

SKATZES/LUCASVILLE 5 SUPPORT BULLETIN NO. 24. Sept. 1999

ACT II, SCENE 4: JAN. 1995.

(We are coming near the end now. In Scenes 2 and 3, we watched Anthony Lavelle, spokesperson for the Black Gangster Disciples, and a young member of the Aryan Brotherhood, Rodger Snodgrass, turn state's evidence. It will be recalled that in August 1994 Snodgrass wrote to Skatzes: "Brother, God knows and we all know that you did nothing more than save lives in that madness, and if the truth be known, they [the prosecution] know that, too." Less than a month later Snodgrass had begun to testify against George Skatzes in connection with all three murders with which Skatzes was charged: the killings of prisoners Earl Elder and David Sommers, and of hostage guard Robert Vallandingham.

Lavelle and Snodgrass both testified as to Skatzes' role in the meeting of prisoners on the morning of April 15, 1993 that allegedly decided to kill Officer Vallandingham. In preparing their testimony, both men listened to a tape made by the FBI in the tunnel underneath the occupied cell block. Lavelle helped the prosecution to identify the speakers whose voices could be heard on the tape.

As we saw in Act I, the transcript of the tape entered into evidence by the prosecution did not record a decision to kill a guard. But there is more to be said about Tunnel Tape 61, which purported to record the April 15 meeting.

First, Siddique Abdullah Hasan presented during his trial in early 1996 a statement by an expert that this tape exhibited numerous "anomalies" and may have been tampered with. The Court denied Hasan the money to obtain further expert analysis.

Second, in Jason Robb's appeal the Ohio Court of Appeals held that the making of the tunnel tapes violated Ohio privacy law, and that Tunnel Tape 61 was wrongly allowed into evidence. The Court further concluded that the "independent" testimony of witnesses like Lavelle and Snodgrass made this error harmless. This is obviously wrong, since Lavelle and Snodgrass listened to the illegal tape and helped in its transcription before they testified, and the tape self-evidently influenced what they remembered on the stand.

Finally, the State of Ohio sent Tunnel Tape 61 (said to have been recorded on April 15, 1993) to the FBI laboratory in Quantico, Virginia for clarification and enhancing. **This is the**

same lab that concealed the evidence that four days later, on April 19, 1993, FBI agents unlawfully used incendiary tear gas in Waco, Texas.

The foundation of the prosecution's case against the Lucasville Five was the testimony of other prisoners like Lavelle and Snodgrass obtained in exchange for plea bargains. There was no physical evidence linking any suspect to any we apon, or any suspect to any victim. The Lucasville Five were convicted on the basis of snitch testimony.

Scene 5, in our next issue, will present the second essential component of the State's case: the exclusion from the Lucasville juries of persons conscientiously opposed to the death penalty.

Scene 4, in the present issue of the Bulletin, offers the viewer the deepest glimpse available in the records into the heart and soul of George Skatzes. By January 1995 Skatzes had learned that Samuel Rodger Snodgrass, Jr., one of Skatzes' closest friends behind bars, a young man to whom he had extended his love and support, had "rolled" and would become the State's most damaging witness against him. Skatzes knew, months before his trial, that young Rodger Snodgrass' decision meant that Skatzes would get the death penalty.

This scene shows how George reacted. Physically it should be staged as the mirror image of the scene preceding it. Where in Scene 3 Snodgrass, in his cell at stage Right, reads letter after letter to Skatzes, so in Scene 4 Skatzes, in his cell at stage Left, writes and reads -- this will depend on the creativity of whoever stages these events -- one long answer. It should constantly be kept in mind and acted out as best one can, that Skatzes finds writing difficult. Moreover, he writes as he talks: not only conversationally, but in a roundabout manner in which he repeats certain feelings and seeks to anticipate reactions from the reader. Whoever plays the part of George Skatzes in the docudrama faces his deepest challenge in this scene.

The letter has been lightly edited in three ways: by substituting commas and periods for dashes; by translating certain German words: "my brother" for "Mein Bruder," "God" for "Gott"; and by cutting a few repetitious passages.)

SKATZES:

Sun. night. 1-1-95.

My brother,

I hope you don't mind my writing. If you do, fuck it:

just tear it up or do whatever. Simple as that.

This letter is not meant to hassle you, cause you problems, or the like! By no means is this to be taken as a threat, nor am I asking you to change your mind, or anything of that nature. No, I'm not going to tell you I'm going to kill you or any of that stupid shit. Look: just read the letter.

You know me. I ramble on; hard for me to get to the point. That is just the way it is. So hang with me. I'll get there.

