

Danièle and René SIRVEN

**TEXAS
DEATH ROW**

A personal account of two meetings with Rickey-Lynn Lewis

Preface

The account you are about to read is, in the words of the authors, not a ‘judgement’ and even less a ‘trial’. It is, rather, an ‘appeal to the conscience of those who make laws, decide and judge from their well-established position to reconsider, to open their ears which have to date remained closed to all arguments’.

It is with great modesty and simplicity that Danièle and René SIRVEN, untiring defenders of the abolition of the death penalty, want their disgust to be heard through their work with the association ‘Fight for Justice – Languedoc-Roussillon, France’. They recount the story of their extraordinary and unforgettable meeting with Rickey-Lynn LEWIS, condemned to death in Texas and on death row since 1994. Danièle and René SIRVEN denounce over and over again the harsh prison conditions, the hypocrisy of the authorities, and the cruelty of the sentence and the unjust outcome of a judicial process tainted by gray areas.

As is unfortunately too often the case in judicial processes in some of the states in the USA, the question of Rickey-Lynn LEWIS’S guilt remains controversial. The authors make only passing reference to this aspect in their account. For them, apart from the unacceptable doubt surrounding the sentence, it is the inhumanity of the death penalty itself that they denounce. The cruelty of the death sentence reduces those who carry it out to the level of executioners and murderers. This irreversible act strips the convicted person of all humanity.

Danièle and René SIRVEN see their account is a weapon in the fight being led by themselves and their association over recent years to have Rickey-Lynn Lewis’s trial reviewed. The stay of execution, gained thanks to the perseverance and generosity of those citizens who took part in a week of mobilization organized in Montpellier, is a first encouraging step but is not enough to remove the threat hanging over the condemned man, which grows more urgent with every day that passes.

Let us hope that the appeal by Danièle and René SIRVEN in all our names for justice, fairness and democracy be heard not only for Rickey-Lynn LEWIS but also for all the men and women condemned to death by the world.

Robert BADINTER

Robert BADINTER (born March 30th 1928) is a French lawyer who is against the Death Penalty. His involvement in favor of the abolition of the Death Penalty began to develop especially following the execution of Roger Bontems on November 28th 1972. Bontems was Buffet’s accomplice during the hostage-taking of a guard and a nurse at the prison, “Centrale de Clairvaux “. During the attack, Buffet cut the throat of both the guard and the nurse. During their trial, this fact was established. All the same, the jury decided to condemn both men to death. The condemnation to death of ‘an innocent man for the murder committed by another man, condemned and executed for this same murder’, revolted Robert Badinter who began to fight even more actively against the Death Penalty.

It was thus, that in 1976 he agreed to defend Patrick Henry, kidnapper and murderer of Philippe Bertrand, a child of nine years of age. French public opinion was particularly shocked by the attitude of the assassin: during the trial, before being charged and arrested, he paraded before reporters proclaiming that kidnappers and murderers of children deserved to die. Robert Badinter pleaded against the Death Penalty whilst another lawyer for the defense, Robert Bocquillon, led the defense. Patrick Henry was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Between this trial and the abolition of the Death Penalty in 1981, three more people were executed. As Chief Justice (1981- 1986), one of the first actions taken by Robert Badinter was to present a bill aiming to abolish the Death Penalty in France. This bill became a law on September 30th 1981.

Frontice

Before bearing witness to what we saw on Death Row in Polunsky-Unit Texas, we are set on drawing attention to the victims, all the victims, of rape or murder.

These people and their loved ones have seen their lives ravaged, sometimes cut off suddenly by the act of another...

We engage our thoughts at this point to question what this other, the “monster”, is.

The monster, “it’s the one who reveals itself”.

Who reveals itself to us all, something that horrifies us.

Something that each of us carries deep within ourselves.

A part of us, not yet rendered human, which could make us “non-author”, in our capacity as humans, of the worst possible destructive harm.

We are capable of almost anything, from the least controlled impulsive violence to the sublime elevation of generous and determined acts.

The possible routes into humanity open up to us, or not, all through our lives.

For the American administration, it is a caged “monster” that we went to meet in Polunsky-Unit.

A “monster” accused of rape and murder.

But we know that the charge did not have a proper defense.

Far from a “monster”, we went to meet what was a bud of humanity through the work of Rickey-Lynn Lewis.

We thought we were going to have to go searching for a bud and we were dazzled by the new blossoming of a great tree.

We saw, before us, a man full of the desire to never harm another.

We met a man who had become human through the experience, within himself, within us, which is infinitely greater than us.

CHAPTER I

BEFORE THE VISIT

My name is Danièle Sirven.

I am sixty-three years old.

I am going to try to recount what I can only refer to as the upsetting experience that my husband, René and I had.

In March and April of 2003, we visited a prisoner in death row with whom we had been corresponding for a brief period.

At the beginning of the summer of 2002 we had joined an Association called 'Fight for Justice, Languedoc-Roussillon, France. They put us in contact with two American men condemned to death.

One in Florida, David-Lee Thomas.

The other in Texas, Rickey-Lynn Lewis.

For us, it was a way of showing our disapproval of the death sentence for any crime whatsoever and to write, in English, to men who are isolated from the world.

I had asked for our names to be added to a list of possible visitors for one of the two prisoners, Rickey-Lynn Lewis who has been living on death row in Texas since 1994, that is to say for the last nine years.

The choice to visit Rickey came from the fact that our youngest daughter and her family were staying in Houston until 2004 and also that we make a visit to the United States annually.

Rickey-Lynn is in his forties.

He was arrested in 1990 for rape of a woman and for a crime committed against her friend.

Two other men who were implicated in the crime were not pursued.

For us, the question of the defendant's guilt does not effect our position against the death penalty.

Punishment by execution only adds, in our eyes, tomb upon tomb, mourning upon mourning and furthermore dehumanizes the whole of a society which organizes such a practice so dispassionately.

Rickey-Lynn is incarcerated in Livingston, to the north of Houston in the Polunsky-Unit, one of 170 prisons in Texas.

That state prison has room for 2900 males... inmates... offenders. Three words to keep in mind: men – prisoners – who have not kept the Law.

In March 2003 there were just under 2700 inmates at Polunsky-Unit, of which 440 were on death row.

All men.

Eight women are faced with legal assassination.

They are held in a unit at Mountain View (D.R.) 2305, Ransom Road, Gatesville, Texas 76528.

Between January 1st and April 3rd 2003, twelve prisoners were executed – all men.

If this rhythm of one death a week continues, they would reach a figure of between forty-eight and fifty for the year 2003!

The disproportion between the number of men and women on death row leads me to ask one nagging question: What are we saying or not saying to all small boys throughout the world? How are they brought up or not brought up? How are they raised so that, in the end, we are witness to their catastrophic lives which apparently could not have turned out otherwise?

Why do so many baby boys become adult male rapists, killers or warriors?

BACKGROUND

In keeping with the rules, on February 28th, a month before the expected visit to Rickey-Lynn, our daughter phoned the prison from Houston to make direct contact with the unit for prisoners sentenced to death, *Death Row*.

The visit request was for Monday March 31st and Tuesday April 1st 2003.

Rickey-Lynn Lewis's first and last names always have to be followed by the six numbers which allow, without further reference, him to be identified.

The person in charge, Mrs. C. whose voice we came to recognize, explained that both my husband's and my names had to be on Rickey's list of accepted visitors.

This list is updated twice a year by the prisoner himself.

Mrs. C. indicated that Rickey-Lynn was, in fact, due to update his list and hand it to her on March 11th.

"It is not sure that he will put you on his list again.", she said and added "I can not, of course, force the prisoner to see you."

The visit requested is called a *special visit* and is for visitors who come from more than 500 miles away. This was our case.

At any rate, Mrs. C. had to study the situation because we were asking for two days in two consecutive months, March and April.

Two different months.

So, she had to consult her supervisor because we were asking for two days straddling two months.

From the moment we arrived in Houston on March 4th, I enquired about fixing our meetings with Rickey-Lynn.

I met with a series of refusals which did not stop me phoning nearly every day.

The tone remained courteous and apologetic on both sides.

The regulations are strict. The possible dates for our meetings never fit in with either our availability or the prison rules.

Besides, according to Mrs. C., it just so happened that Rickey-Lynn was already to have a *special visit* on March 31st and April 1st. Thus, all hope was lost!

Everything Mrs. C. said was in complete contradiction to what Rickey-Lynn wrote in two of his letters where he said he was looking forward to our visit with great joy and impatience.

At that point, deep down inside, I was nearly happy to escape the duty that I had created for myself.

Just these simple phone calls to the prison had me in an emotional state.

Each time before calling Polunsky-Unit, I had to breath deeply to calm myself and to avoid stammering.

My command of the English language is rudimentary.

I started off by saying that I was French, not a point in my favor at that time. I then asked to be excused for expressing myself with difficulty.

Before leaving Houston for a week's holiday, I got a firm reply from Mrs. C.

That reply was NO!

That NO was to be regretted but could not be changed.

The eve of our departure for the south of Texas, I made one last desperate try.

Mrs. C. was not there and I spoke to Miss L, who was replacing her. I made my request once again.

At first, Miss L began also refused.

My sadness and desperation at having come so far were transmitted over the phone.

At the other end of the line, Miss L said "Sorry, so sorry;" And me too, I felt so sorry.

I ended up begging her saying, "Just let us have twenty minutes with Rickey before we leave for Europe. We can not return again until next year."

To our amazement, there she was apologizing even more than before.

She and Mrs. C. had mistaken our Rickey for another and that ours was, in fact, free on March 31st and April 1st....

Unbelievable!

The six-digit number had apparently not been sufficient enough for them to be able to identify Rickey! One small glitch, however; I was to phone again on the Friday before the meeting so that Mrs. C. could confirm the visit.

I phoned as agreed on March 28th and it was Mrs. C. herself who answered.

The authorization had been granted.

We were to be at the reception desk of Polunsky-Unit at 8 o'clock with our passports, our plane tickets and nothing else on Monday March 31st.

We would not be seeing her.

She does not deal with the receiving of visitors.

We were told we could buy 20 dollars' worth of food for Rickey. The same sum could be spent the second day.

The money would be spent within the confines of the Death Row unit.

Mrs. C. advised us to come with this sum in the form of 25 cent coins.

Eighty shiny silver-colored coins that the bank gives you in small, tightly-packed, heavy rolls.

We were to meet Rickey-Lynn on a *special visit*.

Number of hours per day: 4

Number of days allowed: 2

CHAPTER II

DAY ONE

31 March 2003

Up at five fifteen in the morning.

I was not hungry. It was still dark out. We got ready calmly, checked we had the necessary documents and, of course, the money.

In fact, it was only after having visited Rickey, that we could deposit the money. We had to drive to the small town of Huntsville an hour away from Polunsky-Unit where we were able to make the deposit in the name of our Association into his *trust fund*.

It is also in Huntsville where the executions are carried out.

We set off on the road leading to Dallas passing through Livingston an hour and a half's drive to the north of Houston.

It was still dark when we left our hosts' neighborhood with its lawns, flowerbeds and beautiful houses lying in shadows.

The air was cold and damp in the breaking dawn but we knew that if the clouds part, like giant curtains, the sun would be hot.

We left our peaceful neighborhood and took one highway after another. As the sun rose, just before six o'clock, the traffic got heavy.

Americans get up and begin work very early.

There were no jalopies to be seen on these gigantic roadways.

Vehicles dashed freely from one lane to the next, going quickly and sprightly keeping the perfect distance between them all the while.

We crossed *Downtown Houston* on gigantic clover leaves and complex intersections. Skyscrapers perforated the red sky.

It was both beautiful and surreal.

American technology was displaying its accomplishments. In places, ten lanes crossed over each other in sets of five. Trucks gleamed like shiny mastodons which, from time to time, escorted us along our way.

Motorcyclists without helmets, wearing just a hood, darted from one lane to another.

This was obviously no place for timid drivers.

René remained perfectly calm, as usual.

Finally, we were on the road that would take us to Livingston.

We were in the middle of the countryside. The sun was golden. Texas wild flowers had just come out and neither of us had ever seen such a lush array of colors. It was a true firework display by nature!

This abundant rainbow filled the roadside and the medians which divided the lanes.

We had seen such views on postcards, but that was nothing compared to what it was really like.

Bright-blue blue bonnets, which are on the state of Texas's crest, were growing vigorously as wallflowers forming a carpet among the bright-red Indian paintbrush and cascades of deep or pale pink and of yellow as clear as light.

In spite of the enchanting scene, we did not forget the aim of our trip. And what was more, we were desperate to arrive on time.

In this country setting, some simple, wooden buildings, small motels, bric-a-brac stalls, taxidermist shops and small chapels, some of them ramshackle, fleck the grassy expanses.

We arrived, at last, in Livingston.

Tim, a friend of ours in the Association, who had been through this same procedure last January, had drawn us a perfect map.

The wooded countryside was as green as the inside of a jewelry box.

It had turned into a gloriously sunny day.

On our left, we saw the chapel that Tim had mentioned. It had a sign with "The Knights of Columbus" painted neatly on it.

Klu Klux Klan meetings used to be held there in the time when Blacks were lynched...

The very steep shape of the roofs made me think immediately of the pointed masks.
Just below, another notice drew our attention.
Standing sweetly in the grass, it called for the abolition of abortion.
We took another turning. We were afraid we had missed it, but no, there it was before us – the prison: Polunsky-Unit. There it was.
I felt my stomach turn.
We were going to meet Rickey-Lynn Lewis in just a moment.
The institution was well and truly spread out over the entire green horizon off to our right. Crouching at the edge of the green lawn, it scarcely dented the radiant sky. No high walls, no imposing gate.
Brand new, silvery barbed wire ran like lace over a large area along both sides, of the wide, open entrance which greeted us.
There was a parking lot with already about two hundred vehicles in it. We managed to park the car just yards from the imposing entrance that dominated the low, spread out buildings.
We only took our passports and the twenty dollars in coins. I felt moved and very calm.
René asked, “Are you ok?”
“Yes, I’m ok.”
It was a quarter to eight in the morning and we were standing in front of Polunsky-Unit.
I wanted to see, hear, remember everything down to the smallest detail.
I told myself I would concentrate on all those minute things that in ordinary circumstances would not have attracted my attention at all.
I placed my senses into a sort of exaggerated and out of phase realism that was paradoxically both sharp and calm. I tensed my attention.
I wanted to be the eyes and ears of others, the eyes and ears of the world...
The entrance, a sort of tall glass porch, was visible from far away.
We read the big white letters on a midnight-blue background:
“Professionalism, Integrity, Excellence”.
An admirable motto...
A guard, dressed in gray was looking blankly at the flat landscape.
The car park was full of activity. Cars were being parked, female and male guards got out in a continuous flow.
We went in.
The room was bright. At the back, to the right, there was a sort of ticket-window with an all glass booth behind it where an obese, young black woman sat collecting in, through a opening, the badges of those who arrived.
Each guard held a hanger at arm’s length on which was hung their impeccable gray uniform. They also had a change or two of their own shirts or blouses perfectly ironed as if they had come straight from the cleaner’s.
On the left side, a metal detector just like those they have at airports led you then to a sort of airy, wire ‘aviary’ where a guard stood, imperious.
The staff greeted one another, usually smiling.
Relationships between the guards seemed very polite.
Here, as throughout America, the staggering number of overweight people puzzled us.
What a strange democracy where humans lose their shapes and where the features of their faces as well as their own identities become engulfed in their own bodies through the diluting effects of compulsive consumption...
A guard, overflowing in fat, had to go sideways through the security passageways.
On the wall to the right of the entrance, were the ladies’ and gents’ toilets with a mirror made of metal, not glass. I dashed in - René, too – before making our way into the heart of the prison.
We were both right to have planned to wear warm clothes as it was chilly inside.
On the wall to the left, a sign listed all that was forbidden: no arms, of course; no cameras or other objects.
The dress code in force was like what we wore when we went to church in the 30’s...
The announcement is in English and Spanish.
We were in a region where legal and illegal Hispanics alike come in great numbers from nearby South America.

'Wanted' posters like you see in Westerns were stuck on a notice board. Other people were waiting just like us. Not more than five or six. They were obviously visitors, mostly female. A mother or a wife. Or lawyers that we were to see later on in the visiting room. The guard in the glass booth never looked at us once. But at eight a.m. on the dot, she raised her eyes in our direction. We walked up to her and gave her Rickey's name and identity number. She checked these in a big notebook, took and kept our passports and gave us two badges with a number and the letters DR (Death Row). We went through the metal detector and then were given our eighty coins back. Next, we went through the wire aviary-like passageway. The wire-metal door led to a wide open grassy area surrounded by low, squat buildings. The walkway led straight through the lawn like a path in a meticulously maintained park. A multi-colored burst of perfectly-pruned roses seemed to be full of promise. The decorative cabbage plants that Tim had told us about lined the row of roses. We half expected to hear a light, airy tune of Mozart to further soften the atmosphere... We got to the other side of this open space that measured about forty yards across. Some prisoners, in their immaculate, snow-white uniforms had been turned into gardeners and worked painstakingly under the watchful eye of a guard. There was a portico, all in sparkling clean glass, like the entry hall of a hospital, school or good hotel. A calm looking guard was positioned outside. We exchanged greetings. From behind a shiny counter in a big, bright hall with a perfectly waxed floor, another guard pointed the way to Death Row as if showing us how to get to an office in a big office complex. The other visitors had made their way to the same area before us. There was a corridor about 20 yards long with glass on the side overlooking the garden and a solid wall on the other, which led to a glassed-in security passageway. On the wall, just like in an American high school or university, there was a real glass display case. Inside were awards, like in Hollywood, which praised the outstanding merits of the Polunsky-Unit. An award for health care provided to inmates, for the cleanliness of the institution, for psychological support and more, but we did not dare linger to read them for fear of being late. The walls were covered with certificates of honor, like those given to school children, awarded by the administration to guards who had been promoted. Intermingled, were wedding and birth announcements. Clearly, newcomers to the staff are welcomed warmly. There were also job offers posted. At the end of the corridor, just before going into the glassed-in zone, we saw once again the words we had read at the entrance but this time with exalting terms added. The first letter of each encouraging word in bold, spelled out P.R.I.D.E. Professionalism - Respect - Integrity - Dignity - Excellence. Was this to encourage the guards and visitors or a plea to the offenders, the delinquents? We finally entered the last zone, half glass half steel, which measured about two yards by three yards. It led directly to Death Row. Edifying maxims were displayed: "Do the right thing"; "Attitude is a small thing, it makes big things." The last door, which looked very heavy, slid away from in front of us with scarcely a sound. We stepped into a sort of cafeteria twenty yards by fifteen. There were round tables, chairs upturned on them in perfect housekeeping order. All the left side was lined by bay windows that faced the outside. Outside, the patio and garden were bathed in sunlight. Rustic chairs and tables awaited the visitors like in a charming seaside eating place. To the right, opposite where we had arrived, there was a glassed-in cage with a sign saying *Attorneys*. A man we had seen at the entrance earlier seemed to be waiting for *his prisoner* to appear behind the glass like in a shop window. The room was divided in two by a structure of glass and heavy wire which formed cages linked together in a row bordered by a wire corridor. There was a space on the left side that allowed us access to the other side of this structure. A charming, young, black woman was seated at a small table at the beginning of the row of cages.

