

Dead man walking



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“ Dead Man Walking” is a non-fiction work by Sister Helen Prejean, a Roman Catholic nun and one of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Medaille. This is her autobiographical account of her encounter with convicted felons Patrick Sonnier and Robert Willie. Sister Helen corresponded with Sonnier, a man who was sentenced to die by the electric chair for the brutal murder of two teenagers. She took on the task with little knowledge of the criminal justice system in the United States.

After witnessing his execution, she proceeded to correspond with Willie who raped and murdered a young woman. “ Dead Man Walking” is moving because it is beautifully written. Her accounts of her spiritual journey as she discovers more about the capital punishment system through involving her life with the convicted murderers, their families as well as the families of the victims and the people who carry out the executions. An important part of the book was when Sister Helen witnessed an electrocution for the very first time. She wrote, “ Who killed this man? Nobody.

Everybody can argue that he or she was just doing a job – the governor, the warden, the head of the Department of Corrections, the district attorney, the judge, the jury, the Pardon Board, the witnesses to the execution. Nobody feels personally responsible for the death of this man. ” Because of this moral dilemma, Sister Helen did her very best to comprehend the issue by interviewing people. Ironically, one of the people she talked to was the head of the Department of Corrections who she described as “ a good Catholic Man. ” He supervised the executions and was the one who designed the execution process in Louisiana.

According to her, he was a “caring and intelligent man” who was very aware of the system that is produced by the application of the death penalty. She asked him whether he felt he played a part despite the fact that he didn’t believe that the death penalty was morally right. It was a dichotomy that he was lining up the witnesses that were designed to do the protocol. “Do you experience any conflict of conscience between your personal religious beliefs and what your job calls you to do? If Jesus Christ lived on earth today, would he supervise this process?” These were her questions.

The answer was predictable yet chilling. The head of the Department of Corrections explained it by saying that he didn’t make the law. He was only following the law and doing what was best for the ‘process’ to be as ‘humane as possible.’ He also believed that the people who carried out the executions “don’t have to take any personal responsibility for what they are doing. It’s their job. They are told to do it... It’s like a drill, like an exercise, so they have no personal responsibility. Sister Helen viewed this as “severance of personal values from public duty.”

She tried to figure out whether it was ethically dangerous to submerge one’s personal convictions so that they have no bearing on their work. “If a policy or law is morally wrong and we know it’s wrong, aren’t we bound in conscience to oppose it?” Sister Helen met with other people who had a hard time separating work from values. One of them was the Major in charge of the death row at Angola State Prison. “I’m not sure how long I’m going to be able to keep doing this. I’ve been through five of these executions and I can’t eat. I can’t sleep. I’m dreaming about executions. I don’t condone these guy’s crimes.

I know they've done terrible things. " Sister Helen concluded that Marsellus was different from the other men who were involved in the system. " He can't persuade himself that he's just doing his job. My heart goes out to him. " Sister Helen also experienced the complexities, contradictions and the hard truths of the situations. She shared these with the convicts, their families, the victims' families and the people who carried out executions. In her book, the readers get into the thoughts and emotions of the loved ones of the victims. She balanced her logic and reasoning whenever she corresponded with both parties.

Whenever she interacted with the victims' families, she couldn't help but think that the convicts were guilty of their crimes. She also faced the anger of the parents for befriending the murderers of their children. There is also a spiritual drama to the book. It involved the souls of the convicted felons and on the methods Sister Helen used for them to believe that their sins were forgiven. Christianity teaches that no sinner is too low for God's love. Sister Helen encouraged Sonnier and Wilson to reconcile their sins, their crimes and their deaths. People have different feeling involving humanity and religion.

This was seen in " Dead Man Walking. " The characters in the book have changing attitudes on their religion as well as their feelings regarding morality and humanity. The emotional changes the characters went through are genuine. The changes in an individual's morals and ideals depend on the situation they find themselves in. Sister Helen's feelings regarding capital punishment changed because she saw the side of the convicted felons and

their families. Sister Helen dedicated her life on social justice. Her background in the book is that she grew up in a loving household.

When she was younger, she thought that the life of a nun was quiet, religious and contemplative. However, this correspondence with convicted felons was a religious awakening for her. Later on, she realized that in order for her to shoulder the struggles of the poor, she must bear these as if these were also her own. Her work with the St. Thomas projects led her to her correspondence with the convicted felons in death row. The first felon was Patrick Sonnier. Sonnier had been meaning to converse to someone, thus his eagerness for Sister Helen's company. The nun saw in him gratitude and appreciation.

He was a man who was desperate for love and approval from another being. Patrick had a poor and hard childhood. He found love in the prison from Sister Helen. He didn't commit the crime (it was his brother Eddie who killed the teenagers), he was transformed by the experience of love. He died with dignity. His last words were seeking forgiveness to the father or one of the murdered teenagers. Sister Helen's interaction with Sonnier opened her eyes to capital punishment's cruelty and the injustice and abuse of the judicial system in the United States. This changed Prejean's views forever.

