

Getting Life by Michael Morton

The following are excerpts are from the book Getting Life. The book was written by Michael Morton, about his 25 year ordeal fighting to prove his innocence in Texas for a crime he didn't commit.

The book takes you on a journey of emotions and I recommend it to anyone who believes our justice system is infallible. Below are a number of quotes from the book that really hit home and could have been interchanged in some fashion with my story. But my goal was to provide a sample of the incompetence by the investigating officers, arrogant (win at all cost) attitude by the prosecutors', and years of doubt, angst, hardship, and needless loss, placed on the families and loved ones of all involved including Mr. Morton and myself for crimes we didn't commit.

Pg. 69. In reference to a comment made by one of Mr. Morton's trial attorney's, Bill White. "He told me that *'an innocent man in a case like mine is absolutely useless to his defense attorneys.'* And it was true- I knew nothing about the crime, had no explanation, could point to no suspects or offer any provable alternative explanations for what had happened to Chris. I was clueless. White told me *'that wasn't surprising, that a truly innocent man is the hardest kind of defendant to represent.'*" [emphasis added]

Pg. 73 In reference to opposing district attorney Ken Anderson: "He clearly cared more about winning than anything else. He disputed even minor points with my attorneys, refused to agree with them on almost anything, and was very obviously preparing for the battle of his life. He felt dangerous to me, like someone who cared too much about his own grandiose ambitions and too little about the law. I knew enough not to underestimate him." (Again, sounds familiar. Too bad Mark Sisti wasn't smart enough to do the same with Delker.)

Pg. 80 Another reference to opposing district attorney Ken Anderson: "The imagery he used was stark and as extreme as possible. I came to recognize this technique as simply his courtroom style- making statements so outrageous, so beyond comprehension, so disturbing, that juries would fill with collective anger against the defendant and the terrible things that Ken Anderson said he had done- even when the actual evidence did not support his awful imaginings." (We all know how emotional my case was. It certainly doesn't take much to rile up members of a jury when a beautiful young child dies. Sisti needed to do more than simply prove "reasonable doubt" I was not guilty and he needed to make an effort to prove that. There was plenty of evidence available to help him with that task.)

Pg. 85 "We all think we know how we would react to devastating news. Some of us believe we would cry, others might reason that they would feel faint. Still others believe they would scream and collapse if they were told they'd lost someone they love. When I learned of Chris's death, I had collapsed, but not spectacularly there on the lawn. I had fallen apart quickly and quietly completely on the inside- and that was apparently something the sheriff didn't accept as a normal reaction." (This reminded me of the Kittery Detective having the audacity to judge Amanda for having a reaction to Cassidy's death that he felt wasn't a normal reaction.)

Pg. 139 "The attorney who filed my writ made all the difference. He told me prison writs were rarely given serious consideration. The lawyer's bar number on my paperwork elevated it above the typical penitentiary far. It was actually looked at, read, and ultimately, approved." (hmmm. Hope this helps some understand my patience.... And desire not to file pro se...once convicted there is little respect from an inmate, even from the court. People will always doubt our true innocence...)

Pg. 152 In reference to the reality to the state of the relationship with his son Eric. “I told myself things would change when I got out, when I was proved innocent, when everyone knew this was nothing more than a terrible, terrible mistake. What I wouldn’t admit to myself was that some of what had happened to my relationship with Eric was irreparable. The tear had been too traumatic, the years of bad information and bad advice and bad feelings had left ugly wounds and deep bruises- on both of us.

All I knew was that I would always love him- that he would always be the living embodiment of a marriage that ended too soon and a mother who should still be here. Eric would always be part of a small, shattered family that didn’t deserve any of what fate had handed out. And he would always be my son. I hoped that, someday, I would get the chance to be his father. (I could substitute both Kyle and Amanda in here for the young family we started along with Cassidy, shattered through no fault of our own. Obviously, I still love them both very much and always will. Sadly, they have both had people in their ears over the years saying bad things about me, giving bad advice, and tainting the memories we all created together. I can’t possibly combat that, especially in the case of Amanda, where I have had no contact and the opportunity to create ongoing memories.)

Pg. 167 In reference to feelings of loneliness and the loss of contact with his son Eric.

“Suddenly, the only anchor I had was gone. Eric was the only safe place I had left. He had been the receptacle of all my hopes and dreams. He was the light at the end of the tunnel. He was my idol, my religion- my reason for living. I believed in him. He was everything. He was the only thing. And he had vanished. I felt so bad, so hopeless and so defeated and so broken, that I did something completely out of character for me. I cried out to God. I begged for a sign, for a reason to go on, for a way out of my abyss and my pain- for some deliverance, some reassurance, some relief. Something. Anything. I got nothing. Only silence and emptiness- further proof that I’d been right all along: there was no one there. I truly was alone. Every twenty-four hour stretch filled with familiar tedium.” (I can totally relate. Kyle helps give my day purpose so I can get up to fight another day. When I lose contact with him, I lose a piece of myself. If I didn’t have him out there to try and role model for, my time here would certainly be different.)