Everything was clean and white.

The paint was only cracked here and there and was in good condition.

The guard, I nearly called her 'my dear child' as if she were an usherette in a cinema, checked our tickets and looked at our badges.

We gave Rickey's name and number and she pointed to a cabin, number 25. We went and sat in front of it.

There were two chairs in front of each cabin.

I was elbow to elbow, with René on one side and a very young, dark-haired woman with the profile like an eagle, on the other.

We exchanged friendly greetings.

The other visitors sat down, too.

Some were already bent forward in conversation with their loved one.

Behind us, food and drink machines filled all the available wall space.

Some Americans even consider this to be junk food, rubbish food, fast food and reject the constant snacking and oral fixation.

There we were, seated side by side, me and René, on two simple chairs, a glass booth facing us, a wire one behind, closed in to the right and left by a juxtaposition of other booths all alike.

The cage was empty.

It was a quarter past eight and Rickey-Lynn had not yet arrived.

The space that he would occupy was scarcely larger than a phone booth. There was a stool and a phone to communicate with René and me. We each had a phone receiver.

Either side of the thick glass that separated us there was a sort of counter top we could lean our elbows on. It measured about 16 inches wide.

It felt hard under our elbows...

A notice said, "You are being filmed and recorded."

There were people coming and going in and out of the caged corridor.

From where we were seated, we could see prisoners, their hands handcuffed behind their backs, followed by two male or female guards.

Later on, I asked René, "Have you ever seen black guards walking behind prisoners on Death Row?"

No, he had never seen any.

Neither had I.

Forty-five minutes later, Rickey had still not turned up.

I got up and went up to the guard and asked her if she had any idea when he would come to his cage.

She answered, "Not really, but I think he should be coming in the next quarter of an hour." So, we carried on waiting and suddenly, at exactly nine thirty something rustled against the wire cage.

Two silhouettes appeared in the metal corridor - the guard dressed in gray and behind him, a man in white.

The prisoners are led like circus animals through a system of locked doors.

The wire part of the cage opened and Rickey-Lynn came in. That was the moment of shock: the meeting.

THE FIRST HOUR

The cage radiated in Rickey-Lynn's presence. His smile was dazzling. We were overwhelmed.

But Rickey was handcuffed. His arms stuck out from behind his back. To have his handcuffs removed, he had to put his hands through a little trap door behind him. In order to do this, he had to lean forward and lower his whole head so that all we could see was the top of the head of a man bent over.

It was a shame that unlocking the handcuffs took ages.

The guard clattered away like mad but could not undo the handcuffs to free Rickey.

The seconds were long, very long.

Rickey-Lynn contorted himself to facilitate his own liberation and finally he was free. Rickey-Lynn stood up.

He isn't tall but he has broad shoulders.

A badge was stuck on his immaculate uniform.

On it was his photo, the word 'offender' in bold, his name, his identity number and DR written on it, lest any of us forget...

He looked at us.

He leaned forward and placed both hands on the reinforced glass in front of us. We both did the same on our side of the partition so that we were 'holding hands' with Rickey-Lynn and he was holding ours. There was a long moment of intense human contact, of human looks and smiles. The three of us grabbed the heavy, black phones and heard our three voices blend together, our male and female voices speaking beyond the glass divide, beyond all condemnation, guilt, frontiers, skin color, background, administration, regulations, interdictions. Our human eyes and faces were there, face to face, side by side.

That is what mattered at that moment.

Rickey-Lynn sat down. So did we.

He said that we were younger than we looked on the photo that we had sent them of us. We returned the compliment saying that he was handsome and that he had a radiant smile. Nothing else mattered but the time given to us, the moment we had then, this gift of time. Around us, there was a constant, but discreet movement of people.

Some visitors left.

Prisoners left, handcuffed, escorted by their guards.

We could not let a single detail of what was going on escape us.

Rickey-Lynn bent down and showed us the top of his head.

There was a scar that ran from ear to ear forming a dividing line between his face and his scalp.

He had been operated on two weeks earlier, he explained to us.

He had been transported to Galveston, a seaside resort on the Atlantic coast, about one hundred miles from Houston.

At the hospital, he had been well looked after and above all, he had eaten well.

He said that in prison they were not given much to eat and that the food was bad.

He had stayed two days in hospital in Galveston. He had not been in pain.

He explained, using gestures for emphasis, that they had pulled down the skin from the top of his forehead to the middle of his face, as if it were a cloth.

He said that he'd had a tumor in his sinus and that they had removed it.

They had given him 'rays'.

He explained that was why he had rings around his eyes.

He said that when he'd got back from the hospital he was in a lot of pain.

The pain was so strong in his eyes that he could not even see.

They had given him pills.

He felt better now.

But he still couldn't see very well. Things were broken into small pieces.

He couldn't feel the skin on his skull anymore, he said, delicately touching his frizzy hair that was stuck down on his head.

It looked like the head of a new-born baby that had just left its mother.

Suddenly, I whispered to him, "Rickey, can you speak openly?"

He laughed and answered, "Oh yes. And you, too. We can say whatever we want except that you'll be back tomorrow to break me out of here."

I let go a bit and it was then that I was aware of the tension that had been holding me in its grip.

Rickey's laugh rang out like a rare pearl of water in an arid desert.

He joked, "Women get face lifts. Me, I don't have any more wrinkles on my forehead."

Pointing to his own forehead, René said, "I should get a face lift, too."

We all laughed.

Rickey-Lynn had a small inhaler in his hand. He has asthma and always has his medicine on him.

The infirmary covers chronic illnesses but not those that are intermittent. If an inmate has a cold or stomach-ache, he must pay three dollars for each medicine he is given.

He carried on, saying, "Since last Friday when I got the news of your visit I have been so happy. Last night I didn't sleep at all. I was so excited about meeting you. But it is a shame that you couldn't get four days in a row! Oh well, two days aren't bad."

Rickey-Lynn was hungry. He was excited like a happy child.

He had the right, through us, to order food displayed in the vending machines on Death Row. We thought we could use up all the twenty dollars we had brought, but we learned that it was strictly forbidden for Rickey to take any leftovers whatsoever into his cell.

The guard kindly took the phone upon my request and took his order.

In fact, the machines had been filled at about a quarter to ten that morning, creating a huge din that interrupted our conversation...

But at least all the slots were full.

Rickey dictated a list of different flavored potato chips, peanut butter and chocolate biscuits, a cheese and roast-beef sandwich and a Dr Pepper.

He explained to us that it was his favorite drink, something between coke and root-beer.

Tim, who had been to visit before us in January, had advised us to “eat something at the same time as Rickey”.

So, there we were ordering junk food, too, so that we could share a moment which was more banal than talking together but which was for him no less important.

We were going to eat – eat together.

The guard put all the food in a little, brown paper bag made out of bio-degradable paper, so dear to those Americans who care about the environment.

Visitors to the prison are not allowed to touch the food even if it is wrapped.

The little bag travels along the wire corridor and through the trap door, the one where his handcuffs had been removed, to finally reach Rickey-Lynn.

He joyously sets about eating at once.

He was meticulous.

I said to him, “My dear, put the phone down a few seconds so you can get your meal ready.” René encouraged him, too, because he had jammed the receiver between his shoulder and ear so he could open his packets and speak at the same time.

He replied with a superb smile, “I know how to use my hands really well. I learned how to be a mechanic. I used to repair cars with my uncle.”

In point of fact, both hands were agile.

He opened the first packet with his left hand, opening up the seal that gave way to his determination.

But, after I repeated my offer several more times, he finally agreed to use both hands for a few seconds to get his feast ready.

He carefully cut open the brown bag and laid it out like a little napkin, flattening out the folds with care.

First, he opened his potato chips, laying out the packets side by side in a neat row. Then he slowly undid his favorite, the cheese and roast-beef sandwich.

But, the treat he had so desired was frozen. Rickey said, “Shame they do not have a microwave here.”

René and I looked at each other totally puzzled and disgusted.

Rickey wasn't complaining. He had merely made a remark.

Finally, he stacked up his chocolate and peanut butter cookies.

Like a little child with an erector set, he had built a lovely, evenly shaped, vertical column.

He looked at his display of goodies.

He was clearly delighted.

René and me, too.

During the three remaining hours of our visit with Rickey-Lynn, we took care that he checked how his favorite sandwich was defrosting.

There is no microwave on Death Row...

Rickey-Lynn had only used up nine dollars' worth of food.

He ate along slowly during more or less all the rest of our visit...

At times, I had the upsetting feeling that he was gorging himself on purpose...

But we were happy to be together. That was the important thing.

He was there; we were there. Everything was fine.

He had laid everything out in front of him. He used one of his hands to eat and wedged the phone against his shoulder when he wanted to place his other hand against the glass partition so that René and I could both ‘hold’ it.

We placed our two hands, one on top of the other, against his on the other side of the glass.

I began to eat the most extraordinary breakfast I had ever so gloriously shared in all my life. I was seated next to René, opposite Rickey who up until an hour before I had only known his story and whose face I would never now be able to forget. Yes, with my heart bursting, I began the most extraordinary breakfast of my life, in the joy of “being-with”, in the warmest closeness I had ever felt.

THE SECOND HOUR

He talked and he ate.

Nothing that was going on around us escapes him.

Through the glass, he caught sight of ‘The Chaplain’, who was there that day just as a visitor but who had formerly been the prison chaplain.

Rickey explained that he got too close to the convicts on Death Row and that was why he had been let go.

That morning, René and I had spent a few minutes talking with that elderly man with the ready smile. He and his wife, who Rickey waved warmly to, come to visit the prisoners five times a week.

“What else?” Rickey said out loud to himself while relishing his potato chips and then his cookies in turn, something that surprised us quite a bit all the same.

What else?

We asked him if he wanted to speak to us about himself, about his childhood, about what his life was like in prison.

Rickey seemed delighted with the prospect.

At times, he leaned down nearly touching the glass and turned his head so he could see the light coming in from the wide, grassy space outside.

If René and I could enjoy the delicate green shades and the expanses of the springtime garden, Rickey had only got a view of the vending machines that he had looked at with such longing just a short while ago.

I realized that no prisoner could see outside the bright room where we found ourselves.

It seemed that the cages had been positioned on purpose so as to deprive the inmates of even that pleasure.

He talked and he ate. Rickey-Lynn sampled his different flavored potato chips.

He had some chocolate on his fingers. He laughed.

I spoke to him as one would to a greedy child, “You haven’t got anything to wipe your fingers with.”

He replied, “I’m going to wipe my hands on my clothes,” and holding his fingers spread open just a sixteenth of an inch from his immaculate shirt, he pretended to wipe them on it, his eyes smiling.

‘Or,’ he added, “I’m going to lick my fingers, like a kid.”

We laughed, too.

Just then, out from the glassed-in security passageway, a tide of male and female guards flowed onto Death Row.

They came in and spread out everywhere.

There were many of them on all sides of us – behind us and to our right and left.

We could see them through the wire netting, behind the corridor Rickey had come down to reach his cage.... They flooded over our delicate intimacy.

I was worried and asked Rickey, “What’s all this about? Why all these people?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” he explained, “They are the new recruits who are just here to see what Death Row is like. They’ll leave soon.”

And they did, in fact, leave.

It was like a gray tidal wave going out.

Given the space that they had filled, I would say that there had been between 80 and 100 of those courageous men and women, devoted to keeping law and order in American society... A relative calm returned.

We had to stop talking every time the noisy motors that cooled the junk food vending machines turned on.

But just being together, all three of us felt infinitely happy and infinitely patient.

THE THIRD HOUR

Rickey started speaking about his life in prison.

Locked up in his one-man cell twenty-three hours a day.

The only contact with the outside world measures about eight inches high by thirty-two wide. A horizontal slot to let daylight in.

Well, that is how we understood it to be.

At the beginning of his incarceration in 1994, Rickey could see trees and birds through such an opening. Now, he is in a different cell.

Now, he can't see anything... anything at all.

I asked him if he was treated well, if contact with the guards was good.

And he talked to me about the hard, stressful job the guards have; about the difficult position they are in: in proximity to the prisoners and at the same time subject to the rigors of the administration.

He was filled with compassion for them and praised them.

"Now, I don't want to harm anyone and if I could do some good, I'd like to."

Rickey-Lynn's gaze was serious and deep.

Rickey had learned to read and write in Huntsville, the neighboring prison.

Literate inmates had taught him.

He said, "I read very slowly."

I told him I did too, but that René wrote books... He was interested in that. He wanted to write the story of his own life.

He believes in God. He was baptized by the Pastor in 1996.

Rickey believes in God.

I suddenly felt even closer to him knowing we shared that important, common denominator.

He started telling the story of his childhood, of the violence he had known at the hand of his own father who had also taught him to steal.

At one time, he had felt like killing him for all the abuse he had subjected the whole family to.

He spoke about his two sisters, about his baby brother.

He spoke about his maternal grandmother who had taught him how to fish.

At that time, he was living near Dallas.

René and I hang on his every word, each gripping our receivers close to our ears.

We tried to grasp every word and to understand the meaning of every sentence.

Rickey withdrew. He shut his eyes, his complexion turned leaden, he collected his thoughts before saying each word softly through lips that had become bitter.

He spoke about his mother, of her love and of all that she had done for him as well as for his brother and sisters.

He spoke about the deep depression he was in when she was so ill and about the problems he had at the same time making the members of the association understand how he felt.

He said, "I was really low."

His eyelids were shut tight.

He squeezed down on a pain deep inside himself; he turned inward.

Only his words open him to the world.

Rickey-Lynn's face broke up dangerously, it seemed to me.

Worried, René and I looked at each other.

THE FOURTH HOUR

Had we led Rickey where he shouldn't go?

But Rickey continued his relentless account.

His features had become totally fallen.

Beneath his closed eyelids, a shadow formed dark bags.

The charcoal rings seemed to double his lower eyelids which drooped downward.

Rickey seemed to want to talk about his mother - over and over about her.

She had died the year before at the age of 59.

She was very tired. She had come to see him on Death Row.
I said, "Rickey, my dear, we do not want you to feel bad."
He said, "No, no. It is hard but no one has ever heard me speak about myself like this."
"It's good even if it's sad."
Rickey-Lynn Lewis lifted his head up.
He spoke to us about the hope he placed in his most recent re-hearing, about his desire to hear his victim's most recent audio cassette.
He hoped to find a lead to corroborate his version of the facts.
A shiver of horror ran through me...
Clearly, Rickey knew nothing about what we already knew.
Rickey brightened up. His radiant smile returned. His white teeth sparkled.
Our three hands, placed up against the glass, refused to be parted.
He spoke about how he loved horses, dogs, walks in the woods with his maternal grandmother, and fishing for catfish.
He spoke about friends who support him, who write to him.
He tried to pronounce their names using a good French accent. We repeated them; he repeated after us: "Geneviève, Dominique, Sandrine."
He repeated how delighted he had been to meet Tim earlier that year. And, he explained how all his European correspondents - there are thirty of us - to whom he tried to write, give him the courage to live.
At the beginning he didn't know how to write a letter.
Now he could write his letters all by himself.
From time to time, his face would fall once again and grow gray as ashes.
His eyes squeezed shut on all the pain he carried within him, like a woman who carries a pregnancy that is killing her.
Like a mother carrying a dead child that would mean her own death...
I felt afraid for him.
I suspected that René felt the same.
I didn't want to leave Rickey in that state.
Half an hour later, we were going to leave among the sumptuous wild flowers of the Texas countryside.
Rickey-Lynn Lewis would remain alone, left behind.
The relentless administrative machine had decided it should be so.
It's the law.
What law?
What law?
A law that punishes the poor...
Rickey-Lynn had stopped eating.
His famous cheese and roast-beef sandwich had finally defrosted thoroughly.
From time to time, René and I had suggested that he air the thin slices of meat so that they warm up at room temperature.
Rickey ate heartily once again.
A bite of meat then a bite of peanut butter cookie and then a bite of chocolate cookie...
"Eat, my darling, eat."
You remind me of my child,
You could be my child.
What did they do to you or what did they not do for you so that one day you would be suspected of being what you are clearly not today, Rickey-Lynn Lewis - a murderer?
A female guard appeared discreetly behind the cage, on the wire side.
Time was up for Rickey.
Another female guard appeared in front of the cage, on the glass side.
Time was up for us.
When Rickey's time runs out, it runs out for us, too.
They gave all three of us the gift of five extra minutes.
After our departure, Rickey would digest his delicious meal during his hour-long promenade.

In the day-room, a closed room where he would walk alone around a circuit so constructed that he would never meet another human.

However, he would be able to hear his mates who were also kept in solitary confinement and sometimes, they could speak to each other across the dividing walls of their hermetic enclosures.

We had clearly understood that Rickey-Lynn was kept in solitary confinement 23 hours a day and that his promenade hour was spent in solitude in a locked room.

That night, he would not want to eat.

He told us that he did not want to mix food from *outside* that he had shared with us, with food from *inside*.

He would go to bed.

He has a bed with a proper mattress.

He had managed to buy a pillow for himself.

He kept his cell cool in the summer thanks to a big fan he had been able to buy using money from a private donor.

For sure, he would sleep.

As far as news of the outside world went, in his world, he had to do with sound only, no picture...

The prison gives out *televisions without a picture*...

I felt sick to my stomach.

What sick minds dreamed up such an idea!

The time went by quickly, but it is not time itself that counts – it is the present moment.

Rickey-Lynn was delighted.

“Tomorrow morning,” he announced gaily, “we can have a photo taken of the three of us together.”

Tuesday was the day when photos were taken.

We were to take leave of each other before a guard arrived.

That was how Rickey wanted it.

We pressed our hands flat against the glass partition, each of us clenching our other fist tightly.

I sent kisses to Rickey-Lynn, blowing them gently off my fingertips.

René said goodbye affectionately.

Rickey did the same.

And René and I left in a rush.

Just then, someone came along the wire corridor and we did not want to see Rickey-Lynn Lewis handcuffed again.

For us, Rickey-Lynn Lewis is a man.

You do not put handcuffs on a man.

As we left Rickey’s cage, we walked past the small office that the young female guard had occupied earlier that morning.

Now, there was a very young man who had replaced her – a pimple-faced, frail-looking adolescent.

We exchanged polite smiles.

This very young man still had the eyes of a child.

We made our way through all the security doors we had gone through that morning, toward the exit.

At the last barrier, I asked the friendly young female guard who had come on duty since we had arrived that morning, if she could give us some information about the photographs with Rickey-Lynn the next day.

No problem, really. The photo would cost 3 dollars. The speaker pointed out that they were very well done. “You can’t even see the glass partition. You’d really think there wasn’t one there at all.”

I let out a sigh. René, too.

The total lack of awareness on the part of this peaceful-looking person who could have been anyone’s kind mother, made a chill of disgust run up my spine.

I asked if it might be possible to see Mrs. C., who had authorized our visit.

