

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
CHIPPEWA CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
4269 WEST M-80
KINCHELOE, MI 49784-0001

MEMBER--

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MILITARY INSIGNIA COLLECTORS
INTERNATIONAL NAVAL RESEARCH ORGANIZATION
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY
UNITED STATES NAVAL INSTITUTE
COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE
NATIONAL MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NAVAL HISTORICAL FOUNDATION
HISTORIC NAVAL SHIP ASSOCIATION

PAST MEMBER--

MICHIGAN JAYCEES
-STATESMAN
RIVERSIDE JAYCEES
-27th PRESIDENT
-MANAGEMENT V.P.
-SECRETARY
-EDITOR THE PIPELINE

May 1, 2020

The Michigan Humanities Collaboratory
ATTN: Nora Krinitsky
Carceral State Project Director
100 North Hatcher Gallery
Hatcher Graduate Library
913 South University
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Dear Nora:

I am in hopes that at the time I am writing this, finds everything to be the best they can be under the current circumstances with the COVID-19 public health crisis. I was expecting the news you conveyed in your letter of April 9, 2020, regarding the postponement of the 25th Annual Art Exhibition. I had expected this to happen, if not to be cancelled altogether, as many current and future public events have been over the past few weeks.

I am hoping that all those who are associated with both the Prison Creative Arts Project and the Carceral Project have weathered this COVID-19 pandemic without being too adversely affected. It is most unfortunate that this crisis has affected all aspects of normal living. Just as out there in society, some locations in the MDOC have been more fortunate than others. It appears those of us the further north we are the less affected we have been, so far. Hopefully, we are seeing the flattening of the curve and things will be able to return to the "new" normal soon.

I have enclosed my written testimonial for the Carceral State Project. I tried to give you as much as possible for all the questions but I am sure there are things that I missed in the writing, just as there are probably things that may not be helpful or what the project is looking for.

When I started out writing for this project, I had not thought the final product would be so long. But with the amount of time that I was trying to cover and provide the requested information for, it probably would have been twice as long had I wrote about everything. I tried to stick to the more memorable incidents that I have experienced where it showed both the negative and somewhat harsh conditions, along with those that were also positive. For as much as prison is a negative environment, there are still positive things that exist and occur from time to time.

Nora Krinitsky,
U of M Carceral State Project
Page 2
May 1, 2020

RE: Leo Michael Ambler #A188312

I am in hopes that I have provided the project with the information and data that is being sought. If I have not, or there are other things that you are looking for, please let me know if there is any other additional information that the project would like me to provide. I realize that I did get off on a tangent regarding the issue of juvenile lifers and brain development for the activist knowledge question. But that is a very personal issue for me and many others.

I have included events up through the current COVID-19 public health crisis and how my facility has handled all the new daily requirements for living, working, etc. Unlike the schools in society that are closed and cancelled or transferred classes to an on-line format. I still am working as a GED tutor everyday, although we only have limited class sizes and have to run lessons two days in a row because each class subject is split into two classes now.

Just as my own education has not been affected by COVID-19, yet. I am still working on my graduate degree program from California Coast University through the mail. I am about halfway to completing my Master of Science degree in Psychology.

Thank you for your time, attention, and assistance in the teamwork to complete this great project. I look forward to seeing some of the results of our labors. As I said, should anything else be needed please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,



Leo Michael Ambler

cc: file

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 1
APRIL 2020

My name is Leo Michael Ambler and I am writing this as of April 2020, during the world COVID-19 pandemic. I am now 51 years old and have been incarcerated in the Michigan Department of Corrections since 1987, when I was 17 years-old. I now have almost 34 years of incarceration, meaning that I have now spent two-thirds of my life in the MDOC.

WHEN AND WHERE I WAS BORN?

I was born November 5, 1968, in Landstuhl-Rhienland-Pfaltz, Federal Republic of Germany (formerly known as West Germany, now reunified after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990). I was born at the U.S. Army Hospital at Landstuhl, as my father was a member of the U.S. Air Force and was assigned to Ramstein Air Force Base as part of the NATO forces of 4ATAF (4th Allied Tactical Air Force).

My parents met in the U.S. Air Force when they were first stationed at Randaloph Air Force Base in Texas. While in Germany we lived in the American military community at Kaiserslautern, or as most refer to it as "K-Town." We lived there in an apartment until my father's enlistment ended in the middle of 1970. We then moved back to the U.S. and lived in an apartment in my father's hometown of Homer, Michigan. Homer is a small village about 1,200 people in the southern part of the lower peninsula..

I was raised by both my parents until my mother wanted to become a school teacher and went to live on campus at Western Michigan university to study physical education. So for a couple of years I only saw her on the weekends or in between class semesters, unless we went to the campus dorm to see her. When she graduated from WMU with her Bachelor's degree she went to work as a substitute teacher until finding a permanent job in Litchfield, Michigan. My father worked as a laboratory technician in heat treatment and metallurgy for several companies making parts for the automotive industry.

We lived in an apartment on the east side of town until 1975 when we bought a house on the west end of the same street and lived right across from the middle and high school.

The world outside of my family was really an unknown, as we didn't do the great American passtime of going on vacations every summer like many families. We vacationed to West Virginia one time to see a friend of my father, who had brought something back from Germany and we drove down to pick it up and bring it home to Michigan. We did go to my mother's parents for a visit in North

Dakota a couple of times, but because of the distance we didn't do that very often.

Most of the world outside my family unit revolved around people who knew or grew up with my father. This is where I had exposure to learn about horses, one member of a family who went to school with my father raised Clydesdale horses and his sister raised and showed Quarter horses. Which lead us to spend time during the summer and fall going to horse races and shows, along with going through the county fair circuit around the state all summer long. I also learned about forestry and lumber from another friend of my father who ran his own logging operation, where I learned to be a sawyer and how to drive big antique steam tractors..

We lived at the house in Homer, acquiring a Keeshound dog and a stray kitten that I found in a storm drain at the street corner one summer, until 1983. That was when my father had taken a new job with a company that manufactured airplane parts in South Carolina. At the time he was living and working there until the house up here sold and we would all move to South Carolina.

It was then, that I found out indirectly that there were problems between my parents that I was not aware. I found out they were getting a divorce, and of course thought that somehow it was all my fault. Somehow the peace and beauty of small town life was now being shattered and things that were only seen on TV were now becoming part of my reality. It was no longer something that I only saw or knew happened to somebody else, it was now happening to me.

My perceptions about the legal system at this time were positive and that the system was just and fair. This is what had been portrayed in TV shows and books. The innocent were always set free and the guilty were punished, but fairly punished. My grandfather, whome I have only a few fragmented memories, was a member of the county sherriff's department and was a town constable at one time, wouldn't have been involved in something that wasn't just and fair.

My first experience with the legal (criminal) system was when I was 14 years-old and was arrested for assault & battery against another boy who was a couple years younger than me. At first I thought that they will just chastize me about the incident and that would be all there was to it. But when they came back a few days later and took me to the Juvenile Home, I had no idea what to prepare for, my only reference to what to expect was what was portrayed in the movie "Bad Boys" with Sean Penn.

I was processed into the facility by people who did not know me, nor I them. It was the first time in my life that I was forced to take all my clothes off by

some stranger. Then given clothes and shoes that didn't properly fit. Escorted to the intake wing and placed in a room, where I was given a rule book and a list of test questions and a pencil. I was told to read the rule book and answer the test questions, someone would come by and pick up the stuff later. Then they closed the door and turned the lock. I spent the night in a room with a door that had a steel plate on the inside and no door knob. While I waited for someone to come back and check on me, I made the bed and eventually fell asleep at some point in the night waiting for someone to come back and tell me I had done my assignment correctly and what was going to happen next.

