

Příloha

PREFACE

As Confucius or some similar traveller once remarked, ‘A journey of a thousand miles begins with but a single step.’ To write this book my own journey was considerably longer than a thousand miles, but the single step with which it began was a letter which said, in part, this:

I am an English writer and interviewer. Two years ago I published a book called *Life after Life*, which consisted of transcripts of tape-recorded conversations with twelve people, some in prison and some now out in the community on licence, who had committed murder and had served or were still serving sentences of life imprisonment as a result. I am now intending to put together a similar book of interviews with people in the United States of America who are in the same position. The criteria are the same:

- a) The person concerned should have, or have had, a life sentence for murder.
- b) He or she should agree that the finding of ‘guilty’ was correct. (This will not be a book about innocent people who have been wrongly convicted, which is a different subject.)
- c) The person I talk to should be willing to have several hours’ conversation with me in private, which I will tape-record, and there will be no other person present at any time.

In return I give the following assurances:

- 1) No other person but me will ever hear the tape-recordings either now or in the future, and after I have finished with them they will be physically destroyed and incinerated.
- 2) I will not use in the text, or ever reveal to anyone else, the real name of the person interviewed. Nor will I say or indicate in any way in which American state the conversations took place nor – if the person concerned is still incarcerated – will I name the prison in which the conversations occurred.

- 3) All references to actual place names, and the names of other people referred to, will be changed.
- 4) At the conclusion of each tape-recording session, I will ask the person I am talking to if he or she is worried about anything in the recording which might lead to identification: and if there is it will be erased then and there to the person concerned's satisfaction.
- 5) Neither the recorded tapes nor the text of their transcripts will be submitted to any state judicial or penal authority for censorship, approval, or permission to publish.

From this the conclusion, I hope, is plain: talking to me will neither assist the person concerned in any way, nor be to his or her detriment. And, finally, there will be no financial inducement or reward.

Two hundred copies of the letter were sent to American organisations connected with offenders and ex-offenders asking if they would approach possible contacts, to individual prisoners with whom I was already corresponding, to within-prison organisations such as lifers-support groups, to parole and probation officers and offices, and to state prison authorities themselves. The result was at first a trickle, then a flow, and eventually a flood of replies, just as when a stone is dropped in a pond it produces an ever-widening circle of ripples and waves.

As a result I made four visits to the North American continent, spending a total of five months there and travelling not one but seven and a half thousand miles. I corresponded with and visited twenty-seven prisons in thirty-eight states; in every single one of them (with the exception of New Hampshire) I was given full and immediate co-operation, with little formality and complete freedom to talk to and make completely private tape-recorded conversations with anyone I chose. In all I carried out forty-three interviews lasting a total of one hundred and seventy hours.

The United States of America is a federation of individual states, each making its own laws, with its own criminal justice system and control of its own prisons (or 'Correctional Facilities' as some states prefer to call them). There is also a federal system: but its prisons contain less than five per cent of the total number of people incarcerated in the USA, and the procedures which have to be followed to be permitted

access to them are so arcane and bureaucratic that I should probably now still be in America if I had once become enmeshed in them.

Over 1 ¼ million people are in prison in America, more than half of them black or Hispanic. The United States has become the world leader in its rate of incarceration, having surpassed both South Africa and the former Soviet Union. Although in some respects its prisons are less rigorous than their English counterparts – visiting is permitted for much longer periods and far more frequently, access to outside-line telephones is more prevalent, correspondence is unrestricted and uncensored, and in some states postage for prisoners' letters is paid for by the authorities – sentencing is more ferocious and punitive, and for much longer periods than it is in most other countries. As is to be expected this in no way reduces the amount of crime, either petty or serious, and gives no statistical support whatever to those who proclaim its efficacy (any more than the use of the death penalty in those states which practise it reduces the murder rate).