“No, she is not available,” replied the guard who acted as receptionist in the entry-hall.

We drove along the flower-lined road once again.

It was a quarter to two in the afternoon by then.

There was a lot of light and *mild* in the air.

No. No, we were not hungry, not thirsty. We didn’t feel like anything.

We were to be submersed in the sumptuous countryside, decorated by the Texan springtime. We drove for an hour in the direction of the little town of Huntsville, not very far from Livingston. Plain chapels built out of rustic wood planks or more elaborate ones in better condition abounded in the green expanse.

Shocking.

The road ran along the edge of sumptuous Lake Livingston. It was silvery and as big as a sea.

The air vibrated in the light.

But, I was so sad, so sad that the only thing I could do was hold René's hand.

We sat in solemn silence.

I could not stop thinking about Rickey-Lynn Lewis, left behind.

He was back in the shadows and the solitude of his terrible life.

We reached Huntsville, also famous for its model prison

One of one hundred seventy prisons in Texas.

Where *They* (*They* obviously means no one in particular) execute offenders.

It is in Huntsville that some of the legal executions in democratic America take place.

Thanks to the perfect map that Tim had given us, we immediately found the unassuming office where Rickey's Trust Fund is kept.

That is where donations made on behalf of prisoners in Texas are kept.

An elderly, peaceful and gentle looking person made us fill in a totally basic form.

We had, on us, the money in banknotes that the association wanted us to deposit in Rickey's account.

No need to even fill in the box reserved for the name of the person making the deposit...

The whole procedure took only two minutes.

Our clerk added calmly, as she said good-bye to us politely, "Are you visiting here? It's such good weather."

For me, that was the last straw.

I replied coldly that surely she must realize that we had just come from Polunsky-Unit where we had been visiting Rickey-Lynn.

That what we had seen there was so sad that we would not be going out in the fine Texas sun that afternoon. No, it would not be possible. That what went on over there was a disgrace for her great country, which was meant to be democratic, and a sin before the God of all mankind.

Not only *the God of America*.

No man had the right to kill another man.

I said we were very sad.

She said she agreed with us and that she was very sorry.

We went out into the sunshine.

We returned directly to Houston with out eating or drinking.

We were really too sad.

A heavy, infinite sadness hung over us...

Whilst René and I exchanged points of view, we both arrived at the conclusion that Rickey-Lynn was not aware of the threat that hung over him.

If we had understood correctly, he had spoken of the hope of there being a re-hearing.

But, we knew that his appeal had been rejected.

Rickey-Lynn's life was really at risk and Rickey-Lynn did not know it yet.

CHAPTER III

DAY TWO

April 1st 2003.

Day two.

No others would follow.

We took the same route to Polunsky-Unit. We were now used to things and this familiarity reassured us as to how things would go over the next few hours, but at the same time we felt disheartened at the thought of the inevitable farewells.

We went straight from the entrance to the reception desk to make it clear once again that we wanted to have a photo taken.

No problem.

Like the day before, a continuous flow of male and female guards poured through the series of security doors.

They all went about their business cheerfully; showing their entry badge, displaying their identical, impeccable uniforms hung on hangers held at arm's length.

But that day, there were a lot of visitors.

We handed in our passports.

Waiting like us, a very pretty, young girl engaged us in conversation.

She was Swiss and obviously delighted to speak some French.

She told us that she came regularly, twice a year, to visit two prisoners one of whom already knew his execution date and the other who was still waiting for his.

The female guard mimed and said, "No more pictures".

I hoped that I had misunderstood.

She repeated what she had said. I asked, "Perhaps later this morning?"

She replied curtly, "No, no more pictures, and maybe forever."

The young Swiss girl was furious.

René spoke to her about the calm that emanated from Rickey.

She said angrily, "Don't be fooled. Here, lots of them rebel. It's terrible. I assure you that many end up going mad."

The Pasteur we had seen the day before was there with his wife.

They spoke to us about Rickey.

He said, "He's a fine man, very fine. I baptized him in 1996. He's an exceptional man. Here, the system is horrible."

He then repeated three times in a row, "They are crazy. They are crazy. They are crazy."

We went in along with the stream of visitors. Without a second's hesitation, we made our way towards Death Row.

On our canary yellow badge, our reference number had changed but there were still the two letters *D.R.*, *Death Row*.

I was wearing a pretty, little, silky, green jacket. Once I had got through all the security doors, I covered my badge over with the right side of my jacket so Rickey-Lynn wouldn't have to see it again...

We arrived at the meeting point at a quarter past eight and the female guard acting as secretary rushed us along – Rickey was already in his cage.

It wasn't the same one he had been in the day before. This one was not facing the vending machines. It was opposite other wire and glassed-in cubicles where other prisoners, as if exhibited on show, were already waiting for their families or friends.

Without wanting to, I found myself looking at them.

What I saw chilled me to the bone.

Some cages were filled with huge mountains of flesh - enormous shapes which seemed just about human.

Animal-like faces crowned some of those masses.

I wondered if these beings were responsible for the terrible acts they were accused of.

The issue of incarceration without individualized psychiatric care jumped out at you at once; at anyone with an ounce of common sense.

THE FIRST HOUR

René and I sat down opposite Rickey-Lynn, who was smiling radiantly.

His velvet eyes sparkled with joy.

He was handsome, dressed in his immaculate white clothes.

I felt a strong affection for him.

The kind of affection felt by two humans linked by a vital common denominator:

The endeavor to live in mutual recognition of each other's good grace. To live whatever happens...

That was what Rickey showed us, locked in alive and waiting, at best, for the goodwill of a false justice which claims it has the right to decide on his death.

False justice which wants to and will ruthlessly impose his destiny upon him.

René and I both placed our hands on the glass partition just where Rickey had his pressed open on the other side.

We looked at each other for a long time.

Then, we picked up our heavy telephone receivers.

He had been there since 8 o'clock that morning.

He didn't understand why the guards had made him come down at 8 o'clock that day and at half past nine the day before.

I was delighted that he had come in before us as it meant we had not had to observe the humiliating removal of his handcuffs.

For me, of course, the guard is the one who is the most humiliated of all by the whole process.

Well, there was a whole morning stretched out before us.

We were in the only present, only in the present moment...

Rickey had slept well, felt great and besides that, he had left the little aerosol spray he used to calm his asthma, in his cell.

He was looking forward to the souvenir photo that we were going to have taken in a little while, but we had to tell him that it was off.

There would be no photo then and "*maybe forever*"...

Rickey was used to frustrations without contestation.

All three of us came to the conclusion that just our being together was wonderful and was all that mattered.

We asked him how he was set up in his cell.

In a space measuring about four square yards.

He could write; there was a small piece of furniture.

No posters on the walls.

He laughed and said, "They are afraid we will break out by digging a hole behind them."

He has the right to one shower a day.

He can go to the *day-room* for one hour, where he walks around alone.

The money provided by the Association meant he could have nice, comfy walking shoes. He wanted to show them to us.

So, Rickey-Lynn lifted his leg and at the same time, unable to express my indignation, a cry of disgust burst out deep inside me at what I saw: on Rickey-Lynn's pant leg between the ankle and knee, two beautiful gold letters over 8 inches high sparkled on the snow-white cloth.

Two letters that appear again and again like an obsession, in perfect capital letters *D.R.*, *Death Row*, the shame of American democracy.

I felt a wave of nausea sweep over me.

I recalled that the United States came fifth in the world-wide list of nations that kill legally. Just after China, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Congo.

I decided I would tell Rickey-Lynn that later on.

I asked him how he managed to have such white clothes.

Well, he washes them himself, in a sink, along with his socks.

He doesn't mix his clothes in with the communal washing.

He dries them using the big fan he had been given by one of the people who writes to him.
It works fine.
He likes to draw. Sometimes he draws. His models: horses.
Rickey-Lynn knows a lot about horses. He has always been interested in them.
He had given Tim the dimensions of envelopes he would like to have to store his drawings.
We could surely find them and have them sent from a store in Livingston authorized to send merchandise to prisoners.
Rickey-Lynn also likes dogs. He knows a lot about them.
René and I, having little knowledge in this domain, spoke about the Camargue Region in the South of France and its mounted “guardians”.
I managed to recall something vague about “Apaloussa” horses. When Rickey heard me say that word, he began a small inquiry on the subject...
Lucky, I could answer all his questions.
“Apaloussas” come from the Great Plains region in Latin America called the ‘Palousses’. They used to be raised by the Indians and colonizers and were then introduced into North America. They can still be found today as far as the state of Washington.
Rickey was totally into this and pushed things a level further.
He asked me an additional question as if he were going to award me a bonus point: “What color is their coat?”
Phew, I knew. I passed my test!
I told him, “Apaloussas have gray or brown spotted coats; small round spots like freckles.” “Yes,” said Rickey, “That’s it.”
And all three of us laughed.
He explained how, once a month, the whole of Death Row is *locked down*, locked and searched from top to bottom.
During that period, no prisoner can send a letter or receive anything from the outside.
All visits are cancelled.
He reassured us about his deep sadness of the day before.
It had done him good to talk. That evening he had not felt depressed.
He listens to the news a lot on his television without a picture!
We learned that he follows world affairs, America in world affairs, with great interest.
It appears that we share the same point of view.
He spoke about the role the President attributes to America as “world policeman” in order to make his compatriots forget the catastrophic state of social affairs.
“It’s a democracy, a land of freedom and justice for the rich, not for the poor.”
Rickey, like us, hoped for the disarmament of Iraq and certainly not for war.
I told him that on March 16th I had taken part in a demonstration at Fountain Square in Houston.
I thought we had been at least two hundred strong, each holding a small, lit candle and chanting “*no blood for oil*”, in the name of peace.
Rickey spoke about Arafat and Sharon.
How clearly unequal the battle was.
That morning, René took a little, unobtrusive pen and a folded piece of paper out of his shirt pocket.
He wrote down the names of the Heads of State that Rickey had mentioned to be sure he had understood correctly.
He placed the paper against the glass partition and Rickey-Lynn nodded his head, laughing.
We brought up *the Dove of Peace*. All three of us digressed onto the subject of *Christopher Columbus*, the so-called European hero. Rickey had read, very slowly, a book from the friend who had always helped him.
He called her Sister Mary. She had died a short time before.
“I miss her bad.”
His face darkened when he spoke of that recent loss.
He had made his way page by page through that two hundred page long book.
He understood the destruction, extortion, violence and constraints - all imposed by false heroes in the name of civilization and recorded as a falsely glorified version of history.
He was able to look behind the scenes.

I wondered how Rickey-Lynn could have such a clear vision of events with the news we had been hearing for a month, as heavily censored as it was.

Yes, we agreed, those people he was speaking about *know not what they are do*.

The two of us were together, René, too, in The Word that frees, written as an eternal message in the heart of the Gospel.

Rickey believes that the guards and executioners throughout the world as well as where he is, are more to be pitied than the prisoners they torture and execute.

“They know not what they do.”

Yes, Rickey-Lynn, killers of all sorts *knows not what they do*.

I agree. I agree with Rickey-Lynn.

And how can you, from behind that cold, reinforced glass partition...how can you from behind that wire cage, Rickey-Lynn who is convicted of rape and murder... how can you assert all this as plain truth here today, if not because your eyes have been opened and your ears have heard the message buried deep down inside every human?

We rejoiced together.

Rickey-Lynn said, *“I thank God. He has been there for me ever since I was born.”*

I think I understood that sentence which is contradicted by Rickey-Lynn’s painful and catastrophic life.

His outer life.

There remained, however, the obstacle of the great Paradox: it was, in fact, because of his failed and monstrous life that he had discovered what was great within him.

The meeting he talked about that day with such calm, certainty and density.

As for me, my contact with Rickey was in the flamboyant space where light is shed on all that is dark, where all that is monstrous in man melts away.

Yes, Rickey-Lynn, *“They know not what they do.”*

Your eyes, full of pain, are eyes that forgive.

I do not want to know the truth about what you did, in the past.

All I know is that now, you no longer want to hurt others.

In his second letter which we received just before our meeting, Rickey-Lynn had said to us:

“I do not understand why I had to go through this life before Me, and stuff as I have, then when things look like it about to come to an end I meet many New Friends that love Me for Me, and no one try to hurt Me are we me to do bad things. I could have met them before, a long time ago...”

I felt intensely happy. I could feel that Rickey-Lynn and René were happy, too.

THE SECOND HOUR

Time was passing quickly.

Rickey-Lynn asked us both René and me about ourselves, about our lives and about our children.

He has an 18 year-old son but that he doesn’t see him. He doesn’t know what he wants to do in the future.

In the cage, the air grew thick.

Rickey said again, *“I do not see my family. It’s as if I had nobody here.”*

We changed the subject hurriedly.

Rickey’s face fell dramatically.

Around us, in the common area of the visiting room, there was constant activity. The visitors were talkative.

There was an incessant parade of prisoners in the wired-in corridors in front and behind us. From time to time, I saw the massive silhouette of a handcuffed prisoner, followed by the no less massive shape of a first guard with a tiny young female guard walking behind.

The scene was stupefying.

The day before René and I had noticed a huge guard, very marked by old age, with a mass of pure white hair, taking part in those trips back and forth.

And he was there again, imposing and solemn in his impeccable gray uniform.

I wondered how that ancient colossus could tell his grandchildren about his life.
I asked Rickey-Lynn if the mixing together of men and women was not a problem.
“Yes.” he said. “Especially in the women’s prison where the women detainees sometimes have sexual relations with their guards.”
Some guards were tried. Some were convicted.
I wondered how in such a puritanical place as America this surprising temptation was allowed to go on.
Suddenly we noticed Rickey-Lynn’s face brighten up.
He waved energetically to someone behind us. He laughed with great pleasure.
And we turned around. In the cage on the other side of the corridor, we saw a huge, young, black man who looked strong as a big tree. He had a carefully shaved head. A beaming smile lit up his face. He was wearing delicate, gold, wire-rimmed glasses.
Rickey told us, “That one there is my next door neighbor. I recognize him even though prisoners are not meant to see each other. That guy, he’s is a real ray of sunshine on Death Row. He is never depressed; he’s a real ray of sunshine, even though he is young. He must be about 35.”
The colossus motioned to us discretely from behind his reinforced glass partition.
So, the sun shines all the same on Death Row.
No one can stop a man from smiling or from believing, deep down inside himself, in his fellow man.
The general atmosphere was nearly joyful.
Around us, parents and friends are anxious not to miss a second of these times together.
Once again, and here more than elsewhere, I felt the importance of the time that is given to us, glorified by the moment itself.
Behind the cage, the rustle of a uniform, the vibration of the wire from a hand tapping it interrupted our conversation.
A female guard waved a letter and folded it so she could slide it to Rickey-Lynn through one of the holes in the wire partition.
My blood ran cold in my body.
I glanced at my watch. It was half past nine.
Rickey-Lynn gently took hold of the long, narrow envelope, studied the stamps and successive dates on the right-hand side for a long time, looked at the small sticker with his name on it which was stuck over the place where his name had been originally.
René and I shot each other a look of distress.
Rickey-Lynn lifted his head; he did not rush to open the letter.
He said in a flat voice, “*It’s my lawyer.*”
It’s exactly what we hadn’t wanted to hear.
René and I exchanged stunned sideways glances.
It was just what we had not wanted...
And Rickey-Lynn did not open the letter, not yet.
I hoped he would keep it and take it back to his cell.
I did not want to be there when he opened it and read the words and understood the meaning they held.
But, René and I were there, facing Rickey-Lynn.
He turned the envelope over in every direction.
On the 6th of March, it had left the desk of the lawyer appointed by the court to act on his behalf.
He lives in Huntsville, less than an hour away...
We were now April 1st.
What a sinister joke!
Suddenly, Rickey ripped the letter open, leaving lacy edges along the envelope.
He drew out the sheet of paper that had nearly nothing written on it.
He read.
He read aloud.
Meanwhile, René and I held our breath.
Time stood still.
In a strangled voice, Rickey pronounced the words one at a time:
“My rehearing is DENIED.”
His case would not be reheard.

The last possible appeal had been refused.

We understood that the horror of the declaration had been pronounced and settled.

But it seemed to me that Rickey-Lynn had not yet taken in the sense of this declaration that meant the end to his life.

I no longer heard anything other than the full violence of the shock running along the black wire that linked Rickey-Lynn and me.

He read and re-read the words in a flat voice that made me feel he had not yet understood the meaning of the words he was reading.

Rickey did not yet know with his body what his brain had already understood to be certain but as yet distant, peripheral, far from his center and held there by his own hand, at arm's length.

And then, slowly, it seemed to me that his brain began to gradually take in this awful statement that was orbiting around him.

Rickey-Lynn's face had become so sad that it was almost unbearable.

He leaned forward gently and pressed one of his hands on the glass partition. René and I immediately 'touched' it through the hermetic seal of the leaded glass.

The reinforced glass was there.

What sick mind could invent such a way of delivering the announcement of a man's death to him while he is alone? An announcement so carefully prepared by others on simple white writing paper, crowned by the simple letter head of a simple court appointed lawyer, pronounced by a simple impassive administration ...delivered behind a reinforced glass partition.

What very sick mind invented that glass should prevent all demonstrations of love of one human for another?

Rickey-Lynn is a forty year-old man, alone in his abyss.

René and I both felt an abyss-like sadness.

Rickey-Lynn had taken in what had been said to him and that knowledge filtered slowly, unwillingly into his body, the body he HAS.

It was frightening.

Rickey-Lynn placed the letter against the glass partition and we read the few, dramatic lines. It was the word '*DENIED*' written in capital letters that hit you in the eyes at first glance... René noted every word on the little slip of paper, the same little paper where he'd written the shopping list not long before.

Rickey-Lynn sighed, totally overwhelmed.

I myself knew what it was like to have a brush with death and the fear that I now call 'cellular' and which can not be translated into words.

I had experienced it seventeen years ago.

I had seen this same fear experienced by many women who I supported through their suffering with cancer, some of them very young.

But what I was seeing before me was more violent and intolerable.

Rickey-Lynn Lewis's imminent death, the small child crucified at birth, would end the tragic cycle.

Rickey-Lynn regurgitated the overflow of the violence he had endured, into the same violence he had given, and for which he must now still, day after day, night after night bear that cross.

I felt both weak and alive before the disgraceful way our world works.

Rickey-Lynn had nearly leaned his head, like that of a shorn lamb, against the glass partition. It looked as if it weighed a ton.

It looked like it carried the weight of the suffering of the whole world.

Rickey-Lynn spoke.

His voice was sad and weak like a voice coming from afar.

And he said, "*My friends in France will have done all they could to save me. Mrs. Geneviève has a heart of gold. She has helped me.*" And he listed all the first and last names of those who had worked to save him.

And we listened and could only say, "*Yes, yes.*"

I said, "*Dear man.*" René did not speak.

Rickey-Lynn explained that in Polunsky-Unit they wanted to destroy "*my brain, my spirit and my soul*". Now they were going to kill his body but no one can destroy his spirit or his soul.

René and I remained totally silent.