The first thing I want to ask you is, Just who was babysittin' you in the month of September '94, anyway? I'll have to see that dude. [Drawing of smile.] Just a little humor there. Get relaxed: it is not against the law for me to write you!

OK. I'm going to get down to the heart of this letter. This old man has a few things on his mind, and I have to let you know how I feel.

Let's step back in time for a minute. Let's go to April 11, 1993, around 3:00 p.m., exact time unknown. One thing I do know: the place was blowing up! Remember when we were out there pissing on the wall? At that time, to the best of my knowledge, neither of us really knew what was going on.

Well, that is not 100 per cent true. I would be more so correct if I were to write it like this: We knew the place was blowing up, but to the best of my knowledge neither of us really knew at that time who or what was behind it. It could have been a race riot for all we knew.

Well, my point is, we both could have run over on the other side of the yard with all the white dudes. But in my heart I knew 100% for sure I was going inside no matter what was going on because Brother Charles and a lot more solid whites were still in there. We could have walked away and let them do the best they can on their own. But I'm not made like that and neither are you, my brother! If we would have walked on and left them in there like that and if anything bad would have happened to any of them, I couldn't live with that! I sure would rather be settin' right here in this position waitin' on what is to come, as opposed to what would have been had we ran. I couldn't live with our people thinking of me as a low life coward! . . .

To this day, Sam Jr., I'm damn proud of you! You walked side by side with me straight into what could have been the face of death! You showed heart -- plenty of heart! You are a rare breed in my book -- still! We had plenty of times together standing up, standing strong back to back for our rights and

what we believe in! My heart always swells with pride in you: you know that to be the truth! Am I supposed to forget our Brotherhood, and throw it all away? This really bothers me bad! That is why I am writing to you. I have so much jammed up in my heart with no way ever to release it. . . .

Let me say this: You know me. I am not one for the con game bullshit and all that cool fly stuff as they call it. I have never once ever lied to you, and you know that! That is not my style. If I think something, if I don't like somebody, or whatever, they know it. I'm not for the phony bullshit and I feel you should believe in that all the way: still, even after what has happened. What I write here came from my heart. You have my word on that! Of course the choice is all 100% yours to make. You can believe me or you can tell me to fuck off! Understand this: I'm not out to tell you not to do what you are doing. Guess I'm askin' one thing here. Please do not misunderstand my letter. You can count on the fact that I mean what I write!

To the point: just read on, Brother [Skatzes' elipsis]

I really hate what you did! I will never in my life be able to understand any of this. First off, understand I do not hate you, I'm not mad at you! I'm shocked, yes, no doubt about that! The thought of causing you harm has never entered my mind! I'm more than sure you don't care much about that anyway. At this very point of your life you are about to see what true Brotherhood is all about! Death Before Dishonor or til Death do we part: both have a very deep meaning, Brother!

Guess this isn't the time or place to argue what I'm about to write, but I'll write it anyway. There is no way in hell you can make me believe you killed Earl [Elder]! That really blows my mind! I'm havin' one hell of a time puttin' all this together! . . . Never in hell could anybody ever make me believe one of my own would lie like this and all. I really expected the blacks to down me or at least try. If they would have had their way about it, you know the story, no doubt the old Honkie would have been killed in Lucasville! Oh well.

Well, to tell you like it is, Brother, I'm just all fucked up! Something really had to happen to you for you to cop out to a crime, a murder at that, which I believe you did not commit!

I have run this through my head so many times, it is to the point of driving me crazy! I will never figure out how, what did they do to you to get you to lie like you are? I really don't understand, not at all! Just do me one little favor, if

you can: write to me and explain all this. That would sure help!

Listen: I can't stress to you enough, this letter is not a threat on your life or anything, so don't take it that way! You hear me? I am just tore up and confused all to hell! Now, again, you know me very well, and what I write comes from my heart! I'm not tryin' to talk you out of this or anything. Guess that would be almost like tampering with a witness. You know my head has to be all fucked up, so at least give me that much room to get this off my chest! I figure you owe me that much!

It is simple like this: I have been lied on before and all, so one more time really won't hurt. You know I'm doing life for a murder I had nothing to do with. No big deal, these people killed me years ago! I don't know why it is, but for some reason, when it is all said and done I am always the one they want to stroke! Don't take that as my cryin' on your shoulder, it is a fact of life! It had to be this way! They got to you somehow. I will never in life understand this! Understand one thing: I'm not mad at you. I don't hate you for this! They were going to burn me one way or the other no matter what!

