

As I lie upon my back, my arms folded across my chest like a funereal corpse, one elbow touches the cold, concrete wall; the other hangs off the edge of my narrow prison bunk. Sleep does not come easily. The din is nearly constant. Inmates who couldn't give a rip about consideration for others are engaged in stereo wars. One blasts rap as loudly as his CD player can go. Across the tier, a death metal fan tries to drown out the other stereos, televisions, shouting, and maybe his own thoughts and conscience.

One of the most precious fifty-cent items I have ever possessed in my life is a pair of disposable, foam earplugs that I have carefully cleaned and tended for over ten years. An auto shop worker sold them to me at another prison, and they are irreplaceable, not sold at the canteen in this prison. Without them, I would be able to get to sleep each night only through sheer exhaustion. The noise dies down only around midnight, and the prison starts serving breakfast at four-thirty in the morning. Sack lunches are handed out at breakfast, so missing breakfast means also missing lunch.



The time between lying down and drifting off to sleep is often when the memories and regrets about my life before prison creep into my conscious thoughts.

Each of us is the sum of our own experiences, decisions and actions, none of which may be taken back or relived. We may make decisions, in our youth especially, without properly considering the possible long-term consequences. Such has been my life. Not too many of those decisions were so bad as to present the possibility of criminal prosecution and sentencing to prison time, but it takes only one.

As a child, no one says, "I want to grow up to be a drug addict." Nor is anyone's ideal life goal to be a prisoner, hooker, wino or homeless drifter collecting recyclable bottles and cans for a meager existence.

Remember when you were in first grade and everyone wanted to be a fireman, policeman, doctor or astronaut. Imagine if a kid had said, "I want to be a wino, lying filthy, drunk in an alley begging passersby for change to buy my next bottle of cheap wine." Nobody has ever said that, yet bums, junkies, thieves and other criminals exist. How did they ever get to that sad place in lives that began with every potential? Every life is directed by the decisions that a person makes, however inconsequential



they may seem at the time. As many victims of their own self-made disasters have said, "It sounded like a good idea at the time."

Take time to think about the consequences of your potential actions, and how they may affect you, your friends, family and even strangers.

Those aforementioned bums, junkies, thieves and other criminals are the people with whom I rub shoulders every day until the end of my life. I have been locked in a seven by ten foot concrete box with psychotics, neurotics, sociopaths, schizophrenics, compulsives, obsessives, depressives, the hyper-active and the narcoleptic. I have had to live in a dormitory room that houses one hundred and twenty men.

At dinner, I sit with a guy who killed his whole family and then shot off half of his own face in a failed suicide attempt. John Birges, the man who bombed Harvey's in Lake Tahoe was a close friend during the last years of his life, which, sadly, came to an end in a prison infirmary. As did the life of "Baby Ray" Edelman, a life-long entertainer who played the blues in saloons. The Department of Prisons' medical staff chose not to treat him for his liver disease; treatment which would have meant a too-expensive transplant.



Living amongst violent, angry men who are on a hair trigger is a touchy situation. A man once attacked me after he asked me for a canteen order form, and I did not have one to give to him. In the band room, I play guitar with a man who hacked off a man's head with a claw hammer. I try not to upset him.

One must be aware, at every moment, of everyone around, every attitude, and every blind spot. A momentary failure of vigilance can be fatal. A school clerk, a quiet, respectful, intelligent guy, was not paying close enough attention, walking innocently across the yard to return to his cell. Intent upon his own business, he did not notice two large groups of people converging toward the area he was approaching. He was, ironically, the only person killed in the riot. People from one ethnic group bashed in his head with rocks simply because he was of the opposing ethnic group, even though he had no intention of participating in the gang war.

Some cultures glorify the prison experience, even see it as a rite of passage, as if it is a normal part of everyone's life. That is as far from the truth as anything can be. There is nothing at all glamorous about prison. It is dirty, dismal, violent, crowded and ugly. There is precious little privacy



- no shower curtain, no door on the toilet stalls, there is another man within arm's reach of you at all times.

