

## Incarcerated..

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Incarceration doesn't begin in prison, but with the so called justice system. My introduction to the system begin when I was sixteen. I was arrested, interrogated and placed in a cell along side seasoned convicts. I was also offered the luxury of a public defender who was probably so overwhelmed with cases that he had no time to properly prepare to represent me. I say this because I never knew my public defenders name until a week before my sentencing and that was only because he decided to come visit me to inform me that the prosecutor had offered a plea bargain. By then I had been sitting in jail so long under the most deplorable conditions that I would've done just about anything to escape them. So at the age of seventeen I entered a courtroom, stood before a judge and was sentence to ten years in the department of correction or corruption depending upon how you view it. Two weeks later I was transferred to the Missouri department of correction.

The public perception on those of us who has made a mistake or committed a crime comes from news papers, television news and word of mouth, not personal experience. Assuming we are all bad people the public is all so happy under the ~~bas~~ <sup>belief</sup> that prison

is the right place for us. Foolishly they believe that prisoners are being helped in some sort of way, or offered some kind of rehabilitation. This assumption couldn't be further from the truth. Upon my arrival to prison I was met with a big sign that read, leave all your hopes and dreams behind. I didn't pay heed to the sign at that time, but as time wore on that sign would become more and more prevalent in my mind. First you are unloaded from a bus and shortly thereafter the dehumanizing process begins. You are made to strip naked with a hundred other inmates, sprayed with bug spray and then placed in a shower on top of each other. After that they strip you of your dignity by herding you naked down a long hall where hundreds of other inmates whistle and cat call at you. Lastly they issue you an inmate number and a uniform identical to everyone else's, essentially stripping you of your identity. Once this is done you are placed in a six by eight cell with another inmate and a new kind of education begins. Quickly you learn that only the strong survive, you have to be tough physically, but even tougher mentally. Mistakes can get you hurt, sometimes even killed. Those of us who are not violent swiftly learn it. If you are capable of feeling emotion, you eventually lose that ability, you can't afford to have it. Men become animals, predators

preying on those who are considered weak. Principles are lost, values are rejected, morals become non-existent.

The purpose of prison isn't rehabilitation, don't be fooled by corrections. Prisons are built strictly for the punishment of those that society deem unredeemable, and of course to make money. Never mind the psychological effect it has on a person. Forget about the physical toll it takes on you. Let's for a minute consider the millions of prisoners across the United States who could've received help through other sources. For example boot camp or group therapy, anything to stem the flow of millions of men and women being incarcerated in the United States and subjected to harsh treatment, psychological torture, physical abuse, rape and even murder. Bureaucrats should think less about lining their pockets by filling penitentiary beds and more about the preservation of mankind.

Think about this, on average prisoners are kept confined to their cells twenty-three hours a day. They are denigrated, demoralized, disrespected and diminished to nothing more than a number. This treatment not only occurs in general population, but also between staff and inmates. Not take that twenty-three hours and multiply it by five years, ten years of the most vile treatment one is forced to endure. Can you imagine the type of monster those circumstances

create? If the system fails, these are the very same people you will one day come face to face with in society. By law there are no innocent people in prison, let us tell it every person trapped here is innocent. I believe that there are some good people incarcerated and if actually offered the chance for rehabilitation can and will become productive members of society.

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