

The Final Chapters

Chapter 1

In time we found out that Jerry's scheduled parole hearing would be March 2014 just a month away as I write, but that is irrelevant now because he died a week ago. So let us go back three years. Jerry was still at the Davis Correctional Facility run by Corrections Corporation America. Three years is a long time to write about so I'll concentrate on the significant events that stand out during that time.

For the most part he stayed in his cell where he at least felt he stood a chance of avoiding any set up disciplinary cases. In fact he never left its confines for over a year. There was no point in his requesting a special visit as neither of us felt it was worth the travelling and expense on my part when all we'd be able to do is speak via a telephone and see each other on a video screen so we carried on as usual writing to each other on a daily basis. The half hour current affairs programme I'd made with Eifion and Iwan created few ripples of interest when it was aired. Really they were hoping he'd have been set free. They'd been ready to film our emotionally charged meeting on the day of his release, but when his final sentence was commuted to 13 years all of that was laid to rest. Neither Jerry nor I would have cared for all that fuss. The only reason I agreed to the filming was because I thought it could make a positive difference for him in some way? Maybe it did? We'll never know.

In April 2012 I began receiving letters from Jerry telling me about a serious situation he'd witnessed from the window of his cell door when a prisoner named Bob Hughes took over his unit. At this point, I'll let Jerry speak.

“Sharon, do you remember how I've been going on about how gungho this latest warden is and how he's out to put us all on permanent lock down. As if we are not already locked down. What a joke. Plus how Barlow and gang are turned loose to run out of control, gassing and macing prisoners, locking them up etc. And how recently the Warden and Barlow took jobs from max pet inmates and gave them to medium pet inmates. By all DOC policies at no time are maximum and medium security prisoners supposed to be in contact. Anyway, yesterday, March 27, Bob Hughes took one guard at knife point and had him handcuffed behind his back. Hughes had escaped from his handcuffs as another guard, Johnson, was escorting him to Grizzle's office. I gather he'd been called out to the office to make a phone call and that's when he pulled the knife on them, took over the show and did the ordering. Everything I've pointed out to you about this place is true. So much for their so called security. All of this took place in front of my cell just feet away. Hughes had a 10-12 inch knife to the guard's throat. I look over and see guard Johnson handcuffed behind his back standing at the case manager's office door which was wide open. Hughes is standing right at the pod's front door. Came to find out that he told Grizzle to go get Barlow. Barlow and two others step onto the pod and Hughes tells them to sit on their asses. All three sit down, and I could see how scared they all were, especially Barlow. Hughes is talking shit to them, telling Barlow what a no good shit he is, how Barlow's surrounded him with no good protective custody inmates; goes out of his way to help child molesters yet will do nothing for a convict. More or less the same stuff I've alleged many times. Now there's all kinds of guards, associate wardens, Warden and Grizzle on the other side of the pod door. The whole wall is window and glass from waist high to ceiling. I can see all of them and I see Bob Hughes telling a guard to get the fuck away because he's videoing everything. I know exactly what his intentions were because I've been there, done that or have witnessed several incidents of this nature. He was holding hostages for bargaining in order to get the attention of the media and politicians, hoping they'd come here so he could tell them what's on his mind, what these maggots are doing. So Hughes has a knife to the throat of a guard, he's got Johnson in Grizzle's office door standing there like he was told to do and he's got the security major

or newest associate warden along with Barlow and another guard sitting on their asses right in front of the pod door, all of them scared shitless. Now none of these hostages were hurt and Bob was trying to get the attention of the media, Governor etc. All of a sudden, this one idiot, the SM or newest AW jumps up to try to take the knife from Bob Hughes. Hughes is about 6ft tall weighing around 310 pounds. He outweighs all of them man for man. Rumour is this new guy's job was at stake because he'd just transferred to Davis after that so called prison gang riot a few months ago here in Oklahoma. That prison was also run by CCA. He can't have been thinking about the knife held at the guard's throat or he'd not have done what he did placing a fellow officer's life on the line. His thoughts must have been on his own future or maybe it was just his ego? Lucky for the guard, Hughes let's him go. The SM or AW grabs at Hughes and tries to hold him but Hughes breaks away stabbing him in the lower side as he does so while pulling him with him towards the office. Johnson is still standing there as he'd been told but instead of running away from the office he runs right into it. Hughes is also running for the office pulling his captive with him. At this point all Hughes is thinking of is to keep a hostage to have some dealing power, get the media's attention and start an investigation. Once Hughes reaches the office he tries to kick the door shut so they can't get him, but at this point he's rushed by 10-20 guards and of course once in the office, I couldn't see what occurred. I do know they started using the mace.

Now I'd stood in my cell door and observed and heard every bit of this incident except for the beginning when Hughes first took the two guards hostage and told Grizzle to go get Barlow. I saw them all pile into that office and heard the commotion. The Warden was shouting and swearing at everyone to get off the pod. Nobody took any notice; it was a free for all. The stabbing should never have happened if they'd handled it properly. What I'm pointing out here is that we've had three different wardens at this prison and three different unit managers out here on max. Many guards have been made to quit for bringing in contraband while nurses have been exposed for immoral behavior and the list goes on. These private prisons are operated by untrained, unqualified security people.”

So much mace was used that it got into the air vents of the cells on Jerry's pod. The mace affected his chest badly and left him with a debilitating eye infection. This was a serious incident but he knew it would be covered up, played down and wouldn't reach the media and he was right so he asked me to relay everything that happened in a letter to Governor Fallin and senators of Oklahoma. I felt I had to act fast so sent an email as well as a letter. As a result, Barlow, Jerry's unit manager was moved. He'd been the reason for his staying confined to his cell for so long. All the signs were there. It was the exact same situation he'd found himself in during his years in Texas. They'd already forced one misconduct on him just before his last parole hearing and now they were out to get him again before his next hearing. These were his feelings and I also believe it to be the case. Had Barlow been acting alone or had he been under orders? Again, we'll never know.