Health care is abysmal. The staff doctor at Southern Nevada Correctional Center had his license revoked for the death of a patient during a procedure that he was not certified to perform. After he got his license back and quit working at the prison, he was soon back as a convict. Another of his patients had died. This time it was from an overdose of drugs that he had given illegally.

A Henderson doctor had his license revoked for overprescribing sedatives and exchanging drug prescriptions for sex in his office. He then became the staff doctor at Ely State Prison (ESP).

A psychologist at ESP had been a derelict wino in San Francisco until he was in his fifties. He got AA and cleaned up. After going to college late in life and earning a Master's Degree in Psychology, he could not find a job in the Bay area. He came to work at the most remote prison in America, bringing his shabby countenance and Salvation Army wardrobe with him.

Dental care in prison consists of three components: Chinese-made toothpaste and a three-inch toothbrush, pulling of any tooth with a



problem, and dentures once all of the teeth are gone. There is no cleaning, filling or crowns.

I have known several people who have died because of the indifference of the prison medical staff. One went to the infirmary with obvious symptoms of a heart attack: rapid pulse, sweating, and chest pains. They told him to go back to his cell and send in a "kite" for an appointment. He never made it back to the cell, but dropped dead on the sidewalk.

Another man went into the infirmary complaining that he was spitting up blood. Again, the response from medical staff was to tell him to send a kite for an appointment. He went back to his cell, lay down on his shabby prison bunk and bled to death from an ulcer.

A prisoner at ESP wanted to get high on another man's medications. He had stored up a number of tablets that the prescription holder had "cheeked" (held in his cheek, rather than swallowing the pill). He took the pills late at night, and suffered a bad reaction. When he felt especially distressed, he pushed his call button to tell the officers on duty that he was ill. The officers ignored his call. He kicked his door for several minutes to try to get their attention, to no avail. He collapsed by the door. Others



nearby started pushing their call buttons, kicking their doors, and shouting that he needed help. When the officer finally came onto the tier and looked into the cell, over half an hour had passed. He found the inmate collapsed by the door. He went back to the control office and called for a nurse. When medical staff arrived with a gurney, they discovered that the inmate had soiled himself in his weakened condition. They had forgotten to bring gloves and refused to touch him without them. After about fifteen minutes, they returned and loaded him onto the gurney. By this time, he was cyanotic (blue skinned) and listless, but he had just enough energy for those observing to hear him beg, "Don't let me die." But they did.

One reason that older people give advice to younger people is that the elders have had experiences that were unpleasant, harsh, dangerous and even deadly. They wish to pass on the wisdom that they have gained by surviving those situations to help others avoid the same pitfalls.

You can trust that you really do not want to make the same mistakes that many of us prisoners have made. This is no way to live. This is a horrible waste of many lives. Decisions that seem so innocuous at the time can have disastrous consequences. Mistakes can compound. A wrong action leads to another and to a worse one.



Sometimes it takes only that first bad decision. A person decides to try injecting methamphetamine or smoking crack cocaine just once and is instantly hooked. Some people are physically unable to avoid addiction or alcoholism. Their only hope of avoiding ruining their lives is to totally abstain – never even try that first time.

Starting with a clever Oregon sheriff, some law enforcement Web sites have been posting mug shots following methamphetamine users through years of arrests. It is shocking to see the physical deterioration through the series of photos. These are no special effects tricks. They are real-life horror stories of lives ruined by drugs. Many of those wretched people probably thought that they would never get hooked. They were strong enough to try it only once and then leave it alone if they chose. Well, they were tragically wrong.

When I was young, my family drove through downtown Los Angeles and I saw the skid row bums sitting on the sidewalks with their bottles of cheap wine in brown paper bags. That convinced me, before the age of ten, that I never wanted to be like them. Alcohol can be addicting, so I never got drunk in my life. Three times in my life, at parties and at a wedding, I have been served a beer. I could never finish



any of them. People told me that beer is an acquired taste, but I question why anyone would wish to acquire a taste for something that tastes so horrible. I've tried several hard liquors, but found it akin to drinking gasoline. The smell alone is enough to put me off.

