

Contrapasso

In the middle of my life, at the age of forty-four, I found myself on a plane, sandwiched between two U.S. Marshals. I was being extradited from Costa Rica to face charges in New York. The rain forest and live volcanoes gave way to concrete laced with razor wire. After languishing on Rikers Island for a year and a half awaiting trial, I pled guilty to first degree assault. Sentenced to twenty years, I was grateful to leave Rikers. Twenty years of incarceration are ugly, but I was relieved to start my journey. The interminable wait in an oppressive airless jail, in an anxious state of limbo, was torture.

I had hoped that an opportunity to reform myself -- to quit chasing life's luxuries, to learn what was truly important, perhaps understand myself better -- lay ahead. But I was wrong. Instead, a feckless existence rife with inanity and frustration lay in my future. Yet the misery was not confined to the lives of those incarcerated. Pain and suffering afflicted all those who were part of the prison system, including the guards. I found that it wasn't a carceral system. It was chaos. There is little that is systematic when an unhappy group with badges and batons is given free reign to oppress those with few, if any rights.

As a school bus retrofitted with steel cages dropped me off at the gates of Attica State prison, fear and foreboding welled up from within. Handcuffed and shackled, I slowly negotiated my way down the steps of the bus and into Attica's reception building. The lobby is a throwback to the Seventies with slate floors and brick walls. A corridor that leads to the officers' locker room is lined with grainy black and white photos of Attica's 1971 riot, the bloodiest prison uprising in American history. A palpable tension permeates the stale air. Seated in a small, cramped holding pen, I was grateful when

a guard removed the handcuffs and chains that had punished me for sixteen hours.

Within minutes, four corrections officers escorted me and two other prisoners to a dimly lit corridor where they told us to put our hands on the wall and spread our feet. The CO behind me barked in my ear, "Wider, spread your feet wider," as an interrogation began.

"What's your name?"

"Where you from?"

"Whadda ya here for?"

A few feet away, another prisoner was also being grilled.

"What's ya name?"

"What are you, a spic, or a nigger?"

The man answered, "Neither, sir."

As my Hadean journey began, I wondered if I had made the right decision in accepting a twenty-year sentence. A guard commanded the two of us with our hands on the brick wall, "Turn around. Pair off. Stand in front of the gate." He took his wooden baton from its holster, and stared at us. As the electric gate slowly opened with a plangent groan, the guard shouted a one-word order. "Forward."

We walked through a series of gloomy corridors, devoid of color, and dimly lit by narrow windows. The labyrinth echoed with our footsteps. I lost my sense of direction as we made our way through iron gates operated by guards in dark chambers behind bullet-proof glass. We arrived at a small, windowless lobby. Above the entryway, painted in yellow, were the words, "Entering C-Block. Watch your step."

Five officers stood against a brick wall in the lobby, gripping batons, and glaring at us. One of them opened a steel door, painted black. He looked at me and said, "Forty-one cell." As I walked through the door, he slammed it shut. I heard laughter through the steel. Toward the end of a long, dark corridor, I found forty-one cell. I was grateful to finally have some

privacy after a sixteen-hour bus ride where I was chained to another prisoner, even while I used the toilet.

I looked around the cell. The beige walls were dirty. The washbasin had one spigot -- cold water only. The steel bunk, welded to the wall, had no mattress. There was a small window which looked out onto a bleak deserted yard. Sitting on the bunk, I was suddenly overcome with despair, and guilt. I fashioned my State jacket into a pillow, curled up into a ball, and closed my eyes.

The lengthy clang of a bell woke me up in the morning. Nervously, I looked out the opening of my cell door. A face stared back from the opposite cell.

"Whas up. Where you from?"

"New York."

"You gotta stand for the count."

"Okay."

After the shaved heads of two guards passed by my cell, I sat back down on my bunk. I didn't feel like talking. I was stressed, unsure of my surroundings. When I had told a few of the other prisoners on the bus that I was going to Attica, their response was, "Oh, no." I could see fear in their eyes. With my head resting on my jacket, I stared at the ceiling of my cell. Vague, indecipherable words had been written using a lighter, the soot forming letters and shapes. I wanted to do something beside just lay there, waiting. But I had no property -- no books, no pen, no paper. I wanted to get started on this next phase of my incarceration -- the long stretch at a maximum-security prison. I was trapped in a state of uncertainty. I didn't even know what time of day it was. The gray, leaden sky outside my window gave no clue.

