

## True Colors

I stand outside my cell door three times a day to be counted by a corrections officer. Although the process doesn't take more than 10 minutes to count the 66 offenders in the wing, it does become a scene from the movie Groundhog Day. I stare at the beige walls across from me. They are barren and depressing. The bottom border is a cool blue color that would be observed in a swimming pool. These are mood colors: shades that won't incite aggression. There is a top and bottom tier with purple steel rails lining the upper portion. Something is missing: I need hope.

I served my country proudly through two wars, many worldwide operations, disaster assistance, and the funeral honors program. I was a sailor, a soldier, and a combat medic. I received several Commendation and Achievement Medals for saving lives in combat. I employed among many coalition forces and foreign governments. One thing set me apart from all of the rest: I was an American soldier.

The wing can be a volatile setting with various races, religions, criminal cases, ages, gangs affiliations, and even what part of the state one might be from. Not everyone gets along or even associates with one another. Majority of the men have been infuriated by the justice system in one way or another and are not that patriotic. They don't see the true meaning in Freedom. Justice is not a welcome term in the prison atmosphere.

I nervously submit a proposal to the case manager requesting that the American Flag, the flag that carried me through some of the most trying times in my life, be painted across from my cell on that bleak wall I focus on three times a day for many years. The case manager



## True Colors

decides to leave it up to the wing to vote on if they want it. I pretty much know how this is going to end up: "hell no!" Even the guys that erect the flag, in front of the prison school, get heckled daily. So, the Tuesday night wing meeting arrives and my request is read to the wing. I'm prepared to accept defeat and I even have second thoughts about even requesting the emblem. The senior coordinator asks for a show of hands of all who wants this. I take in a deep breath, my heart is pounding, and I hear movement-lots of movement? I look around and there are a sea of hands all upright. A noticed a few smiles marked my way and the majority of the wing, almost the whole community, all supporting me in this endeavor. I choked. My eyes swelled with tears. I damn near broke down into full sobs. I was overwhelmed with this feeling of fellowship among these men. Men that have been discarded by society due to the mistakes that they have made. But despite the differences among these men, they came together in support of something they knew was dear to my heart. A mighty symbol to be painted that bares the stars and stripes of the country that I love and something to carry me through this difficult time in my life.

Shon Pernice #1236421