

## Parole Hearing

by Brian Haycock

“All right, let’s come to order. Good morning, Mr. Holloway. As you are probably aware, we’ve studied your file, heard some testimony from the families of your victims - some of them, anyway, heard from the chaplain, the prison administration. We’ve read the letter from your brother, seen the video left by your mother. And you have our condolences on your loss. She must have been a fine woman. What we’d like to hear now is your version of the events that got us here. How you first got into trouble, what you’ve done to change, why you feel you deserve consideration for parole at this time. Why don’t you just go ahead?”

“All right. Thank you, sir. I’ll start at the beginning, tell you how I got in here. What happened was, I was a young guy - twenty-three - and I had a steady job working on a forklift over at Davidson’s Trucking. Was trying to get on driving a truck. One of those big semis, you know? Just a regular guy getting started in life. I got in a little trouble as a teenager, nothing too serious. I guess I kind of had an attitude about things, like a lot of guys that age. A little chip on my shoulder. Sometimes I’d go out to bars, you know? Roadhouses, beer joints, and there’d be trouble and I’d get into it. What I mean is, I got in some fights now and then. I really wasn’t going out looking for trouble, but if it was around I wouldn’t walk away.

“So this one night - it was Saturday, April 18, 1975. I was out at the Rattlesnake Hole, which was a beer joint on the old Webberville Road. There was a fight that broke out between some local boys and some boys from the Bergstrom Air Force base up there in Austin, which I believe is closed down now. Turned into an airport. I’d had a few beers, and so I waded in, tried to help out the locals, who were getting their asses... I’m sorry, I mean to say they weren’t doing too well. I’m a little nervous here, you could maybe pardon the language. So one thing led to another and I wound up out in the parking lot with this one guy, Ronald Mansach, and we got into it real good. Everyone else was standing around in a circle, even the bouncers who’d run us out of the bar, and they were all yelling at us, urging us on.

“We traded a few punches, then got to wrestling around - your typical bar fight. But then I threw a real nice uppercut, really got my whole body into it, and it caught Ronald Mansach right on the point of the chin. Just a lucky punch, really, or it seemed lucky at first. His head snapped back and he went down backwards and smacked the back of his head on the pavement. I remember it made a real strange sound when it hit, kind of a thud. Scared the hell out of everybody. Then it got real quiet out there on the lot. I stepped back, waited for him to get up, but he didn’t get up. He didn’t move at all. Some of his buddies went to help him, and that was the end of the fighting for that night.

“Anyway, he had a sprained neck, a severe concussion, some memory loss, vision problems. Mostly from his head hitting the pavement. That happens sometimes, a guy just lands the wrong way. He was in the hospital for a month, had to be discharged from the Air Force because of the headaches he was having, blurred vision, whatever. I felt real bad for him. I mean...I didn’t have anything against him. We were just a couple of young guys letting off steam and it wound up going wrong. Anyway, I got charged with agg

assault, which was wrong, because it was a fair fight and there wasn't anything aggravated about it. The judge was..."

"Excuse me, Mr. Holloway. You've already completed your sentence on the assault charge. We're not going to retry that. Let's move on. What we really want to hear about is the trouble you got into here - how that came about."

"Yes, sir, I was just coming to that. The way it came out, I was sentenced to five years in state prison for aggravated assault even though, as I said, it was a fair fight. I mean, if he'd landed that punch on me, I wouldn't have wanted him to wind up in prison over it. But his buddies were pretty mad about it and they kind of twisted things around to make it worse for me, and Ronald Mansach didn't really remember any of it himself. So, anyway, it came out that I was sentenced to five years for aggravated assault."

"Could you get to the homicide convictions, please?"

"Uh, yes sir. I'm sorry. So I got five years here and they told me I'd do three and then get paroled out if I behaved myself, and that's what I meant to do. But they put me in a cell with this guy named Allen Howells. They called him Big Al, which in here is saying something because there are a lot of real big guys in here. You ought to see some of the guys they got in here. So the first night I was in the cell with him, he raped me. I don't like to talk about this, but you need to know what happened. When I tried to fight him off me, he picked me up and slammed my face into the wall, then just did what he wanted with me. I was screaming when it happened, trying to get some help, but the guards just thought it was some big joke. The inmates were all laughing about it. You could hear them all down the cellblock. This happened every night for a couple weeks, and he told me he was going to fuck... I'm sorry, um...he said he was going to sodomize me every night until I got out. Or died. After the second week I bought a shiv - that's a kind of knife that some guys make in the machine shop. It's made out of sheet metal..."