In the corridor, disembodied voices murmured and shouted. Outside in the recreation yard I could hear the clank of iron dumbbells. But I couldn't see the weight pile -- only prisoners in groups of two or three walking in circles, staring at the pavement.

I nodded off, and was awakened by a thud at my cell door. I got up in a daze. A porter was trying to fit a brown plastic tray through the opening in my cell door. As he angled it so it would pass through, a foul smelling liquid spilled out onto the floor. I left the tray by the door. Still tired, I lay back down. I thought about asking the porter for a mattress, but instead accepted my suffering as deserved.

The following morning, my cell door cracked open a few inches. Although hesitant, I slid it open. The porter was standing there with a mattress. He said, "Toma." Instinctively, I said "Gracias," and dragged the mattress to my bunk. It was thin, yet heavy. The canvas covering was yellowed and stained. But I was so tired, I threw myself on top of the mattress. It felt like a pine board, but I was grateful not to have to lay on the cold steel. I fell back into a dreamless sleep.

The following morning, the porter told me his name was Mosca, and that the CO wanted to see me. I walked down the two hundred foot corridor. Heads framed by cell doors stared at me. At the end of the corridor, in a steel cage, sat an overweight guard doing a crossword puzzle. He asked me, "What's your DIN?" I gave him my ID number. He looked at his clipboard and said, without looking up, "Property. Go downstairs."

I descended a dark flight of stairs. At the bottom, a steel door opened. A CO threw two white canvas bags into the stairway, and then slammed the door. I carried them to the top of the stairs, where the CO in the cage said, "Lock back in." By the time I reached my cell, my arms ached. The heavy **bags** held mostly books, and some clothes from Rikers Island.

The clothes were trash, but the books were treasures. From one of the bags, I pulled out García Márquez's Cien Años de Soledad, along with a Spanish/English dictionary. I lay on my bunk, and left Attica, travelling to the Colombian village of Macondo where gypsies peddled trinkets, and a native set out to find a route to the sea, an escape from the quotidian monotony in which he felt trapped.

Reading in Spanish helps me to block out the noise and inane conversation that fill prison life. But I could hear cell doors open with a rumble, slam shut. Like an approaching train, voices got louder, then slowly faded. I began to wonder where those men were going, when I would leave my cell and go to a program, or find a job. The uncertainty and the waiting were frustrating.

I looked up from my reading. Mosca's face hung at my cell door window, staring at me.

"Gotcher property?"

"Yeah, finally."

"Anything ya wanna get rid of?"

I wasn't sure if he meant throw things out or sell them. But I didn't want to get involved. He gave me a creepy feeling -- that he was a manipulator. I told him, "No, I'm good." He vanished, but I could hear him in the corridor, speaking in Spanish. His conversation got loud, turning into an argument. I could hear threats -- *puñetazo*, a punch in the face; *puñalada*, a stab with a knife. Then things got quiet.

I returned to Macondo. José Arcadio Buendía was tinkering in his workshop, trying to turn base metals into gold. His attempts yielded nothing but lumps of slag. I understood his frustration. I too had chased a dream: wealth and treasures. But my selfish behavior, my greed, caused the death of a dear friend. No amount of prison time would bring her back. I spent many hours immersed in novels, reading anything I could get my hands on, in an effort to escape the guilt, the horror for which I was responsible. At night, in the darkness of my cell, the memory of Maria's final moments always returned, reminding me of who I was, of what I had done.

Maria's face dissolved into Mosca's, peering at me.

"Hey yo. The CO says you're off quarantine. If ya want chow, ya gotta sign up when the CO walks."

Mosca vanished, leaving me confused. I hadn't seen a doctor, or a nurse. Who took me off quarantine? Now I was faced with

going to Attica's messhall for the first time. I didn't know the procedure. As prisoners, we dwell in the dark, negotiating murky corridors.

I rummaged through my draft bags, looking for something else to read. There wasn't much. Books are difficult to obtain in prison, subject to illogical package room rules. Attica prohibits families from sending books to loved ones. While I was on Rikers Island, a friend had sent me Dostoevski's Crime and Punishment. Unsure whether it was a thoughtful gift, or a purposeful swipe, I had put it aside.

To relieve my boredom, I started reading the novel, and met the enigmatic character Roskolnikov. His logic baffled me. Yet his actions are representative of many crimes. Most are unplanned, with little thinking involved. Fear is often the driving force. The fear of poverty, hunger, sobriety -- the fear of daily struggles. However, most criminals don't recognize, nor even understand, their motivations. Roskolnikov doesn't know why he killed his victim. Horrified, he is consumed with guilt.

