

An Abbreviated
History of My 45 years
of Incarceration

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On December 5th, 1975, along with another individual, I broke into the home of my employer to steal enough of their property to pay for my return to California, where I had spent the years between 1971 and 1974 as a member of the Naval Construction Battalion #5. I had declined traveling with my employers family to Detroit for the weekend of the 5th - 7th, which gave me the idea to rob their home while it was empty for so long.

My partner and I took a Taxi to my employers residence, from the Pro Bowl bowling alley in Lansing, Michigan, where he and I spent the early hours calling their home to make sure they had left for Detroit. The Taxi dropped us off in front of the Karber home, and I broke in while my partner waited at the front door. We were 10, 15, 20 . . . or maybe even a half hour into retrieving items we wanted to steal and placing them by the door to the garage, where the Karber daughter's car was parked, and which we were going to load up with stolen items and drive away in, when I was confronted, in the dark, by a voice a few feet away from me asking loudly "What Are You Doing In My House?"

I swung around and hit the person asking me this question, knocking him down. I realized that it was Mr. Frank Karber, Sr., and was scared. I screamed for my partner, and between us we beat Mr. Karber very badly. We then hurried and loaded the car, and left him lying on the kitchen floor. I believed that he was alive when we left . . . and even if he was . . . he died there before his family returned from their trip to Detroit.

I turned myself in to the Lansing City Police on December 10, 1975, and was as honest as I could be about my participation in the death of Mr. Frank Karber, Sr. Because of the alcohol and drugs I had in my system at the time of the crime, as well as because of the alcohol and drugs I continued to take between the crime and the day I turned myself in to the Lansing Police Department, the crime was not at all clear. I believe that the trauma of being confronted by Mr. Karber, and the ensuing violence also play' a part in why I can't clearly remember what took place.

After nearly a year in the county jail, going "cold turkey" and "kicking" my amphetamine and alcohol addiction, waiting for my trial, I simply broke down emotionally after only four days of trial and demanded that I be allowed to plead "guilty as charged." My court-appointed attorney let me, in reality effectively abandoning me to plead guilty to a criminal charge that I would later find was not even a real

criminal charge in Michigan! This statement is a factual one, see *People v Aaron*, 409 Mich. 672, 299 N.W.2d 612 (1980).

The experience I had with Mr. Frank Karber, Sr.'s son and daughter-in-law, Frank and Virginia Karber, while I was in the county jail, is the very reason why I was able to heal from what I had done; to accept what I had done with the knowledge and belief that I was forgiven, that I was "redeemable." Virginia Karber gave me a King James Bible, and a silver Christian Cross, and they both told me that they had forgiven me for what I had done . . . simply knowing in their hearts that I did not intend to hurt Frank Sr., and expressed their hopes that I would be able to forgive myself.

Once I had been convicted and sentenced to "Life" imprisonment ("at hard labor"), I was sent to the Reception & Guidance Center ("RGC") at Jackson Prison of Southern Michigan ("SPSM"), in October of 1976. I was there for almost 30 days, and was given a number General Aptitude tests, and a G.E.D. test. I was also tested by various staff members and prisoners while I was there, all of whom believed that they were entitled to "educate" me on what my life as a prisoner "meant." Needless to say, I had prepared myself well enough for all of these tests, that I passed them well enough.

Due mostly to my substance and alcohol abuse the time of my criminal act, I don't remember many of the details that led to the death of Mr. Karber. However, I know that I have always, absolutely accepted that but for my planning and then executing the larceny of the Karber home, Mr. Karber would not have been killed. The remorse and extreme feelings of regret and sadness because of what my actions were in relationship to his violent death, are real, and will be with me the rest of my life, regardless of what I remember or don't remember, regardless of the lies and misstatements that were stated as "factual" in my Presentence Report.

Upon "graduating" from RGC, I was put into a cell inside SPSM, in 1 Block, and immediately classified to work in the factory known as the "Stamp Plant." At that time in 1976, the MDOC normally classified newly arriving prisoners who were under 21 years old to the Michigan Reformatory ("MR"), also known as the "Gladiator School." However, I was told by the Classification Committee reviewing my situation that because of my military experience with welding and brazing metals, and aptitude for certain mechanical skills, I was staying at SPSM to work in the Stamp Plant brazing and welding bed frames (and other needed cell furnishings), which I did for just over two years, until the MDOC opened the "Northside Facility" and closed my block, along with 2 and 3 block off to the inside of SPSM.