I had no contact with anyone until the next morning when they took the intake wing to breakfast and I had to beat on the door to get wome kid across the hall to get staff's attention that I was there. No one knew I had been put in the end room the night before, where they usually placed kids who were being violent and needed to be placed in a secure room.

I spent the weekend in the Juvenile Home, learning the rules and experiencing their system of behavior modification by using postive reinforcement (coupon system/token system for good behavior) and negative reinforcement (timeout) for bad behaviors. My parents bonded me out the following Monday and I was allowed to go home while the formal court proceedings went through its motions.

My first exposure to the proceedings was over the weekend, I was arraigned by a Probate Court Juvenile Referee as to my charges and bond being set for my possible release. After several more formal hearings in an actual courtroom at the Probate Court, I was appointed a Guardian ad Litem to look out for my interests since neither me, nor my family had any idea what was going to happen. During this whole time, even with the Guardian ad Litem explaining things to me and looking out for my interests. It was still a very terrifying expeirience not knowing what to expect or the worse that could happen to me at the time. Eventually I was allowed to plead to a lesser charge of assault and allowed to stay out on bond as long as I continued weekly counseling sessions with a psychologist.

CURRENT INCARCERATION

RIVERSIDE RECEPTION CENTER 1987: Because I was under 21 when sent to the MDOC, I was sent to the Riverside Reception Center in Ionia, instead of going to quarantine at SPSM (State Prison of Southern Michigan) at Jackson where they sent adult offenders over 21 years of age.

I spend only a short time at RRC until they completed their intake screening

testing, and assessments to determine what programming I should take while doing my sentence. At this time every prison was single man cells/rooms, except for a few temporary polebarn facilities that existed at that time. It was the first time in months that when in the room at night there was a feeling of peace to be by yourself and able to let yourself relax to sleep because you're alone and no one can get to you during the night.

MICHIGAN REFORMATORY (RMI) 1987: (Level 4)

This was my first stop at a prison in the MDOC. Walking into the old footunda gives you the first feeling that this is real prison. It was a very humbling experience to go to the cellblock and get up the stairs to the assigned floor. Then when they open the door to the unit and you see 50+ cells in a line and its bars for as far as you could see, and you walk along until you get to your cell and they pop the gate, you have to open it, step in and close it yourself if you were in I-Block, as J-Block had electric doors.

They had so many people in Segregation that the first floor of I-Block (I-1) was full on both the inside and outside of the floor and they had started putting temporary segregation guys on my floor. They started at the far end of the floor, but every day the officer's desk that divided general population from segregation moved closer and closer to my cell. When I ask my counselor on a day when she was making rounds about how to sign up for a job, college, etc. she told me that I should wait until I get to my next facility as she had put me on the transfer list. I was being sent to a regional facility close to where I lived and would be going as soon as they opened the Level 4 unit.

It was here at RMI that I experienced my first walk of the prison yard. This really reminded me of the movies about Alcatraz, as you have two sides of the yard blocked by I & J Blocks and the back part of the yard beyond the fence and factory buildings was the wall. This was the smaller version of the famous "Wall" at Jackson that made the Guinness Book of World Records for several years as the largest walled penitentiary in the world. This set a very sobering and harsh reality, especially, when you see officers waling the tops of the cell blocks with high powered rifles slung across their chest.

The only thing that was out of place to most people and was the only thing that tempered the harshness of the prison yard was a swimming pool! There it sat in its own small fenced area next to the back fence and the back prison wall behind it, this was a surprise to my understanding of prison life.

G. ROBERT COTTON (JCF) LEVEL 4, 1987-1988:

I was sent down to Jackson to one of the new facilities that seemed to be opening up every other week in this new regional prison concept. The belief was to keep you close to where you were sentenced for easy court access and keeping up family relations. I was on the first bus to arrive at JCF to be placed in their new Level 4 housing units of I & J Block. Somehow there was a miscommunication somewhere, as we were not expected for another couple of weeks. But here we were, so they just drove the big bus right onto the grounds and stopped at the front gate of the new units.

We were all chained together on the main base and they brought in all our property and piled it up. They unchained everyone and after a few brief words from the Sergeant, were told to pick our own room since we were here first. Then come let them know who we were and what room we had chosen.

This was a place of organized chaos, as no one knew how to get anything done because both the unit staff was new to the facility as well as us prisoners. It was finding out things and then letting others know what you found out and how or what to do.

I was able to make contact with the coordinator of Jackson Community College and make the needed arrangements to enroll in the next semester. It was several weeks before anything was said about a job or what jobs they would allow us to have outside the unit. But after a few days things needed to be cleaned, trash dumped, etc. So a few of us just started cleaning the unit each day, and after a few weeks they came to classify everyone to a job. Those of us who had been cleaning the unit on our own were given porter jobs automatically and the unit staff took the time to make sure we got paid for all the days we had "worked" before officially being given the job.

This was the first time I experienced being around guys who came from SPSM across the street at Jackson Central Complex. These guys had really been behind the "Wall" as they used to refer to it. They had seen the inside of a REAL prison and all that goes on inside of it. It was much easier to relate to many of these older guys because they had been behind the wall at Jackson and I had been behind the wall at the Reformatory. Some of them were willing to teach you the system, if you were willing to learn and respect how things worked.

I managed to get a couple of semesters of college in before I was sent back to RMI to fill bedspace that was previously used for their protective custody

unit that had been returned to general population.

MICHIGAN REFORMATORY (RMI) LEVEL 4, 1988-1989:

So back to RMI just before Christmas, I am just moving like a ball in a plinko machine, not in control of where we will eventually land. After a week or so things get settled in and I am able to get classified to the kitchen in the mornings for a job, leaving my evenings open to enroll in Montcalm Community College classes in the evenings. Because I am working almost every day and going to college weeknights there is not much time for doing much of anything else. Less time to engage in negative thinking and behaviors made it a good thing, along with making the days go much faster.

This was also my first experience with witnessing prison violence and an uprising incident. Which you must remember there were no prison or street gangs at this time in the MDOC, or at least nothing like the stuff that exists now. There were a couple of religious groups the MDOC treated semi-gang-like but not openly or officially.

The uprising or protest incident occurred one morning in the dining hall, now at this time you could seat around 400-500 guys at a time in the place. Some incident had taken place between a group of prisoners at a table and the Shift Lieutenant. Whatever it was didn't go very well and at some point one of the prisoner religious leaders stood up and asked for a show of unity and all of their religious brothers stood up at one time, several hundred of them. I was working the dishtank at the end of the dining room, where we set things down and dropped the cage doors to the tray drop off windows. We pulled up some milkcrates and lit up a cigarette while watching officers pour in from every doorway. By the way, it was still illegal to smoke inside of a public building at this time, even a kitchen. I thought for many years after that, there is a secret room in the control center where a large group of officers smoke and watch TV just waiting to come running when something happens. I saw each of those guys who stood up the next morning when I was going to work at 4 a.m. and they were being lead all changed together to the rotunda from segregation for dispersal through the MDOC.

When the summer of 1989 arrived they began to transfer many of us to other facilities who were not doing things to get in trouble, so I waited my turn to see how my luck at the next stop would be.

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 7
APRIL 2020

RIVERSIDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY 9RCF) LEVEL 4, 1989-1993:

This was a facility unique in its lifespan, as in its past life it had been a state mental hospital back when those were all the rage. Hid your broken, disabled, dysfunctional, mentally ill, and unwanted family members in those places back in the dark ages of mental health treatment. Thanks to modern thought and chemistry, they have now made prisons out of several of these facilities. But I digress. RCF was unique in many ways, first, half of the population was correctional mental health for RTP (Residential Treatment Program) and an ACU (Acute Care Unit, aka Cutter's Unit). Along with a general prisoner population that was the caretaker workers of the facility. In addition to that there was the Reception Center for those under 21 entering the MDOC as I myself did a few years before this time.

