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“The Last Mile”

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Sunday, March 13, 1994, at 12:35 pm., exactly 35 hours and 26 minutes before my scheduled, state-sanctioned murder, the "Death Row Escort Squad" arrived at my cell, saying "It's time ByrdDog". "Strip", said one. A number of men stood in front of my cell, nervously watching as I shed my clothing, perhaps for the last "strip-search" of my life. After going through the usual routine of "lift em, and spread em", I got dressed, backed up to the cell door, and was handcuffed.

While this was going on, an eerie silence had settled over the entire cellblock. There was none of the usual boisterous yelling, laughter, loud radio's or tv's playing. Nothing. Complete silence. Then, as I backed out of my cell and started on that long walk, the cellblock erupted into a cacophonous uproar - "Stay Strong", "Good Luck", the voices yelled out to me. As I bid them farewell, I vowed, "I'll represent us ALL well, no matter what happens, Stay Strong"!! Meaning that I would not grovel and whine, as some involved in the process would like to see.

Along the way, as I walked down the long main corridor, loud voices raised in solidarity and encouragement greeted me as I passed each cellblock. The shouts from the cellblocks caused my escorts, and the numerous guards that lined the corridor, to become alarmed. The fear and terror of the past riot still fresh in their memories. In an effort to make me speed up the leisure pace I had assumed, meeting each and every eye along the way, they started walking faster. I maintained my stride, and soon they slowed down, resigned to the pace I had set.

Upon arriving in J-1 Super-Max, I was once again strip-searched and my regular death row clothing were exchanged for death house clothing. "Odd", I thought to myself, "what effect does what one is wearing have on the fact of one's impending death"?!!

The atmosphere of the Death House was smothering, suffocating, as if there were a shortage of oxygen. Everyone moved as if in slow motion. Their every move seeming to have been thoroughly rehearsed, learned, robot-like professionalism, as now, for the first time in over thirty years, they (the elite Death Squad) had been called upon to commit murder in the name of the State of Ohio. In some of their eyes I saw fear, concern, and revulsion. In others, sadistic glee. Looking at each one of them with steady, unblinking eyes, I sized them up individually.

Shortly after entering the death cell proper, my attorneys arrived to inform me as to the current state of my situation. We discussed this at great length, and I felt confident that everything possible was being done to halt the insidious plot to murder me that had been set into motion by the State of Ohio.

After enjoying the time spent with my lawyers, I immediately contacted my woman, and later, other family members on the phone that had been provided. I attempted as best I could to assuage their worries and fears. With each one I tried to explain the situation, based on my knowledge and information provided me by my lawyers. This was very difficult, given the fact that they all were well aware of the appeal process, and knew this latest attempt by the State of Ohio to murder me was simply a political move, and not based upon law. I still wanted to calm their fears, give them strength, and assure them all that everything was under control, and that my lawyers were on top of everything, every move the state was trying to make.

For the most part, I remained in constant contact with my woman and family by phone, and was permitted to have a couple of short visits with my lovely woman, engaging in spirited conversation with some of the people who had come down from the Ohio Public Defenders Office, and was truly touched by them.

There were periods when time seemed to stand still, then suddenly speed up. I was offered food, but refused to eat, fearing that it may have been "doctored up" with drugs to make me less resistant and responsive. This refusal was not based on some unreasonable paranoia, but on years of incarceration. I know first hand just how devious prison officials can be, and I wasn't about to take any chances! The whirlwind of

activity continued around me, and as night approached, there was no thought of sleep in my mind. Throughout the night I was on the 'phone talking to people I haven't heard from in years. Everyone expressing their support, love, concern, and pledging their assistance.

Monday morning, March 14th, 1994, was indeed a "Blue Monday" for us all as we learned of the apparent, unprecedented and mean spirited tactics being employed by the "honourable" Carl Rubin, the judge assigned to my case. It seems that even though he had my writ of habeas corpus and motion for the stay of execution before him since March 7th, he decided to wait until the "eleventh hour" before making a ruling, knowing full well that the situation was critical, and time was of the essence. An example of the insidious plot he had hatched in his muddled mind began when he instructed two of my attorneys to meet in his chambers at noon. At the conclusion of the meeting he informed my attorneys that he would deny my motion for a stay of execution, and that he would issue his ruling at approximately 3pm. Nine hours before my scheduled execution! He made this ruling with full knowledge that it was legally wrong, but in keeping with his own "personal" feelings about the length of time my appeal was taking. As he stated on one occasion, "There comes a time when all of this must come to an end". Now he had appointed himself the Supreme litigator, usurping the power of the United States Supreme Court, as well as that of his own District Court. Had it not been for the tireless efforts of my attorneys, who fought gallantly, he may well have succeeded. Through their efforts, an emergency panel of the Sixth Circuit Court convened and issued a stay of execution around 6:30 pm.