The offenders and ex-offenders whose recorded conversations appear in this book are in no sense representative of American murderers. From so tiny a cross-section of course no conclusions may be drawn, except perhaps a tentative reaffirmation of what William Penn the Quaker said, that there is probably if we can see it something of God in everyone.

TP

The little prince

FLOYD T. JACKSON

The pretty fair-haired receptionist in the Laura Ashley dress smiled. 'Oh hi!' she said, 'Mr Jackson said to show you in as soon as you arrived.' She came from behind the desk and led the way down the long maroon-carpeted corridor with a line of Redouté rose prints along one wall, to a door near the end. The name-plate on it said 'Floyd T. Jackson. Deputy Manager: Personnel'. She tapped on the door and held it open.

A dapper man with short black hair, in a grey business suit, a white shirt with a button-down collar and a royal blue tie: he had a firm handshake, and his voice was quiet. He pulled up two low armchairs to a coffee table by the window.

- I'm glad you could make it, good to meet you. An hour you said? And again next Tuesday, and the Tuesday after? That'll suit me fine. The end of the month I go to Cincinnati for a conference so that'll work in just right.

Well, like you said, I haven't prepared anything: we'll go where the conversation takes us, OK? One thing I want to say straight at the beginning though is I had a good childhood. Lots of folk say they didn't don't they? They say a bad childhood was responsible for everything that happened and everything they did. All the fault of their childhood, right? Well I don't, no, not me: I had a real good childhood in every way, I want to make that plain.

My family wasn't rich, not rich at all if we're talking money and material things. As far as those things go we were downright poor. But in all other ways we were rich, you know what I mean? In things that mattered – love, care, concern – I never lacked for those, never for one day in all my childhood life I did not and that's a fact. Four good women raised me, every one of them good and every one of them strong: my mother, my grandmother, and two of my aunts. We all of us lived in a nice clean house in a good neighbourhood in Detroit: and we always had food and we always had clothes. Not much of anything, but always enough of everything for us to get by.

My mother was working, she was a teacher in high school and that meant she had a regular wage. Her being a teacher meant another thing too: she was a well-educated woman, with lots of certificates and things. My mother had something special about her, you know what I mean? She was good hard-working person, and was always trying to put it into me that when I grew up I should be the same.

The great idol of her life was a man by the name of Booker T. Washington, did you ever hear that name? Yes you're absolutely right, that's who he was: the founder of the very first university for black people in Tuskegee Alabama in 1881. And my mother always used to say to me, 'Floyd' she'd say, 'Now you just remember Booker T. Washington, how he showed how important education is to a black man; and you always try as hard as you can to be like him.' And I remember other times she'd say to me 'Floyd, if you can master just two subjects, English and math, then there'll be nothing in your life you can't deal with no matter what it is, whether it's a work problem or an emotional one. If you know English and math, you'll be equipped for every situation in life you'll ever come across.'

A pity I didn't heed her words you know, then when I was young: I've often thought maybe I would have too, if only I'd had me some competition in the family. But the trouble was you see that I didn't have: no brothers or sisters, and in a family of four women I was the only male. In fact, I didn't have no male relatives at all: the only others near my own age were two cousins that I had, and they were both female too. So you see what I was as a kid was I was everybody's pet. Everybody loved me because I was special, and what was special about me was I was male. I wasn't exactly spoiled, I wouldn't say that: but from the earliest age I remember I was kind of looked up to because one day I'd be a man, you know what I mean? I was a little prince waiting to come into his kingdom sort of thing, and because of that I was always well behaved: good at school, worked hard, never played hookey, and well thought of by all my teachers too. Outside of that, I was a member of the church, a cub scout, in every way a model boy. I didn't ever do wrong: I couldn't and I wouldn't, I just wasn't that kind. It stayed that way the whole of the first ten eleven years of my life. Till my father came back into it, in fact.

