

CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER: VISITING AMANDA

Section 1: Before the Visit

I began writing this article several months before meeting Amanda Boals at the Lowell Correctional Institution Work-Camp, the low-security portion of Florida's largest women's prison. In mid-March, Amanda's dad, Chris Boals, sent me the inmate visitation form and suggested I fill it out as soon as possible because the approval process takes 5 to 60 days.

Though I expected the background and criminal record check to take some time, 5 to 60 days is a large estimate that struck me as odd. The form is confusing in its structure and states that any information not applicable to the visitor needs to be labeled as N/A, or it will be instantly denied. This resets the approval clock to a potential extra 60 days. While I understand that leaving spaces empty could be viewed as deceptive, the capacity for error seemed too large for everyone to have sinister intentions. I reread the document at least five times to check for errors, continuing to find spaces not marked N/A that were easy to miss.

Once finished, I sent it to the instructed email and texted Chris the news. He responded with another shocking message: "Amanda will receive notice when you are approved. For whatever reason, they will not inform you. One of the many crazy things about the Justice system."

This struck me as odd, especially because the visitor must provide their name, address, and phone number to the facility when filling out the form. The inmate is charged 50¢ per email and 7¢ per minute on phone calls through Securus eMessaging, a platform that allows communication between incarcerated people and their loved ones. The prison directly profits by only informing the inmate.

Out-of-state loved ones or those who live hours away must expend the resources to get there. They may have to take time off work, arrange a ride, buy a plane ticket, a hotel, etc. This entire process is delayed when only the inmate has the power to inform them of their approval.

I texted Chris, "It seems like they try to prevent you from coming anyway they can." He responded, "They make everything very difficult." My form was approved on April 18th, exactly one month after I submitted it. Chris texted me the news after speaking with Amanda. I received no other confirmation email, text, or call.