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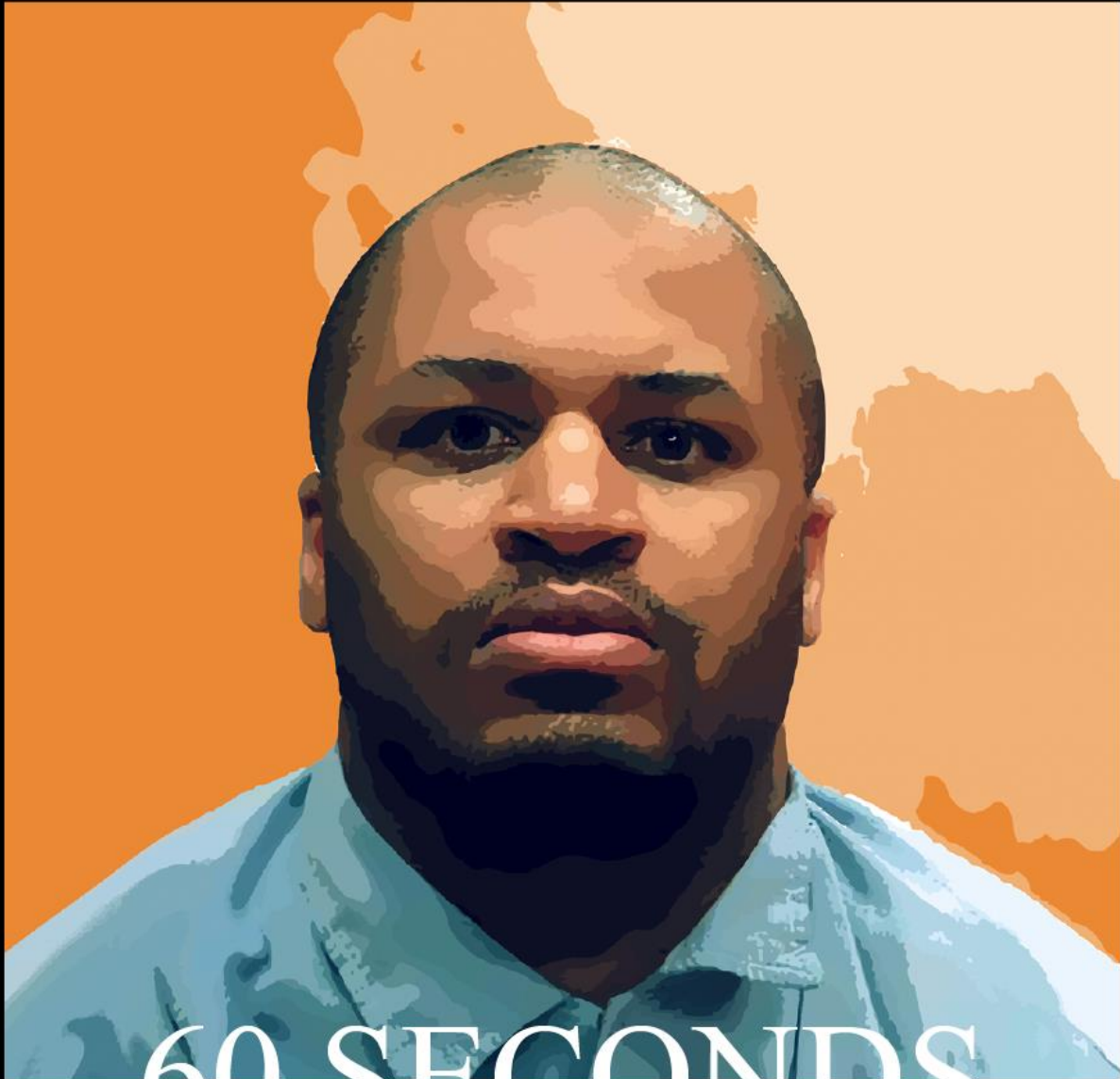
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60 Seconds Remaining

A Death Row Phone Call

Anna M. Clausen



60 SECONDS REMAINING

A DEATH ROW PHONE CALL — STORY BY ANNA M. CLAUSEN

Abstract

Marcus Adams loves The Notebook. It's his favorite romantic movie. The best part, he says, is when the old man climbs into bed with his wife in the end and they pass away together. He thinks that's a good way to go. He won't get to die that way though. Adams is a condemned inmate and has spent the last two decades on San Quentin's death row.

California hasn't actually executed anyone since 2006 – death row inmates there are more likely to die of natural causes or overdose than be executed. That may change soon, as a bill meant to speed up the death penalty process becomes the law.

And so, Marcus Adams waits to find out the answer to that question that gnaws at him every day... How will he die?

Source list

Reporting, production and Story by: Anna M. Clausen

Interviewee: Marcus Adams

Host: Spencer Silva

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Script

Host intro:

In California, death row inmates are more likely to die of natural causes, suicide or even an overdose than be executed. Some of them call it "The Shelf". All they do is sit there and wait to be taken down.

Many have been waiting for decades.

