

# A Peek on The Inside

There is the common predisposed outlook of Prison and Life in Prison by the Public. It becomes ingrained by the Movies and TV Shows, and its glorified by the Music and those who use Prison for "street credit." Prison is a lot of things. But I think that Prison isn't is fun. This is a system meant to reform, but designed to destruct. And the worst part is that its self-perpetual. To the unfortunate individual who find themselves in this system, we come to realize that its nothing like we thought it would be.

When you first come through the door of Prison, you are approached by other prisoners. There is 3 questions that you are asked: 1) Whats your Name? Where are you from? And what organization are you apart of (Blood, Crips, G, Muslim, etc.)? From these 3 simple questions, your time in Prison will be shaped. When I first came to Prison I was 18 with a mandatory 4 year Prison sentence. I had heard stories, but none could truly prepare me for the mental, physical, and emotional stress that awaited. Now don't get me wrong, there are some positive things about this system that I will explain later. But for now, please try to follow me.

The average age of people coming to Prison is 18-30. This is the age of what sociologists called "transitional adulthood." We are young and many try to extend their youth by never "growing up." Growing older is something that's inevitable, but growing-up is optional. So when one has grown older in this system, you must understand that the examples that is set to follow was set by young men with no real sense of direction. There is the common mentality amongst prisoners that emotions are a weakness, kindness is a weakness, and violence is normal. Anything considered weak can't be allowed. Now remember, this example is set by the youthful mind. As a young man with twice as much Prison time to serve as he has lived, I am angry at the world. So this example is willingly accepted. I am tough, and I have to make my presence known, my name respected, and my anger felt. There is a thing called "heart check." This is when one or more prisoners approach the "new guy" and start a confrontation. If you let this go, your stay will be very hard because you will not have the one most important thing earned back behind these Prison walls, respect. My heart check came within my first

45 minutes. I did what was necessary. I'm not praising the violence. But this is the life we live. The environment and conditions of the prison system builds resentment. You first hate your conditions. Then you hate your society for allowing such conditions. And finally you start to hate yourself for falling victim. And the man who hates himself has no interest in reforming himself. In the South Carolina Department of Corrections ("SCDC") rehabilitation is not a priority. It's all about custody & control.

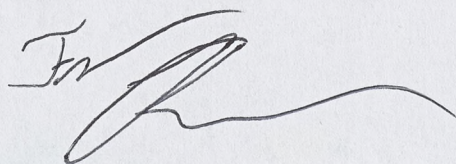
Picture this for a second. You're sitting in an 8'x12" cell. Your windows are covered, so no hope of seeing outside. You are alone. When the officer approaches your cell, he is hostile and unnecessarily aggressive. The smells are of bad hygiene, decay, and mold. The sounds are like a workshop. Metal on metal, scraping, banging, yelling, etc. Your walls are covered with writings, mases, old food, and other unmentionables. The air is cold and still. When the food arrives, it looks like Alpo can dog food. It smells on the verge of being spoiled. And it tastes like warm flesh. No distinguishable flavor. Just flesh. You're provoked by staff. Treated worse than most people treat their animals. You can hear rats in the walls and it's normal to see roaches, ants, and other bugs crawling.

We fight over everything. The wrong look or words can start a fight just as fast as a .50¢ piece of candy. Most have hatred on their minds, so it's no love, no games. Trying to do the right thing is so hard, because the staff imposes so many obstacles for the prisoner who wants to better himself. It's nothing to hear an officer say something like "you don't deserve nothing," or "we waste our tax money on you, for what? You are not meant to be in society." Don't we all make mistakes? Are we really unredeemable? Once my mom asked me, "Fred, why are you so aggressive?" I told her, "Mom, that's the only way I can survive."

Many can not and never will understand the mind & life of a prisoner. Being one myself, I can barely understand it. But prison ~~is~~ causes more scars and injuries than can be seen by the eye. It also has its psychological effects. Many come to prison and lose hope. Seeing incarceration is more than physical. It's also a mind state.

The scars that come from these human warehouses known as Correctional institutional places such as SCDC can't be covered by Garments and Make-up. It's something that neither words nor money can fix. If you take a baby and put him in a room and within that room is everything that is needed to survive, without any outside influences, he will live and grow physically in that room. He will never know anything outside of that world in which he was placed. Why did I use a baby as an example? Because most of us were young when we first came to prison. If taken in the same sense as the baby, the prisoner has the same result: Mankind has the ability to adapt to their environment. Some of the mental effects that come with living in these conditions are Depression, Lack of self worth, Rage, anxiety, Paranoia, homosexuality, and other disorders. When a man is taken captive at 18 and released at 58, his face will tell a story of preservation. But the eyes will tell the story of long days and stress filled nights. Malnutrition, fears, anger, and constant danger. The things I've seen, people make movies about. I've seen men cut and harm themselves committing suicide. I've even attempted it myself. I've seen murders over words. Enough blood to give anyone nightmares. As I explain my daily life, you may ask yourself, why is this story so often mistold and glorified? It's because if the public really knew our daily life, it would be a cry for reform, same as it is now.

As I said earlier, everything about prison isn't bad. It's not fun. But it's not all bad. The free time on your hands can be used to find yourself. I used this time to study and do some deep thinking and reflecting. Prison also teaches to value the simple things in life. You learn how to survive. It's a saying, "we have done so much, with so little, for so long, that now we are qualified to do almost anything with nothing at all." We all teach each other. Once you're accepted, it's like being family. Sure, we still fight at times, but you have a sense of belonging. For many, it's the only family we have.



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