

## Robert Tiran

### *Suicide Is My 401(k)*

For someone serving life without the possibility of parole, suicide is a retirement plan. It is something that is not only considered by all “lifers,” but invested in. Sure the chance of freedom exists, but that is like winning the lotto. And after decades playing the numbers, one loses resolve. The odds of winning become diminished by those around us dying after 20, 30, 40 years “in.”

It is difficult to share such confessions and even more difficult to admit the frequency with which I invest. A future like mine turns into 25 years, and nothing changes; passing 30, and these fences become my only friends; 40 in sight, and all I have ever known has disappeared or died... these are the circumstances which push the condemned to invest in a lifer’s 401(k).

Some years ago, I awoke like most mornings. I rose with the sun and spent the following minutes enjoying the silence that the morning brings. I got up, gathered my cosmetics, and headed to the end of the rock (hallway). The bathrooms in prison are small; there is little privacy, except for a small mop closet.

As I stood before a sink and brushed my morning breath away, I noticed in the mirror a glimmer of movement inside the closet behind me. The door was positioned so that I couldn’t see much... just someone moving within the dim lighting of the mop closet. As I continued watching, a face appeared. The prisoner within was someone who lived a few doors down. He was only familiar in that I knew his name. It is not unusual at this time in the morning for someone to be inside of this closet gathering cleaning supplies. But what raised my attention was the moment our eyes met, an undeniable sense of fright washed over me and made a home in my throat.

In prison, a rule written in an invisible memorandum states that others’ business is just that: their business. To involve oneself in others’ affairs is to stroll the prison yard with a sign staked to my back, “please stab me.” I have witnessed firsthand the consequences of this rule for violations much less than this.

But despite my imaginary guidebook, I stepped to one side to get a clearer view of the contents of this closet. I did this mainly not to pry, but for a more selfish reason: personal security. And as I stepped to the left, still peering in the mirror, I witnessed this man’s affairs... a hangman’s noose. In this moment I was faced with multiple realities. If I informed the officers, I would surely learn my lesson in breaking invisible rules. If I interceded directly, there was no telling what violence he may respond

with. But the trump card dealt between these two futures... if I continued to do nothing, that skeleton would weigh too much.

So I slowly stepped in the doorway, and spoke his name as gently as I could. He turned from squaring his knot, and in a voice just above a whisper yet below conviction he said, "This is my 42nd year." My eyes responded that I completely understood. I asked him to try and think about things, possibly reconsider. He responded, "I have had 42 years of considering and no one left... "

I whispered with a hoarse voice as tears began to swell around my eyelids, "Please don't place this burden on me... this knowing." He stared at me for what seemed like minutes, turned from me, and began to untie the noose from his almost coffin. I asked him as he proceeded to leave if he would consider a favor... maybe speak to the prison shrink. He stopped, and without turning, he said, "Sure," but that she didn't "know what 42 years turned into."

I watched him that day, and a few hours after lunch, I saw him head over to healthcare. I spent the rest of the day wondering if he had really spoke to the shrink and then wondered what might my repercussions be when he got back his bearings. What path might he take in teaching me a lesson in other people's business?

When I awoke the next morning, it was the same as always. I rose with the sun and was then reminded of a possible looming lesson. I gathered my cosmetics, and headed to the bathroom to wash away my sleep. As I approached this man's door, it was impossible not to notice the yellow tape blocking the door. I then noticed stains on his doorstep in a color which I knew by instinct. He had made his decision, and decided it was time to cash in his options. He slit his wrists that evening while I slept, wrapped himself in his blanket and granted himself parole. Furthermore, he had placed a note on his desk asking his victims to forgive him... I wonder if they ever did. You see, in prison, it seems the only way to be forgiven is to finish one's conviction.

What scares me is not the fact that I consider such options or that they surface quite often. The terror which inserts paper cuts into my heart as decades pass is when this thinking turns from often to daily, what then? I am strong and resilient. I am dedicated to never again being the boy who applied pressure to the trigger of a firearm. The debt I feel about my mistakes holds such weight that I could never be him again. I seek forgiveness from those affected by my choices with every single breath. Yet in this place, in reality, forty or fifty years in handcuffs... what else exists but a lifer's 401(k)?

I hope that if I am ever ready to cash in my options, that I do not burden anyone with such a debt. To my knowledge he never told anyone

about our conversation. I guess he decided that he had spared me the weight and burden of knowing by choosing a different route. He was wrong.