

As a Father, I really don't know if I would have had thoughts like a Hawk or a Dove in some cases

“Sometimes, in weak moments, I agree with the proponents of the death penalty in the support of capital punishment. But these are short moments when I try to imagine those absolutely brutal crimes mentioned in the interview. But thinking of it in an overall and general way, I know that hate, anger and revenge can never solve anything or make anything even better.”

By Alex Reinert, pen pal of a death row prisoner, 47, Air Traffic Controller, Frankfurt, Germany, March 2017

The Interview entitled “The Hawk and the Dove” made me think. I found it to be a very interesting conversation because of its controversial and objective nature.

I have written letters to my pen pal Bill for about 5 years now, and have always been a strong opponent of the death penalty. Jeff (the Hawk) did not change that completely, but what he said changed my way of thinking about some aspects.

First, I must say that I'm glad that my pen pal Bill doesn't claim to be innocent like many other DR inmates do. He accepts total responsibility for his crime. He killed three people in an act of rage caused by jealousy and anger. We never had to discuss the justification of his punishment. He killed his parents-in-law and his brother-in-law with a gun. I can't imagine how I would have felt at the beginning of our pen pal ship if he would have been one of those “Monsters” who committed such horrifying things that Jeff mentioned in the interview. “Burning your own children”. “Raping small kids”. As a father, I really don't know if I would have had thoughts like a Hawk or a Dove in such a case. The Lifespark -organization does not choose your pen pal according to preferences, you simply receive the next inmate on the list. So, before I started as a pen pal back then, there was the possibility of receiving the address of a child-rapist or something similar. I remember how grateful I was when I “got Bill” (reading this sentence leaves a surreal feeling).

One thing that always makes me wonder while reading the arguments of opponents and advocates of the death penalty is that both sides refer to God just as if he would provide answers to all of our questions and actions! God does not support any kind of brutalism. He may serve as a guide for doing the right things and for living a righteous life in common, but he does not give any clear answer to the question if killing could be legal or if killing could be good at all, whoever does it, whether it be a state or a person. In asfar as I interpret the Bible, God and Jesus talked about love, and nothing but love. Advocates of the DP could argue that there are some chapters about justice and so on in the Bible. We all – advocates and opponents – interpret the words of the Bible the way it suits our arguments the best, which is a foolish self-deception. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” This sentence can't truly serve as a justification for any violence. If that were so, wars would never end and revenge would rule the world. I decided differently. My decision to write to a Death Row inmate was

driven by my inner feelings of humanity. I cannot explain this further, sorry. I just don't know what to say, it's in me. As a Hawk, some would find this to be very unilateral. Yes, it is. I just don't have any contact with the victims. I would love to start conversations with the relatives of the victims, too. Maybe I will start to do that now (thanks Jeff!).

The bad thing is the way capital punishment is practiced: solitary confinement, years of not being treated as a human being, little to no health care, all of the inhumane treatment on DR – that can't be moral. My pen pal Bill has been on DR for more than 25 years now. He is fighting to get his sentence commuted to a life sentence. My own (European) country handles cases like Bill's very differently. There would have been sophisticated efforts made to resocialize him in the community. I like that principle and find it to be the best thing to do. But after reading the interview with Jeff, I must admit that some people could not have been helped by that. Once I visited Bill in the unit in Texas where he lives a life that is far away of being called a "life". We were sitting there in the visitor's room and talking to each other through telephones. Other inmates and visitors came from time to time to begin their conversations. Then the guard led an inmate into a cabin some meters away from ours on the other side of the room. Bill looked at him and suddenly he was deeply frightened. He told me that this guy is a very, very evil man and that he would kill anybody for no reason. Social rehabilitation for that guy would certainly be nearly impossible, even in my country. But still, if that were so, he would stay in the pen his entire life, which would be the right thing to do. Bill is different. I'm convinced that he would have had the chance to reflect and to express remorse his surroundings had been more positive and supportive. Now – after 25 years on DR – he probably would not be able to lead a normal life outside the Pen.

Let me get back to my reason for writing Bill. I guess that the USA itself is a very violent society. I have often been there in different states: Ohio, NY, CA, TX, AZ, etc. The people are so friendly and helpful. I have almost never met such open-minded and friendly people. I really love the USA and its inhabitants. But I feel and know that there is another side of the coin. No other society so similar to my own is so violent, so full of weapons, so full of daily crimes, so full of hate and anger. Yes, free weapons are a problem, so is social and economic injustice. The chasm between the rich and the poor, loss of jobs and wealth, the low level of education, all are facts that create violence. But I'm not smart enough to elaborate upon all the reasons for this terrible situation. But the statistics speak for themselves: the more guns, the more crimes are committed; the more poor people, the more injustice. The US is destroying itself and it gets worse and worse. And the answers for these problems from the viewpoint of the US are even more weapons, more self-protection and more outlaw justice is practiced. And that cannot be righteous. With my pen pal ship, I want to serve as a counterbalance. My friend Bill tells me so much about love and forgiveness. He doesn't hope to get out again, so his arguing can't be egoistic. He teaches me that time is love and love is time. Time that we spend with our friends and family. Writing and helping Bill may not be a justified thing to do considering the crime he has committed. It is an altruistic action in order to simply make his life a little more worthwhile. And that – some Christians would say – is what Jesus would have done. But as I said before, I don't act because I'm a religious person. I'm doing it because I'm an empathic person. Just as Ines Aubert (the Dove), who conducted the interview with Jeff (the Hawk) I always helped other people since I was young. But not only people, let

me tell you this: Once I worked in an animal shelter as a volunteer. I just remembered that now, as I was thinking of my motivation to write to a DR inmate. There were many dogs, about 50. Some were nice and tame, some not. Some dogs were lying in the corner and would become aggressive if someone approached their area. Teaching them how to be a better boy or girl was the most interesting thing to do. I started by just sitting near them. I wanted them to accept my nearness. That required patience and daily repetition. Most of the dogs were curious about their new neighbor and started to come along. They smelled me cautiously and with time, they let me touch them. Some of them I managed to put on a leash and take them out for a walk. At a certain point they were ready to be given to their new owner: they were re-socialized, trusting humans again! You might wonder what I want to tell you with that? There are so many aspects to it - just think about it yourself.

As I said before, Jeff made me think about me and my motivation in writing Bill. Jeff is right about so many things he has said. Sometimes, in weak moments, I agree with him in support of capital punishment. But these are short moments when I try to imagine those absolutely brutal crimes Jeff mentioned. But thinking of it in an overall and general way, I know that hate, anger and revenge can never solve anything or make anything better. Only forgiveness and love can change things for the better. Hating people or being filled with wrath makes you a hateful person. I don't want to be a hateful person. And to be honest, neither Hawks nor Doves are the right animals to explain the situation. Both birds do not act with intention, greed, hate, pity, moral or otherwise. They just conduct themselves as their nature dictates. Talking about killing, murder or legal homicide is a discussion of love and hate. Nothing else. We can all choose which way we want to go.

I would like to thank Jeff for sharing his thoughts with the world. I think that I never read such valuable and reasonable words before from a supporter of CP, even I think differently in most aspects.