

The Concrete Gardener

1. "A peek at tolerant humanity"

There are times when we search within ourselves only to discover that we might actually be better off somewhere else in life, perhaps living under different conditions. I said, "different" not "improved".

Should this scratch an itch of yours, one key to reaching that other place, wherever (or with whomever) it may exist, is in taking the necessary steps to complete whatever lingers on your plate in the immediate here and now. It requires some mental preparation, objectivity, and a quality plan in place to utilize valuable waking moments in our day to their fullest, especially in this crazy mixed up world we live in.

One's strength in character (or lack of it) may very well viscerally evoke frustration, impatience, a feeling of defeat, or skepticism while we're exploring new possibilities and relationships all the while in what feels like a hurdle-riddled search for answers. Positive change comes at a price however. Focus, dedication, a true-to-self desire to evolve, as well as an ability to respond with diplomacy to the regular, unpredictable and oftentimes chaotic cues of life. What matters in this instance, is staying committed to your personal convictions, however slight or seemingly ridiculous. If you quit, you fail.

Life demands flexibility. Stubborn determination is one thing, but it comes with knowing when and how to cede to consideration of others and their personal pursuits or important bucket list entries. There's plenty of room for everyone to grow, regardless how arid our respective soils may be. A nourishing rain shower will eventually come our way and soak us into our best-possible fruit-bearing selves.

Positive inner-strength by contrast, will prove paramount that conscious and palpable appreciation for real growth (change) lies within our grasps. And, irrespective of our personal planter box (environment) for both imprisoned and free folks alike, the myriad challenges we will all invariably face will lend themselves as instructional aides during the unearthings of connections to our individual resolve, acceptance, and inner-awareness which shares a tiny stage with compromise and flexibility. As a deliberate result of these pairings, the stage comes equipped with an assortment of light to shine upon our life missions with pride.

The degree to which this very shameful sentence of death affects my loved ones, impacts my perception, disturbs my daily commitments, interferes with personal relationships, and even burdens my sleepless hollow redemptive soul with remorse, somehow it has managed to forego chipping-away at my

deliberate investment in self-help and recovery I renew each and every morning when met face-to-face with a daunting new day filled with an intolerance for stupidity. Regardless of what's in store or the would-be aftermath thereof, staying true to oneself is by far, the best medicine.

Unfortunately for those of us who simply wish to pursue positive and productive programs, a nearly-invisible war wages just outside each of our cell doors. The battlegrounds are littered with men from every imaginable walk of life who're desperately attempting to conceal their very own unsavory motives, intentions, and various survival techniques while buried behind masks of every conceivable design, and not because of the Covid pandemic, either. These same individual's bizarre displays of ignorant character is partially responsible for exposing an unusual analogy which for me tends to re-define hopeless strife and emotional discord, real fear, loneliness, and a seemingly-irreparable agony lost in translation among intimate strangers beyond myriad prison walls across this nation.

But for this rather unfortunate program-defeating facade-filled masquerade of the fresh-faced 21st century prisoner, seasoned convicts like myself might find pause to ignore that which appears outwardly to serve only in nullifying the "convict mentality and code" with silent screams for attention from a brand new

motley youth-filled generation of know-nothing, street level, non-violent first term felony offenders.

These boys (many of whom are victims of judicial circumstance) for the most part seem (or act) incapable of adapting to this way of life, finding their own ways, and expressing themselves respectfully without fearing judgment, violence, reprisal, and most notably, being able to accept any degree of responsibility for who they are, how they act, what they've done, and what they hope to get from their incarceration beyond three hot's and a cot.

With an inability to transcend perceptions as well as the occasional first impression, sadly this new generation (inmates) remains unable to wipe-free any of their insensitivities, intentional or otherwise. Once their proverbial genie is out of the bottle, most of these newbies become tossed-aside, unworthy of being "school'd" as to acceptable behaviors, racial boundaries, obligations, and much more as they get older. Prison forbids multiple opportunities to make a first impression. This is so, because as custody levels change, transfers to alternate prisons occur and one's reputation always follows them. It can be a tough cross to bear for those whose intentions may have been sound, but their actions/behaviors through the early years have scarred their reputations irreparably. These guys (and gals) never quite recover from the stigma of being unforgivable and subject to victimization.

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For the "properly schooled" lifer, our unconscious yet routine slate-clearing tendencies often come while sharing our tolerant humanity with others in our similar shoes. We have all made our bones and we all know who is who and where they otherwise stand in the pecking orders which establish themselves in short order.

That said, lying dormant within all of us is an unchecked brittle lack of restraint (ego) which when shaken awake, has the potential to destroy one's entire program. Emotions routinely act out without the benefit of intellect. This sudden hasty knee-jerk reaction to any number of potential stimuli almost always removes the Forest of Compromise from our field of view, even though it sits comfortably beyond the lush tree line of momentary insanity. We've all been there — forced to bite our tongues and swallow our testosterone-filled pride.

Most of us admire and respect individuals who display the types of courage and unwavering perseverance necessary to maintain and nurture his/her convictions. If bruised or broken however, this once-ungielding tenacity might come across as rigid, raw, insensitive, sarcastic, or indifferent. We all have our moments, right? So, perhaps this is the fleeting crossroads where we lean on our compassion and love for others, deciding or even agreeing to not be so quick to pass judgment.

Learning objectivity in practice when otherwise consumed by adversity, is part of discovering the promise made to us which keeps that life-purpose bug chewing its way out of our frontal lobe. Becoming "one" with various and sundry unfamiliar yet promising possibilities outside of our comfort zones when faced with compromise, and choosing to accept a deserved lifeline when tossed in our direction (or in-turn tossing one to someone else drowning in their own despair) are but a few select examples reminiscent of things ingrained while exploring this ever-changing road to rehabilitation and recovery — a lengthy path for some. You'll need to pull a few weeds along the way, but if you stay true to your objectivity and endgame, you can change your life in ways you never imagined possible. Coming to prison has saved my life and instilled a set of lofty goals within me — certain aspirations (i.e. College Degrees, etc) I would never have taken the time for during my wayward past.

To some it may come as a surprise, but accomplishments which prompt one's ability to give something positive (through rehabilitative sweat equity) back to the very same communities from which we (prisoners) have taken while leaving in our wakes, destruction, pain, fear, and mistrust has itself over time become a common theme and desire shared amongst many of us in these shoes.

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It certainly goes without having to paint you a picture, that in an effort to fuel my long-term commitment to personal growth and development, any and all indulgence, advice, or support from mature, emotionally-available like-minded adults willing or capable of fostering certain of my educational and therapeutic pursuits are welcomed and encouraged.

Soft-cover educational, self-help, technology, business, health, and assorted college-level books and periodicals are needed. I'm an info junky, accomplished author (*A Portion of Thyself - Essential Reflections from Death Row*), artist, cook, blogger, and prison reform advocate currently plugging away at bringing inmate organ donation protocols to State prison systems (see: facebook/Inmate Organs) for immediate family members in need.

Should ~~you~~ wish to correspond, I'd humbly request that you mail me stationery supplies and postage if possible.

Thank You,

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