

Misconceptions of Prison

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CHAPTER ONE

Common Misconceptions

When you think of prison you envision orange jumpers, steel bars, gangs, and bread and water for every meal. That is the average law-abiding citizens' perception of prison. However, over the years prison has evolved into a multibillion-dollar industry. One thing about prisons is that they will never close and they will never stop accepting prisoners. Therefore, the prison industry will always be booming. Since the average civilian has a misconception of prison they are terrified to ever go. I would like to clarify some of those misconceptions. Everybody in here claims that they were somebody important in society. Or as they like to say, "that nigga", "boss hog", or "the one". In actuality, they were a dope fiend, alcoholic, drug addict, sexual predator or straight-up thief. Some people were making moves and doing what they say they were, but that's a fairly small percentage of folks. The thing about prison is that you could have been the biggest, dirtiest, broke, stealing, crack-smoking, heroin shooting homeless individual on the street, or a straight-up nobody out there in society with nothing to your name but a drug habit. I mean the biggest catastrophic disappointment to your whole family. You could have been the very definition of a loser. In prison that person is now looked at as a Legionnaire, a savage, and even a mentor to some. I say that because he is most likely a high-ranking gang member due to the years of being in the gang and "putting in work". In some cases, his fellow gang members are his only family.

In the state of Maryland, you get a whole lot of privileges. For example, you can own a big variety of appliances. You can own a television, an Xbox 360, an mp3 player, a radio, a typewriter, books, and subscriptions to magazines. The list goes on. Of course, I enjoy the privileges within these walls however, there is a flipside to that. Maryland is a state that has abolished the death penalty. You could have a family member raped or murdered and the worst that could happen to the assailant is life in prison. Their attacker then comes to prison and lives better than they did on the streets. They get to watch tv, eat three free meals a day, and play Xbox. You can decide for yourself whether it is fair or not.

Of course, there are also multiple forms of suffering that my fellow prisoners and I are subjected to such as financial, psychological, emotional, and physical. You never know what is

going in a person's mind or when something is going to happen in prison. You always have to be on point. Anything can happen at any given moment so it's important to remain aware and alert at all times.

The justice system can help you or hurt you. In most cases, it is going to hurt. It is especially unfair to the African American community, but I'll get into that later. One thing I will get into is the topic of snitching. It is critical that you learn and understand the principle behind it because snitching and the justice system go hand in hand. When you get arrested the first thing they tell you is "you have the right to remain silent". Then you get to the police station and they put you in an interrogation room and say, "tell me everything and you can walk out that door right now". At that moment, the only version of events that matters is yours. You could have been involved in a high-level case such as kidnapping, rape, or murder. However, the state's attorney can offer you 100% immunity if you testify a.k.a 'snitch'. It isn't fair or just or right, but to each his own. There is a somewhat understandable situation wherein one can possibly justify snitching. That is if someone commits a crime while you are with them and you have no idea and you get locked up for it. It is somewhat justifiable, but most convicts won't see it that way. The lesson to be learned is that if someone will tell on a friend or whoever then they will tell on you.

CHAPTER TWO

Pros and a Multitude of Cons

The number of incarcerated men in the United States is appalling. They have the highest incarceration rate in the world. The constitution was established for the sole purpose of rights, justice, and posterity for all. I believe that the constitution is contradictory and needs to be rewritten. I say this because there is so much ambiguity involved. It is sad because America is referred to as the "Land of the Free", yet we have a history of slavery. It's crazy that the 13th amendment abolished slavery and yet it has been reincarnated in other forms. Incarceration is a form of neo-slavery, especially for those with minor offenses and those who were just trying to protect their families.

They always say, "you do the crime, you do the time". That is an unfair and untrue statement. Firstly, you have people who commit crimes and are never prosecuted because they are either extremely wealthy or they're the beneficiary of white privilege. An extremely wealthy individual who catches a charge has the option to settle out of court with a fine or cutting a settlement check to the victim. In addition, the charges are dropped after the money is paid and it's as if the crime never occurred. From the "white privilege" aspect of it, a white man and a black man could be arrested for the same crime, yet the black man would get the more severe sentencing. For instance, a black man may get jail time while his white counterpart only received probation. Another reason that saying doesn't hold is because of the individuals here who suffer from severe mental illness and who are acting on impulse and inducement.

