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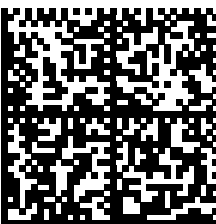
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ZINXHIRI I PROVËS

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It was like watching a horror film”: Journalist recalls interview with Christa Pike 20 years ago: I still can’t stop thinking about her



British journalist Helen Roberts has recounted her meeting with Christa Pike, the American death-row inmate who survived two lethal doses this week.

Two decades ago, Roberts went to a maximum-security prison in Tennessee to interview Pike, who had been sentenced to death for the brutal murder of 19-year-old Colleen Slemmer.

Christa Pike, now 50, faced her execution this week but survived after being administered two doses of pentobarbital. She is currently in critical condition.

The interview took place in December 2006. At the time, Pike was 30 and had spent 11 years in Tennessee's women's prison. She was the youngest woman in the United States to have received a death sentence.

“Sometimes it was incredibly difficult to connect the woman sitting in front of me with the crime she had committed,” Roberts recalls.

According to her, it seemed as though she was facing two completely different people. The journalist says she could not imagine the woman she met as the perpetrator of such a horrific act of violence.

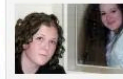
Roberts, who was born in Conwy in north Wales, was working for More magazine at the time and traveled specifically to the United States for the interview.

She says it was the first time she had entered a prison, particularly a maximum-security facility. After numerous checks and passing through several doors, she sat opposite Pike, separated by glass, while they communicated through a speaker.

të fundit /



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The two women were roughly the same age. Roberts says she tried to go into the meeting without prejudice, although she expected to find a woman who was "very direct and brutal."

However, Pike surprised her because she did not match the image the journalist had previously formed of her.

"I was in my mid-20s and was almost the same age as her. We had a few things that brought us closer," Roberts recalls.

She remembers that Pike was well-groomed and had curly hair similar to her own. According to the journalist, these small details helped create a sense of closeness between them.

Pike appeared warm and seemed to want to make a good impression on her interviewer. She smiled, laughed and responded to Roberts's gestures.

"After just a few minutes, she stood up on her side of the glass to move closer to us," the journalist says.

Roberts says Pike did not behave defensively, avoided none of the questions and refused to answer nothing.

"She answered every question clearly and quite openly."

The murder of Colleen Slemmer

In 1995, when she was 18, Christa Pike and her boyfriend at the time, Tadaryl Shipp, beat, tortured and killed 19-year-old Colleen Slemmer. The young people had met her at a training center for troubled youths.

Pike claimed that Slemmer had insulted her and was trying to take her boyfriend away.

Later, two other residents of the center testified that Pike had talked about the murder both before and after it happened. They also said she had shown them a piece of the victim's skull.

Pike was found guilty and sentenced to death in 1996. Tadaryl Shipp, who was 17 when the crime occurred, was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole and remains behind bars.

During the conversation, Pike told Roberts that she had not fully understood the significance of what was happening during the trial. She admitted that she had enjoyed the public attention, something she had never experienced before.

When the interviewer asked her about the murder, Pike did not try to avoid the details.

"She spoke about it in a very matter-of-fact way," Roberts recalls.

Pike described her former self as a completely different person. She told the journalist that on the night she killed Colleen, she had "lost her mind" and experienced the event as though she were watching herself from outside her body.

According to Roberts, Pike expressed deep remorse for what she had done but said she did not believe any words of hers could repair the damage caused.

A childhood marked by abuse

Christa Pike grew up in Beckley, a small working-class town in West Virginia.

According to the account she gave the journalist, her parents, Carissa Hansen and Glenn Pike, were alcoholics and had neglected her.

Pike told Roberts that she had received "no love," apart from the love given to her by her grandmother. Her grandmother died of cancer when Pike was 12.

Roberts says Pike also recounted two incidents of rape: the first at the age of 11, by a neighbor, and the second at 17, by a stranger who had pulled her into the woods.

She changed schools several times and, when she turned 18, enrolled in Knoxville Job Corps. Pike saw this as a chance to start a new life and hoped to become a nurse.

"I can't imagine what she was thinking"

Roberts says the days before the execution were especially difficult for her as everything connected to Pike's fate drew closer.

"Throughout Wednesday, I couldn't stop thinking about her. I kept asking myself what was happening."

When she learned that Pike had survived the injections, the journalist was shocked.

"It was like watching a horror film. I can't understand it. I can't process it. It is absolutely barbaric."

Roberts says she is particularly troubled by the contradiction in the state's actions: first, it tried to execute Pike, and then, after she survived, it sent her to hospital to save her life.

"It simply makes no sense," she said.

When Roberts interviewed her, Pike spent at least 23 hours a day in her cell and was allowed out for one hour of exercise only on certain days.

She was the only woman on death row and had no opportunity to spend time with the other inmates. To pass the time, she had developed a routine that included reading, watching television and writing letters.

Some time after the interview, Roberts received a handmade card from her.

The card was made of purple paper and shaped like a butterfly.

"Thank you for being kind. Thank you for treating me like a woman," it read.

"It was truly moving," Roberts says.

The journalist emphasizes that her account is not intended to diminish Pike's responsibility for the crime.

"Nothing I have said about Christa Pike should be understood as an attempt to minimize her crime," she said.

"She belonged in prison. She had committed a crime, taken another woman's life and needed to be punished for it," the journalist added.

Nevertheless, Roberts says that for two decades she has been haunted by one question:

"If she had received the help she needed at that time, would she have done what she did?"

"She is still a human being. There was no way I could meet her and not be affected," Roberts concludes.

Shtuar më 3.10.2026 23:10

Tags: world



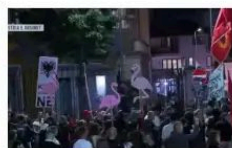
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