

## An American Epidemic

Do you remember when you were naïve enough to believe you were invincible? Now, imagine yourself as that kid and being told your whole life is being stripped from you before you've even had the opportunity to know what it feels like to live by your own rules. Are you there? Can you see it? Can you feel it?

Good!

Sadly and tragically this scenario is much more than an image cooked up by one's imagination.

America is facing a tragedy of epic proportions; an epidemic America is responsible for creating herself, within the "justice" system we are taught is supreme to all others.

At this point you may be wondering what epidemic I'm referring to...

Societies all over the United States have, either by omission or commission, made it acceptable for children to be sent to adult penal institutions. The acceptance of this form of "justice" is not only unacceptable, it's also perverse and counterproductive to the end goal - rehabilitation.

Hello! My name is Meagan Mae Adams. I was arrested at the age of 15 and charged with first degree murder. At the tender age of 16 I was certified in the Juvenile Court to stand trial as an adult. In other words, at the age of 15 I was deemed, by the Juvenile Court, mature enough to stand trial in an adult (criminal) court and faced with being sentenced to prison time in an adult penal institution. The Juvenile Court washed their hands of me. For all intents and purposes I was now an adult.

It's important to note at this time that under the laws



on the Texas books a 15 year old is not old enough to drive, smoke, drink, or have consensual sex, though by being involved in the commission of an offense, whether directly or indirectly, a 15 year old is expected to have an equal level of maturity of an adult and to face the same consequences of an adult. Do you see the doublestandard?

In August of my 16<sup>th</sup> year I was tried in an adult court, convicted of first degree murder, and in September of the same year I was sentenced to a LIFE sentence in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice; a murder my defense and I proved I was not the principle party to.

In December 2003 I was sent to the Hilltop Unit in Gatesville Tx. Nothing in my meagre 16 years of life experience prepared me for every form of abuse, extortion and manipulation I was subjected to upon reaching the unit I was to call home for the next 5 years.

Coming into the system as the youngest person in the female penal system, I was angry and terrified. I spent the first 5-6 years of my incarceration attempting to be taken seriously, so as not to be easy prey to the predators. I didn't (and still don't) understand how I was fiercely protected from delinquents of this caste one day, yet the next I was suddenly expected to know how to protect myself.

Here I sit, now a 31 year old woman, at the Lane Murray Unit in Gatesville Tx. In the past 16 years many things have become clear and many lessons have been learned. Among the things I've grown to see clearly is the fact that prison is not meant to rehabilitate. Prison is punitive at best and dysfunctionally abusive at worst. Somehow the children, like myself, have to wade through the muck and chaos of prison to figure out who we are



and how we'll rise above. Sadly, I've seen many young people lose their true essence to conform to the dysfunction of their surroundings. Amazingly, however, I've also witnessed those who, like myself, recognize the dysfunction for what it is and learn to soar. It's the second group who decide early on that we will succeed, not because of our limitations, but in spite of them.

Children, regardless of circumstance, are still kids. Vulnerable and in need of nurturing. Prison does not solve the problem... it exacerbates and perpetuates the very mentalities which landed the child in the predicament they are in. The way juvenile offenders are prosecuted is worth the reconsideration necessary to make a change.

WE ARE WORTH A SECOND LOOK!

written by:

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