

Little Buddy

My story takes place at Clinton Correctional Facility in upstate New York. I arrived to the Facility on September 14th, 1999, and placed on the death row unit for my conviction of murder.

The death row unit was not part of the main Facility. To be honest, it was a prison inside of a prison. My stay on death row was long, more than eight years of my life were spent on New York's death row.

I would spend my days, passing my time working out doing push-ups, dips and lots of walking around in the very small death row yard. Also, I would vigorously work on my appeals to the Court, and write letters to my family members and friends.

There were not too many bright spots on death row. Most of the time it was dark and dreary with lots of pain and hopelessness. I remember one day, I guess it was my second or third year on death row. I was working on my appeal to the Court when I happen to look out my front gate of my cell and see this little grey-brown female finch sitting on the edge of the window in front of my cell looking at me.

My window was very small, it was a drop down hatch maybe 6" high x 12" long, only a very small amount of air came in but it was the perfect size for a little bird to come through and sit and watch everything that's going on.

The next few days she would come back sit there and just look at me. Other death row inmates who were also on the unit would say "Steve your little buddy is back" That's how I came up with the name for her.

I would save a slice or two of bread for her each day and break it up and toss it in front of my cell when she came. She was so scared and nervous to fly down from the window to eat the bread. As the weeks and months passed she became very bold. The window was only about six feet from the front of my cell.

Before I knew it she was sitting on my bars in my cell only a few feet away. I had a couple of cookies I saved from the lunch meal, and broke one of them up and laid it under my sink and out of the way.

She flew down and went crazy eating the broken-up cookie. That was my big mistake! She loved the cookie so much and wouldn't eat the bread no more. This little bird developed a taste for only the good things.

Winter was coming fast, and to be honest I didn't want her to freeze to death in the cold. I would leave my little window open at night just a little so she could get in. Some nights she would come in, other nights she found somewhere else.

The winter of 2003 was the coldest I have ever felt. Thirty days in a row with temperatures well below zero with the windchill. Now for the past couple of weeks she has been in my cell every night sleeping.

To be honest, I didn't mind caring and helping the little bird. It gave me a purpose in life, something to keep me going, something to look forward to. I took an old towel and made a round-type nest for her.

I placed the makeshift nest under my wall heater, with a small cup of water, some bread, crushed up cookie and a few strands of cooked cold pasta. "Yes" pasta still to this day I can't believe she liked it.

The death row officers would ask me if I wanted my window closed at night. I would ask them to leave it open please. They all knew I had the little bird in my cell. They would make jokes about me and the bird, but they never took her from me.

One night I was sleeping, I woke up to a fight in my cell. It turns out she went back outside and brought back two male finches. I turn on my cell light, and they are rolling around on the floor fighting over her food. They took one look at me and flew out of the window.

Here I am it's 2 AM in the morning I am talking to a bird. I remember saying to her, now you're bringing home your boyfriends. She looked at me like I was crazy. Maybe at the time I was crazy, here I am yelling at a bird.

The next day she never came back. Here I am with my window open in the middle of winter hoping she would fly in. I would go outside in the small death row yard looking for her, but I never see her.

I started to think maybe she died, or worse maybe another bird got her. Days turned into weeks and one day I was in the death row yard and heard a few other inmates talking in the other yard.

There were only two inmates that day because it was so cold outside. I was able to look through the wall which had big cracks and openings in it. One inmate stated to the other that a small little bird flew into his cell a couple of weeks ago. He went on to say that the bird sat inside the cell looking at him.

The inmate he was talking too said, "what did you do bro?" "I killed it with my boot." I knew right there that's why my little buddy never came back. She made the mistake and flew into the wrong open window.

I know the inmate who killed her with the boot. I know what he looks like, and his voice. Still to this day I keep my eyes open for him. It's been ten years since I was on death row, but yet I still find myself thinking of her from time to time.

My appeals abolished the death penalty in this state on June 24th, 2004. Today, I am serving a sentence of life without parole. Inmates who were on death row with me for years, knew how much that little bird meant to me.

They always ask me, "what will you do Steve if you ever run into that guy". I always tell everyone who asks me that question. He will receive the same treatment he gave to that little bird. A Few people I know state-"Steve it's only a bird."

She was more than a bird, I would like to think she was a gift From "God". That little bird brought me so much joy. Even though it was only for a short matter of time.

I have been sitting in a Cell now for almost twenty-three years, and still just thinking of my little Buddy brings a smile to my Face to this day. If you would like to Contact me and speak more about death row or anything else about prison please Feel Free: 😊

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