I was still living in the same cell I was given out of RG&C when it, along with both 2 and 3 block's were "turned-out" to become the Medium Security "Northside" facility. Until this point in time I had

been living within a "Close Custody" facility, with over 3,000 other prisoners . . . now I was living in a newly created Medium Security facility with just over 700 prisoners. Due to my sentence of Life, and the fact that I had only served a few years of this sentence, I was immediately given a Security Classification Hearing. Because of my work record, and my good institutional record for the last few years inside SPSM, I was allowed to remain on the Northside, where I continued working in the Chair Factory, where my skills were applied to making chairs in the newly formed "Chair Factory," where I worked for another two years operating a "Pines Bender" (bending chair frames out of stainless steel tubing), and setting-up the drill presses, the paint line, etc. After a few years in the Chair Factory, I was asked to fill a vacant spot as a mechanic, in the Textile factory. A position as a mechanic in the Textile factory was a very high paying and coveted job. I was the mechanic responsible for the sheet machines (6 of them), for the next 2 years. I eventually quit working in the factory so I could take advantage of the programs that were now available to me because I was living in a Medium Security facility, such as the Optical Lens Grinding vocational trades program, and college courses.

I was able to take advantage of the new opportunity of going to college full time, while also attending the Optical Lens Grinding classes from 8 to 4 each weekday. I have attended various colleges off and on, for many years since first entering the Jackson Community College way back when. It's a real shame that college courses are so limited now, and are not available to the majority of prisoners in Michigan.

In April or May of 1982, there was a riot inside SPSM, which spilled over to the Northside. After a day of chaos and destruction, all prisoner's were eventually locked into their cells. For the next few months we waited while investigations were made, and eventually a number of those who had worked in the Factories on the Northside before the riot were allowed back to work. It was not long after this that busloads of prisoners from the Northside were transferred to the Kinross Correctional Facility ("KCF") in the upper peninsula. I was fortunate to be among those chosen for this transfer. Arriving at KCF was like "culture shock" for me, as the facility was a great expanse of grass and trees, built as a military housing facility originally, and very "welcoming" and familiar to me!

Upon arrival at KCF I was immediately Classified as the facility photographer, attached to the facility newspaper, the "Snowgoose." Again, my military experience in operating a Nikon 35 mm camera, and its many attachments, and even more important to the Special Activities Director (Mr. Paul Shelly) and his assistant (Mr. John McKinnon), my knowledge of and experience in the development process for both color and black and white film placed me in a good prison assignment. I took all of the photo's for the facility's "Photo Line." KCF had a process whereby prisoners could come to the control center each week and have their photo taken in a very professional way (portrait photography). Once

taken, I developed a "Master Sheet" of the photos taken, and would then place them in a three-ring binder so prisoners could then order what they wanted, wallet sized photo's, 3x5's, 5x7's, or 8x10's. I would fill each order by developing the negatives appropriately. The prisoners of KCF could order as many of the photo's taken in the various sizes offered as they wanted.

I was also responsible for taking all of the photo's when a Banquet was held by one of the groups allowed to function at KCF, such as the Child of the Month Club, the Jaycees, the various religious groups, etc. I was also responsible for the pictures generated by all of the Sporting events being held at KCF, and there were a great many sports events, with various sports teams coming in from the outside to compete against the prisoner's teams.

At this period of time within the MDOC, 1982, all Medium Security facilities had a great deal of activity with organizations such as the Jaycees, the NAACP, Child of the Month Club, HASTA and LaRassa, the National Lifer's of America, Inc., as well as others I have forgotten about after so many years. For the first 30 years of my sentence, I was a very active member of most of the groups named above, until they were "phased out" by the department, and no longer allowed to operate. I am a "Founding Father" of the National Lifer's of America, Inc., and still participate in its activities today.

While at KCF I was assaulted by three prisoners while helping landscape the Varsity Softball field. They did not like being "checked" in front of a crowd of other prisoners, about their having their people send pictures I took of them in their cells back to the facility . . . through the mail room where they inspect every photo sent into the facility. I had been called to see the Inspector about their pictures, and was able to talk my way out of being fired only because there were no dates on the photo's, and the prisoners had been at KCF for a number of years. They beat me with a baseball bat and left my unconscious body locked in the small maintenance shed next to the varsity ball field. I was discovered by a search that came from my missing the 1100 count. The facility emergency siren woke me, and I managed to make enough noise for the searchers to find me quickly.

Because I would not tell the administration who assaulted me, or why, after approximately 60 days in the Ad-Seg. unit I was transferred to the newly opened Upper Regional Facility ("URF"), which was a multi-level "regional" prison. I was kept there a very short time, only long enough to tig-weld all of the bed frames to the floor in segregation, known as "Steamboat" unit. I was transferred to the Muskegon Correctional Facility ("MCF"), which, from a prisoners perspective, was much better. MCF was a very progressively operated facility in the mid 80'.