I have been around a while, Brother. I could see it comin'. If it wasn't you it would be somebody else. When they set out to get a man, consider it done! I don't stand one chance in hell! There is no need to explain all that at this time, but take my word for it, the fix is in and I have no way out! I know very well how they play the game. There is nobody in this system one can trust. You heard Brother Charles and I talk about this subject many times. You yourself are a victim. You know the score!

Brother, I'm going to come to you straight, so read this real good! Now, read it again! I have been around a little longer than you, so take this as good, wise advice! This old life of crime is no life! It is not worth it! You are still young, Feb. 10, 1995 you will be all of 25. So my Brother, you have a lot of living to do! I mean what I say here! I say this out of love for my Brother! Let's hope and pray that you will be able to hit the streets before long! If so, put all this as far behind you as possible! Start your life over and live! Live a straight, good life: stay out of trouble, Brother! Believe me life is too short to do it like this, locked up! You tell me: just what the hell kind of a life is this anyway? You have more on the ball, more to offer in life, so why waste it

settin' in some prison? You are better than this, Brother!

I have been tryin' to learn as much about myself, and life, as possible.

Some of the things I have discovered right here in this cell shock me! Looking back over my life style, I now see how much I missed in this life. Please don't make the same old mistakes as I did! That is a shame, a waste! I won't go into all of this now, but if you want to hear it, write to me. I want to help you in any way possible!

What I would like to see you do [is] turn your life over to our God! He really is the only way to go, Brother! I mean what I write! You know me! You have never known me to run that old game on people! I'm not for that! I'm comin' at you straight up and from my heart! No doubt about it, such an attitude has to shock you and make you not believe me. I can understand anybody thinkin' like that because you did wrong me. We can't hide from that. It don't matter none: they were going to fry me one way or the other at any cost. . . .

I know I'm hit. I have been through all this before; why should you go down too? When they kill me they will be doing me a favor! I mean that! I would like to tell you everything they have done to try to break me, the way I see this system, etc. I want you to know these things so you will grow wiser and stay out of shit. I really want to help you!

You lied on me. I don't understand how or why, but that is the way it goes. Make the best of it. Make this move pay off for you! I have no trouble whatsoever in saying, out of my love for you, Brother, I forgive you! I mean that! Sure, most people would call that soft; so be it! I don't care what they think! I know the old devil is using you to do his dirty work! That don't work here! We have been through too much, in my opinion anyway -- maybe you don't think like that -- but I can't just throw it away as if it never was! You are a victim of the system! You are still my Brother. I refuse to let that old devil and the evil people of this system tear us apart! I hate what you did. I don't hate you.

Listen, maybe you will take this letter as a joke. I hope not! I am coming from my heart! Call me weak, call me what you please, but I am speaking my mind! I am not writing this asking you not to lie on me and all that! Brother, it just don't matter to me anymore! If this will give you a new lease on life, I am happy. At least my life is worth something that way. As it was, I would have set here for the rest of my life wasting away to nothing, for nothing! This will earn you that new

lease. At least make the best of it! Don't throw it away! You sold yourself for this, so get out of here and make it! I mean that, Brother! I will never tell you, "you owe me," but you do owe me that much! I sure as hell will give my life if it means you having a new lease!

Call me crazy, whatever! It don't much matter. You don't know the feeling of a walking dead man! I have been in that state for years. It is probably pretty hard for you to understand. Just like when I made an ass of myself with the broadcast; nobody understands that! When I was out there I had to act like I was really into this riot thing. No set plan, just ramble on. When I said, "if we die, we die," that really came from my heart. But it should have been, "if I die, I die!" I just don't give a care about life! That is a very true statement! The jail system has really done a number on my head! I am tired, Brother, and it is almost over! . . . Deep, deep, deep down in my heart I want my blood to be all over the hands of the people in power! . . .

Well, look here: if you are allowed, write to me. We don't have to kick it about any of this bullshit, the trials and all. Just act like it never happened. When it comes time to do what you have to do, do it and make the best of things! I just don't care about it! No doubt they will jump all over this letter. Try to make it out to be something it isn't. . . . When I say I forgive you, oh they are sure to make something of that! See my life is about over. I know now I have surely made so many mistakes (sins). And it will tell you in the Bible, when you stand prayin' if you have anything against a body, forgive them or your Father in heaven can't forgive you! I fully believe that! It is very easy to forgive a Brother such as yourself! I don't at all understand the how and why part, but you have a right to live your life! Maybe you had no other way out. I don't know. But I'll not pass judgment on you.

Guess I'll bring this to a close. I have a lot to tell you: things that happened, etc. So write if at all possible, Brother. I mean this. I love you. You will be in my prayers! . . . I love you, Brother. I really hate it, but I'll still stand by you anyway!

George

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