

...it's down to a fine art”

(The procedure is almost always over by 6:25, and we're free to go.)

## The Execution Process



The inmate arrives at the death house early in the afternoon...  
He spends the afternoon with the death house chaplain... At  
2:00 he's allowed a phone call, at 3:00 a visit with his attorney  
and his spiritual advisor, at 4:30 he's given his last meal.

The inmate'll be in the second cell and I usually go down there and I call his name and tell him it's time to come with me to the next room.

So they will unlock the cell and he's not handcuffed or chained. He's just sitting there. And he and I will walk into the chamber.

I'll tell him to sit down on the gurney and then lay down  
with his head on pillow...

Usually within about twenty seconds he's completely strapped down. Twenty to thirty seconds. I mean, it's down to a fine art.

Some of them are very calm. Some of them are upset.  
Some of them are crying.

Some of them have been sweating. Some of them will  
have the smell of anxiety... if you will, of fear.

It's basically a situation where we just make sure he is secure. That he won't be jumping up, that he won't be able to squirm out of the restraints themselves, and that the job can be done...

After all the straps are done they will look at you and they'll say 'Thank you.' And here you've just strapped them into the table. And they look at you in the eye and tell you "Thank you".

... then all the officers will leave. And then it's the warden and myself in the chamber with him, and there'll be a medical team come in....

At 6:05 the medical team inserts the needles.

I usually put my hand on their leg right below their knee, you know, and I usually give 'em a squeeze, let 'em know I'm right there. You can feel the trembling, the fear that's there, the anxiety that's there. You can feel the heart surging, you know. You can see it pounding through their shirt...

... and I've seen the opposite. I've seen people lay up there, hooked up and waiting for the witnesses to come in. I believe I could say they were more calm than I am with you right now.

At 6:09 my staff escorts the witnesses into two small rooms adjacent to the death chamber. They push up real close to the windows to get a view.

At 6:12 the executioner -- a member of my staff whose identity is kept secret -- begins to administer the chemicals.

The warden will remove his glasses, which is the signal to the executioners behind a mirrored glass window. And when the glasses come off, the lethal injection begins to flow.

It's very quiet. It's extremely quiet. You can hear every breath everyone takes around you. You can hear the cries, the weeping, the praying.

It's usually a real . . . real deep breath. Just seems like they draw in all the air they can... And then whenever that breath goes, it's like a snore. Generally there is some erratic movement on the part of the inmate, some coughing, sputtering, occasionally a gasp.

Then there's quiet.

You see no more breathing, you hear no more sounds.

It's just waiting.

I've seen family members collapse in there. I've seen  
them scream and wail. I've seen them beat the glass. ...  
And yet how do you tell a mother that she can't be there  
in the last moments of her son's life?

You'll never hear another sound like a mother wailing  
whenever she is watching her son be executed...

At 6:20 I call in a doctor to examine the inmate  
and pronounce death.

(Then) all of the witnesses are escorted out immediately and the medical team will then come in and take the IVs out.

And then we, the team members including myself, go in and unstrap him and then assist in putting him on the funeral home gurney until such time as he's wheeled out and that's the end of the process.

The procedure is almost always over by 6:25, and we're free to go.



Lennart Grebelius 2009