Once Barlow had left, Jerry felt it was safe to shower so for the first time in over a year he left his cell. Just two weeks later they got him, no doubt in retaliation for exposing the hostage incident. As he was returning from showering they accused him of disobeying an order to return to his cell. Total lies. His face was pushed down onto a desk before they manhandled him to lock up. On the way there a booted foot was smashed down onto one of the leg irons causing a wound which needed several stitches and his thigh was beaten so badly that months later it was still discoloured and numb. All this was done to try to make him retaliate. They even filmed it all in the hope of his fighting back, but they were disappointed. With all his will power Jerry stopped himself from doing anything. He wasn't going to play their game. They charged him with disobeying an order and the disciplinary papers were filed, but in the end they suspended the charges. My email to the Governor seemed to have worked. I eventually received a letter from administrator Greg Williams telling me that the video footage had been examined and it did not support any evidence of his having been beaten, that his misconduct was the result of his actions and not in retaliation for any information he

provided regarding offender Hughes. Now this really was a stupid thing to say because even the disciplinary report filed by the guard who'd attacked Jerry stated that he had struck the offender! So I wrote another letter to the Governor and sent the disciplinary papers as proof.

Fearful of more set ups Jerry stayed in his cell. At the end of October a new situation developed whereby if any prisoner wanted to leave his cell to shower or go to yard, they were forced to strip naked, squat and cough before being allowed to walk backwards out of their cells. Jerry knew there was a major shakedown due and as such he would be commanded to leave his cell and be subjected to this humiliation despite being level 4 with no active disciplinary case. Under such circumstances who knows what trick they'd pull on him so I wrote to the Governor begging her to intervene. From this point on things began to improve. His case manager, Ms Grizzle, the same woman who'd been caught up in the Hughes incident wrote a letter in support of his forthcoming parole and transfer papers were submitted for medium security. In March 2013, without any warning, they told him to pack his belongings because he was being moved to Oklahoma State Reformatory. After over 33 years at maximum security they'd given him an override to medium.

Chapter 2

On his arrival at OSR he was shocked to realize he wasn't as fit as he'd thought. His breathing was so bad that at first he could only walk short distances. The soles of his feet developed blisters and those that saw him remarked upon the pasty whiteness of his skin. At OSR they popped the cell doors early in the morning and apart from having to return at certain times for a head count, Jerry could spend all his time outdoors into the evening if he wished and visit with men he'd met and known in the system from decades past. He could shower every day, mail his own letters, feed the birds, pet the stray cats and walk in the sunshine. He saw the stars in the night sky for the first time in many years and felt very hopeful for the future believing he'd be allowed to work and place something positive in his prison records ready for his parole hearing. At first his unit manager and case manager encouraged him and promised he'd have a work placement as soon as possible. That his name would be added to the waiting list for the garment factory. If he could work there he'd be eligible for Ekstrand Credits and would take many more days off his time served each month. A huge boost to his moral.

Once I knew he'd transferred I made my arrangements to fly out. All I'd had to do to arrange a special visit was telephone his unit and they'd submitted the application straight away asking me to give them the dates and everything would be in place once I arrived. How simple! How easy! I flew out mid-April spending my first night in Oklahoma City with Pam and Helen, Jerry's sisters. I had my hire car and GPS for navigation. I left the following morning to drive to Hobart in Western Oklahoma crossing the Chisholm Trail on my way, one of the famous routes taken by the cowboys as they drove the Longhorn cattle from Texas to Kansas. I'd booked a room in a motel ready for the first of my two day visits the following day. As I neared Hobart the sky was black and later that afternoon the news warned of tornadoes in the locality. Helen phoned to make sure I was okay giving me strict instructions to pull the bed mattress into the bathroom and get into the bath with the mattress over me should a tornado hit the motel! I looked at the king size mattress and doubted I'd be able to move it.

I survived the storms and the next morning I set out for OSR or Granite as it's more commonly known. Granite is the second oldest prison in Oklahoma at over a hundred years. I drove through the deserted town of Lone Wolf and carried on the short distance until I pulled up right opposite the prison. Granite reminds me of an old Western fort except it's built of the local granite stone instead of wood, hence it's nickname. I was early as visiting didn't start until 8am. It was freezing with a heavy frost. I sat in my car for a while before leaving to wait in line with a few others, mostly women, outside the visiting control room. I'd not seen Jerry in the flesh since he'd been sent from OSP to Davis in August 2007. Our last visit via video link at Davis had been over two and a half years ago and here it was 2013. But no point in looking back, we must look forward and make the most of these visits. Our first contact visit in nearly six years!

I entered the visiting room after shake down and Jerry was already there. I could see him do a double take and knew he was slightly shocked. It wasn't possible to see each other properly at Davis as the image on the screen was so poor. Six years is a long time not to meet face to face. We'd both aged especially taking into account what we'd been through in our own individual ways having to deal with the forced physical separation, the prison games, the uncertainties and the very real dangers to his well being and our future hopes of his release. Neither of us is over demonstrative so as in the past, we embraced, kissed and sat down at a table to catch up with happenings. Because we've written every day for years we have a long running conversation so in a way it was just a case of me telling him of my journey and he filling me in with the last week or so since I'd not have received those letters before I left. The fastest time our letters can reach each other is 5 days. Mostly they range between 5 days and 8 and occasionally a lot more. That's when confusion can set in as letters overtake each other. But considering this and the obvious time delay, we've managed to build

a relationship that's as strong and enduring as any conventional marriage. Maybe more so because writing is such a focussed act. I'd recommend it to any couple who feel they don't know each other properly despite living together.

What a breath of fresh air those visits were. We could go to the vending machines together and choose what to eat. We sat side by side as he was at one corner of the table while I sat at the same corner. We played cards and best of all we stood at a window, all be it a barred window, and looked outside to the car park, the road, distant trees and the blue sky. We were at ground level and just feet away was freedom. It was special.

Our visits lasted six hours on both days. Jerry looked well all things considered. He weighed around 230 pounds so had lost some weight since his arrival at Granite. Being able to move around was making all the difference. The physical difficulties he'd faced had improved and he was now walking three miles a day following the permitted path round and around on the exercise yard. When it came to our final goodbye we held each other close, kissed and he walked to one side of the room with the other men while I stood at the opposite end waiting to be let out with the visitors. We looked at each other and waved. That would be the last time I saw him as I'd come to know him, but neither of us knew it then.

