

The Life and Times of the Death Row Poet

I stand at the cell front. Hands clasped tightly, gripping the steel bar's, as I gaze out, not through one, but two set's of steel bar's. Trying to get a mere glimpse of a world I may never know again, through a two by five foot window, located across the hall, some nine feet outside my death row cell, here at Union Correctional Institution(UCI), which houses over 300 of the 367 men on Florida Death Row. As I gaze out this window, I reflect back on the daunting morning of February 22, 1991. I was half asleep on a thin mattress, on a steel bunk, in a tiny 5 x 840 square foot cage, in what was the old Duval County Jail, when I heard the Correctional Officer (C.O.) call out "Clark!", "Clark!" I responded "yea?" He said "you've got court this morning." I said "yea I know." I just laid there as he walked off. My mind was wandering off in an uneasy anticipation of the event's that would unfold this day. I knew that my life and fate laid in the hand's of this tyrant Judge David C. Wiggins, whom had already let this Judiciary System screw me over. I was a damn fool for thinking that I even had a half ass chance at "Justice!" My mind drifted back until mid 1990, when the District Attorney (D.A.) offered me a plea bargain, of a life sentence, which at the time meant I would have to do 25 years. "No" I rejected their offer, and opted for my Constitutional Right to a trial by a jury of my peer's. Would the Judge take that into consideration? For the D.A.'s office by offering this plea bargain, obviously did not feel that this case warranted the daunting sentence of death, but had only insisted upon it after I rejected their offer. Would the Judge take into consideration, the fact that they had railroaded a 21 year old kid, with an incompetent court appointed attorney, whom had never before handled a Capital Murder trial? I raised up off the bunk, thinking I'm a fool for ever even considering those fact's. I brushed my teeth, and after shower's, two C.O.'s showed up placing the handcuff's and leg irons on me. They escorted me over to the courthouse. Upon arriving in the court room, I was seated next to this two-bit flunky, want-to-be attorney. I listened to him spout off more lies, when finally the bailiff called out "all rise" for the Honorable Judge David C. Wiggins. I rose to my feet, musing over the word "Honorable," and how loosely the term is used on these malicious, vindictive, dishonorable men that sit upon the bench casting judgement, condemning men to death, under the fraudulent concept of "Equal Justice." When in their heart of heart's, they know that the only true equality is that the poor "equally" get screwed by this corrupt legal system that perpetrates this facade of "Justice for All." The Judge steps in, in his shiny black robe, banging his gavel. He said "Mr. Clark, you can remain standing." His word's were jumbled together, for my mind was still clouded by the effect's of the Thorazine, a tranquilizer that the jail psychiatrist had me take during the trial. My mind came to, as I heard the Judge say, "Mr. Clark you have been found guilty by a jury of your peer's and by a vote of 11-1, they have recommended death. "I have weighed these recommendations and other factors very carefully. " "Mr. Clark, I am sentencing you to death by electrocution, where you will be taken to the Florida Department of Corrections (F.D.O.C.), and held until such a time as you will have electrical current's ran through your body, until you are pronounced dead. May God have mercy on your soul." I was whisked out of the courtroom back over to the County Jail, where I was allowed a phone call. I dialed the phone. My mother's voice came over the other end. I said, with no hesitation, "they sentenced me to death." I could hear her hysterical sobs, as she dropped the phone. Sherry, my mom's lover, picked up the phone, but I had to go. So I said, "Take care of mom, I love you, and I'll write when I get to where I'm going." I was then taken down stairs, placed in a transport van. Two C.O.'s drove me to North Florida Reception Center (N.F.R.C.), also known as Lake Butler. I took in the view of the world that I was banished from. As we arrived at N.F.R.C., we entered a world surrounded by gleaming razor wire fences, and gun tower's. We drove up to a garage, the door opened and the van pulled in. The C.O.'s exited the van, opening the rear door. I stepped out, still bound by handcuff's and leg iron's. I was escorted over to a bench were they were removed, and I was instructed to disrobe. One of the C.O.'s was a female. I disrobed in front of her, placing the clothes in a paper bag. I saw her eye's dart down to my crotch. The thought of never being with another woman crossed my mind. The C.O.'s gathered the bag, the handcuff's, and leg iron's and left for the County Jail. I was officially, property of the F.D.O.C., and being that I was under the sentence of death, I was given top priority,

and whisked through the processing, shower, hair cut, finger printing, photos, and physical. I was then taken to a van, placed in it, secured by handcuff's, waste chains, and black security box, which goes over the handcuff's, and leg iron's. We then exited N.F.R.C. and headed toward my final destination, Florida State Prison, (F.S.P.) As we arrived turning off of State Road 16, into the entrance, we drove under an archway with letters reading "Florida State Prison" and I saw the green building, a.k.a., the "Green Monster", surrounded by guard tower's and razor wire fence's. We pulled up to the back entrance to a sally port, where the van was being searched. My mind flashed back to January 24, 1989, 25 month's earlier. I was in Oklahoma, staying with my mom. I walked through the living room and on the news was video footage, showing a hearse pulling out of this very sally port gate, carrying the body of Florida's most notorious serial killer, Ted Bundy. I watched for a brief second. Never could I have dreamed of entering the world of the damned. Not in a million year's could I have imagined this!!

