

REPLY ID: "ITT"

Jan 9, 2014

DEAR MATT STROUD,

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSE AND YES, I WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS INTERVIEW ARTICLE. THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME SPECIFIC TOPICS & QUESTIONS. I TEND TO GET OFF POINT AND RAMBLE SOMETIMES. YOU ASKED ABOUT THE COMMUNITY AND HOW RACISM DIVIDES US. IN PA STATE PRISONS YOU HAVE SO MANY DIFFERENT GANGS, GROUPS, SECTS, CLIQUES. TOO MANY TO COUNT. FOR INSTANCE, WHITE, BLACK, SPANISH, GANG MEMBERS, HUSTLERS, HOMOSEXUALS, CHURCH GUYS, BUT NO MATTER WHAT, RACISM DIVIDES US. THE MENTALITY IN PRISON USED TO BE "US AGAINST THEM". MEANING THE PRISONERS AGAINST THE GUARDS, OR THE SYSTEM. THERE WAS ALWAYS RACISM. MOST OLDER BLACK PRISONERS ARE VERY RACIST. ESPECIALLY THE MUSLIMS. BUT THE SAME GOES WITH THE WHITES. THE OLDER WHITES ARE VERY RACIST. IN THIS PRISON, PEOPLE DO INTERMINGLE BUT USUALLY IT'S WHEN THEY WANT SOMETHING. THE RACIAL DIVIDE DOES NOT JUST OCCUR IN HERE. IT STARTS OUT IN THE WORLD. MOST PEOPLE IN PRISON ARE FROM CITIES AND THERE IS SO MUCH HATRED AMONGST DIFFERENT RACES IN AN URBAN CITY. DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES I HAVE BEEN JUMPED JUST BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF MY SKIN IN MY LIFE? TOO MANY TO REMEMBER. BUT IT'S NOT JUST ME, THIS HAPPENS TO MILLIONS IF AMERICANS IN OUR COUNTRY. WHEN PEOPLE COME TO PRISON, THEY JUST WANT TO FIT IN. SO SOME GUYS THAT ARE NOT RACIST, THEY FALL IN WITH A GANG OR A CLIQUE THAT IS AND THEY FOLLOW. AND RACISM BUILDS. I CANNOT COUNT ON MY FINGERS AND TOES THE AMOUNT OF TIMES I HEAR A PRISONER CALLING ANOTHER PRISONER A "CRACKER" IN HERE, IN 1 DAY. I PERSONALLY GREW UP WITH ALOT OF HATRED IN MY HEART. BUT I OVERCAME MY OWN HATRED WHEN MY SISTERS FIRST MIXED SON WAS BORN. I LOVE THAT KID AND HE IS THE ONE WHO HELPED ME OVERCOME MY OWN RACIST BELIEFS. HATRED IN PRISON IS LIKE GREED, IT BUILDS AND BUILDS AND WILL NEVER END.

YOUR NEXT QUESTION WAS ABOUT ACHIEVEMENTS IN HERE. AS FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AS A LIFER IN THIS STATE, THEY ARE SEVERELY LIMITED. YOU GO TO THE BOTTOM OF EVERY WAITING LIST FOR EVERY PROGRAM, SCHOOL CLASS OR JOB. IF YOU HAVE MONEY, YOU ARE ALLOWED TO SIGN UP FOR COLLEGE COURSES, NOT MANY ARE OFFERED, BUT YOU MUST PRE-PAY AND IT IS NOT CHEAP. \$100 A CLASS MIGHT SEEM LIKE NOTHING OUT IN THE WORLD BUT IN HERE IT IS ALOT OF MONEY WHEN YOU ONLY MAKE 19¢ PER HOUR WORKING. IN HERE, YOUR OWN PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS CAN BE ANYTHING YOU WANT. FOR ME, I MADE CERTAIN



GOALS FOR MYSELF. TO LOSE WEIGHT & GET HEALTHY, TO BECOME ONE OF THE BEST IN THE PRISON AT CARDIO & EXTREME FITNESS WORKOUTS. TO EXPAND MY LIMITED VOCABULARY. PRISON IS SO DULL, LONELY, BORING, IT'S SO VERY COMPETITIVE IN HERE THAT YOU CAN MAKE ANYTHING AN ACHIEVABLE GOAL. THE WOMAN I LOVED MORE THAN MY OWN LIFE WAS KILLED OCT. 25, 2001. AND FOR THE LAST 4-5 YEARS I HAVE SET GOALS FOR MYSELF TO BE A BETTER MAN, SOMEONE SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD OF. SOMEONE MY 16 YEAR OLD DAUGHTER KRISTA CAN BE PROUD OF. I AM A BAPTIZED CATHOLIC. I WANT TO LEARN AND GROW AS A MAN AND BECOME SOMEONE THAT MY FAMILY CAN BE PROUD OF. ALOT OF PRISONERS SET GOALS TO REACH. AN ACCOMPLISHMENT, ANY ACCOMPLISHMENT, CAN MAKE A MAN FEEL BETTER ABOUT HIMSELF. I PERSONALLY HAVE A HOLE IN MY HEART THAT I AM LOOKING TO FILL. SO I SET NEW GOALS FOR MYSELF CONSTANTLY IN ORDER TO SUCCEED MORE. BUT SADLY, AS A LIFER, WE ARE FORGOTTEN BY THE SYSTEM. THEY SAY THEIR GOAL IS TO TURN INMATES INTO PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY, BUT AS A LIFER THERE IS NO NEED BECAUSE WE WILL DIE IN HERE.