While prison certainly isn't a place anyone wants to be, I have identified a few pros to go along with the multitude of cons. You're probably thinking that I am crazy for saying that but allow me to elaborate. You get three meals a day free of charge. Now, are these meals meeting your daily nutritional needs of any nutritional value? Put it this way, they feed you enough to keep you alive. They usually give you 3 slices of bread with every meal. I can only speak to the Maryland Dept. of Corrections. If you are diabetic, have high cholesterol, or have food allergies they do what they can to accommodate you. However, we get the lowest grade meat available to man. Once again, I'd just like to reiterate -- 3 *free* meals a day. Another thing is you get free room and board, electricity, and basic clothing. Utilities paid in advance for free, how great is

that? Lastly, if you are an avid reader you have access to books from the library free of charge along with a legal library. Now the selection of materials they have is limited but something is better than nothing. Your cell can be a womb or a tomb. You can find yourself born anew in prison -- mentally, physically, and spiritually. Or it can be a tomb in which you slowly die both inside and out as you are mentally, physically, and spiritually drained.

As far as incarceration goes there is so much that you must endure. You must deal with an abundance of idiosyncrasies. You must accept the fact that you have obligations that will not be to your liking. You also have to deal with gang members and individuals who care not for the consequences of their actions. There are few things more dangerous than a man with no cares in this world. You have to adjust to your environment and all that comes with it. You have individuals who are institutionalized and just want to be isolated in their cell with no interactions whatsoever. You got sex offenders who have serious issues and chronic masturbators who cannot control themselves whenever a female nurse, officer, or caseworker happens to pass by. Pretty disgusting, right? Just you wait. You have people that call themselves grown men and yet they defecate in the showers just to make people mad and have someone come clean up behind them. You have people in here who prey on the weak simply because they have burned all their bridges on the outside and that is the only way they can get by.

One of the most dehumanizing and humiliating parts of prison is that we are forced to endure strip searches. You are defiled and degraded every single time. We are made to strip naked, separate our penis from our scrotum, turn around and spread our cheeks, and drop and squat. When you're suspected of our more serious matter you are required to bend over at the waist and have your anus analyzed. It is the protocol to strip search whenever an inmate is being transported from one prison to another. It is also necessary before being transported to a hospital or court. Lastly, it is performed when your cell is being searched for any contraband. It is against the law to perform strips as an act of punishment, yet they are a routine part of prison life.

As the final piece to follow up all that I have described to you about the hardships of prison life I present to you the 'cellmate'. Now, it is extremely hard to live in a cell with a cellmate that you don't see eye to eye with or have nothing in common with. You have to be on the same page and schedule. Meaning you are awake when he's awake and asleep when he's asleep. I say this because you must remember that a cell is not a room at the Hilton. You are in close quarters, so any movement is loud and you're constantly bumping into, jumping over, and

moving things. All of which makes a lot of noise. Another thing is the light in the cell. You may be trying to read while your cellmate is asleep and turning the light on will wake him up. That is a big issue. It is best to be on the same schedule to make life easier for each other.

However, these little things aren't the real issue when it comes to cellmates. No, the real problems come into play in the form of idiosyncrasies. I am going to use my current situation as an example. My current cell buddy chews with his mouth open and smacks so loud that you want to smack him. He burps after he takes a drink of anything; be it water, juice, or coffee. In the months we've been cellmates he has never once drunk anything remotely carbonated and yet he burps 50-60 times a day. No exaggeration. This is every day. It annoys me to the point I want to perform gastric surgery on him so he can only hold an infinitesimal amount of liquid inside him. It is agitating, aggravating, and vexatious. The fatuous thing he does is work out (cardio, calisthenics, endurance training) after he gets in the shower. Yes, you read that right, *after* showering. That goes back to me saying you have to deal with an abundance of idiosyncrasies. Do I tolerate it? Yes. Why? Well, what choice do I have really; it could always be worse. In conclusion, you have to stay strong. Never compromise your values or principles to please or accommodate another person's beliefs. Be your own man!