When I was arrested for shoplifting at age twelve, I was placed in a jail cell with a kid who was picked up for sniffing glue. He was incoherent and did not even know his own name. He was about ten years old. Imagine burning out your brain cells with organic solvents. It is not a pretty picture.

In my high school health class, the teacher showed us pictures of healthy lungs and the blackened, shriveled lungs of a person who had died of lung cancer. That convinced me not to smoke cigarettes. I even swore that I would never smoke marijuana, too. That particular vow I later voided. I thought that maybe I would try some pills or hallucinogens, but never pollute my lungs with smoke. And try some pills and hallucinogens, I would.

After my father died at a young age, and my mother was committed to a mental hospital, I was placed in a foster home. The people I lived with were well-meaning enough, but I just did not like living with them.



When the hippie era began in San Francisco, my friend Tom and I decided to hitchhike to San Francisco and join in. We walked over to Highway 101 and stuck out our thumbs.

As soon as we arrived, we found people to stay with and drugs to take and to sell. We earned our place in the apartment by sitting on the stoop and hawking to passersby, "Acid, grass, speed." At the time, LSD was going for a dollar a hit, common Mexican weed was ten dollars an ounce, and methamphetamine was in ten dollar bindles. I did not want to use meth, but misinterpreted a friend's invitation one day when he called down to me from the door of his apartment, "Hey, you want to come up and do a hit with us?" I thought he meant to hit a joint of weed. When I got settled in, he produced a hand-made hypodermic syringe. It was made from an eyedropper, the bulb from a baby's pacifier, a rubber band, a little bit of a dollar bill as a gasket for the needle, and a number twenty-six diabetic needle, all purchased at the local drug store. Since I had accepted the invitation, I went ahead and let him shoot me up. The methamphetamine high was not to my liking, so I never did it again, but some people are not so lucky and become hooked immediately. They say that it was methamphetamine that destroyed the hippie era in San



Francisco. I cannot disagree. It is an ugly drug. The "Summer of Love" was fueled by marijuana and LSD, but soon after the summer of 1967, the Haight-Ashbury district became overrun by "speed freaks."

The time I spent there was magical, to a certain extent, but not ideal. There was a true atmosphere of love for fellow men. There were also some bad behaviors, as there are wherever large groups of random people are gathered. The tour bus companies rerouted the busses from the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park to Haight Street at Masonic Avenue. One Sunday afternoon, those of us who lived there filled the sidewalk at Masonic, and when the light changed, sat down in the street, blocking off Haight Street to all traffic. The police came and barricaded the street. We had a giant block party for the remainder of the afternoon. People put their stereo speakers in their windows and blasted Big Brother and the Holding Company and Jefferson Airplane albums. Toward evening, the police came to clear the street. They rode horses down Haight from west to east and clubbed anybody who refused to go indoors. Some people rained down bottles from the rooftops on the police. I was at an intersection to the west when a motorcycle policeman stopped in the middle of the street and put down the kickstand of his Harley. Almost



immediately, a bottle thrown from a rooftop hit the street next to him. He drew his gun, but did not fire. I ran back toward the apartment where I lived, behind the Haight Florist, between Masonic and Ashbury. I was high on LSD and did not notice that I had stepped on a piece of glass and cut my bare foot. When I got inside, I saw the blood and cleaned up the wound. After things calmed down, I went to the courtyard door and looked out. At that moment, there was a patrol car full of police in riot gear coming down the street. An officer in the back seat pointed a tear gas rifle out the window, and I slammed the door. Then a tear gas grenade bounced off the closed door and some tear gas seeped under the door. If I had been a second slower, the tear gas would have been in the courtyard behind the flower shop and all of the apartments would have been affected.

The next weekend, the mayor declared a street party and officially closed Haight Street. The Grateful Dead set up on a flatbed trailer and performed an impromptu free concert. That day ended peacefully.

Soon after, there came the infamous People's Park riot in Berkeley, across the bay. The following weekend, I hitchhiked across the Bay Bridge to participate in a protest march.