The state has the largest death row population in the Western hemisphere but it hasn't actually executed anyone since 2006. That may change soon, as a bill passed by California voters - meant to speed up the death penalty process - becomes the law.

Reporter Anna M. Clausen reached out to people facing execution. She told them she wanted to know what "waiting" means on California's death row, and how it's changing.

And one day, she got a phone call.

RINGTONE

Lady: This is Global Tel-Link you have a prepaid call from

Marcus: Marcus Adams.

Lady: An Inmate at the California State Prison, San Quentin.
To accept his call, say or dial 5 now.

Anna: Five

Marcus: Hello.

Anna: Hi, is this Marcus,

Marcus: How you doing Anna

Anna: Hi, I'm great. How are you?

Marcus: Eh, alive.

Music fade in

Anna: So, I contacted you because I want to know what it's like to wait for death on death row. Are you comfortable with talking about death?

Marcus: Yep, I mean it doesn't make me nervous or jittery or anxious or upset. I'm surrounded by it. I'm surrounded by death. I'm surrounded by people waiting to die.

You're sitting in a cell all day, and you're waiting to be told. "OK it's time for us to take you to the chamber and execute you" A lot of people view it as... mental torture.

Music fade out

Anna: So, can you introduce yourself?

Marcus: My name is Marcus Adams. I'm from Los Angeles California. When people say "Where are you from?" I just tell them I'm little Sonny and I'm from a gang called the West Side Six Deuce branch Harvard Park Bloods. I've been incarcerated for 21 years. I've been in San Quentin prison for the last 15 years.

Anna: Do you remember the first time that you walked into your cell on death row.

Marcus: Yes

Marcus: When you first get here, all you have is yourself and your blanket, your sheets and the clothes that they give you and that's it. So, you immediately start to reflect on the mistakes that put you where you are.

When I got put in that cell. I said to myself you know this prison is where I'll spend the rest of my life at.

Anna: So how much time do you spend in your cell?

Marcus: about Twenty hours a day.

It's like, I can stick one arm across and touch the wall of my cell and, like then there's no more room for me, like this very small.

Anna: mhmmm...

Marcus: It's like a box. That's the best way I can describe it. And it has a toilet, a sink, a bed, it has my personal items in it, my TV my fan, I got food items in here.

Anna: So, do you have people on the outside?

Marcus: Well, when I first came, I had everybody

Music in

but after about three to four years, people started dropping off.

My mom came to see me in 2009, so... she didn't want to come she never want to come se me here because I'm on death row.

She told me that she had cancer and she told me it was a possibility that you know she would die within the next year and a half. And so yeah that hurted **[sic]** a lot.

And a year later on my 40th birthday my mom passed.

And so, since then I haven't celebrated my birthday.

Phone LADY: This call and or telephone number will be monitored and recorded

Marcus: Uhh, yeah I used to rob banks for a living. That started on an accident, the bank robbery stuff. But, you know

Anna: How so?

Marcus: Ok...

Anna: How do you start robbing banks on accident?

Marcus: When I was 22, I had a check for 280 bucks, and me and one of my home boys went to go cash my check and when I put the check on the counter, the lady started putting the money on the counter and I said, "What are you doing?" And she said, "isn't this a note, are you robbing us" and I said "NO! I'm just here to cash my check" my home boy grabbed the money and left, and so i grabbed the check and I left.

And uhhm... and we started robbing credit unions. -

***Marcus:** Me and the guys would go in and we would rob the banks and try not to hurt no one.*

The last time, we're in the bank, and I heard a shot, I looked back and I saw my co-defendant, shooting another uhhh.. guy in the leg. And while we were leaving the bank I saw the young lady laying on the ground. And she was uhmmm... she was dying.

And we got in the car. We left and then a few days later saw my picture on the news.

MUSIC IN

Marcus: Your life and my life are totally different.

You didn't do crime growing up to survive. You didn't sell drugs, you didn't steal or rob or have to carry a gun for protection against other gangs. My life consisted of all of that.

But at a same time, I'm a human being. and I have the freedom of choice. I knew what I was doing was wrong. And so, I took the easy way out and the easy way landed me behind bars.

MUSIC OUT

Marcus: *I was caught the same day Princess Diana died. 1997.*

I escaped from Santa Barbara County Jail 1998, and we were caught about 45 minutes later. They charged me with escape.

They struck me out on a three strikes rule and they gave me 53 years and life in prison.

Anna: *Mhhmm*

Marcus: *And even though I did not kill anyone or shoot anyone during the bank robbery because of the California felony murder rule I was also charged with murder and attempted murder.*

I received 200 years and then, 19 - what was it - 99 I was charged with three counts of murder and...

ANNA: *So that was an old, alleged, crime that caught up with you?*

Marcus: *Yeah, They were from the same gang who actually murdered my brother.*

MUSIC IN

Even if I was to get my case overturned and I was to get off of death row. I would still have double life and life without parole. I'm still going to die in jail no matter what.

MUSIC OUT

Anna: *So California hasn't executed anyone since 2006 but executions are expected to resume next year. Does it in any way feel like death is getting closer.*

Marcus: *Yep, sometimes, See, to you it seems a long time because you're out there on the streets, but in prison time goes by superfast. You know 21 years is a long time ago. Well for me it seems like yesterday.*

I mean we're all waiting for death but waiting for it, and you have absolutely nothing else to do but the exact same thing every single day, is different.