CHAPTER THREE

Prison Etiquette

Believe it or not, but some inmates have manners. They most likely learned by force or got accustomed to them by associating with the "old heads". However, there's a small percentage of the inmate population who have had these manners ingrained in them since childhood. My mother instilled them in me. She taught me to always remain humble, she was always emphasizing modesty above all else. Her lessons molded me and since then I have never been the type to enjoy confrontation. I prefer to avoid all trouble, issues, and gossip. There are very few people in prison who were raised the same way. Most of the people in prison are loud, obnoxious, and just plain rude for no reason at all. So as far as prison manners, I am speaking of the bare minimum. As in moving out of the way for you to pass, helping you with a door on occasion, and passing back a basketball that has gone out of bounds.

As far as please and thank you or anything related to that, it is far too complex for them. Break wind, no "excuse me". When you're in a cell it's either you or your cellmate; there are no other culprits so you must excuse yourself. In the cell, there are so many things that require using proper mannerisms. Let's start with the bunk situation. There are two bunk options: top or bottom. If you are on the top bunk, try not to let your feet hang down over the sides of the bunk. I mention this because of course no one wants to smell feet, but it also has the added bonus of obstructing the view from the bottom bunk. Not that there's much to look at but it's still polite. Furthermore, if you have dirty socks then the dirt could get in the bottom bunkmate's face or in his bed or food if he is eating. You also can't be getting up a whole lot in the middle of the night because small quarters mean your bunkmate is also getting woken up by the noise each time you do.

Next, there's sink and toilet etiquette. Always clean the sink after shaving or washing up. That is an absolute must. Another thing is that you are to never spit in the sink under any circumstances; spit everything into the toilet. When brushing your teeth spit all your toothpaste into the toilet and make sure to clean up after yourself. Now onto the toilet, or "the bullet" as we like to call it. Mind you that everything I speak of is about men's prison. As I was saying, "the bullet", please make sure that it is clean at all times. With that being said, make sure that you are

flushing as you micturate. There are two main reasons as to why this is so important. The first reason is that nobody wants to hear another man urinate. The second reason is that it stops the urine from splashing on the toilet seat or yourself or the ground. The same goes for when you defecate. It's commonly referred to as the courtesy flush. Lastly, always be sure to wash your hands. You'd be appalled at the number of people who don't.

Moving on from toiletries, there are other ways in which you can uphold your manners. Such as when it comes to entertainment. If you have a television and your cellmate does not, the respectful thing to do is to position it so that you can both view it comfortably. If he does happen to have one, then the right thing to do is use headphones so you can both hear. When it comes to entertainment you have to be the bigger man. If you have a tv and your cellmates trying to sleep then be polite and play the volume as low as possible. If he has a job that requires him to be up early in the morning, then be considerate and try not to watch too much tv late in the night. You must be cautious of the noise in the cell because you have to realize that when you add up all the little things they can lead to a lot of friction within your cell. Ultimately, you never know what the next man is thinking. You should just keep everything cordial. I usually try to keep it cool by setting rules from the start so we both already know it is. You can't go wrong when you have a set of mutual rules to follow.

On top of that, there is the window. It may be cold out and you don't want the window open but your cellmate does or vice versa. You have to compromise and find a way to work it out. Same with the light from the sun. You may want it dark and your celly wants to let in all of the sunlight and you have to work it out so that both parties are in agreement on the outcome. Another thing is cleaning up the cell. You are supposed to keep it together, nice and tidy. You should alternate between who cleans every week or every day or however you establish it. Keep your laundry clean, smelling good, and put away. Along with that comes personal hygiene. It is important to shower daily and keep your laundry clean. Don't have your towels smelling all musty. Try to keep your dirty clothes to a minimal amount. When it comes to food if your cellmate doesn't have anything then break bread. Keep your dishes clean. If you spill a beverage or drop some food make sure that you clean it up immediately.

Now onto the more serious aspects of prison etiquette. We all know that prison is not a joke and that we are talking about convicted killers, rapists, and kidnappers. Assaults and stabbings happen regularly. You have to be alert at all times. If someone or a group of people

come into your cell looking for your cellmate, they don't care if you have anything to do with it or not. Most of the time they try to get them alone but if you happen to be there, how are you supposed to deal with this situation? Honestly, it depends. First and foremost, in these situations, you are supposed to side with your cellmate and protect yourself and your belongings. However, that all depends on what kind of rapport you have with him, to begin with. Some things to consider are: What gang is after him? What are they after him for? What is he locked up for? There is a huge list of questions to ask before you go jumping to his defense. Although most people will act on instinct, it's best to protect yourself and your belongings before anything else.