We listened closely to the suffering of this man who left his hand pressed firmly on the reinforced glass partition, who held his eyes closed tight, who distilled the power of beautiful, moving words like a poet who foretold the greatness of life springing out of the death of a desert.

Life beyond life. Life even if death should come.

With the incarnation of a truth always known to him, and to us, Rickey-Lynn's body became truly mortal before our very eyes and surely before his.

And the pain of his perishable flesh was written in the big, dark rings deeply etched by the shadows of his eyelids.

Rickey was alert on the inside.

He seemed to be listening to a voice within himself which was speaking to him and which he then echoed. It was as if his lips were voicing the words for us to hear, the words that he himself could hear.

He spoke his God from within.

He said that he, Rickey, feels calmer when he prays to Him.

I could no longer hear anything or see anything of the commotion going on around me.

Only his face filled with his pain existed for me.

I could not share his distress, I could only be there for him, *be-with*.

In the midst of my own confusion, I turn my thoughts to an absent, silent God.

Effective in His absence.

Effective in His silence.

A God who is absent and silent and who leaves Rickey-Lynn alone in his abyss.

And subject of his life.

Author of his life.

By accepting his death, Rickey-Lynn is author of his life.

Even in his own death that he inscribes in his path of life, not as an end but as a passage ...

He spoke about passages.

About the passage and about a new start.

Yes, an enormous strength IN Rickey-Lynn Lewis is WITH Rickey-Lynn Lewis.

No one can take that away from him, he said.

It's his Real Life, his "Living" Life whatever happens.

THE THIRD HOUR

Rickey-Lynn is a forty year-old man.

He has a body.

He is a body.

It is fine to nourish oneself with the almighty Word from the Mouth of God, but it was then time for our shared breakfast.

Rickey-Lynn lifted his eyelids.

Rickey was hungry and behaved like an infant when it's time to eat.

I couldn't get over it.

The vending machines had surely been open for a while.

We hadn't paid them the slightest bit of attention.

This strange incursion by a simple bodily need brought welcomed relief to our grave and emotional feelings.

René stood up.

With the help of the female guard who seemed to go beyond her duty and perhaps even beyond the rules, he went and collected together the items for the feast that Rickey-Lynn had ordered. Rickey could not eat as much as the previous day, although he had not been sick at all that night, he said.

His order was more modest and, besides, the vending machines offered less choice.

So, I found myself alone facing Rickey-Lynn.

I dared say to him, "*You know, Rickey, several years ago I thought that I was going to die because I had cancer. And I knew, like you, that it was only my body that might die, that what was essential in*

me would live on. And in that very place where I would not die, I was no longer afraid. I was only afraid where my body was going to die, not in my soul.

I knew, like you, that I was not alone. You are not alone either.”

“Yes, I know.”

Rickey-Lynn spoke to me about his mother and I asked him if he thought she was with him. Yes, she is with him.

The vending machines were no longer full.

The female guard had taken the liberty of substituting similar snacks in Rickey-Lynn’s order.

He was ok about that.

Like the day before, another female guard passed the “*brown bag*” through the narrow opening in the wire-mesh for undoing handcuffs. It was almost as if it were normal.

We had already come to accept and consider as banal what had been intolerable for us only the day before...

René sat back down.

From the other side of the glass partition, Rickey-Lynn had taken up our suggestion to put the phone down while he undid the packaging and embarked on the meticulous meal-time ceremony.

The protocol was paradoxically painstaking and meaningless.

Rickey had not put his beloved roast-beef and cheese sandwich on his list.

I asked him, “*Why?*”

And he said it would be really too much.

I was afraid that he felt too upset.

We had also ordered something; I can not remember what it was, so we could join Rickey-Lynn in his meal.

I could hardly swallow and I ended up just settling for a bit to drink.

THE FOURTH HOUR

Rickey-Lynn ate and drank his *Dr Pepper*.

As he had done the previous day, he stacked up his cookies in a perfect little pile.

It was like a game of Lego.

The scene of Rickey-Lynn sitting there with his *junk food* seemed surrealistic.

I hoped for a moment that we would not return to the subject of the news of his programmed death.

As if it had not been pronounced...

After all, is this not the God that we had just spoken to Rickey-Lynn about, both space and time, gathering together and transcending absolutely all points of view, from the worst to the best of man?

And perhaps, therefore, would there be a space and a time where the eternal soul that Rickey-Lynn had described, would absolutely ignore everything to do with the death of ones body?

Would Rickey-Lynn find refuge in his soul the moment he tasted the sugary memory of the *peanut butter* of his ravaged childhood?

Or would it just be Rickey-Lynn’s body, as it is now present before our eyes, eating because he is very hungry?

In either case, it would be a matter of decantation.

I was very afraid that Rickey-Lynn would raise the topic of the terrible news again.

And he did just that.

To our right, the visitors became restless.

The demanding and incongruous wailing of an infant made me turn my head in their direction.

A yard from us, a very young girl with her hair hanging down loose was holding a new-born child in her arms. I noticed its little, nearly bald head, really round like a chick- pea.

My heart broke.

The young mother unwrapped a bottle filled with milk. The little baby was calm once again. He drank hungrily. On Death Row...

I could not help asking myself with infinite sadness, what memory this little infant will have stored among his first childhood recollections.

We beckoned to the Chaplain who seemed to be making his rounds from one box to the next.

I handed him my receiver so he could speak to Rickey-Lynn.
We could not imagine leaving him totally alone with the news of his imminent death.
The Chaplain said to us, "*I have arranged to meet with Rickey. I'll stay close to him.*"
Time marches on.
Time moves towards us - inexorable and ephemeral. It was noon.
In less than half an hour we would have to leave each other, perhaps forever.
Rickey stopped his feeding.
He drank a mouthful of *Dr Pepper*, his favorite drink.
Rickey squeezed his eyelids tight over his sad eyes.
He spoke of his immortal soul. He said that President Bush was doing in Iraq exactly what was being done to him there, on Death Row in Polunsky-Unit. President Bush didn't want to hear a word about the story of those people, he just wanted to kill.
On Death Row, no one cared about his real story and they were going to kill him.
But, President Bush was wrong and his executioners were wrong.
He, Rickey, would not be destroyed.
They know not what they do.
"No one can take away my smile. I am not complaining. I will not complain."
I told him, "Rickey, if your pain is too great, do not keep it for yourself. Give it to the inner force that sustains you."
It was as if I made this request to reassure myself.
I even said it to him twice.
I told him, "I hope you will speak in front of them as you have spoken before us today."
I was referring, of course, to the executioners.
He said, "They won't let me speak."
I asked him if he would agree for us, René and me, to repeat what we had just heard coming from him his lips. He looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Yes, I trust you."
Rickey-Lynn spoke about his execution.
He drew himself together and calculated aloud.
He concluded, "I should know my date in twenty days."
The date of his last day.
He told us that he would like his friend Tim to be there.
And Geneviève, too.
He asked us, "Does Geneviève speak English?"
And, thinking better of it said, "It doesn't matter if she doesn't. We'll speak to each other with our hearts."
He wondered, "I do not know if my baby brother and my son will come."
We answered, "Perhaps it would be too hard for your son."
He thought that over, "Yes, you're right..."
He did not know who would be there with him.
René and I spoke at the same time assuring him that we would be there if he needed us.
Rickey-Lynn would like his ashes sent to France.
Rickey-Lynn reconsidered.
"If it is too complicated, I want my ashes spread in the woods where I used to go with my grandmother."
We learned that he had sent a letter.
He had expressed his last wishes to Tim and to the Association.
Rickey opened his eyes.
He had a look at what was left of his food, spread out in front of him on the little counter.
I understood that he intended not to leave anything.
He chewed slowly.
He did not let go of the receiver nor of our welcome gazes. We held hands against the glass partition all the while.
The minutes were passing by.
The minutes were running out.
The pace of our exchange picked up.

Suddenly Rickey-Lynn leaned the side of his face on his right hand. He stopped eating his miserable meal.

He squeezed his eyelids shut. I was afraid of the black rings that were spreading over his cheek bones, down the sides of his nose right to his cheeks.

But Rickey-Lynn then seemed to concentrate his human features on a Word buried in the narration of a sermon.

It was like an enigma revealing itself to the listeners that René and I were.

Something like: "Let them that have ears, hear."

It was the terms and the impact of the parable that attempted to work within us.

Rickey-Lynn's mouth became the source through which his own story and the story of every man is told.

He cited the source, the beginning, "Genesis 37 to 45."

A very long text that Rickey recited without stopping.

The story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph, much loved by his father, was able, from a young age, to reach a dimension beyond the ordinary - the interpretation of dreams.

Thrown into a pit by his own brothers; freed by a passing caravan.

And then, later on, the same Joseph saved those same brothers who had wanted to destroy him, forgiving them for all they had done.

Then, it was still the story of Joseph, an immigrant in Egypt, meeting Potiphar, put in prison by the Pharaoh. And, meanwhile, still able to interpret dreams...

Joseph would finally leave his prison, and at the end of the story was acknowledged as the Pharaoh's advisor.

It was Joseph who explained the enigma of the Pharaoh's dream about the thin cows and the fat cows. So, by storing crops they could save lives threatened by the famine.

Rickey-Lynn spoke.

Without stopping, without starting over, intensely – for about ten minutes, I would have guessed – he gave himself up to our eyes which followed him in what I conceived to be a sort of 'dis-incarceration' of The Subject.

He spoke.

The way he held himself in tragic prostration showed how his whole body was suffering, stabbed by his mortality.

But his peaceful, gentle, fragile voice seemed to gushing from a limitless place within himself, where he no longer feared anything.

Within him, a place greater than himself.

The subtle decanting taking place silently before my eyes revealed the grandeur of the human Flesh.

On the one hand, born from below, from the womb of the mother and open thus to being looked at and defined like any perishable, worldly object. On the other hand, called upon to be born from on high again, now and always, in the celestial glory of the immortal soul.

Rickey is his own Subject.

"Nobody kills my soul."

Rickey-Lynn had just told us about the greatness within himself.

He proclaimed his statue as a Human.

His *Being* took leave of his mortal remains the very moment he spoke to us, broken, of his eternal existence, in a different form and elsewhere – in what we call the soul...

I tried with all my force to gather together in my memory what Rickey-Lynn, Man born on high, had said or at any rate, what I had understood.

Rickey-Lynn smiled. "Some people believe," he said, "in reincarnation. As for me, if I reincarnated myself, it would be as a wild horse and he would gallop off, free; he would fly in the wind."

Rickey-Lynn had pulled himself back together.

It was as if all the time he was talking about the story in Genesis, he had rid himself of his shackles.

Rickey-Lynn Lewis's spirit had flown out of the glass and metal cage where it had been enclosed, into never-ending time, starting before his birth and reaching beyond the death of his mortal body.

The end of our visit was imminent.

I said once more to Rickey, "My dear, don't forget. If your pain gets too great for you, turn it over to the inner force that sustains you. Don't forget."

We thanked him for calling us to be witness to what he knew about the great and the beautiful. We told him that he had been a teacher for us these past two days.

All three of us agreed once more that whatever happened, we would meet again in the Land of Absolute Peace that we'd spoken about together.

Rickey was determined to finish the last remains of his strange meal.

I noticed that his lawyer's letter, which he had left on the right hand side of the shelf, had been stained by a grease mark. What did it matter anyhow?

Rickey-Lynn finished his last mouthful.

He did not want to leave a single crumb that would otherwise end up in the garbage can.

He carefully gathered up the packaging and meticulously folded the little brown paper bag, which for a while, had served as a table cloth.

The female guards in the wire corridor behind Rickey-Lynn and behind our backs announced that the time was up and then gave us five minutes of reprieve.

But we remembered that the day before we had left before they re-handcuffed Rickey-Lynn. We asked if he wanted us to say goodbye then and there.

He said, "Yes."

And we both said to him again that we would be there if he needed us.

And that we were sure we would meet again, at any rate, elsewhere.

Rickey-Lynn smiled his beautiful, radiant smile.

We thanked each other mutually once more.

We pressed our hands very hard against the thick glass partition.

I blew Rickey-Lynn kisses off the palm of my hand. He did the same.

René made gestures of affection.

Rickey-Lynn's look, intense, went from René's to mine.

We walked off. We could not see him any more. We did not look back.

I felt desperately sad...

Two steps further on, we walked past the small, smiling, female guard who wished us "a nice afternoon".

I leaned towards her and said in a quiet voice that, no, we would surely not be having "a nice afternoon" because Rickey-Lynn had just received his death sentence.

She let out a small cry, genuinely moved.

I told her that we would be taking away with us all that we had seen there, that we were going to make it known throughout France, where the death sentence no longer exists.

I told her that no man has the right to kill another, that what the administration did there was a crime before God and that it was very sad for her country, for its inhabitants and for their descendants.

She was clearly upset and agreed with me, the young dear child. René then added, "Nothing said is meant against you, of course."

We made our way to the exit following the same route we had taken at eight o'clock that morning.

It was nearly half past twelve in the afternoon when we walked through the entrance portico once more, where the prestigious words "**Professionalism, Integrity, Excellence**" were inscribed.

The guards were changing shifts, in a discreet ballet of entrances and exits.

I realized that by the minute division of tasks carried out by each individual in that place, no collective conscience could develop.

The space was divided up into locked passageways.

The activities of the staff, eight hundred and twenty-one employees also.

I felt so sad and overwhelmed that my legs felt like lead and my voice was faint.

We were leaving through that flower filled countryside bathed in brilliant sunshine.

Rickey-Lynn was left behind us in solitary confinement and I knew that I would never forget the beautiful expression in the eyes of that man for as long as I lived.

His faith will galvanize mine forever more.

Yes, I know for sure, one day, I will meet Rickey-Lynn as I promised would.

He is the living incarnation of the strangeness of an enigmatic Christian saying, the meaning of which has become crystal clear for me:

"Let the dead bury the dead."

Rickey-Lynn is not going to die.

Rickey-Lynn is not going to die.

THE RETURN TO HOUSTON

As we were leaving Polunsky-Unit, we really hoped to take a few photos, very discreetly, of the entrance and the outside of the buildings.

We were crossing through the last doorway when René turned around and asked the last female guard of the last locked passageway if it were possible to take a few shots of the site.

She said, no, of course not, we could take no pictures, not from the parking lot, not from the road, not from anywhere...

Cameras were watching us from all sides.

We were liable to prosecution if we broke the rules...

And so we headed our little car toward the exit, I pretended to be putting my jacket in the trunk and René took the illicit shots on the Q.T.

And the results are not very professional looking!

That little event was an interlude.

A heavy despondency took hold of us, on our silent return trip to Houston.

Before getting back on the big highways, we stopped in a store Livingston.

Tim had explained very clearly how to get there.

Rickey-Lynn had been waiting for several months for the famous envelopes that Tim had spoken to us about; we were determined to get them sent to where they belonged.

Rickey-Lynn wanted them to store his drawings that he had done of horses.

In spite of all our good intentions, we could not find the format requested and suddenly we felt even sadder yet, as if that detail were the last straw, toppling all the contents of our pent up emotions...

We left Livingston.

We went further and further from Rickey-Lynn.

As for him, he was shut up in his cell.

The way to Houston passed through the flamboyant, colorful countryside.

The big city is tall and beautiful.

We were caught up in the arabesques of concrete made of gigantic bow-like roads which dominate that city.

These sumptuous techniques became ridiculous beneath our knowing gaze...

We knew what went on behind the scenes and in the shadows of the dazzling symbol that represents, non-stop, the greatest "Democracy in the World".

For the past month, I had observed, every day, television news that gave no information whatsoever, had heard civilized conversations which exchanged nothing at all, and to top off the feeling of that extreme poverty of collective and individual consciousness, was what I myself had seen but was not shown, not worthy of being shown; the most dehumanizing and abject made by man for mankind – Death Row.

I carry a cold anger within myself, made twice as bad by the nausea I feel.

I am going to carry this anger and this stabbing nausea until they turn into words and perhaps by means of a grace that does not belong to me, into The Word.

I know that I am going to formulate my thoughts in order to speak.

Speak for those without a voice and those without a voice who are locked up alive on Death Row in Texas, in all the Death Rows in the world.

We reached the big yards, all laid in grass, of our place of residence.

Wide open spaces surround the houses. They are not really separated by fences, as in Europe.

Thus, the visitor gets the impression of being in an immense, green park with carefully laid grounds and monumental trees.

Azalea bushes planted right in the ground show off all their delicate colors.

They line the majestic entrances.

The immense double garages welcome double the cars ... enormous and, of course, inevitably the latest models.

Charming benches, hammocks, pergolas covered with flowering lianas, children coming home

from school in the bus that is reserved for them, reliable in its impeccable shuttle runs, choirs of birds, nearly tame squirrels...

But what is the matter, M'am?

The American flags proudly decorate each doorway, "Support our Troops" posters abound

But where is the problem, M'am?

Where is the problem?

As of the next morning, like every morning, the little tidy children will gather at eight o'clock in impeccable classrooms.

No shouting, no unnecessary shouting. They will divide up to go to their respective classes under the benevolent smiles of their teachers and supervisors.

Gathered together around the flag of their great country, the children of which the youngest are five, are going to begin their day of learning.

But, above all, they will be standing, concentrating on the acuteness of their look, directed far off to the far horizon, their left hands open on their little hearts.

They are going to recite "The Pledge of Allegiance" to their shared emblem, the banner with all its lovely stars.

The State of Texas prides itself on being the first of those stars in the constellation.

My visit to Rickey-Lynn Lewis, restrained in his wire cage, inaccessible to all human caresses behind a reinforced glass barrier has rocked my perceptions.

I feel like putting myself in the center of the immense square in Houston, Texas and screaming from my woman's throat what other Texas women had told me: No, no to extortion, to repression, no to war, no to organized death, no to atrocious legalized death.

No.

And I know that I would have simple and ordinary words to shout that would go into the ears of those who heard them...Or not.

I refer to that God that Rickey-Lynn refers to from the tiny room where his body deteriorates each day, where his soul constructs itself continuously.

That absent and silent God who will do nothing for all of us; Who only invites us to awareness.

We have got back. We drank cold orange juice.

The little girl said, "Come." She took me by the hand. "Come, take off your shoes, you are going to feel the grass under your feet, it is very soft."

And I obeyed.

Yes, it is very soft, the grass is. The lawn covers the entire corner of the street.

I walked. The sun was red in its sunset. The end of day generated darkness. The neighbor who lived opposite made a friendly sign to me.

She came up, she crossed the calm space and joined me.

She was about my age, she was delighted to have our host family in the neighborhood.

She asked me about our stay which was coming to an end, about our trip to South Texas, about the marvelous weather we had been lucky to have.

Once again, I felt I was going to let out a huge scream, but no, a miracle happened, and its enormous energy turned itself into words.

And so I said, I said what I had seen, what we had seen, the day before and that day, that very morning, in Polunsky-Unit, an hour and a half from our small paradise full of flowers and beautiful children and birds singing : Polunsky-Unit, Death Row.

She had been expecting a charming, polite, little good-bye conversation as demands the propriety of the milieu we were moving in.

