

## Reflections

My incarceration began almost fifteen years ago. I was arrested in the spring of 2000. The experience of spending a decade-and-a-half in detention demanded constant adjustments. I navigated my way through the system with no clear guidance. I learned much in order to survive.

My journey in prison started on a level four yard; they are commonly referred to as maximum security. My custody designation decreased because I maintained a positive, disciplinary free lifestyle. Each tier in the descent had challenges. I often thought that the authorities were punishing me for behaving. Many of the inmates I left behind defied the rules in order to remain in their comfort zone. I chose the unfamiliar and sometimes threatening path of growth. Would you do the same?

Today I live in a level two facility. I share a cell with seven other men. We are crammed into a space designed to hold half of our number. We have one toilet and one shower. The hardest part of residing together is that we have varying values. When communication breaks down in our cell violence sometimes follows. All of us have our own histories and personal circumstances. We each "do our time" according to our individual needs. It is amazing that we find any common ground at all. Yet, we must coexist.

The benefits I enjoy in this institution are numerous in spite of the hardships I endure. My greatest pleasure is attending college. No other privileges offered here can compare with the opportunity to seek a higher education. I must do the work and make the sacrifices. Still, without support staff the journey would be impossible.

Sometimes security considerations interfere with what I am trying to accomplish. Custody staff has a job to do. They are responsible to keep the peace and to enforce the rules. Sadly, there is little room for individualized wants or needs. Inmates must be treated uniformly. I understand the necessity of having rules. I can still get frustrated when procedures conflict with the important deadlines I am required to meet for college. Patience is needed ~~of~~ <sup>by</sup> all inmates when they deal with the guards.

The prison experience is different from one yard to the next. Every institution is a unique environment. The challenges and rewards offered here continue to refine my soul. Character is often developed in adversity. What the future holds is a mystery. I look forward to its unfolding. I hope you will check back to see what I discover.

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