But don't think I'm blaming him for things, because I'm not. I don't recall I'd ever seen him before. I suppose I might have, but he and my mother had separated when I was six month old. Maybe now I think of it it could have been they weren't married ever, I'm not sure. I know he went off and lived with another lady and I never saw him until I was old enough to be a person. Up until then any kid he saw in the street could have been his, and he only began to take an interest in me when I was forming some character of my own. That's how it often is with fathers, right?

He was a longshoreman, someone who works on the waterfront loading and unloading vessels, a stevedore I believe it's sometimes called as well. And he started calling around at our house once a week, usually Saturday afternoon. I think my mother hoped maybe he was going to renew his interest in her. He was a very tall man, good looking, you know? That's often how it is with women isn't it: no matter how badly a guy's treated her she hopes he'll maybe change? Well in his case it wasn't so: he only ever asked could he take me out a couple of hours, to the park or some place like that. My mother and grandmother said to him 'OK then, but just you see it is the park, and none of them bars of yours.' And he'd say 'No of course not, what sort of a guy do you think I am? I'd not ever even think of doing that with a kid of his age.' Then he'd turn so they couldn't see him, and he'd give me a big wink.

Because that'd be exactly where he would take me, every time: round all his favourite bars. I was small for my age, like I'm still small now; and this big man who was my father, he'd lift me up and set me on the bar everywhere we went for everyone to see. He'd call out 'Hey come on and meet my son everybody; this is Joe Junior, ain't he a fine looking boy?' My name wasn't 'Joe', and I don't think he ever knew what it really was or cared: but his name was Joe, so I was 'Joe Junior' which was all that mattered to him.

After a time it got so they all always kept a special glass for me with 'Joe Junior' on it behind the bar: it was for a soda or something for me every time we went in. And I'll tell you something now: very soon I did, I came to like him very much, that man. Something of a rogue he may have been, sure, but he wasn't no villain and there's a difference you know, there really is. He was big and tall and good-looking, and there was a twinkle in his eye: he had a way with ladies, and he was my father, and I hoped often enough that when I grew up I'd be like him. He always made me promise never to tell my mother or grandmother where we'd been, and I never did: that would have been the end of our trips out together if ever they'd got to know.

Many times I wished he'd come back home and live with my mother and grandmother and me, I really did: and sometimes I told him that. And he'd smile at me and pat me on the head, he'd say 'Boy you know what, that'd be really nice, one day we'll see what we can work out about it, hey?' I mentioned it to my grandmother one time and I remember her face went all kind of tight. She said 'Floyd, now you don't even think of that ever, do you hear me?' But I did.

I guess that's enough for me to tell you about my childhood though, right? What went wrong with my life after, that's the question we come to isn't it? Well believe me, if I could tell you a simple answer, I would: but the truth is and always has been I honestly don't know. But suddenly I started playing hookey from school: one day one week, two days the next, and so on like that. And it wasn't I was being bullied there or my lessons fell off or my grades were poor. It was just I was playing around: or certainly it was at the beginning, and that was all.

Parts of Detroit, like in every city I guess, they were known as not very good environments: they were in every way not at all like the part I lived in, so they were where I always went. There were drugs around, liquor, and plenty of girls: and for some reason to me, that suddenly started to feel like where I belonged. I was restless and school was boring: being good was like I'd been missing out, that's the nearest I can

get. What mattered was to experience life, so I tried everything there was. My first time of taking drugs, of drinking myself incapable, of having full sex with a girl – they all happened with rush, just within a few weeks of me being fourteen. All the guys I mixed with there were around that same age, and nothing was important to all of us except to do everything, and as much of all of it as we could.

I look back at it now you know, and I think it was all somehow weird: weird is the only word I can possibly use. There were maybe two hundred kids around there and all of them behaving that selfsame way. No one did anything terrible, don't get me wrong: there weren't no guns or knives and fights or stuff like that. Maybe a bit of petty crime, burglarising houses for small change, shoplifting, stealing from our parents, taking small items from our homes. That was how we all lived and we all thought it was happiness. And the biggest buzz of all was in having our own society which was just the other side of the law. It went on that way I guess about three years.

