

OPEN LETTER TO MY PEERS PART-II

Over the years of my incarceration I have made many changes in my life for the good and I refuse to let anyone take that away from me. **Some** of my peers don't like the positive changes I have made; such as, not using derogatory foul language, or socializing with anyone whom I do not benefit from in a positive way. If I do go to the yard it is to exercise, help someone, or ask for help, not to hang out or around. I don't use or sell drugs, I don't use or sell alcohol, I don't juggle one for two, I don't gamble, I don't indulge in any LGBT activities , and I am not holding anyone down to do any kind of **wrong!** So **don't ask me to!** More importantly, **I mind my own business!** But that is not my issue, it's theirs.

One of the issues I do have as a facilitator is that I find myself trying to convince **some** of my peers, who call themselves **grown men**, to take the programs that are mandated by the State as a requirement to get home. In addition, I also stress the importance of participating in volunteer programs to better ourselves. We should not take programs for a certificate, or to look good in front of the parole board, because if they ask questions and we can't answer them correctly it will not look good for us.

Some of you want to argue and fight with me when I tell you that you can't teach people to do right when all they see is you doing **wrong!** You want to talk about me because I won't be your **yes-man**. You hate on me because you see in me what you don't see in **yourself!** What you don't realize is that you only see my glory, but you need to learn my story. It took a lot of pain, hardship, sacrifice, loss, tears, and struggle to get to where I am in my life right now. As I look back on my life right now that has been a major achievement for me.

I often hear **some** of my peers calling others "**bug-outs,**" when they themselves fit the true definition of a "**bug out**" more than the person they are labeling. We all have been convicted for committing some type of crime, even if some of us are innocent, though most of us are not innocent. **Some** of us are still committing crimes while in prison; such as, assaulting each other, selling and using drugs, sometimes even overdosing, losing our lives, and having to be revived by being given another drug called **Nor-can** by a nurse. **Some** of us are prone to violence, staying in trouble, going in and out of the box, or getting keep-locked. We think that this is ok until we have to go in front of the Parole Board, and answer for all the tier II and III tickets we have accumulated throughout our sentence. We sometimes expect others to go to the tier hearing to testify on our behalf, even when that person wasn't there. Yet we call others "**bug-outs**"

Unfortunately, **some** of my peers are under the illusion that a person can be incarcerated for decades and wait until he has 90 days left before he is to be released from prison to start preparing himself to go home. In a study called **“the Prison Problem”** published in the Harvard magazine in 2013 on page 5 it states that ‘the few inmates who do reintegrate without much difficulty, who are best positioned to deal with the psychological, effects of the transition, have the **“big three”** in place: **1.** They have a job lined up or find one quickly; **2.** They have housing (often with a relative or through a social-service program); **3.** They have access to health care and treatment for substance-abuse and mental-health issues as necessary. The most effective re-entry programs address these factors, and western recommends directing more Resources their way.’ One more factor that can tip the odds is a mentor, someone who works in the re-entry organization that shares your prison experience. In another article in the Amsterdam News Paper entitled **“Prison reform is needed now”** It is stated that 67% of all people released from prison will relapse into criminal behaviors within 3 years. **You don’t want to be a part of that 67%!!!**

There are **some** who have sentences with life on the back, and there are others with natural life sentences, that would do just about anything to have the life taken off of our sentences. **Some** of us have done all of the things required by the State and more, including staying out of trouble. On the Other hand, **some** are serving sentences without life on the back and have an open date. **Some** of us in all of these categories refuse to stay out of trouble, not considering the fact that our families are doing this time with us. They may even be in debt from sending us packages and money orders, not to mention the fact that they visit us every week, spending money in those vending machines, and excepting our collect phone calls.

One of the most troubling things in this environment is that **some** people don’t know how to think for themselves. **Some** join religions, organizations, gangs, and crews for protection to hide behind numbers and allow others to think for them. This is not to say that all of us do this, because, **some** of us are sincere, **but, for those who are not! Stop hiding behind numbers and learn to think for yourself because sooner or later you will be exposed for who you really are!!!**

Self appointed leaders are another issue. They are the worst kind of leaders because they lead the people without loving the people. Leadership is always for and about the people. Besides, whom are you really leading if the people did not put you there in the first place? They are not going to **follow you!** The first person that a leader must lead is **himself**, because the leader is the example for the people being lead.

Prison culture is detrimental to a human being's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual growth and development.

Mentally: because most of us already come into this negative environment with a bad mentality from growing up in our communities and never receiving the professional help that we needed.

Physically: because we develop health problems over the years of our incarceration not receiving the medical attention we need. In addition to this, because of our situation, we are limited in the type of foods we can eat.

Emotionally: because we are forced to suppress our feelings and witness abuse that takes place in here, between us and amongst the staff.

Spiritually: prison eats away at your spirit causing **some** to become hopeless and give up.

One of the things I don't understand about this environment is that while **some** of us have done away with our criminal thinking and/or working on doing away with it, **some** of us are making a conscious effort to learn criminal thinking and **become better so called criminals!**

For as long as I have been incarcerated, it is only the past 5 years that I have come to realize that **I am truly out of place in this environment!**

Some of us are not ready to go home. **Some** of us don't want to go home. **Some** of us are afraid to go home. **Some** of us simply are home!

You are not ready to go home if you have not changed your **criminal way of thinking!**

Some of us have allowed the prison experience to make us dependent and being independent is too frightening because it means that we have to now provide food, clothing, and shelter for ourselves. **Some** simply say they can't cope on the outside-that going back to prison seems comforting and familiar.

Some of us are afraid to go home and face the family member or members that we have committed crimes against. Nor have we reached out to make amends during our incarceration. In addition, we refuse to take the therapeutic programs we need to help ourselves, so that our chances of committing the same crime again will be less. When someone tries to talk to us about addressing our issues we refuse the help and shut down.

Some of us have unfortunately made prison our home by giving up hope of going home. You have a long prison sentence, but, don't ever go to the Law Library to do research to find something that will help you go home. You go to the yard every opportunity you get to indulge in negative behaviors. You stay in everyone else's business, but, refuse to **handle your own!** You are in prison for committing a crime, yet you continue to commit crimes while serving your sentence. **Wake Up! Wake Up! Wake Up!** Prison is not the place where you really want to die.

In closing, there are **some** of us who have been incarcerated for more than a decade and have made all of the fundamental changes that needed to be made mentally, physically, and emotionally to become productive members of society. These men have taken all of the programs that are required by the State for consideration of them for release. They have also elected to participate in volunteer programs and in some cases started such programs in prison. **Some** of these men are giving back to society from behind prison walls by facilitating programs, sharing their story, and mentoring the young and old who will be going back out into society. **Some** of these men have not only changed their criminal ways of thinking, but they also have helped others do the same. It is truly unfortunate that these men are still in prison when they can be a greater asset to society using the skills and experiences they have learned over the years in the outside world.

Some of these men have been to the parole board numerous times and continue to get hit with another two years. No one can change the past. We can only change ourselves and make amends with the victims of our crimes by reaching out to them through the crime victim program, and helping others not to become as we were.

I close sincerely hoping this document is beneficial.

Sincerely,

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