

## I AM DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

That is a bold statement coming from a 37 years old African American man who is serving a life without parole sentence, little education above a General Equivalency Diploma and minimal support from family or the outside community. Yes, that is a bold statement yet one I do not retract. Do I have your attention?

You see, I consider myself a late developer sort of like wine: the longer the time the finer the wine. Growing up I'm sure I squandered an opportunity or two or even three and there can be various reasons why this was so, however, this prose is about my pending success not my past failures.

Coming to prison at the age of twenty-two saved my life. Who in their right mind would say such a thing? You must understand that one of my best friends was stabbed to death before turning seventeen and my other was shot to death on his birthday because of mistaken identity. This doesn't even account for the numerous associates I've lost in one way or another before they could see the age of twenty-five. When the clock struck twelve on Y2K I was in a prison cell, lying in a cold hard steel bunk, yet the moment was bitter sweet, "DAMN! I really made it...".

For as long as I can remember I was a protector of those too weak to protect themselves and this had me in many physical altercations growing up. This didn't change when I came to prison. The difference now is that my standing up for the weak against prison officials who felt it was their right to oppress us landed me in solitary confinement where I stayed for

thirteen consecutive years. If they only knew then what they know now they would have allowed me to stay in general population. Why, do you ask. Well because they created a monster!

They assumed that solitary confinement would break my will and spirit as it's done to so many people before and will do to more people who come after me. What they didn't anticipate is that after my pity party I would man up and began to apply myself. I awoke one day to realize that bathing myself in melancholy may have felt good ( Why it did I have no idea) but it wouldn't bring about any change and besides I never liked to be a victim in any situation thus I needed to figure out how to once again become the victor.

I needed to figure out my problems, the first being I was conditioned into believing that violence was the only way to address my concerns. Figuring out my problem was a start, I then had to figure out ways to solve it . This led to exercise, reading and tapping into my ability to express myself through writing. Trust me, my journey wasn't/isn't as clean cut as it appears on this paper and considering I have yet to reach the end of my road it's still on-going, but it's ultimately what helped me discover the intelligence I possessed. Let me tell you and you may be able to relate, a person may be complimented by several people and it will not mean anything if the person doesn't feel deserving of the compliment i.e. " your beautiful ", " your intelligent", " good job", etc. However, when one finally realizes that they are actually deserving of said compliments they can acquire a confidence they never had before. It is this confidence that destines me to greatness.

We as a people have a tendency to sabotage ourselves in life by setting imaginary boundaries based on fear. We won't try because we fear failure

and some of us may even fear success. This I learned throughout my time in solitary confinement. My confidence gave me the courage and determination to find alternate solutions to my problems in which each failure (there were plenty and likely many more to come) I gained knowledge and experience which brought me that much closer to success.

From an early age I always believed that reading was fundamental but for me it wasn't so much about education but more so a means of escape. I would devour books at a rapid pace, soaring through the pages of a non-stop thriller or voraciously consuming the clues floating of the pages of a well spun mystery; those were the times I didn't have to confront my own pain. It was this that prepared me for solitary confinement.

Being locked in the cell for twenty four hours a day in the midst of chaos happening all around, I made a conscious decision not to allow anyone to drive me crazy or make me lose my mind. I began to read, first about the history of my people which only made me angry when learning about the detailed atrocities of slavery and the slave trade. Then I turned to educational material such as institutional policies, civil law, business, self-help, etc. I would say I'm well rounded and can hold an intelligent discussion on just about anything.

With my new found knowledge I once again stood up to oppression, this time with my brain, not with my fist. My success was short lived. The officers became angrier that I discovered a means of fighting back without using violence so they gave me a reality check with a few boots to the ribs, a baton to the head, fist to the face and for good measure excruciating pain to the family jewels. Previously this would've been an act of war and retaliation on the horizon but not so this time. I continued to push my paper and each time I

was physically attacked I would exhaust my remedies and file a lawsuit. To add insult to injury for them, I won monetary damages each time so now they stay away. Staff who know me tell other, staff who don't, learn quick! Some still slip up in my presence but for the most part I'm no longer subject to overt oppression or witness to others subjected to it either.

It's amazing that I've been able to reach this point. In thirteen years of solitary confinement to be able to grow as a man while so many had deteriorated as human-beings is a testament unto itself which further bolsters my spirit. I believe without a shadow of a doubt that my conviction will over-turned and I'll be released but that's not what destines me to greatness. My being physically incarcerated or free has absolutely no bearing at all.

Now that we've come to the end of my prose you may still be wondering what or why I'm in fact destined for greatness and you may be looking/hoping for an answer within these final words. To you I say you may not have payed close enough attention up to this point because it's all there before you. If that is not sufficient then stay tuned and I promise you'll see unequivocally that... I AM DESTINED FOR GREATNESS!

-TELLY ROBERT ROYSTER