very real darkness dominated my every feeling, thought, and behavior. There seemed to me to be no way out of that darkness. I pulled innocent people into the darkness and held them there with me for a time.

I believe God preserved my life and brought me to a place where I could see the light of love.

Since that moment of perceiving that light I have examined myself, my past and my present to correct those things I found wrong in my heart, mind, and relationships.

I now stand in spirit at a place which allows me to sincerely appreciate the goodness of love. This place is brilliant in comparison to where I was standing in spirit when God began to draw me in mercy and grace toward the light of love. Should I not stand and advance in light?

Should I not move forward toward the hope I have in God's love? Should I retreat back into the darkness because I can't undo what I did in ignorance of God's love for me and for those people I harmed? If there is anything good that I can do to help anyone I have harmed, I will do it.

I hope that whatever you and I do together include some progress toward that possibility."

Ines: I'm very glad that you asked me, Casper, what I thought you could do to contribute to a real significant resolution. I've thought a lot about that.

One thing occupies me most. It is about honoring the victims' pain. I got the impression that you aren't enough aware of what you did. Your first angry reaction on me reacting that strongly on your past, made me think that you didn't understand what I reacted on. My focus was not on your development or change, my whole focus was on the victims and their past and present and also on their future.

Your change and your place in my heart and in my life are already clear; I don't need anything more to give you a value in my life. I really would love to hear in detail what happened after you were locked up, but I don't think it could ever touch me as much as it did when I learnt about your victims.

I honestly couldn't understand why you couldn't understand me. You seemed to think that what you told me would only reveal what you were going through while I immediately reacted on what the victims were going through.

Knowing you personally makes it easier for me to think you'll be cared for; I can always contribute to that myself and help you to feel good. I can't do any of that for the victims until I know them.

There is another thing that irritated me very much. I once asked you whether you cry. And you answered yes; about things that go wrong in the world. I don't remember exactly what it was. I wondered why you don't cry about your victims. I think you could leave the crying about the world to other people and do it about what you're responsible for.

Some of my friends say that I'm too much involved, to the point that it started burdening my own life. That is true and still, I don't want to get rid of the burden under all circumstances. I probably have to feel so strongly until you do that yourself to the full extent. And no, I don't mean you shouldn't have a good life or you shouldn't feel good or know you are forgiven. I wish you all the best from the bottom of my heart.

I just think your victims should take up more of your time and efforts in that way that you try to reach them and help them. Do you pray for them?

I feel that you should invest as much time into reaching out to the victims as you did into reaching God. If you felt for them today like I do, I could give that responsibility back to you and be released.

Today I think that Casper did everything within his ability to find his victims so that he could express his remorse.

Ines: How do you feel about another person knowing the details of your life?

Casper: Roy knew all the details that you now do, and so did my Mom. Most of them anyway. It took me five hours visiting time to explain it all to Roy, then to pray about it. I hate all that I went through, and all that I made other people go through. Telling Roy everything for the first time felt like I was placing a great burden on my dearest friend, but after hearing his prayer for me I felt he was not only spiritually mature enough to carry that burden but also capable of allowing God to take that negative energy from him.

Mom was a different story, it took her several years to get where Roy immediately went to unload the negative energy.

I felt concerned for both Roy and Mom before I told them, but we all worked through it.

After Casper and I visited in August 2010, we wrote:

Ines: It was a painful struggle for the both of us to overcome everything that could have cut off our dialogue and our feeling of closeness. We both suffered from having to go through that struggle, but there seemed no other way than to tackle it.

We just met a couple of days ago. I've visited you before; however, it was the first time after learning about the crimes you committed in detail. I had feared a little that instead of the loving man that you are today, I'd see in you who you were earlier and that I'd be scared by the person who caused so much damage and pain to other people.

This hasn't happened and I only saw the loving and totally changed man of today. This I consider another mile stone in our relationship which makes me very happy.

Not being burdened like I was any more doesn't mean that I don't feel with your victims or that I devalue what they were exposed to. My empathy for them has not changed and I will go on trying to find some of them so that your apology would reach them and so

that they would get the chance to talk to you and to be heard by you. I don't know how they could go on with their lives after they became your victims, and I have great hope that hearing your apology would help them to come to some additional closure.

Casper: Yes, I wasn't sure our connection would survive your consideration of the details of my past either. There was a point when I thought we would disconnect. I know that you have never struggled more with anything.

I know too that you feel most acutely the emotional trauma some of my victims suffered through, and may yet suffer.

I believe it's very important to give each victim an opportunity to speak, if they choose to. The problem is letting each one know they have that opportunity, should they choose to be heard.

So far we have only been able to contact one person, and though there was no hostility, there was also no desire to engage in a helpful dialogue.

Hopefully someone will choose to engage in dialogue that will be beneficial to him/her, and to anyone else who follows this dialogue.

I wasn't aware you would be looking for the man I was, but I do appreciate that you care to look carefully enough to see the difference between the man I was and the man I am today.