

Lost Hope

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I allowed myself to hope. After 7 1/2 years I started to hope I'd make parole. I hoped to make my daughters 5th grade graduation. I imagined laying on ~~his~~^{my sons} bedroom floor watching him play video games. I dreamed of relieving some of the burden of my mother and step father. I imagined taking my step dad to a jazz concert on fathers day because he is so underappreciated by his own children and he is now raising mine. Although hope seemed like a bad word, we all say it: I don't want to get my hopes up; but I did. Gradually.

When I enrolled in Office Administration for the 30 credits it provides toward an Associates Degree in General Studies my plan was to graduate from college before my release. The plan was to have something to fight against the repulsive stigma of a record. I religiously planned and set reachable goals to better myself and be able to take care of my children legally upon release.

Sacrifices were made. Moving to Syracuse, where we have to live to take Office Admin, meant one shower a day with 19 other women in an outside building, under the scrutiny of an officer. When the bi annual lockdown came we were suppose to get showers Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, however, I did not get a shower for 5 days. My last shower was Sunday. I received my next shower Friday night. Throughout that week I still had to go to school and ~~not~~ be stripped searched.

It was humiliating to strip 3 times a day and 5 times on the days I had night time classes. I had to scream, yell, and give up and take a write up and go to possibly get deprosecution over a shower. The dorm officer took pity on me and allowed me to fill up a bucket and bath in a bathroom stall.

Humiliating, yes. Also a saving grace. Being kicked out of school and a major case would have hurt my chances for parole. Besides, the bucket is common on Sycamore where showers are not always given and even washing clothes is forbidden.

The first semester of Off Admin started off rocky. I had to rise at 2 AM to go to laundry at 3 AM and to the chow hall at 3:45 to await the bus that took us to Hilltop Unit where classes are held. We strip on arrival at Hilltop and before we leave. Then again on arrival at Sycamore. Then I am to go to work as a Janitor from 2 p.m. - 6 p.m. ~~and~~ ^{then} to college at Riverside on college rights which warranted another 2 strip searches. On the rights when there is no transportation, for hours we are stuck outside waiting and thus dead tired at 2 AM when its time to do it again. It was all worth it to me in the end. I graduated 3rd in my class and effectively shaved 3 years off graduation time. Texas reimburses 1 class a semester with only 3 semester a year. It would of taken me about 3 years plus to get those 30 credits. I got 30 credits in 6 months.

After Office Admin I took Captive II

and Bridges to Life to deal with the internal issues of why I committed a crime and the shame that comes with it. I could not take Charges. I was told Charges is for people who are within 2 years of release or if its a parole answer called an FIZR. That means further investigation in 3 months. Charges is 3 months and if completed, home sweet home. I took Parenting years ago. Other Vocationals such as BCIS and Carpentry are for Windham students or people with less education. I have too many college credits to enroll in Windham Vocationals I'm told. Therefore, I have taken all classes available to me. I do have 3 more classes to obtain my Associates Degree. At Crain I may pursue a Bachelors Degree through Texas A.M. I have student loans from one of those cr@ck colleges called Remington College, a college in which I cannot transfer the credits I obtained there and of which charged \$30,000 plus for an Associates Degree. The Associates here puts me further in debt about \$5,000 but thats a steal and I can transfer the credits. I am hesitant to place myself further in debt taking \$100 classes here through A.M. where I make no money working to begin paying it back. I am reluctant, but after receiving a 3 year set off from the parole board I don't know what else to do. I am to be reviewed again in March of 2020. With roughly \$20,000 in debt upon release into a society who won't be too willing to employ an ex con and 2 kids with no husband and every day bills, I don't think

taking more classes is wise.

I worked really hard here to show that I could follow the rules here and in society. I am the model prisoner. I have outstanding grades. I've worked all of these menial jobs without complaint. My support system is excellent with my mother having a career working with women just like me and being able to direct me towards employers who hire felons and other resources. My brother works for the city of Houston. I was chosen on several occasions by the Chaplain to teach classes here. I have absolutely no idea of what else I can do to prove myself. For all of these reasons I let hope slither into my heart and mind. I served half of the 15 years I was given and did my own parole packet emphasizing all that I have achieved including a resume, cover letter, references, certificates etc. Maybe that's where I erred. It appears the people who make parole are the ones the board are confident will return to prison. After all, do not their jobs depend on their being inmates in prison.

I received their answers through the mail stating "The Institutional Division will monitor your treatment plan progress and will report your progress to the Board of Pardons and Parole," but I don't have a treatment plan. When I wrote the Institutional Division asking about it they did not respond. They are done with me until 2020.

The board denied me because of unsuccessful completion of prior parole when in fact in my

parole packet was a certificate of completion of my prior parole.

At least none of the 3 reasons for denial were things I can change: prior criminal history, nature of crime, and the erroneous statement that I did not complete parole before. At least when I told my children against my parents wishes I could tell them it wasn't because I was irresponsible again. It wasn't because I acted out here or did nothing to better myself. Although I told them parole said no, I couldn't bring myself to tell them for how long that no would last. My only option is to sit here costing people money doing nothing except work for free until they release me, but what I want to do is hope.