

This morning I sat at a table in the dining-hall, and held a conversation with one of the most prolific writers I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. After ingesting what passes for breakfast in this place, I walked back to the cell in deep thought. For years I've known that there are very talented people here; but on this day I came to grips with a harsh truth. Although places like these are filled with people that are full of potential, very few will ever have an opportunity to share their gifts with the world. Why? Because they made choices that hindered, rather than nurtured their gifts; which lead them to a place where dreams come to die. Those without a sincere relationship with God are consumed by the morbid mentality that comes from existing in a place that's literally the bowels of society. At some point all who are, or who have endured incarceration experiences a stage of sensory deprivation. Most don't realize that upon conviction there's an unspoken sentence. In time they learn that an extended stay in prison will cause relationships of any kind to slowly deteriorate. Many in my situation spend years doing whatever they can to repair broken ties with their love ones; only to be constantly rejected. Others fade away into the haze of prescription drug use; becoming recluses, and losing touch with themselves and reality. There are a few that have strong support systems. They are normally the ones who haven't learned to appreciate the love and affection their families give so freely. Then there are those like me, who refuse to engage in prison politics; the few that won't allow where we are to define who we are as people. We are those that won't let the weight of a lengthy prison sentence crush our hopes and dreams. In spite of the monotony that comes with existing in prison, we hold on to our individual identities while daily slamming the door in the face of conformity. Few will ever know that we are the men and women that write the lyrics to the melody that God has placed on our hearts. We create stories that can hold the attention of the most disinterested readers. The cadence of the poetry we produce will wrap your soul in the warmth of a rhythm that will cause your heart to flutter. Some of us paint, and draw things that can rival anything on display in Chicago's Art Institute, or the Louvre in Paris, France. Sadly we are written off by most because we made choices that relieved us of our liberties. If you're honest with yourself you have to admit that you know at least one of us. Someone you've written off because their choices cause you to experience more grief than pleasure. For some prison was a blessing because they were walking dead while being held hostage by an addiction; but without the love from their families, the blessing can feel more like a curse. The cold truth is, many won't help a person that's truly in need if it doesn't fit into their agenda. So many in my situation suffer taunts from those who say they love them. They're often beaten with word like, "That's what you get." "I told you so." "I didn't put you in there, and I don't owe you anything." and finally, "I know you don't ever see or hear from us, but we think and talk about you all the time because we love you." From our youth we're taught that love is a verb, but when you're shipped off to prison that doesn't apply. Being here I've saw first hand men mentally crumble due to lack of contact from love ones. Some of them took their lives, because to them death is better than isolation without affection. At one point or another we all secretly entertain that thought. Faith, hope, and prayer has kept me from being consumed by grief; but I understand the pain that comes from being in a cage around hundreds of people, yet feeling all alone. These places aren't designed to rehabilitate, but more so to warehouse those deemed unworthy of living beyond the bars. There was a point when I almost allowed this ordeal to cause me to become callous and uncaring. I could literally feel my moral compass being destroyed by the blows delivered to it by the hands of time. It wasn't until I noticed that my anger was like a malignant cancer that was devouring bits of my soul daily, that I prayed to be freed from the thoughts and

feelings that were extinguishing the light in my spirit. I'm sure that sounds odd coming from a person in my current situation, and I can understand that if you are under the impression that I am what I was accused of doing; BUT I AM NOT, NOR WILL I EVER BE WHO I'VE BEEN LABELED AS. As hard as it may be for many to believe, Prisoners are more than statistics. The fact that we're convicted felons doesn't alter the fact that we are Fathers and Mothers, Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters, Uncles and Aunts, Nephews and Nieces. Simply put, we are people in need of the same love and affection as anyone else. Where we currently reside shouldn't determine the kind of relationship people have with us. Rather than being focused on what landed them in their current situations, try taking the time to learn who they are as people. You may be surprised to find out that they are truly gifted. For those of you that know urban music, imagine how much the world would have missed if the artist Lyfe Jennings had a longer prison sentence, and was never able to release the songs SEX, and STATISTICS; both of which are filled with powerful messages, yet remain entertaining. For those of you that don't know him, look him up and read the lyrics to those songs. While doing so, please keep in mind that those songs were written and performed by a convicted felon. If you can feel this truth, reach out to me. Antwiane Sago 428132 W.C.I. P.O. Box 351 Waupun, WI. 53963-0351. Even if it's not in your heart to write me, please reach out to a love one that's in a similar situation. Whatever you do, don't make empty promises to them, because that hurts more than not hearing from a person. In these places all we have is your word, and our belief in the integrity of your character. Until my next post, God Bless.