Not to be outdone, Ohio Governor George V. Voinavitch personally contacted his friend Ohio Attorney General Lee Fisher to form a pack and they went to the United States Supreme Court, asking them to dissolve the stay of execution, and order my murder to occur as scheduled. This move was purely political, both having political aspirations with elections coming up this year, knowing how profitable it was to jump on the "Kill us quick" bandwagon.

After the U.S. Supreme Court in its entirety had been convened, they declined to lift the stay of execution at approximately 11:30pm. Everyone breathed a great sigh of relief,

including, I might add, the correctional officers that had been present during the whole ordeal. Around 12:20 am Tuesday morning I was again escorted, however, this time, back to Death Row. Again the corridors were filled with loud cheers and good wishes, but it was when I arrived back on the "row" that I received the most thunderous ovations. Everyone had' been following the events closely as they unfolded over the tv and radio, and were all aware that I was coming back.

In the aftermath of Judge Carl Rubins' machinations with my case, he was removed from further involvement. This indicates and validates my previously held suspicions that he was overtly prejudicial towards me and my case, all death row prisoners, and was losing his judicial temperament. To him, the bench from which he's suppose to make decisions based upon law, had instead become a soapbox, which he had claimed to orate his personal convictions! For those that are chomping at the bit for my death, complaining about the length of time my appeal was taking, it doesn't matter whether I'm innocent or not. All they want is to have their blood lust sated. Nothing else matters. Damn Justice, "Give Us The Body" they cry.

Many people have written and asked what it's like being on Death Row, being sent to the death house, and coming within thirty minutes of being murdered by the State? Why I refused to eat my "last meal", and why I chose the electric chair instead of lethal injection? I will try to answer these questions based on my experiences, as I'm sure it differs from some others that have been as fortunate as myself. To walk into the very Jaws of The Beast, and walk out again. Sadly this has not been the case for many throughout this country that are similarly situated.

Being on Death Row, in and of itself, is a form of death. The environment sucks the life from you, and the passing of a single day at times can be but the blink of an eye, or as long as a heartbreaking life. Then there's the drudgery, the soul wrenching monotony of staring at the same steel and concrete, the same people, ad nauseam. Being taken to the death house is, in a way, a relief. Finally one is afforded the opportunity to confront one's killers, who cowardly hide behind the mask of shamelessness. To look into their eyes, smell

their raw fear, and feel one's own strength being pitted against the ultimate sanction, Death.

As for the so-called last meal, and my refusal to eat it and other meals? As I said earlier, years of conditioned paranoia, coupled with the exigencies of events going on around me, eating was the furthest thing from my mind.

I chose the electric chair because I refuse to give any credence to the State's attempt to contrive a rationale for its murders, by offering a lethal injection as a "more humane" form of murder. If they were going to kill me, I was intent upon making it as ghastly as possible for all that bore witness to it.

What went through my mind during those thirty-six hours, were thoughts of my woman, people that I care about and love, and what my death would do to them. I was hoping for the best, and expecting the worst. Those thirty-six hours were devoted to the ones that I care about and love. I had to keep my wits about myself, because as I saw it, it was on me to give the ones I love and care about strength. I had to maintain courage in the face of adversity, so that the burdens of the ones I care about and love would not be overbearing. Their love and support had sustained me all this time, and it was my turn to show and give them strength.

There is a plague in this country that is being controlled and manipulated by politicians, judges, prosecutors, police, professional victims, and victims' rights groups. Until society faces what's really going on in this country and starts wanting real answers for what's going on in our streets, a number of innocent people are going to be put to death, or imprisoned for the rest of their lives. This attitude of lock them up and kill them is not the answer. Who do you think are going to be the ones filling our Death Rows, prisons and jails? Open your eyes before it's too late. The future of this society is at stake. YOU the PEOPLE must take off your blindfolds and look at the real problems, dealing with them rather than sweeping them under the rug with a quick fix that has never worked. Crime is nothing new, the way it is dealt with is a reflection of the society we live in. The reflection I see is a holocaust against the poor and less fortunate.

To all the Brothers and Sisters, mothers and fathers who are on Death Rows, in jails and prisons throughout this country, or struggling to

get through the day to put food on the table, Stay Strong and don't give up. Stop turning on each other and stand United against the oppressors and raise your voices in Unity!