

"How Long-Term Incarceration Effected Me As A Juvenile"  
By: Lasan Bellamy #250213

There's a saying, "in aggressive behavior there is a form of compensation for feelings of inadequacy." To feel inadequate is a hurtful feeling in itself. It leaves many of us who are stuck in an immature childlike mindstate to act out negatively. For with intelligence we know how to address our problems properly to achieve our desired outcome; but yet, since we lack understanding, we act out.

Growing up I experienced feelings of inadequacy through neglect. Raised by a young, single, uneducated mother who did the best she knew was insufficient for me. I turned to the streets to compensate for everything I felt was missing. I picked up bad habits and views about life, trust, relationships and much more. The hardships of prison forced me to challenge my own thinking merely to justify my existence as a civilized human being capable of living in society. I can't speak for another, but that's why this caged bird sings.

I've done over twenty years in prison for trying to imitate what I learned in the streets. I started my sentence at the age of sixteen. I was waived as an adult, sentenced to prison, given an upward departure from my guidelines as if the normal adult sentencing guidelines were not good enough for me as a juvenile. I've also done over eight continuances from the parole board. It's no longer about what I have done compared to what I'm capable of doing. Yet, that's not the half of it. I was so ignorant like an ant oblivious to the cares of the world I couldn't conceive or imagine what that sentence actually meant. I was just here.

Now imagine being a puny little juvenile amongst gangs of grown men physically strong and intimidating that have murdered, raped, mutilated, tortured, stolen, etc. and basically have no respect for human life. That's when you know you've reached the big leagues. All those fairy tales about castles as a child. I now live in one and know many monsters. I'm not saying that everyone fits that category, for rehabilitation is a choice as to reoffend despite being a mouse in a maze. However, it takes a certain form of thinking to infringe upon another to result in your gravitation to this place. Meaning like begets like and meet in a common area such as prison. That's for prisoners and staff, no discriminations.

When I turned seventeen I was sent to a prison called "Gladiator School"

known for its violence. This was a prison for long-term, young violent prisoners who had letters or basketball scores for sentences. I still couldn't grasp the concept of what I was in. I knew I had to adapt fast. This was a place I could get hurt in fast, or lose my life fast. With the music of the ambiance of this new environment, I danced the dance once they set the tone. Unfortunately, I was still functioning off a distorted platform of antisocial thinking. I went straight to survival mode which was nothing more than the seven stages of death. My first stage being to rebel as I was already in denial from day one with distorted thinking to justify why I committed a crime to begin with.

I spent a lot of time alone in segregation. The only way I knew to get through it I stayed involved in mischief or I would have been defeated by the pressures of loneliness, isolation, and my own demons. I started flooding the entire hallway with all the cells on my level with toilet water for attention. It made my time fly. I was rushed by eight guards in riot gear after being gassed. They say I wouldn't cuff up to be removed from the cell, but they wanted to scare me. I sat in an empty cell with soft restraints each time with eyes and skin burning for hours.

A therapist once told me I did all this to myself. That's equivalent to telling a victim of rape it happened because she wore shorts too tight. All the things I did was merely a scapegoat to deal with the isolation of long-term segregation. When I didn't act out, regret of my life emerged where the depression is so strong I felt hopeless, wanting to commit suicide. Yet, even when I tried that, I was too much of a coward. Imagine being stuck in a grave you can't escape unless you kill yourself. Only to realize you're too weak. You continue being tortured. Too weak to end it. That's Hell, a justified cruel and unusual punishment.

I became an animal. I observed others throwing feces, smearing it on walls, putting it in their mouth to spit on someone, prisoners masturbating on staff, cutting themselves... I picked it up and started doing it too. Monkey see, monkey do. I just couldn't put feces in my mouth or cut myself. Yet, all that destructive behavior was like negative energy at the bottom of a tornado for under those circumstances we were mentally ill and staff are not educated to deal with our insanity. A lot of times even their emotions overcrowded their better judgement, provoking us for entertainment.

I was lost completely with no rational mind and out of control. I saw peers

commit suicide and really didn't know how to feel other than I'll eventually have to do it myself. It hurted for I couldn't tell you how I got to that point in life, nor how to get out of it. I felt justice converted to oppression long ago. I faced racism, but couldn't understand how to feel, especially when a white guy in the cell next to me called himself my brother and was Aryan Nation going through the same struggles.

I spent weeks periodically on food loaf where they cook the entire meal into a loaf. The breakfast loaf was coffee cake majority of the time. When I became really hungry, guys would save bread and bits of their meal for me. After midnight, I'd fish from the mail slot at the top of the door with string from my mattress and a 3½" rubber pen, bouncing it until our lines tangled. That's how I received smashed morsels of food wrapped in toilet paper, slid across floors.

For a long time I stayed on water restriction, linen restriction, paper restriction, food loaf, slot restriction, in suicide cells on observation watch, you name it. Not once was I put on medication for I was told the environment caused people to act in such a manner. I'm glad, but ten years later they were still setting the tone to the dance. Somehow in my mind I learned to cope. Thanks to religion. It distracted my mind, providing enough peace to stop digging and climb out of that hole.

When I returned to general population there was another dance and another tone. I read everything I could get my hands on. That made me question myself and my reality. I felt I was in modernized legal slavery right here in America, so I found books concerning slavery, segregation, race and injustices to help me understand.

