

IMPETUOUS

Living in prison is a difficult situation to explain to one's family in order to spare them any grief or stress, let alone to the individual who has never experienced it, will ever experience it or even conceive the thought process of a prisoner living in prison. One must take into consideration each prisoner's situation such as the he or she has been sentenced to, support from family or friends, if any, financial problems and the daily struggles of the prison life environment. Having been in prison for a significant amount of time, I have experienced many things from despair, loneliness, discipline, education, emotional and physical changes, and significant insight. As the fundamental process of learning, through experience and trial and error I have found a way to cope with my environment and deal with the different attitudes of those incarcerated and those who work here.

The past fifteen years that I have spent incarcerated from the Los Angeles county jail to prison has been full of heartache, fights, time in the hole, loss of friends and family through death or communication and reflection. Having been sentenced to a de facto life without parole sentence of 69 yrs to life for a crime committed as a juvenile left me with no hope to ever see a day I may go home. Being young and reckless this mindset of hopelessness left me in a state of the "I don't give a fuck attitude". After all what did I have to look forward to? Nothing I could do would show that I do not belong here or have been reformed because I would never get that opportunity until the age of 88, if I even made it to that age. Little did I know that this mindset is what sent me to a state of depression, that I did not realize I was in until years later, in which I snapped out of when I immersed myself into sports, exercise and the environment around me. This was my

home now, so I had to understand it, abide by it's social structure and norms and learn how to benefit from it.

Living in prison is not an easy task to conform to. From dealing with the attitudes of other convicts whose ages range from 18-60 or more, the attitudes of correctional officer's whose ages, titles and attitude's toward's inmates and their jobs are daily struggles. Not to mention the harassment and staff misconduct you may subjected to, but justified because you are a convicted felon in prison, so what do you expect to be treated like? A human being? Ha! Yeah right. For the most part most correctional officer's treat ya normal within the range of convict and officer. Mutual respect and conversation is exchanged and we go about our business, but there are always those who are not. These officer's are either very gang-bos or simply have a hate for anyone imprisoned. These zealous officer's are the one's who play mind games, disrespect convicts or conduct the misconduct or harassment to entice convict's into retaliation. Not that some convicts are not the ones who themselves have the same attitude towards the officer's, who entice staff to act this way, as well. It is a two way street. Nonetheless, as in any situation, the human spirit will adapt and endure. Through this an individual must make the best of any situation.

Prison is a hopeless abyss set out to diminish you from within. A prisoner cannot not allow this place to break him or her down no matter what adversities we confront. When you are placed in the hole seek the benefits from it. What benefits you ask? the ones you never saw, quiet time, exercise, reading a good book with no distractions, reflection and discussions with yourself and sort of a timeout from the environment that stops you from seeing the bigger picture. How about when you are just bored?', become creative draw, build, write, read or work out. Anytime that we take time out of our day to do something productive we are taking a step towards freedom. This might not lead to actual physical freedom, but it will free you from this place you are in for a few moments. As cliché or sappy, this may sound one must never give up upon

yourself or sell your self short. When you do you are harming yourself by telling yourself that you are nothing.

As my situation showed that I did not care for anything. I was hopeless. I did not value myself. As time went on, I aged, experienced different situations and motivated myself to better myself. My motivation came from opportunities as well as seeing my friends and family changing as well. Prison life stands still for us, well it did and has for me. I still remember like yesterday being that 17-18 year old with my homies, my girl and my neighborhood. Now me and all my homies are adults with all the responsibilities of adults. No longer are we those irrational, reckless, immature adolescents. We don't even call each other by our nicknames anymore. Now we all make our decisions what is best for our families and those who look up to us as a role model. This progress took me a long time to complete, which in reality is still not complete.

Now recently the courts have ruled in the favor of juvenile offenders whose minds are not fully developed, cannot think like adults and should take certain factors into consideration when being sentenced. There is hope for me now. I have a chance, but even before this ruling I had already freed myself from my hopelessness. I accomplished this by educating myself by enrolling into higher education. Although I received a tangible piece of paper that acknowledges I passed all the curriculum to receive my Associates Degree. It does not show the emotional and personal growth gained from it. The simplicity of going to higher learning had a profound effect on my friends and family. My siblings did better in school and were proud of me. Some of my friends went back to school to earn a GED or HS diploma. Once I graduated it became even more evident of the people I reached through this. Not to mention how others viewed me in prison, which were all positive. None of these positive changes would have been possible without the hurt, pain, or mental anguish from being imprisoned.

