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PAGE 1

I AM CURRENTLY INCARCERATED IN A WASHINGTON STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION SERVING A 129 MONTH SENTENCE OF WHICH I HAVE JUST COMPLETED 5 YEARS. I HAVE SPENT 8 OF MY LAST 11 YEARS IN AN INCARCERATED SITUATION.

LOOKING BACK OVER MY LIFE, IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE I HAVE COME TO THIS POINT. YET IN RETROSPECT, I CAN CLEARLY SEE WHERE MY ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ADDICTION LED ME TO MAKE SOME POOR CHOICES IN MY LIFE, AND I CERTAINLY DIDN'T HEED THE WARNING SIGNS THAT ARE SO CLEAR TO ME NOW. PRISON SEEMS TO BE ONE OF THOSE PLACES THAT THOSE OF US FIGHTING ADDICTION AND ABUSE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES. I SAY THIS BECAUSE ALTHOUGH I DON'T HAVE THE ACTUAL FIGURES, I HAVE READ SOMEWHERE THAT PROBABLY 70-80% OF THOSE IN PRISON ARE HERE DUE TO CHRONICAL ADDICTIONS OR ABUSE. WITH FIGURES SUCH AS THOSE, IT WOULD SEEM PRUDENT THAT TODAY'S PRISON SYSTEM, IF IT IS GOING TO WORK ON ALLEVIATING THE SOURCE OF THE CRIMINAL AND INCARCERATION PROBLEM

IN THIS COUNTRY, WOULD FOCUS ON THE APPARENT SOURCE,
~~AND STATISTICS~~

AND STATISTICS SHOW THAT DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE IS
THE PREDOMINANT PRECURSOR TO CRIMINAL ACTIVITY AND
SUBSEQUENTLY PRISON.

I AM OF THE OPINION THAT DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE
IS MERELY THE SYMPTOM OF A MUCH DEEPER, COMPLEX PROBLEM.

THAT PROBLEM I BELIEVE, IS BURIED SOMEWHERE DEEP WITHIN
THE PERSON HIMSELF. THERE ~~HAS~~ HAS BEEN SOME DAMAGE
TO THE PERSONALITY AND SPIRIT OF THE PERSON THAT LEADS
TO THE CHEMICAL ABUSE. THE REASONS FOR THE INNER DAMAGE
TO THE PERSON CAN BE VARIOUS. WE CAN BLAME THE SLOW
DETERIORATION OF THE FAMILY UNIT AND ITS VALUES, SOCIETIES
FOCUS ON THE MATERIAL INSTEAD OF THE EMOTIONAL WELL
BEING OF A CHILD, SOME SORT OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA, OR THE
FOCUS OF MATERIAL WEALTH RATHER THAN THE STRENGTH OR
QUALITY OF A PERSONS MORAL CHARACTER, AS SOCIETIES
INDICATOR OF PERSONAL SUCCESS. THE LIST OF REASONS CAN

GO ON AND ON. I SUGGEST THEN, THAT PRISONS CONSIDER FOCUSING MORE ON THE REBUILDING AND RESTORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRISONERS INNER-SELF THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH, GROUP THERAPY AND ADDICTION RECOVERY PROGRAMS.

MY EXPERIENCES AS AN OFFENDER INSIDE TODAY'S PRISON SYSTEM HAS BEEN ILLUMINATING, NOT ONLY TO THE MANNER IN WHICH SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IMPACT THE MANAGERIAL STYLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, BUT ALSO TO THE WAYS IN WHICH I, MYSELF OPERATE AS A HUMAN BEING.

AFTER NUMEROUS YEARS WITHOUT THE FOGGING AFFECTS OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS, ALONG WITH THE ELIMINATION OF WHAT I CALL "THE DAILY DISTRACTIONS OF LIFE", FOR INSTANCE THE PROBLEMS THAT ARISE WITH RAISING A FAMILY, HOLDING DOWN A JOB, OR PAYING THE BILLS THAT COME WITH TRYING TO MAINTAIN A STEADY, SOLID LIFESTYLE, I HAVE ACTUALLY HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A SELF-AWARENESS AND AN INSIGHT INTO WHO I AM AS A PERSON, WHAT MY VALUES ARE, MY

OWN CHARACTER STRENGTHS, AS WELL AS THOSE CHARACTER WEAKNESSES I NEED TO WORK ON IMPROVING. BY "PEELING AWAY THE LAYERS" OF MY OUTSIDE SELF, I'VE BEGUN TO LEARN WHAT IT IS ABOUT ME THAT IS GOOD, WHOLESOME, AND WORTH SAVING. IN SOME RESPECTS, THIS PRISON EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN LIKE A MONASTIC EXPERIENCE, BECOMING "UNPELXED" FROM SO ~~MUCH~~ ^{MANY} OUTSIDE INFLUENCES, AND ~~REDUCING~~ REDUCING LIFE TO THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR, WHICH HAS GIVEN ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO ~~FOCUS~~ ^{FOCUS} ON INNER CHANGE. YET I MUST SAY AS WELL, SOME DAYS OR WEEKS HAVE BEEN THE HARDEST FOR ME TO ENDURE. IT HAS BEEN MY OWN PSYCHOLOGICAL SURVIVAL, WHERE I HAVE BEEN THE MOST VULNERABLE THESE LAST YEARS.

