

File -

Enclaves 2

Terry Knight #894084

B-10-1

Branchville Correctional Facility
21390 Old State Rd. # 37
Branchville, IN. 47514

Re: "The Road to Branchville"

The Road to Branchville

Branchville Correctional Facility has been my home for nearly four years. If I meet certain criteria I will be eligible for release around the year 2013. I believe that the sentence I received was extremely harsh in light of the circumstances of the case. I was convicted of Burglary as a class B felony and received an enhanced sentence for being found guilty of being an "Habitual Offender." "What is so special about that?" you ask. Well, I'm only thirty-four years old. I am three and a half years into a sentence of sixteen years.

However, that is only a small part of my story. The catalyst came in a bottle that I fell in love with as a child.

I am very leery of the term "Alcoholic." Maybe that is because I fit the definition. Anyway, I was born to alcoholic parents. I guess you could say I was born a drunk. Mom used to tell me stories about my father pouring whiskey in my bottle when I was teething. To say that I began drinking at an early age would be a major understatement.

This is not a chronological tale of my life, so you'll find me jumping from one period of my life to another. This is my personal account of alcohol abuse, how I feel about alcoholism in general and an explanation of why prison fails to reform people. How are these three connected?

Read on and you'll see.

Let's start with prison's ability to reform. When I was thirteen years old I was incarcerated for the first time. I happened to be drunk and high when I committed the crimes I was arrested for. One of the first things that I was asked by the staff members at the juvenile center was, "do you drink or use drugs?" I was honest with them about the extent of my drug and alcohol use so they began counseling me about the dangers of substance abuse.

That was twenty-one years ago. According to the substance abuse counselors employed by various facilities operated by the criminal justice system, I am sick. I have a disease called alcoholism. It causes me to make very poor decisions when I am under the influence of alcohol. That is their theory.

I question that theory for many reasons.

If alcoholism is a disease that is beyond my control, why do I get put in prison for the things I do when I am drunk? If a person with Turret's Syndrome were to go before a judge and have an outburst, would the judge fine them for contempt? Bad analogy? Ok, here's another. A epileptic person is having a seizure. I open their mouth to try to

help their breathing passage stay open. When I do they clamp down, almost severing my finger. Will they be arrested for battery?

First of all, alcohol abuse is not due to a disease! It is a compulsive behavior. Nothing more. You have to develop a taste for alcohol before you begin to abuse it.

How does that relate to prison's ability to reform? It's simple. If you don't know what's broke, you can't fix it. If you diagnose a problem wrong, you'll never find the solution. You don't see doctors giving cancer patients medications for diabetes.

Recidivism is not a joke. When you brush it under the rug you prove that prisoner reform really does not matter to you. It's all about money and punishment.

There are many men in here who truly want to change things about themselves that they consider to be flaws. There are also many who do not care about change. Most correctional officers have no clue as to how to distinguish one group from the other. Their solution? They lump us all into the group that does not care.

If the criminal justice system truly cares about reforming criminals there are a few essential changes that must

be made.

Correctional Officers in the state of Indiana work twelve hour shifts.

Some of them spend more time with us offenders than they do with certain members of their family. How do I know that? I've talked to some of them a lot over the last three and a half years. I like some of them.

They are not sub-human in my opinion. Some offenders believe they are just because they wear that uniform.

Not me! This is one of the changes that needs to take place. The majority of correctional officers believe that us offenders are incapable of change.

That being the case, they treat us all the same. They say they have to be "fair" and treat us all the same. That is not logically sound!

During the time I have spent in prison I have seen men as young as eighteen and as old as eighty. I refuse to believe that it is a good idea to treat a young person the same as you would an elder. I know enough about different personalities to know that's a mistake.

As an offender I can only give you my opinion. Here it is. If you treat me, a thirty-four year old, like a young punk, I'll feel deeply disrespected. That will get a negative,

and sometimes violent, response from me everytime. Why? I don't stereotype people and I won't tolerate people doing it to me!

If I had to make a suggestion about how to lower recidivism rates and ensure that at least some prisoners will be reformed, I would suggest in-depth psychological and sociological training for Correctional Officers. All correctional staff for that matter. It would greatly improve the way offenders and staff communicate with each other.

Alright, I guess I better get to the main topic of this writing, Alcohol abuse.

I was drunk when I committed the crime I am incarcerated for. That has been the case everytime I have been locked up. Seriously! I have never been locked up for something I did when I was sober.

The burglary I committed was a revenge crime. My mother's boyfriend has a bad habit of being verbally abusive to her. It was his house that I burglarized. The day that I burglarized his house he had upset my mother to the point she was crying. Being the "Mammas Boy"

that I am, he pissed me off pretty bad by doing that. I had already had numerous discussions with him about how he talks to my mom. I was sober when this happened so, I just took my mom to my aunt's house and let it go at that.

Later in the day, I was at my cousin's house drinking vodka. Well, the drunker I got the madder I got. That is when I went and broke into his house. He was lying in his bed asleep the whole time. I did it more to send him a message than anything. I wanted to kind of scare him into treating my mamma better. Instead, I costed myself sixteen years of my life.

This boyfriend of my mother's is in his sixtys and has only one leg. Had he been an able bodied man, I would have beat him up when I saw my mamma crying. I would have only gotten charged with a C felony battery for that at most. Maybe they would have filed the habitual charge also, but in the end I still would have gotten less time for physically hurting him than I did for breaking into his house. That is not justice!

I find, more often than not, that the court system's judges do not have the ability to look at the circumstances of each individual case. The symbol of Lady Justice and her scales is a joke.

My ability to make sound decisions that night was impaired by alcohol and my

instinct to protect my mother. I felt like I had to do something, so I did.

I chose to pick up that bottle, that was my first mistake. Then I broke into that mans house, when I should have just open handed slapped the shit out of him for the way he treated my mamma. "The Law" would have given me less time for it. So it must be the lesser of two evils, right?

The punishment never fits the crime. I have seen men come here for child molestation who received less time than I did. Is that just?

I'm just one of many that the judicial system has thrown away. Why? Because I have a weakness when it comes to substance abuse. I have had this problem since I was a child! Instead of helping me they threw me away, but the road to Branchville has taught me many things and I will rise above this!