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Auto Biography of an incarcerated sex offender

This is my first essay for the APWA. I will give some general background of my childhood, then tell of my incarceration experience.

My name is Daniel Isaac Senior. I am forthcoming about my own life, but I do ask that my family remains anonymous. Please do not look them up or try to contact them.

I recognize the purpose of this archive is to teach and learn about ~~the~~ the United States criminal justice system, and therefore my personal life is inconsequential to the cause, but whatsoever details illustrate my experience as an inmate are important. Therefore, I will share only those things that pertain to events that led me to prison, or experiences I have had as an inmate.

Because I recognize that my crimes are offensive to the general public, I will refrain from any graphic details. If I choose to write an essay on how I became a sex offender, I will include a disclaimer.

I was born into a family with good values, with parents that loved unconditionally. I was not abused. I received a good education and graduated high school. I was generally considered a "good person". However, I had some sexual curiosities I didn't understand, and though I refrained from acting on them, at least when it came to physical contact, they never went away; they actually grew stronger.

I was a nerd, and I kept to myself a lot, though I did also have friends I'd occasionally hang out with. I was bullied throughout much of elementary school and junior high, most specifically from second grade to eighth grade. I never fought except occasionally verbally, to say "leave me alone." I've never been in a physical altercation, even to this day. I don't believe in violence. I believe in truth.

In my early teenage years, I began to discover pornography among our family's software. I later found there is a family history of porn addiction. I became the newest link in the chain. I had a number of dark years as I tried to live a clean life and avoid pornography, but kept getting sucked in. I did my best to overcome, but I kept it all a secret. I stopped feeling emotions except really happy or really sad, and most often it was really sad or just general numbness.

I grew up trying to be good. I served a two-year religious mission. I spent time being a good uncle to my young nieces and a good cousin to my young female cousins that lived nearby and would visit. I held down jobs where I'd help people: sales representative at department stores, a "hospitality host" at a restaurant, a "Document Control Archivist" at an office where I helped co-workers find documents they needed. Eventually, I got married. Throughout this time, I was a porn addict off and on.

I started going to counseling, but it didn't help because I didn't want to dwell on my addictions. Eventually, I began hiding from myself, and that only served to increase the magnitude of my acting out. Pornography had always

been coupled with self-stimulation (masturbation), and I had made a pact with my wife that any sexual activity would be strictly limited to the two of us together. Self-stimulation was not allowed. I had never intended to cheat on my wife - I had been very good about limiting sexual contact to myself and I had saved sex for her. (Aside from self-contact, I was a virgin when we got married. In fact, she is the only woman, aside from my mother, that I've ever kissed, even including not on the lips.)

We had a rough marriage. For anonymity purposes, I will never describe it. To be fair, we had good times, we had bad times, and neither of us were really better or worse than the other. I hadn't had a lot of experience handling conflicts or mediating tough issues, and adulthood, by nature, is full of difficult situations, and the stress got to me. I had attachment issues that started in my childhood, and I didn't know to say "I need some time on my own to sort things out," so I let issues build until I burned out.

One day, in a moment of weakness, I took out my frustrations sexually in an inappropriate manner involving someone close to me that wasn't my wife, or even an adult. I knew this individual wouldn't tell, and I didn't either. It started in an innocent manner and quickly got out of control. Unfortunately, it stirred up feelings in this person, and at this person's request, it continued, and sometimes I would offer to initiate and I always left it up to this youth. I didn't go contrary to this person's wishes. After a number of sessions, this person's desires got alarmingly far, and I immediately stopped forever with this "victim".

However, I had been awakened to the innocence of youth, I still hadn't grown up inside and I related best to younger people and another close individual entered the scene, and the pull was stronger and I could not so easily stop.

I started attending twelve-step meetings, but I couldn't get past the third step because I knew the fourth step would require writing out my wrongdoings, and my illegal activity would be the first item on the list. Then, it would be out there, and in the next step, I'd have to let someone else read my list, and I'd be done for.

I started recognizing I had fantasies for the future, other things to try on this young individual, desires to see her become more mature physically, and I knew I couldn't stop on my own, and getting help would automatically lead to legal trouble.

One day, I was about to do something worse, and my victim said no. I immediately stopped and got us dressed and told myself I had to do something. Shortly after, my wife asked me if I was looking at porn, and I admitted I was, and we got in an argument. I wanted to be able to promise her I'd do all I could to get my addiction under control, but I saw I couldn't keep that promise until I confessed my crimes. I struggled in my heart, and asked for alone time to ponder. After a very heartfelt prayer pleading for guidance, I felt inspired to turn myself in.