Another way RCF became unique in 1988 when the MDOC decided to try out experimental temporary housing, they purchased two TENTS! Yes, that's right they bought these things that looked like half an egg laying on the ground. Now mind you, out west in Arizona this is not a problem. But for Michigan winters this was not the brightest concept ever conceived by the MDOC.

I did not spend the first winter in the tents, I arrived the next summer and was told the war stories from those who survived the first winter. Now the tent was a unique style of prison living. The interior was divided in half and you had 80 bunks on each half in a small section of double bunks. You had 10 rows of beds running along part of the "back wall." Each row had 8 sets of bunk beds in a row towards the front of the unit. These rows were grouped so that the rows were in sets of 2 with open walkspace on the outside of the rows to access lockers, etc, and the space in between the 2 rows there was a high school type desk to write on or type for every 4 bunks. There was a small space for the "daryroom" to watch TV, and a small area with tables and some games to to play.

Because they didn't have the electrical capacity for anyone to have their TVs, they had to be stored until you got a room in another building by getting on the room list. This being a "temporary" housing unit, they didn't figure that we would be staying in this setting for very long, so we wouldn't need our personal TVs.

It was at this time when I was getting things together to get more college classes from Montcalm Community College that after a couple of semesters the

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 8
APRIL 2020

Pell Grants funding was pulled and I lost hope of finishing any college degree.

Most of my days were spent working in the satellite kitchen of the Acute Care Unit and a lot of reading at night. It was at this time that one of the guys next to me asked if I would come down to the Veteran's Office in the Special Activities area. They needed someone to do typing and filing of members requests to obtain copies of the military records. They also ran a small fundraiser of weight lifting nutritional items and equipment out of the office as well. All this started out of a discussion one day about my collection of military patches, etc. at home and was still collecting even while in prison.

After becoming an Associate Member of the Riverside Veterans, and the chapter secretary for awhile, I was introduced to the Jaycee organization. Now I knew of the Jaycees for years with their annual dunktanks and haunted houses. But I never knew just who they were and what they were about. Little was I to know I was about to get a crash course in the Jaycees.

I was asked by several members of the Jaycee chapter to join during their special membership drive. So I joined up figuring that I would be one of the general members for awhile to get my feet wet in what the Jaycees were all about. But that was just a dream on my part as the first meeting that I attended was the one for nominations to the Board of directors. Why I did not see this one coming, as of course I am nominated for the position of Secretary and was duly voted into office.

I really enjoyed my time with the Jaycees, as they worked on both building up the individual as well as a selfless dedication to the local community. The Riverside Jaycees competed against chapters from all over the state and had many state and national awards to its credit. It had an annual project with Make-A-Wish to send a terminally ill child and members of their family to Disneyworld. All of which was paid for by the many fundraisers we did during the course of a year. We had a card and candy shop that had a selection of greeting cards that would rival that of most stores in the free world. Plus all the bags of candy, meats, cheese, nuts, and other snack items sold on a daily basis. There were also photo fundraisers that made a lot of money that was used for a variety of projects.

The Riverside Jaycees was unique because in addition to the Veterans and Jaycees, there was also the NAACP chapter and a HASTA (Hispanic Americans Striving Towards Advancement). Many times we pooled funds, resources, and people to do

many things not just for the community inside the fence, but the local one outside the fence as well. There were several projects we ran to do special things for those guys who were in the mental health units. We had to be a bit more creative to make some of the games and events about overcoming challenges and having a good time, more than just about winning a prize.

We would also do special cookouts for the mental health units and their staff. Many of these events were not something one expects to see in a prison setting. To be able to bring a small moment of joy to someone who for instance, had not seen or had an actual banana split in decades is something that still gives me a warm feeling all these years later.

The summer holiday events were the best as everyone came out to participate and have a good time. One 4th of July, we were running a DJ music shack at one corner of the yard, when the shift captain came across the yard with a local state trooper to tell us that we needed to turn down the music a little bit. Seems we were disturbing someone else's party just down the road. Everyone got a good laugh out of that one and it was brought up at least once a year after that.

I spent my entire time at RCF involved with the Jaycees, after my first year as the chapter secretary, the following two years I was the Management Vice-President and my last year at RCF I was made the President of the Chapter.

RCF was unique in that we never had any real violence there, while it was far from being Shangrila, the occasional fight, etc. did happen. It was not until many years later when they added a polebarn unit that violence really affected the place.

I spent one winter in the tent while waiting for a single bed room. It was something that most people don't believe when you try to explain that to sit and play cards in the table area or to watch the unit TV. You sometimes needed ALL the clothes that you wore to go stand outside in the line for the store. The rest of the time you stayed bundled up on your bed with your blankets on top of you. During the daytime wasn't bad, but when the sun went down or a winter storm came through, it was something else.

They had tried their best to get heat from those heating units, but when the heater is outside, and the uninsulated duct work was outside, then not much heat will make it inside. Then what heat does get into the living area doesn't last long because the tent has no insulation, its just a heavy rubberized coated

fabric. Whoever thought this experiment up should have been made to spend a winter there with us to see the error of their ideas. There are many ideas that look great on paper, most of them should stay there!

They finally did fix the heating problem the third year the tent was open by placing a big massive heating unit inside the tent at each end. These had big steam lines that were hooked up to the facility's steam system and with the big fans, kept the tent nice and toasty. But the following summer they transferred everyone out of the facility that did not have a job and turned the tent into a gym.

I spent a few months in a single room in the general population building before I made it to the top of the list to move to the Honor Unit. I had never been to a facility that had one of these units, so it was a real change for me. While there were 40 guys in bunk beds living in our dayroom on one side. The honor floor was beyond the locked door going down the hallway. You used your room key to open the hall door. Then we each had our own single bed room with a spring bed, not the hard metal slabs that were in the other units. Each room had a doublewide walllocker to spread things out. But the best thing was that each room had cable TV and if you went to the Special Activities Office you could rent a cable box by the month and buy HBO, Cinemax, or Disney. So with all night power, this was a very privileged living arrangement. We had our own refrigerator and freezer, stove with oven and complete mini kitchen. This almost made you forget you were still in prison, but one misconduct report and you could lose it all and have to start over to wait a year just to get back on the list. They did eventually run cable TV to all the rooms for the general population building, but only the honor floor still had the cable boxes.

I was also able to complete both my vocational training while I was at RCF, it was a requirement to complete clerk school to learn typing, filing, accounting, and word processing, before working in the library. I was able to get into some group psychotherapy while here at RCF as well.

The library, when I started working there was just a typical prison library, old books, tired card catalogue, and no computers! After a group of guys started putting together grant proposals, and we got several grants for books, magazines, and other stuff, big audiobook library for the visually impaired and planned to start a videolibrary as well. The biggest grant we got was for all new computers with printers and a LAN. We were able to start digital check in/out of resources,

inventory with barcode scanners made a week long process turn into a few days work.

Sending the librarian down to state surplus to pick up other agencies throw away computers was a field of endeavor for us. Sometimes taking six computers apart just to piece together a single one that worked. The library eventually outgrew its old confines and was allowed to move down to the first floor of the building when they renovated the old kitchen worker dormitory.

I also had the benefit of working with a psychologist that thought it was beneficial to run group therapy with both long and short time offenders. She believed that this would provide a consistency and continuity to the therapy process. Whereas, most MDOC thinking is to make people wait until they are within a couple of years of their parole eligibility date. For many people this is too short a time frame to correct a life time of bad habits and thinking behaviors.

I also experienced working with staff from the Outpatient Mental Health Team and the group that they ran to help support those who were taking restricted medication for various mood disorders. There were many times that this group work supplemented and further enhance the issues, discussions, and gains made in the other therapy groups that each of us was also a part of.