But I spoke, I let fly screams disguised as tolerable words and it is there that she joined me, too.

She was, she said, a Christian, Catholic, and explained to me that the group to which she belonged never stopped fighting against the Death Penalty.

And the both of us held hands, united in what units humans in world over, the desire for Peace.

She explained that their action was ineffectual, for the moment, but not defeated.

We hugged each other for a final, memorable good-bye.

Yes, the little girl was right, the grass was soft under my feet...

Thoughts of Rickey-Lynn are inseparable from my own thoughts of being.

In the evening, I phoned Seattle, the biggest city in the state of Washington, at the Pacific Ocean.
Way over there, Marie was interested in Rickey-Lynn's fate. At the other end of the line, she was silenced. She listened to what I told her of our meeting with him.
I told her about the permanent reminder of the tragic place: Death Row.
Everywhere, on the walls, on the guard's uniforms, our visitors' clothes, on Rickey-Lynn, himself the "offender"...the two letters, D.R.
Marie listened, concentrated.
And then, she laughed, her pearl-like laugh.
She said, "No, no, it's not D.R. as in *Death Row*, it's Danièle et René...your two first names."
And then she added, "Write that to Rickey-Lynn."
That night, René and I each wrote on one side of the same piece paper, to the one we had met among all the convicted.
We were to praise our encounter.
René and I, we would tell him, each in our own way that he would be important in our lives from then on, that we would never forget what he had taught us in those few hours spent together.
We made a detailed report of the day whilst sitting at the family table.
To Rickey, we made the offer put forward by Marie.
The blue night of Texas enveloped the flowery gardens with its heavy sails of dew.
Me, I thought about Rickey-Lynn Lewis, who's trying to take into his painful head the news that a letter had given him of his planned death.
I do not know why, but I imagined a nice secretary typing, amongst the rest of the daily mail, the hideous declaration to a human being that she does not know.
I could neither cry nor sleep.
I held René's hand.
I prayed to MY ABSENT GOD to continue to abandon me and thus make me meet, my own force of Being.
I prayed.
Exhaustion spread its great shroud of cottony cotton.
Tomorrow will be another day...
Tomorrow will be another day...
Perhaps...

CHAPTER IV

AFTER THE VISIT

We both slept soundly.

René went to town with my daughter to find a store that would agree to undertake the sending items to prisoners in Polunsky-Unit.

Efficient organisation.

They return, both delighted with their purchases.

That very week, Rickey-Lynn would be receiving two books that seemed written and illustrated just for him.

They were: “Thunder of the Mustangs” and “Wild Horses: A spirit unbroken”.

I decided to phone Polunsky-Unit Prison to have news of Rickey-Lynn before our departure for Europe the following day.

I picked up the receiver confidently.

I asked for Death Row and Mrs C. replied immediately. She was charming from the start.

I must say that I thanked her warmly for having authorised our visit with Rickey-Lynn and that I then explained to her that we would have liked to have met her whilst there, but that she had not been available.

We spoke at the same time, expressing our regret over this missed opportunity.

The tone was pleasing.

Mrs C. told me that she had studied French at university and she even offered to help me if I could not find certain words.

I thanked her.

I explained.

Our visit with Rickey-Lynn had been so timely the other day.

Rickey-Lynn had received his death sentence.

Mrs C. let out a cry of surprise.

She was truly “So, so sorry for him.”

I informed her that our departure for Europe was imminent and that we would really like to know how Rickey-Lynn was dealing with the tragic news of his up-coming death which made as much sense to him as an unidentified flying object, but that must, at all costs, be made to sink in.

Mrs C was sympathetic.

She promised to find out what she could from the Warden, the person in charge of Death Row. She even told me to phone back whenever I liked any time after 9 a.m. the following morning.

I preferred to set a time that suited her.

She agreed and I suddenly felt amazingly close to this affable person as if paradoxically, we both had the same goal: supporting Rickey-Lynn, shut up live in his impeccably clean, white sarcophagus.

That afternoon, our host took us to visit the Menil Collection; a museum built of glass and stood amidst leafy gardens.

Nearby, there was a building open to the public, called The Rothko Chapel.

In the big, austere room draped in navy blue, some men were busy putting in benches.

The young, black woman who greeted us at the entry and filled our hands with tourist brochures explained to us that in the evening a Tibetan Lama would be coming to speak about world peace.

I started.

So, in the middle of Texas there were Americans who dared express their departure from the one and only opinion.

René stayed to meditate in the vast, carpeted room alive with people coming and going in the throws of preparing for the conference.

I felt seething with words left unsaid.

I went outside.

Birds were singing in the trees.

The light was falling like golden pearls on the masses of flowers.

I could only walk along the peaceful paths seeking an inner peace that I could not find.

I suddenly went back inside.

I spoke to the young girl who greeted visitors in these premises of Peace.
I told her that we had visited Polunsky-Unit the two previous days.
That we had met a convicted man.
That he is called Rickey-Lynn.
I told her about Death Row and she told me she didn't know a thing about it.
Two men in their sixties, like me, came up to us.
I literally swooped down on them.
Using my astonishment at coming across a center for meditation, right in the middle of Houston as a pretext for speaking, I lashed them with my burning words about Polunsky-Unit and the slow agony organised, according to the Law, for its offenders.
One of those two men calmly replied that prison is not meant to be pleasant. We agreed on that point...
I spoke of the social injustice which punishes the poor with 62% of those awaiting execution being Coloured.
I said that I was going back to Europe with images burned into my heart to which I planned to bear witness.
He then replied seriously, "You know, I myself lost my wife. She was shot dead. We have to get rid of these parasites."
At that very moment, René came out of where he had been meditating.
And, he heard those last sentences and said, "Like you, my first wife was also shot dead. But I am against the death sentence all the same."
The four of us, me, René and the two human beings we had just met, stood there speechless. The angel of silence passes, passes overhead.
Moved by a great feeling of mutual understanding and shared emotion, the four of us simultaneously joined our eight hands together.
Our eight human hands were intertwined.
Hands of women, hands of men.
We had just spoken about what was most important for our respective paths.
The question of Life and Death.

The next day we were to leave the house in enough time to be at the airport three hours before the plane left.
I first phoned Mrs C. at nine o'clock, as she'd said I could.
She had not yet been in contact with the Warden on Death Row.
I phoned back at eleven o'clock, just before putting our bags in the truck of our hosts' huge car.
Mrs C. assured me, immediately, that Rickey-Lynn was not feeling "too down", not too depressed.
I could only hope that what Mrs C. told me was true.
I told Mrs C. that I was very, very sad for Rickey-Lynn.
I told her it must be very hard for her to do this job.
I asked her if she would allow me to write her from France.
She replied, no, that it was not possible. But, she added, "You can phone me..."
I thanked her warmly.
We left Houston.
During the trip back both René and I slept a deadly, deep sleep.

I had, myself, realized a long while before that our lives are more or less a long corridor of death.
And that the mysterious path between the time of our birth and that of our parting can be rich in meaning, rich in what is sown, in what is reaped...
I know that it is through unacceptable and yet inevitable trials, facing what is totally unbearable, that each of us can find human compassion - solitude and solidarity.
But that face-to-face experience with Rickey-Lynn Lewis had already transformed and would continue to transform over and over and unceasingly, how I see the world.
During our "special visit" I had seen the diabolical at work with my own eyes.
Men, confined to Death Row, who had one day committed a monstrous act.
They had for a moment, or forever in the case of the mentally retarded, lost their humanity.

The frosty administration's response, like a retort, was to reproduce the same and then some, of the worst.

Men had got together and cold-heartedly dreamt up in their sick heads this place where everything possible was done to destroy other men psychologically before inflicting upon them the long torture of the death of their body.

Everything from the architecture to the time table, from their clothes to the way their daily life and their final moment are organized, is minutely calculated so as to inflict maximum harm.

The definition of something diabolical is that it has no author nor person responsible for the destruction it generates.

It passes through it and ejects itself from it.

It is no one in particular; it is nowhere in particular.

Like everyone else, I decry the horror organized by the sick minds of these Nazi death camps. Leaving Death Row in Texas, I felt faced by emptiness.

The eight hundred some model employees puffed up with pride by the awards given out by the prison, their prison, take part in this legalized torture with a total lack of conscience.

The Democracy of the United States of America which claims to be the torch bearer of a message of hope for the world continues to murder behind the scenes in its spotless, model prisons.

Thirty-eight states of a so-called developed country quietly go about the business of planning to legally kill the most disadvantaged, the most pitifully mentally limited among their citizens.

A list is carefully sent out over the internet and updated with great precision. Such lovely transparency satisfies good consciences.

The dutiful printer, in its automated neutrality, delicately delivers a page blackened by words, onto its tray.

Precisely organized columns specify the date of execution, the last name and the first name, the identity number, the birth date, the race (white, black, or Hispanic), the date of admission to Polunsky-Unit, the county where the crime was committed...

Rickey-Lynn Lewis's name appears on the bottom of a page.

His date of execution: the 7th of August 2003.

I let out a great sob.

Rickey-Lynn was going to be transferred to a cell where he would be under twenty-four hour observation.

Then, a police wagon would transport him to Huntsville, the legal slaughterhouse for Texas offenders.

At the set time, Rickey-Lynn Lewis would make his way, surrounded by his guards, to a small white room within the Walls Unit.

The victim's witnesses and the witnesses of the person presumed guilty would attend the execution.

He would be laid out on a sort of operating table called a gurney, also white.

His feet, his torso, his arms outstretched like on a cross would all be bound by thick leather strapping.

His hands would be wrapped in white cloth.

The "execution nurses" would see to every minute detail.

Two needles would be skillfully inserted into his veins and he would have to wait for the statutory three minutes prior to the execution...

Learned chemists have perfected clever means for slaying humans in the way one eradicates rats.

Three different injections administered at the hands of three different, anonymous individuals thus at the hands of no one, bring about the extinction of a poor life.

The killing lasts on average between six and ten minutes.

The death will be officially termed a homicide.

The cycle will therefore be complete.

All the stars of the Star - Spangled Banner tarnish before my knowing eyes.

And so ends a loathsome account.

But, in Rickey-Lynn's heaven, the brightness of the immortal constellations will forever light up his soul.

It will join in the great call that it awaits, He who tirelessly accompanies us, the radiant First Born from among all the Dead.

He who said, at the very moment of his own death at the hand of His executioners, of these same executioners: "*They know not what they do.*"

CHAPTER V

AND THEN, BACK TO FRANCE

We flew above the roundness with its brown, blue and emerald geography.

Six thousand eighty miles separated our airy apartment full of flowers from Polunsky-Unit. We quickly got things back in order.

I felt a pressing need to write down, there and then, what I had heard and seen.

I couldn't make notes first. Every detail of that two-day visit was branded on my short-term memory.

Each detail triggered off memories of when I was a child and a young woman – faced with all the tyrannies that destroy what is human in man.

I revisited memories of incidents to which I had been an involuntary witness: the colonial violence in North Africa and all the banal but no less destructive violence they call “educational”...

The compulsion to harm your fellow man under the pretext of sanctioning his errors and even his crimes, is carried out in all legality in prisons and detention centers all over the world. Confronted by the perversion carried out at Polunsky-Unit against those deemed to be the “worst”, who are in fact those who suffer the most in Texan society: the poor, the delinquent; my common sense is overwhelmed...

The ‘delinquent-poor’ or the ‘poor-delinquent’ of whom over half, blighted at birth, are mentally handicapped, pay for a society which uses only repressive options.

A society that does not ‘recycle’ those it treats like ‘trash’; never treating them as one of their own, rather leaving them to deteriorate before destroying them.

On April 24th, Rickey-Lynn wrote us a letter that staggered both me and René.

After speaking about what his life was like on Death Row, he said, “From now on, I will call you Mom and Dad because that is how much love I feel for you both.”

I read those words while translating the missive for René.

We were moved and honored.

We adopted Rickey-Lynn.

One day, I suggested a nickname for him, “Little Lamb”.

On May 5th, at eleven o'clock in the morning, the president of our Association rang at our door. She looked very sad. Rickey's execution date had been set.

Mike Charlton, the lawyer, had just notified our group.

The administration would lethally inject Rickey-Lynn on August 7, 2003 at six o'clock in the evening.

I cried out, “My poor dear.”

René's features darkened like the countryside under heavy clouds.

Rickey-Lynn had calculated correctly.

Scarcely five weeks had elapsed between the time he received the letter announcing his death, slipped to him surreptitiously by the female guard through a hole of the wire Polunsky-Unit visit cage carefully painted in white, and the quiet printing out on the computer of the list of those condemned to death...

Poor dear. Poor lamb. What sad misery inflicted by man on his fellow man!

Our modest Association gathered together, organized film showings about the death penalty, discussions, conferences and appearances on local radio stations...

The days of June ticked by, basked in the Southern sun.

A layer of ice grips our hearts, however.

During a meeting, our Association decided to send two members from Montpellier to the execution on August 7th.

Up until the moment of the lethal injection, Rickey-Lynn could, of course, get a reprieve.

So, we had to foresee further ahead...

In the case of a reprieve, René and I would remain available for a deferred execution date, probably three months later.

Time was pressing and chances of stopping the Texan killing machine were slim.

At the end of the month of June, however, René and I received a letter from Rickey-Lynn that upset us.

With great calm and little use of emotive words, he sent a precise piece of information and a firm request. He detailed how he wanted his last days and his last moments to be. He called upon us to be there.

In view of that letter, the prudent decision taken to “share” out the time spent with Rickey at the hour of his death seemed mad to us.

Vacation time was upon us, however.

We had rented a small studio apartment at the sea.

Rickey-Lynn was in my thoughts day and night, like a desperate, expectant mother.

I transported him out of his tomb and shared the infinite sea, the children playing in the waves, the squawking seagulls and the daily flight of the flamingos flying in perfect rows in the redness of the setting sun.

The summer vacation stretched on.

A blue swimming pool offered its turquoise coolness to those living in the building.

The air vibrated in the torrid heat with the exasperated choir of the cicada musicians.

The second of half of summer began.

I grew sadder and sadder, felt more and more distressed.

René and I both felt very strongly that if Rickey was to be executed, we could not stay and wait in France. No, we couldn't do that.

July 26th, the burning air of a burning summer hung heavily on the parasol pine trees.

Beach towels dried practically the minute they were spread out... tanned skin was glad of some shade.

Suddenly our calm relaxation at the side of the cool swimming made me feel nauseous...

No news from the lawyer or the investigator from Houston.

While we were there by the swimming pool, Rickey-Lynn was rotting in his “watch cell”.

He was checked by a guard every two hours, day and night. He had to identify himself – and horror of horrors - he was being fattened up like a pig...

He wrote, “In this place, I get a lot to eat.”

It was four o'clock in the afternoon where we were.

Suddenly, I got up and said to René, “Let's go back home. I know that I can not stay in Montpellier while they kill Rickey.”

René agreed with me completely.

The decision to go to our protégé partly calmed our anxiety.

That very evening, we would book our tickets for Houston.

The price would be considerable. We knew it.

The mauve, star-filled, summer evening sky twinkled colorfully.

We returned home to our calm apartment.

I went to the kitchen to get something cold to drink and René went to the computer in his office...

A few seconds went by and I heard René let out a loud cry, he who I had never before heard shout...

We threw ourselves into each other's arms and he cried out again, “Rickey, Rickey has been given a reprieve.”

We hugged each other and cried. Together, we went back to the computer to double check the great news.

Yes, the great news was there on the screen: ‘Rickey has been given a reprieve.’ And what was more, no date limit had been set, which was an even better sign...

The answer machine was full of messages from members and friends of the Association. Paradoxically, Rickey-Lynn's lawyer and his investigator were not yet aware of the news.

It was only on July 29th, nine days before his scheduled death, that Rickey himself learned that he had received a stay of execution.

In the letter he wrote that very day, on that very occasion, he praised his Lord and wrote saying, “Hello, Mom and Dad. Today is a beautiful day.”

Rickey-Lynn had prepared himself to die.

Had he been taken out of his watch cell? We didn't know.

Later on, he informed us that, from then on, all prisoners were to change cells every six months.

He said that some prisoners would surely be very destabilized by that new rule intended to remove all points of reference, even spatial.

In the autumn, he was subjected to a stint of being "locked down".

That means a period of total isolation for everyone in the prison including no cafeteria, no post and no visits.

Autumn passed by.

A new judge arrived – a woman. Like all judges in Texas, she had been elected by her fellow-citizens.

We knew she was not against the death penalty.

Lisa Milstein and Tena Francis, investigators in Texas, had visited us the previous November.

During a meeting held in Montpellier about the Death Penalty and about the work of the Association, they shared information with us and with members of the public that made a cold shiver run down your back.

We ourselves especially noted that in the USA, Federal laws are handed down to the individual states which interpret them at their level before passing them along to the different state counties for a second interpretation, specific to them.

Therefore, there was no hope of any coherent policy concerning Rickey-Lynn Lewis's future: no date limit for a decision, no fixed legal precedent to rely on.

The judge would decide...

Rickey-Lynn Lewis waited.

I wrote him a letter shortly after in which I spoke to him, among other things, of the meaning of the term 'FLESH' as it appears in Judeo-Christian Scriptures.

In Hebrew the word is 'BASAR'.

I shared with him the idea that 'Flesh' only refer to human beings.

'Flesh of the body we have', like a worldly object and also 'Flesh of the body we are' a body which speaks and which will rise.

A tunic made of skin destined to become clothes of enlightenment, the body of death, promised to the body of Glory.

On no account does 'Flesh' of MAN mean 'meat'...

And Rickey, in reply, wrote in colored ink across the top left corner of the envelope "BASAR", as if he were sharing a joke with us...

It made both me and René burst out laughing with happiness.

He said, "Mom, I pray that everyone reads this book that calls Man 'BASAR'. And there are lots and lots of people in Texas who should read it because they really think that we are just old meat."

"You could teach the people of Texas a lot."

In that same letter, Rickey-Lynn told us that he was in a cell next to Steven Moody's, cell E for him and cell F for his fellow inmate.

Steven Moody had recently been the subject of a television program in which he spoke about the living conditions in Polunsky-Unit.

On December 19, 2003 and January 6, 2004 I would be making my way there to meet with Rickey-Lynn who from prison, wished each of us a 'Beautiful Christmas' and a 'Happy New Year'.

From where he was in solitary confinement, Rickey-Lynn taught us so much.

He knew, in spite of his moments of despair, about which he spoke little or not at all, how to re-inhabit his soul.

Reduced to abject poverty - stripped of all possessions, all information and all power – Rickey-Lynn LEWIS was spiritually rich, quenched by the Source of life which would never run dry.

Appendix I

Some letters from Rickey-Lynn :

Rickey-Lynn LEWIS N° 999097
Polunsky-Unit / D.R.
3872 F.M. 350 South
Livingston. TX. 77351. U.S.A.

2.3.2003.