"We know what a shiv is."

"Yes, sir. Well, I bought one from a guy that worked in the metal shop and hid it under the mattress. I couldn't use it right away. I knew if I didn't get him the first time, he'd kill me right there, so I had to be sure. So I took it a few more nights, then I saw an opening and I took it. He was sitting on the bed with his back to me, not paying much attention, a little out of breath, you know? And I pulled the shiv out from where I'd hidden it - being real quiet, moving real slow, knowing it was the only chance I'd get. I got up behind him, reached around, and sliced his throat. There was blood everywhere. It was spurting out both sides of his neck, but he was still alive, trying to hold the wound closed with one hand and get hold of me with the other. He was making these weird noises, gurgling, like he was trying to scream, but he couldn't. He had me by the throat for a while and I thought he was going to finish me, but then he got weaker and he let go. And he died. Blood loss, was what they said. That and lack of oxygen and, well, he died."

"And you confessed to killing him."

“Well, when the guards came we were in a locked cell, his blood all over me, the shiv in my hand, so there wasn’t much I could say about that. Of course, it was self-defense. He would have killed me if I hadn’t killed him first. There was a trial, they made it manslaughter because of the circumstances and I got fifteen to twenty, on account of it was my second felony conviction. The first being the assault that got me in here in the first place.”

“So you’re saying you didn’t really do anything wrong?”

“Well, I don’t know what to tell you about that. It was self-defense. And this guy Big Al, well if you’d ever met him, you’d see what I mean. The guy was an animal. They should have given me a medal.”

“Okay, so what happened then?”

“Well, sir, I spent some time in solitary after that. You kill a cellmate, they don’t usually hurry up and give you another one. Then after I’d been in the hole for about six months they had some other people they needed to put in solitary and they needed the room so they moved me back into general population. I got put in with Johnny Riccardi, he was a guy in for burglary, doing twenty years ‘cause it was like his fourth time in the joint. He was an older guy and we got along pretty good. He used to tell these stories...”

“Mr. Holloway, we don’t want to hear about Riccardi. He died of cancer in 1979. There was an incident in the shower room... Why don’t you tell us about that?”

“Yes, sir. I’m sorry, sir. I don’t get much chance to talk to people who don’t already live here, if you know what I mean. Anyway, yeah, there was some trouble about me killing Big Al. Turned out he had some friends, which surprised the hell out of me ‘cause he wasn’t a real sociable guy - and these friends of his weren’t too happy about the way he’d passed on. They came up and spoke to me about it a couple times out in the yard. And they told me they were going to kill me, and they pretty much told me when and where and how. Which wasn’t real smart, because when it happened I was ready for it.

“They sent this guy after me. Skunk Debleau. Funny-lookin’ guy. He had this skin condition. He had these black and white stripes, why they called him Skunk. Ask me, he looked more like a zebra. Anyway, he was a lifer, was in for a couple murders on the outside. Would have gotten an injection, but they didn’t have that back when he went down. And he was dumb as a bag of rocks, one time he... Well, never mind about that. So Skunk, he came into the shower room when I was alone in there. I mean, I was naked as a newborn and this guy comes in with a piece of sheet metal two feet long, all sharpened up and with a thick handle wrapped with friction tape, and he starts grinning at me, telling me what he was going to do with me.

“What he didn’t know was I’d been taking steps, knowing something was going down. So I had this bottle, what looked like a bottle of shampoo. But it wasn’t shampoo, it was bleach, and I emptied it right in his face while he was standing there talking. And I’d brought a baseball bat in there with me. Well, it wasn’t really a baseball bat, but it was

about the size and weight of one, and I grabbed that from out of the corner of the shower stall and whacked him up in the head while he was standing there clawing at his eyes. And then...well, the long and the short of it was, Skunk died.