They want to execute me, they want to tie me down to a table and they wanna, they wanna to stick needles in me and pump poison in me until I'm dead.

You know I call this existence. I don't believe that I'm living. I'm not living. I just exist.

Anna: *What are your worst moments like.*

Marcus: Uhmhhh... being by myself,

MUSIC IN

being alone, not having no one to talk to, being stuck in this cell everyday. Can't go out, cant walk to the park, cant go to museums, you know, can't go kick it with a female.

Anna: yeah, you miss love?

Marcus: To be honest with you, I've never been in love. But I miss the idea of being in love.

I always wanted to find a female. I always wanted to find, that love that never dies, that never breaks. Like, have you ever seen that movie. Oooh, what is the name of it, uhm... The Notebook.

Anna: yeah, i have,

Marcus: I love it (laughs) I love it, that's my favorite romantic movie. My favorite part is the very end when he climbs in bed with her and they pass away together. That was beautiful, I love it. I love that movie, I've watched it over ten times.

Like, just because im a gang member, that doesn't mean i didn't want love, i didn't want romance. i never found it but...

MUSIC OUT

Phone lady: This call and or telephone number will be monitored and recorded.

MUSIC IN

Marcus: I think about my own fate almost every day. I think about the future. every day, the past, what I did to get here. I think about the victims. I think about.. will I die in the execution chamber will I die of, you know old age will I die of natural causes. Well I don't know how I will die but I think about it.

Anna: Mhmm... do you think people will care?

Marcus: I think that my family care. I think that, old friends care. But, it's not really a concern to them because it's not happening at this very moment. So, I think the victims' uhm.. Their families.... You know.. yeah.

Anna: Do you think they're waiting for you to die.

Marcus: Well the individual that died in the bank, her husband personally told me in my last trial that he would be here for the execution to watch me die uhmmmm.. the family of the three individuals that died in 1994. Uh... I believe they want to be here also. So, if that day comes when I'm tied to a table and executed you know if they want to come and watch... if that gives them some type of peace - so be it.

MUSIC IN

Anna: So where do you think you will go, heaven or hell?

Marcus: I'm going to heaven.

Anna: Yeah.

Marcus: Yeah.

Anna: Why?

Marcus: Because I'm not a bad person. I've never really been a bad person. I've made some bad mistakes.

Anna: Some big mistakes

Marcus: (laughs) yeah, some big mistakes.

Anna: Right, But they won't keep you from heaven?

Marcus: God forgives. I know what I did was wrong. I can't honestly say that I wouldn't rob a bank, because I can't see myself being homeless. I can't see my family suffering. But as for taking another human being's life I would never do that again.

Anna: How do you want to die?

Marcus: I guess I would like to die in my sleep. I don't want to be buried. my cell is literally, basically a box. I've been living in these boxes for years. So I'd rather be cremated. And I saw on this PBS show that they can take these ashes and turn it into a diamond so I'd rather have my ashes turned into a diamond.

Anna: why do you want to become a diamond?

Marcus: cause I feel like I will still be free. I'd be around somebody's neck or on somebody's finger you know. Throughout time.

Marcus: A friend of mine, since I've been incarcerated here, told me I have a daughter, but...it was with a girl, that you know we had a one night stand and after that one night I never saw her again. And, she told my homeboy that I had a daughter, and he finally wrote me years later:

“Yeah you have this daughter named Stacy, and she was born in 1995.”

it feels fucked up.

Phone Lady: YOU HAVE SIXTY SECONDS REMAINING

Marcus: And, I know all her life she's wondered who I am, why I'm not there, why did I abandon her, why did I never look for her and it's because I never knew she existed until 2014.

You know, If I ever find her, I would want me to be turned into a diamond and I would want to be with her.

Anna: *What if she doesn't want the diamond?*

Marcus: *I would tell her in the beginning you have every right to be angry with me.*

Phone Lady: YOU HAVE THIRTY SECONDS REMAINING

But, whatever you choose to do with your life no matter what it is I support you. No matter how she felt, I would always love her. In my eyes she would be able to do no wrong.

Anna: *Can you call me back?*

Marus: *Uhhmm...*

Anna: *Or are they...*

Marcus: *Yeah, they're going to take the phone.*

Anna: *ok.*

Marcus: *Have a beautiful night, take care and...*

Dial tone

MUSIC IN

Spencer: *So, Anna, have you heard from Marcus.*

Anna: *Yes, I speak to him regularly. Being on death row means that, you have a lot of time for phone calls. He's still spends 20 hours a day in his cell, he's still watching romantic movies.. and he still hasn't found his daughter.*

Spencer: *Do you know what's going to happen to him?*

Anna: *He has some appeals left, but if the new legislation does what it's supposed to, his time on earth could be cut in half. So, instead of spending the next 30 something years of his life on death row, in prison, he'll be executed much sooner.*

Spencer: *Wow. And until then?*

Anna: *He waits.*