

Fate?

For the past fourteen years of my life I have unfortunately been incarcerated. In that time I have met a countless number of individuals, characters and have had different cellmates. The past year has not been the best for me, but by far has not been the worse. As sad as this may sound I reflect on the best years I have had in prison with a cellmate who became my best friend and what I believe to be as close to having a brother.

In 2000 I was 27 years old, had nine years in of being incarcerated and had recently been released from the S.H.U. My cellmate at the time had also been released from the S.H.U. with me. We were cellmates for some time, but down the line a friend of his from the streets arrived at the prison, so what we did was some switching around so that he could move in with his friend and I could find someone I would be comfortable with. Having a good cellmate in prison is one of the most important factors of being there. After all it is like a marriage and you don't want someone living with you who is an uncontrollable drug addict or mentally unstable. Two men placed in a room built for one in which you both live in, use the restroom in, stay active in and must share. Any prison in California, except level 1's or level 2's, upon your arrival you are thrown in with whoever or your race. From there you could maneuver your way to find someone compatible, unless where you arrived at is fine by both of you. We inmates cannot simply move whenever we want to, it must be approved by all the parties involved, correctional officers, inmates and the administration. It is a process.

Just arrived to prison fresh from Los Angeles county jail, 23 years old, with a 50-life sentence, on a level 4 180 design prison and to top it off during the beginning of a racial lockdown that would last a year. My friend, Santos, and I were both from the San Fernando Valley, so we had a lot of similar things to talk about. I was only four years older than him, but to me he was just a kid who was green from head to toe. As with any new cellmate or arrival someone will explain to you how the environment works, rules, areas to walk in, which not to and of course casual conversation. Someone who has been in this particular prison for sometime showed or explained to Santos the get down.

During this year of complete lockdown we spent all 24 hours a day 7 days a week in our cells. We were not allowed to purchase commissary, use the phone, receive packages or go outside until 5 months into the lockdown. Only then did we receive the ability to purchase limited canteen and go outside in limited numbers with our own race once a week. The first months were hard for my friend because here he was a young guy who had it all, just dumped off in prison in a bad time and no ability to call anyone or receive visits. To top it off no one was reaching out to him, no friends or family. I knew this was something hurtful, because I myself went through that same thing upon my arrival to prison. No one wrote me, everyone's phone number was blocked, had no money to buy commissary or hygiene products it was all bad. So I shared my experience to try to ease his mind, console him and let him know he

Was not alone. Besides Whatever I had he had. All food, hygiene + V-Viewing was shared. We did ok and in time all got better.

This experience for my friend was beneficial, as it was for me as well. For my friend he was starting from the gravel up. From the get-go he experienced one of the worse times in prison early on, so everything else was no big deal. For me I got to realize a lot of things about myself and became a better person.

As the months went on and we exchange stories, life events and found out that he knew some of my friends out in the streets. We both were into our studies me in college and him in high school, we became each other's tutor or personal audience. We were very compatible, bonded and loved making our pruno for both sport and income. What we never expected was that our lives were intertwined years ago. Two things made this possible. One was winning a C.D. "The Best of Trinere", 1980's Dance Music, old school, and getting in contact with a cousin of mine.

The CD always reminded me of when my cousin Effie would babysit me and drive me around in her Mustang 5.0. It was the early '90's and she would always refer to me as her baby brother. I would share those things and he would say that his father had a girlfriend by the same name, but there was no way as I explained her age, where she lived, so that settled that. Years, 3 years, down the line we are still cellies and we have

accumulated a vast amount of music and luxuries that made life more comfortable, I got in contact with my cousin Effie. I have not seen, talked to or even know what she has been up to since 1991-1992. So I show Santos her picture and he goes crazy, "that's her, that's my dad's ex-girlfriend". Me and my cousin catch up, we talk and I ask her questions and sure enough it was true, but that wasn't even the half of it.

All these years as cellmates both of our mothers became friends, they would carpool to share the expenses to come visit us. Otherwise the drive from Los Angeles to Sacramento was just too expensive, let alone heart-breaking. Our families and us never put two and two together or ever even remotely would think of this. Most of this was due to not hearing from my father's side of the family since I was 12-13 years old and second I had not heard from my father since 2001. After the revelation of my cousin and his father is when we found out my father was dating his aunt, which was Santos father's sister!

When I was out in 2001 I had got in contact with my father after eight years and it turns out he lived in Canoga Park, two cities down from me, when he introduced me to his girlfriend. At this point of time my cousin would pick up Santos from High School and my father knew Santos as well, but we never met. My cousin almost married his father and my father almost married his aunt. So here we are many ~~over~~ years later, cellmates, good friends and were almost

family through marriage.

In 2014 Went Went our Seperate paths due to being transferred to different prisons, but I will never forget the friendship We had. Through him I was able to retain my college work information and formulate great work due to our debates or conversations. As I would tell him "it's true you could learn alot from a dummy". Little did I know he grew from all this as well. We both did not engage in drugs, drug use or stupidity that is so rampant in prison, while still being true to being active in the general population. We had our bad times, good times, but as with human beings placed in similarly situated positions they will band together. We did this and helped one another. In more ways than one. Managed our food, income, found ways to gain necessities and unbeknownst to us gave one another emotional support. It is weird how life works at times. I met a friend in an unlikely place. Our lives were intertwined long ago. In the end I found a true real friend in New Folsom prison.