

His under escape attempt

3/4/72

Mr. W.F. Childress, Editor
The Knoxville Journal
P.O. Box 911
Knoxville, Tenn. 37901.

Dear Mr. Childress,

Many thanks for ~~taking~~^{taking} the time and reporting what you do in your letter of the 2nd. I will, of course, respect the confidence, as I ask you to do because of my relationship with Ray. The clippings are particularly helpful yet a bit troubling, for they do not say precisely what made the national wires.

I have had several chats with Warden Moore and formed a high opinion of him. But he has not taken the time to respond to a letter I wrote him, the first I wrote after this recent affair. I sent my rather strong letter to Ray through him because I wanted him to be aware of what I was saying.

And I have been rather vigorous in writing Jerry, too. You are correct on his appearance after the Ray adventure. He was there this time five days earlier.

The timing on this troubles me, and it appears on the face of it to be irrational. I do not consider James irrational.

You may not have seen the Esquire piece, not up to its standards, not accurate, prejudicial, and an open incitation to any colleagues Ray may have had to do something. Then this. And both coincide with the two court decisions, both of which I consider unjust. Now if the timing had been after these decisions, that would make more sense. Ray has come others, like Marie, so I can't claim insanity. But I was persuaded that he had decided to go the way of the law and I am persuaded the law is and should be all his way. Please believe me, the prosecution can't even place him at the scene of the crime. They can't even place him in the city. I know where he was, knew it before I learned it from him, and - have details from him that he had and has no way of knowing have official confirmation, by an official who had no way of knowing he was confirming Ray's story to me.

Moreover, I am satisfied that if Ray beats this rap he is free of all other charges. If he gets into court it will be difficult for him not to win. Why, then, should he run the risk of having to spend the rest of his life a fugitive when so many have a vested interest in his non-survival, before he exhausts his legal remedies, before the first of the pending decisions? Two possibilities suggest themselves to me. I discard one, that he is irrational. The other is one he denies, fear of retribution.

Aside from these, I can think of nothing other than what he tells me, that it didn't happen, and I have trouble believing that, too. Frankly, I can't imagine Warden Moore making this story up. I suppose there is a possibility it was contrived without the warden's knowledge, but that, too, is not easy to believe. So, I am left with the feeling that none of it makes complete sense.

Until reading the clippings you sent, all the accounts I saw had Ray seen by guards, not caught, walking away, not crawling back in.

Please excuse the cigarette burn. I'm way behind from two months of limited use of my left hand. I almost chopped a thumb off. The medical restraints have just been lifted.

I can understand as innocent error that Luttrell was quoted giving two different notes for the incident. That is not as easy with different versions of what happened.

One account says he would have been at the feet of an armed guard as he got out of the building -- after a drop given as 40 feet. I have difficulty believing he would not have known this to have been the situation. The 40 feet can be accepted if it is true that he also had a block and tackle, which one account reports.

Jerry is the most obvious probable accomplice on the outside. I have trouble believing he would run this risk unless he has an earlier involvement, of which there is neither any indication or any reason to suspect it. I can think of others whose names are unknown to me who make more sense. And it is unlikely that were James to get out, there would not be an immediate all-points for Jerry's well-known car.

I realize I am confessing bewilderment. I can't understand any of it, including that this was intended as merely a first step. Would not the hole he was supposedly sawing have been detected?

If he did make this and the earlier attempt or if he did not, I do not think this will be the last or the last reported. What I do think is that with each his chances of survival wear thinner. That solves problems for others but not for him.

I wish it were possible for me to get down there soon. He has taken more from me than I had anticipated he would and I'd like to keep after him. He has been close-mouthed and I don't think he can say what I am sure authorities want him to say and I certainly do. I do not think, for example, that he can make positive identification of those with whom he was engaged in admittedly criminal activity. But I also think he can supply leads. However, my finances just can't enable the trip now. And he just has not given me any of the possible leads. I have gotten some on my own. When I can get down there again I'll let you know first so that we can get together, if you'd like. I have more than enough for another book, but I do not plan it. I have put it aside for court use, for I think above all we do need our system to justice to work. It can't unless he lives until that day. Should circumstances change or should something happen to him, I would write the book.

Meanwhile, I'd certainly appreciate it if you could keep me posted on anything you may hear. Again thanks for your time and trouble.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg