

Ezra C. Martin
#214336
Oakhill Corr. Inst.
P.O. Box 938
Oregon, WI 54575

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The first time that I ever saw the words, "This is Mr. Martin's 5th incarceration..", in print an overflowing sense of shame filled me. How did I allow myself to become a five times loser? That is the question that I asked myself, and I believed that the answer to that question would be pivotal to my breaking this negative cycle that I had allowed myself to be caught-up in. I was able to find the answer through honest introspection.

The reason why I continued to make mistakes; repetitively, was because I never saw my arrest or incarceration as being my fault, but the fault of others (Parole Officer, Police Officer, etc.). Therefore, I did not have to change my conduct because as long as it was someone else's fault for my troubles I never saw my own culpability. It was this distorted thinking that led me to continue transgressing society's laws without pausing to reflect on the damage I was doing to my future, not to mention to society in general. Yes, I am very ashamed of my inability to make change in my life while I was still a part of society. The truth is that I really should not have had to come to prison to make positive change, but that is what it took and I am thankful that I did.

I grew up in a strong, loving family that taught/showed me fine examples of what living right was. Though my parents separated when I was young I grew up spending a considerable amount of time living with my father. He was my hero and provided me with a wonderful example of manhood & responsibility. However, as I became a teenager my father became addicted to drugs, this event shattered my life's direction, and as a result I took to the streets in a naïve effort to find the example of a man that I felt I had lost. And by the age of 16 I was waived into the adult prison system. When I emerged after that first incarceration at the age of 18 I was convinced that because of my status as an ex-con I would never be fully accepted back into society. This pessimistic falsehood led to a feeling of being rejected by society and my adolescent, reactionary response was in turn, to reject society.

It was the psychological surrender to this feeling of rejection that allowed me to continue in my criminal behavior without any feeling of wrongdoing. As a child feeling shunned, I thought since there now no place for me within society because of my status as a felon I would simply exist in the world outside of society.

I now understand that it was this distorted thinking that led me to five incarcerations. I no longer think or feel this way. In fact, I now know that as long as I have a positive outlook there is always a place for me in society.

I come from a community that has many problems and instead of using my intellect, skills, and strengths that I was blessed with to help bring about positive change I helped bring about further erosion. This reality too, is a source of shame for me. But rather than allow the tremendous amount of shame I feel about my past conduct paralyze me, I use it as the chief motivation to fuel my commitment to not only become a better man, overcome my past, & build a brighter future. But I also plan to return to my community and assist in fixing that which I helped to break.

My personal dedication to change has been consistent & constant throughout my incarceration. I chose not to wait until I became eligible for parole to begin positive actions but rather began doing so immediately upon my arrest.

The initial work toward self-progression was done internally. I had to essentially change who I was and the person I used to be. Which, I was able to do as I said by self-introspection. In order to do this I had to realign my whole thinking pattern from that of someone wronged to someone who chose to live far below his potential. Once I accepted this I began to tap into that well of potential that I had allowed to stay dormant for so long. I did not accomplish this simply by thinking different, I prayed that my heart and mind would be changed for the better, and then I set about seeking the knowledge that would help me to do so.

A great part of my self-progress comes from the spiritual growth that I have experienced since my arrest in 1997. A person's relationship with The Supreme Being has always been viewed as private in our society and I will keep that tradition here, but I am convinced that the continuity of my change has been sustained solely by my spirituality. It inspires me, challenges me, guides me, and strengthens me.