Another unique feature that we were allowed to have a RCF was organizational banquets or awards ceremonies. Each group member was allowed to have two guests come into the facility and we could meet in the diningroom. The staff made themselves as unobtrusive as possible to give the event a more relaxed atmosphere than the semi restrictiveness of the visiting room. While the banquet was limited to light snacks and refreshments it was a very pleasant atmosphere that is no longer to be enjoyed .

But unfortunately my time here slowly ran out and after the past seven (7) years in Level 4, I was now eligible for a custody reduction down to Level 2.

G. ROBERT COTTON (JCF) LEVEL 2, 1993-1994:

I found myself sent back to Jackson and placed at JCF. Only now I get to experience living in the cubicle environment of the polebarns. Which at one time wasn't bad as there are only five (5) beds per cube unlike having eight (8) that we have no days

I was surprised coming through the Control Center to recognize many staff from my last stop here at JCF. One, now a sergeant, was working in the bubble

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 12
APRIL 2020

when I came through. Since JCF had become a tokenless economy, when I was here before, I wanted to cash in my money tokens from RCF before going to the housing unit and having them be labeled contraband. So I got the attention of the sergeant and told him I wanted a receipt for my tokens. Now he wasn't too surprised by seeing the tokens I placed on the counter. It was all the new staff that had never seen tokens before. So now they all stop what they are doing to come over and see what prison token money looks like. They are pawing through these pieces of plastic, brass, and aluminum, asking if these things are really worth money and what each token was worth.

Cubicle life is not that bad, as I had spent a couple months at RCF in a four (4) man room before getting a single bed room. It all depends on which side of the unit you are located. If on the front hallway where the officer's desk is in the lobby, usually there is less nefarious activity going on. As well as sometimes the further down the front hallway the better because you have less traffic as that if you don't live all the way down the hall, you have no business being down there. The front cubes at the head of each hall are for those who require closer observation for various reasons, usually because the person is a problem child and does not play well with others. So fortunately I get on the front hall and into the cube next to the end of the hall.

So I spend the next few weeks finding out what is new and what hasn't changed since I was here last. I find that none of the organizations have survived here since Central Office tightened up the rules about fundraisers, which left all the prisoner organizations unable to sustain their operations and good works to the communities both inside and outside the fence.

I also find that I am out of luck with any type of group therapy support here from either institutional psychological services or the OPMHT. So while I wait to find a job, I spend the days working and out in the weight pit, going to the law library and learning how to paint with acrylics. I am also completing a correspondence Paralegal Degree program through the Professional Development Institute to continue with my education since college is off the table for now.

Eventually I get lucky and one of the guys in the cube works in the library and tells me they need guys with legal training to work at the law library. I have him talk to his boss and get an interview arranged. After going through all my qualifications I am offered a job, which I readily accept. So now I spend most of my day out of the unit in the library either working or researching

my own legal issues. There are many who come to the library who want to research their own issues to file their own legal papers, be able to understand what their lawyer is filing for them, or to understand what the appellate court is saying in the opinions for their cases.

Many who come to the library want to learn and read about the right thing. their biggest problem is that they just don't know where to start looking. For those who had a case citation to start with, I work with them through what all parts of the citation mean and how to use available resources to see what other cases may have used the original case and how it was applied. For those who had nothing to start with, I have to start them out at the statute(s) under which they were charged and then work them into the case citations.

I spent about 18 months here at JCF this time around before I got myself into trouble and became involved in a fight with another person. This was my first experience with going to segregation for 30 days of detention. While this was a set back for my good behavior, there are odd times when one door is closed, another one opens. I had a meeting with the deputy warden for a security classification review, where he informed me that while they were going to leave my security level as a 2, I was going to be transferred across the street to "Northside." So this actually brightened my day, because there were wending me to a facility that was all single bunk cells, and still had the only active college program still in the MDOC. This wasn't punishment, this was doing me a favor!

CHARLES EGLER FACILITY (NORTHSIDE) (SMN), LEVEL 2, 1994-2001:

So I arrive at SMN with about half my segregation time left to serve, when in the Control Center they just give me my I.D. card, pass and cell block assignment. Then I was directed down the long walkway to the cell block where I was supposed to go. So hey, who am I to question the fact that they are just letting me go and not have to serve the rest of my sanctions in segregation.

Now at one time, when I was younger I had driven by the big Jackson prison complex and had seen prisoners walking this very same yard. Now here I am all these years later walking across this very same yard. When I walked into the cellblock, 3-South, and looked through the fence divider at, 3-North. I thought about all the old prison movies that I have seen. The view looked just like many of them, standing on the ground floor (base) and looking down the length of the cellblock. The looking up and seeing the four floors (tiers) stacked one on top the other up to the high ceiling.

This was way different from being at the Reformatory where each floor was separated from the others and each half of the floor was its own separate unit. This was all open from base to ceiling and 160 cells comprised a housing unit. Northside comprised the cellblocks 1, 2, & 3 of the SPSM Complex, these three cell blocks formed the "northside" of the complex that actually turned into the "Wall" at the east end of 1 Block. So as you walked to go to the dining hall, back yard and into Duane Waters Hospital, you got a view of a section of that wall.

If you got a job working for Michigan State Industries (MSI) you walked up a set of steps between the hospital and 1 Block and walked through the wall to get to the textile and chair factories. This section of the wall was not that imposing from the front as it was half hidden by a hill, but after going through the wall and walking along the old roadway to the factory buildings, you were at the base of the wall and it was a lot more imposing and intimidating.

When I reported to the officer's station in 3-South, they gave me my bedroll and told me that I was locking at 38-3-3. Which told me I was not living in the 38th cell, 3rd gallery, 3-Block. So I went to find my new temporary home, which turned out to be the very last cell on the gallery. Which meant I should not have a lot of people in front of my cell bars. I find that I must wait for the officers to make a round in order to be let into my cell. I notice that the scavengers have left me with no chair and a broken desk. When the officer makes her round and opens the cell door for me, she says to check the other vacant cells on the gallery for a chair and a better desk.

After getting settled in, I make contact with the Montcalm Community College office and make the arrangements to get back into college. Since I don't have a job right away its easy to to to college on a fulltime basis with classes in the afternoon and evenings. I spend the rest of my free time working on painting. I was a fulltime college student for about a year before I was offered a job. My neighbor came back one day and asked me if I wanted a job working in the kitchen. He said the Food Service Director was looking to hire some new workers and needed to hire a clerk. So thinking that this would be a good chance to get a top job without having to claw my way up the ladder from the bottom. I readily told my neighbor to tell his boss that I would like an interview.

So the next day, I get the interview and find out that the Food Service

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 15
APRIL 2020

Director wanted to hire guys that had no previous work in his kitchen and who were not over familiar with his staff. Now when I tell him that I am not classified to work in his kitchen and he told me not to worry, if he picked me to work, he had connections with the Classification Director. The following day I was sent to see the Classification Director to be moved to the kitchen. The day after that, one of the block officers came and woke me up and told me that I was late for work in the kitchen. When I told him that I didn't have a work detail yet, he said that I should pick it up when I got to the kitchen.

So I spent the next six months learning the ins/outs of processing therapeutic diets, keeping track of about 200 prisoners diets and snacks. Filling out their menus each week from those given to me by the Dietician. Breaking them into daily production packets for the diet cooks and pre-plating special diet meals for those prisoners housed at the hospital across from the kitchen building. I also learned about inventory control and how to work with balancing up to three weeks of inventory both on hand, on order, and being used, then calculating the balance of what is now left in order to determine what needs to be ordered.

