

Duplicate

Being Sane In An Insane Place

By: Lacio Hamilton

Incarceration is not just the concrete, the razor wire, bullet proof glass, or trained assassins watching from gun towers. Incarceration is not just the isolation, the monotony, loneliness, or the assiduous misery. Incarceration is not just the anxiety, the idleness, apathy, or the pent up frustrations characteristic of these dismal crypts. Neither is it just having to always chase after something, having to hide something, or having to hold my ground against something, or someone. It is knowing how very different my life, and the life of hundreds of thousands of others, could have been. A real live nightmare of sorts.

It is the unimaginable reality that I, or anyone for that matter, could be extracted and severed from the habits, the routines, familiar, normal, and regular activities of making a life. Such as work, social improvements, romance, and lineage. It is the forceful, the pointed, abusive, oppressive, and violent manner in which correctional policies, programs and procedures assault individuality and independence. An asphyxiation of sorts.

It is the systematic application of the principles of behavior modification. Techniques that can include both rewards (positive reinforcement) and punishment (negative reinforcement). However, the emphasis is on punishment and minimizes rewards. Which are simply the absence of deprivations one ordinarily expects not to have to sustain. It is the similarity between the correctional facility and Frankenstein. Whose diseased ego created a huge, pathologically strong, demented, ugly creature (symbolic to what is being done to offenders). Which was functionally censored by making him underintelligent. Erecting institutions flexible enough to keep the creature working, but rigid enough to forestall any growth of his mental faculties. And like Frankenstein's creature, I am suppose to live through the correctional facility; be content watching the correctional facility flourish. A horror story of sorts.

It is the social distance not only from family, friends and future relations but, the social distance from the people who administrate and staff correctional facilities. People I am in close physical proximity to everyday. It is the idea that anything other than giving commands to offenders poses a danger because we will appear human. It is that the people who staff these places have no reason to maintain standards of humane treatment. No reason to refrain from doing what no one should do to anyone. It is the contradiction between what correctional administrators and staff does, and what official websites and paid spokes people say they do. It is that even when I am right, I am told I am wrong. A schizophrenia of sorts.

It is the systematic process of reinforcing the unconditional fact of my existence: I have

no control over the regulation and orientation of my own being. It is the misleading name given to this condition i.e., learned helplessness. A derivative of psychologist B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning commonly called, learned techniques. It is being taught to accept without question administrator's and staff's power to control me. It is a brainwashing of sorts.

It is the talent wasting. It is the aspirations that lay in ruins. It is the dreams deferred. It is tomorrow and never today. Except the ordeal of incarceration means tomorrow never comes. What people on the outside experience as tomorrow, incarcerated persons experience as "Ground Hog Day." That is, each day is like the day before it, and the day before it, until days and weeks and months and years blend together like mush. A twilight zone of sorts.

The point must be literally brought home, into our communities, houses, and individual thought processes that the ordeal of incarceration, physical detainment, is also the ordeal of a calculated emotional and psychological devastation. It is the insanity of it all. You know, being sane in an insane place.

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