Lastly, when it comes to contraband (weapons, drugs, cell phones, etc.) there are things to consider when being shaken down by the officers or prison guards. When contraband is found in the cell there are a multitude of ways it could go depending on the answers to the following questions. Were you and your cellmate sharing the contraband? Who was the sole owner? Do you both take the charge? Or do you have a prior arrangement on who was to take the charge? Whose fault was it that the items got found? What are the consequences? These are just some of the things that you have to consider and plan for. Just remember that it is critical to mind your business and stay out of the way.

CHAPTER FOUR

For Better or Worse

I used to think that prison was essentially a school for felons. Everybody got a story about how they got locked up and what they would do differently next time. Or if only they did it this way then they wouldn't have gotten caught. At the end of the day, you are learning a new crime to commit along with a way to perfect it. Then you tell them about your crimes, your methods, and your techniques. You are letting them know ways to break laws with immaculate execution. For real. You trade your skills with other inmates. You let them in on valuable information regarding your line of work.

When it comes to illegal activity drug addicts are without a doubt the most creative, artistic, and innovative. Why is that? It is because they will do whatever it takes, by any means necessary, to receive their next high. In addition to that, they will do anything to not go through withdrawal. From digging through trash at a Walmart until they find a receipt with an expensive enough item which they then steal from that Walmart. Then they will go to another Walmart to return it with the stolen receipt. How do I know this? I've done it. I learned from a former acquaintance of mine, trust me when I say it works. Another thing I learned from a drug addict is to stuff tissue paper in the change dispenser of a vending machine so that when people buy something their change doesn't come out and they assume it's broken. Then come back later and collect the money. All you have to do is light the tissue on fire; it burns instantly, and the change comes pouring out. It's not much but it adds up. I used to do it as a kid to buy weed. My point is that you don't have to commit acts of violence to get money to get high.

In prison, you learn so much from people, some good, most bad. Some people did what they felt was necessary to provide for their family. Some were just at the wrong place at the wrong time. Then you got some who were born into crime families and they just fell in line. It's sad when you meet someone who was born into poverty, or in the projects, without an education. I feel for them, but they need to stop thinking it's cool. There is nothing cool about being born into a life with a single mother on welfare with 5+ kids surviving on food stamps and WIC checks. I respect the struggle, but it shouldn't be worn like a badge of honor.

I never understood why people in prison always base a person's intellect on where they're from. Everyone in here is so caught up in stereotypes that they don't even give each other a chance. It doesn't matter where you're from it matters where you're going. Get out of the hood first, then come back and uplift others. Do what you got to do. If possible, get out of prison. You know everyone isn't going home. There are people here with life and no parole. Some of them fell victim to self-defense killings, others committed crimes of passion. In most cases, it boils down to someone trying to defend themselves, their reputation, their hood, or just revenge. Some are just natural born killers. No cut cards, they probably woke up on that fateful day and thought "someone gotta die today". Others still just can't control their temper.

The crazy thing is that the same person that committed murder could be the main one in prison getting beat up, robbed, and stabbed. Really though, you can be anything you want in society, yet you come to prison and become a punk, pushover, and peon. The fact is that you don't know a real gangster until you get to prison and see him in action. Some people are just regular folks that got caught up doing something they had no business doing. You have to think before you act though because 30 seconds of foolishness could get you 30 years.

Some people have committed heinous, grizzly, and perverted crimes. Most of them are in protective custody, but not all. They are sick and they make me sick: preying on innocent little kids and distributing child pornography. Yet some of the correctional officers will cater to these sickos and let them do whatever they like. It is unfair. They commit these disgusting heinous crimes, get their time, and go straight to protective custody. In my opinion, protective custody should be off-limits to sex offenders. They think it's cool and okay to take advantage of and rape young kids. They sodomize and photograph children and get round the clock protection in prison. Who was there to protect the children or victims they violated? No one. Yet they get to as they please in here. Another point of contention I have is with the amount of time they are sentenced. It makes me sick to my stomach that they are sentenced to less time than the rest of us. They finish their sentences just to return to society and re-offend again and again.