Maybe it's not too unusual for kids, I mean to go through a phase like that: maybe it's something most of them do for a while and then grow out of. I was never in serious trouble though, none of us were. But the police learned most of our names, and they had our number: we had the potential for one day getting into serious crime. They began coming around our homes now and again, and asking us a few questions. We'd not done anything, but I guess they were giving a hint to our parents it was time they should be watching out for us, you know how I mean?

And if that was what it was, it worked for sure for my mother. Once she'd gotten over the shock of finding I was no longer her precious little boy devoting his time to education in the way she understood it, and which naturally caused her a great deal of distress and worry, she sat me down for a serious talk. She asked me to tell her straight just exactly what was wrong with the way she'd been raising me. Well, I could no more tell her then than I've been able to tell you now. All I could say was it wasn't I was unhappy, but I felt I wanted to broaden my knowledge of life, that was all. She asked me did I want to squander the hard work I'd already put in on my education, or did I want to go on trying to make something good for myself in my future. I told her yes I did: so she said she'd think about it a while very carefully, and talk with my grandmother and my aunts about it. Then we'd all discuss it all together and see what we could come up with in the way of ideas.

What they finally said was this: they said they thought the real trouble was I need to learn how to discipline myself, not rely on other folks like her and school to do it for

me. And she thought maybe a spell in the armed forces would help me learn how. It was a good life, a man's life, it paid good, there was opportunities for travel and new experiences, and I'd not be leading such a sheltered life like I had so far in a household that was entirely female like ours. Well, that appealed to me, I thought it made sense, so it didn't take much effort on her part to persuade me that the sooner I started in on it, the better it would be.

I've an appointment at four, so should we maybe finish at that point for today, and pick it up again from there next week? Sure, same day same time, that'd suit me fine.

-Where'd we finish last time? Oh sure, when I joined the navy at seventeen, I remember, that's right. Well, I signed on for four years: and I did, I really enjoyed the life. To a boy from a Detroit suburb, it was a great adventure you know, I went all over the world: Germany, Norway, Denmark, the Philippines, I even once briefly visited your country, England. We put into a place called Portsmouth I think it was, on the south coast there. A really cute little town I remember it as: very quaint, old-fashioned streets and houses and things. From there we had a couple of days seeing London as well: Buckingham Palace, Windsor Palace where your Queen lives, and somewhere else where there was an old old cathedral called Salsboro or some name like that, would that be it?

I liked the navy, always all the time seeing those new places: and I learned some new skills in it too. I was a maintenance engineer: and before long I was promoted to be a petty officer and had maybe around twenty men under me, so I guess I was doing pretty good. I didn't see it that way, but I should have signed on for twenty years. And maybe I wouldn't have ended where I did if I had you know. I often think that: I was my own man, I earned good money, I had responsibility, and I could have made a good life for myself, I could. But I didn't, instead I hooked up with guys who were doing bad things, just like I'd done when I was home. I was drinking and gambling and whoring whenever we were in a port, and there were four of us in particular who formed our own little group. Every place we went, as soon as we got ashore it was where's the action, where's the bars, where are the girls? Dissolution, that was our life. Before, it'd been with kids: but now it was with grown men. Two of us were eighteen and two of us were twenty-one: and if you saw one of us around, the others'd always be somewhere near, you could rely on that. And because of it, what happened happened: one for all and all

for one. I don't want to say the responsibility for the final outcome was anyone else's though, it wouldn't be true: the main fault was mine.

