

A Tale of Guilt

What is death, but a finality? What is life, but pain?

I understand both sides of the death penalty. So I'd like to share my thoughts, my views, and my tormented tale, a tale of guilt, a tale of pain, and a tale of sorrow, beyond belief.

The story starts in early June of 1995. I was lying on my bunk in my 9 x 6...63 square foot cell, here at Union Correctional Institution, one of the two housing units for Florida's Death Row, when the officer stepped in front of my cell, stating "mail call": On Q, I rumbled off my name and number, "Clark, # 812974" and he handed me the letter, as he continued down the hall. I looked at the return address, not recognizing the name. Connie Bowers. So I immediately pulled the staple out of the envelope, which the mail room placed in it after opening it, and checking it for contraband. I extracted the letter from the envelope, unfolding it. I began to read it, as she told me a little bit about herself, and how she had moved from Ohio to Florida, and had just recently separated. She ended the letter by stating "I am not looking for romance or a young stud, but if you need a friend, I am here." I immediately sat down and wrote her.

Over the next several months our letters flowed back and forth in a nice rhythm. We built a friendship like I had never had before. There was so much about my life that she couldn't understand. One of those things was the relationship between my father and I. I explained to her, that he and I had never had a father-son relationship, it was more like a friendship, a bad friendship. At the age of 6, 7, or 8, I was able to sit on the tail gate of his '64 El Comino and have a beer with him. He used to make me fight other kids, one in particular, he was a neighbor's kid name Jack, who was about three years older than me.

My father went out of the way to try to make me tough and mean, because my mother was a lesbian, and he feared his son would turn out gay.

I told Connie of a fight in the mid '70's between my mother and father. They were fighting, both drunk, throwing blow for blow, when my father jumped off the ground saying, "I'm going to kill the bitch!". As he ran through the house, I ran behind him, screaming and crying. When I reached the bedroom door, I saw him pull the shotgun down off the gun rack. I turned around and my mother was behind me. I stood in front of her, crying, as my father stood before us with a 12 gauge shot gun, screaming, "Move Ronnie!" My step mother was in the background screaming, "Please don't Wayne!"

I don't know if it was my tears or her screams that convinced him to let us leave, but she got out of there alive. It would be months before I, an 8 year old kid, would chance another encounter with him. At 15 years old, I dropped out of school, and started dealing drugs for my father. No curfews, most nights I wouldn't even show up. I was selling drugs

and hanging around with guys ten or fifteen years older than me. Connie couldn't comprehend what kind of father would allow this. Thus, she kept insisting on meeting him. I kept saying no. Sure he was my father, sure I loved him...but I did not respect him, nor did I like him. He would show up once or twice a year for a visit, and as far as I was concerned that was enough.

In late September of 1995, against my better judgement, I broke down and gave Connie his address and phone number. I heard they spoke on the phone quite a few times. They met, and went out on several dates. I tried to tell her she could do better, she didn't listen. In November of 1995, Connie was finally approved to visit, and she came up to see me, bringing him along. By December of 1995 they moved in together, and in

August of 1996 they were married.

That summer I had met a woman named Brandi, from Texas. Her and I became really close, and in October of 1996, after months of writing about my case, for which I am under a sentence of death, Brandi came out and asked about getting me a lawyer. She asked me to check around, and the name of Banard Daily came up, an attorney out of Tallahassee. So Connie called him and told him about my case. He agreed to take the case for \$44,000. I told Brandi, and gave her Connie's phone number. The night she called, Connie had to leave for work early, so my father answered the phone. I never shared anything with him, for he was on a "need to know" basis only, and as far as I was concerned he didn't need to know anything when it came to me, for I didn't feel any love from him. One time in the summer of '96 I asked him there in front of Connie, "Dad, how about coming up here once a week, for a few hours, just to get me out of this cage?" He said, "I aint coming up here every weekend." I looked over at her, and she looked at him with disbelief. Another time over that summer, I received \$20 from him. When Connie showed up for a visit, I sat down with her, and I said, "I love you, but don't ever make him do that again." I dont want him to do anything that he doesn't want to do, and I've only received money one other time under his name, and that was \$15 for my birthday in 1992, and he didn't send it, my step mother Francis did. I said to Connie, "you send me money out of love, because you want to, not because you have to, so please never again." He never did again.

