

## **The Ride**

At the end of my visits with loved ones December 10, 2003, which was at 12 noon (the day of my execution), the Major said: "It's time Zimmerman". For me it was a welcomed blessing in my personal spiritual faith. A strength of peace, assurance, preparedness and excitement for a journey into the promised Land that humans are ever searching for, here on earth described as utopia. Nevertheless, as this was to be genuine relief for me it was chilling to the bone for my loved ones. Comforted in my assured peace yes, but cringing at the thought of losing me. Feelings they could not hide.

Being handcuffed and taken back to building 12 where death row is housed, I was strip searched, electronically checked and then given State issued boxers, a jumper and cloth slippers. A waist belt was put on me that had chains running down to the leg, irons already in place, while my hands were being cuffed to the waist belt. With the wardens, captains and several officers present, I was walked outside and put into a caged area in the back of a van. After official papers were exchanged and signed, the back gate of building 12 was opened and we proceeded to the main prison's back gate. What seemed to be an hour was only minutes as we waited for front and back escorts to arrive with enough firepower for World War III and the quick ride to the Walls Unit in Huntsville, Tx.

Though I was chained like a dog and had to hear the remarks of self righteous TDCJ-ID officers on their feelings/beliefs about me (murderers in general), and what we all deserved, none of it bothered me at all. For I was in a zone no one could rob me of. So I thought!

As we travelled down the highway, my excitement of peace and joy increased and left me smiling as I saw people walking, sitting out on their porches, kids playing in their yards, adults getting into their cars to come and go as they pleased, etc. A symbolic sign of what was sure to be my physical release of a chain around my neck for over 16 years. An oppressed confinement where your label 'Death Row' keeps you from earning privileges regardless of what your behaviour is. Spiritually free indeed. Yet the physical restraint that was rapidly coming to an end was every reason to smile for. So I thought!

Just like that the van was cruising through a narrow maze that came to an end deep within the prison where the death house was located. The back van door opened and then the cage door. I was helped out of the van with only 3 ft to the building door I'd enter, to the hall of death. I remember looking up into the clear blue sky saying to myself 'Beautiful Day'. I then took a deep breath and walked into the death house. A hall of 5 or 6 cells with one covered with screen used for attorney/spiritual visits.

I was unshackled, strip searched again (to make sure I didn't stop at a local US Army surplus store I guess), to make sure that nothing could be fashioned into a weapon, since a key was no longer necessary. Ah yes, once you're there you're treated like a human being with no chain cuffs or leg irons. How courteous of them.

I was then finger printed to make sure I was the right Kevin Zimmerman because what a mess that would be for them if they killed the wrong Kevin Zimmerman. I washed up, put on better clothes and went into a cell where I was to wait at full attention for the warden to come in. There was no doubt that a good ole boy pep talk was at hand, as to how death was done at the Walls Unit in Huntsville Tx. Took it all with humour of course, as a couple of officers were amazed by my cooperation and joy. All praise of this observation is to God who prepared me as a Light.

The walks in and introduces himself and sincerely asks if I'm alright, which I confirm with a 'yes'. "From here on in you'll come and go without restraints, and if there is anything you need ask and we'll get it for

you, within reason of course." He then explained that at 6:00 p.m. he'd come in and walk me to the death chamber where I would be strapped down, and I could go on my own or by force. I assured him of my Christian walk and there'd be no problems out of me. I was then told my spiritual advisor, Kathryn H. Cox could come in for 30 minutes but the prison chaplain would be there throughout the day. Trying to hold back a tear he told me there was still no change. He asked if I used drugs, and if so if I had any problems with my veins. Surprised by his genuineness, I found added comfort in knowing he took NO pleasure in what could transpire. He then left and the officers all relaxed.

Chaplain Lopez and I conversed for quite some time and drank tea. At 3:00 p.m., the warden comes in and informs me the 5th Circuit had denied me. "Yes." I said with a smile, which I gathered he and the others wondered if I was a good faker or serious about being ready to go. He then left once again.

My last meal was brought in. An egg and breakfast patty sandwich, fried pork chop, fried chicken, French fries, lots of ketchup, 4 milks and a chocolate cake was what I ordered. All well-ordered and based in small portions on our daily trays left me embarrassed because there was no way I could eat it all. Chaplain Lopez bailed me out and ate with me while we talked in depth on Scriptures and the power of God. That time allowed him to assure the others I was truly at peace and on a spiritual level for a peaceful end.

With time winding down I was able to make calls to the hospitality house, so it seemed, to speak one last time with my ex-wife, my aunt and my friend from Switzerland, Bee. I then called home to talk to my 18 year old son Kyle, then with his 15 year old sister Kara whom I consider my daughter, then with Kyle again, and I told him this was it and then we said 'Till next time' and hung up.

Several minutes later, 15 to 6:00 p.m., I was told: "We're taking you back." I felt like a baseball bat hit me in the face and then felt as though all of my spiritual and emotional life was sucked right out of me. One officer said "Drama", to insinuate I was faking. "No, that's real," the major who knew me said.

A woman came in and asked: "How do you feel? Were you surprised about the stay?" "I'm disappointed. I was ready to go. The stay only means 18 more months of this crap." I responded in a low voice. Which for clarity here, I meant 18 more months of the oppressive conditions on death row with its modernised dungeon (Bldg. 12) at the Polunsky Unit in Livingston Tx.

Instantly I was chained like a dog once again and thrown into the van's dog cage and on my way back to a place I prayed I'd never see, touch or feel ever again. I cried in confusion asking God "Why?". I cried even more so as we came within distance of the prison lights that made me realize what it all meant. The strangest of it all was the combination of feeling let down and/or rebuked by God, and an ominous sign of the yellowish greyish tint of this large moon hung so low as though I could get up on top of the building, reach up and touch it.

In the events of my fast paced life, learning I was adopted at 7 or 8, my severe head injury at age 10 that messed me up so bad my grades dramatically declined, in which I became freak, retarded, and Frankenstein's other half before my school peers who rejected me, losing my grandfather at the age of 14 who was the one member I truly bonded t, that left me cursing God. None of the above events, single handedly, was as cruel as what I went through after some months of preparation, physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, only for it to be taken away. Not two weeks or even two days before, but 15 minutes. Definitely the cruellest thing that I'd ever experienced.

For two days I was disappointed and depressed as I prayed for understanding. And then I came to realise

it isn't about me but rather God's purpose, which could have been for me or maybe for the benefit of another person or many. As I was then ready and willing to accept this blow in humbleness I get hit in the face yet again on the 5th day as the Supreme Court vacated my stay. Yes, I lie not, my disappointment and depression was quickly turned to anger. I'm a strong Christian and my faith in God will not be broken by NO man. Nevertheless, I am a human being with feelings which includes anger. If one can not envision what I have gone through to understand that anger, then let them remain ignorant in their own self-righteousness. I WILL NOT act on that anger in no way, shape or form, but I am angry and rightly so.

As this Christmas day has come and gone I am slowly beginning to heal from the harsh reality of what I experienced in the past 15 days. Yet I'm still wounded indeed from "The Ride".

Kevin Zimmerman,  
also known as Brother Zee