And this is the way it came about, just around the time the four years I'd signed on for were coming to their end. We put into port on the East Coast, and we had a ten-day furlough, our final one, and even by our own low standards what we raised was Hell. We had competitions every day: which one of us could drink the most liquor and stay standing, which one could win the largest bet at roulette, who could screw the most girls one other another in twenty-four hours. We went on that way for eight days I guess, maybe nine; and then finally one night we all got ourselves involved in a big fight in a downtown bar. Usually I let the others do the serious fighting because I was the smallest, but this particular night there was no chance of that, there were fists flying everywhere. Everyone fought: furniture was smashed, bottles and glasses broken, everything. And I saw one of my buddies was backed up in a corner, with three guys standing in a bunch with their fists raised, ready to give him a beating.

Like I said, all for one and one for all. I didn't stop to think about it, I went behind them, and I gave one an almighty punch, just as hard as I could. Where I caught him was here in the side of his throat, and he dropped to the floor like he was a sack of potatoes. I'd fractured a vein or burst a blood vessel, I've never known exactly what: but whatever, right there and then he was instantly dead. I didn't know it, I thought he was just unconscious or something, but me and my buddy didn't stay to find out. And I felt quite proud of myself for what I'd done.

We went back to the ship real quick: we thought it was the safest place to be. What we didn't expect though was who came to see us the next day: it was the police. They asked us to go with them and answer a few questions about the fight there'd been in this bar: a guy in it had been killed. Was I the one who'd done it? Half a dozen people who were there were going to say they'd seen me deliver that blow.

It does something to you, something like that: it's like nothing you've ever experienced in your life. A guy who was a living person, another human being: now he's no more, and it's due only to you. Your lives are inextricable: but you're alive and he's dead, and you caused that and it can never be undone. Something went out of me at that moment in my life: and now all of these years later, it's never come back and it never will. I got a life sentence for murder: and I think I was lucky I didn't go to the chair, it was only that that state didn't have the death penalty then, that was all.

Prison's the only place in the world you can go where there's nothing else for you to do but think: and it took me the whole of the first seven years in there before I got my thinking straight, it really did. I wasn't going to let myself admit I'd really killed a guy, you know what I mean? I was all the time making excuses about it: it'd been an accident because I hadn't meant to do it, or he'd had a weak carotid artery, or he'd seen the punch coming and tried to duck out of it but he'd miscalculated and ducked into it instead. And anyway what if I hadn't hit him? Him and those guys with him, they'd have beaten my buddy to death. So what, if I had killed one man I'd saved the life of another. On and on I went, every variation I could think of, trying to think of an escape. Like I say, for seven years I did that, but finally I stopped. I don't know why: perhaps because I ran out of excuses, that's all, but in the end I recognised them for what they were and accepted the fault was no one else's but mine.

The person who helped me most was my mother. In spite of what I'd done, she never gave up on me. Every single month she made a five-hundred-mile round trip to the prison to visit me. She came on the Greyhound bus when she'd finished school Friday afternoon, travelled all night and came to see me Saturday, stopped over in a nearby cheap motel, then Sunday took the bus again back home. She wrote me once every week, and what she wrote or said when she came to see me was always the same. She said 'Son, there's still good in you like there is in everyone. You done wrong, and the one person who can help you do right again is you.' She never blamed me, she never told me stop trying to find excuses for myself, she just said on and on she loved me and she wanted me to start over my life again when the day came that I came out. She said, 'Take this chance you've got now to go on improving your education.' So I did: I worked in the prison print shop, and all the time I could spare I read and I read. I took a business administration course and got my diploma for it: it wasn't something much, but it was a start for a new way of thinking for me, you know what I mean?

With my mother's help and all the books and magazines I read that she was always sending in to me, I got very slowly to see I was young enough to make something of myself still. I did seventeen years: when I went in I was twenty-three years of age and when I came out I was just forty-one. And all I can say of it is this, that when I went in I was stupid and irresponsible, and when I came out half my lifetime later, at last I was a mature and thoughtful man. Five years ago that was now: let's talk about how it went from there next time shall we, if that's OK?