“Of course, I still had a problem, ‘cause the guys who sent him in there were right outside, guarding the door, making sure no one would come in to help me. And I’d used up most of my bleach on Skunk. After a while, they started calling out to Skunk, asking if he was okay, you know? Sounding a little worried about it. They tried opening the door a little, peeking in around it. But I’d shut off the lights and dragged Skunk back into a corner and they couldn’t see what was going on. So finally they opened up the door and came in. I rushed at them with the bat in one hand and Skunk’s sword in the other, just going wild on them, trying to get out of there. And the way it came out, there was so much noise, with them screaming and all, it must have woke up a couple of the guards. They came and restored order and took some of us to the infirmary. And took a couple guys to the morgue.”

“So that was self-defense, too?”

“Well, yeah. I mean, they were there to kill me. That was the whole point.”

“And four of them died.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Four of them, counting Skunk. You know, if you think about it, it was real stupid of them to open up that door like that, come in on me. I mean, either I was dead or I was standing there with that sword and who knew what else, and they just came in there empty-handed.”

“So it was their own fault?”

“Well, I don’t know what to say about that. They talk to us a lot about taking responsibility for our actions, so I guess the whole thing was partly my fault, but I can’t see how. I don’t know what else I could have done. I mean, I could have just let them kill me, but other than that...”

“So then what happened?”

“I stood trial for two counts of second degree homicide. They said I could have stopped hacking on those guys after they were down, and I didn’t, so that was murder. I was convicted and given twenty more years for that. Then what happened was, they were worried that Big Al’s friends might have friends and they didn’t want to get things going - so I went back to solitary for a couple years. After that, they put me back in general population because some people had been paroled out and some others had died and they figured nothing would happen.”

“And they were wrong.”

“Well, things always happen in here. That’s what makes it such an interesting place to live. But for a while there was other stuff going on and nobody seemed to be too

worried about me. There was a Mexican prison gang got started, the Zapatistas, and they were a real bad bunch. ‘Course, the Mexicans in here had been taking shit from the other inmates for years, so it’s no surprise they finally started fighting back. But then some of the nigg... Uh, the African-American inmates started calling themselves the Zulu Killers, but the rest of us just called them the Zoos, which they didn’t like too much. And then the Orientals were calling themselves the Samurai, not that there were enough of them to call it a real gang. So some of the white guys started kind of banding together, just for self-defense, you know? And around that time they started executing people again and things got real weird around here. I mean even worse than it was already.”

“There was another incident. An inmate named, um...Rey Cabron was killed in the laundry and you were convicted of that. Care to tell us about that?”

“Sure. He was one of those Zips, which is what the rest of us called the Zapatistas. There was an incident out in the yard. One of their guys got beat up and they didn’t know that much about it, on account of the guy was in the infirmary with his jaw wired shut and he couldn’t talk too good. But the Zips were pretty sure it was a white guy that did it, so they decided to go after one of the white guys. They went for me, ‘cause they knew I’d be alone in the laundry where I was working at the time, so it was like they just went for an easy target. But as it turned out, it wasn’t so easy ‘cause that bleach trick works real well in a laundry. So what happened, six of them came after me and one of them died. That guy Cabron. The others ran out of there like the INS was at the door. And when the guards came in, it was just me and him in there. So they got me for another second-degree and gave me another twenty to life on top of the other things. Which is why I’m still in here. But you know, that incident really changed things in here. The Zips calmed down a lot after that. And that guy Cabron, he was trouble with a capital T. He was bad news. He was so bad even the other Zips were glad he was gone, although they didn’t say anything about that at the trial where I got the twenty to life. You know what? They should have given me a medal.”

“All right. That’s enough about that. Why don’t you tell us about your gang. The Aryan Hammer, right? Nice name.”

“Yeah. Well, I don’t know what they told you, but it isn’t my gang. I’m just friends with some of the guys, and if I get in trouble they’ll have my back. In here, everybody’s in a gang. You got the Zips, the Zoos, the Sams. The Hammer. You got guys connected with other gangs in the other prisons. If you’re on your own, you’re dead. You ought to try living in here for a while, you’re going to get an attitude about the stuff that goes on in here. See for yourselves, you know? So like I say, I just hang out with some of the guys, try not to get killed.”

