

What I Would Tell My Younger Self to Avoid This Life

By J. S. Russell

To my fourteen year old self,

I'm you, 23 years later, sitting in a prison cell with a Life; all suspended, but 49 year sentence. I suggest and hope that you take heed to the advice that I'm about to give you.

It's a tough time for you, I know, I've been there. It will pass, but remember and learn from it. Your self-worth is not a reflection of the quality and style of your clothes. Don't let your self-esteem be determined by the amount of money that you have or don't have in your pockets. I know of what we are capable and I ask that you start to think about the possibilities. Allow yourself to dream more. I know that you dread the walk to Petworth Station, seeing the fiends and the filth on Georgia Avenue while you are going to school. I know about the times that you don't even bother getting off of the train because of the feelings of despair and lowliness. I'm telling you that it doesn't last.

There's a book that you'll read, if you haven't already, titled, "The Invisible Man", by Ralph Ellison. This book will change your view on reading and set you in the right direction. I will tell you that the more you learn and the more that you are exposed to, the more empowered you will feel. Now is the time to start reading on something that is a major issue in your life, finances. Learn about money, saving, investing, and plan how you will pay for your college education. I know the short comings that you are soon to face, and they are due to a lack of preparation.

For every endeavor, do your research. What you don't find in a book, ask qualified people who have experience with the subject. Next year, you'll be able to get your work permit. Take advantage of any opportunity that you can get work experience and an honest dollar in your pocket. Crime will put you in a constant state of fear. Fear of the police, fear of informants, fear of the robbers, and fear of having to commit violent acts. There's an indescribable peace that I've experienced when I didn't have to live paranoid. Hopefully, this will be your norm. If not, there's a little girl without her father, a mother without her son, cousins, aunts, and a grandmother without a dominate male figure to protect them, guide them, and to set the standard for being a man. On top of that, you're alone amongst a multitude, similar to how you feel now, but amplified and confined.

If you begin to focus on the things that you want and not on how they are or how you don't want them to be, you'll go in that direction. Read all that you can concerning your goals. I would practically live in a library if I could. Become familiar with all that the library has to offer you, it's resources, services, events, and workshops. Now is the time to decide where you want your future to be. You're not helpless, a victim of circumstance, or at the whim of fate. You can make a conscious effort that will lead towards the success that you desire. Don't sweat and failures. They will serve as valuable learning experiences that will help you build character. Just persevere. Don't be hesitant to put yourself in unfamiliar circumstances. The more diverse your experience, the richer the knowledge from which you

can draw. Always take notice of those who are doing well at what you want to do. Ask them about their life, their work, and how they got to where they are. Do not be afraid to voice any of your struggles and concerns.

Everything that I said is to give you the benefit of my hindsight, the knowledge that I've gained, and my regrets. Our life has been an amazing ride, but I don't want prison to be a stop for you. You can make your mark in such an awesome way and live a much fulfilling life. Please, take my advice, and take your advice.