

The Killing of Larry Lonchars

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Larry Lonchars has been in the news off and on ever since he killed my friend Steve. He also killed Steve's dad and his girlfriend. The news stories mostly focus on various issues relating to the death penalty, and they rarely refer to Steve, other than to mention that the killings were related to a gambling debt. Steve was a gambler and a drug dealer.

Steve, and myself, for that matter, were the kind of people many death penalty advocates think deserve to be dead. I always thought Steve was a nice guy, a nicer and more honest drug dealer than myself. I got sober and I got a shot at a real life, and Steve got a bullet in the head. That's just how things work out, I suppose.

Not long ago I was walking through some woods on a pleasant afternoon and I came upon a scrap of newspaper. The scrap was about Larry Lonchars' desire to change the method of his execution. Larry Lonchars usually wants to be executed. Sometimes he changes his mind, but he usually feels pretty hopeless and wants his lawyers to leave him alone to die. They, of course, say that he's confused and that he really needs them to stop his execution.

Anyway, according to this newspaper scrap, Larry Lonchars decided a while back that he wanted to donate his organs. He wanted what seems to him to have been a pretty meaningless life to wind up having some meaning after all. The problem with Larry Lonchars' plan is that after the State of Georgia gets done with what they have planned for him down at Jackson, there won't be anything left to donate. Electrocutation messes up a man's insides.

So the story was about the legal battle over finding a way to salvage Larry Lonchars' organs. Even lethal injection damages much of the goods beyond any salvaging. There was talk of a firing squad, or hanging. One State Legislator introduced a bill to bring back the guillotine—no damage to the organs there.

Ultimately, Larry Lonchars called in Jack Kevorkian as a consultant to help determine how best to facilitate the process of execution and organ donation. Kevorkian explained that the liver and kidneys could be salvaged after

administration of the lethal injection. However, the heart and lungs, in order to be of any use, would have to be removed under heavy sedation, prior to the administration of any deadly poisons. My question is, why bother with the poisons at that point? The job would already be done. To tell you the truth, though, no matter what the news reports have to say about Larry Lonchars, they always take my mind back to the day in nineteen eighty-six when I first found out what had happened to Steve.

I was driving down Moore's Mill road on another nice sunny afternoon, listening to one of the news-radio stations. They played a tape of a 911 call.

A female voice said, "I'm shot. He's still here, hurry!"

"Where are you shot?"

"In the living room." There were the sounds of two gunshots. That was one in Steve's brain and one in the brain of his father.

"He's still here. Hurry!"

"Calm down, now. Where are you shot?"

"In the living room. I'm in the living room. Hurry, please."

"No, where in your body are you shot? What part of your body?"

"My stomach. I'm shot in my stomach."

Then there was a gurgling sound as she was stabbed in the throat. Seventeen times she was stabbed in the throat.

Larry Lonchars, being at the center of a semi-famous death penalty case, gets his share of publicity. But his victims don't get much mention. They weren't tortured to death. It was fairly quick. And they weren't a nice yuppie family. They were just gamblers and drug dealers who got killed doing something they shouldn't have been doing.

But still, it was wrong to kill them, wasn't it? Personally, I don't see too much difference between what Larry Lonchars did and what the State wants to do to him. If it's wrong, it's wrong.

Some people insist that Larry Lonchars deserves to die. I wonder—what does people getting what they deserve have to do with anything? Did I deserve to have people help me the way they did and get me out the mess I was in? Did I deserve a nice life out walking on a sunny afternoon through the woods with a scrap of newspaper in my hands? I don't think so. I've known plenty of nicer guys than me who wound up in prisons and graves. Did Steve deserve a bullet in his head? Probably not as much as I did, and I sure am glad no one executed me.

Does Larry Lonchars deserve to die? So what if he does? Is it worth us becoming killers in order to give someone what they deserve? Larry Lonchars became a killer and he doesn't feel too good about it. That should be a lesson to us. If it's wrong, it's wrong.

In a matter of self defense you may perhaps make a case for killing. In a matter of war, you may even make your case for killing. But in a matter of a man trapped tight in a cage in our custody—there is no case. If it's wrong, it's wrong. If he wants to die let him call back Jack Kevorkian for a surreptitious visit. I don't want the stain of his blood on my hands. We don't deserve the stain of his blood on our hands.

A couple of weeks ago an appeals court granted Larry Lonchars' request that his appeal be terminated. Twice Larry Lonchars has come within moments of dying. Once, he was granted a stay just sixty seconds prior to the pulling of the switch.

This past Friday in DeKalb County, Superior Court Judge Castellani scheduled Larry Lonchars' execution for November thirteenth at two p.m. The lawyers on both sides agree that this finally seems to be the end of the road. They expect this case to be closed at that time.

This time, Larry Lonchars is ready to die any old way the State wants to kill him. He says he deserves to be in hell. I don't know if that's where he's headed, but if he did wind up in hell he would be familiar with the surroundings. He grew up there. Certainly no child deserves the hell, the beatings and degradations, that constituted the childhood of Larry Lonchars. I hope he isn't headed back there. And I hope we as a people don't find it necessary to abuse this man any more than he already has been abused. Is there anyone who would claim that killing is not abusive?

But, most of all, on a nice sunny day like this, I think about my friend Steve, and all of the stuff in life he missed out on. For a gambler and a drug dealer, he wasn't such a bad guy.