

Music: The Salve of Prison

How important is music while you're incarcerated? I think music does so much for a person, especially during difficult times. I'd like to share some of that today, as I sit in my cell, today, May 2nd, 2015.

I wrote an essay on "MP3s In Prison" and got a lot of responses from the outside. First off, it is really very important for writers to hear from readers; I can't tell you how thankful I am when I get a letter from someone who reads my works. The second I get one, I want to write 5 more. So I encourage you to let those writes know how much you appreciate their works.

Anyway, we're talking about music, and how it can be such a help to anyone, especially inmates. From the time I started writing this essay, I had my MP3 set on repeat on a particular song, "Year Of The Cat" by Cat Stevens. Quick music lesson; this song went as high as #8 on Billboard, back in 1977, by the name Al Stewart. But it's not from 1977 I remember the song, it's much later, while I'm in college.

This song has meaning to me because while in college, in Western Carolina, I worked at the campus radio station. By my senior year, we were changing formats, and often when this happens, there is a "shock" period. The station does something drastic- radical- to "shock" the listeners. What we did was take a song..."The Year Of The Cat", and played it

continuously... 24 hours a day... for a week!

I got SICK of the song, as did everyone else...but then, I started to grow fond of it. It wasn't such a bad song, and it created a spot in my memory of fond times while in college.

Years later, now that I'm in prison, I play this, remembering the fun times I had while in college. As many say, they're the best years of your life. So as I sit here, listening to this song over and over, I smile inside, remembering working at the campus radio station, the classes I attended, the friends I made, and the university that sits so fondly in my heart.

Now, I've said much about this one song, but currently I have 130 songs, so there are others and each have a reason. For example, I just turned it to a jazzy song, "Sky Islands" by Dianne Reeves. I fell in love with this song many years ago, and Dianne Reeves has a beautiful voice. I think this song is over 20 years old, maybe older. It reminds me of my senior year in college when I was co-oping in Raleigh, North Carolina. I was just discovering jazz music, and I loved it. I don't know how old the song was when I first heard it.

I also have music on my MP3 that I don't listen to. Of course, you'd ask, "why put music on your MP3 that you don't listen to"? Well, a handful of songs, about 5 to 7, are put up there for my cellmate, or "cellie". Not everybody can afford

an MP3, especially these incredibly overpriced SanDisks that they charge \$70 for the older ones, and \$90 for the newer ones. For that reason, I put a couple of songs up there for them. One cellie was a 22 year old guy who liked Christian music, so I put a couple of up there for him. My current cellie likes Jay-Z and stuff like that, so I put on a couple for him. I don't listen to it that much, but it's there for them when I let them use it.

I've grown to like a lot of New Age music (but I am a Christian) for the meditation and peace I get from it. Trust me, more inmates need to chill out to music by David Arkenstone or Dave Stern and others. Right now, I'm listening to "Meditation II", a 19-minute piece with gentle music and the sounds of nature in the background. I've gone to bed OFTEN with this on repeat.

My point, as I wrap this up, is that music can, and does, play an important part in the healing process of incarceration. Rehabilitation can't happen until the inmate is able to turn from the current stress of life, and focus on a hope for a better one. Music often reminds us of such pleasant times, and often give us a balm to our hearts that things can get better.

Anyway, until next time...