

Survival- Living with the Death Penalty

“Joey, put your toys away. It’s time to go visit Grampa.”

“Aw, Mom, do I have to go?”

“Yes, dear, you know it makes him happy to see you.”

“But it makes me sad, and it makes you sad.”

“I know, but he needs us. Bring along a couple of your little trucks to play with. Sometimes the wait is long.”

“I don’t feel like playing.”

They drive in silence. The prison wall looms over the parking lot. Holding his mother’s hand, Joey asks, “Are they planning to kill him again?”

“No, he’s got a good lawyer this time. Not like 25 years ago. Maybe the judge will realize he didn’t do it. All these years no one has believed him, ever since I was your age, a long sad time.”

Inside they sit on the hard bench. Joey leans against his mother holding a truck in each hand, his head hanging down. A few others sit scattered around the bare room.

The clanging of a metal door breaks the silence and the prisoners shuffle in.

“There’s Grampa. We can go and sit across from him. Try to smile.”

Grampa sees them and a smile lights up his grey face. “Hey, Joey! How are you today? Thanks for coming. Here’s my hug coming through the grill to you”

Joey gives a small smile and makes a hugging gesture back.

“Mary Ann, I’m glad you came today. There’s a bit of hope from the lawyer. He thinks we will get a hearing with Judge Jones. He’s one of the newer judges and seems fair.”

“Well, Dad, that’s good. Now we can breathe a bit, and wait some more.”

“So, Joey, are you riding your bike? I like the picture your mom brought to show me that you don’t need the training wheels anymore. Is the sun shining today?”

“I guess so.”

“Dad, you could use some sun. Does it reach into the yard when you get to walk outside?”

“Depends on the time of day, and the time of year. Now it’s off to the south and I don’t see it much. Winter is coming. Chilly out there walking these days.”

“Grampa, do they give you a coat?”

“Sort of- not a very warm one.”

“Mom, can we bring him a warm coat?”

“No, Joey. He just gets what the guards give him. Sorry, Dad.”

“Just keep coming, Mary Ann. I know it’s not easy, but it’s the best thing you can do for me. And put on some make-up next time so I can see how pretty you can be.”

“It’s hard, Dad. I don’t feel pretty, but I’ll try. Joey and I are doing O.K. The kindergarten teacher says he’s doing well, but he’s very quiet. Maybe next time he can bring along one of his favorite books to show you.”

“I’d like that. Have you got one about a dog? I had a dog when I was your age. He went everywhere with me.”

“I’ll look for a dog book, Grampa. Do they let you have books in here?”

“Sometimes, but I don’t care much for the choices.”

“Oh, time’s up. We’ll have to go now. See you next month, Dad, and hope there’s some news by then.”

“Goodbye, Grampa. I Wish I could give you a real hug.”

“Goodbye to you both. Take care, and love each other.”

In the parking lot, Joey looks up. “Mom, Grampa is a nice man. Why is he kept in here?”

“There’s no good reason, Joey. No reason at all. It’s called a ‘miscarriage of justice’ and we have to live with it.”

This story was inspired by a presentation at the NAEYC Conference in November 2016 by Fran Roznowski, a P.E.A.C.E member, with Quiniana Futrell and Dedric Davis. This Children of Incarcerated Parents Interest Forum session examined the struggles of families and children living long years in uncertainty and separation. Go to [You Tube for a video of the presentation of A Cry for Help- NAEYC 2016](#)

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