

## *Dear members of the human race!*

This is a newsletter to each one of you who possesses a living heart and a living soul, from one of your fellow comrades. I just came back home to Denmark from Florida. In Florida I visited a friend. His name is Lancelot Armstrong. He comes from the beautiful island of Jamaica. I have communicated with him since February 1999, and we became jolly good friends through our letters. Lancelot is sentenced to die.

He has been on death row for about ten years now. Fighting for a new trial, trying to get help from the outside. I visited him for three days, starting on Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> of September to Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2000, in U.C.I. Raiford (Union "Correctional" Institution, what a cynical name). These events did move me deeply and that is, why I want to tell you about it. On the first day I had to fight my tears, being confronted with the harsh reality of the whole idea of capital punishment. First I was led through five different steelgates until I reached my destination: death row. There the officer in charge locked me up in one of those tiny small interview rooms, where I had to wait for Lance. The whole procedure and environment left a cold and heavy impression on me. My neckhair stood up electrified when I realized: This is the place, where people are held in isolation for years and decades, before they are getting killed. Cold, calculated murder. Welcome to the machine. Steel, concrete and security glass.

The moment, Lancelot stepped into the room, all my fears and nervousness vanished. After the officer took away the handcuffs from Lance, we embraced each other: "What's up brother, how' you doin'?" "Doin' just fine, brother, you look good, too." We sat at the table that's filling the entire room and it is as if we always knew each other, as if we grew up together....

Visitation time is from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM and we don't know how all the time went so quickly. We embrace each other again to say good bye: "See ya tomorrow, bro."

The next two days we celebrated in the "canteen" together with some other inmates and their visitors. Parents, bretheren, friends and children, and the prisoners, "innocents", "murderers" and "rapists", we all have a light in our eyes like kids on Christmas. In one end of the room a couple is kissing like they are on honeymoon, from somewhere else laughter is floating through the air. We can forget for a few hours where we are. Lance is teaching me how to play draughts, and he is winning every game. "You wait and see", I say, "when I come back next time, I won't give you a chance". We also play Dominoes. Others walk on by, stop at our table, we talk. We talk about our families, drink softdrinks, crack jokes and heat up our meals in the microwave oven. Lance tells me his story, how he happened to be on death row. We make plans about how to get him out again. This occupied all our time over these days. Some of you may say: visitation time from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, that's quite long. – It is not. It is way too short. On Sunday, half an hour before visitation ends, the atmosphere in the canteen becomes a little nervous. Couples move closer together, every moment, every eye contact gains unmeasurable importance. I feel a dull pressure around my eyes and a bitter taste in my mouth. We don't know, when we'll meet again. Lance's voice sounds pressurized, his eyes tell me a deep sorrow, but also hope and appreciation over my visit. We pray together. Then he is reading Psalm 27, I recite the verses 12-13 for you: "Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

End of visitation. A last embrace. Another one. It is an uncertain good bye. A woman is crying. The faces of the people around me tell helplessness and despair. On my way out, along the wirefences and the steelgates, my vision becomes weary. Just let me get out of here! I don't want to start crying here. Later in the car, on the way back to the hotel, the pain runs through my eyes. Hannah, a faithful woman from Denmark who moved here with her two beautiful daughters to marry a man on

death row, takes me to a church service. I still cry. Later I talk to more women who visited their friends on death row. That helped clear my head.

A man (his name is James Floyd, Hannah's husband) has spent 20 years on death row. He was 17 years old, when he got in. His story started when he just wanted to get a sixpack of beer from the gas station. On the way he found a cheque book lying in a waste bin. He took it out and tried to withdraw some money from the next bank. It worked out just fine. When he wanted to do it next time again, he got arrested by the police. The cheque book belonged to an old lady, who was murdered in her own home on the other side of the city. There are no traces of that young man to or from the house. He said he has never been there. There is no evidence that could lead to the conclusion that he could have been somehow guilty. Nil. Zero (0). He could not pay an attorney and was the only black person at the trial. Neighbors of the victim told the police, they saw a car approaching the house and two white men entering the house. Then they heard some noise that sounded like a fight from the house, then the two guys ran back to the car and hit the road. Nothing of this was investigated by the police and no one mentioned it at court. He was seventeen years old, a teenager, and now he will be soon FORTY YEARS OLD!

There are also others on death row. They killed other people, raped and robbed. It gets always very emotional and contradictory to talk about and be confronted with such stories, but still most of these people, at least all I know and ever heard of, have one thing in common: Since they were born, they had to exist and survive in a hell of abuse, drugs and violence. None of them have ever experienced how it feels to be loved, what it means to be accepted and what it means to forgive and feel secure. Some only learned how to read and write in jail, many become deeply religious. Most of them survive on the illusion of "somehow" getting out of there. Usually they get killed before.

