

Murderer is filled with remorse for sin

Inmate mourns man killed 13 years ago

By Kenneth Edward Hartman

Who mourns Thomas Allen Fellowes? I do. Thirteen years ago, I killed Thomas Allen Fellowes in a senseless act of brutality on the grounds at Ramona Park in Long Beach. It had been a long night of drinking and drug use and fighting in Santa Ana when I happened upon him, lying on a bench at the park.

I harassed him, and after a few heated words, I struck him. He went to the ground. Enraged and insensible, I repeatedly kicked him until he was dead. I started it, I pursued the confrontation, it was wholly my fault; he bears no culpability. Less than 24 hours later I was arrested, along with another who had the misfortune of being sucked into the vortex of anger that was me.

The trial lasted about two days, and five months after I killed Mr. Fellowes, I was at the Chino Guidance Center sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. I was 19 years old.

Who was Thomas Allen Fellowes? Had he a wife and children? For the past 13 years, I have asked myself these questions many, many times. I knew him for only a few moments, the last moments of his life. He was a slight man, dressed in the attire of a blue-collar working man. I was told that he had no family, and to my knowledge, no one showed up at the trial on his behalf.

He was indigent and obviously down on his luck, sleeping in a park. He was seen earlier in the day drinking the dregs from discarded beer cans, so I assume he had a substance-abuse problem. Lying on a park bench alone, he was a solitary man. Perhaps he was simply estranged from his family. I have long desired to know more about him. He was 44 years old.

Who am I? I went through the public school system in Long Beach until the 10th grade, when I dropped out. I had had previous encounters with the law and had committed previous acts of violence as well. I left home early and quickly became a daily abuser of drugs and alcohol as I moved from one temporary place to another. I am not a member of a minority group nor the product of a broken home. I was not molested or physically abused by my parents. I was filled with a rage that consumed me and propelled me.

While under the influence, I

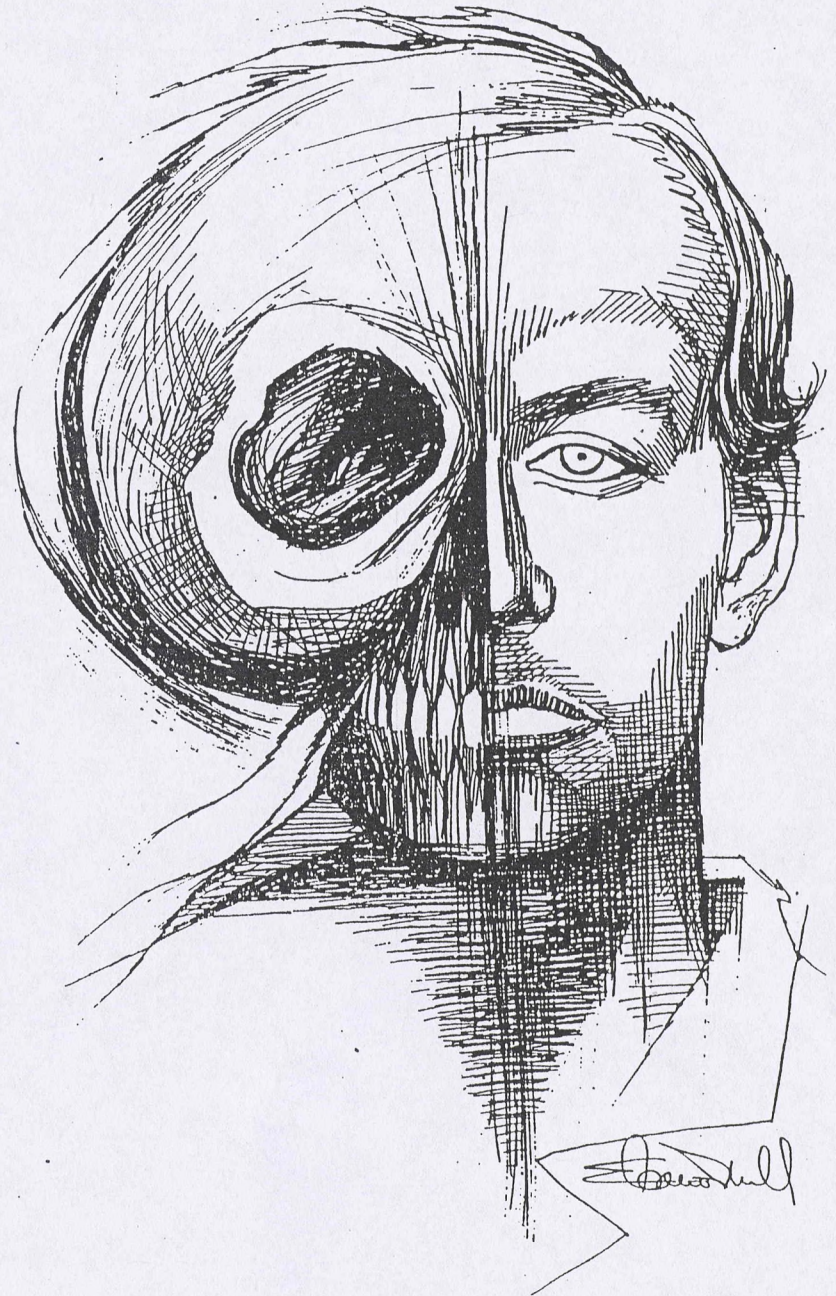
became a monster and, to be honest, a menace to society. Thirteen years later, I better understand the sources of that rage and have worked to rid myself of it. Like Mr. Fellowes, no one showed up at the trial on my behalf nor has my family supported me since. Over the years, I have come to feel an affinity for the hapless man I killed. And in a sense that people will never comprehend, understandably, that Thomas Allen Fellowes is truly a part of me. His death at my hands created an onerous guilt that I will bear for the remainder of my life.

I am now 32 years old. I have much less anger and more reason to live than I had 13 years ago. Love has entered my existence and forever altered my perception of both myself and the world. A beautiful woman reached out to me in the darkness of my solitude and led me into the light of humanity. With this love has come compassion, empathy, responsibility and remorse. This self-awareness has been a mixed blessing, for I have awakened into a self-imposed nightmare that seems to stretch beyond either horizon.

It has been written that true redemption posits a three-pronged test. The first prong is a sincere feeling of remorse for your act. I feel in my heart the great wrong that the taking of another's life is, and I am ashamed. The second prong is to never again act similarly. I have relived the pain I inflicted as a young man and examined my life through eyes that finally see, and I have vowed to never visit upon another such atrocious behavior. The third prong is to undo what you have done. Therein lies the crux of my dilemma. I cannot raise Mr. Fellowes from the dead, nor can I trade places with him. Though I don't believe I can ever fully resolve this issue, I have come to this partial resolution; it has become my responsibility to live my life, whether free or confined, in such a manner as to validate and perhaps vindicate the life and death of Thomas Allen Fellowes.

As long as I live, there will be at least one person who remembers, who honors the poor man who died a terrible death in Ramona Park 13 years ago. May you rest in peace, Thomas.

Kenneth Edward Hartman is serving a prison sentence of life without possibility of parole at the maximum security facility in Tehachapi.



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