

"EXISTING... NOT LIVING"

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THOSE THREE WORDS, "EXISTING... NOT LIVING," BASICALLY SUM UP THE REALIZATION OF A NATURAL LIFE SENTENCE IN PRISON. I HAD JUST TURNED NINETEEN AND HAD BEEN ON A THREE WEEK LONG DRUG AND ALCOHOL BIASE. THEN WHAM! REALITY CAME SLAMMING DOWN. IN ALL ACTUALITY THOUGH, I WAS SOBERING UP AS THE DOOR TO THE CELL WAS SLAMMING CLOSED.

YUP, I WAS IN THE COUNTY JAIL. I HAD BEEN CHARGED WITH FIRST DEGREE MURDER, AND LATER, CONVICTED OF THE SAME OFFENSE. NOW HERE IT IS, NINETEEN YEARS LATER AND I'M STILL HOPING FOR A SECOND CHANCE TO REDEEM MYSELF.

MANY CAN AND WILL SAY THAT I WAS CONVICTED OF MURDER AND SHOULD NEVER AGAIN SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY. THE CRAZY PART IS, I CAN THINK OF A MILLION REASONS WHY I SHOULD GET ANOTHER CHANCE AND COUNTER THEM ALL WITH ONE SENTENCE. PROBABLY THE SAME SENTENCE SO MANY OTHERS HAVE ALREADY THOUGHT OF: "YOUR VICTIM NEVER GOT A SECOND CHANCE. YOUR VICTIM NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO DO THIS OR THAT. WHY SHOULD YOU." AND THAT SENTENCE IS VERY TRUE.

Day After Day, I just sit in this cell, wasting air and waiting for death. The sad part is, when it's my time to go, there will be plenty of more unfortunate souls to take my place. If I choose, I can do absolutely whatever I want. The rules and administration have no boundaries on me. Consequences have no meaning when you have nothing to lose, and nothing to live for. After all, I'm never going home.

The worst the administration can do to me is throw me in segregation. Oh well, they'll let me out sooner or later. Nothing will change, I still have nothing to lose or to look forward to. I will still be merely existing... not living.

I can be the worst prisoner ever, or the best. Good or bad behavior has absolutely no affect on my sentence. Not only that, through the eyes of the administration, I am only good for "job security." Myself and other lifers like me, we create jobs every year. Out with the old staff members, in with the new. Whether it's corrections officers, nurses, doctors, food service workers, whatever you can think of, if they work for the prisons, I am job security. Again, I am only existing... not living.

Prison is one of the harshest, coldest, and most violent places I've ever been. The level of violence is most likely beyond anything you could possibly imagine. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy. Sometimes the

VIOLENCE JUST CAN'T BE AVOIDED. THIS VIOLENT WORLD IS,
 DEFINITELY, NOTHING TO LIVE FOR. SO AGAIN, NOTHING HAS
 CHANGED. I AM ONLY EXISTING.

IS IT EVEN POSSIBLE TO GIVE GUYS LIKE ME A
 SENSE OF "BEING," AS IN HUMAN BEING, AFTER SOME JUDGE
 GIVES US A LIFE SENTENCE? MOST SAY THAT MURDER IS THE
 WORST CRIME IMAGINABLE, THAT THERE'S NO POSSIBILITY OF
 REHABILITATION FOR MYSELF AND OTHERS LIKE ME. HOWEVER, PEOPLE
 THAT THINK LIKE THIS ARE WRONG! LOOK AT THE RECIDIVISM
 RATE AND WHO'S AT THE TOP!

I WAS ONLY INVOLVED IN WHAT I WAS BECAUSE OF THE
 DRUGS. AT THAT TIME, MY BRAIN WAS SO FRIED, I COULDN'T THINK
 STRAIGHT. I WAS DOING EVERY DRUG UNDER THE SUN. THAT'S JUST NOT
 ME. I WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN ANY MURDER WITH A
 CLEAR AND CONSCIOUS MIND.

A HORRIBLE THING HAPPENED. I MADE A TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE
 MISTAKE. HOWEVER, OUR LAW MAKERS SAY THAT THIS IS NOT A VALID
 DEFENSE TO A MURDER CHARGE. BEING ADDICTED TO NARCOTICS
 HOLDS NO SIGNIFICANCE IN A MURDER TRIAL.