-Some folks might say I was institutionalised by prison: in a lot of ways I'd have to agree with them, it's correct, I was. On my record it'd show I was nearly a model prisoner: for the full seventeen years I was quiet and well behaved, and never got written up for an infraction of prison rules, not once in all that time. A thing that helped was I never wore a watch. It's harder to live under the prison system if you're thinking all the time 'When'll I get out, when'll I be free?' But I taught myself not to think that way. I'd done wrong, I'd done a bad thing: the world didn't owe me a living, it was me that owed one to the world. Doing time was the only thing I could do to pay: not adequately, not even approximately, but it was the only way. When I'd done enough, society would say so, not me. There wasn't no point in me getting frustrated, I'd just forget the subject was there.

When they told me six month ahead I was going to go out, right off I started to write letters to anyone I could think of that might give me a job. I didn't have any personal friends or contacts, but my mother provided me with some business directories, and I scoured them for any sort of firm I thought might give me a chance. I wrote them who I was and where, and exactly why I'd been in prison for seventeen years. I didn't have much to offer in qualifications except for my business studies diploma, but I said I'd start at the bottom and if they'd give me a probationary period, meantime before I came out I'd read up everything I could find if they'd tell me what their special subjects and interests were.

You know what? The response I got was amazing: I'd never have believed how many people there were who if you were straight with them, they'd consider giving you a chance. All this stuff you read in newspapers about people not wanting to know if you're a transgressor, it just wasn't true. I guess I had something like twenty-five replies: the majority said they were sorry they didn't have anything, but wished me luck and they'd keep my name on file. But six in total, they were really positive, they told me to come see them when I got out. That was such a lift to my spirits you know, I can't describe.

And that's how it went. I started with small concern that made auto-engine parts, in their offices, as kind of a general clerk. I stopped there six months, then one day one of their customers asked me if I'd go work for him. I was real nervous, I mean about telling him my record, because he didn't know it, did he? So before I accepted I gave him the full story, and said if he wanted to withdraw the offer I'd have no hard feelings.

But he said no, I'd been honest with him and he thanked me for it. And his offer still held.

You know all of it was truly amazing: and it set me to thinking if so many people were doing what they were, taking a risk and giving me a chance, then the least I could do was go on seriously trying to improve myself even more, and build up my confidence. So I enrolled myself in night school and went to classes two evenings a week: I studied beginners' psychology and personnel management work.

For a year, I lived very simply. I had one-room apartment, I kept away from any kind of trouble, I didn't drink, not even a drop: I saved a little money and I went on and on studying in every second of my time. Then I got a really big break: I got taken on by this big company here I'm with now, whose name is known very widely in the Mid-West and everywhere. I read the vacancy in a newspaper, and told them my record; and with it I'd recommendations about my character from the two companies I'd worked for, plus a statement on my progress from the college where I was studying. And they were people yet again who gave me a chance. I had to take a drop in salary to start with them, but to have the opportunity to work for a concern this size is what matters: if you want it, you've a job the rest of your life.

It was two years ago I came here, and in the time since I've worked hard and I've continued my studies. What I am now is Deputy Personnel Manager for this whole area: and even if I say it myself, I think that's pretty good compared with where I was five years ago. Life looks good: and I've had one other big break too that I don't deserve. The best a man can have: I've married a lovely lady, and we have our own apartment too, in a good part of town. She and my mother who lives with us now, they get along together just fine: and in three months' time if nothing goes wrong, we shall then have our first child. 'Life begins at forty' right? You know what I mean?

VICTIMS

(None of the people in this section knows, is known to, or has any connection with those in the previous sections of the book.)

Margaret Ferguson

WALKING A LONELY CORRIDOR

A pale lilac tracksuit and beige slippers; rimless steel spectacles and pale blue eyes. She blinked them nervously while she talked, lighting a cigarette, cupping a plastic coffee mug in her frail thin hands. She was fifty-seven, with thinning grey hair.