“It says in your file you have a swastika tattooed on one arm, a hammer with the word ‘Aryan’ written across it on the other.”

“Sure. It’s just, you know, to let people know I’m not on my own, that there’s people watching out for me. Kind of a trouble-preventer, if you know what you mean.

Most everybody in here has some kind of a jailhouse tat. When I get out, I'm going to get that removed right off. I know it won't go over real well on the outside."

"If you get out."

"Right, yeah, if I get out."

"It also says in your file that you're calling yourself the Grand Emperor of the Aryan Hammer."

"Well, that's not true. That's just a lie. There's no such thing as a Grand Emperor, and if there was it sure wouldn't be me. It's like I said, I just know some of the guys, and we watch out for each other. I don't know where they get this Grand Emperor shit. Uh, stuff."

"All right, let's go over a couple of other things. There was a riot here in '92 and you were the head of the gang that held some of the guards hostage. You had a list of demands and threatened to kill the guards if your demands weren't met."

"No sir, that's not right. I can't believe they put that in there that way. For one thing, when the riot got started I was in solitary on account of...well, you know. I just wasn't involved in getting that going. What happened was, there was a riot got started because some of the guards were using cattle prods on the prisoners, which they weren't supposed to do. So there was some fighting over that and things kind of went downhill. There was a standoff, a couple of guards were taken hostage, a lot of threats got thrown around. I didn't even know about it until a couple of the guys came down and let everyone out of solitary, filled us in. At that point, some of the convicts were way out of control, using the prods on the guards, making a party out of it, and then they were just going to go ahead and kill the guards. It was gonna be a bloodbath in here if that happened. I mean, they would have come in here with riot gear and assault rifles, cleaned house. I talked the convicts out of it, convinced them to let me negotiate, get some concessions, then they'd let the guards go and everybody'd be happy. So I did some negotiating, got the warden to give up enough to satisfy the inmates who had the guards. They said we'd get better food, longer time out in the yard, stuff like that, you know, if we... uh, if *they* let the guards go. And no more cattle prods. There were a bunch of things they agreed to, and of course none of them happened. But anyway, I saved those guards' lives."

"They should have given you a medal for that."

"Yeah, well, I don't want a medal. I just want a fair chance for a parole - a chance to make some kind of life on the outside while I still can."

"We've got some other things in here, a number of fights, beefs with the guards, the time you were caught with eight gallons of moonshine in your cell... That's pretty routine. Here's something more serious. We have a report that you were named as the chief suspect in a plot to extort money from the families of prisoners. It says here--"

“What it says in there is a lie.”

“It says African-Americans on the outside were told their relatives in prison would be killed unless they paid thousands of dollars to members of the Aryan Hammer.”

“Listen. I’ve been in here for thirty years. I don’t have nothing to do with what goes on outside. Guys leave here, I don’t see them again until they get popped and wind up back inside. How am I going to run some extortion deal out of here? Most of the time, I don’t even have phone privileges. I can’t set up deals like that. My guess? Some guys who got out tried that hustle on their own. No one on the inside knew anything about it. See, stuff like that, they just put that in the jacket to make trouble for me. It doesn’t mean anything.”

“All right, I think we’ve heard enough about that. Do you have anything you’d like to add in your own defense?”

“Um, yeah. Yeah, I do. I want to say that I’ve been trying real hard to get my life back on track. It’s a hard life in here. Real hard. I wasn’t a bad guy or nothing, I just came up for a couple years over a simple bar fight. And if that hadn’t happened, I’d have never gotten in trouble at all. I’d be doing something, maybe driving a truck, something like that, probably have a family of my own. But you know? I’m fifty-four years old now and I’ve done nothing my whole life but serve time over what started as an assault beef. And I’ve had some problems in here. I admit that. But I was just trying to survive, that’s all. Anyway, I’ve been trying real hard to get prepared to live a, uh, productive life on the outside. I’ve been studying with the chaplain, like I’m sure he told you, learning my Bible, doing a lot of that praying. You know, I’ve really found the, uh, the Lord in here. I feel like I’ve been reborn. All I ask is for a chance to go out into the world and prove I can be a, uh, a benefit...no, an asset. That’s it. An asset to society. So like I say, I’m ready to get out of here now, and I’ll really appreciate it if you’ll let that happen.”