Currently there are more than 3500 death row inmates in the USA. There are five states worldwide, that execute juvenile offenders. The USA is on that list. Even mentally disturbed people sit on America's death rows. Some really weird politicians even try to make it possible to sentence kids aged twelve (12!) years old to death.

My friend Lance was born in the beginning of the 60's and lost his youth in the Jamaica of the 70's. The heart of the caribbean region was torn apart in a brutal and bloody powerstruggle, two political parties fighting for leadership of the country. Additional to his sad circumstances, many people thought Lance stupid, because he couldn't learn how to read and write and was later diagnosed with dyslexia. How he learned reading was later in prison, and the only book he could read in the beginning, was the Holy Bible. Lance witnessed many cruel killings. His biological father deserted him before he was even born. His stepfather reigned with a leather belt and hit on every moving thing when he was drunk. And drunk he was often. Lancelot's mother emigrated at the end of the 70's into the USA, lance followed her in 1983. Because of his many skills in practical working, Lance built up his own little construction and maintenance company which was financially quite successful. One evening he got a call from his ex-girlfriend (Kay Ellen), to say he should pick her up from work because her car was at the garage. Kay had previously given birth to his twin daughters, so he was supporting her now and then. She herself was manger of a chicken snack bar. When Lance went to pick her up, one of his employees (Wayne Coleman) was driving him. He was most likely under the influence of several drugs. When they arrived at the snackbar, Wayne said: "Let's rob that bitch!" and drew his pistol. Lance protested and tried to hinder him, Wayne just hit him hard on the head with the shaft of his gun causing him to bleed. While Lance was out cold, a police patrol arrived. The two police men drew their guns and ordered Lance to step out of the car. He followed their orders. He told them, there's a guy robbing the store. They told him to shut up and searched him and the car for weapons, without finding any. Then Wayne came out of the bar, shooting immediately at the officers, one fell down dead, the other one hid and shot back.

When Lancelot realized that it could be fatal for him to be caught as a Jamaican next to a dead white cop (he feared he would be killed by the police for racial reasons), he simply stood in shock and tried to escape from it all. So he jumped in his car, likewise Wayne, and off they went. Both got caught the next day. To shortly sum up the trial: The state attorney blackmailed the main witnesses to force them to give false statements, and the jury got manipulated in different ways. The result: Wayne got 75 years in prison and Lancelot became a convicted cop killer, ending up on death row. I do not make these things up. There exists 34 boxes of documents of legal evidence which can prove all these things and that Lance was totally wrongly convicted!! He has been on death row now for over ten years. And an appeal is pending. Of course, he got a state appointed defence lawyer, but these lawyers are bound by certain restrictions a private lawyer would not be subjected to. To picture it clearly: The state, which sentences a person to death, is also appointing a lawyer for that person. But this very state is regulating and restricting that very appointed lawyer in his/her work so much, that it becomes literally impossible for the lawyer to change a single part of the sentence. *These real circumstances let one come to the conclusion that "justice" and the "legal system" of the USA have as much in common as "virginity" and a "whore": Nothing!*

One of the many things Lance and I are currently fighting for, is to pay the lawyers of his choice, which are said to be good. But they won't raise an eyebrow or even start working on his case unless they receive a payment of USD 10.000 in advance. That is only to get them start and research and represent Lancelot in a possible new trial. Then they have to receive another USD 15.000,- and Lance will walk free. That totals 25.000,- USD for a human being's life. It has never been so cheap to buy a life.

So what more do I need to say to illustrate the desperate situation we're in? I am calling out to you for help for my brother Lance from the deepest depths of my soul. We need only a little help from each one of you. If all who read this would contribute, his life could be purchased. On September 2000 we had approximately USD 700 on Lancelot's defense account. Now in February 2001, we have only approximately USD 200. Due to civil lawsuits he had to file and pay in order to fight the strategy called "dehumanizing" which is being carried out from the prison officials against the inmates and resulting in cruel attacks on the most basic rights of the prisoners.

Here is some practical information you need to save a human life:

(her var bankforbindelser til Lance, postadresser og email kontakt til mig og til Florida death row advocacy group)

Any donations are welcome. Just look at his picture and listen to your heart. I wish you the best for your life. May you or one of your beloved ones never taste such bitterness and horror.

**Lancelot Armstrong must walk free.**