

## Ode To The Big House

---

Firstly, let's be frank, we probably deserve it. Now, if you're the exception and have lived a purely law abiding life before being caught up in maze of unfortunate circumstances which led you to be railroaded by an imperfect criminal justice system--this is not for you. Sorry buddy, keep your chin up. But, the rest of us, yeah, we belong here, that is, if we're being completely honest with ourselves. Who among us was not already living either on the wrong side of the law or walking precariously along its edge? We all know the million little things we've done which could have (and probably should have) landed us an extended stay at one of America's finest graybar hotels. We simply weren't caught. Let me be clear, this doesn't take away from the fact that many of us got a raw deal and were bent over by an imperfect system of overworked, under-incentivized public defenders and angry, fed up States Attorneys and Judges all of which led to a guilty plea deal or conviction. And, yes (of course!) that is both unfair and unjust BUT it doesn't mean we didn't commit a crime and shouldn't be serving some sentence.

We needed this forced hiatus to reevaluate, recalibrate, and refocus. Everyone, in my opinion, could benefit from a stint in the concrete jungle (just like everyone should work as a server once in their life). Let's get beyond what's right or wrong for a moment. What about the epiphanies we glean when separated from the world and given true perspective? What we're made of? Who our family really is? This experience opens our hearts to the beauty of what we too often have taken for granted. Some of us will get in shape, beat addictions, gain an education, reconnect with estranged relationships, and adopt other positive habits. It is an often heard inmate refrain that prison likely saved our life. Most of us were in a downward spiral falling deeper into the well with every passing day.

For me, prison has taught me how important family is and how grossly I had taken them for granted. I have never loved my daughter more--something I never thought possible-- or appreciated the loyalty and compassion of the few friends and family that chose to stand by my side through this difficult time. In many ways, it is as if I was buried, but not yet dead; from the right perspective this is a unique gift.

It's a conundrum. I have said that prison could benefit anyone and yet I often think, I would never wish this experience on my worst enemy. There is a sort of loss of self when your freedom is ripped from you. Prison life forces us to live in the cell of our own skull. Everyone is a prisoner of their own mind-- trapped in bars of firing neurons. Can you imagine a worst punishment for a guilty conscience than cranial segregation? BUT...Could looking in help us find the way out? Could the incarceration itself give us the key to transformation? This is no easy task, a real examination of our past and moral inventory would mean lighting the dark side of our soul---a place of screaming loneliness that does not welcome visitors.

Don't let me fool you, I'm no saint. The devil still lurks in secret chambers of my heart desperate to get out. And occasionally he does. I've fought, lied, stolen, manipulated, intimidated....and that was just yesterday. I've landed in the hole more times than I care to remember and yet I stand by my statement: Prison can be good for us. We will know ourselves a little better; hold our family a little closer; appreciate life a little deeper, and know the value of freedom in a way few can understand.