I have received your letter and I am very please to have it, thank you both very much
And yes, I would love to visit with both of you, Mrs Daniele and Mr René, please do come??
I will be changing My Visitor list on March 11th 2003, and I will surly be adding both of your names,
So that you may come into see Me ok?
Please bringing lots of smiles, because We will have a beautiful Visit ok ?? At the moment
Polunsky Unit, for Death Row is on lock- down, and it looks like
We will be that way for about 1 Month o.k. commissary We are not able to
buy any thing.
However We still can have our Visitations Rights if We have a Visit, so come on
to see Me ?
I do not understand why I had to go throught this life befor Me, and stuff as I have, then when things
look like it about to come to an end I meet many New
Friends that love Me, and no one try to hurt Me are we me to do bad things.

3-25-03

I have just received your letter from Houston Tx, leting Me know that you both
will be coming to see March 31 & April 1.
I am a little up sit, because time and time again, I have expland to every one, that
I can have 2 special Visits a Month.
And if you came a few days at the end one month, that 2 days. The new month that 2 days to !
That all know that already and how could they not tell you, this vever important
infromation, I am crying.
Mrs Sirven and Mr René, I hat to see yo all come so far to see Me, and you all
only get two days. Well I thank Jésus that I am able to see you both for 2 days,
and that you Both had a nice Trip over here to see Me and I am now praying
that our Lord watch over you all while you are here, And take you both back
home safty.
We will still have a beautiful Visit together, and enjoy it ok !

You know that I had my opération March 13, and I am healing pretty good.
But I am still very sewer in my head at the top, And my Eyes still hurt to.
And the cut on my Left side still has not heall all the way up yet ! But I am
coming along ok, just slow.

4-18-03

Dear Mrs Danièle and Mr René,

I have received yo all letter, leting Me know that yo all made it home very safe
and all went fine, thank the Lord to that !!
Yes I visit was very beautiful, and I neverforget it as long as I live, I will always

charishe that moment the three of us shore together. I can still see yo, all vision in My Eye, when I close them, if like you are still here with Me in Spirit, thank you both for giving Me strength.

And Mr René, yes I did received two good horse books, 1 was Thunder of the Mustangs, and there other was Wild Horses - A spirit Unbroken.

They both are very easy for Me to read, And I pick first, Wild Horses to read. The pictures are so pretty and they show the Wild Mustangs in there own World, living one day at a time.

My dear Friends, Mr René and Mrs Danièle, I am most grateful to have the two books I like them both.

I did also write and thanked the pretty little flowers Daughter, in Houston Tx to, and her husband Mr Christophe B to.letter after

Mrs Virginie wrote Me beautiful letter, welcoming Me into the Family it was very sweet. I thank My Lord Jésus for all of this love that has went into My heart and soul, From Your Family. I am so happy to be a part of your Family. Mrs Danièle, I thank you for the pretty little flowers picture, that you draw on the letters that you send to Me.

I wrote Mrs Geneviève a letter after our visit to let her know that it was a great Visit.

And now I have a letter from her, Telling me about my love and huges I ask you'all to give to her for Me. Thank you, AND she is so happy and was very glad, to get my thoughts, on you all return. She is My life, and I owe her so much, I only pray that I may returne all of the love and strength that Mrs Geneviève put forth to fight and save My life.

Mrs Daniele, I am very please that you have sit my picture in between your Children pictures, And I can feel there love of protection it a good place to be.

It is alright to send a picture of Me, to your Clildren, so they can be does to Me, And I does to them ?

And especially to Mrs Mary-Pierre and Baby Son, little Précious Pascal. I will alway call both of these names to our Lord and Savior, Who created Us all to be Brothers and Sisters, in this big World We live in.

Yes D. R.means DANIELE & RENE, Mrs Mary-Pierre, is very sweet and so kind. Please give her and little Précious Pascal, My hugs and kisses from My Heart to theres ! And may the good Lord let us meet to one day, in Jésus name I pray for this.

I will always remember Mrs Mary-Pierre and Pascal too.

You know I have a birthday in July to on the 21th of that month. When is Mrs Mary-Pierre birthday in July ? We share the same month for our birthday !!

Mrs Danièle and Mr René, I would love very much; if you would send Me some photocopy pictures of your all Childrens ? I will put them on my wall, with your picture, two pictures I have already ok ??

I have most of my Family from France on my wall above My head to watch over Me at night as I sleep throught the drakness of each.

Mr René and Mrs Danièle, It has been so long in my life since I have felt the Love from France, that has touch My heart so deeply, and I thank our Lord for all of you by my side ! I love you all very much.

Mr René, I wrote to Tim, and let him know that you would be glad to help out with the Book if he needed him to help sale the Book.

So he do know that you will help, ok Mr René ?

Before I start, I have ask Tim for a little Dictionary so I could us this book to help wrote My Story. He has the size.

That is ok about the big Envelopes. I can get 1 from an Inmate if I need it ! But the cost for one is 1.11 cent, and that is way to hight. The Polunsky Prison don't sale big Envelopes that size !

In May 1th, there not be any more orders of big Envelopes are legal Pons; And

Prisoners will not be allow to write the other Prisoners, Unless its on record you are Kin to each other, that is the only way.

Well We are on lock down again for on the shake down. They are still allowing Visits.

But commissary is close down.

They just lock us down in March 03, for that some thing Now ! So now, We have to stay in our cells, 24 hours aday untill We come off of Lock down.

Mrs Danièle and Mr René, this is were I will come to and close with My letter.

But My heart and love is always open, Day and Night. Take care, and my God keep on blessing you, both and Family. Love, Rickey Lynn.

4.24.03.

Rickey-Lynn Lewis 999097

Polunsky-Unit/ Danièle et René, HI!

3872 F.M. 350 South

Livingston Tx 77351

My Dear Friends that I charish in my heart and soul, Mrs Danièle and Mr René. I have received your letter, that say my sister Virginie call to give yo' all news that I did received the Horses Books.

The 2 Books can to Me on the some day of her letter tell Me that the book was on the way to Me. I love them very much.

I pray that our next visit, will be 16 hours, and it will be ways beautiful than our first, and We together will grow more close'er and close as a New Family, We all will build in our Hears and our Soul.

Here in América, I have My Brother IVIE LYNN Jr, and my Son CARVIN LYNN, and Mrs Catherine. They are the only blood Family I have, that I know love me.

Mrs Catherine is not blood, but She would help Me in any way if She can. She is 73 years old and in 12-1-03, She will be 74.

Now I have add new love ones to My life, that I can feel the love that they have for Me.

Christophe and Virginie Family, and I am so happy for this, because I have them close, if I need help they are by my side. This give Me strenght to over come any and all fears that may raise up before Me. It is the same feeling that came when You Mr René,came to visit Me, I felt no fear of any thing Man could do to Me, because Jésus Christ, is My Lord, and if it is my time to died, let it be the Lord will, and I will return this rented body back to dust which it came, and free , my Soul forever, and I will embrace death with Love, because my Soul will not be touched.

Free and wild as the Mustangs, My spirit will be, carrying all My Family from Family deeply inside my Heart, because they are the power of my strenght. My Love is forever without end.

I can only go on Tim and Mrs Geneviève words that My hire Lawyer and private Investigator are doing good Job. I truth them, that it is the truth and indeed they are.

I still have not saw either one of them for Polunsky, since last year.

Now My Private Investigator did come up here, to see Me, but She left 30 minutes before the Officers could come to get Me. I did get up sit about it, because this is a very important time for Me, and I have questions that need answering.

I have already told Tim and Mrs Geneviève, about all of that. Now My Investigator, did mail Us an up date on her work and I was very happy to read all that She had to say.

But there are still Documents that I have been asking for since last year, that I have not getted, yet that I was promise that I would get !!

Mr René and Mrs Danièle, I have a good feeling that every thing is good to be sweet and ok, like our dear Brother Joseph.

I do not believe that My Lord carry Me this far to leave Me, and that is from My Heart.

The good Lord has learn Me a lot of things about lift itself, and to be a responsible Man that I am to day. There was no way I could learn this, at home, because My Mother and Father bout was unducated and did not learn to read and write.

And when I was very very young, My Daddy had Me doing all Kinds of wrong, And I was doing what he told Me to do.

My Maman did not know of the things, My Daddy had Me doing.

And as I grow up in life, My Daddy, sisters, did not help, because it was ok, do anything around.

All of my life I have had muche pain and stuffing and the God save Me, and carry Me throught it all, because with My Daddy had beating, I should been dead.

But this hard life, I will try to tell to Tim, and fill in everything. I hope that I can do it and the bad dreams will not come back, that I use to have.

I wish that all of the bad and painful things would jst disappear, but it will not matter how hard . I try they are all way there.

Mr René & Mrs Danièle, yo'all are free to tell what ever you wish to about My life on Death Row.

It very hard here, and the conditions are very , very bad for a Man to live in. It is Isolation, design to broke a Man, down to the ground, Body and Soul.

And so many have fallen to these Mental creation, and are not the same Persons as I use to Know.

There are many, many Guxs, I have not seen since I've been on Polunsky Unit.

And you do not keep up with who has a date, to be killed. You will not know if they are alive, or are dead !

That why it is very important that Inmates on Death Row, have visits, to help keep them right in the mind, and to meet and share information about all that is going on, at Polunsky Unit, good News and bad News.

Many Death Row Inmates, do not even have a Radio, and I feel very sorry about that.

There are many, many changes that need to be taken placse at Polunsky Unit. But, I do not see it happening no time soon.

If I did not have Family love Me, I know that I would have went crazy along time ago !

That why I thank My Lord for waking Me up to see a New day. With good health and strenght that I have.

And I also thank him for all of my Family in my heart that I carry each and every day. That these Family's and love ones be watched over and protect to.

I have so much to be thankful for, and I am.

It would a big blessing if We had many more big Associations he in the U.S.A. to help us here on Death Row.It is a big, big sheam that We the Husman Beings on Death Row, have to ask People in many others Countrys, to help Us, because there is no help here for Us ! That hurts so bad.

My case can be fround at this Web site, And photos to : htt : [www. Zebra.net/wenderler/rickey](http://www.Zebra.net/wenderler/rickey)

It is all link to other Groups that are fighting the Death Penaltiy to.

I really do not like speaking about Polunsky Unit, But if it to help, then I am please to let any one that ask Me.

When I change My Visiting List in Sept 03, I will add Mrs Geneviève, and I will ask My Sister Virginie & Chris, may I add them, if they both would like to come.

Or one, I will put whoever. All Children 16 years of age can just come in, they do not have to be on my list.

Now, remember that I will always keep you both on my Visiting, ok ? And Tim to.

However, I will surly let you both know when We do visit, ok ?

From this day on, I will call you, Mother and Daddy, because that is the love I have for both of you.

Now I end my letter until next time, But My heart and mind will continue to think and Love both of you.

Today, I ask that your smiles will be my smile. I love you.

Your Son Rickey-Lynn.

P.S. Give Mrs Geneviève, my love, kisses and big huges, ok.

And to the Group to, I am just fine ! I have a Family that Love Me.

And to Mrs Geneviève, I thank her for the kind word on the big horse Post, that she send to Me.

She give Me agife to when I see, a flow I think of her.

5.20. 2003.

Dear Mom & Dad,

I am very happy because, I feel all of the love that you both have send into my heart from the very first day We meet.

I am very grateful, to have you both, and yo'all Family by my side, and I will always give all of my love and highest respect back in reture, this I vow, I thank yo'all.

Yes, I have all of the photos of the Family, and in my own way, I have made the picture, were I will know who every one is !

Mom, I did not forget precious little Pascal, bless his heart, He look very sweet.

To Me, little Pascal look so much like Daddy Jim, and Madeleine look so much like Marie.

And the picture, of Dad and Marie and Virginie all siting together is the most beautiful one.

And Jerome and Virginie, take these looks from Mom because your all eyes and smile are so much a like.

And every time I look at the Children Anna and Victoria, who took these look from Chris. And Manon, Jeffrey, baby Killian, and Wilhem, I smile to, because they are smiling !

I have all of these pictures, and Precious little Pascal, all on My cell wall, at the head of my bed, were I have Tim two Daughters at, so they can watch over Me, when I am asleep, because they are Jésus Angles.

And I will put the other pictures in my Book.

Mom & Dad, I am sorry that my letter are so lat geting back with yo'all, but I am very slow in writing, because I have the dictionary in my lefe hand, and my ink pen right hand, and I have to fine a word every 2, 3, 4 minutes because I can not spell at all.

Mom & Dad, I am still feeling very good, just like our day We Visit each other, and I do not have any worry about anything.

On June 1st, Tim oldest Daughter Meredith, will read a speek I wrote far all of my Family, in beautiful France, and every word came from My heart.

I have also ended up with two big dictionarys. The first one come from, My Sister Virginie and Brother Chris.

So since as I get it, I write a letter to Tim, to let him know that I have received a big dictionary now, but it was two late, and I do not see how My letter did not get to him in Time !

Oh well, I ask My Sister and Brother could I mail it to Anna and Victoria, because one day it will come in handy.(.....)

Now Dad, I am wanting to see My brother Alain and Christine ?

And I will never forget Mom, what you told Me, and it will stay in my heart and soul always.

Because, you both have given to Me, so much strenght and took away all of my fears that I once had, befor We meet.

I am doing ok, very much more then I thought I would be. I still give My thanks to our Lord Jésus, for all of the blessing that he have given to Me, and still is, and I am very grateful that Jésus is to standing by my side to !!

Mom, I did not have a nick name from my childhood.

But I was 17th, a friend of mines give Me the nick name "little Rat", because My ears use to stick out a lot, and he said that I look like a little Rat.

I did not have a problem with it. I name him "lome Head".

But when I came to Death Row, and started playing basket-ball real good, I get the name "Short Dog".

Mom it is ok, if you want to call Me "Little Lamb", that is a sweet name, plus I like it too.

It is ok, that you and Dad wrote about our Visit together, that is a very good Idea, that you have done.

Dad & Mom, I have also wrote the book our for Brother Tim, to fix up about my life.

He should have it by now, and writing it up. I told Tim, to talk with Dad, about a buyer for it.

I know I left out a lot of things, but I also put a lot of very improtant things in there too, mostly of what I can prove pretty easy, by someone in my Maman Family and My Daddy Family.

When People write books on there life, there is allway someone, who want to see if it is the truth. So all that is in what I wrote, is on records are. I can prove that it is true, by someone in My Maman and My Daddy Family.

I did get a nice letter from Mrs Geneviève and from Tim, and there was a lot of good News, said to Me, from our hire Lawyer. So it is going to be just fine, and I truly believe that.

Mom, the flowers that you drew on your letters are very nice. You do that very well.

Today, I have made the small light inside of Me, very bright, just as you have ask of Me, Mom, and I will keep it on bright, 24 hours a day & 7 days a week.

I am fine, My head is almost well, but these is not any pain any more. And I have lots of food to eat in my cell, and I am only waiting for the good Lord, to do his work, and took Me off Death Row, and I believe that, with all of my hearth.

Please let Mrs Geneviève, and My Baby Sister Marion, know that I am fine, and I send both of them, my love and kisses and many big huges from my Heart to theses always.

And also to the Group at L. P. J., ok ?

Mom and Dad, I will close my letter for now, but My heart and love, is always open, 24 hours a day, to you and Dad.

And I thank yo'all so much for the love and strenght you both brought to Me, when I needed it the most. Love, peaces and freedom to be.

Your son forever. Rickey-Lynn.

5. 30. 2003

Since the day of Mr and Mrs Sirven, visit, I have had this good peaces feeling inside, and love that is coming from you all, and I am ok?

I am on Death Row with a date to die, but, all of this love is around, like comfrontfull, blocking away all the saddress of that date.

I have a saddress, but is for the lost of my Maman and dear Sister Mary.

Genevieve, I am ok and I love you and the group and the others, so much for loving Me who I am inside and standing by my side and believing in Me I am great.

Well as always I am very behide in my letters writing because most of my mail have been hideing so where in the mail room, and weeks later it all comes at once! I will be glad when they take my name off of these hit list. You know what I mean!!

6. 21. O3.

Instead of "Death - Row" he writes "Danièle and René".

My Dear Mom and Dad. Smile for Me today?

I have received your wonderful letter Mom, and I am as always happy to hear from you and Dad, and I send you both my huges, Love and kisses from my heart into you'all.

I like Cat that you draw on the letter that you send to Me, I think it pretty, and the shoes that you put on it too.

I am doing ok, and I will have to write to My dear Friend Mrs Geneviève to, So she will know that I am all right.

She ask Me, was my left eye swell up. It could be, because my left eye have been giving Me some troubles after the operation.

My eyes get mass up, when I was very young from My Daddy beting on Me with his fist, and knocking Me around.

In 1989, I had a operation on them, and they was fixed a little, but not all of the way.

Wes is Dad at, is he there and doing ok ?

Please give him my love, huges and kisses and I pray that he is doing fine, And are not working to hard !

My Lawyer has all the story about when I was a little boy, growing up, And should be sending it all to Tim soom.

I do hope that every thing will turn out ok with that, because you know how that can be !
My baby Brother and Son is suppose to be coming to see Me and time now, And I will be very very happy to see them after not seeing for so long.
I will tell you all about the Visit when they come, ok ?
Mom and Dad, I am doing fine and is at peace and I am writting letters to all of my friend, trying to get all catugh up on my letters.
I am a very slow wroter because I have to use my Dictionary a lot, to spell My words. And I do not like to wrote. But, now since I am at Polunsky Unit, I have to write to help my mind and to stay in touch with the World, and My Family, so that I will not lost my Mind.
I fine out that, when I write to My Family, that are all my Friends, I free myself from this Placse and I am no longer here at Polunsky Unit.
I am there at My Family home, and I Am Visiting with them, throught all of my letters, and I feel good most of the time, when I am writting them.
I have some days that I am unable to write all and I just mors up against and against, and I will stop, because My mind is some were else, but not ready to write, and I will have to stop.
Now, is the weather in France ?
Here, around Polunsky it is very, very hot, and pretty and shiny out side very hot.
Dad and Mom, I did not have a lot to say this time, because I have to save a little something and New, to go in my next letter to you all.
Smile, I love you both very much, because you brought Me, comfront and Love and a peaces of mind, when I need it the most.
Now, I have to expland this, so that you all will know, ok ?
My execution date is 8- 7- 03, right ? That is on a Thursday in that month.
Now, on Monday 4 and Tuesday 5, I will be allow all day, Visits from 8.00 a.m until 15.00 p.m. I can have in up to 10 People, visiting Me, at the same time, all day thes to day !
Now, for Wednesday 6th and Thursday 7th, Ten People are still allow in on these to day, but only until 8:00 A.m to 12:00 noon, and visiting hour, is over with !
Thursday at 12:00 noon, Officers will come and get Me from the visiting, that if I am out thes visiting some one, and take Me to the HUNTSVILLE TEXAS, to the Wall Unit, for execution at 6:00 p.m, 8. 7. 03.
The People that I have liste on My list, to stay with Me on these day, all the way up to execution are :
Ch Jack Wilcox, Daniel Beau, Tim Broadbent, and Mom & Dad.
Every one is one my Visiting List now. And I will be able to add Mrs Geneviève to my list, 3 Weeks befor the execution dat, ok ?
I am not expecting Mrs Geneviève to witnes no execution. But, I would like her, to stay with Me, these four days with Mom & Dad and Tim, and Brother Daniel Beau, and Dominique S, is also welcome to come.
I have all of you on My list, that is the only way that you will be allow.
All children under 16 years of age, are allow in. And all Blood Kind are allow in to ever, if they are not on my Visit, They come in !
I am only explaning all of this, so that every one will know ahead of time that these are the days. I need you all to be with Me.
I am not looking to be murder by the State, I am only laying this all out, O.K, smile !
See, this Inmate told Me all the wrong infromation about the Visiting days, and I send all that, with the story about my childhood, because I thought it was true !
Brother Daniel know about a house in the Town of Huntsville, that will let People stay 2 days free and feed you to for free.
That is about it, And please make sure that this infromation is explaning to every one, O.K. ?
I will close this letter for now, But all of my love in my heart for you, all I will never close, that is open always.
Love, peaces and freedom to be.
God bless you.
All Love, your Son RICKEY-LYNN.