Pg. 172 In reference to his innocence and how even being wronged your confidence can erode over time. “Over time I had internalized a toxic amount of the shame and undeserved guilt associated with Chris’s murder and my conviction. Once in a while, when I would reveal to another inmate- or a free world prison employee- what had happened to me, I found myself, automatically offering whatever external support I had for what I was saying. Even for me, my truth was no longer enough on its own. ‘I passed two polygraphs’. I’d say. I’d kept the paperwork, verifying the results. ‘The prosecution withheld evidence of my innocence,’ I’d tell them- not knowing that even I was completely unaware of the most dishonest and illegal of these omissions. I assured my audience that I knew Chris was killed by someone else- probably someone who had broken into our house- because ‘my 3 yr old son told me he saw a large man taking a shower with his clothes on.

I sounded to myself, like an old con- itself a kind of awful evidence- further proof that my circumstances had diminished me, made me doubt myself, made me want to get away from me. I hated it. It was so easy to feel hopeless.” (Man, I can relate but I couldn’t put my finger on it until Mr. Morton put it into words. Like Morton, I know the truth but start losing confidence the longer things drag on then toxic shame comes into play.)

Pg. 184 In reference to the grind of prison wearing him down. “I had exhausted my lifetime supply of optimism. Everyday in prison left me tired- tired of the grueling sameness, tired of the coarseness and cruelty, tired of the dehumanization of being locked up like an animal.” (YUP)

Pg. 189 In reference to looking over family photos sent in by his mom. “I searched every scene, pulling out the smallest details. Are those new curtains on Mom’s windows? What is the food in the

yellow bowl? Whose kid is that? I could not get enough of the faces. I feasted on the backgrounds. I could almost taste the meals. The clothes everyone wore simply fascinated me. But the way my family had changed over the years hit me hardest. In more than one picture, I hadn't recognized my younger Matt- and that hurt. I had missed so much. And I longed for everyone and every element of the outside world so much it ached. I wanted to go home. I'd had enough of prison, enough of the stiff-upper lip life I had been living for so many years. The world had gone on without me. (I can certainly relate to this feeling)

Pg. 214 In reference to his first post prison meal in a restaurant with people he CHOSE to eat with and ENJOYED their company. "I ordered trout. It was the first time in 25 years I had eaten fish that hadn't been smashed into a square and tasted like chicken. It was the first time in 25 years I shared a table with people who had never stabbed anyone- so I was finally able to use a knife and a fork. Good bye, cruel spork. The silverware felt wonderfully heavy and solid in my hands. The sound of my knife and fork clinking on the plate was impressive. After years of eating off plastic trays with a plastic utensil, the look and feel of the silver, china, and crystal seemed wildly luxurious. I'd gone from pauper to prince in one day. I wiped my hands on the linen napkin much more than I needed to. For me, simply *having* a napkin was a novelty. If I wanted or needed a napkin in the prison chow hall, I had to bring toilet paper from my cell.

But the real kicker was having someone serve me dinner- having another person carefully place my full plate in front of me, smile at me, make sure my glass was filled, and fuss over whether or not I liked the food. For me, this was absolutely mind-boggling. 'Prison dining' (insert derisive laughter here) is eating every single meal in the world's worst cafeteria. The cooks don't care, the kitchen workers hate their jobs, and the food is the absolute cheapest and most poorly prepared possible. This experience was like a preview of heaven- the very best meal I'd ever had. (Michael has captured the essence of prison dining perfectly. I have often thought of my first post-prison meal. I Hopefully it will happen.)

Pg.258 In reference to what the punishment should be for the man who actually murdered his wife keeping in mind that Morton already spent 25 years in prison for her murder which he did not commit. "I had learned the hard way that there are worse things than dying- and that was what I wanted for Mark Norwood. I wanted him to go to the netherworld I'd been banished to-for the rest of his life. I wanted him to lose all of his freedoms, large and small. I wanted him to be miserable. - for a very long time- and then die behind the cold, uncaring walls of prison, alone. (I know the feeling. For the longest time I've felt sure I KNEW WHO was responsible for Cassidy's death and wanted HIM to suffer a similar fate that I have endured and then some. If it turns out that Cassidy died from an accumulation of accidents, I'll be the first to offer an apology for thinking negative thoughts. Unfortunately, the police did a marvelous job sending us down the road of finger pointing with their sloppy investigation and asking questions like who did this? Vs. Let's try to find out what happened.

Pg. 262 In reference to a key witness changing her mind about Morton's guilt after DNA proved him innocence. Unfortunately, like so many others she had her mind made up prior and her statements were very damaging during his trial but she was more truthful/ less emotionally/ swayed by police during the trial of Mark Norwood. "Apparently she had come around. This time on the stand, she did not accuse me of ripping out the marigolds Chris had planted, and she did not testify-wrongly- that I referred to my wife as 'bitch.' She actually said some kind things about Chris and me as parents, telling the jury we never let Eric out of our sight- that we were with him, everywhere and always. She said that was how she knew something was very wrong at our home on the day Chris died. Our little boy was outside alone, something we would never have let happen." (I often think of this and wonder how many people would change their story if they knew more facts. I think of some of the ridiculous stuff that has been said about Cassidy and Amanda and my parenting and it makes me sick. Ex. Amanda taking Cassidy to the mall covered with bruises etc. GRRR.)

Chad