Now my boss was a bit old fashioned and about as computer illiterate as you could be. Anytime we needed to do things with the computer, like prisoner payroll (which I did for several years longhand with time cards) and working with menus and inventory orders. I would have to be in the monther-in-law seat next to my boss and giving directions like Garmin when driving down the road. I had many days of amusing frustration when giving instructions of left mouse click, right mouse click, go to this icon, not that left, your other left. It was so hard not to just push my boss to the side and do what needed to be done myself. But MDOC policy stated that I am not allowed to touch any computer that is connected to a network or had internet access, and not air gapped or a stand alone computer. So I worked with what I was given.

To illustrate the mild amusement, I get working with my boss when he wants to make some menu changes. Now doing this manually with a typewriter, I at best can get 11 items listed in a meal block, but I need to fit 15 items. When I try explaining my inability to solve this problem, my boss shows me a menu from another facility that he is trying to copy and they have line space for 20 items! So suspecting what is being used to write the other menu, I ask to see what we are working from, and notice that this menu is done using a spreadsheet with the software Lotus 1-2-3. I ask my boss to call his counter part at the

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 16
APRIL 2020

other facility and confirm my suspicions, which turns out I am correct. I now tell my boss we need this Lotus 1-2-3 menu spreadsheet in order to do what he wants. So he calls the MDOC Food Service Director in Lansing to get a copy of the menu spreadsheet file from her. But when she says that she will copy the file to a 2½" disk and send this to him in the interdepartmental mailrun. He then asks me with a completely innocent face if this is what is meant by sending an email?!

Life at SMN was not uneventful in the least, as this was still part of "old school" Jackson there was always a higher level of prison violence than many other facilities. There were many times that emergency count was called and officers would come around and make us take off our shirts, spin around, and check our hands for wounds.

While I was at SMN I was able to complete my Associate Degree in Business Administration and then enrolled with Spring Arbor College (Now University) to begin work on my Bachelor Degree in Behavioral Science. It was surprising that these two college programs were still up and running after all the Pell Grant funding for prisoners had been stopped. But both programs had received private funding along with some money from the state to continue operating. I completed my Bachelor Degree in 2000 and was one of the last two graduates from the program at that facility.

One of the rather unique things that I encountered at SMN was dealing with the great Y2K fiasco. Oh how the whole world was in a panic about all the computers crashing because it would not know the difference between the year 1900 and 2000. As I was working as the Director's Clerk in the kitchen, I had a ringside seat to everything surrounding Y2K. We spent weeks writing disaster management plans and compiled several plans of what if planning that took several reams of paper. We spent almost a week making 9,000 sack meals to be distributed January 1, 2, & 3, 2000 when the power grid failed and the zombie apocalypse was upon us. Went to bed December 31, 1999 expecting things to be armeggedon when I woke up in the morning. But things were quite normal on January 1, 2000, all the hype was just another marketing scare. The only thing that was bad was eating balona sandwiches for the next 3 days to use up all the premade bag meals that had been prepared for the world's greatest "what if" that never was.

Another unique experience was being at work in the kitchen on September 11, 2001. No one was really aware of anything that was going on in New York.

It was just a regular morning in the kitchen, until the phone calls started coming in from the outside. As the clerk in the office, part of my job was to answer the phone when all the staff were out on the floor or on the serving line. Several staff who worked as kitchen supervisors were members of the National Guard, and it was quite surprising when some one from their Guard Armory called for them. It was then that they were told that their unit was now on alert and they needed to report immediately. We had a TV in the storage room that was used for sanitation training. We rolled it out into the commissary and juryrigged an antenna to get the news to see what was happening.

We watched in shock as things were replayed and then the twin towers fell. Some how none of this seemed real, this only occurred in the movies. I remember how quiet it was the next couple of days walking outside after all the air traffic in the country was grounded. This was really noticable at SMN because the yard was right in the flight path for airplanes landing at the Jackson Airport just to the west of SMN.

The last unique thing I encountered at SMN was when they decided to close it down to general population and use it for a "new" Reception and Guidance Center and Parole Violators. They started shipping guys out by the busload everyday. Each day the cellblocks got quieter as there were less people. Then they closed down the Western Wayne facility and brought all the parole violators to Jackson. Then they started to transfer the parole violators from inside Jackson from 11 & 12 Block and bring them to SMN in groups of 40 at a time. They brought them through the hospital and took them to either 2 or 3 Block on SMN. At the same time they brought 40 guys into the dining room to prepare to go through the hospital into 11 & 12 blocks. It took them all day doing this prisoner shuffle, all the while filming various aspects and talking about how this was the largest prisoner transfer in MDOC history.

This was the beginning of the end of my time at SMN. They slowly over the next few months transferred all of us out of general population that were workers that kept the place running. My turn finally came in October 2001, when I was transferred to Carson City.

CARSON CITY (DRF) LEVEL 2, 2001-2009:

Now while I was waiting in the Control Center at SMN to ride out, I had a last chance to talk to one of the kitchen supervisors that I had worked for these past 6 years. This was before the idea of privatization of state jobs

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 18
APRIL 2020

and all staff had to actually to physically be present for their annual training with staff from all other facilities. So the "old boy network" was still in full operation. The supervisor asked me if I knew where I was going and when I told him that it was Carson City. He told me to go to the kitchen when I got there and talk to the commissary supervisor there and have him call and he would give me a good reference for a job. The two of them had worked together at a pizza bar in Lansing before then started working for the MDOC.

So I get to DRF and after so many years of living in a single cell, I now have to get readjusted to living in a two man room. I start out in 800 Unit and am placed on the intake wing, where I am told I would be moving to another unit after I am classified to a job, unless I ask the Resident Unit Manager to move to the other side of the unit to B Wing. Moving within a unit is one thing, but moving all around a facility is too much work to pack, move, unpack. So I ask to stay in the unit and am moved to the other wing shortly afterwards.

After I get settled into the permanent wing of the unit, I go to lunch one day and ask to see the commissary supervisor. I am taken back through the kitchen to the commissary where I tell him who I am and that his friend told me to have him call about giving me a job. At first, he doesn't really believe me until I shown him some of my old work details and work reports with his friend's signature. He then calls and gets a reference to my work ethics and character and a few days later I have a job in the kitchen.

I work for a few months on the serving line before being moved to work as a cook. My new supervisor is one of the best people I ever worked for, as she was tough but also fair. She instilled making quality products not just quantity. We are not allowed to pan anything from the kettles until she tastes it and checks to see if it is hot enough. We don't pan anything from the oven until she checks the temperature and the appearance. But after about 6 months, she leaves the MDOC and the standards she set are not followed as closely by her replacement and it becomes an up hill struggle with the other cooks who now don't care about the quality of their work.

There is a posting for guys who want to work 3rd shift as bakers. I know a couple of the guys on the shift and decide this would be a better environment to work as there is much less stress and there is only 18 people to deal with every day at the most. I get one of the jobs in the bakery working 3rd shift and about this time get moved into the room of the Director's Clerk. So while I am at work all night he has the room to himself and while he is at work all

day I have the room to myself. The 3rd shift unit officers also allow us to keep our day/night cycle on our days off from work and allow us to stay up and watch TV all night.

I learn how to take the small baking projects I learned as a child from my grandmother and mother, and make them on an industrial scale. On many things we are given license to experiment with new ideas and recipes. Some experiments turn out to be great hits with the population, like jello cake and rice crispy treats for 1,400! Many times the challenge comes from the Food Service Director who would add a new item to the menu without much warning to challenge us to come up with the project. Other times we make small samples and leave them for taste testing and get the challenge of how to make the small pan taste great, now go ahead and make it for population, but the big batch had better taste as good as the test pan.

Towards the end of 2007 the MDOC finally ran out of excuses, vendors, and black and white TV!!! After every other state in the country had long since allowed their prisoners to buy color TVs. The MDOC finally had to move into the new era. After all the years of lies and bureaucratic double talk about the various reasons for not allowing color TVs. The best one I heard was that color TVs give off too much radiation and because of our restricted living space, we would be too close to the TVs and be irradiated. That was one of the whopper fish stories that you needed to put your boots on when the administration used to tell it to us.

