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The following essay submission is actually several excerpts that were included in a letter I recently wrote to an old friend of mine. The topics raised within it seem to fit the criteria that suits the purpose of this archive so I've determined that they might be worth documenting. I hope this information is beneficial to others who are able to use empathy to understand alternative perspectives and identify controversial areas that could be improved upon more efficiently.

"I hope this letter finds you in happy, healthy, and festive spirits. My family came to visit me again last week. It seems like things got off to a rather bumpy and frustrating start though because it sounds like they had to wait for nearly 90 minutes before I was called to the visiting area. I am not exactly sure what happened regarding the actual complications, but I suspect that there was a miscommunication of some kind involving the correctional officer's on my housing block. My family said that they arrived around 10 AM, but my cell door wasn't opened nor was I called out until around 10:55 AM. Furthermore, I was instructed to report to "assessment" which is similar to a doctor or dentist line movement. Needless to say, when I arrived there they had absolutely no idea what I was there for. The officer at the assessment desk called back over to my housing block and they eventually sorted it out somehow. I'm certainly much more understanding about it than my family was it seems. Obviously and unfortunately, my toddler has an impulsive nature like my own with an identical lack of patience. We did still have a great time playing together for a few hours and all things considered, I am grateful to have been able to see them all again. This was my 'Christmas present' and, although I wish things were different, I couldn't have asked for a better gift. My kid is SO smart, adorable, and hilarious! I constantly miss my family and I think about them all the time. It's hard to believe that it's been just over a year since court orders finally resulted in us being able to spend time together with our mutual and best interests in mind. Once upon a nightmare, I never thought I'd see that day and, although I'm still paying the price for when I was overwhelmed by the ineffable hopelessness that originated from that prolonged and painful period of separation, I am glad that things are getting a little better as every day that passes gets us a little closer

to being able to put these terribly dark chapters in their place permanently. I STILL haven't cut my hair in accordance with the oath I made when I realized what was happening back in the late summer of 2017. I swore that I'd keep growing it out until the nightmare ended by any means necessary. Unfortunately, I ended up getting into some trouble in 2018 that led to my current incarceration. I was such a psychological disaster at the time and I honestly didn't know if I'd survive long enough to face the consequences of my actions. A very serious and rather extreme sequence of events transpired in late 2018 (well after my charges were pending but before I was officially sentenced in relation to them). As crazy as it sounds, I've since come to the conclusion that the "universal/omnipotent powers that be" knew that it was the ONLY way to bring me back from the brinks of insanity and absolute oblivion. Through a surge of adrenaline and the desperate sensation of urgency, I FORCED myself to CREATE hope from the despair that dominated my life at this time. I have no idea where this energetic wave of clarity and adamant determination originated from, but I do know WHY it came and I compulsively took drastic action right away. In the end, the courts got involved with the dramatic sequence of events that unfolded and actually generated a favorable outcome for me and my family. Unfortunately, I still had the open charges pending and I eventually realized that I was going to end up doing some time as a result of them. I also knew that the state DOC system was probably going to produce more favorable conditions as opposed to any heavily flawed county system for me personally. I considered the boot camp option as a part of that conclusion but, after I weighed out the pros and cons, I ended up inevitably deciding that a path centered on treatment would probably be more beneficial for me in the end. My current disposition is currently undetermined as I am presumably on a waiting list for one of the aforementioned treatment programs. The boot camp program probably would have resulted in me going home sooner since it's a 6 month program with automatic parole being granted upon completion, but there was also a waiting period for that program, so I decided to pursue an option that was more cognitively based instead of physically based. I did realize and

accept the fact that if I went with the boot camp path, they probably would have made me cut all of my hair off as a stipulation of the program, but I told myself that it was a reasonable factor worth altering my path for. Obviously, boot camp wasn't meant to be so I still have a full head of hair. It's a reminder and a visual representation of the time spent paying a tab of indescribable misery that I never initially, consciously, or willingly charged myself. I'd never wish it upon anyone else either, I'll refrain from going into detail further with the intention of preserving the peace that has since been established (but it will be nice to get a haircut as soon as I get home again someday!)

This past Friday marked the halfway to my minimum sentence point. Obviously, that doesn't totally apply to The PA DOC's "standard operating procedures", but it's still something to look forward to. I really WANT to get into this treatment program (a specific kind of therapeutic community) and then hopefully still be able to focus on using any "extra" time here as constructively as possible. I expressed this as politely and assertively as possible to two (2) individuals that I've heard are somehow the ones to address about it. I've included verbatim copies of these messages/"requests" with this letter for your review. Do you think they sound too much like "begging" because that's really NOT what I was trying to achieve here... In fact, I'm fairly confident that The DOC handbook actually directly addresses the specific subject of "begging for enrollment into treatment programs" and exclusively prohibits it. Therefore, I made sure that I did NOT directly ask for enrollment... I basically asked IF I could ask about enrollment... You'll see what I mean. I just wanted to let them know that, if possible, I have bigger ambitions than many others they'll likely encounter and that I'm able, willing, and interested in pursuing them if I am granted the opportunity to do so. If I happen to be enrolled into the O.V.D.T.C. treatment program soon, I COULD theoretically - still have enough time to also pursue additional educational courses making the time spent here significantly more efficient and effective. From a more "extrinsic"/"empathic" perspective, I just kind of figured making the most of this experience really SHOULDNT be optional

especially since the taxpayers are investing approximately \$40,000.00 a year for me to be confined here for the purpose of undergoing rehabilitation efforts. There are quite a few "IF'S" associated with this being potentially feasible and if there's one thing that's a cold, hard fact about The DOC, it's that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Even if this doesn't work out, I have several alternative contingency plans that will all have beneficial results. I've compiled a rather impressive list of useful activities, routines, and practices that I can utilize in here AND when I return home again someday. I've done this all upon my own free will thus far with an awareness that "winging it" will not work. I actually do rather well with structure (when I want it to work / don't want to destroy it) and now that I have the obligation, responsibility, and joy of being a father to my child, I'll do whatever it takes to provide the best life that I can for us (and to do that, I've got to be the very BEST version of myself). Anyway, I've separated the list I created into 3 sub-categories of physical, mental, and spiritual well being and I have been actively working on each aspect for several months now. Some are producing productive results faster than others, but my rates of growth are all progressing and balancing out fairly well with each other so far. Re-conditioning definitely takes time and the volition to remain committed to it on a daily basis. I obviously still experience a certain degree of anxiety about things I can not currently control (such as getting a job, saving money, transportation needs, getting a place suitable for my child and I, etc...), but before I can even think about devoting my energy into focussing on those areas, I need to slow things down and do what I need to do on this side of the fence first and foremost. The resiliency of my natural instincts to better myself truly is an amazing feat that sustains my hope for the future. I won't say that I'm happy to be here, but I will say that I'm happy to NOT be where I once was on the path of life not so long ago. By the way, this perspective was one of the primary points I extracted from the book "The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F*ck" by Mark Manson. I mean I probably would have had the same sentiment no matter what, but that little book really made things more centralized for me personally. It's a great point of reference with many excellent spoonfuls of practical wisdom having been collected and conveyed in a very convenient, retrievable

manner. Long story short, I'm trying to say 'Thank You' for purchasing it and having it sent to me. For a "self help" themed book, it's truly rather awesome and impressive to say the least. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to examine certain fundamentals of their own personality in order to generate more stable foundations to build upon. It REALLY is that great!"

Submitted by "Merlin DuFrein" on 12-25-2019