

My visit to Lonnie on January 29 and 30, 2007 at Polunsky Unit, Texas



My plane landed at Houston on Saturday January 27 at 4 p.m. and I had to keep my rendezvous to Polunsky the same evening at 8 p.m. However, I had to wait until Monday morning to see Lonnie, because he already had had a visit a few days before and inmates are allowed only one visit a week, whether a “regular visit” or a “special” one. Therefore it was with a bleeding heart that I had to leave the prison 5 minutes after I had been in. Two hours taken off the 10 hours planned!

Monday morning: this time the doors opened for me and soon I was at last in the visiting room. I was designated a place, number 35. After some 45 minutes, I hear a noise of metallic bars knocked against one another: it was at last the door of the cage being opened and here was Lonnie, his face illuminated by a big smile, his arms still handcuffed. The manacles are taken off so he can sit. Prior to taking his phone, his face suddenly very solemn, he places his hands against the glass and I put mine over his for a brief moment. I can almost feel the heat of his hands through the glass. Then, we take our phones and, within a few seconds, forgetting the thick glass that is separating us, our 4 hours long conversation begins. At last I can hear the sound of his voice!

Lonnie talks a lot and very rapidly. He is very animated and on his face you can see all kinds of various expressions, joking one minute and then very serious in a matter of seconds. Very reserved, he never speaks about his hellish life. As he says, what good is it to talk about this place? If he writes to us, if he appreciates his visits, it’s for him to be able to see, hear, live through us, it’s not to be plunged back again in a universe he knows much too well. Conversation is about many different subjects, from the most serious (“Next time you’ll see me it will be here or in the cemetery”) to the most trivial. As we are talking, other prisoners are led to their visitors and I can see them passing behind the cage. When Lonnie sees my eyes following them, he turns at once to see who it is and, sometimes, makes some comments or calls them and says a few words. It is for him the only and rare opportunity to meet other fellow inmates that he knows but who are too far away from his own cell or have been moved to another block. Sometimes he shows me one of them, saying: “He has been given a date” or “He’s one of those who escaped from Ellis One Unit in November 1998”.

The first visit is ending and we have to part as soon as we are told but it’s not too difficult because the sadness I feel at having to go is replaced at once by the pleasure of our next visit the next day.

We talked during 8 hours altogether and not a single minute did I find the time too long. The end of the

second visit approaching, when only a few minutes were left, Lonnie said: "Don't cry for me, please". And as hard as it is, it's a promise that I did my best to keep.

Lonnie and I said good bye to each other and I left without knowing, thank God, that it was the last time I saw him.

While walking back from the visiting room to the prison parking lot, I could not help but think that I needed only a few steps to be in the free world again while, for Lonnie, it had been for nearly 17 years as unrealizable as trying to walk from the Earth to the Moon.

Lonnie was executed on July 24, 2007

Anne-Lise Wood