Attica is filled with men who have little to no understanding of how they got here. They are lost souls -- confused, wandering in pain and misery -- looking for a route to a better life, perhaps redemption. Walking endless circles in barren yards, they seek to relieve their suffering.

In groups of two and three, Attica's guards also beat the same path. Freed from their steel cages, they walk the yards, smoke and joke. At times, they squat on the concrete steps and looking skyward, bask in the sun. They too seek relief from the oppressive darkness that fills the prison. Many are serving twenty-five sentences, eight hours at a time.

For an opportunity to leave the oppression of their cramped cells, prisoners go to the messhall, despite the tasteless food. Dinner is often just slices of cheese on white bread. Prison is an endless search to satisfy insistent cravings. Tobacco, coffee, even a bag of potato chips are distractions, temporary reprieves

from frustration and misery. Leaving one's cell -- to go to the messhall, or to the yard -- lessens the suffering. Guards know this, and in order to ratchet up the misery, to augment the pain, they deny prisoners their rights.

Invariably, after guards take a list for chow or yard, somebody doesn't get what they requested. A man who signed up for chow, while other prisoners are heading to the messhall, is heard shouting from within his cell. When men are going to the yard on a warm, sunny day, somebody is left behind, frustrated and angry. The guards have a standard response. "He's not on the list." The prisoners that COs don't like, because of their attitude, or skin color, are the ones whose names mysteriously disappear from the chow list.

Even though we despise this abuse of authority, and gripe about it, we are guilty of the same behavior. Prisoners gossip about another man's crime -- condemn him, even punch and kick him. They judge him -- his offense, his culpability -- despite having no proof of guilt. Hundreds of innocent men have been released from prisons as a result of newly discovered evidence. Yet prisoners will blithely accept an accusation, or simply rumor, in condemning and punishing a fellow inmate.

We rail against the system -- the police, the courts -- yet we impose judgment and mete out punishment. Prisoners will steal another man's television, his food, and his dignity because of the ugliness of his crime. Prisons are filled with victims of mass incarceration -- guilty as a result of addiction, poverty, or skin color. Yet we are perpetrators of the injustice that we despise.

As I read about Roskolnikov languishing in his tiny room, unsure about his future, Mosca's bald head appeared at my cell door.

"Hey yo. Joey, from Rikers Island, he says he knows you. He says put down for the yard."

Without thinking, I said OK. But then I became apprehensive. I had never been to Attica's yard. I didn't know the procedure, or what the yard would be like. But when the CO came by with the list, I blurted out, "Forty-one cell, yard."

I looked forward to seeing Joey. He had a great sense of humor. In the Rikers Island yard, which was just a barren patch of concrete, he always made me laugh. But I worried about Attica's yard. I had no idea how to get there. Shortly, a bell sounded, indicating the yard was going out. Guys stood at their cell gates -- talking, shouting.

"Hey yo, Gee, you put down for yard?"

"Yo, El, get a weight bench."

"Hey yo, Dre, how many pouches you takin'?"

A pouch of loose tobacco serves as prison currency. It can be used to buy coffee, food, sneakers, just about anything. I often heard guys shouting between cells, bartering bricks: packs of cigarettes.

When my cell gate opened, I stepped into the corridor, unsure of what to do next. Men began moving toward the stairs, leaving a clear space of about twenty feet between them and the CO. By reaching through the bars of his protective cage, the CO unlocked the gate at the top of the stairs. As soon as he said, "Yard," the group of men surged forward and bounded down the stairs. I followed them. We exited into a windowless lobby filled with guards glowering at us. A CO wearing a blue baseball cap pointed at me and said, "Hey you. Get over here. Put your hands on the wall."

Panic seized me. Struggling to think clearly, I saw a clear space of brick wall, and headed for it. I placed my hands high over my head on the wall, and spread my legs. Directly behind me, his mouth just inches from my ear, a guard said, "Spread your legs more." He kicked the heel of my foot. "Where's your ID?" Instinctively, I reached for it in my shirt pocket.

"What are you, stupid? Don't move, or I'll bash you in the head with this stick."

He took my ID card, and threw it on the floor. Then he reached around my waist, undid my belt, and threw that on the floor, too.

"Got anything on you?"

