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Written by: SANDRO TAVARES

Prison is a terrible place.

I don't think society fully grasp what it is like to be imprisoned. Or maybe they do but consensus is that convicted felons only get what they deserve. Well, the truth is that the majority of incarcerated men will eventually find their way back into society and the residual effects of their imprisonment will have an impact on society as a whole.

The way that the prison system is being run ~~is~~ currently is extremely flawed and it only serves as a spring-

board for recidivism.
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When men are given prison sentences it's not as if they are just being removed from society for ~~a~~ ^{the} duration of their sentence; rather they are placed in a microcosm and are forced to endure the most soul-wrenching experiences and then they are released back into the bigger world and are expected to be reformed, law-abiding citizens. In reality the current prison structure is far from being conducive to reformation.

For one there are not enough voca-

tional programs that will enable ex-cons to thrive in society and earn an honest living for themselves upon their release, leaving most guys to resort to—out of frustration or desperation—the same activities that landed them there to begin with.

Another problem is that prison administrators don't do a good enough job of separating guys who are committed to bettering themselves from those who have simply given up on themselves.

I've seen many guys who come to prison with optimism and hope about

their self-improvement and who are committed to positive change abandon those sentiments and adopt a "when in Rome one must do what the Romans do" attitude upon realizing that positivity and humbleness can make them a target for ridicule and/or violence and work to their detriment.

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I have been incarcerated for a little over 8 years now. 2 in county jail awaiting trial and 6 in the Massachusetts DOC.

Initially, I lost trial and was given two natural life sentences for

joint-venture on 2 counts of first-degree murder. The appeals court over-turned my convictions a few years later and I pled out to 2 consecutive 14 year sentences for 2 counts of manslaughter.

I was 25 years old at the time of my arrest but at that time my maturity level was on par with that of a high-school kid, sadly.

I had been getting arrested since the age of 15, but never nothing this serious.

Prior to this arrest every time I found myself behind bars it would

afford me some time for introspection and after much reflection I would always conclude that I wasn't a bad person but simply a product of my environment. I felt that I was a good-hearted person who at times committed some not-so-good-hearted actions in order to get ahead and catch up to the people whom I viewed to be fortunate and successful.

After all it wasn't as if I had it easy; growing up with no father, being raised by a single mother who was only around on weekends because

she toiled endlessly only to be able to put hand-me-down clothes on my back while financially supporting what seemed to be a village (5 other siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and many poor family members back in our homeland of Cape Verde), and not to mention that every month loomed the threat of homelessness because rent money was a constant source of worry for us.

Those hardships allowed me to rationalize my behaviors and the person who I had become.

This last arrest had a different

effect on me. Maybe it's the gravitas that accompanies the loss of life or maybe it's just that I finally matured fully.

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The days that followed my last arrest have been the most trying of my life.

I went through much introspection and I concluded that any hope I had left hinged on my commitment to streamlining my entire philosophy about life and adopting honest and positive attitudes.

One day I came across a proverb that said: The road to hell is paved

with good intentions. For me that was an epiphanous moment. It was like a light bulb had suddenly went on inside my head and everything about myself became clear. It was in that moment that I realized that I had indeed become a bad person. It was—and still is—a difficult thing to have to concede but I realized that if I meant well in my heart but my actions stood in contrast to those feelings that I was a bad person for sure.

I became despondent upon this

realization as I stood at a fork in the road. A place I had stood at many times throughout my life.

The cynic in me told me that I was too old and that it was futile to attempt any changes now, but the optimist in me told me that it was possible to redeem my self and salvage the rest of my life.

I grappled with both notions for a while, but me being the eternal dreamer and optimist — to the point of naiveté at times — I chose to start anew and give it all that I could

muster to become a good person —

Someone whose actions is a representation of how they truly feel inside.

. . .
To live in society for about 30 years and acquire many bad habits and then one day decide to change those habits has to be difficult, but to attempt the same feat in a prison setting is to magnify the level of difficulty many times over.

The only things that come easy in prison is negativity and violence and most of the time it feels like it's the

only thing that is understood, but in spite of this I owe it to the people I hurt, to society, and to my self to give it a valiant try.

Guys such as my self and many others who yearn to do the right thing should be prodded by prison administrators and given the resources to succeed and not be left to our own devices to sink or swim.

Not because we deserve sympathy or pity, but because society will benefit just as much as we do, if not more.

It is true that they have some

programs now, and some of them are even good, but the reality is that most of the existing programs are frivolous and will have minimal impact in the real world.

More programs are needed, many more. Practical ones that can be used for success in the real world.

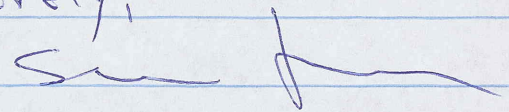
Inmates should be heard in regards to the programs that prisons provide. Not just heard but our ideas should be brought to fruition.

I can guarantee you that the implementation of more programs will

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cause a huge drop in recidivism, but maybe that's just naiveté on my behalf, maybe a drop in the recidivism rate is bad for the big bussiness that is the prison industrial complex.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Sam" followed by a stylized flourish.