

# World Day Against the Death Penalty

By Kevin Cooper

On December 17, 2003, I was given an execution date of February 10, 2004, here in the state of California, in the prison of San Quentin.

For the next 54 days I was mentally, emotionally, and psychologically tortured by the prison staff, prison psychiatrist, and especially the different execution squads, as they all take part in their sick-ass rituals of death that they are trained to put all condemned inmates through, who have received execution dates. Asking stupid questions over and over again, such as “Do you feel alright? Would you like a last meal?”—with the emphasis on the word, *last*. “Would you like a “Tombstone Pizza” as your last meal? Why is your blood pressure so high?”

They would take me out of the cage I was in around 2:00 A.M. to take a photo of me. They would search my arms for what they called suitable veins, where they could place their razor-sharp needles during the execution. They did this almost every other day—all of these things—and whenever they could not find a suitable vein, they would go get a belt or rope or anything else they could find and tie it around my arm to make my veins come to the surface. Then they would talk about my veins like I wasn't even there.

They would say, “We can use this vein, and if we can't get this one when he is on the gurney, we can use that one.” As I stated, things like this were done over and over and over again during those 54 days. This is all part of their ritual of death so that they can break down your spirit and make you want to die to get this madness over with. Those inhumane human beings were doing what they were taught to do as they participated in this state's and this country's man made, torturous, murder of poor and minority peoples, both of which I am.

On February 9, 2004, while standing in a cage ten feet away from the death chamber, in the death chamber waiting room, I came within three hours and 42 minutes of being strapped down to the death gurney and having those razor-sharp needles stuck in my arms. Once in a person's arm, then their veins, the poisonous and torturous lethal injection process begins and doesn't end until the condemned man or woman, and in this case me, was tortured to death.

According to United States Supreme Court Judge Sotomayor, lethal injection is like being burned alive from the inside.

While waiting for this unbelievable, and inhumane American act of violence to happen to me, I was told at 8:17 P.M. that the United States Supreme court was not going to lift the stay of execution that the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in California had granted me earlier that day. This meant that I was not going to be tortured physically as those volunteer prison guard executioners were doing to all death row inmates who found themselves in the same situation that I was in.

Those guards who volunteer to become executioners are trained how to torture an inmate who they are going to murder. They are taught exactly how much of each drug to use to have a “humane execution” which is an oxymoron because there is no humane way to murder another human being, and that is what a state-sanctioned execution is—murder.

If they are taught how much of the drugs to give so as not to torture someone, then they are also taught that if you give less than that amount of each drug, you will torture and cause lots of pain to that person who can't scream out in pain because they are paralyzed by the one drug that you make sure you give them enough of, or more than enough of.

The death penalty is not about death *per se*, it's about a torturous death—a torturous end of the life process because the torture starts when the person gets an execution date. That's when the mind games start, and the rest follows all the way to the physical torture at the end of the process.

I watched my life tick off that large clock that was on the wall across from me in that death chamber waiting room, which is another form of torture in and of itself, counting down the seconds, minutes, and hours for your own murder at the hands of the state. As I watched and counted down the hours which would end my life at one minute after midnight on February 10, 2004. I not only saw my life pass before my eyes, as well as my torturous death—I came to truly understand man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Because this prison and its volunteer prison guard executioners have been proven to have tortured darn near all death row inmates who they executed, both before me, and after me. This prison has not been allowed to carry out this historic and horrific crime against humanity since 2006.

It's time, or way past the time, to once and for all rid ourselves of Capital Punishment; to end the death penalty not just California, but in every state in this country, and across the world. As a survivor of this manmade madness, and as a descendant of African Americans who have been legally murdered by the powers that be for any reason, and no reason at all, I must stand up and speak out and say: "Abolish the Death Penalty!"

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