But on that November night in 1996, he answered the phone and spoke with Brandi, and found out that she was going to hire an attorney. I found out later that they spoke several other times over that week. Brandi never did speak with Connie. That next weekend, Connie and my father showed up. We had a nice visit, but as they were leaving, he gave me a hug, and said "Son, no matter what happens, always know that I love you." I pulled back, and looked at him, wondering what this was all about, but I could only watch as they left, for visiting hours were over. I would find out soon enough what that was all about. The next day at mail call, I laid back on my bunk and opened Brandi's letter, and in her very first sentence she stated, "you sorry S.O.B., your father told me everything! How you and Connie are trying to con me out of my money." I threw the letter down, and I felt sick. I felt hot flashes running through me. No he wouldn't!!! Sacrifice his own son!!! Let his first born go to the electric chair, just so he could live more comfortably!!! NO!!! But he did. Love? This is love?!! I threw my locker at the door, how could he?!! I laid back on my bunk and the tears ran down my cheeks, it felt like someone was standing on my chest.

I tried to understand why? Why would he do this? How could he do this? He knew that money would save my life. After a while I put it all together. The words he whispered in my ear. So I wrote to Connie and said "please come see me this weekend, it is very important, and don't bring that bum!" I then sat down and wrote to Brandi, I said, "I dont expect you to believe this, but everything he said to you is a lie." I said "here is what is fixing to happen...he is going to continue to call you and even write to you and send you photos, he is coming to Texas, and going to leave Connie, and try to get with you for the money. I know what you are thinking, no way a father would do this to his son, and abandon his son on death row for finanacial gain." I said, just wait, wait and see. "

Connie showed up that weekend, and I told her what all had taken place. She was shocked, in total disbelief. She said, "how could he?" I responded, "he always has, and he always will put himself first. A loving father doesn't put a beer in his little son's hand, a loving father doesn't put his 15 year old son on the street, selling drug's for financial gain. He is a bum, he was a bum the day I was born, and he will be a bum until the day

that I die." She said, "that explains why he has been getting the Bronco ready, he is planning a trip to Texas." She left out of the visiting park that day more confused than I had ever seen her. She left him in December of 1996 because of that. Brandi would send me a card which my father had sent her, with photos of him enclosed, wearing no shirt. Yep! He did exactly what I said he would do.

Her and I would correspond for a few more months. In late January of 1997, Connie would come in to visit. As we sat there, I asked her, "what did you do this week?" As she was telling me, she said, "I went to Ferna...." and she stopped mid sentence. I finished it for her, "Fernandina". She said yes. I said, "you are back with Dad?" She said, "Ronnie, you of all people know what it is like to be alone, and I don't want to be alone. I responded, "You can do better, he is a bum and he always will be!" She tried to justify his actions. I would'nt accept it. I told her I never wanted to see him again. She tried, Oh how she tried to get me to forgive him.

In mid February of 1997 I got into a fight and went into disciplinary confinement (D.C.) there are no visits, only mail. So Connie and I wrote two or three times a week. I knew my father was looking at my letters, so in every letter, I would ask "hows the bum doing?" He wrote a letter with blood on it and said "you can't deny that" with an arrow pointing to the blood. Connie told me "your dad is reading your mail, and he gets upset when you call him a bum." She wrote, and said "when you get off of D.C. I'll be up there to get you out of that cage every weekend, I don't care what your dad says." I received that letter on March 26, 1997. I would receive another on March 27th or 28th. On March 31, 1997 at noon, I was doing cell clean up, I had just swept my cell, and the officer was standing there talking to me, when he asked, "Was that guy in the Lake City newspaper last week related to you?" I said who, and he replied, "Ronald Clark." I asked, "Ronald Wayne Clark, Sr.?" he said "yea." I was backing away from my cell bars, I did'nt want to know, I knew I did'nt, but it came out "what did he do?" When the officer responded "he killed his wife." NO.NO.NO.