I wasn't sure what he meant, but since I had nothing in my pockets, I said no. With his hand gripping the back of my neck, and his elbow pressed into the small of my back, he ran his free hand up and down my arms, my stomach, and my chest. He felt the crucifix hanging on a chain around my neck.

"What's that?"

"A cross."

"That's not gonna help you here."

He ran his hands up and down my legs, my buttocks, and my crotch.

"Untie your boots."

After I did so, he pulled my boots off, put his and inside them, then threw them on the floor.

"Pick up your shit, and take it back upstairs. Don't come out of your cell for two days."

I picked up my clothes, climbed the stairs in my socks, and walked back to my cell, humiliated. I figured I was singled out because I was new. But I felt like I had done something wrong, guilty of some unwitting offense.

Other than going to the yard, there is very little to do at Attica. The programs that the administration requires us to take have long waiting lists. Some men have been waiting twenty years. Even though the programs are mandatory, they are nearly impossible to get into unless you are close to being released. In which case, men have only weeks to effect changes in behavior and thinking that have developed over the course of years, perhaps a lifetime. Some of that thinking -- resentment and bitterness -- has been amplified by prison itself.

Unable to get into mandatory programs, I started going to the voluntary Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. I had attended AA before coming to prison and knew that the support and stories of those in recovery were powerful. I wrote to the prison AA advisor. After months on the waiting list I finally got a small piece of paper indicating a call-out for AA, in the chapel. I looked forward to the meeting, but was nervous about negotiating my way to the chapel. It was in another block of the prison, separated by six, officer-manned gates.

When the CO passed by my cell holding a clipboard, I signed up for AA. My neighbor warned me, "Don't bring nothin' to the chapel. Not even a Bible." At about six-thirty that night, my cell gate opened. I walked down the gallery and waited with other men at the bottom of the stairs, behind the black steel door. It opened to reveal a bearded guard holding a sheet of paper. As each man gave his cell location, the guard uttered a terse, "Go." When I gave him my cell location, he said, "You're not on the list," and slammed the door. As I climbed back up the stairs, confused and frustrated, I could hear laughter.

In my cell I fell back on the bunk, angry. Trying to forget my humiliation I returned to Macondo, where José Arcadio Buendía continued to search for a route to the sea, an escape from the life in which he felt trapped. But I had difficulty concentrating. I kept thinking of the CO who wouldn't let me go to AA.

The following week, I received another slip indicating a call-out for AA. This time a different officer held the clipboard. I gave him my cell location. He checked my name off on the list, and said, "Go."

The AA meeting was held in a cavernous chapel that also served as a messhall. The front half resembled a theater, with a stage, rows of seats, and a center aisle. I sat in the front row. Men trickled in as each block of the prison arrived. One

man made coffee in a beat-up aluminum urn. Another arranged AA literature at the edge of the stage. A small group of men stood near the stage talking until a guard yelled, "Sit down."

The meeting was very much like AA meetings I had attended on the streets of New York. Men took turns speaking. A chairman moderated. Nearly every man spoke of pain, misery, and suffering. They all searched for a serenity that was elusive, ephemeral. Halfway through the meeting, there was a coffee break. We got a chance to talk to the outside volunteers who up until the break, had been seated separately from us, as if we might harm them.

Some of the volunteers had travelled for hours from Canada to attend the meeting. After the coffee break, one of them spoke. He told us about his self-destructive behavior. Trapped in a cycle of anger and violence, his misery became normal, part of his everyday life. He chased his misery, like a drug. He said the only difference between him, and those of us in prison, was that he didn't get caught.

I also got to know some of the inmates who attended the meetings. A man whose cell was near mine attended AA faithfully. His last name was King, and that's what other men called him. He seemed to accept whatever came his way. He displayed a serenity, a quality that is often discussed at AA meetings but difficult to attain. One night, just outside the chapel as we lined up to attend AA, one of the guards told King to step out and to put his hands on the wall. The guards often searched men going to AA as a form of harassment. After the rest of us filed into the chapel, the guards closed the wooden double doors at the entrance to the chapel. That was unusual. They normally just slid the steel gate shut. After a few minutes, I heard the bells sound, indicating a fight somewhere in the prison. I never saw King again, and no one ever found out what happened to him.

I developed a resentment toward the guards and the prison administration. They made it difficult for prisoners to attend

programs and thereby better themselves. I was no longer the biggest obstacle to changing my behavior. The barriers erected by prison officials -- inane rules, long waiting lists, hassles and humiliation from abusive guards -- became my greatest challenge, and challenges for other prisoners as well.

