

To Whom It May Concern,

For years I wanted to share my story. Tell of my journeys, my trials and tribulations. From early on, you can say I didn't have a typical childhood. It wasn't all about play dates, and running through sprinklers without a care in the world. I was raised in a single parent household with two other siblings. It was what they call now, a dysfunctional home. We lived in severe poverty. My father was incarcerated, so we never built a strong relationship. I know that it was the lack of a strong father-figure that lead me to lash out, to rebel against authority, to misbehave. I was brought to the Clifford Beers Clinic for counseling where they diagnosed as anti-social. I am not sure what they expected. Both my parents have a criminal history. My mother was convicted of larceny and failure to appear. My father, well has a record that includes a series of bank robberies and manslaughter. They were both addicted to crack-cocaine. They weren't fit parents, and the state knew it. When I was 13, both my siblings were taken away by the Department of Children and Families. They were young, just 5 and 6-years old. Me, they left. Maybe they thought I was too far gone. I followed the path of the two worst role models a child could have. I was addicted to drugs by age 11.

I grew up in the hillside of New Haven, Connecticut. The area is known for having a vast amount of criminal activity. By 1991 I had been in and out of juvenile detention centers on charges ranging from selling cocaine to carrying a gun without a permit.

To the naked eye, it's easy to judge me and say throw away the key... lock this guy up forever. But my nature, my true nature won't allow me to give up. It won't allow me to let my past dictate my future. I want people to be aware that childhood concepts are formed from your family. My family at times described my characteristics and actions as lazy, thoughtless, clumsy and irritating. I was too young to even begin the process of analyzing what they meant... I just accepted them as true. I developed a picture of myself, whether accurate or distorted, it's what I believed as real. It was a pessimistic household.

I realize now it's always a two -edged sword to try blaming one's environment as the cause of criminal activity. We obviously want to believe in our ability to make free choices and decisions in our life. But let's face facts... it's easier for a child growing up with every advantage in the world to go on and do something with their lives, than for the kid growing up in the hood with no family support, surrounded by drugs and guns. If you go to Choate... you probably will be better off than if you grew up being educated on the hill. I dropped out of school when I was 12. I just thought it wasn't relevant to what was going on at home. I learned about Columbus... what did that have to do with my world? I would have stayed in school if they taught me how to get my father out of prison, my mother off of drugs, how to be a true older brother to my siblings. I mean, I needed to know how to keep the lights on. They don't teach you that. So I dropped out. Yet another bad decision for a youth with no guidance. By age 15 I was facing life in prison. I wasn't even the guy who committed the murder. But the law in Connecticut says that felony murder includes anyone and everyone who was involved in a robbery responsible if it turns deadly.

I want kids to know that any involvement in a crime like this can have life ending ramifications. My crime happened in 1995. I entered adult prison with my reading comprehension being at a 3rd grade level, language... 4th grade... math... 5th grade. How was I going to help myself in this situation when I didn't even know how to spell Mississippi? During the case, the judge made me an offer: a flat 10-year-sentence, or 14 years after serving 8, which would end up with me doing 6 – and a half for robbery charges only. I rejected the deal and went to trial. They gave me 45-years in prison. The trigger man got only 25 for shooting, killing, robbing and kidnapping someone.

A recent juvenile bill cut my sentence down to 27 years. I have been inside for 20. I have spent more time behind bars, than I have in the outside world. But I have not given up. I never will. While incarcerated I earned inmate status for model behavior, encouraging other inmates to change. I received my G.E.D. which taught me how to deal with discipline and focus. I completed Tier 2 which taught me how gain control of my addictions. I completed the People Empower People program which taught me how to communicate, manage conflicts and stress in my life. I completed anger management, which taught me how to channel my anger and refocus it in a positive way. I have worked in the institution kitchen where I learned about the importance of teamwork, accomplishing a job, and making good decisions. I completed the Business Education Vocational Training program where I learned keyboarding, word processing, spreadsheets, records management and accounting. I completed the Commercial Cleaning Vocational Education Program with proficiency in every subject. I received a Unified School District #1 Outstanding Achievement Award, as well as numerous offender work performance reports. (See Attached)

I have lived in a cell for 20 years. That can break a man. But as you can see, I have worked to better myself during this time. I have learned to work well with others while also being able to think for myself. I am not the same anti-social kid who DCF left in a terrible home environment. I am a strong positive person who can do great things in society.

There have been a few updates to my home life since I have been away. My sister earned her Master's in General Psychology and now is a social worker. My brother does maintenance at Job Core. My mother is no longer on drugs, and has been clean for over 18 years. She works at an outreach program and also has a job at Crossroads. Unfortunately, my father continues to live his negative lifestyle.

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