



Travel update, spring 2015

By Ines Aubert, Switzerland, April 2015

The Travel update was written during the trip to see Robert Pruett a last time before his scheduled execution on April 28th, 2015

April 17th: Travel update – Before I leave

I'll be leaving for the USA Friday early in the morning. The last thing I heard is that Robert is doing well and that he is at peace.

On Saturday I will first go and see my friend Mark on death row in Florida and then go on to Texas. All my pen pals know about all the others and are kept updated about their fate.

As you can imagine, friendship means the world to those in prison. In his last letter Mark wrote something that moved me deeply:

How I wish for your sake and Robert's that it was a normal visit. But I expect good things to come even of this, perhaps not in the moments leading up to - but in the days that follow. Life finds a way, even as we are distracted by grief or loss. And of course all is not lost, you will carry Robert just as you carry Casper, just as you will one day carry me. And we three and whomever else finds themselves in the warm embrace of your heart, could hope to find no better repository for the memory of us, who we were, who we became with you.

You will be fine. Robert will be fine.

Mark

Like Robert does, I will read incoming messages during my two weeks trip. However, I won't probably answer to all the mail, which is what I normally do. Also, please understand that I will not continue to forward greetings from people who are not personal friends of Robert once I leave Switzerland.

April 19th: Where have you been all day long?"

No good news about Robert's fate so far.

This morning, in Woodville Texas, when I sat in the visit room, waiting for Robert's "son" Seth (who he is you will find [here](#)), I watched a Hispanic grandmother with three young children next to me. She was handing the phone to one after the other so they could talk to the man sitting on the other side of the glass. I heard one of the boys say into the phone with his little voice: "I miss you, Daddy. Where have you been all day long?"

So many inmates could ask their fathers this question: Where have you been?

Robert's father was mostly absent in his childhood and couldn't give him the guidance and care a child needs. The same goes for Seth. Both Robert's and Seth's fathers are in prison with long sentences. The little boy's father, obviously, is in prison as well.

I just hope that for these children "all day long" doesn't equal "all their childhood".

By the way, Robert and his father have been denied a visit although there is the possibility to transfer one of them to the prison of the other and put them in adjacent cells so they can talk the whole night. They haven't seen each other for 18 years.

April 21st: Travel update – The big tear

I haven't yet been able to see Robert and I don't have any news from him.

For thirteen years Robert and I have been on an eventful journey together: we shared a lot and went through a lot. I can say that Robert is familiar with all aspects of my life. He knows the people who are important to me and the challenges I face. Writing to him has long become a habit and a stable part of my life. No need to mention that Robert has been very dear to me for all these years.

And now this: I am here in Texas to say goodbye to him.

One part of me feels that this is the one place on the planet I want to be: Here, near Robert whom I consider a son. The other part cries that I want to be anywhere but not here, where such a cruel and violent act will be performed, right in front of my eyes. These two motions are tearing me apart.

But then, when I think about it; there will be a big tear and a scar in my soul anyway if they proceed to execute Robert next week. So, I can't avoid the tear and I should rather accept that I will probably be going on living with a scar. It comforts me to think of it as some kind of a gem, a tear jewel so to speak. I will wear it with love and light.

PS: You might want to read the interview I made with Robert in July 2014 about the topic execution [here](#).

April 23rd: Travel update – Love and Light for everybody

Robert is doing alright and he's still at peace. I will be seeing him tomorrow.

Through a friend who saw him today Robert sends this message: "Hi everyone, I've read all of the messages. They've touched my heart, and I can feel the love. I appreciate everyone's support."

There are people involved in Robert's life that we generally tend to forget to send light and love to. It's the victims' families and others involved who we consider "on the other side".

A woman who cares about Robert has recently told me she was thinking about how she could honor Robert in her "small way". Not a small way but a big and loving way would be to think in positive terms even of those on the other side who wish Robert dead. We can send light and love to them too in the hope that they might one day see the light.

You can also do it with other people in your life whom you consider "on the other side".

Two years ago I had the chance to meet both Ray's son Jake and Ray's father Jerry.

Ray Yarbrough was the victim in Robert's first case where his father stabbed a neighbor to death.

With Jake I made an interview that I put on Robert's homepage with Jake's approval. You will find the interview with Ray's son Jake Yarbrough [here](#).

I'm not in contact with Jake anymore.

April 24th: Travel update – Robert's impact on your life

I visited Robert today. He's in good spirits and we enjoyed a good time together. Robert asked me to give you a message:

"We don't know what is going to happen. But we should consider this an opportunity to practice the awareness of living in the present. I thank you all for your messages. It's a humbling experience for me to see the impact my life has had on your lives."

April 26th: Travel update – What really counts

Unless he gets a stay, Robert will have "all-day visits" on Monday and Tuesday, which means he will be out in the visit room and meet with his friends all day long. He has had that on Friday already. Robert is in a separate booth for these all-day visits. Unlike in the regular visit room the visitors have a small room on their own with a table and a few chairs. So that provides some privacy.

Last Friday, three other close friends and I were with him in turn and three of us will do it again on Monday and Tuesday. The visit on Tuesday will last only until noon and then they will bring Robert to Huntsville where he will stay in a cell next to the death chamber until shortly before 6pm. All the executions in Texas take place in Huntsville in the Walls Unit.