EVERY DAY I FIGHT FOR A LITTLE POSITIVITY AND A LITTLE
 TOUCH OF HUMANITY IN MY LIFE. THAT IS LIVING. I IMAGINE
 MYSELF OUTSIDE OF THESE WALLS AND FENCES, LIVING LIFE TO
 THE FULLEST. SOME OF MY FELLOW PRISONERS WANT THE MOST
 EXTRAVAGANT THINGS THEY CAN THINK OF. ME, I WOULD BE
 MORE THAN HAPPY WITH A "NORMAL LIFE." IN THOSE THOUGHTS, I
 AM LIVING, NOT MERELY EXISTING.

SHOULD A NINETEEN YEAR OLD KID BE STRIPPED OF LIFE BECAUSE OF A HORRIBLE MISTAKE HE MADE? ONE HE WOULD CHANGE A HUNDRED TIMES OVER IF HE COULD. DOES ONE MISTAKE, NO MATTER HOW BAD, MEAN HE'S INCAPABLE OF CHANGE?

ACCORDING TO OUR LAW MAKERS, THE ANSWER TO THAT IS, YES. HOWEVER, THESE SAME LAW MAKERS SAID THAT IT IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL TO SENTENCE JUVENILE OFFENDERS TO LIFE IN PRISON. WE'RE TALKING A DIFFERENCE OF TWO OR THREE YEARS. YES, AT EIGHTEEN WE'RE CONSIDERED ADULTS. BUT OUT OF ALL THE PARENTS OUT THERE READING THIS, HOW MANY OF YOU STILL CONSIDER YOUR NINETEEN YEAR OLD A CHILD? HOW MANY OF YOU WOULD WANT TO SEE YOUR NINETEEN YEAR OLD SENT TO PRISON FOR THE REST OF HIS NATURAL LIFE BECAUSE HE MADE A MISTAKE? TO BE REAL, MOST NINETEEN YEAR OLDS STILL LIVE AT HOME WITH THEIR PARENTS!

TO END THIS "EXISTING... NOT LIVING" PLAGUE, THE MASS INCARCERATION OF OUR COUNTRY'S YOUTH, WE NEED TO ENCOURAGE AND PUSH OUR LAW MAKERS TO RE-EXAMINE THESE LIFER LAWS. AS IT IS, WE CAN COME TO PRISON FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES, YET WE ARE NOT OLD ENOUGH TO LEGALLY PURCHASE ALCOHOL. THINK ABOUT THAT! WE HAVE TO BE TWENTY-ONE YEARS OLD TO BUY ALCOHOL, BUT WE CAN COME TO PRISON FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES AT SEVENTEEN, EIGHTEEN, AND NINETEEN.

A LIFE SENTENCE SHOULD BE A FLAT TERM OF YEARS, FOR EXAMPLE TWENTY YEARS, OR, EACH MURDER CASE SHOULD BE EVALUATED ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS. IF IT'S PROVEN THAT THE OFFENDERS WERE DRUG ADDICTS, WHICH IS NOW CONSIDERED A SICKNESS BY

SOME, THOSE INDIVIDUALS SHOULD BE GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY AT A CLEAN AND SOBER LIFE. THEY SHOULD BE GIVEN TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION, NOT A LIFE SENTENCE.

FOR EVERY MURDER, IT'S SAID THAT A LIFE HAS BEEN LOST, A FAMILY SHATTERED. THAT IS NOT THE WHOLE TRUTH. IF ONE OR TWO PEOPLE KILLS ANOTHER AND ARE SENT TO PRISON, FOR LIFE, NOT ONE LIFE IS LOST, TWO OR THREE LIVES ARE LOST. NOT ONE FAMILY IS SHATTERED, TWO OR THREE FAMILIES ARE SHATTERED.

TRUE, MURDER IS A HORRIBLE CRIME. I'LL GIVE YOU THAT. BUT LOOK AROUND. WHO'S COMMITTING MOST OF THE MURDERS? IT'S OUR YOUTH! FROM THE AGES OF 16-24. BUT EVENTUALLY PEOPLE AGE OUT OF CRIME AND ARE NO LONGER A THREAT TO THE PUBLIC." SO DOES THIS ONE HORRIBLE MISTAKE MEAN THAT THESE KIDS, AND THOSE LIKE ME ARE TAINTED FOR LIFE AND CAN DO NO GOOD IN SOCIETY? A YOUNG KID THAT'S NOT RESPONSIBLE ENOUGH TO BUY ALCOHOL, YET IS RESPONSIBLE ENOUGH TO HANDLE THIS TYPE OF ENVIRONMENT: RAPE, STABBINGS, GANGS, DRUGS, EXTORTION, OTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE, IT GOES ON AND ON. OUR YOUTH IS BEING THROWN TO THE WOLVES AND IT'S A WONDER WHY OUR PENAL SYSTEM IS SO VIOLENT. PUT A KID WHO HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO LOSE AND NOTHING TO LIVE FOR IN A PLACE LIKE THIS AND WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

