

Escapee Fed Eggs and a Sermon

On Feb. 18, 1984, five of the bad men behind bars and concertina wire at Fort Pillow State Prison in Henning, Tennessee, overpowered a guard and escaped.

In the bloody spree that followed, three people were killed (including one of the escapees), a state trooper was critically wounded in a shootout, and 17 hostages were seized in four incidents.

One of the convicts, Riley Arzeneaux, 26, serving 25 years for second-degree murder, followed a railroad line southwest. For two days, he wandered through the Hatchie River bottoms before appearing in the backyard of Nathon and Louise Degrafinreid, 20 miles from Brownsville, Tennessee.



When Degrafinreid, a retired construction worker, went out to fetch the cat on the morning of Feb. 21, he reappeared with a disheveled and famished Arzeneaux holding a shotgun to Degrafinreid's ribs.

"Lady, I am so hungry," he told Louise. "I haven't had anything to eat in three days."

"Young man," lectured the peppery Louise, "I am a Christian lady, and I don't want no violence. Now lay your gun down."

Remarkably, he did. She fixed him a half gallon of powdered milk, bacon, eggs, coffee and toast, but she wouldn't let him eat until he bowed his head for prayer. Not knowing what to say for a prayer, she told him to say "Jesus wept" with her. He mumbled the words.

"You remind me of my grandma," he groused. While he gobbled down his breakfast, she preached. And when the police arrived – having been notified by a friend who was talking to Louise on the phone when Arzeneaux burst in – she persuaded him to surrender. As police put handcuffs on the prisoner, they looked at this couple and wondered how they had managed to avoid being killed.

"I did not want his body to get all scattered here in my house," she later explained in an interview.

Imagine you were in this situation. How would you conduct yourself? Would you be defiant? Would you be cautious? Would you stammer around, unable to resist?

(more)

I choose to think that God placed a hedge of protection around the Degrafinreids, and the Holy Spirit gave Louise the boldness to confront the prisoner with the gospel of Christ. And I believe husband and wife were both praying to our Lord when confronted with this danger. God listened and responded.

When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say (Luke 12:11-12 NIV).

– Beecher Hunter