For better or worse, prison changes people. In a lot of ways, it is like a school. You learn a lot of lessons. The biggest lesson that I have learned is that time is valuable. Seriously. I do so much in a day that I find myself wishing there were more than 24 hours in a day. I try to set timelines and deadlines for my everyday tasks. Organization is an essential skill in prison. When you begin to organize and plan your time you realize that things go a lot smoother. I recently

started weekly and monthly tasks. A routine and schedule are excellent ways to create and maintain stability in your life. Another lesson I learned is that everything isn't for everybody. It's best to just be yourself. Don't alter or amend your morals or principles to please anyone. Be real. Stay true.

CHAPTER FIVE

Infractions and Grievances

Prison protocol never ceases to amaze me. The ambiguity is so bountiful that they get away with so much. While basic protocols are mandatory the correctional officers only follow them when it benefits them. They blatantly disrespect us, prisoners, time and time again with no remorse or consequence. As far as prisoner politics go, there is so much misconduct involved and with prisoners having no regard for each other's feelings the officers feel they can do the same. It is unfortunate because instead of us uplifting each other and presenting a united front against the officers it is us versus each other versus them. A lot of things go on behind the scenes too, such as "bootlicking", "brown-nosing", and "uncle tomin".

Let's say that you have 40 years. In the state of Maryland, that sentence will land you in a medium-security prison. You've just arrived at prison and have yet to put even a small dent in those 40 years. So you come to prison and you're on a medium compound. Whenever you receive multiple category 100 infractions your security risk level is raised. For instance, a person with a one-year sentence who would've been placed in a minimum-security compound can get multiple infractions within the last few days of his time get transferred to a medium-security compound. So now you with your 40-year sentence are placed in a cell with someone who has a few days left in lockup. With only a few days left they don't care about causing trouble. They're disrespecting officers and drawing attention to your cell. You have 40 years and don't want any trouble, so you beg him to chill out. He refuses. He states, "I don't care, I'm about to go home. I leave any day. Make me chill out." Constantly and casually disrespecting you without a care in the world. You get fed up with his childish stupidity and one day decide to confront him. He tries to attack you and while defending yourself you push him off you and he falls, hits his head, and dies. Now you have a jailhouse murder added to your rap sheet that could've been avoided had there just been some mutual understanding and respect amongst prisoners.

Another thing that is a big issue here is that when it comes to infractions and disciplinary reports, they always take the officer's word above all others. You can be given an infraction and placed on lock up for "disrespecting an officer", yet they are given liberal rights to blatantly disrespect and mistreat us every day. They have a pointless and ineffectual grievance system

where you can file a report that usually falls on deaf ears but that's the only legal recourse, we prisoners have. I do not use the system because at the end of the day it's just another form of snitching. I have been falsely accused and reprimanded by officers on multiple occasions and just had to accept the consequences no matter how unjust. I believe correctional officers should be required to wear body cameras. It would go a long way towards alleviating a lot of the issues on both sides. I just find it painfully sad and infuriating that you can earn an infraction for the same thing they do to you daily.

CHAPTER SIX

Prison Politics

All of society's perceptions of prison are speculative. So much goes on in prison that people are unaware of. Some people live like they never left the streets. That's just the way it is. If you have money, are in a gang, or a part of an organization, you can get pretty much anything you want on the inside. On the flip side, anything can be done to you, especially if you have no allegiances in or outside prison. Prison can make or break you. They say that your cell can be a womb or a tomb. Most people, maybe even the majority of the population, are terrified of going to prison. For some, it is a fear second only to death. There are those who upon realizing that prison is inevitable will kill themselves. You would think that accompanying this fear would be a multitude of ways to avoid prison or at the very least leave as soon as possible, but that isn't the case. Prison is designed to keep you stuck inside once you are there or continue to bring you back once you are released. It doesn't help that some officers are here just to make you miserable. That is their self-mandated job. In reality, it is the inmates who are in charge. The gang leaders are the ones keeping everything in order. They're the ones who have the most influence. Most of them have substantial notoriety associated with their name. Even if you don't know them personally you know of them. That alone speaks volumes.

