

A day before my 18th birthday I was arrested in Milwaukee WI for possession with intent to deliver. I was sentenced to 9 years under the Wisconsin Truth In Sentencing Act. The judge ordered me to do 3 years inside and 6 years on Mandatory Supervision. Most of the 3 years was spent at the Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center (REECC).⁴ At REECC I obtained my HSED in 2002. To get into the Office Assistant college course through Gateway Tech, I had to steal a cookie. My being employed as a dishwasher trumped school so I had to get myself fired.

Desperate to further my education and believing that the more skills I had the better my chances of never coming back to prison, I formulated a plan. I knew that I would receive a write up but I needed it to be minor so I could go to school. I took a cookie out of the cookie jar and stood on the back dock. Then I sent my accomplice to go spit. When the boss came I pretended to be caught red handed just about to take a bite. The authorities knew what I was up to because I had told them prior that I wanted to go to school. Pissed about my little stunt, I was sent to the hole for 13 days, but the case was still a minor so they had to let me rock into

population. I made it up just in time for ~~Keyboarding~~
Keyboarding class.

As a child I was highly intelligent, but circumstances sent me on a different path. I remember during summer break as a child I sat down to watch soaps with my mom. One Life to Live ~~with my mom~~ was on and I met Nora Buchanan, a savvy attorney, on the show who never lost a case. I wanted to be a lawyer so bad and was sad everytime the show came on and they didn't show Nora. To remedy this, I started watching The Practice; a show about a law firm full of top notch attorneys winning complicated cases. Nobody dreams of being a convict.

I believe in the justice system although it needs a makeover. It, like people, can change.

During my time in the Wisconsin Prison System I deduced several things:

1. When a state is not largely dependent on the Prison Industrial Complex it fosters rehabilitation
2. It ~~does~~ ^{did} not dehumanize me
3. They paid us to work and offered opportunities for advancement which nurtured independence, integrity, and confidence

I do not know what it is like in Wisconsin now, but back then they had a decent system, at least for a drug dealer like me. A dealer wakes up and goes to bed when they feel like it, only budgets for a re-up, and

● doesn't give thought to long term success and advancement. By contrast I learned to get up early for work, go to bed at a decent hour so I could perform well, plan my spending and not have to ask anyone to take care of me, and set goals for the future.

In addition to working for wages, I was able to have my own which reduced violence at least by 75%. I had my own clear TV, radio, clothing, decent products and storage space, hair care products. In short, I was still a human being. And I could call whomever I wanted. I was in House Dancing 3 times a week. Eventually I was given a top monitor and work release where I went to a factory and made \$8.50 an hour. This job made my transition back into society easier. I was accustomed to conducting my affairs like an adult.

So many people have misconceptions and judgments about people who return to prison. They feel like you threw your chance away at freedom. The system feels you a menace to society. Their solution is more time with laws like the 3 strike law or enhancement and habitual laws never paying any attention to the whys. I know the whys and the hows from experience.

● I was released a week before my 21st birthday. Within 3 months I had a job, enrolled in Remington College, and rented my first apartment. etc The

apartment was bare! I mean I had absolutely nothing to put in it, but I had the keys. It was my first time not being homeless since I was 12. I was so happy. That is until my check cashing clerk refused to cash my payroll and told me I owed them for the last check I cashed because it bounced. I immediately went to my employer who encouraged me to open a bank account and deposit my checks, which I did. A month later the same thing happened at my bank and my rent was due. I also found out I was pregnant. I made all the wrong decisions from there but I had not reverted to a life of crime until I carried my baby girl out of the hospital with nowhere to go. My greatest fear was ~~not~~ realized: We were homeless... again.

Drugs inevitably lead to other crimes. That is a truism that most criminals and activists would ostrisize me for acknowledging, but it's a truism all the same. However, the agencies entrusted with enforcing laws and making society safer and better are dropping the ball dramatically. Prison as a source of punishment only with the illusion of ~~rehabilitation~~ programs for political and financial reasons is fruitless. Texas, where I am incarcerated now, is a prison and oil state. This state has over 100 prisons, is a death penalty state, and has an unchecked parole system.

Texas loves to defy the Federal Government and will refuse federal funds in order to keep its independence. The Texas Prison System is a blood sucker. The entire Texas Government is stuck in the past. This state never got over losing the Civil War, but as is the case for most political snakes, they found a way to keep their slaves in inmates. Prisoners in Texas are dehumanized and made retarded, much as slaves were of old. Any reform to this system will come at the Federal Government's insistence just as it did when Texas was unthinkingly over utilizing the death penalty on minorities. Only in Texas can an African American's natural hair be used as a tool to keep them in prison. It is written policy that the "Afro" is not to be worn and considered "extreme". Wearing an Afro can result in a case being written. Cases in turn is a ground to deny parole.

Parole functions as the scariest beast in which the inmate has no defense against. When you enter a Texas Prison, you are evaluated and given an Institution Treatment Plan (ITP). If you need a GED or Vocational it will be on your ITP. However, most people complete all requirements, keep case history to a minimum, and still get denied parole... because they can. "Nature of Crime" can be used as a reason for denial and that will never change. Therefore, parole is the end all be all

and it is unchecked.

The purpose suppose to be to have a safe society. This thing called the Prison Industry has become a monster. There are people here for stealing a six pack out of the corner store and bumped into one of the workers in their rush to get away. Then there are cases like Daunteae Sanford in Michigan who ~~was~~ ^{at} 14 was set up by Detroit police for murders he did not commit. There are battered women who were beaten constantly and raped constantly by men who were suppose to love and protect them; and when the abuses turned that violence on the children

The woman was put in prison for injury to a child by neglect. What do people see when they do background checks for jobs or apartments? What does parole see? Robbery, murder, child neglect/ endangerment and what will these people think? Our police and District attorneys are on a mission to meet quotas and have huge conviction rates. The result is them on crusades to make defendants look like monsters no matter the circumstances. The result is millions of Americans with no faces, only numbers, broken homes resulting in more criminals in a justice system that cares nothing about justice. Mass incarceration makes our society more dangerous.

I can tell you many stories about prison life, and I will just now in real time as I write this the

● ceiling just fell in on an inmate sleep in his bed! I can tell you stories about 4 different prisons I have been sent to, but all across our nation mass incarceration is a problem. No matter if the prison is a good one or bad one we have to ask if locking away all these people solving our problems with crime in this nation. I can assure you that it is not. There are obvious solutions, but I fear the justice department and people profiting off the prison industry really don't want a safer society. Their environment is already safe isn't it? Is it most crime in urban areas? Is that not profiting off of other peoples pain and misery? What do you think?