However, some of my resentment became directed toward myself -- my stupidity, selfishness, and failings. I fixated on my mistakes, the actions that brought me to prison. The festering anger poisoned me. I didn't want to be around others. I avoided the messhall, annoyed by its restrictions, noise, having to spend an hour seated on an uncomfortable metal stool, trapped at a table with men who also despised the food. I resented the guards who hovered over the tables, brandishing nightsticks, and barking at those who mistakenly sat in the wrong seat.

I also avoided the recreation yard, mostly out of fear. Guards resent prisoners enjoying the freedom of the yard, but they also harass specific prisoners -- those they don't like because of their crime, or their religion. While frisking them, retribution takes place. I often heard a guard bang several times on the brick wall in the lobby with his stick. The alarm bells would sound, followed by the screams of a man being beaten. The ominous silence that followed reflected our fear, our gratitude for the steel walls and bars that protect us.

Yet, the guards are not the only ones who determine the level of punishment in prison. Inmates too buy into the idea that some men deserve to suffer more than others. Many prisoners feel wholly justified in punishing those with sex crimes. On the galleries and in the yards, child molesters and rapists are punched, kicked, stabbed. Sometimes, their faces are sliced open with ragged can tops, left with disfiguring scars. Despite the great majority of us being guilty of crimes, we judge others -- fault them and blast them for their sins. Yet we are all guilty of transgressions, and hypocrisy. Thieves steal from

other prisoners. Murderers cut and stab. We demand respect. But we're quick to rob another man of his dignity.

Blacks discriminate against whites. Whites are bigoted toward blacks, and Hispanics. In the recreation yards, tables are controlled according to race. Social groups are determined by ethnicity. And nearly all homosexuals are shunned and ridiculed. I often hear men disparage others with labels of "maricón" and "fuckin' faggot." Prison teems with slurs hurled by those who would resent and be angered by being the targets of those insults. The very thing we despise -- hatred -- we inflict upon others.

Many prisoners are stuck in the same mode of thinking which fueled their lives on the streets and led them to prison. Filled with resentments and anger, emotions cloud their minds. They fail to understand their past. As Dante Alighieri wrote, "What I was living, so am I dead." Sadly, prison offers few opportunities for self-examination. Attica has over one thousand men, half its population, on waiting lists for anti-violence programs. Three-quarters of Attica's population languishes on a waiting list for Alcohol and Substance Abuse Therapy. Yet there are no seats for them in the program because Attica employs only one substance abuse counselor.

Attica's opportunities, and its environment, are determined by its 585 officers. Even though there is a program committee that assigns prison jobs to inmates, officers ultimately determine which prisoners keep those jobs. Prisoners that they don't like like find themselves reassigned, fired, or long-term unemployed. Officers decide which cell gates open, and which remain closed. They determine who goes to work, who eats, who gets an education. Even though the college program is privately funded, officers determine who participates, and who graduates. Inmates who incur disfavor are transferred to a prison with no college program. In the middle of a college semester, my classmate

Thomas Gant was sent to another prison because an officer didn't like his attitude.

Through inaction also, officers can determine a man's level of suffering. If a prisoner is being beaten, cut, or stabbed during a fight in the yard, guards can break it up, or stand by. When a fight takes place on a gallery, or in a cell, officers decide how long it will continue, and whether the beaten man gets medical treatment or is left in his cell, bleeding.

If officers feel a man disrespects them, they may inflict punishment. Mere words can result in bloodshed. Through eyewitness accounts, and hospital records, State officials uncovered prisoner abuse by guards at Attica. In 2011, because they didn't like a comment they mistakenly thought George Williams made, three guards broke his ankles, a shoulder, an arm, and an eye socket. Then they threw him down a flight of concrete stairs, handcuffed.

Even without touching a man, guards and inmates can bring about a man's downfall. Those convicted of sex crimes face constant harassment and threats. Behind their backs, prisoners gossip and reveal the prurient details of their crimes. To their faces they are ridiculed and humiliated. The gloominess of their future, the fear of reprisals and violence, result in despair. They live in what Dante called, "a dark wood where no path [is] marked." Out of a sense of hopelessness, some take their own lives. For a few days, tongues wag; some gloat. By the following week the suicide is forgotten.

