

Change is difficult; Growth is difficult. Real growth necessitates exploring and challenging my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, morals, and behaviors. Likewise, it includes taking a critical stance towards my environment. This is my life; everything in it is personal, intimate, and immersed in who I am. I cannot compartmentalize my life to such an extent that nothing touches my core.

This is unhealthy, and illogical. I must, however, learn to develop a meaningful, rational and self-affirming lease from which I understand, and thus successfully navigate, this environment. Otherwise, I will wither and crumble in my struggle. Today these are my deep-seated frustrations, stuck in the fires of systematic repression.

I have two fundamental choices. Either point at all the problems and I'd be correct, because there are problems - and then give up, or fight. Fight for myself by realizing my growth is up to me. Not the justice system, but me.

Which is why I have decided to write about my first-hand experience incarcerated from the perspective of an immature juvenile said to be unfit for society, how it feels and what it has been like growing up in an adult male penitentiary serving a life sentence while challenging and trying to overcome the effects of "Arrested Development". In part, the process by which healthy, pro-social maturation becomes obstructed by the experience of long-term incarceration. August 8, 2016

I was let out of long-term solitary confinement in a super maximum security holding facility. Battery on two correction officers while on a mind altering substance is what led me to solitary confinement. Solitary ~~and~~ confinement

is being confined to a cell 23 hours a day sometimes 24 hours a day with limited contact between prisoners and staff, and between prisoners and visitors for extended periods of time. This placement may extend for periods of years, or even decades. Deprivation of human contact and environmental



and sensory stimuli; the duration of the confinement; and disqualification for parole consideration is harshness of this condition. After being in solitary confinement for nearly four years, I've find myself right back in long-term solitary confinement after only four months of being released back into general population. I was determined, dedicated and actively trying to walk a straight path, rehabilitate and give myself a fair shot at success in life. Only to find myself making the mistake of teaming and partnering up with failure and eventually becoming involved in others (risky behavior), two fights in one day, both gang related.

When entering prison we find ourselves immersed in a negative culture where destructive values and behaviors are often normalized. Prisoners should reasonably anticipate receiving administrative segregation at some point in their incarceration. Furthermore, prison offers limited opportunities for education and personal development. Consequently, years of my life have been stunted lacking awareness of this dynamic. I have been susceptible to these dysfunctional values and behaviors. Even while trying to change I still find

myself gravitating towards these values and behaviors because it feels normal and natural. I've lost a lot due to my placement in solitary confinement again, my electronics which reduces stress while being incarcerated in which aren't allowable for ~~me~~ no less than eight months, a job in which would have helped me transition and prepared me to reintegrate back out into society, be productive and stay out when the opportunity presented itself, relationships, friendships, trust, confidence, faith, hope and even a little sanity.

In a few months I'll be 29 years of age and I'll be incarcerated going on twelve straight years in August 2017. This is my first time incarcerated. I was introduced to the penitentiary at the age of 17 in the year 2005 for First Degree Felony murder, Aggravated Robbery,



and Conspiracy to Commit Aggravated Robbery in which I received a sentence of 20 years to life for Felony Murder and Agg Robbery now concurrently and 34 months for the Conspiracy to Commit Agg Robbery now consecutively.

Meaning I must serve 20 years straight before being eligible for parole, if I'm then granted parole I must serve 34 months. For a 17 year old boy, that's very hard to cope with. Heavy drug usage and rebelling has been my way of coping and escaping my reality. In my growth various forces, both positive and negative influence me. Being a young black male from the inner-city of Kansas City, Mo, a product of social factors, cultural factors, family factors, and internal factors. I'm incarcerated at an early age, I realize my manhood has been shaped by a destructive prison culture as well as those various factors I've mentioned in my life.

Taking inventory of my life thus far, however reveals disappointments, losses, pain, suffering, mistakes, and a very sobering reality that tells me one thing - my life, my success, is not guaranteed. This is not Hollywood - there are no happy endings for some of us. Yet, change, which is the only way I can re-direct my trajectory, is also no guarantee. The more I consider any type of change, the more I realize I'm not only relinquishing the identity I've always had, but also I am stepping into the unknown. Staring at this juncture in my life, evaluating and weighing options, exploring and critiquing values, morals, philosophies, and futures, I begin to notice another layer of life: the injustice, unfairness, and imbalances. The people I most love and have spent my life embracing are, sometimes, the people who are most destructive.

The system which places these standards on me is a system which is unjust and repressive. I see the inconsistencies, the contradictions and the craziness of it all, and all along I'm trying to decipher what's best for me. Even more, any hope I have of parole requires changes, despite the broken system itself being



unwilling or unable to change. What sticks out also from everything I have experienced in the past and am currently experiencing is those who are manipulators and deceivers get if not all, the majority of help, attention, and get shown favoritism by administrators, correction officers, and other ~~and~~ contract employees. While those as such as myself who are genuine, intentions are pure and are actively trying to better ourselves and give back are treated as if we don't exist and are left to fend for ourselves. "Responsibility" means, in part, the capacity to manage roles, duties, tasks and functions in a healthy, constructive manner. It means handling ambiguity and ambivalence; balancing conflict and stress. Fundamentally, it means ones ability to move forward in a self-directed, proactive effort, overcoming the obstacles and pressures of life. Let me be clear - not everybody is responsible. Frankly, I'm surrounded by irresponsibility. Men who are unable or unwilling to conduct themselves decently, who thrive on predatory, illegal lifestyles, who live high-risk lifestyles, and who are a threat to people around them and themselves. Sure, people talk a good game, but when you really look at them, they simply don't walk the walk. They may acquire a few new words and learn a few new tricks, but they fundamentally live as adolescents - women are objects, violence and predation is prized, long-term planning is neglected, education is dismissed, etc. I've been there. Prisoners as such as myself enter these doors in a traumatic state. Anger, depression, grief, fear, anxiety, hopelessness, abandonment, resentment, loneliness, and suicidal are common. We may struggle with addiction, poor communication and problem-solving skills, mental health problems, gang and racial issues, and so forth. Prison feeds off this negativity. Change is often viewed as weak, and submissive, or not keeping it "real". Surrounded by such a damaging atmosphere, life in prison can quickly become a cycle of self-destruction.

In prison, a system where legalized injustice and inhumanities are perpetrated, the struggle to grow will always be uphill and tough. If I



fail, they won't care. I'm a statistic; there are thousands of failures all around me, and until I really exhibit something different, most of the time they'll assume I'm just like the thousands who aren't really trying. This is a cold, callous, impersonal reality, but this is it. There are so many injustices of this system it's enough to muffle my development and enough to convince me to give up. I won't be the first and I won't be the last. Many men find themselves emotionally and mentally unable to grow. Maybe that's me.

Somewhere deep down inside of me, I don't believe it is. I also don't believe that this is all that life has to offer me. Make no mistake - ultimately I must define these struggles. But by drawing upon my perspective you may be able to build upon your own. I hope my words here further open discussion.