



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I was wondering what it would be like to have my neck broken and to be fully aware that somebody was being paid to end my life by breaking it. The waiting to have the hangman's noose, being placed around my neck, must be something else, again, don't you think? What must go through a person's mind in the certain knowledge that, at a certain time, he or she will be hanged by the neck until being pronounced by a doctor that he or she is legally dead? Do you think that, at the time of that trapdoor, being sprung, one can hear one's neck snap, prior to the actual event? (It is said that a man, who has lost a leg, continues to feel his missing limb) I wonder whether or not the feeling of imminent death is akin to turning off a light switch. Or is it more like a tightening of a harsh rope, around one's throat, the air, being restricted as one starts to try to gasp for air and, then, to choke to death, slowly, and, then ... Bang! Your neck has been snapped as one snaps a dry twig, lying on the forest floor? It must be an experience like no other, don't you agree? I was thinking what it would be like to be unable to control my bodily functions just before death comes to claim me. It is said that a person, who is being hanged, pees and defecates, most profusely during his last minutes of life. I suppose the good-natured Singapore Government gives a condemned man an adult diaper so that he will not dirty up the floor as the hangman's noose does its merciful job of choking him to death just before snapping his neck. For that period of time between the struggle for life and the certainty of death, it must be like an eternity. For a condemned man, such as the late, twenty five year old, Mr Nguyen Tuong Van, who was hanged in Singapore, last week, for trying to hand-carry fourteen ounces of heroin while travelling from Cambodia to Australia, one has to wonder what went through this young Australian's mind as he walked up the steps to embrace the hangman's noose for the first and last time. The Singapore Government must be pleased with itself that one more drug-runner has been exterminated from this earth. Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, the son of Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who ruled Singapore as (official) Prime Minister with an iron fist between 1959 and 1990, when asked for clemency by the Prime Minister of Australia, replied that Singapore had determined that drug trafficking was a very serious crime 'and the penalty is death.' I wonder, also, whether or not Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong would have had the courage to put the hangman's noose around the neck of Mr Nguyen Tuong Van, himself, and, then, trip the trapdoor in order to allow this young man to drop to his death. Interestingly enough, capital punishment has never, throughout the history of the world, deterred capital crimes. People seem to have an innate propensity to be greedy and, as such, they continuously consider ways and means to increase their worldly goods, often at the expense of others, by legal or illegal means. Also, man has a propensity to be impulsive in his actions and, when engaged in mutual combat with his fellow, he may well kill his opponent as much as by accident as by design. Also, of course, there is the contract killer, the type of person who holds life to be of no real consequence (except the contract killer's, of course) and, that being the case, his services are for hire. The internationally acclaimed prison system, it seems, has never been proved to be a solution to the problems of modern society: The criminal mind persists; the contract killers proliferate; mutual combat continues, unabated. The statistics in respect of recidivism appear to prove the point that the present theory of penology is far from being the answer to the rehabilitation of the criminal. Rehabilitation is defined as being the restoration of somebody's former position, rank, rights and privileges, influence, or good reputation. Put another way, the rehabilitation of a criminal is to restore him to the bosom of society by having the slate, washed permanently clean. The purpose of rehabilitation is, inter alia, the instilling or restitution of positive skills or attitudes in a person, to provide him or her with a more contributive and fulfilling role in society. Incarcerating a felon by an extended period of time and, thereby, depriving him or her of his/her freedom has proved to be not the solution to the problem of 'curing' the criminal mind. Whoever came up with the idea of imprisoning a

criminal? What is its ultimate purpose? It is supposed to be punishment to fit the crime, one is told. What is clear is that the prison system, throughout the world, does not rehabilitate the criminal in the vast majority of cases. The hangman's noose, on the other hand, is a guarantee of the end of a criminal's wicked ways. Also, hanging a person until he or she is dead is a much cheaper way of dealing with criminals than incarceration. So, love that rope! Lastly, in the words of Lord Foot, who died in 1990: 'Thirty years' imprisonment is ... a declaration of society's intellectual bankruptcy in the field of penology.'

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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