I left my motel around 3am to drive to the airport in Oklahoma City. My flight was due to leave around 8am and I had to be there in plenty of time. I switched on my GPS but it wanted a password, some kind of code? I looked at my rental agreement and found a code, keyed it in but nothing happened. Horror of horrors! I was miles away with no map and didn't even have much of a clue in which direction to drive. All I could do was set off and hope for the best. Almost two hours later I still didn't know if I was heading in the right direction and was resigned to missing my flight. Luckily I spotted several parked police cars as I drove through a place called Chickasha. A group of police officers stood next to them talking. I pulled up and asked for directions. One of them told me to keep driving until I hit the sign for the turn pike. My saving grace! A few miles later I joined it and was able to use the sign posts to find my way to Oklahoma City and the car rental returns at the airport.

The months slipped by. We talked about his release. Surely the parole board would agree to his parole when his two stage hearing began the following March and surely the Governor would agree and sign the certificate? But just in case the unthinkable happened and they denied him, he was on track to discharge anyway by 2015 so either way he didn't have many months left to serve. We were spending time thinking of what would happen on his release. We knew I had to stay in Wales. My work is here plus my mother isn't in the best of health and is dependant upon me more and more. It would be a case of my visiting Oklahoma as often as I could and then we'd take it from there, but we needed somewhere for Jerry to live. The answer came in a generous offer from Larry and Sandie, Jerry's brother and our sister-in-law who live in Enid, Oklahoma. They have their own home with a cellar that is habitable and so it was agreed that he could move in with them once he left prison. This meant such a lot to the both of us, especially Jerry. It lifted a huge weight off his already overburdened mind.

Nothing happened as far as his being able to work. They told him his name was on the waiting list for the garment factory but he watched as newcomers jumped ahead of him. His happiness at being moved to medium security was wearing thin when it became apparent no one would help him in this way. His health had been compromised many times through the years but especially during his time at Davis when he'd had to resort to two lengthy hunger strikes. He'd have flare ups that we put down to his gall bladder. He experienced intermittent stomach pains and vomiting. He sometimes had difficulty passing water, would get constipated and these symptoms were to appear more and more the longer he stayed at Granite. Reluctantly he put in for sick calls knowing full well he'd not

be examined, would be fobbed off with some medication or other and this is what happened. He told the doctor his symptoms. He was prescribed 15mgs of Meloxicam and 20mgs of Omeprazole. I looked them up on the Internet and saw that they were thyroid medication. He took them for 10 days and his symptoms got worse not better. I felt he shouldn't have been prescribed them anyway as it stated that both drugs should only be administered under strict medical supervision. No way would Jerry get that kind of attention at Granite.

Mid October, he put in a sick call hoping to be prescribed stronger pain killers. He'd been taking two 500mgs of Ibuprofene for his arthritis but the pain he was in now was keeping him awake at night. The doctor refused his request telling him if he wanted something stronger he should see the psyche doctor. The doctor stopped his Ibuprofene and prescribed 750mgs of methocarbamol, a muscle relaxant. Jerry wrote, "It pisses me off how they push medication and drugs on prisoners not even knowing what is wrong really. I've been here 7 months and have had no Physical and they've not done any blood tests. Chronic care here is a joke."

Just a week after his visit with the doctor something happened that shook Jerry to the core. I received his letter and my blood ran cold. They'd moved a prisoner in with him with an S.O.S. Gang warrant over him. This meant that orders were out that he should be "stabbed on sight". Jerry has never been a gang member but this situation he'd been placed in left him vulnerable on both sides. If he ignored the gang warrant and allowed the man to cell with him, he too would be a marked man. If he acted upon the warrant, his chances of getting out of prison would be destroyed. He got up from his bunk and walking out he told the guy to speak with the captain so he could move him somewhere else.

Jerry made for the exercise yard to gather his thoughts; if this new cellie had not moved by the time he'd returned he'd have no option but to make him move despite the consequences. The inmate's name was Shawn Smith and luckily for Jerry the situation was resolved for him when several gang members attacked Smith beating him about the face with weighted socks. He might also have been stabbed but we're not sure? They had to rush him to the infirmary. Smith had been housed in protective custody at Davis and as I said in a letter I sent to the Warden, "The fact he was attacked the same day he arrived at Granite shows the urgency." Jerry knows there were several empty cells they could have placed Smith into but they deliberately targeted his cell. At least that's how it looked to us.

Jerry spent more time in his cell, not just because he felt it was best to do so but because he didn't feel well. He'd decided there was no point in putting in any more sick calls. That he would have to endure the pain as best he could and keep on keeping on. Although I'd have loved to visit him, it was now becoming more important that I hold onto as much money as possible because we'd be needing it on his release. The minimum amount of money for me to visit is around fifteen hundred dollars or one thousand pounds which includes flight, hire car and motels. And there are very often other costs added to that. My plan had always been to fly out in April to attend his second stage parole hearing with Sandie. We felt it would be good if she would speak for him as he'd be staying at her home. Both Sandie and Larry have had problems with drugs in the past and have prior convictions but that was many years ago. They've both turned their lives around and Sandie is an advocate working alongside the ODOC to help offenders on their release from prison.

It was obvious to me that Jerry was ill, but neither of us knew what was wrong? I felt helpless. It was nearing Christmas. I'd had to take time off work in November. My mother was diagnosed with osteoporosis eight years ago and in that time she's fractured several vertebrae, cracked her ribs and broken her femur. Now an x-ray revealed she had three crushed vertebrae. For a while she couldn't move except in a wheelchair and I had to get up at night as well as tend to her during the day. Her mobility gradually improved but her pain did not and we were in a nightmare situation trying to get

pain control that didn't of itself make her ill. Christmas Eve arrived and I received a letter from Jerry. He was sick. He'd got someone to mail the letter for him and I was left in the dark. I tried calling the prison but no one would give me any information.

Two days before New Years Eve my granddaughter Kayleigh phoned me. Somehow she'd seen a message from Bindy, our friend and support in Australia via Facebook asking anyone who might know me to let me know that Jerry was in hospital. I'd been without my own computer for several months and used the library to email. Bindy and I had both signed up to the V.I.N.E. alert on the ODOC inmate locator. Ironically, this is a voluntary organisation that alerts victims of crime when any offender is moved from one facility to another or is released. I'd also had a V.I.N.E. alert but hadn't had a chance to check my emails.

