

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

April 24, 2011

It is a glorious, sunny day at Stanley Correctional Institution (SCI). The weather has been terrible this spring and I am so glad it is finally improving. I have only been here a few months and am not at all happy about being here.

I have spent the last 9 years in minimum security facilities and coming back to a medium security prison was quite a shock, especially since the medium security prison of 2011 is much like the maximum security prisons of the early 1990s. This is all part of the ongoing agenda of our political leaders - turning the United States into a two-class society. I see the wealthy getting tax breaks while the poor go hungry and homeless. The worse our free citizens are treated, the worse the prisoners are treated. The rationale is that prisoners should not be treated better than those who did not commit crimes so conditions in prison become harsher and harsher.

It is the same with the amount of time being served on prison sentences. I have a life sentence and became eligible for release on parole in 1996. In the 1980s when I came to prison the average lifer was serving 13-15 years to release. Slowly over the last two decades the average amount of time has increased so it is now 25-35 years for a life sentence. There is no justification for this change. It is simply a matter of warehousing prisoners needlessly for decades and has become an established policy of Wisconsin politicians.

The reason I am back in medium is because the parole commission (its new name is the Early Release Review Commission, or ERRC) increased my defer from 8 to 12 months. The way it works for lifers in Wisconsin is that the ERRC conducts periodic reviews and sets a deferral length to the next review period. The length of that deferral determines whether a lifer can get a security reduction. My 8 month defer allowed me to be in minimum security. The pretext for my defer increase was my "current offense and prior criminal record." No other reason. What is the point? I have spent 19 months out in the community on work release. I have proven that I am not a risk to anyone and can be safely released on parole. In fact, I thought I was going to be paroled this year. God's delays are not God's denials. It will happen, just not as soon as I want.

### Hard Work

Fool says, hard work  
will get you what you want.  
Sage says, hard work  
will get you an early grave.  
Socialist says, hard work  
is the bane of the masses.  
Idealist says, hard work  
made Obama president.  
Cynic says, hard work (and a little nepotism)  
are all it takes.  
I say, hard work  
will get you what you want.  
That and the Grace of God.

Harlan Richards

## The Heart Speaks

I dreamt another sort of life,  
    where my heart spoke loud and clear,  
To all who would listen, but most of all,  
    I dreamt another sort of life,  
Where hard work was rewarded, integrity  
    was praised and selflessness the norm.  
It must have been a dream because  
    as I awoke from my reverie,  
I saw another sort of life,  
    where hearts are crushed ere they speak,  
And words are daggers falsely twisted.  
    It was another sort of life,  
Where despots destroy, treachery  
    is praised and selfishness the norm.  
Let me in my reverie stay,  
    where my heart speaks loud and clear,  
And all who listen do agree,  
    it's best to be . . . in another sort of life.

Harlan Richards