I knew that if I faced my wife I'd chicken out and end up continuing my charades, so I wrote a letter to her, wrote a note for the police, and I abandoned my family to go walking to find the police station. I was picked up by an officer, who had been informed to find me, and I turned myself in.

The officers were friendly. They were pleasantly pleased I was turning myself in. I had the pat-down, the miranda rights, the handcuffs, the backseat ride in a police cruiser, and I entered the police station. At this time, it was around one in the morning. I sat alone at the interrogation table and waited with my head in my hands. It was a long wait. Meanwhile, I could see shadows moving behind the one-way mirror, while, I presumed, the police processed paperwork and watched to make sure I didn't do anything stupid.

The detective came in and was friendly but very structured. He mediated a conversation, having me go through everything, how many times in this house, how many times in the next, and so forth. I didn't want a lawyer because I wasn't trying to hide. I answered truthfully all but one question I recognized as fishing for other crimes. That is - I admitted the additional crime he asked me if I'd done, but I told him it'd been long enough ago I'd forgotten the details. (That never became a charge.) I was honest when I had told him, regarding that one thing, that when I had done it I didn't know it was illegal, and when I found out it was, I stopped.

I had to sign a paper giving permission to search my computers for porn. For all I know, the police still have those three computers. I thought that procedure was odd, because my crime didn't involve computers, and what porn would have been on them was legal.

The hardships began when I got to jail. Jail is horrible. It's all about uncertainty, which spawns loads of anxiety. They do all they can to withhold valuable information, they don't even have their own policies and rules openly available, so prisoners are afraid they'll get in trouble for no reason because there's such specific ways a prisoner must live, and those ways aren't known. New prisoners are preyed upon because they don't know what's going on.

Worse off, the court system, the prisoner's lifeline and the ultimate decider of each prisoner's fate, is more secretive about their workings than the jail is. The public defenders don't help much, and prisoners get better legal advice from other prisoners than from anyone in the legal system.

I am comfortable being in prison, though at first I wasn't. However, I never want to be in a jail again. Everybody in jail is uptight all the time and that tension affects everybody, even the officers. All that would be required to ease most of that tension is education of policies and the basic legal process. It won't happen, because the officers don't trust prisoners with information because they don't trust the prisoners, period.

I remember remarking to a transport officer en route to court that I'll never come back to jail again. I understand what I did wrong, I see the pain it causes, and I will not inflict that on anyone ever again. He responded that I am full of crap and most everyone who goes to jail returns in and out for the rest of their lives.

To be honest, I do think that was a prejudicial attitude to take, and statistically speaking, the recidivism rate of sex crimes is low. However, I see now that although I was being very open with myself while I was in jail, I was totally in denial about how severe my condition is. It was only after I got feedback in letters and from other inmates (once I ~~was in~~ <sup>got to</sup> prison) that I started to see it.

One thing that I wished I had known, that would have helped to relieve my anguish, was that "mental health" is not limited to those with mental issues. The number one thing I desperately longed for was counseling, and I could have had it the whole time. I considered seeing what it was, but I worried that the prosecution would find out I was seeing therapists, and they would deem me crazy and that would negatively affect my sentencing. I had no reason not to think that way — nobody knew anything about anything regarding the system, and it was common knowledge (which may or may not be true) that the courts have access to know everything you do in jail: who you're writing to, if you get a write-up, if you file a grievance, what programs you participate in, what notes officers put in your file, what security level you're in, even what meds you take, and

They can use that against you. It's probably only moderately true, like on as-needed bases, and only limited information, but when you don't know what is going on, and you see signs that they do, you tend to get paranoid. Because of that, I didn't get help in jail, and I tried to be very careful in every step I took.

I didn't understand my charges. I didn't know I'd be charged with one count for each time, I didn't know what I did constituted three crimes (because each type of crime is similar but with slight technical differences). I didn't understand how what I did related to the crimes I was charged with until almost a year later, when I was in prison (after my final sentencing), and my mother-in-law saw my confusion in a letter to my wife and sent me a copy of each law. During court, I learned more from my parents than from my defender — he talked to them but not to me. I think it's because he didn't have time to tell me because I might ask him questions and it'd take his time to answer me. He was so over-extended that he actually missed one of my hearings.