After I was picked up by the police and returned to Ventura, where I was still officially a ward of the state, I spent a while in Juvenile Hall. Then I got placed in another foster home with some very nice people. They got me my first job, as an assistant in a flower shop. I made the mistake of accepting some pills at a party and came home high. The next morning, I was back in Juvenile Hall.

My uncle heard about our plight and had my two siblings and me brought to Connecticut to live with him. He had my mother brought to a mental hospital near him. That whole summer, the only illegal substance that I used was the occasional joint that my cousin provided.

When my mother was discharged, we packed up and headed back to California in a hearse I talked her into buying for me. I convinced her that the plane fares would be expensive, and we would have to buy a car when we got there, anyway. While she was a little skeptical that I could navigate across the entire country at sixteen, she agreed. When we got to Phoenix, though, she decided against Ventura, in favor of Las Vegas, despite heavy protest on our parts. None of us wanted to be stuck in a gambling town in the desert when we had grown up on the beach in California. We really had no vote, though.



I started my senior year of high school at Valley High. The hearse, shoulder-length hair, fringed leather jacket and other avant-garde attire made me the center of attention amongst the young local hippies. Those factors also made me a target of the local gendarmes, who were constantly stopping the hearse and searching it for drugs. Back then, the Sheriff's department was notorious for running hippies and bikers out of town. They never caught me, but I got myself caught by taking some mild tranquilizer pills with me to school. I got arrested, expelled, and declared a "hazard to the general welfare of the student body of Clark County Schools." When I appeared in Juvenile Court in full hippie regalia, flag pants, dark octagonal sunglasses and all (this was not the best of plans), the judge did not see me as remorseful. He sentenced me to incarceration at the Nevada Youth Training Center in Elko, Nevada, really a minimum-security juvenile prison. They kept me there just three months, the minimum term before parole. When I was released from NYTC, I did my parole without incident and then returned to my reprobate ways, unreformed. My jobs and activities included: going to college at UNLV, working in a late-night coffee house, working as a roadie and equipment manager for a local rock band called Wolf Ticket, partnering in a light



show company called Pump Visual Productions, and playing drums in a garage band. I auditioned for the stage production *Hair* at the Hilton and for the lead singer position in a blues rock band. Everything I chose to be involved in and everywhere I went was saturated with the drug and hippie culture. There was not a single person in all of my circles of friends who did not smoke marijuana and hashish. Even my partner in a professional photography outfit grew marijuana in hydroponic tanks in a back bedroom. Two cocktail waitresses we dated lived near him and they had a hydroponic farm in their garage. They grew Columbian Gold, extracted hash oil from half of the crop and infused the buds of the other half with the oil. It was remarkably good weed for the early seventies. A friend stationed at Nellis Air Force Base was on the ground service crew for a top secret, swing-wing F-111 fighter-bomber. When the plane returned from Vietnam for service, it was kept in a secure hanger. No one but the assigned crews ever saw the plane. They would fill the bomb bays with very potent Thai weed in Vietnam and sell it in Las Vegas.

At least once a month, I attended or worked at a rock concert. On Led Zeppelin's first American tour, Wolf Ticket opened for them at the Las Vegas Ice Palace. We worked concerts with the Doors, Alice Cooper



and many others. Pump Visual Productions did light shows at the Convention Center for Jethro Tull, Deep Purple and lots of other bands.

On the side, I sold small amounts of weed, acid and other hallucinogens to my circle of friends. On one trip (so to speak) to Idlewild, California, I had my first bad acid trip. The three of us in Pump drove there to buy acid and weed. I took one tablet as soon as the transaction was completed, another later, and a third as we were on the road back to Las Vegas. From the backseat of a Firebird on I-15, I believed that I had to telekinetically keep the rising full moon to our right in order to avert a tragic car crash. For three hours, I was very exhausted and stressed. As soon as we reached the crest at Sloan, and the Las Vegas Valley came into view, I was relieved of my psychic duty and felt fine.