I threw one punch, and then another into the concrete wall. My chest hurt, my head hurt, I felt as if someone had just stomped my heart into the ground. Why did I give her his number? Why???!! I might as well have killed her myself. I laid down on the bunk and cried and cried and cried until I could'nt cry anymore. I hoped and prayed that someone would tell me it is not her, that it was a bad joke, or a dream, or anything but the truth. I hated him! I wanted him dead! An eye for an eye!

I would later learn some of the accounts that lead up to it. They had gotten into an argument the morning of March 24, 1997. Neighbors would say they heard her scream "Please don't Wayne!" as he chased her out of the house, shooting her with a 12 gauge shotgun. As she continued to try to escape, the coward shot her down in the front yard, laid the shotgun down, sat on the front porch, and waited for the cops to arrive.

Hearing those details of her pleading for her life, further infuriated me. I would lay in bed thinking of how I could kill him. I would hurt to my soul, to the deepest part of my heart. I felt guilt, sorrow and pain like know one could feel, for I believed the bum murdered her, because she spoke out against him, about me. Maybe about him screwing up the chance of getting me a good lawyer.

The State Attorney was seeking the death penalty for him. At first I wanted him dead, and would've killed him if given the chance. The more and more I thought about it, death was too easy. For he would be escaping his pain filled life, into the unknown. Escaping into a spiritual world of peace and tranquility? Escaping from the punishment that I want for him. Yes, death was far too easy. Life in prison, that was what I wanted for him. The State Attorney would later offer a plea bargain, on part of Connie's family

he would accept.

In November of 2000 he would be sentenced to spend the rest of his natural life in prison. I would later correspond with him. I started off that correspondence seeking the answer to the one question I yearned to know...why did he kill her? He never would reveal it to me. He said that he didn't remember any of it. Yet, he told the homicide detectives year's earlier that he killed her because she bad mouthed his mother. I don't believe that for a second.

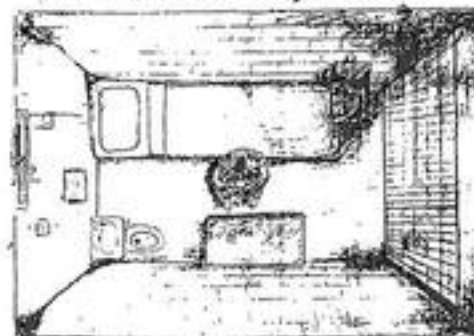
I even tried to forgive him. That was Connie's goal to begin with...to repair an unrepairable father and son relationship. I tried, but I just couldn't do it. I was torn between love and hate. I last saw my father on that November day in 1996 when he whispered in my ear, "no matter what happened Son, always know that I love you." I had enough guilt to deal with before any of this happened, but the guilt, the pain, and the tremendous amount of sorrow he placed on my shoulders was anything but love. When he shot and murdered her on March 24, 1997, he killed half of me too. I would not wish what I feel on anyone.

So as I sit here on death row, I know both sides of the revenge factor. I also realize that life is full of pain, and death is the finality to that pain. I realize that I am here for a purpose and although I can't see, and sometimes can't understand my purpose, I must carry on to fulfill my purpose in life, and yet carry on with guilt.

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Welcome to My World



Little Boy

Written by: Ronald W. Clark, Jr.

My pain begins so deep within
Within my heart, within my soul
For as a child my innocence was stole
So I've caused more heartache
across the miles
I've brought more tears
than I brought smiles.
Yes, even as a little boy,
I brought more tears
than I brought joy
And yet it seems
like such a bad dream
But that's the life,
the life I've seen.
For there's so much pain
deep within,
That I just touched
on where it began.
For even as a little boy,
I felt more pain
than I felt joy.

Written January 28, 2000

Worshiped the Ground

When I heard the officer say
He killed his wife the other day
I took a step back, and I looked around,
And my heart felt like, it had been stomped on the ground,
And I screamed and shouted and I cursed him down.
For he had killed my best friend, and the woman I had found.
Who I loved and cherished, and worshiped the ground,
That this woman had walked on, that I had found.

The Death Penalty by Ronald W. Clark

A rich man will walk
And a poor man will die
And America will scream
An eye for an eye
But only a poor mother will cry
For a rich woman's son
Will never die.

Written February 26, 2000 © 2000