Prison propaganda is so complex. Both inmates and officers have to deal with it. Inmates are tasked with either having to make a name for themselves or uphold a certain image. On the flip side, officers have to show inmates that they are not to be trifled with, but sometimes they go too far. I don't know how things were before the early 2000s but now it is totally out of control. You have some prisoners snitching on each other just to acquire appliances and materials that were confiscated as contraband from other inmates. Inmates will drop anonymous notes implicating another just to get rid of them either because they need that person out of the way or they're trying to prevent them from doing something. Other reasons include trying to conceal a secret about their past or identity that if made public would make life difficult for themselves. It's now more convenient than ever to snitch on your fellow inmates. They have tip lines where you can speak directly to an officer without anybody ever knowing it was you.

Violence is mandatory on the inside. From gang-on-gang violence to beefs that were initiated on the streets or in another prison. It doesn't even matter how a conflict was started all that matters is you handle it. There is nothing mellifluous about prison. Every day is filled with a barrage of obstacles. Even a simple task such as going to get your meal from the dining hall is fraught with danger. You have to stay alert because even if you are not the intended target you can get caught in the crossfire. Guilty by association is a common concept in the streets but in prison, you are also guilty by proximity. You aren't safe doing anything. When it comes to exercising or working out in the prison yard you could get your head pulverized by a dumbbell or free weight, so you always want a trustworthy comrade accompanying you. The same goes for taking a shower. The second before you close your eyes could be the last time you ever open them. That's why you need to have someone watching your back at all times. Things go down when you least expect it.

Prisoners have rights, obligations, and unwritten codes. Rights such as three meals a day, free access to water, electricity, and free access to the media. However, we aren't allowed any internet access on devices that could connect us to the media. You'd think they would allow it but I imagine the number of restrictions they would need to place on the internet access would make it practically useless anyway. I can only speak to the practices and policies of Maryland State Prison so things may be a little different elsewhere. Obligations and unwritten codes go hand in hand. Such as mind your own business and respect everybody. Unwritten codes are ambiguous because it all depends on the crowd or caliber of people you associate with. So you never know what to expect outside your group. As I matured there were certain things that I started to disregard because I started to see things for what they really were. I also began to see people for who they really are. One unwritten code is that you're supposed to always have your buddy or childhood friend's back whether he's in a fight with a certain someone or a whole gang. However, the trick with this is that there is no way to know if he would do the same for you if the roles were reversed.

A lot of people play prison politics. It is all a big joke. You have gangs and you have religious groups. The in-between is being a civilian. When you're in a gang that is your so-called family. When your number is called by the gang it is usually to attack or stab another "family's" member. Instances like that occur for reasons such as stealing, lying, or the ever-popular messing with the "gay boy". I don't indulge in any of it. I believe it is in your best interests to take your

chances as a civilian. You will have a lot more problems as a civilian, but you will feel better about yourself knowing that you didn't sell your soul for protection. Above all stay true to yourself and uphold the same values and principles you've always had.

To adapt to the prison atmosphere, you must maintain a resilient mindset. There are so many things beyond your control. However, that does not mean you have to compromise your principles or morals. You just have to be prepared for curveballs. At any given time they can change the rules. Protocols that have been in place for decades can change in a moment. Something that you've had for over ten years could become contraband overnight. Or you could have been in the same cell for 5 years and situated with a good roommate and out of the blue, you're moved to a terrible cell with an insufferable cellmate. There are a multitude of situations and scenarios that could occur any day and catch you off guard. One of the biggest inconveniences is getting moved from the bottom bunk to the top or vice versa. Another is having a homosexual moved into your cell. People automatically assume that you are messing around with him even though it is not that kind of party. It's unfortunate to be in that situation because if you make him move out then you'll get in trouble for making threats and dictating. If you are assigned to be in the cell with him and you refuse you get sent to lock up for refusing housing.