On one other occasion I had a bad trip. There was a free concert for Christmas in the Laguna Canyon in California. Two friends, Mike and Russ, and I drove down to attend. Buddy Miles and several local bands played. At midnight, Christmas Eve, people went throughout the campgrounds handing out Christmas cards that each contained a tab of Orange Sunshine acid. We took our doses and lay down in their station wagon to nap before coming on. They dozed off, but I stayed awake.



When I came on to the acid, I started to realize how powerful a dose I had taken. That must have been what we referred to as an eight-way. At the time, a dose of LSD was two hundred and fifty micrograms, and eight-way would be two thousand mics. Compare that to today's average dose of around sixty mics. Well, that was the most acid I had ever taken. Through the fogged window, without my glasses, I imagined that I could clearly see the fairgrounds' gate and the traffic on the road. Again, like my only other bad trip, I thought I was telekinetically in control. I had to keep traffic safe or there would be a horrible crash.

My moaning woke Mike. He later told me that he awoke to the proverbial burst of rainbow colors. He asked if I was okay. I said, "Mike, I'm freaking out." Russ woke up and asked what he could do to help. Our friend Jennifer was my rock. I thought that talking to her would help me. Russ drove us to the nearest phone, but, by then, I was asking for a doctor. We went back to the festival and went to the medical tent. An attendant gave me an orange. I relaxed and gazed into the depths of its translucent peel and my mind calmed immediately. It took me to a good place. We enjoyed the rest of the weekend without incident.



Anti-drug propaganda would have you believe that even sane, stable people can have bad trips, from which they never return. I don't know if all that's true. What I do know from personal experience is that extremely stressful, bad trips can happen to an intelligent user with vast experience. It happened to me when I had taken very high doses.

It is easy to dismiss the hyperbole of most of the government's propaganda about drugs. For many decades, the government has been producing or promoting lies about drugs. "Reefer Madness" is a flagrant example. It is an early anti-drug film. It depicted marijuana smokers going insane, committing rape and suicide. After Prohibition, temperance groups looked for something to attack in order to justify their existence. Marijuana was their natural victim. Before 1937, there were no laws forbidding marijuana use in this country. Propagandists campaigned to make marijuana illegal and they succeeded. Over the next decades, the United States government entered into treaties with many foreign nations, pledging mutual support for anti-marijuana efforts, and forbidding any attempts to re-legalize or de-criminalize marijuana.



Legislators in some U.S. states have taken it upon themselves to decriminalize marijuana for personal or medical use. The federal government is not happy about those state laws.

In 1969, I was invited to debate Mary Jane Loper, the president of the Southern Nevada Drug Abuse Counsel. The forum was a local television program called *The Duke Hoover Show*. I did extensive research for the debate. She came prepared with only the accepted propaganda. For every anecdotal point that she made, I provided a university or research organization study that disproved her contention. For instance, she claimed that driving under the influence of marijuana was ten times worse than driving at the then legal limit of .01 blood alcohol. I cited a study by the State of Washington Department of Motor Vehicles.

They wanted to prove that driving while under the influence of marijuana was dangerous. Their results were the opposite. In a double-blind driving simulator test, they administered real or placebo marijuana to two groups, experienced marijuana smokers and non-smokers. They took a baseline test drive and then compared the driving abilities of the test subjects after smoking.



What they found was that no subject experienced reduced reaction times; none became more distracted from the tasks of driving. The only significant difference they were able to determine was that the experienced users who smoked the real marijuana perceived their intoxicated state and drove more slowly and carefully.

While there have been innumerable attempts by government agencies and independent organizations pursuing their anti-drug agendas to spread propaganda and lies, some of the information that they disseminate is true and correct. Drugs do destroy lives. Drugs kill people.

You should heed advice to avoid drug use. Find activities that are healthy, fun and exciting. Try many different sports and find one or several that you enjoy. Go hiking. Learn to fly a plane. Join clubs and social groups. Be spiritual. Volunteer with charity organizations. Learn to play an instrument. Participate as an actor, set designer or other role in little theater plays. Learn photography or film production and directing.

There is so much you can do to realize the unlimited potential of your life. Do not waste it through substance abuse.