Oh what a difference things were when I finally got my new color TV after 20 years of being behind the times and still watching black and white TV. Now part of the reason for this holding out on the color TVs was probably the politicians being so worried about their political careers. They were just so afraid that the public would say that prisoners with color TVs was coddling. Especially, after all the years that we had the MDOC tied up in court over the property lawsuit that we eventually lost because it became way too big and lost its original focus. The publicity that case received over the years was not always favorable to the MDOC.

It was also during this same time that the MDOC decided to go non smoking. There were several reasons put forth by various parties, but the real reason was that the MDOC was negotiating for a new contract healthcare provider and the company who was wanting the contract said they would do their services for a specified cost if the MDOC got rid of smoking. Then at the last minute, the company went elsewhere for business.

Not that getting rid of smoking in the MDOC was not a bad thing. After smoking for 20 years, I started when I went to the county jail. For some reason there was an illusion that if you didn't smoke in jail/prison, you were looked at as weak, real guys smoked! But over the years with the cost of tobacco products on the rise with additional taxes every year. Things were at the point where I was basically working just to support my smoking habit.

It was a good thing that I did not have many other expenses, as working midnights we ate off menu every night. Its amazing what you can do with some institutional food when you are only making 30 portions instead of 1,400. You can actually make something that resembles actual food! But this was the beginning of the end for the quality of food in food service. As this was the time of the first rumblings of privitization in food service. I am told in the Bakery, that if and when we create new items, to put on the menu, they can't cost anymore than the item that they are replacing.

So now I had to learn to start scavenging leftover bits and pieces to keep making new products. Those odd leftover pans of pears, peaches, pineapple, and half boxes of bananas, start to add up. Then comes the question of why are you telling me to make peach crisp with pie filling from the warehouse, when I can make our own better pie filling from scratch at half the cost? Are they really trying to save money?

This is also the point where the whole MDOC starts changing. At one point here at DRF, both sides of the facility are Level 2. But the temporary side has a higher rate of unrest and violence. Several officers transferred there to work, only to transfer back several months later because the place was so uneasy to work in. The the administration comes up with a brainstorm idea that if they send some lifers over to the temporary side as a stabilizing influence, the younger population will calm down. Every counselor called all the lifers in their units to their offices asking each to volunteer to transfer over to the temporary units. To a man, every single lifer told the administration, not only no, but hell no! Somehow they just didn't understand that it is not our job to be psychotherapists and solve their problems.

It was also at this time the MDOC pulled off the biggest scam of all time and the Michigan public has never realized they were bamboozled. All these "regional facilities" that had an attached "temporary facility" located next to them had separate names for years. At one point the MDOC invited the public

to name these "temporary" facilities, i.e., Ionia Temporary (Deerfield), Kinross Temporary (Straights) for examples. Now just a couple years later the MDOC announced it was "reducing" the number of prisons in the state by closing several facilities. An example of this lie and falsehood was announcements of closing Carson City Regional and Boyer Road facilities and opening Carson City Correctional Facility, now referred to as DRF-East and DRF-West. The MDOC closed nothing! They just changed the name sign on the front door, the physical facility(s) never changed.

Part of the MDOC's budget reduction plan was to stop paying prisoners any type of performance bonus for kitchen workers. Now this monthly extra money added to our monthly pay was to encourage good work behavior and ethics on the assignment. But when the MDOC cut these bonuses out for prisoners who were assigned to food service after a certain date but had been grandfathered in those of us who were working when the new rule took effect. This created a conflict between these two groups of workers because those still earning bonus money were trying to keep their work standards to not lose it or get fired. Then those new workers were not eligible for bonus pay were making up for this loss of money by stealing anything that wasn't nailed down.

There was also a conspiracy theory among those who were still earning bonus pay in that they seemed to want to prioritize transferring those of us still making bonus pay. That way there was a break in their employment and they would now not be eligible for bonus pay at the next assignment. I sometimes believe this is partially the reason for my transfer from DRF to Gus Harrison (Adrian) in addition to being found not guilty on a false misconduct charge. I was called into work one day by the morning production supervisor because she ran short of a bakery item when she was given her correct pan count and because she chose not to allow the item to be secured when workers came on shift in the morning they stole several pans causing her to be short.

After she tried to shift the fault to me as the department head and state I lied on my paperwork and took advantage of a new shift supervisor. I filed a grievance on her asking that she be counseled about her conduct and made an observation that if she was allowed to continue, she could become a danger to herself and other staff in creating a hostile work environment. Her response the day she received the grievance was to write me a misconduct report for insolence.

Now there has always been a rule both written and unwritten that prisoners

may not file a grievance on anything related to a misconduct report, nor may staff file a misconduct report on a prisoner who filed a grievance. So I had to go through the whole misconduct process and at DRF ANY misconduct got you laid in from your work assignment pending the outcome of the hearing. When the hearing day finally came, the hearings officer took one look at the misconduct report and onelook at me and asked only one question. Was this ticket written after and on the grievance I filed? When I answered yes and showed the filing dates. The hearings officer responded that the ticket could not stand and staff should know better than to attempt this and threw the misconduct out.

But later that day, I was told in the unit that the Deputy Warden called and said that just because I beat the ticket, I was still not allowed to return to work. Three days before Christmas, I was sent to Adrian.

GUS HARRISON (ADRIAN) (ARF) LEVEL 2, 2009-2012:

After so many years of working 3rd shift, this was a bit of a shock to the system to readjust to being up all day and sleeping at night. But fortunately when I was given my property on 3rd shift the night that I arrived. I told the unit staff about being a 3rd shift worker for the past 7 years and I might be up all night until I could readjust, they said there was no problem if I was up watching TV all night.

Now ARF was another facility that had both general population and residential treatment programming (RTP). The difference here was they were kept separated with a different yard and meal times. When some RTP prisoners were felt able to function with normal population, they were brought to one of the general population units to transition.

Since ARF had no 3rd shift kitchen workers, I was left to work on 1st shift. I started in the dish tank and moved to the utility cleaning crew and spent a year as the Back Dock Lead worker until I was promoted to the director's Clerk job based on my past clerk experience.

ARF was one of the few facilities that stillhad ice machines and cold pop machines in the housing units, which made things somewhat more liveable. One of the biggest faults with ARF was that there were not and still not any phones inside the housing units. You have to go outside rain, snow, or sun if you want to use the phone.

Another fault about ARF was the high rate of room theft. As the thieves and gangbangers had found that if you took the sanitizer spray bottles and

sprayed the key lock on the room door. It caused the door lock to short and the locking bolt to snap open and stay open until the mechanism dried out and the electrical short stopped. But the staff and administration did nothing to stop this from happening. They made no changes to the security locking system. All they ever did was to hold the spray bottles at the desk and make you turn in your ID card while you used them. The staff and administration always claimed they were not responsible for lost or stolen personal property.

It was also around this time that a younger generation started coming to prison. Along with this came the gangbangers. They spent most of their time either fighting each other to control various things, or stealing from those who were not part of the gang lifestyle. Part of the problem at this time was too many of these young guys were coming into the system and were not being sent to spend a large portion of their time in a Level 4 setting like the Reformatory or Jackson. So they had no real appreciation of the benefits of these lower level facilities. They were just coming from the street and coming right to a Level 2 and were still operating with a street mentality.

One of the nice things about ARF was there is a very large front yard around the general population units and a nice large back yard. Bad thing is during the winter months there is no back yard after 4 p.m. The exception to this was the Recreation Department allowed a special callout during the winter. This was for those workers in maintenance, MSI optical, school tutors, and any clerks who worked 7-3 or 8-4 and had no access to the back yard weight pit during the day. We were allowed to go to the back yard weight pit from 6:30-8 p.m. Monday through Friday.