I called the prison but still they'd give me no information. They said Jerry would have to sign a medical release form. There already was one in his prison records as he'd signed one years ago so I could receive his medical papers. Several days passed and I could make no headway. Out of the blue, I got an email from Sandie.. A Dr Nemri at the Lyndsey Municipal Hospital had telephoned her at Jerry's request so that he could inform her that Jerry had stage 4 cancer in his liver and lungs and had been given a year to live at most. His cancer was incurable but treatable. Jerry wanted Sandie to let me know.

Chapter 3

Once I'd recovered from the shock I phoned Bindy to give her this awful news. I spoke with Sandie, I called Helen and Pam. I told my family here in Wales along with Kay, Noel, Joanna and Jean, his very dear friends in England. I continued to write to him even though he wasn't allowed letters at the hospital. I sent them to Granite hoping he'd eventually get them. I called the hospital and spoke with Dr Nemri. He told me he'd sent Jerry that very day to another hospital for some scans, that his cancer was very advanced and now they were giving him less than six months.

Sandie had given Michael, Jerry's son, the news of his cancer. Michael had only seen his father once when he was four years old. They'd corresponded off and on and in recent years they'd re-established contact. Mike had split from his wife several years back and was in a steady relationship with Victoria. She was very keen that Jerry and Michael should be in touch so birthday cards and Christmas cards were exchanged along with letters and photos. Jerry's granddaughter Amber had recently given birth and Jerry was now a great grandfather to baby Abbie. I'd forwarded lots of photos that Amber had sent me and he was as pleased as punch to receive them.

The news of his father's illness hit Michael hard. All he wanted now was to visit him before it was too late. Sandie called the hospital to ask for a special visit. They were willing but she'd have to get permission from the DOC. Jerry spent 10 days at Lyndsey before being transferred to the Lexington Reception and Assessment Facility.

The special visit for Michael, Sandie, his brother Larry and Helen and Pam was denied on the grounds that they didn't pass the security background check. Michael in the mean time had got time off work and he and Victoria had driven hundreds of miles from their home in North Carolina never believing for a minute that the DOC would stop him from seeing his dying father. I can only imagine how dire the drive back to North Carolina must have been.

As soon as I knew Jerry was at Lexington I phoned and was put through to unit 8. I spoke with one of his case managers and he informed me that Jerry was fine, he was walking around. I didn't bother asking if I could speak with him as I knew the chances of that were very slim. All I could do was take them at their word and hold onto the fact that Jerry was eating; he was able to walk.

My mother was still very poorly. I was back and fore the doctors trying to get her pain medication sorted out so that she could at least eat and function. They had her on Co-dydramol, they tried Tramadol, then Morphine based pain patches. All this medication just made her so ill. I didn't know if I was coming or going. My desire to fly out to see Jerry was tempered by my knowing that I couldn't leave my mother in such a vulnerable state. They couldn't deny my visit as I was on his official visiting list.

I'd been calling the prison and had spoken with Tammy Hill the Health Administrator. She told me they were starting the ball rolling for Jerry to receive a medical parole. I checked the DOC website and read that a medical parole has firstly to be recommended by the facility physician, the facility warden sends it to the Executive Director, if he approves it, he sends it to the parole board, if they approve it, it's sent to the Governor for her signature. That's what it would need for his immediate release. I phoned the parole board. They told me there was no point in them asking for a medical parole as his scheduled parole was due in March. She said it takes months for a medical parole to be approved? In the mean time they moved Jerry from unit 8 to the medical unit at Lexington. Same facility but at least a medical unit sounded better than an ordinary prison unit.

I was desperate to speak with him and so I called the prison and spoke with his case manager Jeremiah Jones. I begged him to allow me a phone call. If he could arrange it, I would call at an

allotted time and as long as Jerry was there we could speak. He told me to call back on Tuesday as Monday was Martin Luther King Day, a public holiday. In the mean time, he'd clear it with McDougal, the unit manager. I called on Tuesday and he gave me an extension number and told me to phone back in 30 minutes, that Jerry would be there and we could speak for 15 minutes.

I made the call and he handed Jerry the phone. I had the speaker on amplify so my mother could listen. This would be the very first time she'd hear her son-in-laws voice. It didn't sound like Jerry at all. I was so taken aback. He sounded as weak as a kitten and very, very old. He apologised for not writing but he simply couldn't concentrate and felt too ill. He told me there was nothing he could do, that it was now up to me. He said he should be in a hospital. I asked him if he was eating. He said he tries to eat if he can get something suitable to eat. That he was supposed to have a special diet but that it hadn't yet been approved. I asked if he was in pain? He said he was taking medication and without it he would be in a lot of pain. I later found out he was on morphine. It was a struggle to understand him at times. I explained that mam could hear him and he told her he loved her. It was a heartbreaking call. I asked him if he felt I should visit? I was trying to get him to give me some idea of how ill he was, but really his voice and manner told me all I needed to know. He was worried about the cost of my flight but yes, he'd love to see me. My mind was paralysed. I couldn't believe the way he sounded. We ended the call and gave each other our love.

Within minutes of me putting the phone down I was calling the prison again. I spoke with unit manager McDougal and told him I wanted a special visit for the coming weekend. He asked me if I was an approved visitor and I told him I was. He said in that case I could visit but they could not get a special visit approved for that coming weekend. That I'd have to come the following week. I was to call back in a few days to make sure the visit was approved but he couldn't see any problem. The Saturday of the following weekend would be February 1st. I immediately began making my arrangements to fly out.

Chapter 4

I arrived in Oklahoma City early evening. It was Thursday and I'd arranged to stay at the airport hotel and collect my hire car the next day. I ruled out staying with Pam this time as I knew she wasn't well. I'd been in contact with Sandie and Helen and they knew my plans to drive to Norman on Friday. I'd searched for a motel nearest to Lexington and Norman seemed to be the best location. I'd given Sandie the motel's phone number and told her I'd be paying the prison a surprise visit. I wanted to speak with someone regarding the medical parole because I needed to know if it would interfere in any way with his scheduled hearing. I also wanted more information about Jerry's condition, where our visit would be, would he be well enough to sit in a visiting room? I'd given up trying to speak with Tammy Hill by phone as all I could get was her answer machine and that was too full to leave a message anyway.

