

THERE'S THE RUB

(Chapter Seven)

One thing about prison is that almost everyone has a nickname. Everything from "Goggles" to "Fish", "Prophecy" to "Knowledge", "Eight" to "Four-Five"...the list goes on. My next individual goes by a nickname as well, Vee, short for Devon. Vee and I met each other at Souza Baranowski prison considered the super-max of the Massachusetts prison system. At the time I was a bookie, taking bets on anything that had legs and could move. Vee was one of my best customers and basically bet on anything that could or couldn't move.

Born with a silver tongue, Vee reminded me of a used car salesman who was determined to sell you a car piece by piece and convince you that it would save you more in the long run. Each day he would discuss his picks and each time I would check to see if my watch was missing from my wrist. He was a hustler and he knew every angle to play and what odds to give. He was as street smart as they come – and with good reason – it's what he was born into.

Born while his father was incarcerated for selling drugs, and raised around aunts and uncles who sold drugs and stole it was not uncommon for him to see piles of money, drugs and guns laying around the house. On weekends they would be smoking weed, drinking, and playing poker. It's no wonder he wanted to be anything other than a drug dealer. At the age of 12 he began selling drugs and by age 14 picked up his first arrest for a stolen car. This was a ride going in one direction and its downward spiral was beginning long before he could choose otherwise. Many years later and with several arrests to go with it, Vee fathered two beautiful girls but he never took the time to actually be a father...or the son his mother wanted him to be. Instead, he chose a life of crime. Unfortunately, it took the taking of a life in order for him to gain his own.

He soon found himself in a situation that turned drastically violent. On July 19, 2000, Vee shot and killed a neighborhood acquaintance over a dispute that had been going on for days. He was eventually arrested and sentenced to second-degree murder. Ordinarily, that should be the end of the story but in reality it was just the beginning.

Somehow he found a way to "maintain" some semblance of positive adjustment. The most trouble he has been in while incarcerated is "refusing a direct order". However most guys can stay out of trouble while in prison, so long as they put their mind to it. It's another thing entirely to change your self-awareness. The moment he began to see the "lifestyle" he lived was a lie, happened when his youngest daughter (5 years old) said to him on a visit, "will you be home in time for my Girl Scout meeting?"

"I sat there stunned," he told me. "It was the first time I ever broke down and cried in public...right there in the middle of the visiting room for everyone to see. Here was an innocent little girl who was just months old when I committed my crime, yet, she's feeling the effects of decisions I made five years earlier." Slowly he began a quest to not only change himself but heal the brokenheartedness he caused while giving back to a community he took so much from.

He graduated from the Correctional Recovery Program (CRA) and was asked to come back as a graduate mentor. He enrolled into Project Youth and has become a frequent speaker in telling his story to the students. He has also written to several Brockton City Councilors regarding violence in the city and suggested ideas on how to prevent future violence. He even authored a book entitled "The Streets Lied & We Believed". A compilation of over 60 prisoners expressing their thoughts on prison, dealing drugs and their own life that led them to prison.

Not a day goes by that he doesn't speak to one of his daughters. They admire him and value his insight. It's a bond that keeps him going and inspires him to be more than what anyone ever expected of him. Yet, there's the rub, he became more than he ever expected of himself.

As Told To:

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