

"A DAY IN LIFE"

Doing time in prison is more than a falling away of the days into months, months into years and years into decades. It's a period of a prisoner's life that disappears into the shadow land of never before known loneliness, despair and anger.

No man is ever prepared to do time in prison, no matter what his background. Once inside he will be in awe by the savagery of the inmates and astounded by the callous and brutal indifference of the prison officials.

There are no tender moments in prison, only the tender memories of half forgotten wives, mothers, children, and friends. A convict is concerned with merely surviving each day. He must find a way to survive the dehumanizing prison system that demands that he become a victim or become as brutal and unfeeling as the grim man around him. However the tender portion of a man is not dead, only dormant, and those half forgotten memories are examined with care each night in a place where no official or inmate can intrude... in his dreams...

Each man finds his own method of survival. For the strong willed it is easy. For the weak willed it is hard. For some it comes from the trafficking of drugs, home-made wine and other contraband. For some it comes from gambling with cards

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or sporting events. For some it comes from the ever available closeness of a homosexual relationship. For some it comes from running in packs of gangs. While in others it is religion and the Church that offers an escape. Many find the ones of like mind and indulge in conversation directed towards the building of self-confidence by exaggerating the importance of ones crime and the laying of carefully detailed, elaborate plans to commit future crimes whenever the opportunity comes.

No matter what the method, the bottom line is — Survival...

The struggling war of a day in life within the gates of prison oftentimes is harder than other days, yet it is never easy on a man's soul. Even on quiet days the moments are stressing. For things are missed, however they seem so small; like hot apple pie and chocolate chip ice cream, a real steak with fixings, the rumble of a Harley, the delightful laughter of a child, or the warmth of a woman are some soul crushing trivia that constantly bring pain on a man's soul...

After over twenty-one years in prison for a crime I didn't even commit, I look for — but can not find, the man I was once.

(cont.)

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Sometimes I stand staring at my disparaging reflection, like a wondering child, of the man I have become. A man that struggles daily with the fading ability to feel the tenderness of the life I once knew. I see a man, whom if released at this moment, would go out these prison gates as ill-equipped to live in the free-world of today - as the fool whom entered prison over two decades ago. Not from concern of being confined again, but from the loss of being able to respond to sentimental tenderness...

This is not intended to be a list of bloody events which I have witnessed, but rather, one mans search for the shreds of pride and dignity that are kept hidden, like midnight snacks for a fat man, in the soul of a true survivor. That search, however, can not help but reveal the memories of violent stabbings, racial riots and murders by knife or other weapons, within these fences of purgatory. It is all there, covered by fear, contempt and hate that every man feels. Controlled, in my case, not by security officers clubs and mace nor by the fear of the pain of seperation from the free

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world, but by the joy of self-expression in written words...

Only in written words have I found my way of doing time. Writing for myself as well as for others, depending on meager support from loved ones, have I survived, but my only escape, my only privacy has come from my written words. With a pen I am allowed the liberty to say, to express - "TO FEEL", and when the words are thrown away or destroyed, forever banished by fire, then there can never be reprisal for my rebelliousness. Thereby I will have been in touch, through my pen and paper, with contumacy or tenderness and whatever strength that is within me... and I have survived...

Should I pass away in prison, then it doesn't matter. Yet should I be allowed to return to live in the world of house rent, car payments, money management, freedom of choice and tender loving care my trepidations are real. For within these gates of madness I have not been taught any of these things nor encouraged to seek these standards.

Inside these confines of misery I have only learned it is prudent to prey on the weak, to fight savagely when provoked and to

(cont)

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show only the manipulating face of cooperation to those whom are in authority...

As I've watched many a man leave these gates armed only with a used set of illmatched clothing, a twenty-five dollar (or less) check and a bus ticket within the State to fight the battle of reentering society again, it is no wonder why recidivism is so high. I myself am dispirited with such a thought. But I would go quickly to that challenge, armed only with those pitiful tools, because I am a true survivor...

When I am an old man, not far away, I suspect I will look back and judge the merit of my life. I think I will possibly see more good in the past few decades than I can now imagine. I suspect the warm, loving compassion of my mate will be more precious because of the bitter solitude of prison. The savagery and indifference I've been forced to contend with will make the laughter of an innocent child more musical. The anger I feel for being wrongfully convicted, I hope, will never fade away. I want to always remember this anger — and remember that I was almost consumed by it...

AS I AM, AS I WILL BE DONALD D. HAIRGROVE