

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

May 29, 2017

Jailhouse Romance

One of my readers asked me about this subject and rather than give her a response I decided to write a blog about it.

What's it like, spending 32 years in prison without ever making love? Like a dull ache that never goes away but fades over time until it becomes part of the backdrop of one's life. All the great sages have advocated celibacy and untold numbers of aspirants have chosen to voluntarily abstain from sex and romantic relationships. However, as all the stories of Catholic priests molesting children make clear, it is only a viable option where exposure to the opposite sex is limited or the commitment is voluntary and sincere.

Sexual energy can be redirected into other areas. There are meditation techniques which can use sexual energy to reach spiritual enlightenment. There is a vast difference between sexual desire (lust) and emotional desire (love). Based on my experience, it is possible to sublimate your sexual desire and redirect that energy into other worthwhile pursuits.

Obsessing over sex when there are no meaningful options to satisfy that urge is like a starving person fantasizing about feasting. It accomplishes nothing and contributes to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. I think Buddhists have the right idea in their premise that the root of all pain is desire. Eliminate desire and you eliminate the pain of unfulfilled desire.

Having said all that, some guys choose to be bisexual (gay for the stay) and find a partner among fellow prisoners. Others look for victims (other prisoners) they can rape or seek to establish intimate relationships with female staff members. Masturbation goes on regularly but it's not talked about very much by prisoners. In my opinion, being forced to masturbate as a means of sexual gratification is humiliating and degrading. I would not wish forced celibacy on anyone, especially the decades-long celibacy prison administrators take for granted. There are also bromances - two guys who form a deep emotional attachment to each other and cell up together for years without a sexual relationship.

Most guys in prison want to have an emotional relationship with a woman, especially if they are serving a long sentence. Nothing is more important in life than loving and being loved. Very few long term prisoners have a woman in their life. Usually, when guys talk about it, they don't speak of having or wanting

a fulfilling emotional experience, but rather want a servant who will send them money, buy them things and be their gofer (go for this, go for that) on the outside. In other words, they only think of what they can get out of a woman instead of what they can contribute to a relationship. Most women are loving, compassionate and giving. They don't mind helping their man out. I see too many men taking advantage of a woman. They don't want a relationship, they want a cash cow to support them while they are in prison.

The longer men are separated from women and deprived of an intimate emotional relationship, the more isolated and rigid they become. They lose the ability to relate to women and become cold and callous. When they have a significant other in their lives exchanging love and caring, they can regain their compassion.

I have gone years both with and without a woman in my life. I got married in prison and we were together for many years before the stress of my imprisonment tore us apart. I currently have a wonderful woman in my life and I thank God for her every day. The number one rule is to always put your partner's interests ahead of your own. If you both do that, you can have a long and fulfilling relationship. As I said before, to love and be loved is the most important thing in life.

I am also including a poem I wrote the other day which relates to this subject.

May you all find love, satisfaction and fulfillment whether in or out of prison.