

My first visit ever at Polunsky Unit

Polunsky Unit, May 29, 2003 - 8:15 am

Robert Finally, here we are... Here, in the middle of the country, on a hot and humid day, raise barbed wires, miradors, blocks of concrete...

The emotion is almost too much, a few tears sprung out; fortunately, there're the others who are also there to encourage each other.

We go in and one after each other we give our correspondent's name and ID number; the lady officer checks in the computer that we're on the visitors' list and that we have all made the request for a special visit. Then, we let our passport at the desk and go for the body search "sessions"; we're authorized to take some handkerchiefs, US\$ 30.- in cash and our return flight ticket... A first door opens automatically, then shuts behind us, a second door... a long alley nicely decorated with flowers... Another door, a second one and finally the visiting room. Most curiously, some kind of peace comes down upon us... soon our friends will be there.

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Love and peace come out of the visiting room and it is difficult to believe that one finds oneself in the famous Texas Death Row!

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We have booth no. 35.

100 times, 200 times, I've imagined this first meeting.... the window, the lack of physical contact, the telephone... I have become familiar with these elements during the past few months.... but, my first look at my pen-pal, what is it going to be like, when he'll enter the booth, handcuffed and he'll have to kneel down in order to be able to put his hands through the tiny opening to that the guard can take the cuffs off him.... last gesture of humiliation in regards to their families, their friends for these people who represent "nothing" to the State of Texas anymore, but an ID number.

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Here comes Roberto in his booth and ... I can't recall my first words, neither his... but only the great joy to meet at last : 4 hours of happiness filled with words, but also of many laughter, smiles, looks, silences inhabited by all we've been exchanging in our letters... even the sound of his voice seems familiar to me!

We share a small meal together. I was afraid of 4 hours of visit... afraid of not knowing what to say and now, I wish I could hold back the time... It's tough to have to go, but today there's the joy of tomorrow's meeting!

1:30 p.m., our visit ends and no option to negotiate, even for one more minute... "rules are rules" and yet, Roberto will be brought back to his cell 2 hours later... but at least this has given him the opportunity to chat a little bit with his next booth neighbor.

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After these moments heavy on joy, emotion, we enjoy a welcome rest until sunset by Lake Livingston. Rest filled with all what we just lived with our pen-pals. Such a peculiar friendship, which cannot be compared to any other friendship... a heart to heart... when one goes to the essential. Such a deep feeling of incredible suffering and loneliness... expressed by hidden words. We were there for them and barely few months after, there're here for us too ready to transmit their strength if necessary!

Polunsky Unit, May 30, 2003, 8:00 am

Booth no 31 - 2nd four hours visit

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9:15 am: Roberto arrives; we're happy! 4 hours, that goes so fast... Once more, we would like to hold back the time...

"10 more minutes" comes to tell us Mrs. William. We have enough time to say good bye. I tell him I'll be back... if... the State of Texas let him live a while longer...

My last look at Roberto will come from the other side of the visiting room as I am leaving the area... the wave of a hand... It is most difficult to have to go letting behind us our friends... There are presently 450, "waiting", on Texas death row!

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After these heavy hours, again, we decide to go to Lake Livingston and later, we all enjoy a Mexican meal offered by one member of the group.

Saturday May 31st, 2003

The whole day is peacefully spent at Lake Livingston; later on, all agree to go "visit" Huntsville, where all executions take place and where the prisoners' cemetery is located...

There is no word which can express what we all feel in this heavy atmosphere...

Follows Roberto's answer to all those who made Christiane's visit possible.

(In italics, the words are in French in Roberto's text)

June 23, 2003

Dear Christiane,

Please give this message to all your family and friends.

Bonjour! (Hi!) To all friends and family of Christiane, and also to Rene. J'espere que tu vas bien! (I hope you're doing okay!) I would like to take this moment to say : MERCI BEAUCOUP!!! (Thank you very much!) For all the support that you have been given Christiane in her wish to come to the U.S.A. to meet her Pen-Pal in person for the very first time, and visit him for 8 hours. MERCI BEAUCOUP! (Thank you

very much!) for all your help in paying for the trip. Merci (thanks) for all your kind words. What you have done said, may one day be forgotten, but how you make made me FEEL very special, and very blessed to have a Pen-Pal like Christiane, who shares not only her love and friendship, but also the love and friendship of her friends and family. For that I THANK YOU, and Grace a Dieu (God bless you).

Salut (bye) and all the best; sincerely

Roberto