The fear of being forgotten afflicts nearly all prisoners. Separated from society, cut off from the world of electronic communication and social media, prisoners struggle to remain parts of their families. Three hundred men jostle for the use of five phones in the yard. Lines form; tempers flare. A fight breaks out and alarm bells sound. Blood on the pavement is evidence of the importance that prisoners place on being remembered. Judges deem separation from society as the primary castigation when imposing sentences. Yet the isolation that results is only

part of the punishment. Violence, abuse, and degradation are heaped onto the blazing pyre.

Prisoners are constantly retried for their crimes because guards wield nearly unquestioned and unassailable authority. They each have their own set of rules, their ways of running the galleries and companies that they choose to work. Simply by moving to a different floor within the same block, I found the procedures and the rules to be very different. As days and shifts change, I must know each guard's methods and peculiarities. Tuesday's rules are not the same as Monday's. One misstep can result in punishment -- being confined to one's cell, or missing chow and going hungry. Ridicule and humiliation are strewn about like rock salt during an ice storm. When I was confused about a procedure, I asked the CO for clarification. His response was, "What are you, a fuckin' retard?"

The clout that prison guards wield is used not only to punish inmates, but also to threaten and harass counselors, teachers and community volunteers. In the prison parking lot, counselors deemed soft on inmates find their cars damaged, their tires flattened. Administration officials who speak out about prisoner abuse find pornographic pictures and derogatory notes taped to their office doors. Community volunteers, when checking in at the front gate, are humiliated and cursed. A volunteer for the Alternatives to Violence Project was told, "Why do you waste your time coming in here? Why don't you stay at home, where you fuckin' belong?"

I returned to my cell one night after attending a Quaker worship meeting. Local volunteers come to the prison and join us in prayer and discussion groups. As I got near my cell, I heard two men talking on the gallery.

"Yeah, a guy got cut in the yard."

"I didn't hear no bell."

"Na, there was no bell. The COs, they knew it was goin' down. They just let it happen. Didn't even break it up. The CO, he says the dude that got cut, he was a piece a shit."

"Musta been a rapo."

Guards often rely on prisoners to impose punishment they feel is justified. They offer favors to prisoners to do their dirty work. In return for a TV or a pack of cigarettes, a prisoner will beat up a fellow inmate whom the guards don't like, or whose crime they abhor. The same prisoners who rail against the unfairness of the criminal justice system, the corruption and mendacity, will accept gossip as proof of a man's guilt.

My prison job requires me to work seven days a week, including holidays. While I struggled to find time to write this essay, the guards gave me some time off from work. Unhappy with the administration, officers shut the prison down in protest. Religious worship and educational programs came to a halt. Suddenly, chow, which normally took one hour, required three. The protest went on for days, having been precipitated by official misconduct. Prison guards had been caught on camera beating an inmate and then falsifying reports about it. When the administration punished the guards involved by telling them to stay home, with no pay, the guards staged a massive slowdown, bringing prison programs to a halt. During the slowdown, I sat in my cell writing this essay.

I realized during the slowdown that many of the guards are frustrated, just as we are, by the inanity that is rampant in prison -- the rigidity, the illogical rules, the lack of purpose in a system run amok. Some set their own rules and procedures in an effort to create logic in an insane environment. Guards complain about a faceless them -- the administration, Albany, politicians -- just as much as we do. Many feel their jobs,

and by extension their lives, are monotonous and pointless. The slowdown showed that the only way they felt they could bring about change was to further wreck the system, to add to the chaos.

As local communities have become aware of the abuses occurring in their hometowns, within the concrete walls that shield prisons from public scrutiny, some have taken steps to lessen the suffering. Donald Huber, a native of the town of Attica, read about the horrific beating of George Williams. He felt that regardless of the crime that brought Williams to prison the punishment that he endured was inexcusable. Huber enlisted the support of community members in helping George to start a new life. Through donations, he raised enough money for him to attend barber school. Williams graduated from Tribeca Barber School in December of 2015, four years after his crippling beating by Attica's officers.

In prison, Williams had felt that he was a lost soul, incapable of redemption, and unable to turn his life around. But he says he has emerged from that darkness, and is now on a different path. Incarceration has brought about positive changes in my life, too. Although I can hardly say that I did it on my own, I've amassed ten years of sobriety. As a result of that clearer thinking, I've become more communicative -- writing regularly to my family and friends. Education has also become important. I finally achieved a college degree, became fluent in a second language, and discovered that I enjoy teaching -- tutoring English and math. But in order to realize those accomplishments, I had to demolish my former self. I often wish I could have recognized my faults, and turned my life around, without plunging into the inferno.

- August, 2016