I reached the motel mid morning but didn't check in, I simply noted where it was and continued on my way to the town of Lexington. Once I reached Lexington I still had to drive another six miles before I reached the prison. Indicating left I pulled onto the car park. I've come to recognise these prison layouts. Apart from OSP and OSR they all have a familiar look to them. I suppose it's because the former are behind walls while the others are surrounded by fencing. My eyes searched the car park for some kind of entrance. There was a van being unloaded so I walked towards it and the delivery man pointed to an open gate with steps leading down to the doors of the administration block. Within seconds I walked through two sets of glass doors into reception. The receptionist sat behind a tall desk, she was busy answering telephone calls. To my left was an office set behind glass and to my right was the shakedown area where everyone wishing to enter the prison confines must be searched first. I walked up to the desk and introduced myself. I asked to speak with a deputy warden regarding my husband an inmate at their facility. I explained that I'd come all the way from Britain and my request was urgent. As I spoke the office door opened and out walked a smartly dressed woman with shoulder length fair hair. The receptionist called to her whilst informing me that here was the deputy warden if I'd like to speak with her. I explained everything to her. She was obviously in a rush. She said, "We have two incidents we're dealing with at the moment but if you'd like to take a seat I'll have someone come speak with you as soon as possible." There were chairs set against a wall outside the office while the reception desk was immediately opposite. I sat down and waited.

The area was constantly busy. Two trustee inmates hovered around mopping the floor, helping with deliveries, sweeping, dusting. Neither was still for a second. Prison staff arrived and left via the security to my right. The receptionist's voice was constant, "Lex A and R" she replied as she answered the phone. The big news that day was the sudden closure of a nearby bridge that had left several staff members stranded after they'd crossed it during their lunch break. This meant them having to make a long detour via Norman just to return to the prison. Two hours passed and I was still waiting. The first receptionist who it seems had worked at Lex A&R for 29 years was finally able to take her break when her "relief" who'd been one of those caught up in the sudden bridge closure eventually returned. As the headset was handed over she was informed of my presence. I decided it was time to speak so I asked if it was usual for a visitor such as myself to be kept waiting so long. She said, "Oh yes, it takes them a long time to make sure they're releasing the right person." I explained that I wasn't there to collect anyone, that I wanted to speak with someone regarding my husband who was very ill. She made some phone calls and I continued to wait. Suddenly a young dark haired woman sat herself down by my side. She told me Jerry was at the hospital in Lyndsey. I asked her how that can be because when I'd checked the DOC website it showed that he was at Lexington. She said, "I'm sorry, but he's at the hospital." I asked her if his condition had deteriorated? She said it had and that they didn't expect him to last the weekend. She wondered if I knew where the hospital was? It was nearing 4pm and visiting would soon be over there, she informed me. The hospital was a fair distance away and she doubted they'd let me in to

see him if I arrived there late. I explained that I had a special visit in place for the following two days and asked her if she could find me the address of the hospital so I could programme it into my GPS. She found me the address and apologised for the long time it had taken them to speak with me. By then I'd been waiting four hours. I told her I'd return to the motel and decide what to do once I reached there. She expressed her concern for my troubles.

In the mean time Sandie had phoned Lexington at 9.30am same day to ask how Jerry was. I don't have a phone that works in America so the only way she could contact me would be by calling the motel or email. I'd bought a Tablet just before flying out and had already used it that morning to check if Jerry was still at Lexington.

Sandie had managed to speak with Tammy Hill who offered to take a medical release form to Jerry for his signature so that she'd be free to discuss his condition. She told Sandie to call back within the hour. Sandie called but Tammy Hill gave her the news that she'd found Jerry unconscious. She gave Sandie the impression he was still there at the prison. A few hours later Sandie called again and Tammy Hill told her I was at the facility and had been given the opportunity to see Jerry but had refused. Sandie replied, "Had that been the case, Sharon would not have refused." We don't know the exact time that day Jerry was taken to Lyndsey hospital? At 5.45pm case manager Corey White telephoned Sandie regarding arranging a special visit for Larry and Helen. The visit was approved within an hour. Sandie asked him why they couldn't have approved such a visit two weeks earlier when Jerry would have been at least well enough to speak and know who they were? There's no point in asking such questions really. There never is a satisfactory answer. They usually trundle out their greatest weapon that well used old chestnut, "Security". Every denial can be justified if they can place it under the heading of "Security".

I was completely unaware that Sandie had been speaking with Tammy Hill and during the four hours I was at the prison not one person asked me if I'd like to see Jerry. Obviously I'd have jumped at the chance. Who was the young woman who gave me the news that he was at Lyndsey and not at the prison? I didn't think to ask her name. Perhaps she was Tammy Hill?

An unusual thing happened the day before I left for Oklahoma. I had an email from Sandie letting me know that Mike Lorenz who works for probation and parole would be calling at their house to make sure their home offer to Jerry was legitimate. Sandie was excited because it sounded like the medical parole was making good progress. I phoned the parole board offices straight away to ask if the application had reached them but they knew nothing about it. The lady there told me there is no separate hearing for a medical parole, that it has to be slotted in to the monthly docket and there was nothing for Jerry in the docket for February? If this was the case, how could Mike Lorenz be paying such a call?

Sandie and Larry both know Mike Lorenz. He'd been Larry's case manager many years ago and had dealt with his release from prison. He told them, "This is the strangest thing I've ever seen. I have absolutely no paperwork for Jerry. All I got was a memo asking me to check out your place. I can see everything is fine so all I can think is that they are rushing through his release."

I left the prison and drove to the motel. When I reached there the guy on the front desk told me he'd had several messages from someone called Sandie. That I was to go straight to the hospital. I turned on my heels and made for my car. I said I'd be back later but I didn't know when. Truth is I had no intention of returning because I'd decided that if Jerry was now at Lyndsey, it would make sense for me to book into a motel in that area. I'd not paid a deposit so wouldn't lose any money. I threw my case in the car, keyed in the address for the GPS and set off. I actually drove straight past the hospital it was so small. Just a single story brick building set back from the main road. After a few miles I realised my mistake and pulled up. A Pick-up appeared on the small side road where I'd

stopped. I got out of my car and asked the driver if he could direct me to the hospital. He told me to follow him and when he reached it he'd flash his warning lights. I think if he'd not done so I'd have just kept driving past it because I'd been expecting a much larger place.