So many things go on that could get you in trouble. Even defending yourself is considered fighting. When you are told to do something by an officer, even if it is completely ridiculous or absurd, and you refuse then it's considered disobeying a direct order and you're sent to lock up. Officers lie all the time and always get away with it. It's the same way on the streets; they believe a "highly respected officer" over anybody. Authority is such a privilege in America. From low-level crossing guards to high-level FBI agents, it's like they can do no wrong. While not all correctional officers are bad there are few good ones. Everyone loves to have authority over someone else. Just like in elementary school when everyone wanted to be line leader or hall monitor. In the case of the hall monitor, you are just waiting to catch somebody slipping or wandering aimlessly in the hall. Or when your parents let you babysit your younger siblings for the first time. That feeling of being the boss is addictive. Add all those experiences together and you will better understand the aspirations of a correctional officer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Karma and the Constitution

I am a firm believer in karma. I do not believe it has anything to do with religion, but rather karma is connected to your spirituality. You may not always be the direct recipient of your karma. It may come later in life and your offspring or sibling may suffer from something you did in the past. You might catch it for something one of your ancestors did. Truth be told anything can happen at any time. My karma came directly back to me. I have gotten away with so much in life but now I am paying for it all. Giving a friend a ride ultimately cost me 19 years of my life. It is what it is. I already know that this is just what was meant to happen. It is just a part of my life story. The past is history, but it is bound to repeat itself. When you think something is over, and you are finally done it can reappear at the worst of times almost like cancer. It can come back in a dwarfish manner or it can be tenfold. You just never know.

At first, I couldn't face the fact that I got such a long sentencing for such frivolous involvement, but I came to terms with my karma finally catching up with me. Now I must extend my knowledge and lead a more focused life. Even in my 30's, I struggle with what is right and wrong. I feel so much pressure to do what is right, but who can say what is right? The constitution states all our alleged rights. However, even the constitution is ambiguous and distorted at times.

The 1st amendment states that you are entitled to "freedom of speech, free press, the right to assemble, and petition". Yet you can be arrested for certain statements. For example, Donald Trump speaks his mind and says whatever he pleases. Yet if someone were to say "I think I should kill Donald Trump; I wish he was dead" the FBI, ATF, and local authorities would be at your door in record timing. Then you find yourself in federal custody awaiting trial or making terroristic threats when essentially all you did was speak your mind. Another example is Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem. Not only did he get cut by the San Francisco 49ers, but he got blacklisted by the NFL in its entirety. He was criticized by so many people. Millions of people were against what he believed and took a knee for. For all the police brutality, racial injustice, and abuse of authority. In the end, he came out on top because now the NFL is allowing people to take a knee or remain in the locker room during the national anthem

altogether. Not only the NFL but all the minor league sports teams are condoning it. Just from one person's gesture, a movement was started. Now Kaepernick is the main face of Nike. They love what he did and continue to support him. These two examples demonstrate how the first amendment is not truly upheld in its entirety. The second amendment isn't truly upheld either. It states that you have the right to keep and bear arms and that is not to be infringed. However, as a convicted felon in the U.S., you will most likely lose that right. You can just as easily be sent to prison for purchasing an "illegal" firearm. It doesn't make sense that something we have the right to own can be purchased illegally.

All this leads me to again ask the question, what is right both legally and morally? Which of the two overpowers the other? At the end of the day, you have to factor in so many variables to the equation that you can never truly know the correct answer. If you are devoutly religious and have an excellent spiritual connection to your higher powers, then you might say that moral rights are most important. If you are highly patriotic you might say that legal rights are most important. Morally you have so many religious obligations that you would break the law or enforce a law that contradicts the constitution because you feel it is the morally right thing to do. Legally all you think about is the fact that you pay taxes, vote, and pledge allegiance to the land of the free that ain't really free. The same pledge of allegiance that concludes with "for liberty and justice for all" yet historically that has never been an option for a significant portion of the population.

Of course, there has to be order and retribution, but why are there exceptions? For instance, in the case of diplomatic immunity, you may not have to be held accountable for the consequences of your actions because you are a diplomat. What a joke. Furthermore, if you can commit a crime and get away with it then years later your accomplice can bring your crimes to light and they will be offered a lighter sentence or outright immunity for providing intel on a cold case. Legally this is seen as right and fair. Only in America would such a morally bankrupt law exist. My point is that I feel the constitution needs to be amended again to better suit modern Americans. Nowadays things that were once considered taboo or even forbidden are now socially acceptable. So if you can make exceptions for one type of crowd why not another? If you have the right to change your name and your gender, then why can't we as a society decide to change the rule.