7. 29. 03.

Hello Maman and Dad,

Today is a very beautiful day, and I thank our Lord Jésus, that We have been so blessed to see it. Our Lord is so good !

I am very sure that yo'all ready have the News in France, that I get a Stay of execution, and I am very happy for that, and I thank Jésus and My Lawyer Mike, Lisa, and Gerald.

I talk with Mike and Lisa and Gerald on the phone, and they, Lisa was the first to tell Me that I get a stay. We talk for a long time, to get a good understand on a few thing about my Case.

I talked with a lot of respect as always.

Maman and Dad, I was telling Mrs Geneviève, that I have about a handren letters from My Family in France, that show Me, that I was not along. I am very please with that !

Maman and Dad, I have all of you and Dads letters and the pretty card of the little river. It reminds Me, of a River, close to were My GrandMother once live, with lots of big catfish in it.

I love to go fishing to, And to eat them, they are very good !

I also received a very nice letter from brother Jérôme, and I will answer to his letter soon, ok ?

Please give him my love and high respects from my heart !

I am glad that you all get my picture of Me. All My Family in France, really like it very much.

I am so happy to have all of the Friends. I have in Friend by my side during one of the hardest partes of my life Now when I had the date.

I could feel all of these love from all of these letters, I get daring that time.

And Maman and Dad, there are no words to explan how they made Me feel, there are no words ! I just send them all my love from my heart , for making a difference for Me, to say Rickey Lynn, you are not along !

And most of all, I wish that My big Family in France would send my Lawyer Mike, a thank you card with Lisa and Gerald names add in there to please ! ?

I will be my way to say, I am most grateful to have them by my side, Regradless of all the problems along the way.

We all talk on the phone, and all that should be fix and I will be geting, what I ask for soon in the mail, ok !

And I thank Dad for his sweet thoughts and loving words, that he always send at the end of your letters, and it help Me a lot, to know both of you are here for Me.

It is good to know that My dear Sister Marie-Pierre and I, was born in the some month of July.

And so, is Mrs Geneviève, to was born in July 20, and me 21. We are very close, and We have many things in common in life.

I believe that it was Jésus that send her and My Family, to be by My side, And I am very thankful that She is My Friend.

I have now, Christophe and Virginie on my Visting list now. So, they are free to come and see Me. So please, explan the rules to them, Maman and Dad ?

I am going to be very, very happy to meet My French Brother and Sister, and of course, My two little Nices too !

Maman, Brother Christophe has help Me a lot, to do very improtant things, geting my word out, And I thank him very much !

Maman, I thank you for the post card of the White Horses from the South of France, living in water from the Sea. They like the salty glasse to !

Mrs Geneviève and another one of my Friends, use to send Me, this Post Cards always.

I did not know it at first, but this Horses are half Arabian Horse to from these breed. All of them do not always turn White.

Yes, my baby Brother Ivie Jr, came to Visit Me en the 7-7-03, and We had a real good time. My Son Carvin-Lynn was suppose to come to, but he did not come to Ivie Jr house.

And Me, and Brother Daniel Beau had a beautiful Visit to, and We laught and eat together, And We prayed together too. It was very hurt to see him go, As all of my Friends there in France !!

Yes, Gerald Bierbaum, did finally send My Brother the money, after I send him a special Letter, that he most signe to get.

I will never in life ask them to send nothing also for Me. It only take one time for Me to learn, And I will not let it happnes again !

I am very please, Maman, when I see the Flowers that you have draw on the letters coming to Me. It is very sweet and it puts a smile on My face always !

It is hard for Me, to stop writing a letter short, because I have so much to say, And explan too. Smile.

But I am OK now, And I pray that our Lord Jésus, and Mother Mary, will change my situation, And set Me Free to more to France, were the People love Me at.

This I pray, Maman and Dad !

Well, I will end there, but your love is always in my heart, now and always, with out end !

I am ok Maman and Dad.

Take care because I love you all very, very much..

God bless you both.

Your Son from My Heart.

Rickey-Lynn.

"Dieu connaît la vérité. Tu dois croire en la justice divine"

"Smile, je t'aime, toi." (Written in French by Rickey-Lynn)

Appendix II

BACKGROUND INFORMATION, IMPRESSIONS and REFLECTIONS

My name is René Sirven.

The experience shared with my wife, Danièle, visiting Death Row at Polunsky-Unit, the feelings that remain as strong now as they were then, and the promise made to Rickey-Lynn that we would write about what we saw, have led me to carry on along the path begun with him.

Yes, I owe it to Rickey-Lynn to tell people about the death penalty and how it is applied in the U.S.A. I owe it to him to share my impressions, my thoughts and the questions born out of meeting a man, locked up in order to be killed. I owe it to him to speak out against a penal and social system that seeks to eliminate him after having excluded him.

Some background information

- about the death penalty in the U.S.A.: the principles behind it and how it is applied
- about prison conditions: what is shown; what is hidden

The death penalty in the U.S.A.: the principles behind it and how it is applied

The principles

The death penalty in the U.S.A. is a complex phenomenon built on constitutional, legal, moral and religious foundations.

1 – Constitutional and legal grounds

The Constitution establishes that all people have rights which the government is bound to protect. The death penalty, an exemplary and definitive sanction, falls perfectly within this idea of protection.

Its evolution is linked especially to the Eighth Amendment of the Bill of Rights which forbids recourse to “cruel punishment which is out of the ordinary”.

In the first draft of the Constitution, two other amendments referred to the possibility of applying the death sentence without reference to the Eighth Amendment.

This evolution led to:

- 1- Limiting the range of its application: For example, horse theft and producing counterfeit money are excluded. It has to be an *aggravated* crime such as the murder of several people or of a policeman, rape or treason;
- 2- Controlling the conditions under which it is applied, the procedures and method of execution:
 - Procedures: Procedures must be carried out in due form and in two phases:
 - 1 - Establishing guilt: determining proof of the aggravated nature of the crime must be provided
 - 2 – Sentencing: all the elements of any extenuating circumstances must be brought forward
 - Method of execution: Lethal injection is most common. Note, however, that the electric chair, hanging (in four States), firing squad (one State) and the gas chamber have not, to this day, been classified as ‘*cruel*’.

The various methods of execution are mentioned by Rickey in his letters. They are elevated to a higher level by the emotional and affective charge let loose by the words said by a man, by Rickey-Lynn Lewis, the man who is going to die and who is preparing for his death with simplicity and dignity.

The reading of the official documents available on the internet, numerous, explicit and terrifyingly cold, seems to us to add to the contrast between this man, human among humans who accompany him and those men, organizers of a system which carries out a legal murder in the minutest detail.

Execution by lethal injection

It takes place at six o'clock p.m. at Walls-Unit in the prison of Huntsville, a small town about three-quarters of an hour from Polunsky-Unit, where prisoners are incarcerated, located near Livingston.

The condemned person is taken to a small room in which there is a table that looks like a medical examination table but with two armrests in the form of a cross.

The prisoner is attached to the table by leather straps arranged in the form of a cross, at the level of the feet, torso and arms. His hands are wrapped and tied to the table.

His arms are placed on the armrests ready to receive the injections delivered by the two needles linked by two tubes which come out of a trapdoor in the wall.

The needles are put in place and three minutes later, the time allowed by law for a possible stay of execution, the prison Director Orders the manual release of the injections, at ten second intervals:

15cc of sodium thiopental, 2%

15cc of pancuronium bromide

15cc of potassium chloride

The first is a strong barbituate, the second is a derivative of curare and the third invades the entire blood system bringing on a massive heart attack.

The official cause of death written on the death certificate: homicide.

The execution takes place in the presence of witnesses and normally lasts from six to ten minutes. The family of the condemned person and the family of the victim including children under 16, can observe the execution through a glass partition.

Rickey-Lynn knew the stages leading up to the execution:

Cell on Death Row: 10 years in Rickey-Lynn's own case.

Watch cell for the last weeks: nine cells laid out in a circle around a central point from which a guard keeps a constant eye on the inmates. It is from that cell in Polunsky-Unit, Livingston that he was to be transferred to Walls-Unit, Huntsville at noon on August 7th to be executed at six o'clock p.m.

On August 1st, 2003, thirty-eight States out of fifty still retained the death penalty in their penal system. Twenty-two States allowed it for those who were minors at the time the crime was committed.

In 2002, seventy-one prisoners were executed in thirteen States:

Texas: 33	Florida: 3
Oklahoma: 7	Alabama: 2
Missouri: 6	Mississippi: 2
Georgia: 4	North Carolina: 2
Virginia: 4	Louisiana: 1
South Carolina: 3	California: 1
Ohio: 3	

In December 2003, the schedule was published, available on the Texas Department of Justice internet site, showing acceleration in the rate of executions: the third, fourth, ninth, tenth and eleventh of December – 5 executions in 9 days!

However, during our *special visit* on December 19th, the wife of the Chaplain who visited inmates on Death Row daily, told us that the machine had stopped after the executions on December 3rd and 4th.

The execution of Billy Vickers, planned for the 9th, had been stopped after the condemned man had waited 10 hours.

Kevin Zimmerman's execution was stopped on the 10th just when he was finishing his last meal. When he heard the news, he fainted and when he came round, he begged them to put an end to his torture, "I want to die. I don't want to live through all of that again."

The rate of executions picked up speed on the January 6th, 2004 with the putting to death of Matthews Ynobe, a 27 year old Black man. His death was followed by that of Bruce Kenneth on the 14th.

Billy Vickers was executed on January 21st, 2004 and Kevin Zimmerman on the 28th.

The official document, 'Scheduled Executions' published January 7th, 2004 announced thirteen executions over the following months.

The present debates mainly center around the improvement of procedures. Some people, like Supreme Court judge, Harry Blackmun conclude that it is impossible. With regard to the case of Collins versus Collins (1994), this judge said that from then on, he would no longer try to patch up the mechanisms regarding the death penalty. Furthermore, he stated that for over twenty years he had made an effort, along with the majority of the Court, to develop procedures and ground rules which would have made the death penalty more than just a semblance of justice being served. He felt morally and intellectually obliged to concede that the experiment had failed. It had become obvious to him that no combination of ground rules and rules as to how to carry it out would ever be able to protect the death penalty from constitutional deficiencies which are inherent in it.

What we observed during our visit and learned from the investigators and legal experts involved in Rickey-Lynn's defense, convinced us that we were faced with what is a '*semblance of justice*', hanging on a legal thread and carried out in an omnipresent arbitrariness.

2- Religious and moral arguments

As far as religion goes, the weight of the Evangelical and Baptist churches is considerable, founded on Biblical references such as, "He who lives by the sword, shall die by the sword."² The Southern State of Texas and the Southeastern States of Virginia, Florida and the Carolinas which apply the death penalty the most also make up what is commonly referred to as the *Bible Belt*.

Man's law, the Constitution, and God's law, the Bible, are constantly called upon as the two pillars of Justice.

Justification for the death penalty in moral terms is based on America's conception of the rights and duties of each citizen and the legitimacy of the sanction itself.

At the present time, much is made of the rights of the victim and their loved ones and of the obligation to punish the criminal as severely as possible from the moment of incarceration. It has become increasingly clear to us that, in reality, this principle leads to the taking into account of the social and ethnic characteristics of the victim rather than those of the presumed criminal.

1 As cited by Betsy Linehan in the article 'Des Américains contre la peine de mort', in the journal *Projet*, No. 275 September 2003, Centre de Recherche et d'Action Sociale, 14 rue d'Assas, 75006, Paris.

2 During our stay in March 2003, which coincided with the beginning of the war in Iraq, we saw American flags and banners saying 'God bless our troops' spring up everywhere.

It is exactly what the commentaries in the local press in Tyler, a small town near Dallas where Rickey-Lynn Lewis's crime is said to have taken place, said upon the announcement of a further stay of execution.

The "Tyler Morning Telegraph" on September 3rd 2003, printed: "*Rickey-Lynn Lewis, one of the prisoners who has been on the County's Death Row the longest, has jumped on the band wagon along with those Texas criminals who are trying to claim mental retardation as a means of staying alive.*"

Thirteen years after the crime, the journalist reported the reactions of the wife of the victim, who herself had been raped during the course of the attack. Referring to the scheduled date of execution, August 7th, she said, "*I had hoped that justice would be done. It is very frustrating, but I can do nothing about it.*"

Application of the death penalty

Beyond the issue of procedural dysfunction regarding the death penalty, lies the problem of the application of the rules themselves.

For instance, Rickey's court-appointed lawyer did not get involved very much in the case, did very little to find out much about it and was, therefore, not very effective. Let's recall the letter Rickey-

Lynn received in our presence informing him in four lines that his last appeal had been refused and putting the word REFUSED in capital letters on purpose to make it stand out. There was no visit, no discussion, no human exchange regarding the awful news. The only remaining possibility mentioned was to appeal to the Supreme Court. The lawyer did not raise the possibility of petitioning, as provided by the Law, on the grounds of proven mental deficiency at the time of the crime. That law, however, has been on the books since 2002 even if it is not applied in all of the States or in all the Counties which can interpret it widely. This margin of interpretation turns the fate of defendants into a sinister lottery: the death penalty can be applied ten times more often in One County than in a neighboring one. Let's also recall that the two snipers who killed several people near Washington, D.C. in 2002 were taken to the State of Virginia where execution is allowed from the age of 16. One of the two accused men was 17 at the time of the incident. The State of Texas, of which George W. Bush was then governor, heads the list for executions. In 2003 alone, on average, one execution was carried out a week.

Justice and money

The way justice itself is organized underlines the important role money plays. There is not, as is the case in France, a single judge who examines both sides of the case. It is the defendant's lawyer and his team of investigators who must provide proof in favor of their client to prove their innocence or to show extenuating circumstances. However, such a defense is extremely expensive, costing several tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars. We can easily understand that a rich person accused of a crime has little fear of finding themselves on Death Row one day, whilst on the other hand the poor, for the most part Black or Hispanic find themselves to be in the majority.

In an interview reported in the journal, Project, referred to earlier, Kevin Doyle, the lawyer against the death penalty, stated that the role money plays is essential! If your name is not O.J. Simpson, you do not have access to a dream team unless you mean lawyers who sleep during sessions. You will end up with a lawyer appointed by the court and who is, most often, not up to the mark.

An investigator confided in us that she had, in actual fact, seen such a court-appointed lawyer sleep during a trial involving the death sentence.

We must also point out that the set fee paid by the State to lawyers appointed to take on such cases is not very motivating, especially if they are not against the death penalty...

The question of money is, thus, at the very heart of how the penal system works:

- Money from State and County tax payers, who elect the executive as well as legislative representatives, is spent on the investigation and the trial.
- Money is required to make the penal and prison system function: a prisoner costs (and thus 'brings in') 61 dollars a day; the cost of the drugs used for the execution is 86.06 dollars (in 2003).
- Concerning the money that has to be got together by the presumed criminal to ensure an effective defense: it is simply not available, it would appear, given the abject poverty which is the most common lot of these prisoners. No public funds are made available to make up for this lack of money. Just recall the exorbitant cost of basic necessities alone on Death Row.

Rickey-Lynn managed to escape his execution scheduled for the 7th of September, 2003 thanks to the 23,500 Euros collected during a week of action against the death penalty, organized in Montpellier, France in May 2002. This event brought together various Associations and performing artists such as "Têtes raides".

With that sum of money, Mike Charlton(3), a real lawyer, both competent and committed, and his team, especially the investigator Lisa Milstein, managed to get their appeal accepted on the legal grounds of mental deficiency. They also obtained a stay of execution which meant Rickey-Lynn could leave his watch cell, where he had been under twenty-four hour a day observation; the special anti-chamber to the execution room.

It is our hope that Mike Charlton be appointed by the court to take on the case until it is examined by the designated judge.

Justice and racism

What Kevin Doyle, the lawyer against the death penalty, delicately refers to as “prejudices of race and class” obviously adds to the financial factor resulting in a high disproportion between the number of Colored and White prisoners on Death Row.

In the State of Maryland which voted against a proposal for a death penalty moratorium on the 18th of March 18, 2003, the Black population represents 28% of the total population but 75% of prisoners executed.

On the 1st of March, 2003, 444 men and 6 women were to be counted on Death Row in Texas:

32% Whites
41.3% Blacks
25.6% Hispanics
1.1% Other

(in other words, 68% ‘Colored’)

The total population of the State of Texas is made up of:

52.4% Whites
11.5% Blacks
32% Hispanics
4.1% Other

(in other words, 47.6% ‘Colored’)

3 Mike Charlton was the lawyer for Odell Barnes Jr., the young Afro-American sentenced to death in 1991 in Huntsville, Texas for a crime for which he continued to claim his innocence to the end. In spite of world-wide protest, he was executed on the 1st of March, 2000 just days before his 32nd birthday. The French Association, “Lutte pour la justice, contre la peine de mort” (“Struggle for Justice, against the Death Penalty”) was formed in accordance with Odell Barnes’s personal request, to work alongside Texan associations against the death penalty.

Justice and injustice

All of the above leads not to questioning the principle of legal killing which is what the death penalty actually is, but rather to questioning the justice or injustice of such a sentence. People in the U.S.A. are beginning to speak out to denounce botched investigations and trials, not to mention those which are faked. For example, in Texas in 2003, there was a scandal over falsified DNA tests carried out by the Harris County criminal laboratory and another over tests for which the correct procedures were not followed such as in the laboratory in the County of Fort Worth. These incidents concern about one hundred cases.

Everyone recalls the remarkable action in 2003, taken by George Ryan, the Governor of Illinois when he declared a moratorium on executions and named an investigating commission which made 85 proposals for changing the procedure.

In the end, the Governor pardoned four prisoners and commuted 183 sentences because he was not convinced that the proposals would be applied to those cases.

Rickey-Lynn Lewis

The case: In September 1990, 3 or 4 people broke into the house of George Newman-Hilton in Tyler, Texas. During the attack, George Newman was killed, Connie Hilton raped and objects, including the victims' car, were stolen. Three days later, based on the statement made by a known drug dealer, the police stopped Rickey-Lynn Lewis. He was sentenced to death in 1994. The sentence was confirmed in a new hearing in 1997.