It was gone 5pm by the time I entered the building. The place looked deserted. The shutters had been pulled down on the receptionists desk. I waited a few minutes unsure what to do when suddenly I heard footsteps approaching and a set of double doors in a small corridor opened revealing a woman who was obviously on her way out. I explained why I was there and where I came from and she told me she'd go find someone who could help me. She returned a little later informing me to wait where I was and an officer would be with me shortly. When the officer arrived he took me through the double doors to their security control and shake down area. All I had on me was my drivers license and car keys. These were handed into control while a wand that detects metal was waved over my person and an identity badge attached to my clothing. I was so pleased they weren't going to send me away. We stepped into a corridor and straight through into a side room once the locking mechanism to the door had been released.

A wizened old man with skeletal arms and face lay in a hospital bed. I spoke his name and he opened his eyes, they were full of disbelief and helplessness. I understood it was Jerry yet I couldn't see any resemblance to the man I knew except for his tattoos. I'd walked into the room without the officer and so here we were for the first time since we'd known each other completely on our own except for that time back in 2003 when they left us unsupervised because we were separated by a sheet of glass. I put my arms around him and told him I loved him. I barely heard his reply, "I love you Sharon." Immediately he closed his eyes while he struggled to breath. His mouth was as wide open as it could possible stretch and all the time I was with him it stayed that way. He tried to tell me something. I could see in his eyes it was important but I couldn't understand. The officer returned with a chair and we were left alone again. He was propped up on pillows and the mattress under his head was raised slightly. I asked him if he was in pain and he nodded weakly. A young woman came in and checked his pulse and blood pressure. The room had two beds, the other was empty. Everything was clean and his bed looked comfortable. I mentioned that I thought he was in pain. She said he'd had some pain medicine only two hours ago, but would tell the nurse. A few minutes later a nurse appeared with two syringes filled with morphine. She emptied them into his mouth. He could hardly swallow but she said the medicine would be absorbed quickly. She warned me he'd soon fall asleep; I told her that was much better for him than being in pain. She nodded sympathetically.

I spoke to him but I really don't know if he knew what I was saying. I stroked his arm. I gave him messages of love from family and all his faithful friends. His skin and the whites of his eyes were a sickly yellow. Every so often he would speak and I could just make out what he was saying. He kept repeating, "Oh my God". I didn't know if he was saying it because he was in pain or if it meant something else? It seemed out of character. He said it in exactly the same way each time as though he could see something or knew something truly unbelievable. I stayed with him for five hours. At one point he roused himself and pulled his gown off leaving his arms and chest bare. His stomach was slightly swollen and his collar bones were stretched across his shoulders standing proud because only skin and bone remained. I thought how I'd called the medical unit at Lexington a few days before I flew out and spoke with a lady there, I don't know who she was? I asked her if she could tell me how Jerry looked. She said he's fine, he's walking around. I asked her his weight. She said, "Hold on while I take a look at his records. It says here he weighs 215 pounds." I told her that can't be right because he weighed that much back in December. Looking at him lying in bed I'd guess he had lost 60 to 80 pounds since then. Was that possible?

He moved his right leg occasionally raising his knee up. He did this a couple of times before I noticed it made a sound. I knew what that sound was. I said out loud, "Oh no, it can't be?" but it

was. I run my hand down his lower leg to his ankle and felt the leg restraint. He was chained to the bed! Thankfully he didn't give me the impression that he knew it was there except why lift that leg and not the other which wasn't chained? At least the chain was long enough to allow him to lift his knee.

I pulled the gown up around his neck. I didn't want them to think I'd taken it off. I managed to give him a few spoonfuls of crushed ice that had been left in a jug on the table by his bed. He seemed to enjoy it and sucked on it like a baby pulling his cheeks in while his mouth remained open. His features and his laboured breathing reminded me of my father. He'd had a stroke and for six weeks he was in hospital never fully regaining consciousness. On the day he passed away, I'd called in to see him on my way home from work. He was in a side ward alone just like Jerry. I took one look at him and left straight away to fetch my mother as I could see he didn't have long left. We returned within the hour but he must have taken his last breath just seconds before we walked into the room. A part of me hoped that Jerry wouldn't linger too long. I wanted his struggle to be over. More than anything I wanted him to pass before I had to fly home on the Monday. My mother still wasn't well and leaving her had been a wrench. I knew I'd have to go home soon, but I didn't know how I'd be able to leave him while he was alive.

He reached out for me and put his arms around my neck. He looked at me with unseeing eyes and said, "I love you mom." These would be the last words I heard him speak. He must have thought I was his mother. I replied, "I love you son." He turned on his left side and lifted his right arm over his head where it rested with his fingers touching his shoulder. He fell asleep and was still sleeping when I left just after 10pm. On my way out I was told I could visit the next day 1pm till 4pm. Helen and Larry would also be allowed to visit.

There was a motel just down the road from the hospital. I pulled alongside reception. There was a notice on the door apologising that no rooms were available. I decided to drive back to Norman because at least I had a room reserved there and Sandie had the motel's number. It was gone eleven when I arrived. I'd not eaten since breakfast but that didn't worry me. I lay on the bed processing everything. For the first time in all of my many visits to Oklahoma I felt I was doing it alone. There were no letters before I left letting me know how excited he was and how much he was looking forward to seeing me. He wasn't there to greet me on our first visit bursting with questions of how my journey had been, what kind of hire car was I driving this time, was the motel okay? His physical presence was already slipping away. Strange you might think considering we had never lived together, but our relationship had relied so much on our letters and now there were none. After nearly 12 years it was very strange and so different.

Chapter 5

In the morning Sandie phoned to let me know that Larry and Helen would be visiting Jerry. She wanted directions. I warned her that Larry must slow down and keep his eyes peeled when he reached Lyndsey or he'd miss the hospital. I arranged to meet them at 12.30 so the three of us could go in together at 1pm. Unfortunately they were late. Larry has a pacemaker and his health isn't good so they'd had to make several stops on the way and that had delayed them, not that I was aware of this at the time. I waited till 1.30 but decided I must go in alone. Because it was Saturday the main entrance I'd used the day before was shut. I stood there wondering what to do when a lady in a nearby parked car asked me if I needed help? I explained the situation and she told me I needed to go to the emergency entrance at the back of the building. She said she'd be staying in her car a while and would direct Helen and Larry if they arrived.

