

My Journey & Survival

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I was just like you, fellow inmates. I was tested as a child for intelligence, and was told I was very bright. So why did I misbehave?

I am tying this into how I embarked on a long journey through the system, which now means its' end. I was placed in states' custody at a fairly young age. The facilities in which I was placed showed me, at a very tender age, that what was respected in this world was not intelligence, but toughness, and cunning. I simply lost myself, and my way. I was running from demons. I won't get into that. I found escape in the trouble I caused. Skipping school, drugs, so on, and so forth. At seventeen I went to "the Gym", simply a converted gymnasium with mattresses on the floor. This environment

Set the stage for how I survived in prison. Fast forward a few years, I found myself in county jail amongst much more experienced inmates. I knew "the code" already, but not the hierarchy. I fought when necessary. Was not good yet at that. I had yet to have "mental health issues". I took medicine for sleep and depression. At around 25 or 26 I found myself in prison again yet this time when I found myself depressed, feeling alone, in solitary confinement (later "outlawed"), and still running from inner turmoil, I hurt myself. I continued to turn to this coping mechanism for many years. I was labeled "seriously mentally ill", which I will get into now. What did this label

mean? I almost died once, but mostly committed acts as cries for help. I was crying out, feeling lost in a black hole, a pit of bodies called prison. My problems drowned out by thousands more like me. Later down my road, I lost my Father and my mind. Almost an arm, from self-harm. I was placed in "Intensive Diversionary Treatment Program," and forever shuffled through "programs" in corrections which amounted to segregation. Areas with small numbers of people, most very very ill. When you came out to go to "groups" you were handcuffed and shackled. You were locked to a metal desk by hands and feet when attending these sessions. The teachers, you could tell,

did not want to be there either. But until you were fully "fixed" you cannot live in population, general population. Along the way I lost my beloved brother, as I sank deeper into myself, and negative coping skills. Fast forward, years blur, the same. I got married, found myself, at 39 years old, and started making a recovery. I still am in a "program", but now I take what I can use, and use it to my advantage. I have suffered, true. I wear my heart on my sleeve, and (in prison) that is not always good. But I love me. I use the abuses and pains caused by solitary confinements as motivation to activism. Helping to empower others to advocate for the enforcement of their civil rights.

—John Arnold