

Inside The Box

A Prisoner Tells His Tale

By Matthew Hattley

Reasonable Doubt Part 1



Matthew Hattley

In the past I've attempted to explain the parole hearing process for readers, but it's a complex concept, so I'm going to try a totally different approach.

To put things into perspective, I need you to visualize the following synopsis: A 25 year old, who's greatly intoxicated with alcohol, gets into an altercation with another young man — a total stranger. The situation escalates rapidly, a weapon appears, and a struggle ensues. The

weapon fires accidentally and kills one of the young men, unbeknown to the other.

The drunk man leaves the scene and is arrested a short time later — eventually being sent to Rikers Island where he spends the next 16 months vigorously fighting his case, unable to obtain the \$250,000 cash bail. After two separate trials, the first of which ended in a mistrial, the jury finds him guilty of 2 counts of second degree murder and he's sentenced to 25 years to life for each, both counts running concurrently.

Once he's sent to a state prison reception center, he is informed by a corrections counselor that he must participate in several mandatory programs based on his crime: Aggression Replacement Training, Substance Abuse and Vocational.

During the first six years of his sentence, he satisfied the majority of said required programs, and became a facilitator for a couple of them. He also received several misbehavior reports; it's difficult to adjust to his new environment — he releases his pain and frustration physically and verbally on those around him. At least until he learns to control and suppress such rage.

After seven years of incarceration, he finally decides it's time to turn his life around — for the better; he starts

leaving the negative aspects/behavior behind. It's time to focus on what's right for a change — regardless of how the other prisoners perceived him; he realizes it's no longer about "HIM." A dramatic change is finally in progress; he emerges from merely existing to living again. The passion to succeed can be seen in his eyes.

His family begins to see the changes via visits, phone calls and correspondence and start to embrace him again; it was difficult for them to watch him self-destruct within the first 6 years and they had all slowly pulled away from him. Being alone was extremely difficult to endure, especially since he was over 100 miles away from his home neighborhood. Yet the isolation made him a stronger man; introspection enters the equation.

Within 20 years he acquired several significant trades — drafting, general mechanic, HVAC, etc. — which would assist him in finding employment once he returned to society. His disciplinary record goes unblemished for 8 years. He now concentrates on making the best of a bad situation, no longer allowing the crime to define him. But then he never glorified his crime, or the prison system. He displays genuine remorse for his actions, which he takes full responsibility for.

He's also interacting with several community organizations in hopes of one day being given the opportunity of working directly with youth. Through his vast experience of life in prison, he intends to help others to NOT make the same mistakes he did in the past. The youth must see that there's a more productive way to navigate the streets of New York — their futures depend on it.

For the last few years his primary concern is reestablishing family and community ties. Their love and support gave him the strength to continue following his current path. Plus their connection gave him something to really look forward to upon his release. As he had done everything expected of him within the corrections system, and then some, he was more than eligible to receive parole. His future was beginning to brighten for a change. His family began to prepare for his return after a quarter century of incarceration.

To be continued in Part 2...

Matthew Hattley, #93A9739
Woodbourne Correctional Facility
99 Prison Road - P.O. Box 1000
Woodbourne, NY 12788-1000

comments@shawangunkjournal.com