

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

November 3, 2012

28 Years & Counting

Happy anniversary Harlan! You have now been in prison for 28 years for stabbing a man in self-defense.

After all these years I still can't believe that our criminal justice system is so corrupt that it would knowingly send an innocent man to prison for life. Yet here I sit, a victim of an injustice for which there is no means of redress.

Even after I was convicted I believed the court system would acknowledge its errors and release me. But after I lost my direct appeal and the courts created procedural hurdles to stop innocent people from pursuing post-conviction relief, it became apparent that I was expected to serve a life sentence in spite of not being guilty of murder.

The corruption I write of is not the kind where you slide some money under the table and get a favorable decision. This is the kind where judges disregard laws, fairness and prior precedent to further a specific agenda. Collectively, the Republican-appointed judiciary has made it impossible for anyone convicted of a crime to get a fair trial. The federal courts set the standards for constitutional law and state courts blindly follow them.

I can usually write succinctly and eloquently about anything - except when it comes to the circumstances which sent me to prison. Every time I address the issue I get so upset I end up spouting a diatribe. It does my cause no good to come off sounding like a nut case.

Yet the fact remains, I've now served 28 years for a "murder" I never should have been charged with. But what frustrates and disgusts me most of all is that had I not followed the advice of my attorney (and made numerous errors of judgment thereafter) I never would have been convicted of murder.

So even though I was wrongfully convicted of murder I compounded the effects of that conviction by my own poor judgment.

Thankfully, wisdom comes with age and even if I'm not free, at least I am making better decisions these days.