

LEO CARDEZ (PEN NAME)
(The Fight)

"I am not going to die in here," I said to myself as I fought for my life in jail. It was September [redacted] three days after my felony conviction. I was awaiting sentencing at the infamously dangerous Cook County Jail. I was a newbie or as they say, on the new. I was scared, of course, but refused to show it.

He was 6'3", 250 pounds, without an ounce of fat on him. He ran the deck and preyed on the weak. One look at me and I'm sure he thought I would be the easiest butt he ever kicked.

He cornered me by the showers and demanded payment for protection. I said nothing, he just stared at me intently. Fear took over, I wanted to run, but had nowhere to go; I looked for help, none was coming. I thought of every prison movie I'd ever seen, cower now and forever be branded a mark. My arm shot out to grab and choke him before my mind had even decided to fight. The Lord gave me the strength and will to fight. I remember thinking, NO, YOU WILL NOT BEAT ME and that's when the fight began.

There was blood everywhere and I kept swearing at him every obscenity I could muster, but I wouldn't let my choke hold go. I knew given enough time and lack of oxygen even a gorilla would fall. Eventually, he stopped fighting, and I let him go. His friends came to help him off. I looked down and saw a puddle of blood and traced it back to the back of my head. He had slammed me into the wall and cracked my skull.

I was a flurry of emotions. I went over to the glass window and alerted a guard to my condition. "What happened?" he asked. "I slipped in the shower," I said, "Now get me a nurse before I bleed to death." I did not panic. I wasn't in tears. I wasn't in shock. I just looked at the guard and pointed toward the door. Help me through this Jesus, I thought.

I had emergency trauma care including 17 stitches and a broken wrist. While in recovery I was reading a daily devotional. It read, Ps 18:2: "The Lord is my rock..my shield..I called to the Lord..and I have been saved from my enemies..He rescued me from my powerful enemy..who was too strong for me." (Ps 18:3-6, 16-19)

Several inmates (have) told me I should have died that day. That guy was a known enforcer who had no qualms about killing. They say that me being alive does not make sense because his guys should have jumped in to help him finish me off.

But, the Lord had his miracle-working hand holding me the whole time, so much so that my family couldn't even tell I had been in a fight during their visit just a few days later.

Since that day in September, I've been sentenced to 10 yrs and transferred to an "easy" prison upstate. My family has had to establish a new normal. There have been bumps along the way, but God has been so good to cover our minds with peace, love, strength, and hope.

Of course, there have been times my faith has been tested. But, in those moments I recede to the Good Book and always find solace. From the very beginning of my incarceration, one of my prayers has been, "God use this experience for some good, if not for me then for someone else. Let this pain have purpose." And He has. I've seen my relationships change. I've changed. He chose me to carry this burden and trusted me to do so, so I must. I'm thankful to God in all situations even a prison fight.

