

## PHANTOM SOULS By Gerard Gregory Schultz Jr

Unable to be perceived by the outside world and sometimes unable to be perceived by our own selves. We are an estimated 2 million, but the sound of a pin falling down onto the ground makes a much louder sound than 4 million teardrops that incessantly fall every second of every hour of every day for the "phantom souls" that are entombed in their purgatory state of existence inside correctional facilities across the United States.

We are "phantom souls" the men, women and children incarcerated from all realms of life. Yes, it can be said "that we've made mistakes and wrong choices in our life's quest". It can be said, "that in more cases than one that we deserve to be imprisoned, some of us for the rest of our lives". It can also be said "that many of us have disappointed and let down the people of our own communities", but has it been said "that we are human beings too"? Has everyone forgotten that we too are your parents, spouses, children, relatives and friends? Has it been said "that we too still bleed, and bleed and even breathe the very same air as the rest of the world does"? We still bleed! We still breathe! Unfortunately, the world has immediately forgotten our presence and existence as soon as the iron gates slam and cell door close.

That is why we are "phantom souls", because no one can even see us or hear us and if it were possible to do so, it would be like a bee's wing falling onto your shoulder or an eyelash falling on your nose. Hardly detectable. We have no outside effect at all. What we do have in here is something mentally, emotionally and physically corrosively debilitating which none of us convicted felons would ever wish upon anyone else to ever have to experience.

As "phantom souls" we are trapped in a purgatory state of existence with hells fire already burning our feet. I've been locked in this purgatory state for over a decade and I still have not gotten used to this burning sensation that never ceases to burn, not even in my sleep! Animals in animal shelters in a horrid way are blessed. Because after 7 days if no one wants them, then they are morbidly euthanized. An inhumane bitter sweet luxury of a quick escape from this protracted nightmare we unfortunately cannot receive. For we "phantom souls" must endure the pain of life without parole sentences with no rehabilitation or educational reform available just left to rot inside supermax prisons.

Everyone eventually leaves your side friends, siblings, parents, relatives, your spouse and lastly your own children leave you to stand utterly alone. Everyone scatters away from our lives like cockroaches scatter when the lights turn on. No more visits, no more collect calls accepted, no more photos, no more letters and no more outside financial assistance to purchase the bare necessities which are hard to come by in here. No more-nothing! That's it! You are officially cut off from the very



essential things that were giving your "phantom soul" the slightest hope by having to endure hell itself, just to try to get back to its body, back to life and back to love.

This is when mental illness, violence, murder and the suicide rate in correctional facilities and their draconian supermax prisons drastically increases. Because a "phantom soul" with no help, no education, no vocational training and no proper rehabilitation for the vast majority with nothing to lose and no hope for the future is better off dead. Actually, that is what a "phantom soul" truly is. For we are dead men walking. It's a bone chilling feeling to realize that.

Now as a "phantom soul" loses itself completely, it then attaches itself to the prison atmosphere, its lifestyle, culture and methods of mere survival like a leech to your inviting flesh thirsty for its blood. It is nothing nice or positive at all! For we do not live in here we must strive daily to survive in a cold isolated world full of pain, loneliness, anger, confusion and hate. It's a menagerie where its big dog eats little dog. Kill or be killed. Many animals such as human snakes of all shapes and sizes roam this place with two faces and menacing glares with evil agendas. Having to resort to convict criminal ingenuity to get by and survive. "Phantom souls" must condition themselves to be alert and ready at any moment and anytime mentally, emotionally and physically for the instant danger reveals itself and chaos erupts.