“All right. Thank you, Mr. Holloway. Mrs. Marsh, do you have anything else you’d like to ask the prisoner?”

“Hmm. Yes. I certainly do. Mr. Holloway, do you think the people you killed would want you to be walking around loose like nothing ever happened to them?”

“Jesus Chr... I mean, uh, I don’t know what you’re saying there, ma’am. I mean, they’re dead. They don’t care.”

“And now that you’ve found the Lord, do you think the Lord would want you to get out on parole?”

“Well, yeah. Sure. Isn’t he supposed to forgive shit like, I mean, uh, you know, sins? Transgressions. I’m sorry, I’m a little flustered here. Sure. He’d want me to have another chance.”

“I don’t have anything else.”

“Mr. Jefferson? Anything you’d like to ask?”

“You’ve got to be kidding. I say we put this lowlife pile of puke back in his cage and forget about him. The sooner the better.”

“All right, then. We’ll be--”

“Wait a minute. What exactly the hell is that supposed to mean? ‘Put him back in his cage and forget about him?’ Don’t roll your eyes at me, you son of a... Hey, I’m talking to you.”

“Mr. Holloway, you need to control yourself. We’ve completed our questions and now we’ll be meeting privately to discuss--”

“To discuss what? Keeping me in here for another, what, four fucking years until my next hearing? Then just keep turning me down until I’m dead? Is that what you’re gonna discuss?”

“Mr. Holl--”

“Because I’m fed the fuck up with this. I see what’s going on here. I know how it is. You come in here, get paid to sit here for a half hour and then you send me back to that cell block for four more years, see if I survive that. What, you think it’s an easy life being in here? You think it’s some picnic? You should spend some time in here yourselves, then you’d be letting all of us out of here.”

“We’re going to discuss your case now, Mr. Holloway. And then we’ll--”

“Well, here’s something else for you to discuss. Listen good. I lied to you. That stuff about the Aryan Hammer? How I didn’t know much about it? That was bullshit. I’m the king of the Aryan Hammer. We’ve got people all over the state, people sworn to fight for the Hammer until they die. And we know where you live. All of you. And we know where your families live. And we know where your friends live. And if you don’t get me the fuck out of here you are all dead, and all your families are dead.”

“Guards, get this man out of here.”

“And all your friends are dead, and...”

“Stop. Don’t do it.”

“OH NO!”

“OH MY GOD!”

“Guard? What happened?”

“Sir, I don’t know. We just got a hold of him as he was coming over the table there, and...I don’t know, he fell kind of sideways, and it looked like he hit his head on the corner of the table. That’s a pretty sharp corner they put on these tables. I don’t know. He’s not moving.”

“You think he’s dead?”

“Let me see, here. I don’t feel much of a pulse. Maybe we should call over to the infirmary. They could send someone over, try to revive him.”

“Yes, that’s a good idea. We should get started on that. Mr. Jefferson, Mrs. Marsh, do you agree?”

“Yes sir, Mr. Chairman. We should really hurry up and do that. Every second he spends on that floor, it’ll be that much harder to bring him around.”

“I’m sure you’re right. That pool of blood under his head there, that doesn’t look good. I think there’s a phone out in the hall. Someone should go out there and call.”

“Sir, this won’t be a problem for me will it? I mean, on my record.”

“Oh, no, Guard...Roderick. You too, um, Thomas. You won’t need to worry about this at all. The man was out of control, coming over that table trying to get his hands on us. God knows what could have happened. If it wasn’t for you, he might have killed us. No, you won’t be in any trouble at all. In fact, they’ll probably give you both medals.”

*Brian Haycock lives in Austin, Texas, where he has worked mainly for nonprofit organizations. He enjoys running (especially in the summer heat), listening to music of all kinds and reading crime stories. He also writes blogs about energy, the environment, and other issues (usually with a little humor worked in) for a variety of websites. He has never been arrested. Knock on wood.*