THE PEOPLE IN PRISON COME WITH VARIED STAGES OF EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MATURITY. MY ALCOHOL AND DRUG ADDICTION IN CONJUNCTION WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAUMAS STUNTED MY EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH. ALSO, MY COPING SKILLS ARE LIMITED AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURES I FEEL CAN

BE VERY INTENSE, AND BECAUSE OF THIS, MY ABILITY TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES DURING THESE TIMES CAN BE TOUGH.

IT IS DURING THESE TIMES THAT I AM MORE LIKELY TO LET MY ANGER GET THE BEST OF ME, ATTEMPT SUICIDE, OR JUST MAKE SELF-DESTRUCTIVE DECISIONS.

BEING A VERY SENSITIVE AND EMOTIONAL PERSON, I CAN AT TIMES FEEL VERY OUT OF PLACE IN THIS ENVIRONMENT. I FIND A REAL CRAVING FOR SOLITUDE OR ALONE TIME. A QUIET TIME WHICH CAN BE SPENT IN REFLECTION, OR CONTEMPLATION. A TIME TO WRITE OR PRAY ABOUT MY LIFE EXPERIENCES, MY FEELINGS, ^{AND} MY QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH WITHOUT THE DISTRACTIONS OF CONSTANT NOISE, PEOPLE TRAFFIC ETC. IN PRISON, FINDING TIME TO BE ALONE, AWAY FROM THE NEGATIVE ENERGY WHICH CAN DOMINATE THE ENVIRONMENT, CAN BE CLOSE TO IMPOSSIBLE. SOMETIMES I WILL WAKE MYSELF UP AT 4 OR 5 IN THE MORNING, MAKE A CUP OF COFFEE, AND SPEND SOME QUIET TIME WITH MYSELF.

THESE TIMES I CAN FEEL A CERTAIN HEALING GOING ON WITHIN MYSELF AND I CHERISH THESE TIMES. THE MOST UNFORTUNATE THING ABOUT PUTTING SO MANY PEOPLE IN SUCH A SMALL PLACE TOGETHER, IS THAT THE NEGATIVITY TENDS TO DOMINATE THE ENVIRONMENT AND IT SIMPLY FEEDS ON ITSELF. IF I WERE TO PUT A POSITIVE SPIN ON THIS EXPERIENCE, IT WOULD BE THAT THROUGH ~~THE~~ THIS HARDEST TIME IN MY LIFE, I HAVE LEARNED TO ADAPT, AND IN MANY WAYS THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHTER BECAUSE OF THIS.

THIS BRINGS ME TO ~~THE~~ MY REAL MOTIVATION FOR WRITING THIS ESSAY. IF SOCIETY IS GOING TO NEED TO CONTINUE TO IMPRISON PEOPLE, WHY NOT MAKE IT A POSITIVE LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE THAT INSPIRES PEOPLE TO BE THE BEST THEY CAN BE?

IT IS APPARENT THAT OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS OR SO, THE FOCUS OF THE PENAL SYSTEM IN THIS COUNTRY HAS BEEN ONE OF PUNISHMENT WITHOUT MUCH OF THE

REHABILITATION. THERE IS OF COURSE A VALUE TO THE PUNISHMENT ASPECT. IT CAN AND WILL BE A DETERRANT FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE. HOWEVER, IF WE AGREE THAT CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IS LEARNED BEHAVIOR, THEN WE MUST TAKE THE LONG VIEW AND FOCUS SOME ENERGIES ON HELPING THE INDIVIDUAL "UNLEARN" THAT BEHAVIOR, OR "REHABILITATE" THE OFFENDER IF SOCIETY IS GOING TO ACCOMPLISH REDUCING THE RECIDIVISM RATE, THE PRISON POPULATION AND ULTIMATELY THE AMOUNT OF MONEY SPENT. WITHOUT HELPING THAT PERSON UNLEARN HIS SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR AND REBUILD THAT PERSON FROM THE INSIDE, YOU ARE LEFT WITH AN INDIVIDUAL NO BETTER ABLE TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH SOCIETY, LIFE OR THE COMMUNITY THAN WHEN HE ENTERED PRISON. YOU BUILD THE HUMAN BEING, YOU ULTIMATELY BUILD THE COMMUNITY.