For many pride is sealed with tattoos others they are shields, for they shield many from exposing their true selves. Respect, acceptance, loyalty, acknowledgement, reputation, honour and authority are earned by the degree of corrupt mercilessness and violent deeds of ruthlessness against any other prisoner whom violates convict code of ethics and by-laws; violence against rival gangs, racial enemies and against the guards. We cannot forget the guards the evil sneaky swine. For they are the most ruthless, deceitful, dangerous, conniving, lying and cheating gang in the prison. For 7 times out of 10 a prisoner is assaulted, marked for death, unjustly persecuted or punished and even killed; and a guard one way or another had their hand in the treachery. Sad but true. Hate is the only way that emotion is expressed inside of this concrete bed of barbed wire thorny roses that we reside in. Unfortunately in prison life jealousy, envy, deceit, gossiping and plotting against others without anything else to do, look forward to or lose is what many fall in to since all other positive extracurricular activities are cut only available to selected few or non-existent. The vast majority of everyone display acts of treachery and hate against one another burning with boredom and lack of mental, emotional and physical stimulations that are positive and productive all wanting what the next person is or has. As I've said "we are phantom souls" so we are never satisfied with who we are or what we have. Yet people out in society wonder why prisons become so rampant with gangs, violence, drug abuse, racism, hate and the mass deterioration of once good natured souls. Men die in here both physically and mentally and it's worse than any war or natural disaster because this is all planned. Oh you think that is the prisoners whom do the planning? They are a problem but it is the government and its reckless prison administrations and faulty judicial systems that do the planning which provide laws,



sentences, stipulations, restrictions and budget cuts of prison rehabilitation, education, therapy, job training and recidivism prevention programs. To which is faulty and hard for us not to fall prone to its negative back-lash, in that way we become prisoners casted off into this environment. I didn't make these laws and I didn't create these fetid institutions and their mind altering supermax prisons with no other purpose but to punish physically and to torture us and break us mentally, emotionally and physically creating the animals many of us unfortunately become. The government did this and planned this horrendous thing that is the greatest unknown atrocity in America, for all men are not created nor treated equal. Like I said "we are phantom souls" and we are unknown. For a "phantom soul" is nothing but an institutionalized lost sense of hope.

Every day when the guard comes by the cells for mail-call to pass out mail, there are so many "phantom souls" literally trying to maintain their composure from the overwhelming anxiety and desperate hope of possibly receiving a letter. From who? It doesn't really matter, just a letter from someone telling you "that you are thought of and exist to the outside world". But in most cases the letters do not come and the sadness creeps in, but it's quickly deterred by anger and aloofness. A couple of curse words, reassuring comments and thoughts to tell yourself "I don't care if I get mail or not". Well, it is a lie and if any "phantom soul" claims such, then they are a damned liar! But hey, everyone lies to someone, so why not lie to yourself, right?

If you do receive a letter, an answered collect call, or even a visit, for a brief moment of time one is not a "phantom soul". They are once again a parent, sibling, someone's child, spouse or a friend. They are a person, they are a human being, plain and simple they are alive again. Oh, and it's a Beautiful thing. You can literally feel the next man exhale a breath of relief and then inhale in a breath of hope to try to last until the next letter, visit or answered collect call ever comes again.

Do we "phantom souls" ever cry? Well... this is actually a touchy and controversial subject because in essence we are not supposed to, but my personal opinion as a hardened "phantom soul" is that yes everyone does somehow some way. Especially for us "phantom souls" in here whom experience hurt, anger, confusion, loneliness and stress daily, we tend to hide it best. Sort of like an M&M candy, hard shell on the outside but soft on the inside. Through ones artwork, poetry or creative writing tears are shed symbolically or secretly crying and muffling your sobs and hiding your tears into your pillow so that no one else is able to see or hear. I guess some of us even cry in our sleep. I can honestly say that I did once that I am aware of. One night I awoke to find hot tears running down my face I felt a deep aching sense of sorrow and hurt. What was I crying about? I don't even know which just astounds me.

As for us trying to do something for ourselves and rehabilitating ourselves back in to our enriched flesh and bones. Well, just imagine the civil rights movement between blacks and whites, the United Farmworkers union striking against the greedy grape grower industry and immigrants trying to get a fair shake on the new biased and even bigoted immigration reform policies and laws. Just intensify that a trillion times over



and over with the condoning fact that the government and its reckless prison administrations feel justified in how they treat and deprive our "phantom souls" from a transition back to life through any rehabilitation reform with light at the other end of the dark tunnel. For it is no secret that the government and its reckless prison administrations have literally cut back or cut off the means for prisoner reform through rehabilitation, education and vocational and job training especially to prisoners with lengthy sentences and life without parole sentences whom have great influence over many younger prisoners and those with shorter sentences. Yet America gives away billions of dollars to supposedly help and aid Pakistan for whatever reasons and have the audacity to question and look down their noses at countries like China over human rights violations. When America cannot or chooses not to fix its own.

