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“Scum”

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[Death Row, Huntsville, TX]

"Until you are dead! Until you are DEAD!
UNTIL YOU ARE DEAD"! Those words
echoed in my head as I stood before the judge--
knees trembling, tears rolling down my face--as
he passed sentence on me. This couldn't be
happening to ME, I thought, but it was!

On March 25, 1985, I was arrested for the
robbery/slaying of a convenience store clerk.
Almost two years later, on February 6, 1987, I
was being sentenced to death for the crime. Part
of the reason for the ultimate sentence was that I
was considered to be "a continuing threat to
society"!

The jury had labeled me "worthless,
unremorseful, and unable to be rehabilitated".
They felt there was no way that I could reenter
society and contribute anything meaningful and
constructive. I could no longer, now or in the
future, be a productive member of society. I was
a personification of all the bad elements in our
society. In short, I was scum, and they had to get
rid of me by putting me to death!

Once I was an honor student and a three-
year letterman on my high school tennis team. I
had spent three years receiving vocational
training in mill and cabinet making. I had a
management career in the fast food industry, I
had even co-owned and operated my own
business, all before the age of twenty-two. Had it
been all for nothing? Didn't it matter that I had
never been on probation or sent to the
penitentiary for any crime?

I was sent to the Texas Department of
Criminal Justice to await my execution. In my
heart, I knew I wasn't a "continuing threat to
society". I knew that I had been and could
continue to be a useful member of society, even
from behind bars. I had to prove to a judge and
jury that I could still make a positive
contribution to society.

That's what I set out to do! With nothing but
time on my hands, I began to read books on
every subject that interested me and some that
didn't. Since I enjoy working with my hands and
creating, I began to draw. With no formal art
training, it was a little difficult at first, so I
started by tracing different pictures and coloring
them. I also picked up pointers and techniques
from others who enjoyed drawing.

By reading various books on writing, I
became interested in putting my thoughts down
on paper. Being locked away from the rest of the
world, I soon began to daydream and fantasize,
playing make-believe in my mind to keep the
solitude from getting the best of me. Writing
became a great escape because it allowed me to
be elsewhere, with other people and doing things
that I know I will most likely never get a chance
to do. Now, almost four years after I was labeled
"Scum", I still sit here on Death Row, waiting to
be executed, disposed of like garbage!

I've accomplished much in that time. I am
not tracing drawings anymore. I'm a self-taught
artist and have sold over two-hundred and fifty
drawings. I have enrolled in a fiction writing
course through a correspondence program. After
completing the course, I plan to write children's
books and short stories, doing the illustrations
myself. I've had three small articles published in
a religious newsletter. Not much, maybe, but it's
a start! As for my academic education, I'm
attending Sam Houston State University,
majoring in Business Administration and
minoring in Sociology, through its
correspondence program. A person, any person,
who has the willingness, the determination and
motivation, can pull themselves out of
disparaging circumstances and make a positive
experience out of it. Sometimes help is needed
though.

Someone once told me a story about a man
and his son walking along a beach. They noticed
hundreds and hundreds of starfish that had been
washed ashore by the tide. As they continued to
walk, every now and then the boy would reach
down, pick up one of the starfish and throw it
back into the water. When the boy was picking
up the fourth one, his father said, "You can't save
all of them. What you are doing won't matter".
The boy replied, "It will to this one", and he
threw it back into the water.

Although I have been washed up on the beach by the tide of social outrage, I continue to inch my way back, hoping that one day I will be able to reenter the waterway of our society. Samuel Johnson once said, "It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives". The act of dying is not of importance; it lasts so short a time. If I don't accomplish all that I set out to do, I will have at least accomplished some of it. Hopefully, someone has benefited from the drawings and writings that I have completed thus far. Should the state execution be the way that I must die, I will die with the knowledge in my own mind that "I'M NOT SCUM"!