

"It Is Good Justice Is Blind Because She Would Not Like Some Of The Things Done  
In Her Name If She Could See Them"

by Wesley I. Purkey

Not long after turning 18 in 1970 I was booked in the Sedgwich County Jail, Wichita, KS after being convicted of burglary by a jury not of my peers. The jail was packed beyond capacity and because of such I was housed in one of the segregation cells on the fifth floor. The cell had a piece of plywood and a waffle size mattress for a bunk on the floor and a hole in the floor for a toilet which required flushing from outside the cell. I later learned that this was called a chinese toilet and has since that time been found to be constitutionally proscribed and if you have ever had the not so good fortune to use one you will know why. Within a few days I was moved to a regular cell on the fifth floor with two other inmates and the stage was being set for yet another not so fond memory to take place.

One of the guys in the cell was named Larry Kroff in his mid-thirties, a farmer from Western Kansas he told me. He was charged with killing three people and attempted murder on a fourth person. Later on he told me that he had shot'em down like them dogs they were. He pretty much bragged about killing his estranged ex-wife, her boy friend and shooting another couple that was with them at a trailer park in Southwest Wichita severely wounding the girl and killing her boy friend. He said that he emptied a 22 ca. rifle shooting these people and then reloaded it and emptied it again. I took him at his word particularly because the Wichita Eagle had pretty attested to these facts in several different articles written on these murders. The other guy in the cell was named Shorty King, a midget about Kroff's same age, who was a pretty nice guy. Liked to cards and sit around and b.s.! He supposedly killed his girl friend, a prostitute for ripping him off of some drugs, although he didn't really have much to say about it. Another guy I got to know pretty well during my time celling with these guys was a guy living in the cell adjacent to our's was Frank Sweeny who also was about Kroff's and Shorty's same ages who had killed two people in Wichita and another five in Indiana. He told me one night that a song had been written about him titled, "Indiana Wants You." He went on humorously saying that, "they may want me but they might not get me!" Needless to say that my little burglary conviction kinda paled in comparison to my new acquaints who had killed eleven people between them.

I was jarred out of a sound sleep one night by a deep grunting sound and commotion at the foot of my bunk. Just a foot off of my bunk Kroff was hanging by a sheet wrapped around his neck and tied to the cell bars wearing only a pair of boxer shorts. He was frantically kicking, grunting, with his hands pulling at the sheet around his neck. Jumping up I tried lifting him up by his legs to take the tension off the sheet, but he continued kicking and twisting making it extremely difficult to lift him up. He must of weighed every bit of 260-270, eating 20 to 30 Reeses Peanutbutter Cups every week. At 10¢ a pop he could easily afford that and did and now they were taking their toll. Shorty was trying to get the knot untied, but said that it had twisted to the backside of the bars. I could hear Sweeny and

a couple of other guys down the range screaming at the top of their lungs to get the jailers attention in the Booking Area on the 3rd floor. People in the courthouse parking lot could of heard them if it had not been 3 a.m. and empty. Even with Shorty trying to help me lift Kroff up which he really could not manage to do I was sweating profusely and my arms were giving out. His complexion was turning mauve in color and he had stop kicking and was now hanging without resistance. Finally a jailer, Rocky came around the corner of the walkway and started to ask 'what is all the screaming about' but stopped in his tracks when seeing Kroff hanging from the bars. Shorty hollered at him that the knot on the sheet was on the backside of the bars and he needed to untie it which Rocky immediately started trying to do to no avail. He took out a pocket knife and started cutting the sheet down which finally snapped with Kroff coming down on top of me and both of us falling on top of Shorty who landed with a loud moan. About this same time another jailer was opening our cell door and was lifting Kroff off of me and began doing CPR on him. Rocky entered the cell shortly thereafter and help Shorty get up as well who was obviously in pain with a broken arm which was twisted backwards at the elbow. The paramedics arrived, continuing CPR and took Kroff to St. Francis Hospital a few blocks away. The next night Rocky told me and Shorty that initially they thought Kroff had fractured his 2nd vertebra in his neck known as a 'hangman's break', but later found out that he had only suffered paralysis to the left side of his face and arm, as well as severe bruising. Rocky said that he isn't coming back to the jail that he is being transferred by the court to the State Hospital for a mental evaluation first. Not long after this incident I was transferred to the Kansas State Industrial Reformatory at Hutchinson, KS to begin my sentence for burglary.

Almost a year later Shorty showed up at KSIR and told me that he had taken a plead bargain for 7 - 15 years pleading guilty to a manslaughter charge. He told me that just a couple weeks after I left the jail that Kroff had been brought back from the State Hospital because of an attempted escape. Further that it was unbelievable that despite Kroff testifying during his trial telling the jury what he had told us that he had shot those people down like the dogs they were that they still found him not guilty by reason of insanity of all three murders and the attempted murder. Shorty said that his family who has money hired a psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger of the renowned Menninger Foundation in Topka, KS who testified that Kroff was temporary insane when he shot and killed these people and severely wounded the fourth person. So in combination Shorty said that with hiring the best criminal defense attorneys money could buy and this renowned psychiatrist Kroff walked on all of those murders, although the jury convicted him of the attempted escape from the State Hospital and the court gave him time served. Unbelievable I told Shorty and here I sit serving more time than you and Kroff combine and haven't killed anyone. Like they say, justice is for those with money not those who face the justice system with court appointed lawyers which is synonymous with pro forma representation. 'Money talks and b.s. walks,' as the old adage goes!!!