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The Happiest Man on Death Row

You stand there, gazing through a thick glass window into the faintly lit chamber. A flimsy man occupies the chair situated at the focal point of the little room with a smile on his face. You know what's going on and why he's here, but he doesn't have the foggiest idea of what's happening. As two guards exit the chamber and firmly shut the door behind them, you can't resist the urge to allow the tears to fall as the young man in the seat grins at you one final time.

The young man depicted in the preceding paragraph is Joe Arridy. Before we get to his story, I will talk about his early life. Joe Arridy was born on April 29, 1915, in Pueblo, Colorado, to Syrian parents Henry and Mary Arridy. His parents emigrated to the United States in 1909, and his father worked for the Colorado Fuel & Iron Works. Joe was an only child during his first few years and although he was physically well, he had mental problems. Joe's condition was evident when he entered first grade and could not keep up with the other children. With the advice of his school principal during Joe's second year at school, Joe stayed at home for the next three years, playing and wandering around with his two brothers.

The Arridy had a younger brother and a daughter the following year. Henry Arridy soon quit his job and began begging to support the family. His mother Mary could not keep up with Joe since Henry was constantly in and out of jail, and Joe was developing quickly with an addition to his other two siblings. Since his parents could not supervise him well, they decided to ask the neighbors what to do with him. The neighbors, who generally disliked them, recommended sending him to the Training School for Mental Defectives at Grand Junction. Unfortunately, the school was pretty much an insane asylum.

Joe was finally sent to a joint insane asylum. The workers at the asylum tested Joe and discovered that his IQ was 46, the mind of a six-year-old. The workers determined that he was a follower of rules and a happy child. Arridy

