

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 466

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will be about Clyde Thompson. Don Umphrey wrote a book about him titled *The Meanest Man in Texas*. Clyde was a preacher's kid gone bad. He murdered his first two victims in 1928. He laughed hysterically when he was convicted and sentenced to death. His execution number was 83. Each time a prisoner was put to death, every other prisoner was moved one cell closer to the death chamber. They called the electric chair, "OldSparky." After an execution the hallway would be filled with the horrible stench of burning flesh and hair. Incredibly, Clyde's date with death was commuted by Gov. Sterling just seven hours before his execution.

His meanness became legendary. The Ft. Worth Star Telegram accumulated a file with fifty stories about him. His first attempted escape came in 1932. He was caught and placed in a grueling work detail. The torture only made him meaner.

His reputation for toughness was also a source of constant trouble. Guards felt that they had to try and intimidate him. They didn't! Once a guard didn't like his attitude and threatened to shoot him with a shot gun. Clyde responded by cursing the guard and throwing a hoe at him. Then he ripped open his shirt, popping the buttons, and dared the guard to shoot him in the heart. He didn't! On that occasion Clyde was stripped and placed in the hole. His hands were manacled behind his back and his feet were chained. To make the torture more severe, his feet were drawn backward and padlocked to the hand cuffs. Then he was left in the darkness with no way to protect himself from hungry bugs and mosquitoes. The experience only made him meaner.

In 1933 he tried again to escape. One convict was killed in the attempt. Clyde's hat was shot off, but he was unscratched. Afterward, however, he was severely beaten by a guard and suffered numerous injuries including several broken ribs. The man who ratted on him was Tommy Ries. Clyde gave him a death sentence far more quick and certain than the State of Texas would impose. In short order, he murdered Tommy with a home made knife smuggled out of the prison blacksmith shop.

Clyde's reputation for meanness was further enhanced when he took a "caning" without uttering a sound. He was stripped naked and held down by four guards. The fifth guard beat him with a leather "bat" about thirty inches long. After quietly taking twenty-one strokes, Clyde got up and asked someone to give him a light for his cigarette.

On May 29, 1935 a prisoner named Everett Melvin tried to force him to perform a homosexual act. Clyde killed him. When the guards came, he said to the Captain: "Well, Cap, it looks like I'm in trouble again."

In 1937 he tried again to escape. This time three men were killed and Clyde was wounded in the shoulder.

Finally, Clyde was placed in isolation in a concrete morgue. The walls were two feet thick. Inside there were six concrete slabs for coffins. The only ventilation, and source of light, were two small holes opposite the steel door. They were about three inches in diameter and six feet apart. His toilet was a five-gallon bucket. He ate with his hands because he was not trusted with eating utensils.

Weeks later a twelve-inch hole was cut in the steel door to provide more light. From the morbid isolation of that morgue, Clyde begged for something to read. He was given his father's Bible. He always assumed the Bible was full of contradictions, but upon studying it, he found otherwise. There was only enough light to read for five hours a day. Clyde made notes by scratching on the wall with a rock and sought diligently to understand the Scriptures. The more he read, the more his faith grew. Ultimately he gave himself to Christ. In spite of his isolation, he somehow managed to start winning other inmates to Christ. His morgue became a meeting place where believers gathered. Over the course of many years the reality of his conversion could not be denied. The "new" Clyde Thompson was as different from the old as a butterfly is from a caterpillar.

Clyde was finally granted a full pardon by Gov. John Connally in 1963. As you know, this was the same year that Gov. Connally was shot on November 22 when president Kennedy was killed. The bullet struck Connally in the collarbone and went through the right side of his chest. It smashed three ribs, punctured his lung, shattered his right wrist, and finally lodged in his left leg just above the knee.

Clyde first made a living by selling Bibles and then became chaplain of the Lubbock Texas County Jail. To the day of his death was true to Christ. He died of natural causes July 2, 1979. His amazing conversion provides a convincing commentary on the statement of Scripture: "**If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature**" (II Cor. 5:17.) "**O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**" (Rom. 11:33)

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce