

Thoughts From The Heart
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Looking Back

WHEN I GOT SENTENCED I REMEMBER TURNING AROUND AND LOOKING FOR PEACE OF MIND AND SOUL, BUT FOUND NONE. I THOUGHT BY THE TIME I GOT OUT MY TWO DAUGHTERS WOULD BE GROWN AND IN COLLEGE, OR EVEN MARRIED WITH CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN. ALL OF THESE FEARS AND OTHERS WERE THERE, BUT MOST OF ALL WHAT SCARED ME WAS THE SENSE THAT I WOULD BE SPENDING THE NEXT FIFTEEN YEARS AMONG PEOPLE WHO WERE, IN MY MIND, RUTHLESS AND VIOLENT AND I WOULD TURN INTO ONE OF THEM. WHEN I GOT TO PRISON, I EXPERIENCE FEAR BEYOND BELIEF. I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE TO WALK, WHAT TO SAY, WHERE TO EVEN PUT MY EYES. IN PRISON, YOUR "EYES" ARE VERY IMPORTANT. YOU DO NOT LOOK AT PEOPLE; IF YOU LOOK AT SOMEONE, HE COULD GET VERY ANGRY AT YOU.

AFTER SIX MONTHS, I WAS MOVED TO THE PRISON WHERE I WOULD DO THE MAJOR PORTION OF MY TIME. TO MOVE ME THEY PUT MY FEET AND HANDS IN SHACKLES. THIS WAS VERY DRAMATIC. THEY MOVED US IN THE DARK. WHEN WE GOT THERE, THEY TOOK ME INTO THIS HUGE GUARDROOM. ALL I SAW WAS STEEL. I WAS PROCESSED AND TAKEN TO MY CELL. IT WAS TINY, MAYBE FOUR FEET WIDE BY EIGHT FEET LONG. IT WAS PITCH-DARK, ALL STEEL ALL NIGHT LONG I CRIED. I CRIED AND I SHOOK WITH FEAR ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN IN THE MORNING WHEN I GOT UP. I HOPED THEY WOULD JUST LEAVE ME IN MY CELL, I HOPED THEY WOULD JUST LET ME DIE. THEY WAKE ME UP IN THE MORNING AND TOOK ME TO CHOW AND THEN TO THE PRISON YARD. BOY, THAT TERM SCARED ME: "PRISON YARD", THAT WHERE I WOULD BE ON MY OWN. THE CALL BACK WASN'T GOING TO BE UNTIL ABOUT TWO HOURS LATER. I WAS TERRIFIED. BUT WHEN I WALKED OUT INTO THE YARD THE FIRST THING I SAW WAS A LITTLE COURTYARD WITH A CIRCLE, MAYBE THIRTY YARDS ACROSS, FILLED WITH FLOWERS: BRIGHT, BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS. NOW FOR THE LAST SIX MONTHS I HAD BEEN IN MY CELL FOR TWENTY-THREE OUT OF EVERY TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

I might have seen a tree somewhere off in the distance, but I hadn't see anything like this. I walked over in a daze and got down on my knees and smelled the flowers. I felt like I was on some other planet. It was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen in my life. I looked up there, and all I could see was this expansive sight of incredibly beautiful mountains. Of course, there was also the prison yard and the gun towers and all the walls, but somehow, the mountains superseded the prison, and the prison was like a back drop to the mountains. It was Indian Summer, and it was beautiful. At this point a knot that I could feel in my solar plexus became very, very vivid in my experience. That knot started to grow, to get very strong. I started to feel nauseous. The knot began to move up into my chest, and it moved up I felt like I was going to start crying. I didn't know what to do. In prison you simply do not cry in front of other people, because if you show weakness in any way you are handing an invitation to people of a "predatory----nature".

MY FACE GOT RED-HOT. I COULD FEEL THE TEARS COMING. I KNEW I WAS GOING TO BREAK DOWN. THAT FEELING WAS COMING UP INSIDE ME LIKE A VOLCANO. THEN I LOOKED UP AND I SAW A RUNNING TRACK. I'D BEEN AN TRACK ATHLETE ALL MY LIFE; RUNNING HAD BEEN A WAY FOR ME TO RELEASE EMOTIONS. SO I JUMPED UP AND STARTED RUNNING. AND AS I DID, THE KNOT INSIDE ME EXPLODED. TEARS CAME POURING OUT OF ME. I WAS CRYING UNCONTROLLABLY AS I RAN AROUND THE TRACK. IT WAS COMING OUT SO HARD AND SO STRONG THAT I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE. I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE. ALL THE INMATES WERE OUT IN THE YARD, BUT I DIDN'T EVEN SEE THEM. THEY DIDN'T MATTER ANYMORE, NOTHING DID. I DIDN'T CARE WHO SAW ME OR DIDN'T SEE ME. I JUST RAN AND CRIED. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT WAS, I FELT EXHAUSTED. I WANTED TO SOMEPLACE WHERE THERE WAS NOBODY, WHERE I COULD BE WITH MYSELF. I RAN OFF THE TRACK, AND SAT DOWN AGAINST A BUILDING. I SAW THE OTHER INMATES WALKING ON THE TRACK, PEERING OVER AT ME, AS THEY WALKED BY, I JUST STARTED SMILING. I WASN'T AFRAID TO LOOK AT THEM. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN SIX MONTHS THAT I HAD LOOKED AT ANOTHER HUMAN BEING SQUARE IN THE FACE.