

When An Inmate's Father Dies

It's a situation no person ought to have to go through.

But it happens.

Of all the subjects I have written about concerning prisons, this is likely the most sensitive, because it deals with something that is quite irreversible...death.

How do you deal with the passing of a loved one while you are doing time? There are actually several angles here, but the one I want to touch on is the problems that are created when the prison fails to do what it is supposed to do.

Let's understand something here; no officer, warden or ANY prison official has any authority to create extra persecution to any inmate. No judge sentenced a person and said, "and any extra persecution laid on you while doing time by the prison is also part of your punishment". No, the sentence alone, the separation from family, freedom and the life you had IS the punishment.

Yet, what happens when the prison takes foolish liberties to increase the punishment of the inmate? It happens far too often, and goes unchecked because they can spin the

problem. And while it does happen, there are lines that are crossed that have to be checked.

What do you do, if your father dies while you are in prison, and the prison refuses to tell you?

The Bureau of Prisons has a moral obligation, and a LEGAL one, to inform the inmate if he has lost a family member. Now, we know they cannot know this unless someone of the family of the inmate calls to confirm it, but once this message has been relayed, the prison has an obligation to help that person in his time of mourning.

So what happens when the prison fails to do this? Who then takes responsibility?

Enter then, the situation that happened here: An inmate here calls home on a Tuesday, to ask his grandmother why his father had not sent him the legal documents he needed, because several days had passed, and he had not heard from him.

"Nobody told you?" says the grandmother.

"Told me WHAT?" says the inmate.

"You father died Thursday. He was taken to the hospital and died of lung cancer."

"Why didn't somebody TELL me??"

"I called the prison, I told them!"

The inmate's father DIED Thursday, yet only by a phonecall he was able to find out FIVE DAYS LATER. Where was the prison in this time of need?

Of course, the prison doesn't have to care... it's not their father. But it DOES matter to the inmate who lost his dad.

The inmate, in great grief, goes to one of his friends, and pours his heart to him, full of tears...yes, men have feelings too...

The inmate, and two of his friends, decide to try to contact the prison Chaplain, to find out what to do, and why the prison failed to inform him of his father's death.

At the Chapel, they find the assistant Chaplain, who tells them that the Chaplain won't be in until SUNDAY; so...what's HE there for?

He checks the computer, to see if the Unit Team (Unit Manager, Case Manager and Counselor) got an email or any information regarding the situation. He tells the three inmates that he got no email from the Unit Team, so in theory, there was no message sent.

This then implies a terrible accusation; that the grandmother failed to tell her grandson that his father died. Who do we believe? A grieving son who gets terrible news, and that his grandmother told him that she informed the prison, or the prison, who says they didn't get an email?

Someone dropped the ball, are we to assume that the prison is right, and the inmate is wrong? Why then, does the prison get the benefit of the doubt? It can be quite likely that the prison failed to do it's job, and is covering for itself. Prisons don't like to admit that they are wrong, especially in very sensitive situations like death.

So, what can the inmate do? He can't get in touch with the Counselor; she's on a week-long vacation. Where is the Unit Team when you need them?

They manage to get another Unit Counselor to try to make a call home for the inmate. He wasn't able to get through for the inmate. This was on Wednesday... six days after the death of the inmate's father.

Now, at the writing of this essay, it has been a week... a WEEK! The inmate still has no confirmation on his situation, and clearly he has no closure.

Here then is the problem; his father may have already been buried... it has been a week. If the prison has failed to

first inform the inmate of the death of his father, and then failed to make any accommodations, what then is the inmate in question supposed to do?

When an inmate's father, or any member of his family, dies, there should be an immediate, and compassionate act of the prison to help the person to get through his time in need. But if the prison fails to do this, what is the inmate supposed to do?

Right now, at this moment, there is an inmate who has lost his father...and the prison hasn't done anything to help him. One then has to wonder, does the prison care?