So it is a struggle in every way, so we continue to remain "phantom souls". Lost wandering like ghost-like souls between hell and a hard place in a purgatory state in soulless cells. Think about it, have you ever seen someones eyes that reflect nothing? It is heart wrenching and people say "oh, they do deserve it for what they've done". I feel sorry for those people, because their souls are more lost than ours is. Compassion and understanding are gifts that are attained, and the sad thing is, few people ever attain those gifts. As "phantom souls" we have no voice to the outside world, but there are minds of great intelligence in here that could put an end to all issues that are deteriorating our Beautiful world. Many topics of discussions in here of art, politics, religion, history, war, philosophy, economics, literature, hobbies and music are so baffling people just wouldn't be able to fathom what we know, are truly capable of and are trying to express. Just imagine what we could accomplish with the proper rehabilitative and educational reform provided to "all" of us while incarcerated at all levels.

This is why people out in the free society are so astounded and even sickened by the fact of how the prison system continues to corrupt and not help many young and short time offenders whom become repeat offenders and progress further into crime. Prisoners with long term sentences and life without parole whom are not being rehabilitated and positively stimulated become part of the virus that helps spread the disease to other prisoners entering and leaving prison. For as "phantom souls" we become institutionalized through this deterioration and negative unreformed recidivism disease eating us alive!

We "phantom souls" experience a real travesty of loss, despair, anger, sadness, confusion and loneliness. What we feel is so intense, it can be described as that feeling in the movie the Titanic when Leonardo Di Caprio drifted off into his icy tomb of death from making sure his true love Kate Winslet would be safe, or that first initial thought and feeling of the attacks on 9/11 and that feeling of anger and despair over the flooding of Hurricane Katrina and the errors made in the aftermath in New Orleans. Just think of the first few seconds of each of those feelings. That is what we



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feel in our hearts and our hearts pump blood, which means; we still bleed, we still breathe.

This is not a poor me story for I deserve to be punished for my crimes that I take full responsibility for, but I also need help to be better for myself, the prison I survive in and for society whom pays taxes to the government to help and fix our society and those things to make it better and more productive and prosperous. This is something felt by everyone. Most if not all convicts will not admit it but there is no fault in that. Because in a crazy way if we do admit it to ourselves that we are alive then it all rushes in and the emotions are too much to bear. Prison is not always the answer for everything. Punishment with no reform and no proper educational rehabilitation is not the answer. Life without parole with hopelessness and nothing to lose or gain is not the answer. Long term solitary confinement in draconian supermax prisons is not the answer.

Rehabilitation, love, education, understanding, hope and change are the answer. But how can it be properly applied so that it is not taken advantage of? I don't know, but I sure hope that someone can find a way or a solid solution to this problem before this "phantom soul" completely fades away.....

By Gerard Gregory Schultz Jr. # (AZDOC) 110601, an Arizona Dept. Of Corrections prisoner housed out of state via the (I.C.C.) Interstate Corrections Compact since February 25th 2015. Locked down in both Arizona supermax prisons SMU<sup>I</sup> and Browning Unit formerly SMU<sup>II</sup> since returning to the Arizona Dept. Of Corrections on June 13th. 2001 until I was transferred out of state. I was in New Mexico Corrections Dept. supermax lock up upon arrival in South Unit and the North Unit supermax prisons in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I was sent out of state to the (IDOC) Illinois Dept. Of Corrections on August 30th. 2006 housed at Menard Correctional Center a maximum security lock up prison then sent to their Joliet Correctional Center supermax prison on May 13th. 2008 until December 22nd. 2012; due to state budget cuts and the need to close the extremely most expensive supermax prison that has only been at less than half capacity filled since 1998. Since the closure of the Joliet supermax we are still locked down in supermax status in Pontiac Correctional Center in solitary confinement in a special cellhouse North Administrative Detention. A so called non-punitive form of segregation from the general population. Yet we have many restrictions that the general population and pe inmates<sup>s</sup> do not have. No work, no school, no congregate religious services, no self help rehabilitation programs offered such as anger management or drug treatment, limited phone calls, non-contact visits, limited store, limited showers, limited property just lots of bitterness, negativity, and frustrations....