I went through the same shakedown procedure and was let into the same room only this time it was different. Jerry was still breathing but it was obvious he'd deteriorated a lot. He was unconscious. There was no response at all to my voice, no reaction as I caught hold of his hand. His eyes were slightly open but held no spark of life. Grief is unpredictable. It catches you unawares and washes over you like a tidal wave. It caught me now and I battled with my tears and emotions. We were alone. I'll be eternally grateful for the time we had alone together. At least I did get to experience it and I hope that at some level Jerry knew as well. He was attached to a drip. I think it must have been a saline drip? After a while the machine made a beeping noise to signal it was empty. A nurse arrived remarking with a kindly smile as she walked into the room that she'd thought it was Hamilton's. Before she left to get more saline solution she told me how nice it was for them to see a patient who had someone that cared about him. Usually inmates were completely alone. She said how Jerry had spoken about me on his first visit to the hospital a month previous and how pleased she was to have the opportunity to meet me. Another nurse had said the same thing to me the day before. I told her a little about him and she was obviously interested. She said how usually they didn't know anything of the history of the inmates in their care. I told her I could see he didn't have long to live and she agreed. "I'm grateful he doesn't seem to be in any pain", I said. She told me they'd been making sure he received enough medication. I thanked her. We might have talked more but at that moment Larry and Helen walked in. Larry is Jerry's older brother, but not by much. This was the first time for me to meet him. He came to Jerry's bedside straight away but Helen held back. With her hands covering her eyes she leaned against the wall completely overcome and terrified of what she'd see. I'd warned Sandie to let them know about Jerry's appearance, but nothing can really prepare a person for such a sight and I was now witnessing the shocked look on Larry's face. They'd not seen their brother for over ten years.

With our support Helen came to the bed and wailing she threw herself onto Jerry calling his name and telling him she loved him. She tried to rouse him and I was actually afraid he'd regain consciousness although really I knew this wasn't going to happen. I didn't want him to because he was now free of pain. His whole body was evidence of the pain he must have endured over the previous weeks. No one could look like he did unless they had suffered hell. Why did they keep him at Lexington so long? Was he sent to the hospital only because I'd surprised them? It must have been obvious that he was staring at death's door before I got there on Friday? What if I hadn't flown out? It didn't bare thinking about.

Helen and Larry couldn't stay long and there was nothing they could do so after an hour they left, but at least they did get to see him and while it was in terrible circumstances I hoped it would be a help to them in the future. At least they'd be able to tell Pam and Tina, Jerry's sisters and phone their brother Chuck who lives in Las Vegas. But what about Michael? How sad that McDougal had denied his visit. Even the nurses told me they knew the captain there at the hospital would have

allowed Michael in, but it wasn't his decision to make. It was up to his unit manager at "Lex A&R."

We were alone again. I watched him aware that every breath could be his last. Apart from his intermittent breathing he was absolutely still. His hands were laid across his stomach. The veins were dark blue and standing proud on his skin. A blue tinge crept from the tips of his fingers stretching the length of his arms. How many times over the years had he told me, "I'll make a believer of you, Sharon." He said this whenever the DOC placed another obstacle in our way. There was only one book about prisons out of the many he'd read through the years that he agreed painted a true and accurate picture, "Into The Belly Of The Beast, by Jack Abbot. He'd recently re-read it and encouraged me to read it also, but as usual I declined. I'd always avoided anything to do with prisons whether it's books or films or television programmes. I simply wanted to concentrate on his experience. I didn't want to be influenced by anyone or anything else. I listened to him, I studied his paperwork, I did my own research and I formed my own opinions. I didn't need Jerry to make a believer of me, I had enough proof of my own and I'd experienced enough myself to know that everything he claimed about the DOC and the way it operated was absolutely correct.

He was proud of the book I'd written, "Set Me Free"; proud of the website Bindy had built. He even got to see the website in his unit manager's office when he first arrived at Granite. He'd watched most of my interview about the riot of 1985 that we'd filmed with Eddie Morgan and Jerry Holt. This was what was so hard to explain. At first his unit team had been amazed at his story. His unit manager Gonzales told me Jerry was a gentleman. He'd allowed him to telephone me at the motel in Hobart when I arrived there on the Friday before our visit. Gonzales told me he wanted to help Jerry. So what happened? Why the change of heart? Jerry should have at least been allowed to work. Someone had to be behind all of this? Someone was making sure he couldn't progress? I thought about everything I'd done through the years with the help of Bindy, Ray, Tami, Eddie, Jerry Holt, Ronda, Rodney and others in this outside world. All the letters I'd written. The fact I've been able to prove so much using actual paperwork. Then there was my meeting with parole board member James Brown and his appalled reaction which had given us so much hope. He'd almost made it. Tammy Hill told Sandie that Jerry had signed his medical parole certificate. The parole certificate for his final sentence. As far as I know all that was needed was the Governor's signature. I was told the same thing just before I left Lexington on the Friday. So yes, he'd almost made it.

My visit was supposed to end by 4pm. That time came and went. Maybe I could have stayed until the end, but by 5pm I decided I'd leave. I felt that Jerry had already left anyway. On my way out I asked the officer on duty if I could telephone in the morning. I was due another visit the next day but in my heart I knew it wouldn't happen. He called across to the nurses who were sitting in a glass walled room right next to the shakedown area to ask if it would be okay. They were in agreement. He also cleared it with his superior in the control room. I thanked them for letting me see Jerry and for their care because from what I had seen, he had been well looked after at Lyndsey.

Beset by waves of grief that came and went uncontrollably I drove back to my motel in Norman. I woke after a restless night and checked my emails. There was one from Bindy asking me how I was faring with the snow? "What snow", I thought? I went to the window and pulled back the curtain to find that it was snowing heavily and had been for some time by the look of it. I wondered how I'd get back to Oklahoma City that day if it continued snowing as it was. I had a room booked at the Four Points hotel. I washed, dressed and made my way to the room set aside for breakfast. I'd try to eat something before phoning the hospital. I didn't think I should call until after 8am. There was a television in the room and news reports were coming in thick and fast about the snow and how many inches could be expected in the different areas of Oklahoma. They were predicting up to six inches for Norman. I didn't fancy travelling in those conditions especially as they were warning people not to drive unless it was absolutely necessary. I was still watching the news when they cut to another story. It was February 2 or as it's more commonly known in America, Ground Hog Day!