THE MURDER LAWS HAVE HARDLY CHANGED. THE ONLY CHANGE I'M AWARE OF IN THE LAST NINETEEN YEARS HAS BEEN THE RULING THAT IT'S UNCONSTITUTIONAL TO SENTENCE JUVENILES TO LIFE IN PRISON. AGAIN, THE ONLY REAL DIFFERENCE IS TWO OR THREE YEARS. IT'S TIME FOR OUR LAW MAKERS TO CHANGE THIS AND LET

GUYS LIKE MYSELF AND OTHER YOUTHS THAT HAVE MADE HORRIBLE MISTAKES, EARN A SECOND CHANCE TO LIVE... INSTEAD OF MERELY EXISTING.

WHEN OUR LAW MAKERS DO MAKE CHANGES, IN REGARDS TO RELEASING PRISONERS EARLY, IT'S ALWAYS FOR NON-VIOLENT OFFENDERS. WHICH IS COOL. ON THE OTHER HAND, MOST OF THESE GUYS HAVE "SHORT-TIME," THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND THE FULL EXTENT OF PRISON. UNFORTUNATELY, MOST OF THESE GUYS END UP COMING BACK TO PRISON. IF GUYS THAT HAVE HAD LIFE SENTENCES AND WERE FACED WITH ONLY EXISTING FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES, HAD ANOTHER CHANCE TO "LIVE", I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THE PUBLIC WOULD SEE A DRAMATIC CHANGE IN THE RECIDIVISM RATE. WHY? BECAUSE GUYS FACED WITH A LIFE SENTENCE KNOW THAT THIS PRISON SHIT IS NO JOKE. WE KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE STRIPPED OF EVERYTHING, SO WE CAN'T AFFORD TO TAKE ANYTHING FOR GRANTED. WE ARE WELL AWARE THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS IS PLAYING FOR KEEPS! WE ALSO KNOW THAT IT'D BE BETTER FLIPPING BURGERS THAN SITTING IN PRISON FOR ANY AMOUNT OF TIME.

IN CLOSING, I URGE ALL OF YOU TO BE A VOICE AND CREATE CHANGE. THERE'S GUYS WHO HAVE BEEN IN PRISON, TWENTY, THIRTY YEARS, AND MORE. THEIR ENTIRE LIVES. THEY CAME TO PRISON AS TEENAGERS, NOW WE'RE ALMOST IN OUR FORTIES AND FIFTIES. MYSELF INCLUDED, AS I SAID, I CAME TO PRISON AT NINETEEN, I JUST TURNED THIRTY-EIGHT. FOR ALL OF US, OUR LIVES WERE OVER BEFORE THEY EVEN BEGAN. STEP UP! URGE OUR LAW MAKERS TO CHANGE THESE LIFER LAWS. LET US BEGIN

TO LIVE AND NOT MERELY EXIST.

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CRIME IS MOSTLY A YOUNG MAN'S GAME. MOST VIOLENT CRIME IS COMMITTED BY YOUNG MEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 TO 25. BUT EVENTUALLY PEOPLE AGE OUT OF CRIME AND ARE NO LONGER A THREAT TO THE PUBLIC. SEE BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, VIOLENT CRIMES, 2, 4 (1994), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/viocrm.pdf> (REPORTING THAT 85% OF VIOLENT OFFENDERS ARE MALE, AND YOUNG PEOPLE AGES 16-24 "CONSISTENTLY HAVE THE HIGHEST VIOLENT CRIME RATES"). MARC MAUER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE SENTENCING PROJECT, TESTIMONY TO CHARLES COLSON TASK FORCE ON FEDERAL CORRECTIONS (MARCH 11, 2015), <http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/a-proposal-to-reduce-time-served-in-federal-prison/> ("RESEARCH SHOWS THAT AFTER PEAKING IN THE MID-TO-LATE TEENAGE YEARS, OFFENDING BEGINS TO DECLINE AS INDIVIDUALS ARE IN THEIR 20s AND DROPS SHARPLY AS THEY REACH THEIR 30s AND 40s.")

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PLEASE INCLUDE A RETURN MAILING ADDRESS. AT

THE MOMENT I CAN RECEIVE JPAYS BUT I CANNOT

SEND THEM. THANK YOU.