I spent four years at MCF, working as a writer for the prison newspaper, the "Factor", attending

college classes provided by Muskegon Community College, and for the first time becoming heavily involved with the Vietnam Veteran's of America, Inc., there, sponsored by the men of the Muskegon Chapter 31. I was the Chairman of the Vietnam Veteran's chapter at MCF when, with the help from our Chapter 31 sponsor, we built and then dedicated the only permanent, standing Memorial to MIA and KIA Vietnam Veterans in the entire United States. There are 31 plaques on the wall there, separated by a 30 foot flagpole flying an American Flag that has flown at the Vietnam Vetean's Memorial located in Washington, D.C., all built by prisoners inside a prison facility!

I was just completing my second vocational training course in Television Studio Productions, when we dedicated this memorial, and was able to participate in filming the dedication ceremony using state-of-the-art video camera equipment. There should still be some record of this event available somewhere within the archival records of MCF, the V.V.A. Chapter 31, the National V.V.A., or the MDOC .

It was while at MCF that I was diagnosed with Arthritis in my feet. I was in my early 30's at the time, and placed on "Aspirin Therapy" as treatment for it. To this day, some 35 plus years later, have I had a Doctor determine or diagnose exactly what type of Arthritis I have. Of course, it has spread to every part of my body over all of these years, causing me a great deal of pain and discomfort daily.

After only a few years at MCF I was transferred to the Carson City Regional Facility ("DRF"), where I began my "idealistic" legal battle against the MDOC's application of their new Drug Testing Policy, which featured forcing prisoners to give a urine sample at any time, for the purpose of determining drug use. In effect, these drug tests "incriminate" those who take them, and are found to have an illegal or banned substance in their system. This new policy was, from my point of view, meant to punish me (and other prisoners) for using an illegal or banned substance that was, for the most part brought into the facility by staff members to begin with. Once it was determined that there was an illegal or banned substance in a prisoners system, the result was punishment without any offer of help or guidance to stop the addiction that was discovered by these new tests.

I arrived at DRF with "0" points on my Security Classification Sheet, which technically made me a very manageable prisoner eligible for a very low custody level. In the late 1980's, when my idealistic campaign began, the lowest point total possible to be Level I eligible, was "0." I went from the lowest possible security point total to having over 31 points, in less than a year. 31 points denote that a prisoner has a very serious "management problem," and should be housed within a level V (Maximum Security) facility status. In just a matter of a few months, as I challenged this new policy by refusing to give a urine sample each time I was ordered to do so, I was written multiple "Substance Abuse" misconduct reports. By the time I had exhausted the legal challenge I had begun, which was meant to

address the issue of being forced to incriminate myself, I found myself at the Marquette Branch Prison ("MBP") for having been found guilty of a large number of Substance Abuse Misconduct's for refusing to give a urine sample.

I began giving the urine requested of me while at MBP, having lost my legal challenges, so it didn't take me long to get my points back to "Medium Security" numbers, so that I was transferred back to lower custody facilities in a very short period of time. As I was doing the "step-down" from MBP to another Medium Security facility, I completed the third of my five Vocational Trades (Vocational Food Technology) in 1993, while incarcerated in the Level IV area of the "DRF."

I found myself at the Huron Men's Correctional Facility ("HVM") in the mid to late 1990's, where I completed the fourth of my five Vocational Trades, in a very comprehensive Custodial Maintenance program, while working as a Gym Porter and organized sporting events official/referee. While working as a gym porter I helped move an entire softball field, including the backstop that had its six posts buried and cemented into the ground approximately seven feet . . . with only a shovel, a pick ax, and a wheelbarrow!

I was eventually transferred to the Riverside Correctional Facility ("RCF") in Ionia, Michigan, where I spent a number of years, late 90's to 2004, as the main kitchen clerk. From RCF I was once again transferred to the medium security part of DRF, where for over the next six years I was the Garden Clerk during the spring and summer months, and during the winter months I was the Housing Unit Quartermaster. I was instrumental in getting the Garden Project, which was just individual gardening plots when I became the Garden Clerk, to expand to include a number of very productive Community plots, which grew produce specifically for the Carson City community of Food Pantry's and Shelters. While there I also completed the "Cage Your Rage" program.

I was transferred to the St. Louis Correctional Facility ("SRC") in 2010, due to the closing of MCF. The closing of MCF happened very quickly, and there were over 200 prisoners being housed there that had to be moved immediately, and as a result of this "emergency" I, along with many other prisoners at DRF was "bumped" from DRF to SRC to accommodate those being transferred from MCF. Why they couldn't have been sent directly to SRC, is a question I can't answer. However, while at SRC I was able to complete my fifth vocational trade, Horticulture, in the year I was at SRC. I also took the "Career Scope" aptitude test, and the TABE Vocational Trades Programming test while I was there.

