

MY STORY by INDIA PORTER

My name is India Porter and I am currently incarcerated with The Michigan Department of Corrections. I was sentenced to 25 to 40 years for 2 counts of Assault with intent to Murder, felony firearm and felon in possession of a firearm. As of August 28, 2015 I have served 13 years on that sentence.

Am I guilty of my crime? Yes. Had someone asked me that question almost 9 years ago I would have probably blamed everyone and everything else before I took responsibility for my actions.

I could go on and on and rant and rave about how unfair this system is and about how much of an injustice was done to me to lead me here. I could tell you how big of a desire I have to be set free physically, just like the millions of other incarcerated people. But our reality is that a lot of us are in much bigger prisons, and they are the ones without barb wired fences, and bars.

True freedom is a state of mind. One of the biggest epiphany's I had happened while I was here incarcerated. And that was: until I could I take a real hard honest look at myself, not the self looking back at me in the mirror nailed onto the wall. My real self. The self no one else saw, because it was on the inside of me, and get real about what was broken in me, and figure out what really sent me to prison, I would never be free.

When I realized that my real enemies were not my victims, or the prosecutor, or the judge. My real enemy was my "inner me" that was when I got free. I had been carrying around so much hurt, anger and resentment from my childhood that what happened when I committed this crime was the sum total of all those years of not dealing with my issues in a healthy way. It is a fact, hurt people hurt people.

After reading a study done by the U.S. Department of Justice that analyzed what



causes led to young girls being delinquent, here is what I found:

"...Studies of girls who are chronic runaways document significant levels of sexual and physical victimization (Feitel et al., 1992; Stiffman, 1989; Welsh et al., 1995) This suggests that although their offense behavior may not appear to be very serious, these girls may be fleeing from serious problems and victimization, some involving illegal behavior by adults, which in turn makes them vulnerable to subsequent victimization and engaging in other behaviors that violate the law such as prostitution, survival sex, and drug use. Similarly, research on aggression in girls and assaults committed by girls suggests that these behaviors can best be understood in the context of their families, peer groups, schools, communities, and experiences (Brown, 1998; Caspi et al., 1993; Champion and Durant, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Leitz, 2003; Lockwood, 1997; Margolin and Gordis, 2000; Molnar et al., 2005; Warr, 1996).

"Exposure to severe or cumulative stressors—and responses to them—are strongly associated with risk-taking behavior, including delinquency. Stressors are conditions that elicit strong negative responses and that are perceived as uncontrollable and unpredictable. Such conditions produce alterations in the body's stress responses that disrupt cognitive and emotional processes, thereby increasing the likelihood of risky behaviors in vulnerable adolescents (McBurnett et al., 2005; Sinha, 2001).

"...there is further evidence that girls more often experience certain types of trauma (e.g., sexual abuse and rape) than boys (Hennessey et al., 2004; Snyder, 2000). Many studies of special populations suggests that the incidence of sexual abuse is more pervasive among girls who engage in antisocial behavior, particularly those who engage in violent behavior..."

"...Sexual abuse is the most studied type of maltreatment of girls. Existing research focuses primarily on psychological outcomes and has a number of



methodological limitations...Siegel and Williams (2003) found that, with statistical controls for race and family dysfunction in a study girls, sexual abuse victims had an increased likelihood of juvenile arrests for violent crimes and adult arrests for any offense. Widom (1995).

I've quoted all this to say, I am that delinquent girl The U.S. Department of Justice was referring to. I am that girl, all grown up, just like they predicted, serving 25 to 40 years for an assaultive crime.

My story starts when I was 11 years old. That was the first time I was molested. My mother battled schizophrenia, and my father was a drug addict whom I may have seen a total of 15 times my entire life until he died from an over-dose when I was 17.

By the time I was 13 I was a homeless run-a-way, living with a friend, in the same household with the person who molested me when I was 11. At this time he was having sex with me. He was an adult, but I didn't think it was wrong because I consented to having sex with him. At the time I thought sex equated to love. I didn't have anyone else in my life telling me they loved me, so for him to say it in exchange for my body, I felt it was worth it.

By the time I was 14 I was doing what ever was necessary to survive. Mainly having sex with men of many different age groups for money. Survival sex. This had become my life. Sex with men for money.

After I had been sexually abused at 11, it was like my world had been enveloped in a cocoon of darkness. My whole view on life was warped. I didn't love or value myself. I had no idea even how to. I had never felt love from anyone, and the only time I felt wanted was when I was having sex with men. So, I grew up associating my worth as a person to my desirability to men. Drugs was never an issue for me. I was addicted to wanting to be loved. And just like an alcoholic looking for refuge in the bottom of a bottle. Or a drug addict chasing that



first high in their next <sup>hit</sup> hit. I wanted to be loved. And I thought sex was the closes I would ever get to it. Not knowing I was losing myself in the process. By the time I committed my crime to come here I was lost. I had so much emotional damage built up on the inside of me. So much anger that I was literally mad at the world. I could never understand why that even when things seemed to be going right for me, I could never really be happy.

One of the harest realities I have had to face about myself was the fact that I was a victim of the sex industry. I was raised to believe I had to use my body to survive. I never thought that this life style was dysfunctional. I just believed that was just how it was for me. Coming to prison and realizing this was like being sloppy drunk having a black out and waking up the next day hung over, and people telling you all the crazy things you did the night before.

