



Title: Love Matters
Storyteller: Michael VonAllmen
Episode: Michael VonAllmen & Ted Conover
Originally Aired: 11/22/16

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In January of 1983, I was arrested for raping some woman I had never seen before. I was fortunate enough to make bond when I was arrested, so I avoided incarceration until the conviction.

From the convic- after- as soon as I was convicted, they took me down to the jail and right away I got the typical, "Hey, what are you in for?"

And my response was, "I'm in here for rape, but I didn't do it."

A few months later, I'm shipped down to the prison. I'm shipped down to the prison, go into the fish tank, and right away the story starts. "What are you in for?"

And I say, "I'm in for a rape, but I swear I didn't do it."

And that's where I met the me-toos. They said, "Yeah, me too. Let me know how that works for you."

So, a few years passes by and I'm no longer telling that story to the fish, I'm telling it to the lifers and the long-timers. And as I tell my story I get the feedback, "Your story sounds believable. And there's one other story that sounds believable, and it's the story of Ted Maynard."

And I said, "Well, who is Ted Maynard?" Because it kept coming back, "Ted Maynard sounds like he's innocent as well."

So I'm finally, because I'm innocent, I seek him out. I'm drawn to this guy, Ted Maynard. And when, uh, finally somebody points him out to me on the yard and he's this old, broken, frail man that has done isolated himself from the rest of the population because of the hard bit he had done early on. But he had been lock- when I met him, he had been locked up about 15, 16 years and done learned how to do his time. And his time was to cut everybody out and just eat and sleep.

But because of this innocence, I'm drawn to him. And finally I get up next to him and we develop a relationship. And we start jailing together, we start, uh, we don't talk about our innocence. We talk about how to do time. And that's the way it was and we...we just did our bit together.

Eleven years goes by and all of a sudden I get paroled. And I go to Maynard and I said, "Maynard?" And he had already been abandoned by everybody else. I tell him, "Maynard, I'mma remember you when I get out. I'll help you."

I get out and true to my word, I write him a few letters. I send him a little money. But I'm dealing with re-adjustment myself. And, in a short time I had just become another one of those transient people in Maynard's life, done crossed through his world.

But I didn't forget Maynard. Sixteen years on parole goes by, and one day I opened up my newspaper and there's the Innocence Project right there on my kitchen table. Sixteen years on parole, I call them up and they go to work on my case and uncover this textbook example of mistaken identity. And all of a sudden, after



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27 years as a convicted sex offender, I'm a real live citizen again. I get to vote, and I get a voice.

All of a sudden, I got a real live voice as well. And the very first thing I say with my voice is, "Get Ted Maynard out of prison. He's got nothing in this world. He's got nothing in this world, but a life sentence. He needs some help."

So, the Innocence Project took on his case and they got to looking at him and his case started in 1969. So, uncovering any evidence in that thing was really difficult, in fact, impossible.

So in the end, the Innocence Project didn't have anything to work with. And they, not that they were abandoning the case, but my voice, I wasn't going to let it go. I said, "Well, what about parole? What about some other way of doing it?" And then, starts preparing a parole package for Ted. But in the end, by now, Ted had done been diagnosed with dementia. So, for him to be paroled was definitely to a nursing home some kind of way. We weren't finding any nursing home that would take a convicted murderer. And, that's where my voice – that's as far as my voice could carry Ted.

But I still have this voice so I lift it up in other areas, the death penalty being the first thing I go after. And with- with- as I start lifting my voice with the death penalty, that's where I start meeting an incredible group of people that I never imagined existed. And, one of them was Sister Helen Prejean - the author of the book *Dead Man Walking* and the subject of the same movie, *Dead Man Walking* - an incredible person who attacks the death penalty purely on the love of another human being. Way different from where I was attacking it. But, to hear her talk about this message of love, you can't help but to be moved by her- her message.

And, I was traveling with Sister Helen to another venue when I got a phone call from my wife. And the hospital had called. They wanted to know if I would call them. I call them and they tell me, "Ted Maynard has had some medical issues. Oh. You are the only person."

And because of the parole package being sent I had gone back to the prison for the first time to visit Ted, to let him know that I hadn't forgotten him, that I was doing all I could from here, that we were working on this parole package. That visit, in 2012 or 2013, was the first visit he had had since 1973.

So, when he had this medical issue, the medical people looked on his record and saw that I was the only person in his life in the outside in the last 30 or 30 plus years. They asked if I would mind making decisions about Ted's life, or Ted's medical condition. Well, of course, I was honored to be able to step up for Ted in this situation. So they asked if I could come in and talk to 'em. And when I go in and talk to 'em they tell me how dire his situation is, that he's had a stroke. His larynx, throat is paralyzed. He's on a ventilator.



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"In order for him to live, we're going to have to put a trach in and install a feeding tube. We can keep him alive artificially. Is that what Ted wanted for his life?"

Whoa, not me. Well, while I was honored to step up, now it got to be really heavy burden. And I said, "If you don't mind, let me invite the people that's been investigating this case in, and we all collectively make a decision here."

They agreed, and the next day myself, the doctor team, and the Kentucky Innocence Project met with these folks, and we're hearing Ted's situation. So, what they're explaining how they're going to put this trach in, the feeding tube in, and then they say, "And he's going to be confined to the bed for the rest of his life."

And I just heard the words "confined" and that was - whoa, wait a minute - I'm not here to confine anybody. I'm here as a liberator. So with- with that word, I was able to decide, yes, let's pull the plug on Ted, and liberate him.

So, we collectively made that decision. The medical team, the Innocence Project and myself, we walk into the room. The doctor, the respiratory therapist, removed the ventilator tube. The armed guard that's been sitting with him for 24/7 gets up and walks out of the room. The doctors walk out, and for the first time in 41 years Ted is outside of a prison wall with no guard supervision.

They pull the tube and right away the decline starts. It was obvious that Ted was going to be dead in just a few minutes. A really awkward moment, solemn moment. And the first thing I do is identify myself. I say, "Ted, it's Mike. You're in the hospital. You're not going back to prison."

And there's silence.

And you just watched the numbers going down, the lines starting to decrease. And- and I just had this prison rage all of a sudden, and I just scream out, "And ain't no fucking screws going to tell you what to do anymore! It's over with brother!"

And again, there's this silence and you just wonder what- what do you say? And- and, Linda says, "You're going to a better place, Ted."

It's just so awkward. What do you say to someone that you know was about to- about to die? And the numbers keep going down and it's definite, he is going to be dead within seconds, when out of nowhere flashes Sister Helen in front of my eyes and, without control of my own mouth, I just say it, "Ted, I love you."

I was shocked that these words had just came out. But even more shocking was how those numbers were in decline all of a sudden paused and just hovered like he was processing what he had just heard, the words that no one has said to him in a meaningful way in over 40 years.

And then, the numbers started to rise. I said, "What!"

And- but death was- it was certain. He- there was this moment of rise and it was like, yes, this is freedom. Being loved was freedom and they got it.

And then the numbers just plunged, and boom. Ted was dead.



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The doctor came in, reached over and felt for a pulse. Then he took a stethoscope on and listened for a heartbeat. Then he looked at his watch and noted the time of death.

Ted was exonerated by a medical doctor, and I am his voice.

Thank you.