ABRAHAM MASLOW SPOKE OF THE "HIERARCHY OF NEEDS" AND A HUMAN'S NEEDS FOR A SENSE OF BELONGING AND

ACCEPTANCE, AND THAT UNTIL THAT NEED WAS MET IN SOME WAY, A PERSON COULD NOT ACHIEVE HIS POTENTIAL. I SUGGEST THAT IF WE HELP A PERSON FEEL WORTHWHILE, GOOD ABOUT HIMSELF, AND DEVELOP A SENSE OF PURPOSE FOR HIS LIFE, HE WILL DEVELOP A SENSE OF ACCEPTANCE AND BELONGING, AND IN ORDER TO REACH HIS POTENTIAL WILL NOT SUBJECT HIMSELF TO SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR SUCH AS CHEMICAL ABUSE OR CRIMINAL ACTION.

HERE, THE STATE OF WASHINGTON'S DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS IS SUPPORTING AND IMPLEMENTING WHAT THEY CALL THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY RECOVERY PROGRAMS TO HELP ACHIEVE THIS GOAL.

IN THE GENESIS RIGHT LIVING COMMUNITY, OF WHICH I AM A MEMBER, IT IS EMPHASIZED THAT WE ARE A COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO DESIRE CHANGE WITHIN OUR LIVES, AND WANT TO WORK ON THE GOAL OF REALIZING

THAT WE AS INDIVIDUALS ARE PART OF A GREATER COMMUNITY, HOLD EACH OTHER ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS, BECAUSE ULTIMATELY OUR ACTIONS HAVE AN AFFECT ON THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE, AND IN THE PROCESS WE HOPE TO BECOME A ^{POSITIVE} ~~ROLE~~ MODEL, ROLE MODEL FOR EACH OTHER. IT IS THE HOPE THAT THROUGH WORKING ON INNER CHANGE TOGETHER, WE DEVELOP A SENSE OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE AS WELL AS A SENSE OF BELONGING. IT IS ^{ALSO} THE HOPE THAT THROUGH LIVING IN THIS THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY 24/7, WE WILL TAKE THESE NEW SKILLS INTO THE COMMUNITY WITH US UPON OUR RELEASE, AND ULTIMATELY REALIZE OUR POTENTIAL AND BECOME A CONTRIBUTING MEMBER OF SOCIETY.

ALTHOUGH THE DEPARTMENT HASN'T GOTTEN THERE YET, IT IS MY HOPE THAT THEY WILL SEE THE PROFOUND ~~AFF~~ EFFECT BENEFIT OF COMBINING THIS RECOVERY BASED COMMUNITY PROGRAM WITH SOME SORT OF VOCATIONAL APPRENTICE

TYPE OF TRAINING PROGRAM. IT IS MY ~~BEL~~ BELIEF THAT BY COMBINING SOME SORT OF VOCATIONAL TRADE EDUCATION WITH REBUILDING THE INNER-SELF, TOGETHER THEY WOULD HAVE A PROFOUND AFFECT ON A PERSON'S SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO SOCIETY.

THE PROBLEM OF COURSE WITH INVESTING THE KIND OF TIME AND MONEY INTO THIS KIND OF ENDEAVOR IS THAT WE PROBABLY WILL NOT SEE THE POSITIVE CHANGES OF THESE PROGRAMS FOR A PERIOD OF TIME, AND AS A SOCIETY, ALONG WITH GOVERNMENT, WE TEND TO WANT NEARLY INSTANT POSITIVE RESULTS OR STATISTICAL DATA TO SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF OUR INVESTMENT. BUT COMPLEX SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE NOT SOLVED WITH QUICK FIXES. ONE HAS NO FURTHER TO LOOK THAN WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE, CIVIL RIGHTS, OR THE WAR ON DRUGS OR TERROR TO SEE THIS, WE ALL KNOW THAT FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR MOST ALL OF US ANYWAY, ~~DOESN'T~~ DOESN'T COME FROM WINNING THE LOTTERY, IT COMES WITH THE

SYSTEMATIC DISCIPLINE OF SAVING, INVESTING, PUTTING OFF SHORT TERM WANTS FOR SOMETHING BETTER AND GREATER IN THE LONG TERM. SO IT WILL ~~BE~~ MOST LIKELY BE WITH PROBLEMS AS COMPLEX AS PRISON REFORM AND THE REDUCTION OF CRIME IN THE COMMUNITY. IT IS CERTAINLY APPARANT THAT WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING HASN'T WORKED, FOR MYSELF ANYWAY, IT HAS BEEN MY YEARS OF INCARCERATION, MY ~~FORCED~~ FORCED CLEAN AND SOBER TIME, MY STEADY EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL MATURATION, THE ONSET OF ~~AGE~~ AGE, THE GROWING INSIGHT INTO MYSELF AS A PERSON, ALONG WITH MY PARTICIPATION IN A RECOVERY BASED PROGRAM (18 MONTHS) THAT HAVE BEGUN TO HAVE A PROFOUND AFFECT ON THE WAY IN WHICH I VIEW LIFE, SOCIETY, AND MYSELF. IT IS MY GREATEST HOPE, THAT WHEN I REENTER SOCIETY, I WILL BRING THE BEST PARTS OF MYSELF INTO THE COMMUNITY.

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