The court hearings were tedious. I'd be handcuffed behind my back (because my crime was considered violent even though it was not) and shackled at my ankles, then forced to walk a mile to the garage (it was a large jail, all one building on a single floor, with 32 separate pods of 32 cells each). It's hard to keep up a fast pace when your feet are tied together by a short chain. We'd then be assigned holding cells, where we'd wait for an indeterminate amount of time. We'd then be shuffled to

a car, van, or bus (depending on how many prisoners were going to that courthouse), where we'd have to sit on our hands and try to stay balanced, un-seat belted, while the vehicle weaved in and out of traffic at high speeds. Then, we'd be led to another holding cell (sometimes alone), where we'd wait for hours with nothing to do but stare at the walls and try not to focus on our sore ankles or our burning shoulders (try holding your hands behind your back for six hours). Finally, ~~it~~ was my turn to see the judge, and I'd be led to a holding chamber outside the courtroom, where I'd wait another twenty minutes, not knowing what I was going to do. Sometimes, my public defender would whisper to me what was going to happen and what I should say, sometimes in front of other prisoners. Then, we'd enter the courtroom, I'd say one or two specific words, the judge would say something, and ~~it~~ I'd be rescheduled for another time. I'd be three minutes in the courtroom. Then, back to the holding cell to wait, they felt like dungeons because they were underground, made of cement, often cold and dark, and there'd be eerie echoes from other cells. Then, back to a crazy-driving vehicle, into a strip search area where finally we'd get our shackles removed, and we'd have to hurry and get dressed, get the shackles back on <sup>while kneeling on</sup> ~~the floor~~ a concrete bench, wait in holding again, get a cold sack lunch that was usually expired and soggy, and shuffle back a mile to our cells where the shackles would be removed once and for all and we'd reflect on what just happened.

It took about six such times for me to finally be sentenced to prison. I still don't understand why. They had all the evidence; I spelled it all out the day of

my arrest. As far as I see, there was nothing else to do. They were, however, able to reduce my charges, so my sentence became tolerable.

At least I got a decent public defender though when it came to sentencing he had no good defense and had to consult with the prosecution to know what the final charges meant. I say decent because the initial defender I was assigned didn't want to defend me because of my charges. It wasn't until she read that I turned myself in and was cooperative with the police that she told me she'd give me a chance and she assigned me to a new judge and a new defender.

When it came to going to prison, I was scared. There were so many horror stories and no one knew for sure what was real, and even the officers couldn't answer any questions about prison because it is its own entity and state vs. county and so they weren't privy to any information.

My final sentence, after reductions, is three counts of fifteen to life, run concurrently (at the same time). It could have been six, ten, or fifteen, concurrent or consecutive (one after another). As life in Utah is up to 99 years, I am happy for concurrency. The judge's explanation was that I get the maximum sentence because two and a half years of crime is not deemed a first offense, but I got mercy in way of concurrent instead of consecutive (which the State wanted me to suffer) because I turned myself in.

Prison, at first, was unsettling for me because everyone automatically starts in maximum security while each inmate is monitored and evaluated for behavior and personality. I was non-aggressive, and I was somewhat dominated by those who were more assertive. As a general rule, gang bangers hate sex offenders, and it didn't take much for them to figure out what I was. My lack of confidence and lack of tattoos or hardened demeanor gave me away the second I walked into the pod. I was threatened and had to pay a tax of my desserts from every meal tray. After a month, I was classified as a "sigma", which is the non-aggressive type, and I was moved to a section specifically for sigmas, where I was no longer in danger of "kappa's", or aggressive inmates. It took five and a half months from when I entered Utah State Prison to be moved to general population, because I was slated for minimum security and beds weren't readily available. Since then, changes have been made and it is easier to get a bed in minimum if you are a sigma.

Now, I am in an open dorm with no locks, I get to go outside most of the day, there are a number of programs such as music school with instruments, choir, religious services, education, and job opportunities.

If everything stays on schedule, in 2020 we move to a new prison that is in process of being built, and this facility will be razed and become commercial buildings. We know most about this through TV news and newspapers. We rarely learn of prison

developments through staff,

That is my account of how I became an inmate at Utah State Prison.

-Dan

Addendum: a quick explanation on my sentencing

Utah is one of a handful of states which still use "indeterminate sentencing", meaning at sentencing, Utah State inmates get a range of time instead of an exact date. The actual release date is determined by a parole board.

There are very few types of charges that are a life tops. As far as I have learned, life sentences are reserved for only murder and heinous sex offenses.

You can see my actual charges online. They are public record. Look up the Utah State Prison website and search for Daniel Senior, #210643.

My charges are severe for two reasons: 1. my victims were young, and 2. the charges are "aggravated" (denoting violence) because I was in a "position of trust". Although I did not use violence in any way whatsoever, it is assumed that my victims felt that if they said no that would cause conflict because I held authority over them. I will not state my relationship to my victims, for their protection.