

There truly are some very helpful courses and inspiring groups offered here at SCI Camp Hill that will aid in shaping the future for me personally. I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the ones that I've obtained beneficial knowledge from and produced coping skills through thus far. I've only had the ability to attend a fraction of the courses and groups that exist here and neither of them are considered to be "treatment programs" that are mandated by The DOC and/or The PBPP. For me, these are both voluntary groups that I've applied myself to and honestly learned a significant amount of useful information from. I realize that the value and integrity of excellent instructors are key components to the efficiency of what I'm able to extract from the curriculum. This factor is mutually apparent despite the fact that these "class sessions" are based upon 2 completely independent and different operation methods. The 2 specific courses I've attended are named "The Pathways To Success" and "Day of Responsibility". The 'P2S' is a curriculum based class that focuses on identifying personal interests, strengths, weaknesses, developing skills, researching potential occupational choices, balancing lifestyles, assessing decisions via critical thinking after reviewing enhanced data, and establishing detailed, realistic, and systematic plans to live a healthy life upon release from custody. The "DOR" model resembles more of a "support group" approach with more open forums for discussion with speakers and feedback from others being the primary set of tools used after a topic for discussion or sharing is explained to the group. There are often several parts to a centralized topic. For example, the following is a series of questions that composes one topic for a group session. "#1=What is my pain? #2=Have I reached my limit in relation to it? #3=What positivity can be gained from the pain endured?" The group members usually sit in a circle formation and take turns sharing their own personal perspectives in relation to the topic, however, verbally participating is not mandatory for those (like myself) who aren't inherently comfortable sharing personal information in the presence of strangers or for those who choose to only listen to the insight others are willing to provide. I actually wanted to speak in the last session I attended,

but I became too overwhelmed, anxious, and unable to keep myself mentally composed while the circle grew smaller as it made its way toward me. It seems that I'm just not quite ready to verbally share in front of large groups of people I'm not personally familiar with yet. Fortunately for me, I remember many of the thoughts I found myself pondering about as I reflected upon the questions asked and I know of one method of sharing that eliminates the anxiety/lack of security I feel when I find myself as the physical center of attention - writing. The following is what I wanted to say in the group session that correlated its topic of discussion with the 3 aforementioned questions. These are literally most of the thoughts that I found myself contemplating about and achieving growth through as I sat there in silence.

I like to stand when I speak but speaking in front of others is a rare event for me any more. That being said, when I do choose to speak, I try to make sure that what I'm saying is worth hearing. Today's topic hits very close to home for me personally and I'd like to share my input in relation to it after taking the time to say Thank You to everyone else who has spoken before me. I heard many perspectives that I can relate to and inspiration isn't always as effective as it used to be for me any more. I respect you guys for helping me to get upon that motivation through your testimonies today. Here's my take on the matter. What is my pain? In short, it's being separated from my daughter and constantly not knowing if she's safe out there in the free world. Anxiety, worry, and fear are 3 words that describe this kind of pain and what's worse is the helpless feeling of not being able to do anything about it. I am always concerned that my daughter will end up in harm's way as a result of negligence and/or ignorance and I feel like a failure for being where I am today. My daughter deserves better and that's what I'm building with my time here until I can return home again. Have I reached my limit? Well, I'm at my limit today. I believe in daily highs and lows as opposed to an "overall limit" and this range generally seems to fluctuate depending on the conditions and circumstances of my life at any given moment. I can say that I've found a significant amount of progress in being able to identify these highs and lows through writing daily. It helps me to reflect upon each day and prevents emotions or unaddressed negativity from piling up in the back of my

mind, what positivity can be extracted from the pain endured? This can be difficult for me to put into words at times so I guess I should start by confronting my pessimistic attitude. I usually have to remind myself that being "less negative" directs me in a more positive direction which is where I need to sow the seeds of optimism. In this case, I am reminded of a quote I heard some time ago that says "Gratitude comes from a place in your soul that knows the story could have ended up differently." I was a walking path of psychological destruction out there when I caught the charges that led me back to The DOC. I was consistently into all kinds of madness for about a year straight and, as I sit here today, I find myself facing several epiphanies. The first is in relation to human nature as a whole and the realization that if EVERYONE was caught for EVERYTHING they've EVER done wrong, no matter how petty each instance might independently seem to be, then it would add up to EVERYONE doing a life sentence - myself included. I am only here for what I was CAUGHT doing and I deserve far worse than I received. All things considered, my soul knows that the story could have ended up differently so I am extremely grateful to be here in the first place. I'm sure that I'll be able to refine much more positivity from my pain in the future as lessons are learned, events transpire, and developments are made but, for now, I am satisfied with the growth that I've established. Thanks for listening.

Although I wasn't able to share that particular speech with anyone in person, writing it down is still an excellent form of practice for me. My confidence will eventually grow as I continue familiarizing myself with the group and its functions accordingly. If nothing else, at least I have another point to reflect upon that strengthens my cognitive awareness of the mistakes I've made. As the topics change, my focus will become diversified which will broaden my ability to repair damaged patterns of thinking that have been problematic for me in certain situations in the past. The "P25" course has helped me to develop dramatically better plans for when I'm eventually released into society again someday so, between just these 2 activities, I've managed to apply myself and found an exceptional amount of hope for the future. I realize how fortunate

I am to have access to these resources and the guidance of very professional instructors who treat everyone with respect as long as they are acting responsibly. There are many other places in the world where none of these opportunities exist and those found in them are probably subjected to very unpleasant circumstances that result in traumatic condemnation instead of any measure of rehabilitation. I will not take this for granted.

Education comes in many forms for each one of us and, although time only flows in one direction on the river of life, WE get to decide if we're growing or dying along the way. I've wasted far too much of this life for far too long and I want to make the most of whatever's left of it while I'm still capable of choosing which way I want to paddle. I don't know exactly what awaits out there for me, but I'm currently charting a course that will lead me to a better destination. I've been blindly treading dangerously turbulent waters while lost and drowning and it seems that the universe has decided to throw me a life-preserver (pun TOTALLY intended). Many aren't given this chance to recover and I refuse to let my arrogance cheat me out of a life worth living any longer. I know the odds are not in my favor, but I'm choosing to make them irrelevant. If it's a matter of 'sink or swim', I'm going to keep kicking either way for as long as I possibly can. The improbable was once deemed as impossible and, no matter how difficult things are for me going forward, I intend to do some serious living along the way. I'll conclude this essay with 3 profoundly provocative concepts that are directly correlated. The first 2 are ideas that inspired my own poetic version that became the 3RD. If to learn is to change then education equals evolution. With that being said, "The wisest of people didn't get to be that way by having all of the answers - they got that way by asking all of the questions." Therefore, "I don't know what else to say to you,
Producing answers is not my task;
I'd rather tell you about the questions,
That you don't know you're supposed to ask."

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