

## DAMN THE TORPEDOS!

by Timothy J. Muise

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Many years ago I was a sternman on my brother's lobsterboat the Genesis III. The biblical reference had something to do with the venture (the "lobster" business) being the beginning of a new journey. We had to learn how to work the traps close to the rocks on shore while waves crashed around us. The lobster were close to shore and in order to catch them we had to take a risk, but we took this risk with the required caution. We caught lobsters, made money, and bonded traveling this "journey" together. I know my brother smiles down from heaven when he sees me employing lessons I learned about life from our days on the ocean together.

Being a man of very limited education I have had to rely upon my life experience to be my teacher, my guide. I also have made use of the knowledge of others, but this tool did not materialize until later in my life as when I was young I had "all the answers", answers which led me to prison! I learned that sometimes when a goal is truly worth achieving you need to take risks. You may have to "lobster" close to shore. In prison I see so many worthwhile possibilities, and I would like to fight all the battles, but I have had to make some choices, to pick and choose my battles so to speak, and this can be difficult for someone like myself. As I see it we must work for the greater good. This greater good means creating an environment where every incarcerated man and woman can have the opportunity to reenter the community well prepared. This also means changing attitudes about life sentences in Massachusetts. The citizens of the Commonwealth speak through the laws passed by their political representatives. In this state "lififers" are allowed to seek a commutation of the prison sentence under certain criteria. Today's Department of Correction has virtually negated that allowance by relegating the "lifer" to an existence where it is almost impossible to achieve the required level of exceptional reform. The negative impact this had upon the other non-lifers in the system is incredible and creates a public safety nightmare of epic proportions. This is proven out in the consistent high recidivism rates and crime rates. The system has been steady heading for the rocks.

When I give thought to why state officials and legislators have ignored the failings of the corrections system I can only come up with the argument that the jobs "program" created by our \$500 million plus corrections budget places public safety behind personal gain. I have seen generations of guards working in one facility, father, son and grandson. Captains are making \$35,000.00 in overtime alone with a base pay of \$85,000.00! This totals \$130,000.00!! Not bad work if you can get it. These guards can also work their 40 hour work week in 3 days by swapping shifts with each other. They work 2 double shifts for 2 days and 1 single shift for 1 day and have 4 days off! Some guards are fulltime guards and full time cops in their towns! Now back in my lobstering days i would have had to catch a whole bunch of lobsters to make the cabbage these guys are making, and that does not take into consideration the pensions, benefits, vacations, and

sick time that I only dreamed about back then. Their not even fishing close to the rocks as today's prison system is relatively calm. Guards actually sleep at their posts, no fear of assault or escape. Please do not believe what you see on television. Men in the prisons of Massachusetts are content to watch TV, lift weights, play cards, and engage in other mundane activities, to such an extent that the guards have had to stretch their imaginations to think up issues to "police". Don't feed the birds, no washing laundry, no pictures of pretty women in your cell and other surreal policies have all been birthed from the womb of the DOC jobs program. If the public only knew who has the helm of this ship of fools, a real runaway Titanic, they would send some of these pirates off to walk the plank. No fishing close to the rocks for these Gilligans.

My life lessons have taught me that to combat this problem it is going to take a few devoted individuals, both inside and outside of prison, to make a change. The world is always changed by the efforts and ideas of a few good men/women. These hard-chargers get the ideas out there and the ball starts rolling picking up speed along the way, speed in the form of other devoted believers and activists. They are willing to fish "close to the rocks" in order to make change, change that will actually save lives. There are a lot of "idea" men in prison, men with good intentions and good ideas, but what we really need are more "action" men. Men who are willing to get in the trenches and get their hands dirty. Presenting the facts in a logical and effective fashion requires skill and diligence. Just like the Marines we are searching for a few good men who can help us to bring the news to the public, that being the news that they are being missserved by a failing corrections system. Are you one of those "good men"?

I want to be clear why it is important to connect the failing of the DOC jobs program to the movement for correctional reform. Until we can defeat the monster this fantasy picture of prison has become we will never be able to work for real reform. When we show, through the facts and specifics, that the system is broken because of the guards and administrators being derilict in their duties then we can start to propose the solutions and search for progressive reform minded individuals to take over the helm and begin to fish close to the rocks. We know the lobsters are there and that the payday is not far off, but we lack the Captains with the fortitude to reap the harvest. It is not that difficult. We just have to break through that propaganda that the DOC has layed so thickly and steer through that fog to a new and clear horizon of reform. Join the movement. Risk ruin on the rocks. Work with us to make the streets of our cities and towns safer. Please contact me at the following address to find out how. Damn the torpedos, full speed ahead!;

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