She became a full-time anti death penalty advocate. She was also the spiritual adviser or another man on death row, Robert Willie. Willie was complex. He was also defiant and contrite. He was different from Sonnier because he knew that his execution was inevitable. He faced it bravely. He had been an outlaw since he was fourteen and was thrown in and out of jail.

Prison was his second home. He looked up to Adolf Hitler and Fidel Castro and boasted the supremacy of the Aryan race. However, during his last breath, he lovingly talked to his family. At the same time, Sister Helen ministered to the families of the victims.

She reached out to them and supported them in the best way that she could. Vernon Harvey was the stepfather of Faith Hathway, the teenage girl who was raped and murdered by Robert Willie. Harvey's rage and grief was his instrument to become a vocal supporter of the death penalty. The irony was that he was a considerate and compassionate man. He disagreed with Sister Helen and her anti-death penalty stance but listened to her points nonetheless. Even after Willie's death, Vernon's wounds from the tragedy failed to heal. The book ennobles the issues that we face today which is capital punishment.

It confronts a controversial concern in our society and Sister Helen does her best to view it fairly from both sides. She does not take any shortcuts. It moves the readers to a great emotional experience without manipulating them. After this experience, Sister Helen continues sending out the message of profound compassion to everyone she meets. She has a new Christian perspective when it comes to capital punishment. Unlike Sister Helen, I am pro-death penalty. I believe in 'eye for an eye.' All over the country, there are news stories that bemoan and hype the countdown of the execution numbers.

Why do people count the hours these murderers have left to live? Who is counting the hours the victims' families face that are filled with anger and

grief for the loss of their loved ones. A conservative estimated that the number of victims were 1895. These were the people killed by 1000 murderers. Why is it that we hear so much about these murderers but so little about their victims and their loved ones? Here are some stories of murderers and their victims. 1 Melvin, Linda and Richard Lorenz were killed by Roger Stafford. Melvin stopped on a highway to help a woman whose car had broken down.

The woman was Stafford's wife and she was used as bait. The family was ambushed by Stafford and his brother. Less than a month after, the trio killed six employees of a steak house in Oklahoma. Katy Davis was attacked and was forced to open the door by Charles Recor, a felon on parole for a previous murder. He and two other men ransacked her apartment, abducted her and took her to a lake where she was beaten, gang-raped, shot in the head and repeatedly forced underwater until she drowned. Let's not look any further from the book. Here's what happened to Faith Hathaway, Willie's victim. She was 17 when she was murdered.

She had just graduated from high school and was leaving for the Army the following day. She was abducted after leaving a farewell party. Willie and his accomplice Joseph Vacarro was on an 8-day murder, robbery and rape rampage. Hathaway was raped by both men and stabbed 17 times. She was raped again after she died. The death penalty debate in the United States is dominated by the voice of the anti-death penalty movement, where Sister Helen Prejean is a current active member of. The culture of lies and deceit dominates that movement. I believe that the falsehood is wrongly accepted by those advocates of capital punishment.

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For me, the only concern is the innocence of the felon who is convicted. If he is guilty of brutal murders, then he deserves to die as well. If possible, in the same manner as he killed his victims. In order for the process to be carried as humane as possible, those involved in the execution carried out electric chair procedures. Eventually, the government deemed this as inhumane so they changed it to lethal injection. With regards to penalizing an innocent man, this is resolved with great effort through countless pretrial, trial, appeals, writ and clemency procedures conducted by the legislation.

This decreases the possibility of an innocent ever being convicted, sentenced to death or executed. Perhaps, the drive of Sister Helen Prejean to be an advocate for the anti-death penalty is because she witnessed first-hand what an “innocent” man such as Sonnier had to go through while he was in death row. The Death Penalty Information Center and most opponents fail to review the role of clemency and appeals which merits the death row inmates claims of their innocence or their guilt. As a matter of fact, clemency is used in order to grant the mercy to death row murderers and to also spare the inmates whose guilt is now in question.

More or less, some death row inmates have been spared by clemency. 2 I believe that by executing the murderers, you prevent them from murdering again. This action saves innocent lives. This has been tried and tested over the years because studies only show that a convicted man of murder who has been released on parole commits another crime eventually. There are thousands of documented cases that represent the lives of innocent individuals who are for the death penalty. The circumstances in our society

merely dictate that the majority of these convicted felons deserve the death penalty for the murders they committed in the first place.

Regarding deterrence, executions produce lower murder rates. The executions also produce fewer murders. It also shows that in the states where the death penalty does not exist, there are more murders. There is not a rope hanging in the head of those murderers which serve as their conscience of whether they commit a crime or not. I respect Sister Helen Prejean's need to stand against the death penalty and I commend her for seeing the goodness in all the people involved, the murderers, the victims and the families of both sides. But, my take, the murderers should deserve death because they shed another person's blood.