And there it was, Punxsatawney, Pennsylvania, just like the film! The guy in the old fashioned clothes and the tall hat was proclaiming another six weeks of winter. There was no doubting that as I looked through the window to the falling snow.

I put the phone down in my room, Jerry had passed away last night. I didn't know what time. I'd asked but was told I couldn't have that information. Was last night yesterday? Did he pass away on the 1st or was it after midnight on the 2nd? I guessed he'd died on the 1st and I later found out that I was right. He'd been certified dead around 10pm. His body had already left Lyndsey and was now at Hibbs Funeral Home, Choctaw. I was given a telephone number so I could call there. I tried it but it didn't connect. I called Sandie but couldn't get an answer. Five minutes later she telephoned me. She said she would let everyone know. Not long afterwards the phone in my room rang again. It was Victoria, Michael's partner. She asked me if I'd speak with him. That's when Jerry's death really hit me. Michael was upset, but more than that he was beseeching me not to cremate his father's remains until he'd seen his body. Everyone thought I'd get the cremation done quickly so I could take Jerry's ashes home with me to Wales. I felt like my heart was being torn out of my chest. I've never taken such a call in my life and I hope I never will again. I promised Michael nothing would happen to his father until he'd seen him. I told him he could have his wedding ring. After that neither of us could speak. I put the phone down and cried. I kept telling myself out loud that that was the saddest thing I had ever experienced. It was just so so sad.

That was it, I made my mind up I'd stay another night in Norman and first thing in the morning, I'd drive to Lexington and collect Jerry's belongings. It stopped snowing by early afternoon. Just before eight the following day I checked out. I cleared several inches of snow off my car and scraped off the ice. It was way below freezing. It wasn't too bad when I set off, but the nearer the prison I got the worse the road became until I was driving on a sheet of compacted snow and ice. I saw several abandoned vehicles on the sides of the road that had come a cropper. They'd each skidded off at various places and were laying at weird angles at the bottom of shallow ditches. I thought whoever owned them would have their work cut out retrieving them. I concentrated more on my driving not wishing to end up the same way. I'd tried phoning the prison before I left but the call wouldn't connect. Once again I'd be making a the surprise visit.

I pulled onto the icy car park. A snow plough of some kind had piled the snow into various corners and I managed to find a clear space to park. By coincidence as I entered the reception, the same deputy warden was walking out of the office. She came to me and putting both hands on my shoulders she asked me how I was. I told her I was fine. She said she was very sorry that Jerry had died. She introduced me to his unit manager who was standing by her side. He had short dark hair and small brown eyes. I looked straight into them and said, "Hello Mr McDougal, I've come to collect my husband's belongings." "Oh, I'm not sure about that. I don't think you can have them today", he said. I blurted out that I would be flying home that afternoon, and would also have to go to the funeral home to arrange Jerry's cremation. "Right now will be my only chance to collect his things", I told him. "This is something very important to me", I said. The deputy warden butted in, "I think under the circumstances you can make sure Mrs Hamilton gets her husband's belongings." And that was it, they both left while I sat down to wait. Suddenly I remembered about the money in Jerry's inmate trust fund. All prisoners are allowed to spend so much money each week on things like toiletries, stationary, stamps, snacks and other sundries. It's one of the ways the DOC collects some revenue. These luxuries or maybe we should call them necessities make all the difference especially as the food served in most facilities is not what people out here would stomach no matter how good the prison menus may sound on paper. I wanted Michael to have what was left in the fund because he was having to make another two day drive to Oklahoma from North Carolina. I spoke with the receptionist and she called someone who would deal with my request.

I'd only sat down a few minutes when here comes a man pushing a trolley loaded down with a very

large box and two medium sized boxes. These contained Jerry's things. He asked if I was Mrs Hamilton and said he'd have to go through the contents with me, but before that happened, another man appeared and introduced himself as the Chaplain. He would deal with my request concerning Jerry's money. I explained that I wanted it to be sent to his son. Before we could go any further he needed to know if I was really Jerry's wife? "Do you have any proof that you are legally married", he asked? Now I don't know about you but I'm not usually in the habit of carrying my marriage certificate around with me! Pointing at the boxes I told him there should be a copy in one of them as I'd sent Jerry one when we'd married. I could tell he doubted that we really were husband and wife. "Where did you marry?", he asked. "At OSP", I replied. I thought of all the hoops the DOC had made us jump through in order to marry. How they'd tried everything in their power to prevent it right to the last minute and how I had first hand evidence that this wasn't the treatment others were subjected to. "What about Jerry's son? How do we know he has a son?", he asked. "Because I'm telling you he does!", I replied. He wanted Michael's address. I told him I had it in my car so while I left to get it, he went to make some inquiries regarding how much money was owing. I returned with the address but unfortunately in my haste I didn't copy it down correctly. This caused some confusion so in the end I gave him Michael's phone number and the Chaplain was able to speak with him. Back he came again but was still questioning whether I was legally Jerry's wife. He said he had no choice but to try to find our marriage certificate especially since I'd confirmed that I would be paying for the cremation and not the DOC. I'd promised Michael he could have his father's ashes.

The Chaplain opened one of the smaller boxes and started rummaging through. "Oh, those are letters I've sent Jerry", I said. He held them in his hand. He grabbed some other things, but it soon became apparent it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. There were envelopes stuffed with photos, birthday cards and Christmas cards he'd kept. We'd have had to empty each one. He looked at me and I said, "Jerry and I married at OSP on March 6, 2006. Jack Peery married us. He's now deceased." This seemed to do it. Maybe he knew Jack Peery? He looked at me and said, "You know Sharon, I believe you. I don't think you'd come all this way if you weren't married." Hallelujah! He put everything back and closed the box. He'd sorted the money for Michael and a cheque would be mailed to his address. I signed several forms and papers and he pushed the trolley out to the car park while I fetched my car. I met him at the top of the ramp outside the administration block. He loaded the boxes onto the back seat of my car. There was just enough room. Before I drove away I said, "I'll be updating Jerry's website when I get home, you should check it out. You just type Jerry W Hamilton.com I think you'll find it interesting." He smiled at me and said, "You have a blessed day, Sharon."