- I have a daughter called Susan and three lovely little grandchildren, but they live in New York: they come and visit twice a year. It's usually Easter and Thanksgiving, they stay with us a week each time. Fortunately they get on with my husband and he's very fond of them so everything's OK. My first husband, Susan's father, he and I divorced when she was three: he lives in Paris France with his second wife with whom he has four children. He writes occasionally to her, but not to our son Bill who's Susan's elder brother, never to him at all.

I came here to live seven years ago. I like it and I've made quite a few friends: well more acquaintances I should say. Susan's father's fairly generous over alimony so I have no problems financially, I get along. It's not exactly a mansion where I live as you see, but I have my little car out the driveway there and I've really all I need. Tuesdays and Thursdays I go to Bluebell Valley which is the old folks' home: I play the piano and we have a singalong and I think a lot of the residents appreciate that. With one or two of them I've gotten to be real friends.

Maybe I'll stay here the rest of my time; I hope so, we've moved house three times now the last ten years. Fred, he's my husband, he's coming up for retirement soon and I know he'd like us to settle. He's been good about us moving in the past: he's always said the important thing's I should be happy about where we were. I feel I owe it to him to let him stay in one place now where he can put down roots, enjoy his golf and stuff like that: specially since he's been so good about Bill who's not even his own son I mean. A lot of men wouldn't have been that way. Also he takes three or four days off

from work when I go visit Bill: it's a drive seven hundred miles there and seven hundred miles back and that's a long way to travel for someone Fred's age.

My son Bill is doing two natural life sentences for rape and murder of a seventeen-year-old girl. He did it nineteen years ago and they say he's no chance ever of parole. I don't want to say anything to the detriment of the girl or make any kind of excuse for Bill: I never have. I guess like other mothers who've had something of this kind happen in their lives I feel guilty about it to some extent myself: like if I hadn't done this or that or had raised him differently it wouldn't have occurred. Me and his father divorced when he was seven and I brought him and Susan up on my own and I can see all the things I did wrong. Even remarrying again: I feel I was selfish about that, putting my own happiness first. But then I have to say that even if Fred's only his stepfather and not his real parent, no one could have cared for Bill more or had a better relationship with him. Certainly his own father didn't, he abandoned him and went off with someone else younger and prettier than me. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that: it sounds bitter, like I'm trying to put the blame on him.

Bill had been away from home two years, then one day I had this letter from him written from jail in Nebraska saying he was waiting to go for trial. I had to read it six times before I could take it in what he was saying, which was he was going to plead guilty because he was. I thought there must be a mistake somewhere and Fred took me to see him and it was like Bill was a stranger. He said I should forget about him, he knew what his sentences would be and there was no point me seeing him any more. The first year or two he was incarcerated I was tempted to, to be honest I have to say that, I felt I owed it Fred and Susan to put Bill out of my life. I talked with both of them about it and they both said the same thing: no matter what he did you can't abandon your own son. Maybe without them saying it I would have, I can't really tell.

I go see him twice a year and we write regularly once a month. What worries me most about it is other people finding out. I did tell a neighbour once who I thought would understand. I said it was in confidence but she told other people: I know from how they looked at me in the supermarket or the street, and no one asked me into their homes for coffee any more. It's like they think you've some kind of unspeakable disease: it was the same for Susan, they wouldn't let their children talk with her. I couldn't take any more of it after a while and Fred agreed we'd move.

This has happened three times now. I've learned my lesson, I've never told anyone else, I don't trust people any more. What's it got to do with them anyway? You live your life within limits like this: you don't let anyone inside of them and get close to you, it's like walking a lonely corridor.

I'm grateful neither Fred nor Susan ever tells anyone else. Susan hasn't told her children, that I know for sure: and she says she's not going to until they're a lot older than they are. She may have mentioned it to her husband, but if she has he's good about it, he doesn't look at me when we see them as if he knows. If Bill hadn't written to me and said he'd met you and hoped I'd talk with you, you wouldn't have known either would you: if you'd met me some place I don't think you'd have guessed, right? Good, no.