Maybe I 'll wake up and be in my bed. The van start's up and pull's down the back road, where it stops among a half dozen or so C.O.'s, which are quite obviously waiting for me. The two C.O.'s in the van get out. The door open's up and all eye's are focused on me. I stepped out and looked up at the daunting appearance of this building, that had stolen so many lives. One of the officers said, "up that ramp." So I started up this back ramp, that leads to the second floor. My heart was racing, for I was facing the unknown. An uneasy feeling of doom had fallen upon me. For this building reeked of death, of fear, as we reached the top of the ramp, we came to an opened ,solid steel door. I stepped through onto a tile floor, that looked like it belonged in any school or public office building. We walked forward about 30 yard's down this 10 to 12 foot wide hall, coming to a stop, in front of steel bars, painted an off color gray. A button was hit from the control room to our right, on the other side of these bar's. I was informed to step through, which i complied. We had just entered what I would later find out, is designated, "Time Square." I stepped over to the control room, where a small 12 inch by 10 inch door was opened at about knee level. I was told to give my name and number. I bent down and stated, "Ronald Clark, Jr. # 812974." The C.O. continued to direct me down the hall to my right, where to our right we passed a half dozen small holding cages. We continue on, going through another electronic gate, coming to a stop at another gate, which was ten or so yards from the last gate. The C.O. pushed a buzzer and out of a door to our right, on the other side of the gate, stepped a C.O. Placing a key in the gate, he turned and opened it. We stepped through, and entered the door the C.O. had come out of. Over the top of the door were the words "Medical Clinic." As I stepped in I was told to have a seat next to one of the desk's, where my vitals were taken, and I answered numerous questions on my medical history. I was then escorted back out, passing through both gates, and stopping at the control room. The C.O. got a key, walked over, opening one of the little cages. I stepped in, the door was then shut, and locked. The cage was no more than 2 x 2 feet, with a wooden bench in the back to sit on. To sit I had to spread my knee's apart and they still pressed against the bar's. I sat in there for a good two hour's. I spoke with many inmate's that were placed in the cell's on either side of me. Most were in population or close managment (C.M.), which is a type of lockdown. The C.O.'s finally opened the cage, I stepped out, following him to the control room, where he place the key in a slot, and told me to walk straight ahead. I walked 5 yard's and stopped at the gate. I turned to my left, and could see the door that went out to the back ramp, where I had come in through, a few hour's earlier. As the gate rolled open, my attention was focused ahead, and as far as the eye could see, I could see nothing but the hall. I was told from front to back, it 's a quarter of a mile long. Six wing's spaced out evenly, branching off both side's, for a total of twelve wing's, housing right over 100 inmates per wing. The gate opened and we began to walk, we then came to a second gate and it opened as we approached it. I saw at the top of the gate, was a camera, which ran to the main control room. Each time you walked through a gate, you could hear it closing behind you. Steel on steel, crashing together in an angry manner. This steel captivated the body, mind and spirit. We came upon window's located on each side of the hall. These were called day room's, and inside were men sitting at the table's, playing card's, watching t.v., and talking. These men were doing life sentence's. As I walked by, I could see men stop what they were doing, all eye's were focused on me, the new arrival, whom most had seen on the new's minutes earlier, as