Here are some more statistics:

Between 66 and 90% of women in the sex industry were sexually abused as children. Women in the sex industry experience higher rates of substance abuse, domestic violence, rape, violent assault, std's and post-traumatic stress disorder.

All of these revelations angered me. My entire life summed up in a study by The U.S. Department of Justice. It angers me because this sytem knows about this. And no one is doing anything to help young girls like me, to prevent them from experiencing the hell that comes along with sometime only being born.

When I reflect back over all the things that have led to me offending and coming to prison, I often feel like I never had a chance. But I read a quote by Benjamin Disraeli: "Man is not the creature of circumstance, circumstances are the creature of man."

And he's right. I have to take responsibility for my own existence.

But, at the same time if this system "The Department of Corrections" were doing what it was supposed to be doing, in light of all the aforementioned studies,



and statistics. Why doesn't this "Department of Corrections" have any type of programming to help me deal with the issues that have caused me to offend?

There is no sexual abuse groups for victims, there is no insight and accountability available, nothing for an assaultive offender until you are one year within your earliest release date.

I have been incarcerated for 13 years now, and I do not qualify for any groups or programs that promote rehabilitation until 2026. According to the Department of Corrections stipulations I have to spend another 11-12 years jut existing. There is no computer literacy training, when everything in society is computer based. After being locked up for 13 years, the world I knew before I came is very different from the world right now. I am going to leave one day and prison is doing nothing to help me prepare to eventually re-enter society. Because of inmate mail policy, I cannot purchase a book that would at least give me basic instruction on how to operate and navigate on-line. I am not allowed to purchase books on business or real estate.

I am a person who wants to change positively in every way I can. It is extremely hard for me because I feel "trapped" in an environment that doesn't promote or support that change.

When I wake up in the morning my options consist of: Do I get up and sit in the activity room all day and play cards or table top games? Or do I hang out on the yard or gym? or maybe I'll stay in my cell all day, since because of over-crowding issues I'm only allowed 2 hours of activity room usage a day? Everyday I feel that I am here just existing. Here taking up space until 2027 and I can see the parole board and hopefully they let me go home, wherever that may be at that time.

If I <sup>did</sup> ~~have~~ <sup>not</sup> ~~have~~ the help of Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior I honestly don't know how I would make it.



The purpose of The Department of Corrections is to make our communities safer and aid in the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals. Warehousing people from our community in prison for decades on end and just forgetting them is not going to solve the problem. This system needs to begin treating us like people who have problems, not like "the" problem just sweep under a rug.

In closing, I was sentenced to 25 - 40 years. I have served over 13 years on my sentence. My sentencing guideline ranged from 9 years on the lowest end and 23 on the highest end. The prosecutor suggested I be sentenced to 9-15 years. My sentencing Judge Diane M. Hathaway felt I deserved the absolute maximum penalty for my crime. She never gave a reason for it, she just gave me the maximum. In 2012, Diane M. Hathaway was sentenced to 1 year in Federal Prison for bank fraud.

The same person who sentenced me to more time in prison than I had been ~~in~~ alive is a law breaker just like me. She too has cost tax payers money, was dishonest, and left a negative mark on society.

What makes her any different than me? Why should I have to spend another 11-12 years in prison by the judgment of a convicted felon? Although I am no longer the person I was when I committed this crime over 15 years ago, my sentence, that a convicted felon has issued me is keeping me locked up for another 11-12 years.

For the last 4 years I have been trying to come to grips with this and find a way to look at this in a politically correct way. But am I wrong to believe that after 13 years I have done everything possible to become a better person am I wrong for wanting mercy?

I wanted to write my victims a letter to apologize to them. I never intended on sending it, but I just felt it was something I should do to further my responsibility and accountability process. After during some research I found



out that one the victims in my case is incarcerated as well. He was charged for assaulting a mentally handicap person, by hitting him in the head with tire iron.

After reading the facts surrounding his case I was disturbed.

After all of the facts surrounding my situation, I hate to sound as if I am some entitled inmate who feels the world owes me something. That is not who I am. I am a woman who believes that she has made some bad decisions. Learned everything I could from my bad decisions and willing to do everything I can to never make decision like the ones that have caused me to come here.

Am I wrong for wanting a second chance at life as a free woman while I am still fairly young? Am I wrong for believing my life matters enough to deserve a second chance? And that I am capable of returning back to society, living a normal life and have such a strong desire to use my experiences and lessoned learned to do good in my community?

A person convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison will see the parole board after 10 years and have a chance to go home. And if they do not get a positive decision after the first ten years, they have a review every 5 years after. I don't have a chance of getting out until I have served at least 25 years flat. The parole board will not even consider my case.

Over the next 11-12 years tax payers are going to pay \$408,000 to keep me incarcerated. I am someone who is able to return back into society, work hard and pay taxes myself. I have gained employment skills, and I have a very strong outside support system of family, friends, mentors, and my faith-based community supporting me. A team of people willing to do whatever is needed to help me transition back into society as a free woman, and are prepared to do whatever is necessary to keep me accountable to living a crime-free life. Most importantly I desire to live a crime-free productive life, building up my community, and



contributing any way I can to add to human kind.

Diane Hathaway may not have thought 13 years would be enough. Then again, I wonder if she would still give me that same sentence after serving her time?

Where is the justice?