From SRC I was transferred to the Thumb Regional Facility ("LCF"), where I began an Advanced Gardening class dealing with the Management of a Greenhouse. I was also working in the kitchen as a

Cook when I was charged with "Attempt Escape from a Secure Facility" and "Dangerous Contraband." Both of these charges stemmed from the fact that the cell I was assigned to upon my arrival at LCF, had a small "hole" carved into the floor, about 3 inches deep, 2 inches wide, and 5 or 6 inches long, hidden underneath the linoleum floor tiles of the cell's floor. This "hole" had been dug out of the cement beneath the linoleum with the paint scraper that was discovered hidden behind the mirror affixed to the cell door with security screws.

I have come to understand "after-the-fact" that this hole was very likely chiseled out and used by the prisoner who was living in the cell when I arrived at LCF, who had been caught with a cell phone before I arrived and was assigned a bunk in "his" cell. The dimensions of the "hole" absolutely fit the dimensions of a cell phone. Even though no evidence was available that a "Critical Incident Report" could be found attesting to it ever having been lost or stolen, and I had attempted to move out of that cell a number of times since arriving at LRF, I was found guilty by the Hearings Officer because, in her opinion, I "should have known" there was a hole in the cell floor, and reported it to staff, or I actually "knew there was a hole in the floor of the cell" and failed to report it to staff. Such is the justice of the MDOC.

I suffered a very severe mental breakdown as a result of my being found guilty of this charge. It was a very devastating shock to be found guilty of not just something that I did not even have a clue that existed . . . but of a charge that is so serious, and has such harsh and long-lasting ramifications. To this day, whenever I am transferred out of a facility, for any reason, I am put into handcuff's and a Black Box," which is highly painful to wear. I am now ineligible for certain prison work assignments and programs because of my guilty finding for Escape and Dangerous Contraband. As a first-degree Lifer, my only avenue of "parole" is through the Office of the Governor, and how does such a guilty finding effect a decision that is, in essence, political? Not in a positive manner, that's for sure!

This instance brought to me in a very real, deep way, for the very first time . . . the very real and "more-likely-than-not probability that I will die in prison. I continue to battle this new mind set each and every day now.

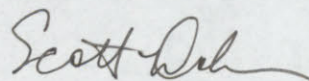
I have received other misconducts over the years - some that I deserved and some that I felt were unfairly written against me or that could have been, in my opinion, better dealt with a conversation. I have argued with staff, refused to comply with an order I felt was unjustified, and have smoked marijuana on occasion, for both the relief from pain it gives me and as an escape from the absolute insanity of this environment . . . experienced every moment of **every day for over 44 years**. I have

never, in the lifetime I have spent within an ever-changing prison environment, been written a misconduct for "Fighting, or "Assaultive" behavior of any kind, or for having a weapon in my possession. I have maintained a very stringent (possibly too stringent) set of personal morals all these years, which has kept me from committing or being a party to any kind of violent behavior while at the same exact time attempting to improve myself through good work ethics and practices, higher education, and finally . . . and most importantly . . . through serious and consistent periods of self-reflection and self-correction. The prison environment is not "set-up" to facilitate or accommodate me, or my philosophical slash spiritual journey of betterment and introspection . . . my "stringent" set of personal morals. Very few can truly understand the challenges a person trying to be "good" and "normal" faces in a corrupt prison environment.

Most recently, while at the Saginaw Correctional Facility ("SRF") to explore my military service-related claims, while living within a housing unit of veterans only, I participated in the Saginaw Valley State University program "Conflict Resolution and Community Workshop", as well as the "Interactive Communication Class" offered by the facilities Librarian. The Interactive Communications Class was essentially a Debate Class, a precursor to participating in an advanced debate class offered by Saginaw Valley State University. I was participating in the advanced debate class when I was transferred from SRF to where I am now, at the Adrian Correctional Facility ("ARF"). I was also the Vice-Chairman of the prison chapter of the National Lifer's of America, Inc., while at SRF.

I wish to reiterate and emphasize that the vast majority of the evaluations I have received over these last 45 plus years, were for participation in various areas of prison life that should be considered as being "highly stressful," and under conditions that are extremely unique to an environment that operates outside of any "normal" set of parameters. The fact that the great majority of these evaluations are "positive" in nature must be recognized in this context. Sort of like a "sane" person trying to operate within an "insane" set of circumstances!

Respectfully Submitted,



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Dated: April 7, 2020