When I encounter all those convicts like myself sentenced to 40, 50, or 100 year or life sentences for crimes committed as juveniles, I remember how lost I was. I used to be that defensive kid who would snap or feel pressured. I was the one being pulled away before I acted and scolded in a firm but gentle manner by the older homie. I laugh at it now. Now here I am the one who is pulling them to the side and trying to guide them. I see all the great things I have lost or missed out on. The things that I will lose or miss out on, but this pain and realization led me to think, "isn't that the approach or point that the penal system hopes to inflict upon a prisoner?" If so, I am confident in saying it has worked for me. This mental anguish led me to get away from prison through productive measures that ultimately became the catalyst for the person, the man, I have become today.

This mental anguish inflicted on a prisoner is a punishment that is the subset of the primary punishment of being physically incarcerated. Some may view the mental anguish as the primary punishment and the physical incarceration the subset of the primary punishment. When we come to realization that mental anguish is being mentally incarcerated, only then can we move forward from the putrid and stagnant abyss we are in. Undoubtedly being mentally incarcerated is worse than physical incarceration because the mind never quits, it wonders, it questions and it needs stimulation. Depending on the individual he or she can find motivation to escape their incarceration. Prison may not offer the best of the best programs, but any activity whether it be leisure or formal helps escape the grasp of incarceration. All my leisure time and formal time spent on higher education became the most serendipitous decision I have ever made in my life. No longer do I suffer from my mental incarceration because I am no longer in a stagnant, putrid situation. My thoughts, decisions, and beliefs flow with fluidity and with a mellifluous feeling.

Finding harmony within yourself will allow a prisoner to conduct themselves with respect, selfworth and respect for others. When you, a human being, become aware of your selfworth the selfworth of others becomes apparent to you. You begin to think before you speak. You become a compassionate and considerate person because you now have the others you communicate or interact with feelings or beliefs in mind before you retort. This trait is a necessity in prison when speaking with correctional officers and other convicts, that can only be gained in time and through growth. Your communication skills and understanding are what people in prison will judge you on, among other qualities, but when you possess these skills you are the rational person that can be trusted not to think impulsively or irrationally. When dealing with correctional officers this is a very important skill to possess, since any and all correctional officers would rather have a level headed individual working around them, as opposed to the smart mouth, hot tempered youngster.

When I began my prison term I never saw correctional officers as I do now. Back then I saw them as the C.R.A.S.H units from LAPD and the deputies from L.A. County jail. As time went on my point of view has changed because not only have I changed, but prison itself has changed. Not to confuse anyone on my feelings on a correctional officer as a friend because that is not what I am saying at all! What I mean is that in prison at an early age I would never communicate with officials, ask for help or ask for a job. I was not going to beg a cop for a job, I was not going to work for no cop and when I would get referred for a job I would not get it at all. That reinforced my opinion, but I guess the reason why is because my attitude showed through my demeanor. Now I see these guys as

men doing their jobs. Some are younger than me, some older and some the same age as me. The small talk and jokes made are simply formalities since we must all coexist here and work with one another to get along. Being able to deal with these correctional officer's who may be your boss or supervisor is a vital role to learn because in the free world you will have a boss or supervisor who is someone like that officer. Basically what it boils down to is mutual respect.

Prison life for me still continues to be a struggle, but not an uphill battle full of emotional turmoil. I still deal with possibly losing my mother in here, or me possibly passing away in here and not being there for my siblings. This sentence I received and all the baggage it brought with it did what no one else could do. It got me to see the world as it is, to educate myself, to love myself and become a better solely for myself and no one else. When I did this all else fell into place. Living in prison is different for every prisoner it is not a one size fits all. Some of us are more fortunate than others when it comes to support from family and friends both emotional and financial. Some have less time, an actual parole date and some no chance at all. Many have vices that control them to further dig themselves into a hole deeper than the one they are in.

There are too many testimonials, opinions and views on prison life to express the entire scope of prison life. The realities of prison life vary from age groups, ethnic groups and life styles. Not to mention all the situations and circumstances, which cannot be mentioned that are critical factors. Nothing in this California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation enforces the motto of rehabilitation. This paradox is belied by the claim that they want to help and ensure to keep you involved with your family and community, when to the contrary they do all they can to stop your ties

With your family and visitors to use as leverage to get you to become an informant or be a subservient inmate.

Prison life for this convict in the California Penal System was the hardest mental battle I ever had to endure. Losing my last two teenage years, all my twenties and now in my thirties has me in a state of shock. My generation of friends and I are no longer the careless kids we used to be. They are all fathers, mothers and respectable adults, while I am the convicted felon condemned to life in prison. There is no situation that will ever humble you more than being sentenced to life in prison, more so from your adolescent years. As most people from my generation that grew up on rap and love Tupac's music because we can relate with it. For me my troubles began at in the age of thirteen, 1996. My "troublesome" began and ended with the verse of another song of his that said "how do you feel to lose your life for something you did as an adolescent?" Like the bottom scum of the putrid and stagnant abyss that I am in, which I may never emerge from.