AND YOUR LAST QUESTION. WHEN I CAME T PRISON I WAS 21 YEARS OLD. JUST SENTENCED TO LIFE WITH NO PAROLE. I WAS VERY ANGRY, VIOLENT, AND SUICIDAL. 3 YEARS LATER MY JUSTINE WAS KILLED AND I BECAME WORSE. THE ONE GOOD THING IN MY LIFE WAS JUST KILLED AND I LOST ALL HOPE. I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT BETTERING MYSELF. BUT AS TIME WENT ON, I HAD GROWN TIRED OF BEING MISERABLE, ALONE, SAD, SO I LOOKED AT MYSELF AND DID NOT WANT TO BE THAT PERSON SO I LOOKED AT HOW I COULD CHANGE. I WAS ABOUT 29 YEARS OLD WHEN I MET A FRIEND, ANOTHER ITALIAN NAMED PAUL. HE WAS ALSO SERVING LIFE BUT AS OUR FRIENDSHIP GREW, HE TOOK ME TO CHURCH. THAT WAS THE BEGINNING OF MY CHANGE. IT ALL STARTED WITH A FRIEND WHO CARED ENOUGH TO WANT TO HELP ME CHANGE. PAUL WAS VERY EDUCATED, VERY WELL SPOKEN, A LEADER IN PRISON, AND A GENUINELY GOOD MAN. SO I BEGAN MY OWN PROCESS OF CHANGING. I HAD FAMILY, A FEW FRIENDS IN THE WORLD WHO STILL CARED ABOUT ME AND I HAD GOTTEN INVOLVED WITH THE CHURCH HERE IN THE PRISON. I'M NO BIBLE THUMPER LIKE YOU SEE IN THE MOVIES. I'VE NEVER EVEN FULLY READ THE BIBLE BUT I WANTED TO DO BETTER, BE BETTER. I HAD DEVELOPED SUCH A CONSCIENCE THAT THE GUILT OF MY LIFE BEGAN TO EAT AT ME, STILL DOES AT TIMES. THE REGRETS, THE REMORSE, KEEPS ME AWAKE AT NIGHTS SOMETIMES. I HAVEN'T HAD A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP IN 15 1/2 YEARS. THERE COMES A TIME WHEN YOU DON'T WANT



TO BE THAT PERSON ANYMORE. INSIDE YOU WANT TO CHANGE. ALOT OF GUYS WONT BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE THE SUPPORT OF A FRIEND. BUT I ADMIRERD PAUL, HIS STRENGTH, HIS FAITH, AND I WANTED BETTER FOR MYSELF. I HAD NO DESIRE TO BE LIKE HIM BUT I WANTED TO BE THE BEST THAT I COULD BE. I STILL HAVE MANY FLAWS AND FAULTS THAT I WANT TO OVERCOME BUT IT IS A DAILY STRUGGLE. IN PRISON YOU CAN NOT BE SEEN AS WEAK. IF YOU ARE, YOU WILL BE SEEN AS PREY AND THE PREDATORS WILL COME. IT COULD BE TO STEAL YOUR STUFF, TO RAPE YOU, TO BULLY YOU, OR JUST TO TREAT YOU LIKE CRAP. RIGHT NOW IN MY LIFE, I KNOW I WILL DIE IN HERE. BUT I STRUGGLE EVERY DAY TO BE A BETTER MAN. NOT JUST FOR GOD, BUT ALSO FOR MY FAMILY, MY MOM WHOM I LOVE SO MUCH AND I FEEL LIKE A FAILURE TO HER, AND FOR MY DAUGHTER KRISTA WHO I HAVE NEVER BEEN THERE FOR, AND ALSO FOR ALL OF MY FAMILY AND GOD FRIENDS IN MY LIFE, AND NOW FOR MY SISTERS WHO I JUST FOUND AFTER OVER 20+ YEARS OF NOT KNOWING WHERE THEY WERE. LOVE & CARING IS WHAT MAKES YOU WANT TO BE A BETTER MAN, HUMAN BEING. I AM 37 BUT I AM NOT DONE GROWING AS A HUMAN BEING AND IF I EVER AM GIVEN THE CHANCE AT LIFE OUTSIDE, I WOULD NOT RE-OFFEND. OF THAT I AM SURE. BUT IN MY HOME STATE, THEY DON'T BELIEVE IN SECOND CHANCES.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY MATT AND YOU MAY ASK ME WHATEVER QUESTIONS YOU HAVE. I HAVE NO SECRETS AND THIS IS A PART OF GROWING AND BETTERING MYSELF AS A MAN. I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU AGAIN. I HAVE ~~THE~~ QUESTION<sup>S</sup>, I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW A LITTLE MORE ABOUT YOUR MAGAZINE. IS IT MONTHLY? ONLY ON THE INTERNET? IS THERE ANY WAY THAT I COULD SEE IT? I SHALL AWAIT YOUR NEXT LETTER. UNTIL THEN, CIAO.

SINCERELY,

ROBERT PEZZECA

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'ROBERT PEZZECA', written over the typed name. The signature is stylized and somewhat illegible due to overlapping loops and flourishes.