In the narrative by Fredrick Douglass, he mentioned when he was in slavery, in the slave quarters, the slaves would argue and fight with each other over which slave master had the most money, or treated their slaves the best instead of trying to get free. I looked around and that's all I seen. They were even trying to fight me. Whatever the administration allowed in our small environment, like a piece of bread, we would fight over like seagulls. They know it. I hate that and try my hardest not to be seen in such a light.

However, I was now using intellect and reason to guide my life instead of being a product of my environment. By reading, I learned better, teaching myself how to achieve better. I no longer received misconducts unless I wanted to demonstrate ill intention on behalf of staff like Martin marching for

equality. I began to think for others around me, both prisoners and staff, maneuvering through the chaos of their thoughts and feelings. Invisibility became my friend.

All these years I felt alone and abandoned. I was always too far from my mother for her to visit. I had a daughter at fifteen before I came to prison. She became a woman before I became a man. They say ignorance is bliss and if you asked me if I prefer the bliss of ignorance... I'd say yes, but I can't turn back.

I have taken many cognitive behavioral thinking groups and understand much, which I'm grateful for. In 2013 I received a parole to another cognitive behavioral thinking group in society, which was more intense. I couldn't leave or work. My original coping skills were taken from me and the conditions of the parole were to successfully complete the program or return to prison. I felt set up for failure. The program was founded by a family member of the parole board, so I had to complete it. Yet, I felt overwhelmed and before they could send me back to prison, I absconded.

Everything I had going for me I threw away just that fast despite my entire struggle. I wanted to go to college so bad. I believe college is the place to free me. Freedom in this sense is more than a release from prison. I need education. FASFA allowed me \$15,000.00 in grants and loans to get an education to lower my recidivism rate, but I can't use it.

While in society, I went to libraries, restaurants, read books I yearned to read for years, ate food I never ate before and observed life through new eyes. I was working on my bucket list. Old peers looked the same, but aged. I didn't know those people anymore. I was Michael J. Fox in Back To The Future, except in an alternate universe for I left society before the internet when everyone carried pagers instead of cell phones.

I was crushed. After some experiences I turned myself in. Back in my hole, isolated from the world. In here it's just me, my coffee, my art, books, and my thoughts. I received two more continuances like a punishment for failure to adapt instead of an unwillingness to adhere to a code of reliability. I was placed in another program for I am in a class of prisoners who can never be free of our crime. In Michigan, I have to register four times a year for the rest of my life for a crime that I committed at the age of sixteen. That means death still lurks in the back of my mind just as what I'm being conditioned for because I have nothing to lose or live for since everything has been taken

from me and I've been denied the opportunity to rebuild my life. That makes me angry. Not allowing me to rebuild is how they justify longer incarceration with old labels that no longer describe who I am today.

However, one thing I learned that distinguishes me from people of society is our experiences. I've never known love, responsibility for another, etc. I can see it in the maturity of people interactions when I engage them. That hurts most of all for as a thirty-seven year old I know elements are missing and I lack. I'm just waiting for a mid-life crisis. I'm constantly reminded I don't fit and the added pressures placed upon my class of prisoners not only burdens the system, but also my chances of a positive transition to being a productive member of society. All they keep saying is just do the programs while discriminating against us in prison and society like a weird form of apartheid they take pride in as a hereditary need to segregate.

Therefore, again I question my reality. Is prison where I belong? I'm so institutionalized that I'm comfortable being in prison. A place that I hate. People die out there. They have struggles. The cares of the world. The rat race. Here I am, back where I started. Inadequacy. I don't think the aggression will emerge this time for a man who goes on a quest for knowledge can never return home. Or am I just another ticking time bomb?

I slipped through the hands of society long ago, falling in an abyss. Good thing there is no up or down in outer space. I feel lost to you all, like a senior citizen with Alzheimer's disease living life through memories when they were most happy. Lost in my refuge until the event of my demise. A peace hard to describe. Yet, I feel as I am the magnum opus of our time for in a unique way, "STILL I RISE"!

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# LONG-TERM INCARCERATION

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16 X 20, CANVAS, ACRYLICS

WHEN SOMEONE HAS BEEN INCARCERATED A LONG TIME HIS LIFE DEFINITELY CHANGES. THE ATTACHMENTS HE HAD BEFORE GOES AWAY CAUSING HIM TO DREAM, HOPE, AND ASPIRE FOR BETTER. THEREFORE, HE EVENTUALLY DOES SOME SELF-REFLECTION ELIMINATING (SHEDDING) UNFAVORABLE TRAITS WITHIN HIMSELF ACCORDING TO THE CAPACITY OF HIS THINKING WHILE GRADUALLY BLOSSOMING LIKE A LOTUS FLOWER. YET, STILL INCARCERATED DETACHED FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC HE IMAGINES HIS OWN REALITY WHERE HIS WORLD SURPASSES ALL BOUNDARIES. THAT MEANS HIS THOUGHTS ARE UNIVERSAL WITH UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES AND HIS INCARCERATION WILL ALWAYS DWELL IN THE BACK OF HIS MIND SOMEWHERE HIDDEN WITHIN HIS FANTASIES. NOTICE THE POOL REFLECTS HIS REALITY ONLY, FOR HIS FANTASY HAS NOT MANIFEST. ITS ONLY A FIGMENT OF HIS IMAGINATION TO HELP HIM MAINTAIN HIS SANITY. THEREFORE, OUT OF THE UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES THE MIND CAN CONCEIVE TO ACHIEVE... WE HAVE LONG-TERM INCARCERATION. EXPAND THE UNIVERSE! 5/26/15



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