the death sentence was handed down to me. We walked until we arrived at the last gate. I could see five steel door's located on the other side of this gate. Two on the left, two on the right, and one at the end of the hall. I later would learn that the very end door, was Q-Wing, and that Florida's Death Chamber is located there on the first floor. The gate rolled open, we stepped in, the C.O. pointed at the first steel door to my left, and said "stand right there." I complied. I noticed the "S" located over the top. A sergeant (Sgt.) that was working the hall, stepped up placing the key in the door, turning it. Taking the key out he then tapped on the door. From the other side of the door, I could hear the key being inserted, and turned. The door opened, and I was told to step in. As I stepped in I noticed two C.O.'s and a Sgt. To my right, was a stair case, one set of stair's, leading to the third floor, the other leading to the first floor. To the far right of this wall to the staircase was a walkway leading to the northside of S-wing. Directly in front of me, was a Sgt. Desk. To my left was a board with the cell number's and name's and number's of the inmates that were housed in the cell's. To my far left, I could see the bar's that lead down to the tier, two south. Upon entering the steel door, I could hear the multitude of sound's coming from down the tier, toilet's flushing, locker's slamming, t.v.'s and radio's blaring, screaming and shouting, as men are arguing, and attempting to talk over one another. The repugnant smell's hit my nostrils all at once, causing me to twitch. The scent of urine, feces, sweat, and stale cigarette smoke, laid stagnant in the air. The Sgt. said "name and number", again I stated, "Ronald W. Clark, Jr. #812974." He said "step over here to your right, " pointing behind the wall of the stair case. As I stepped over, one of the C.O.'s had placed a key in a box, turning it, he sld the panel door's open. As they opened they rattled. I stood there in front of the bar door's that lead down to tier S-2-N. As I looked down I could see bar's on both side's of this 3 1/2 foot wide hall. To my left mirror's started coming out from the bar's. I could see the reflection of the eye's that were starring back at me. The other C.O. and Sgt. stepped up to the bar door's, placing a key in and turning, we stepped through and began to walk. To my left was a closet, holding cleaning supplies, then two shower's. I could smell the mold, and mildew as I passed. I then came to the first cell and there stood it's occupant, gazing back at me, as I walked by his cage. Each and every cage I passed, were the eye's of the walking dead, taking on the view of their new arrival. To my right was a metal grate, called a cat walk, for the C.O. and Sgt. to walk on in the event of a disturbance on the wing, you could see through the grating to the first and third floor. To the right of the metal grating, was a wall, with window's spaced out evenly down this tier. Out of the window' s, you could see the puke green building, as you were looking at R-Wing. I arrived, stopping in front of cell S-2N-8, which would be my detestable dwelling for the next two year's. The C.O. pulled the door back. I stepped in, and the C.O. slammed the door shut. I then heard a rolling of steel clinging, as a locking mechanism fell into place. The C.O. removed the handcuff's, gave me some paper's to sign, and a rule book, and then turned and left. I turned back to view my cage. To my right was a shelf located about five feet off the ground. Then a steel bunk, no more than fourteen inches off the floor. At the back of the cell, over the bunk, was a metal stand for a t.v., which I would not see one for another 30 day's. On the back wall, to the left, was a sink and a toilet. Coming back directly in front of me, was a foot locker. I sat down on the bunk, opening the locker and roaches scurried out, trying to hide from the light that invaded their darkness. I looked as a roach scurried up the side of the wall, in and out of the crevices of chipped, dingy yellow paint. As I kicked the wall squashing it with my foot, I then heard a voice, "Hey new guy?" I responded, "yea?" He said, "where you from?" "Jacksonville," I stated. He said, "okay, I saw you on the new's earlier. They say you killed a man, and took his truck and boot's?" I said, "yea, but that 's a lie." He said, "my name is Mike, but people call me Doc." I said, "they call me RC." I asked, "how long you been here?" "Six years." I said, "Six years!!!" He said, "that 's nothing, you have guy's that have been here eighteen years." I said, "eighteen years!!!, your playing with my mind." He said, "no bullshit, my other neighbor was a cuban, Manual," whom later in 1999 would commit suicide in his cell, at Union Correctional Institution,(UCI), the new Death Row housing unit that was being built, that I would move over to, in late February 1993. I spoke with Doc for a while, as he filled me in on the way thing's worked here. I was then given sheet's, as I made the bed, turning out the light, and lying there, reflecting back on my life, and

these inept day's event's. If only I would awake in the morning, to find the date was January 25, 1989, and this was a nightmare, caused by the news footage I had seen the day before, on the Bundy execution. But that wouldn't be. I would wake up day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, for over a decade and a half, in this 9x654 square foot cage, and the nightmare of this reality of my existence.



Ronald W. Clark, Jr. # 812974
Union Correctional Institution
7819 N.W. 228th Street
Raiford, Fl 32026-4410
email: thedeathrowpoet@sbcglobal.net
www.angelfire.com/fl15/mtwt3

Daunting Existence

I strain to look out, so far away,
through the crack in the window,
at the dawn of the day.
To catch a glimpse of freedom
far off in the distance,
escaping this cage
and my daunting existence.
I can see freedom,
but only in my past,
so please tell me why,
am I trying to last?
Existing in this world,
that has deminished all hope,
so please tell me how
I'm suppose to cope?
For I stand at my cell bar's
staring off in the distance,
yet I still have to cope
with my daunting existence.



Guilt

My heart is so very weary,
my eye's so very teary.
In a state of deep dark confusion,
Provided with no solution.
Pain running deep within,
I hurt again and again.
My heart begins to wilt,
from the weight of all this guilt.
The day's so long and dim,
My life is so very grim.
I feel there is no hope,
yet I continue to cope.
My watch continues to chime,
one hour at a time.
The day's the pass so slow,
as the guilt continues to flow.
This I surely swear,
more guilt and pain I cannot bear.

Death Row

Written by: Ronald W. Clark, Jr.
February 1, 1999

Death row is a place
Where a man is disgraced.
Where flies don't land
And birds don't sing
Where there's no love
For anything.
Where one seeks love
But cannot find
For people truly feel
We are a waste of time.
So you sit in your cage
Day after day
And watch your life
Waste away.
You have no hopes
You have no dreams
You have no meaning
It surely seems.

Written by: Ronald W. Clark, Jr
October 24, 2005



P.O. Box 25730
Chicago, IL 60625
773-955-4841
nodeathpenalty.org