But it was the gang activity that clouded all the good aspects of ARF. I was the victim of gang related activity twice. The first time was when I was coming back from the late night weight pit on the New Year's weekend of 2011-12. When I got to the walkway of my unit, some little gangbanger ran up from behind me and hit me in the head with a padlock several times and disappeared out into the crowd of the front yard. When staff, either finally noticed or some one went and told them what happened, the first reporting officer's comment to me on the way to Healthcare was, "You should take care and pay your debts." Not hey are you alright, or what happened. Just an automatic assumption that I was at fault for my injury.

My second encounter with gang activity happened only a few months later,

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 24
APRIL 2020

after my old bunky from DRF arrived at ARF and they started allowing what they called "friendly moves" as long as both parties were misconduct free for a year. Shortly after we were moved together someone felt slighted and I came back from working overtime one week end and our room door lock was shorted out and unlocked. I found some of our property had been stolen, and our footlockers destroyed and I had to ask that my roommate be called back from work so we could assess the damage. This was one of the few times that staff actually made an attempt to search for any missing property, because the unit staff was upset that it happened on their watch. After a few minutes of looking all of our stuff was found to be in our neighbor's room. After a few days we were allowed to search through everything that was recovered to separate our stuff from the person's stuff where everything was found.

But a week or so later, because they did nothing to break up the little gangbanger theft click. As we came back from work again, only to find that they had struck again. Only this time, they had over 8 hours that we were at work to make everything disappear, so there was no looking for the missing stuff this time. So as much as I did not want to, I needed to go back to "prison rules" to solve this problem or it was just going to continue. I had a discussion with my bunky and he wasn't willing to take any measures to prevent this from continuing. So I was going to be on my own for a response to this intrusion.

On the way to work the next morning, I picked a fight with the guy who was caught with all of our stuff the first time. So this became my second time to experience going to segregation. What was unique about segregation at ARF was that there are only 24 cells in segregation for a total facility count of 2,800! So they operate on either transferring you out of the facility or the early release program. I go to the hearing and get my sanction days and the dual sanctions of Loss of Priviledges, so that when I am kicked out of segregation, I will still have to complete the LOP sanctions.

I get taken to talk to the Security Classification Committee about what hapened and what they are going to do with me. When they ask when was the last time I had a misconduct report, it has been so long that I have no idea. So they have to look it up and find out that it has been more than 20 years since my last misconduct report that I was guilty. So they ask me why at my age, was I involved with one of these young gangbangers. I related to them the incidents about the theft of property and that I was really left no choice but to take drastic action to stop it from continuing. They show understanding and

believe what happened and why I chose to react the way I did. But don't give me a clear answer as to whether I will be staying at ARF or transferred.

Now I start my sanctions and the long wait to see if I am staying or leaving ARF. Each day they bring one or more guys to segregation and cut people loose back to the yard. I start counting who was here before me and who came afterwards. Now I am watching and waiting for enough people to do something to get placed in segregation so that I can get put out on early release. Sure enough after 10 days in segregation, they give me a trash bag for my stuff and tell me to go back to the yard. Unfortunately, I am placed in another housing unit, but that wasn't such a bad thing. The only friction that I encountered was when I got out of segregation, my job had been filled because they did not expect me to stay at ARF. So they placed me in another job slot and some of the people who were associated with the guy that I picked the fight with, weren't happy that I was allowed to stay and he was transferred. But after about a month, I was transferred as well back to Ionia, but this time to MTU.

HAND@BB: MICHIGAN TRAINING UNIT (MTU) LEVEL 2, 2012:

Now this facility was originally built to deal with younger offenders. So there was a great emphasis on education and vocational training at this facility. But in the infinite wisdom of the powers to be in the MDOC, someone decided it would be a good idea to mix older and younger offenders at this facility in an attempt to stabilize the violence level. Which is a mistake the MDOC just cannot get an understanding, we the older offenders don't want to be around these younger offenders. They wouldn't listen to their own family, they won't listen to the MDOC staff, so what makes you think that they are going to listen to anything an older offender has to offer.

So I get orientated to the facility and see the classification director. Now because I have talked to a few guys that I worked with at other facilities. I find out they have a nice bakery in the kitchen, so I get signed up for the kitchen. I also find out that if I talk to my counselor in the unit, that he can go on the computer and reopen my vocational trade window and allow me to sign up for another vocational trade. So I see the counselor and get placed on the lists to learn welding and CNC machining.

After a few days I get called to the kitchen to work and find that several of the supervisors I know from the kitchen at RCF. Even though I never worked for them, the many Jaycee projects that went through the kitchen gave me some great contact points to help me work my way up in this kitchen.

I do not have any issues here at MTU, until I get my second bunky, who is released from segregation. Because he is only in his early 20s and is a profound white supremacist, I know there will be problems. As soon as he gets off his sanctions, the problems start. Little things start disappearing, but when confronted he claims innocence and says that the door must not be locking all the way when he goes to eat or to the yard while I am at work. But when I have staff check the door lock they find nothing wrong. So I go to the counselor and ask to be moved downstairs to the first floor where there is more observation of the hallways from the officer's desk.

I am told that it might be better if I moved to the unit next door that is supposed to be for only those who are 30 years old and up. Meaning it should be a more stable unit. So I agree that this would be best and the next day when I come back from work, they tell me to pack up and move to C-Unit.

Now I get to C-Unit and find these rooms are actually smaller than the rooms in D-Unit. I can actually stand in the middle of the room and stretch out my arms and touch both sides of the room walls. If my bunky wants to get into his wall locker or either of us wants to open a foot locker. The other guy has to get up on their bunk or step out of the room because there is not enough room for both people to be standing at the same time. To add to this, some units have a sink and toilet in the room as well! I have been in closets that have more room than what is available in these rooms at MTU. But one has to remember that this facility was originally built for juvenile offenders and only one person per room as its original design.

Things start to go alright, I have to wait for 6 months since the fighting misconduct before I am amble to be placed on the approved list to go to the weight pit and work out again. So when I go to the yard, it is all about walking laps. But there is no paved walking/running track here, just dirt and sand, so no walking during the rain storms or several days afterwards because the path is a mud bog.

While I am there they have cut off half of the back yard because the perimeter fence ran all the way up to a local road. There was too much contraband being thrown over the fence that a buffer zone was put in place. But that wasn't enough, so they were moving the softball field from the back half of the yard next to the buffer zone, to the front part of the yard where there was open space. So now they would only allow us access to less than half of the original designed back yard.

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 27
APRIL 2020

This was the result of having a younger population at the facility and the MDOC in general. They want their drugs and cellphones at any cost, they just can't live without either of them. No matter how much they create more restrictions throughout the system.

Things fo great for awhile, but this was not to last for long. I could see B-Unit from my room window and everyday I see officers go running into the unit and dragging out guys to segregation everyday. So some genius comes up with the idea to start sending older guys over to live in B-Unit and bringing younger guys into C-Unit. This was when C-Unit took a turn for the worst. The young gang bangers started being moved in and thought they wre the kings of the hill. They started to run their little scams and scare tactics on all the older guys. They thought they found a victim when they tried to play their little games with me. But I decided that I was not going to let this even begin to get out of hand here at this facility. This was the era of the cowardly gang tactic of the "buck fifty" where they sneak up behind people with a razor blade and slash you from the corner of your mouth to the ear. It takes about 150 stitches to close the wound, hence the name "buck fifty."

