

## IS IT EVER ENOUGH...

Hello - I am an incarcerated female in the Ohio Reformatory for Women in the state of Ohio and have been locked up since 1975. I saw a parole board in 1995 after serving 20-years with an excellent institution record, but was told "you are expected to do the right thing" and first and foremost you are to be punished and was given another 20-years to do. In the state of Ohio parole is a privilege not a right, so legally one can be made to spend the rest of their life in prison when serving a sentence that has the word "life" in it. Yet, if the sentence of "life without chance of parole" was not even legal consideration at the time you were sentenced why is the parole board allowed to enact such a sentence? Sort of makes one go "hmm", doesn't it?

I obviously was not from the privileged upper class with scads of money for the "dream team" type of legal defense because had that been the case I would not have been convicted, or if I had been then some type of super deal would have been cut. My attorney was "appointed" by the courts and although I believe he meant well he simply was not up to the task of providing superior defense tactics. I personally had never been "in trouble" with the law and knew little to nothing about things like "Miranda" or other issues that likely would have allowed me to help myself. Of course, just because one does not know something is not a defense and I likely was my own worst enemy during the initial questioning by the law enforcement agency.

As I approach my 32nd year in prison I still maintain an excellent institution record, simply because I am not a trouble maker and have always tried to follow rules because I obviously know that doing so is my choice and not done to garner perks or the magic of parole!!! I have worked, furthered my education, done community service and found things to pass my time in a constructive and positive manner - gosh, that sounds like what I did in the free world.... Just because one is in prison does not mean they are some rabid mad dog that deserves to be shot at sunrise... Yet, the media and politicians paint persons in prison exactly like that and find colorful ways to describe us as "beady eyed, bottom dwelling, scum suckers" and far worse descriptions. No, I am not trying to convince anyone that might read this we are all upstanding citizens but simply individuals who made poor choices that lead to tragic consequences and irreversible life altering changes.

I have seen huge changes within the prison as well as in the outside world. With the passage of each year someone doing this kind of time loses more contacts in the free world, as well as those inside the razor wire fence. Life moves forward and stands still for no one. People in the free world have their own lives, families and obligations and certainly having a relative or just a friend in prison is not going to be at the top of their list of priorities. Yes, I am sure there are those of you reading this that will say "you should have thought before you did whatever put you into prison what the outcome would be." That sounds reasonable, but it is not true. I can honestly say I have asked many of my fellow prisoners, "did you consider the possible consequences before you broke the law?" No, people do not think about what might or might not happen as a rule when their reasoning is not at its' best. Human nature simply does not work with clear logic in the heat of passion, anger or fear. Am I trying to justify, no not really but simply asking the reader to be objective.

The United States has one of the largest and fastest growing prison populations of all countries. When I came into this women's prison the population was possibly 500 and now it has swollen to over 2,400 and is steadily increasing. There are three other female facilities in Ohio but those are considered to be prerelease type centers and as a rule one is not sent there

until close to their release back into society. I believe there are approximately another 1,700 women incarcerated in those facilities. There is also an increase in the juvenile population which in Ohio is housed here in a separate housing unit. Some of these women are as young as 15 or 16 years-old but the court system chose to try them as adult offenders. This prison also houses, the currently one woman under sentence of death. The male prisoners under the death sentence in Ohio are housed in two other male prisons.

A large percentage of prisoners here, and in all other prisons are called returnees because they come back, time after time. "Why?" The system does not work and the biggest contributing factor is there are precious few programs in place to assist the ex-felon coming out of prison. Employers are hesitant to down right refusing to hire ex-felons no matter how skilled and qualified that ex-felon might be. Landlords refuse to rent to ex-felons and there are many laws that forbid registered sex-offenders from living near schools, parks or other places children occupy. It is not an uncommon practice for someone completing "flat time" which is without a parole requirement to simply be released with no place to go. A lot of ex-felons genuinely did their prison time in a positive manner and utilized the programs, education and other opportunities for self improvement but without that helping hand when they come out it is far too easy to fall bák into old and negative patterns of behavior and commit a crime to get money to live on when no legal means of work is presented. Yet, instead of changing things this country just merrily continues to lock people up, over and over and reap the benefits of the prison industry complex. Prisons in this country are multi million dollar industries and the prisoners simply the commodities traded in to secure the incomes for those running them and working in them. The tax payers have been convinced by the media and politicians it is the right thing to do and locking up the "bad people" will make the world safer.

My observations are first hand and I do feel I am not being unfair in what I have written about. Am I bitter, no just saddened I made poor decisions and choices and will never be given the opportunity to effectively contribute to the real world again. I really am not a monster just another prisoner who is slowly becoming nothing more than a stastic and once I die just another number in the archives of the Ohio prison system.

If you have read this and would care to correspond with me I would be delighted to meet "pen friends." Mail for someone in prisoner is a true blessing and a chance to hear what the real world is now like.

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