There will be protesters in front of the prison, as well as people celebrating the execution. The two groups each have their separate places to gather. At the time of the execution between 6pm and 7pm a radio show called "Execution watch" will be aired with information about Robert.

These are the grim details of the next days unless Robert receives a stay, but focusing on life and light, is what counts most for him.

April 27th: Travel update – It's different

I would like to thank everybody who has shown so much support to Robert and me. It is overwhelming to see how many people care.

This is an outstanding situation and quite surreal. But Robert is doing alright and so am I. It is amazing to me that we can still laugh and have fun. But as Robert says: Why shut down when there is still time to enjoy each other's company in the present?

Today was Robert's second all day visit. He also had a visit from his attorney and from three chaplains, one of them being the one to be present tomorrow if the execution takes place. Can you imagine being asked "Who do you want to pick up your body after we killed you?" Actually, the chaplain asked Robert only the first part of the question but the second part is what makes this question a necessity. Robert quite laconically commented the whole situation with "Well, it's... different."

Robert was allowed to talk to his father on the phone for 10 minutes today, which came as a surprise. He also had a visit with his mother on Saturday.

People have been asking about a possible stay. There is a slight chance for a stay but it might come very shortly before the execution. I will inform everybody through this list as quickly as I can but it will probably take some time to get to my computer after I learned about it.

April 28th: Travel update – Stay

Robert got a stay! Everybody is laughing and crying here at the hospitality house. I will write more later.

April 28th: Travel update – A new experience

Here are some facts from Robert's attorney first:

Robert's execution date was withdrawn, so that more DNA testing can be done on the weapon. The testing needs to be completed by May 28th. After that there will have to be a hearing. So even if the new testing doesn't help us, the soonest a new date can be set will be at or after the hearing (which probably won't happen until the end of May or sometime in June). If the new testing isn't helpful, a new date could be set at the hearing. Any new date will have to be at least 30 days after the order setting the date is entered.

So, at least until summer Robert should be safe.

Robert called it "a new experience" and that's what it was for me too. Going through all the stages – last letters, last visits and a last phone call – before the execution was something I will never forget.

In the early afternoon, Robert was allowed to make phone calls and talk to all of us in the Hospitality House in Huntsville where the families and friends of the inmate gather. Robert was his old self and talked and laughed on the phone with his friends and family members who were there.

Two chaplains explained us what would happen before and during the execution and we could also ask questions. Our questions were whether they would let Robert wear his glasses so he could see the friends who would witness the execution through the window.

It was "a new experience" as well to listen to someone describing in detail what would happen when they kill someone.

Then sometime around 3pm we learned about the stay and could talk to Robert on the phone again. Now everything had changed and we were excited to be able to make plans, for the next letters, next visits – no next phone calls though. The inmates can only talk on the phone before the execution.

I will probably write more about this whole experience but not right now. I'm very tired and will enjoy a good and happy sleep tonight.

Thank you all again so very much for your support and care! I was flooded with “hooray” messages from all over the world after my last Travel update. This is unbelievable.

Although I know that prison guards were ready to build a “Wall of Grey” in front of the Walls Unit and to celebrate Robert’s death I still encourage everybody to send these people love and light as well.

April 30th: Travel update – I will be back later

This list has grown rapidly and still does as almost every day new people are dropping in. On one hand this is great on the other hand I must admit that I will have to find ways to channel all the positive energy of so many people so that they can become creative and active without me being involved. I feel that I’m not in a position any longer where I can handle all the incoming e-mails. The same goes for Robert who is totally flooded with mail.

With a group of people I will discuss how we could continue with this list in the future. I will go on sharing news about Robert, but less frequently.

For the time being, please accept that I won’t answer most of your e-mails and probably won’t even read them. I need a little more time for myself. It has been a quite exhausting journey.

Many people expressed their gratitude for my updates and for my work; you’re welcome. Thank you for the compliment. :-)

Here is some food for thoughts for you: most people on this list feel outraged about the injustice that has been done to Robert. It is indeed outrageous to give an innocent man the death penalty, who would question that?!

However, when I started writing to Robert many years ago, to me, he wasn’t innocent. I did not choose him but was given his address and thought I would be writing to a guilty inmate. I knew that most inmates on death row are in fact guilty.

I’m very much against any kind of violence or even murder, but I’m ready to be a person to talk to for someone who committed a murder and who needs a friend.

Under these promises I started the pen pal-ship with Robert. I was not looking for an innocent inmate but accepted the challenge of having this young man who was almost still a boy with some opinions quite opposing to mine in my life. It was the beginning of our journey and friendship and there were no signs that one day Robert would become popular.

Besides Robert, I have other pen pals in prison and most of them are guilty and admit they are. I still have close friendships with several of them. Solidarity is my main motivation and I feel sorry for those whose bad upbringing led them to make bad choices and to commit crimes.

Being a friend to them, to me, is a way to give something back.

I am very much against the death penalty in any case.

What I'm asking you is to think about becoming an important person in another inmate's life, may he be innocent or guilty.

There is no need to rush into any decision on this; it is a commitment that should be taken seriously. You won't know beforehand who will be your pen pal and where the journey will lead to when you start writing.

It is a way to be ready to share love and light by being a person who cares and who responds.