

The new fish and the strong man

"When I arrived at Holman State prison 18 years ago, I was so much of a new fish out of water, slang for new prisoner that I swear scales used to fall off of me as I walked! ?So I didn't know any better when I had my very first encounter with one of the most respected inmates on death row whow everyone calle ARTHUR JULIUS. He lived only a few doors down the tier from my cell and each time i saw him I would be friendly and tell him hello, or say what's up?!?! At first the big man paid no attention to me, but after several weeks, he began to acknowledge me and accept my new presence in his small world by returning the salutations I offered. About 5 or 6 weeks passed, when one day as I was making my way back to my cell, I found an envelope on the floor at his cell door. Stopping, I picked it up and gave it to him! The name on the envelope didn't strike a chord, but the cell number written on it did. Well, hesitantly I still gave it to him and ARTHUR JULIUS was sitting on his bunk, the top half of his body bent over the makeshift small little tables in these cells. He always looked so stone-faced, he concentrated on what he was doing.

Like everyone else, I was unsure as to whether or not to interrupt him, so I decided to press on anyway. ARTHUR JULIUS, I called. He responded with a look that resembled more of an annoyance than curiosity. I slid the letter up onto the bars of his cell. I found this on the floor. Leaping up, ARTHUR JULIUS snatched the letter off the bars, reminding me of a lion wanting some meat to eat. He said that he didn't want the letter, and that's why I threw it on the floor! Did you read it? While holding the letter protectively in his big hand. I assured him I hadn't and busied myself with looking at the various pieces of artwork that lined his cell walls. Well, changin the subject, I began to compliment him on the drawings.

So, off-guard now, ARTHUR JULIUS eased up a little. He told me ha had done that artwork and showed me the picture he had been busy with when I interrupted him. It was a beautiful picture of prison life with a view of the outside world. I told him that I wish that I could draw like that.

Somehow we bured ourselves in a deep conversation about art and we found we each hat so much in common with the other. We must have talked for an hour or so straight. Then I asked him why you didn't want that letter? He told me that he couldn't read, and I told him if you teach me to draw, I will teach you to read, so we became each others teachers! So, he became my art-teacher that day, my friend! ?What about me? Well.... the next day when I went outside, I eyed ARTHUR JULIUS sitting alone out on the walk yard. He signaled for me to join him and I made my way over. After sitting down, we talked for a while, when I noticed his hand go unter the table out of sight. Not knowing what to think, I tried to remain calm. I had no idea what he was reading for. It did cross my mind that maybe it was a big shank, but I couldn't think of anything I had done to offend him, so I hopefully pushed that thought out of my mind.

Imagine my surprise when he pulled his hand back up and placed the letter I had found on the tier floor at his cell. He looked at me as if attempting to determine his next step. Then almost shyly, this strong and very proud man explained to me that he received many letters, but that he could not read any of them.

At first I didn't comprehend the meaning of his words. He sat there with his granite stare, eyeing me. Then out of nowhere, I told him if you want me to, I will read it for you and without a word ARTHUR JULIUS game the letter to me to read. Opening it, I looked at the date it bore and took note that the letter was about 2 months old. A quick peek at the postmark on it confirmed the fact, and I realized that he must have been carrying this letter with him for all that time, but could not read it!

The letter was from his daughter and as I readed it to him, his face softened with each word I relayed.

Soon he was smiling to ear-to-ear with a big smile ?

In that instant I realized just how powerful family-love is. It had transcended the miles, endured the distance of time, and come to rest in this man's heart. I spent the rest of that yard time re-reading that letter to my new friend as he shared stories with me about his ex-wife and daughter! Later that week he did a lovely drawing for her. Having found out that he hadn't seen his family in 8 or 9 years, so I took, it upon myself to write a short letter for him to mail with his card, but carefully choosing words I believed he felt for his family. It may have been the lighting, but I thought I spotted a tear as I read it to him and yes, we are on death row, but we still have some compassion for others in this world.

The sad part of this story, we never found out what she thought of these things ARTHUR JULIUS sent, because he was put to death before receiving a reply. But I still like to think that his daughter was as happy to hear from her father as he was to hear from her. I came into his life at the right time.?

This letter should be required reading for all of the group. I also encourage you all to think about these words in this letter as a way of showing that we all can make a difference on our lives by mail and I pray that my stories will make you wake up and see that people on death row are human-beings with feelings and not just death row inmates!"

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