Incoherencies, injustices, gray areas in the proceedings: At the time of his arrest, and contrary to his rights by law, Rickey-Lynn Lewis was not granted access to a lawyer. He had several court-appointed lawyers, none of whom was well-prepared and who failed, therefore, to defend him effectively or with commitment. In September 1990 and May 1994, blood samples were taken illegally without the judge's order and without Rickey-Lynn's consent. It is impossible to establish what happened to those samples. These blood samples were unable to determine without any possible doubt that it was Rickey-Lynn's blood that was found at the home of the victims.

Experts established that given the angle from which the shot that killed George Newman was taken, the murderer had to have been at least 5 feet 8 inches tall. Rickey-Lynn is only 5 feet 3 inches tall. During the first trial in 1994, Connie Newman could not give any description at all of her assailants. The details given during the trial in 1997 do not match Rickey-Lynn's height, hairstyle, face shape or first name. In order to compile the file of accusations, the police relied on the statements of two well-known drug dealers. They both got immunity in exchange for their testimonies. One of them, however, failed to pass the lie detection test. The testimonies of the two witnesses were modified in order to accuse Rickey-Lynn. The prosecutor intimidated a further witness.

No fingerprints, hair or saliva found at the scene of the crime belonged to Rickey-Lynn.

Based on irrefutable principles, both constitutional and biblical, the American justice system is far from even questioning the use of the death penalty as a punishment for crime.

Likewise, it does not seem able to make any fundamental changes to a system that is biased by financial, social and racial discrimination.

The denial of this discrimination and the legality attached to it do not stand up to scrutiny. Neither does the flagrant contrast between what is said and shown to the public bear a resemblance to the hidden, terrifying reality.

Conditions of imprisonment

Outward appearances:

- Visitors are greeted politely at the reception desk. A smile, positive comments about the weather, the region and your stay all tend to create a peaceful, problem-free relationship. The tone is always sugary even when refusing a request.
- The areas you are allowed to visit are all very clean and bright. They give the impression of offering total transparency. You could imagine yourself to be in a well-maintained school, in a simple, ordinary gathering place.
- The obvious preoccupation with showing the quality of the institution: the awards displayed, the lists posting staff promotions, and the announcements concerning their family and professional life (births, appointments to office...)

- The moral and ethical values of the institution displayed by the various maxims and slogans which appear in huge lettering at the entrance and on the walls of the corridors and the locked passageways. Nothing is left out: “Professionalism, Respect, Integrity, Dignity, Excellence”. The first letter of each of these forms the word PRIDE.
- Repeated reminders of the legality of the regulations posted on the walls of the reception area for everyone to read. For example, Mrs C. highlighted over the phone that there was no way they could force Rickey to see us.
- The openness and transparency of the prison as ‘proven’ by the “Media Days” held every Wednesday. (Rickey made clear to us that none of the prisoners agree to talk to the reporters because they no longer trust them.)

Behind the scenes:

- The extreme difficulty in being granted a ‘special’ visit. Such visits are entirely ‘normal’ in that they are provided for by the regulations. They are, however, often refused for a variety of hardly credible reasons. No discussion is allowed.
- Absolute arbitrariness: For example, the decision was announced at the last moment (just when we arrived), to cancel the Tuesday morning photograph session. The only information provided was that it “may be forever”.
- The obligation Rickey was under to eat all the food bought for him by his visitors, only during their visit. He was not allowed to take anything back to his cell. He could not, therefore, improve on the very ordinary, and according to him, not sufficient food. This restriction goes totally against the right given to visitors to deposit 20\$ per visit in the name of a prisoner. (Note that the frozen sandwiches had to defrost at room temperature, thus in only a few hours.)
- What Rickey told us about the cost of food for the prisoners being above the price in the vending machines available to visitors. For example, the drink ‘Dr Pepper’ costs them 75 cents instead of 50 cents for visitors. What he said about the stinginess with which basic necessities were provided or sold to prisoners.
- What he told us:
 - About being locked up in solitary confinement, about his so-called hour’s walk, always taken alone, always taken inside the day room.
 - About the implacable functioning of a system which he could not grasp at all: the mail arrives and leaves entirely at the whim of the prison.

Another example: We tried for ages, without success, to get postage stamps to a prisoner we had been writing to for several years in a prison in Florida. After each attempt we learned another rule, for example:

- 1° Children must not add decorative stickers to the accompanying letter.
 - 2° No more than 20 stamps may be sent at any one time.
-

What he told us about the numerous details of the rules which led to his being deprived of television but which allowed him a radio, which did not allow posters or photos to be hung in the cell (Rickey added, laughing, “That must be to stop us escaping by digging a hole in the wall!”)

What he told us about the stinginess that stopped all artistic expression (paint was only provided in ridiculously small quantities), etc.

- The horror of seeing what is not normally visible from the visitor's chair: the huge, golden letters DR on the prisoner's trouser leg, on the immaculate piece of clothing worn by a man condemned to a death decided upon and carried out by other men.

Impressions and reflections

The general impression one gets is that of an enormous, but very subtle and cautiously laid out perversion which consists of subjecting men to a slow death, to continual punishment. These men, referred to as *offenders*, are condemned to die at an undetermined time yet are regulated by pointless red tape, enforced in all good conscience, in order to give them every chance.

At Polunsky-Unit, we felt we were in a paradigm of perversion:

- a place where Goodness, expressed, desired, and thought about, leads to death.
- a place where, in total contradiction to the Christian message, death is the only solution to man's weakness.
- a place where imitation and "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" are always applied and lead to criminal replication.
- a place where our own internal monsters, which we so easily recognize in others - the weak, the poor, the mad - are penned in before being killed according to the rules, and thus affording us peace of mind.

This perversion is aided by the breaking up of time, space and the jobs carried out by the staff:

- Time is broken up into carefully organized segments of activity within the prison. The succession of day and night, biological rhythms, the alternation between sleep and wakefulness are destroyed by the implacable running through of activities particular to prison life.

When one understands the importance that the organization of time and space play in mental health and the destructive effects of their disorganization, one is set to wondering how every one of those *men-inmates*, does not go crazy.

Or, as we did, one can think about the strength of character and inner force that protect them from madness.

Studying the timetable is, in this regard, edifying. We let you be the judge:

3:00 a.m. breakfast	4:00 p.m. dinner
5:00 a.m. collection of trays and outgoing mail	5:30 p.m. collection of dinner trays
6:00 a.m. guards change shift	7:00 p.m. cleaning of corridors
Between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m. day room (1 hr.)	8:30 p.m. distribution of incoming mail
10:00 a.m. lunch	6:30 p.m. roll call
11:00 a.m. collection of lunch trays	10:00 p.m. guards change shift another roll call
12:00 a.m. shower (20 min. to 1 hr.)	11:30 p.m. cleaning of corridors requests (e.g. list of visitors)
1:30 p.m. roll call	Between midnight and 3:00 a.m. Lining up to get change of clothes

2:00 p.m. guards change shift and another roll call	3:00 a.m. breakfast.... etc.
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- Dividing up of space: You go from the reception area into the first locked passageway then into the first corridor, then into another locked passageway. At each point, you are met by a member of staff in charge of one simple, precise task: check your badge, tell you the way to follow, give you the number of the stall in front of the cage of the prisoner to be visited.
- This relay system is calmly carried out by staff determined to fulfill their job well. We remind you that the executions themselves, twelve between January and the end of March 2003, take place elsewhere at Walls-Unit, Huntsville.
- We can see that this dividing up of space serves to protect the men and women whose job it is to prepare, organize and carry out homicide. It allows them to avoid feeling guilty... and perhaps from going mad themselves. A collective madness, carefully covered up by the Law exists, in its place.

This collective protection applies also to the legal murder for which there is no identifiable author, no designated person responsible, within a system which carefully organizes the disassociation of people, acts and places.

But, at what price? At the cost of losing our sense of humanity which consists precisely in personal contact and coming together in groups which gives meaning to what we all do, say and think.

In etymological terms, we can refer to something as being 'diabolical' if it separates as opposed to being 'symbolic' and bringing together, giving meaning.

'Diabolical' is that which justifies such a separation whilst mixing together the victim, his loved ones along with their great suffering, their enormous sorrow and their legitimate anger which calls for punishment, along with the institution entrusted with imparting Justice by making distinctions without separating, by protecting the weak against the strong, by treating the poor as they do the rich, by weighing the guilt and its sanction.

Yes, we felt dragged into this 'diabolical' system just like those people, employed to carry out their tasks as best they can so as to ensure their own and their family's subsistence, to have a job, to keep it and to maintain if not improve their own material position.

Yes, Rickey-Lynn Lewis was right when he said, "I do not hold it against those who work here because *they know not what they do.*" And adding, "It is a very tiring and difficult job."

That is why these words are not meant to be interpreted as a judgment, and even less as a criticism.

They are an appeal.

An appeal to our conscience to take up, spread, and carry this cause to the ears which remain closed, to those who make the laws, who decide and who judge their brothers, from their carefully protected, well-established positions....

Houston and Montpellier

April to December 2003

POSTFACE I

Rickey-Lynn Lewis is forty years old. He is imprisoned on Death Row in Polunsky-Unit, north of Houston, Texas. He is sentenced to die by legalized murder in the first degree.

Along with Danièle and René who visited him four times and with Rickey-Lynn who is present with us, we offer the following prayer to God: *Lord, before the body of Your Son who was murdered, before the bodies of all those who humanity murders, take pity on us, show us your mercy.*

It was in the evening, after the Last Supper: “Serve yourselves. Eat. Drink...”

After the song of Grace of the Eucharist, Jesus and his companions left for the olive garden (Mc 14.26). There, alone in the night, Jesus fulfilled his Father’s immense desire for life and love. There, Jesus renounced his own life and entered into Life. There, men met together until the middle of the afternoon to organize that murder. Understanding this gift of body and blood, allows us to see the separation of body and blood as death brought about by others, as organized violence.

Rickey-Lynn Lewis was sentenced in 1990 for the rape of a woman and the murder of her friend. Their blood cries out before us, before the face of God. We do not want to stifle that cry. Neither does Rickey-Lynn. That day, God heard the cry of blood spilt like that of Abel. Yes, God recognized that from the beginning, man is capable of killing his brother. Rickey-Lynn is sentenced to death by men who think they are protecting society and delivering justice. God gave Cain a second chance and protected him. We have all been born of that.

Since 1994, Rickey-Lynn has been on Death Row. Since that time, the justice system of the State of Texas has controlled every minute detail of his life: 23 hours out of 24 spent every day in solitary confinement; one hour walking a circuit devised so he can’t meet anyone else.

April 1st, 2003, he received the decision that his appeal for a reprieve had been refused. A short, standard letter typed out conscientiously by a secretary. Did she realise what she was typing? Rickey-Lynn, before the very eyes of Danièle and René became disembodied and became his soul. Was this perverse cruelty or a sign offered by humanity? Let the dead bury their dead!

July 26, 2003, he received a stay of execution. A new date was to be set.

In 1996, Rickey-Lynn was baptised in the death and the life of Jesus. Before that moment, he had not yet been born. He wanted to kill his father who beat up everyone in the family and who made him steal and fight. He only had his mother’s love right up to the end and she died of exhaustion in 2002. From then on, Rickey-Lynn delved into his own mind and soul giving all the goodness he possessed to his guards. He doesn’t want to hurt anyone any more. He smiles, he loves – he has joined life.

Those who organise everything for the best are going to do their best to murder Rickey-Lynn’s body. Rickey-Lynn’s soul is born of the love of a mother, of a few rare and intense visits, of distancing himself from his father and of the grace of God, finally embraced there, on Death Row. His legal murders *know not what they do* and the administration of death will bury yet another corpse.

The separation of body and blood - that is to say, violent death at the hand of another – divides humanity in two. And this separation divides each of us deep within ourselves: the awful or hidden choice that rankles until our last breath. Consider the logical and technological organisation of those who have chosen to administer death. Bombs are surgical or atomic. The electric chair, the acme of modern technology, denounced as being retrograde and therefore barbaric, has been eliminated. They recruit better nurses who receive compensation for forgiving the three lethal injections. I’ve just returned from Auschwitz Birkenau with hope to share: a memorial to peace. Engineers made the best plans for gas chambers, chemists used zyclun B to kill, Doctor Mengele selected from among the new arrivals to purify mankind. We have all seen the film on Arte showing the death camps in Cambodia, the prisons in Cayenne. The list is long and not yet finished.

And without going to extremes, let's look at all the negative, life-destroying relationships humans carry on weaving in which the other doesn't exist, in which one person manipulates the other, in which one person controls the other ... in short, when humans become only something to throw away one day or other. That is what leads to death day after day.

Jesus was judged iniquitously, was sentenced and executed! That is why his body and his blood were separated because his death, as ours, is not only the symmetry of birth, but also the recognition of our mortality. Jesus died when in full vigour, in the middle of a mission that they wanted to stop. A whole amassing of power organised his murder. His death was intentional, prepared and carried out with great care by other men. His death is at the heart of our violent lives!

Thus the paradox of the Incarnation: The Saviour of the world took upon himself the violence of the world to give us Life. The Passion of Jesus unravels the fundamental enigma of human life: mankind is divided, torn into two parts; those who take away life from others and those who give their lives for others. This tear traverses each of us through and through. Evil and death are not only for others. This reality reveals how we are torn and invites us to choose true life. Love one another as Jesus loved us, the only choice possible for life. Jesus is exactly where the tear of life is. His life was torn from him on the cross by that organised part of mankind which carries out violent acts but on Holy Thursday he had already given his life in abundance so that we should have life. Body GIVEN in nourishment, blood SPILT for our lives! The violence of those who come together to separate the body and the blood, is revealed and denounced by the one who gives his body and his blood. After the Last Supper, Jesus goes forward alone to the top of Mont Olive after crossing the ravine of Cedron, the ravine of anguish which leads to a violent death. There, the Son recognises the Father! (Mc 14, 32-42). All the energy of the will of the Father goes towards true life, that life which frees itself from the spiral of life taken at the cost of life given. At the top of the hill, violent death is inverted into life, stronger through its mildness than death, than all death. Only a deliberate refusal of love without end can now lead to death.

That is why Rickey-Lynn, whose life men contrive to remove as they take the place of God - the sole master of life and who has never condemned anyone to death, not even Cain! - could be born again to life, on Death Row. It is thanks to this Jesus, condemned to death, to a violent death, intended by man - that love came forever into our world to save it from within. To save it from violence, hatred, the amassing of power that acts as if it were God. To save it from the fascination with death delivered to others in exchange for a life which is no longer life! To save it from those dead who bury the dead because *they know not what they do*.

Thus freed of death delivered to others in thousands of ways, we can celebrate God because he is the God of Life, of true life! We can understand the ancient liturgical prayer before communion: "Body and blood separated mean death, reunited in this cup, they signify the bringing together of the body and the blood of Christ come back to life, who multiplies his affection for us." Let's celebrate God for his victory over death which releases us from all the forces of death and transforms us into workers of life and of peace.

Brother Gilles DANROC O.P.

POSTFACE II

Update for the members of the Association and all those who support Rickey Lynn LEWIS.

SUMMARY OCTOBRE 2005

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Rickey Lynn LEWIS

1- The case

In September 1990, 3 or 4 people broke into the home of George Newman in Tyler, Texas. During the attack, George Newman was killed, his partner Connie Hilton raped, and the victims' car stolen. Three days later, on the strength of statements made by a drug dealer, the police arrested Rickey Lynn Lewis. He was sentenced to death in 1994; his sentence was upheld in a new hearing in 1997.

2- The inconsistencies, injustices and grey areas of the procedure

During his arrest, Rickey Lynn did not benefit from the help of a lawyer as stipulated by the law. His court appointed lawyers changed several times and being badly prepared, never defended him fully or effectively. Experts established that according to the angle from which the fatal bullet which killed George Newman was shot, the murder had to be at least 5 ft. 8 in. tall. Rickey Lynn is only 5 ft. 2 in. The details given in the course of the 1997 trial do not match Rickey in terms of height, hair style, face shape, first name, etc.

The court appointed lawyers could not counter the Texas judiciary machine.

3- Action taken

In May 2002, the French Association "Struggle for Justice" (LPJ Languedoc-Roussillon), along with the help of a group of associations and the band "Têtes Raides", organised a week of action and discussions about the Death Penalty in Montpellier, France, culminating in a big concert featuring a dozen performers. The profits from the week financed the counter investigation carried out by Lisa Milstein into Rickey Lynn's mental handicap.

Mike Charlton, one of Odell Barns's lawyers, was hired by the Association to try to save Rickey Lynn Lewis by referring to the Supreme Court decree (2002) which forbids the execution of the mentally handicapped. His intervention resulted in obtaining a stay of execution just a few days before August 7th, 2003, the date set for his execution by lethal injection.

The Association also organises discussions throughout the year about the Death Penalty and Rickey Lynn's case, a 43 year old, poor, black mentally handicapped man – locked on Death Row, Texas, for a crime he did not commit.

It is possible for you to help Rickey Lynn by writing to him, by buying and encouraging others to buy this book of which the profits go to improving his life in prison and to meet the costs of his defence.

4- Latest new

The file establishing his mental handicap is solid. There is no lack of evidence: the investigation undertaken by Lisa Milstein into his childhood spent in specialised institutions, the results of his IQ tests and witness reports.

Nevertheless, on February 15th, 2005, Tyler Law Court determined that Rickey Lynn Lewis is, admittedly, handicapped but not enough to merit the commutation of his sentence to life imprisonment.

The prosecution expert evaluated his IQ at 79 (as opposed to 59 by the defence expert). Nine more points than the threshold of 70 set by Court Supreme decree.

The appeal before the Court of Austin, capital of the state of Texas, prepared by our lawyer, Mike Charlton, was rejected. However, we have just learned that the Fifth Circuit Court has accepted our request (April 15th, 2005). So, all is not lost and we are preparing to continue our action.

More now than ever, Rickey Lynn Lewis needs the support of the chain of human solidarity especially because last August, he received a new execution date set for September 7th, 2005 which was immediately cancelled by a Federal Court judge. One can only imagine that political motives determined the decision taken by the local judge.

The hot and cold winds of the perverse judicial system continue to blow!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	2
Frontice	3
Chapter I Before the Visit	4
Background (4)	
Chapter II Day One	7
The First Hour (10) – The Second Hour (13) - The Third Hour (14)	
The Fourth Hour (14)	
Chapter III Day Two	18
The First Hour (19) - The Second Hour (21) - The Third Hour (24)	
The Fourth Hour (25) – Return to Houston (29)	
Chapter IV After the Visit	32
Chapter V Back to France	36
Appendix I Some letters written by Rickey-Lynn Lewis.....	39
Appendix II – Background information, impressions, reflections	48
Some background information (48) – Constitutional and legal grounds (48)	
Religious and moral arguments (50) - Application of the death penalty (50)	
Justice and money (51) Justice and racism (52) – Justice and injustice (52)	
Prison conditions (53) – Outward appearances (53) – Behind the scenes (54)	
Impressions and reflections	55
Post-face I	57
Post-face II	59
References	61