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page 1 of 2

Shawnee C.C.

370 words

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AGE, NOTHING BUT AN IDOC #

By

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I've been imprisoned since age 14 in 1995. Being a murderer, I've earned it. I'm serving 58yrs and 17yrs at the rate of 50% for good behavior, for a total of 37½yrs, which will make me 52 before my release. And that's a blessing, since the maximum may have been 60yrs and 20yrs--perhaps if I had been a hardened adult, a career criminal, maybe a gang member, drug dealer, or addict. I thank God the judge used his discretion to consider my youth and inexperience, reducing my adult term by an entire 5yrs. Well, 2½ for good behavior.

Of course, I'm not the poster child for stiff penalties or compassionate consideration either one; IDOC (IL Dept. of Corrections) has a plethora of sentence packages for its children tried as adults, ranging from decades on end to natural life, mostly for the disadvantaged minority (meaning black and poor), all wrapped up in the optimistic expectation that we'll survive the years at the cheapest storage rate possible before our release back into society as senior citizens, or our burial on (State)Boot Hill. With rare, if any, exceptions, we're sentenced like adults, warehoused like adults, and then discharged like adults--minus adult experiences, adult social skills, or adult job skills. I imagine the posters for this trend would look much like the promotion for Slavery or Nazi Germany.

Also, much like during those infamous eras in history, few people are bold enough to tear the posters down and fight the trend, or even frown in their direction. Populace and Politician alike are keen to protest children smoking, drinking, voting, paying taxes, joining a war effort, being labor abused, sex abused, or even psychologically abused--but we can sentence them like adults, imprison them like adults, and then see them neglected by adults who deem them adult-like in culpability. And in most States, especially Illinois, the young offender can't even appeal to adults for a reduced sentence through good conduct, parole, or an act of God, Who supposedly suffers the children to come unto Him.

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As for rehabilitation ensuring our reform and a competent return to society, well, those posters have never existed in Illinois; It's not politically correct to suggest a 2nd chance is possible for violent offenders, even 1st Time offenders, even children. In Illinois, where the debt is heavier than a lead boat on troubled seas, all offenders go down with the ship, owing to an IDOC policy of "punish everyone equally and reward none severely;" They've relentlessly shut down profitable industries, programs, volunteer work, nonprofit donations, and every incentive for being a model prisoner. In my own case, after being forced into the adult system at age 17, I soon had to report sexual abuse by an adult predator. The result? Now I am branded with Sexual Misconduct. And although I've been incarcerated since 1995, without gang affiliation, without discipline for over 15yrs, I've yet to be taught a single trade skill, or even how to type, with the waiting lists for such few courses as exist, or the facilities where they may be found, growing longer than the line to a Star Wars premiere, and often just as fantastic a disappointment.

Then in Illinois the "Truth in Sentencing" policy appears, only strengthening the dark side of the force dominating our justice and prison system by binding the courts to an even harsher lack of discernment between juveniles sentenced as adults and adults sentenced as adults. As such, if I'd been sentenced 2 years later I'd be serving my 75yr sentence at the rate of 85-100% for good behavior, exactly like all the adults who practiced their particular criminal careers years in advance, exactly like my childhood potential for growth and rehabilitation was cancelled by one act, one crime, for my whole lifetime.

Now only a true saint would suggest that a crime is less evil when performed by a child, no matter his inexperience, and the victims are certainly no less burdened by sorrow or pain; there is no recompense on this earth for our crimes. Yet most of us will still be released, apart from sentiment, opinion or truth, so shouldn't an accounting be had in regards to the age of youthful offenders and the length of their identification as just another IDOC #? Shouldn't someone compute the difference between adult terms and juvenile terms, compounded by a criminal past, or the very lack thereof? Shouldn't someone calculate the statistics proving that long term sentences don't work, rehabilitation does, and that children grow up to become different people with an exhibition of good behavior when given the chance?

I'll be the poster child for that.