These are young punks who run around thumping their fist off their chests taling about how much of a man they are. But won't face you directly to confront you, they always sneak attack from behind or a blind corner. They almost never come at you by themselves, they have to come with a group because they are too scared to have a one to one altercation. They sneak into your room when you are not around and actually believe that stealing is a legitimate "hustle" to survive. Hustling usually consists of making greeting cards, candy, fudge bars, cleaning shoes, cooking specialty food meals, etc.

They are really arch cowards looking for someone to bully to make themselves feel superior because their existence is miserable. They have used up and burned their family bridges so bad that they see no other choices but to seek involvement in a gang for protection because they, themselves, will be or are bullied to join.

So when one young gang banger tries to pull his little scams, unlike others around me who cave into the wishes of these crumb snatchers. I decide to fight fire with fire, because since I won't pay these little terrorists they will do something just enough to injury me to "get me off the yard" or they will turn my bunky against me and he will allow them access to the room to steal my stuff.

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 28
APRIL 2020

The real scary part of all this is I am turning into someone I am really not, nor do I want to be. So I decide that I must make a public example out of this little thug and the consequences be damned. I decide to make sure to leave a reminder to him everyday when he gets up to look in the mirror. I am going to cook him!

I try for several days to let this issue go and may be things will just calm down and go a way. But he just won't get it through his head to let it go and leave me alone. So I figure out his daily routine and when I see him getting ready to go to the shower room I head to the dayroom and use the microwave. I have a large cup full of coconut grease, shampoo, and rice. I heat it up so its all melted together and boiling. I take the cup back up stairs and wait in the bathroom until I see him coming by to go to the shower. I ask him if we can talk for a minute and when he stops, I sling the hot mixture at him. Fortunately, he ducks as I start moving so that the hot mixture flies over him and into the stairwell behind him.

He then takes off screaming, "Help Police!" as he jumps down two flights of stairs running for the officer's desk. I give chase, but he gets to the desk before me. But when confronted by the officers at the desk, we both say nothing about what has happened. So we are told to go to our rooms for the rest of shift. But as we go up the stairs, the little thug decides he has found his manhood again and starts to run off at the mouth. So he runs up the stairs and I give chase. I manage to get between him and his room, so there is no place for him to go, but after running in circles around the second floor for a few minutes. He makes it back to his room and grabs a padlock to start swinging at me. Now this whole time, everyone in the unit is watching and the staff are laughing at this little tough guy on the run. But when I start to break the door in, they decide this has gone far enough. They come upstairs and tell me to stop and cuff up because they have called for the yard crew to come get me and if I am still going at it when they get there, they will taser me. So not wanting to be hit with a bug zapper, I stop and let them take me out of the unit. They take me to healthcare for evaluation and decide what they are going to do with me.

The nurse checks my blood pressure and says if I don't calm down she will have to give me a shot to reduce my blood pressure. In the meantime, the lieutenant shows up and starts asking questions and making phone calls. After I get my

LED MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 29
APRIL 2020

blood pressure down to satisfy the nurse. They tell me to go back to C-Unit and get my stuff and then move to A-Unit.

So I am escorted back to C-Unit and go to my room and pack my property. Now there are all sorts of guys who want to help me carry my stuff downstairs and put it on a cart. I stopped at the desk and apologized to the unit officers who were taken by surprise by my behavior. But they nodded understanding and said they weren't going to write any misconducts for the incident.

Now I spent about a week in A-Unit and a few days after moving there, I was told that the little young thug had been run out of the unit by other gang bangers because he was chased around the unit by an "old man." He sought protection and was now down on the first floor of A-Unit in segregation. I had a room on the second floor above the segregation area and could look down at his room.

But after a week I was moved to F-Unit because the A-Unit counselor had other people he wanted in his unit and I was not to his liking at the present time. Now F-Unit was actually an RTP unit and I was a general population prisoner. So this was most awkward to say the least. But I had a double bunk room to myself for about a week, until they let a couple of RTP guys out of segregation and needed their RTP bedspace. So they moved me to B-Unit, yeah the unit where I watched them have big problems for weeks before all this started.

I move into B-Unit and I am placed in a room with a guy who is both younger than me and an open homosexual. Which is not a problem, I have an open mind, as long as things happen elsewhere, we don't have any issues. But things begin to become very strange quite quickly. I come back from work and find things moved, and then begin to find small things missing. But when I question my bunky, he claims to know nothing and has not had house guests. I get more suspicious and take extra measures to lock my TV and fan by running the cords through the padlock on my locker since its right next to the foot of my bed. I come back from work a few days later and find my TV face down on the bed and the fan laying on the floor and can see where someone has tried to yank the plugs through the lock.

When I ask my bunky what happened, he claims that officers came to shakedown the room. But they have keys to open the padlocks and would not leave the TV and fan like that after a shakedown. The story later changes that there is a duplicate key to the door lock. Then the story changes that someone came and

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 30
APRIL 2020

stole his store bag because there is something wrong with the deadbolt lock. Yet when I check with unit staff he has not reported problems with the lock, or reported his store bag being stolen. Nor have they been in the room to shakedown.

So I go to work the next morning and talk to the regular unit officer in A-Unit about getting moved back to A-Unit. I ask him if he will talk to the unit counselor and allow me to get moved back to the unit when a bed opens up. But this was not to be. Not long after I walk to the A-Unit officer when he comes to eat. I am working in the back cook's area, when the kitchen officer comes through the doors and has a yard sergeant and two yard officers with him. This is not a good situation and is not going to end well. They ask me to step out front to the officer's dining room to talk. Then they ask me to empty my pockets and take off my kitchen whites, then turn around to cuff up.

The whole time, I am asking them what's going on, as I know that I have done nothing wrong. So this has to be something that has happened to my bunk or the gang bangers have put something together and lied to staff to set me up. But they wouldn't tell me anything, even after they had be cuffed up. It was not until we are almost to the segregation unit that they finally told me what was going on by asking me why I had a shank in my room.

So this is it, the gang bangers couldn't get me off the yard any other way, so now they have framed me with a weapon, or someone wants me out of the room to they can have an uninterrupted relationship with my bunk. But either way there is no way out of this for me because even if they found this weapon in an area that I am "responsible" for, even though it may not be securable to prevent anyone else from access. The contraband is considered mine.

I get processed into segregation and sometime later a sergeant comes by to review the misconduct report. He asks what was I going to do with the shank. He doesn't believe me when I tell him I don't know what he is talking about. He says what do you mean, its your shank, it was found in your bed, inside your pillow. I still protest my innocence even though I know this will do no good. In here you are guilty even if your prove your innocent. I ask him if he has a picture of the shank and he pulls out a photocopy of it, to show me. When I ask him what is it, he replies that it looks like something from the welding shop. But how did I get this out of the welding shop when I have never set foot in the vocational/school building since being at the facility. To this he had no response.

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 31
APRIL 2020

So I get a copy of the ticket and find out that the weapon was found by one of the B-Unit counselors after he "received" a statement from a confidential informant and HE went to my room and shook down my area. So when I go through the hearing process I am able to submit questions to attempt to find some truth. But my bunkie of course plays dumb and know nothing about how it got there. The counselor who "found" the weapon and wrote the ticket claims he did question for a minute if this was a set up, but disregarded that thought because his confidential source has proven to be very reliable in the past. But without sending the weapon to the State Police crime lab for DNA and fingerprinting there is no way to prove my innocence. With misconduct reports the evidence standard is based on a preponderance of the evidence, not beyond a reasonable doubt. Even the hearing officer questioned this whole incident and postponed the hearing until he questioned the counselor. But in the end, I was found guilty of possession of a weapon and given 20 days detention. Yet the hearing officer still though there was something wrong here and gave me 20 days detention instead of the maximum 30 days because I already had 10 days prehearing confinement. Normally they don't give any credit for prehearing confinement days when calculating the sanction.

So now I have to wait and see if they will let me stay at the facility or are they going to send me some place else. A few days later they come and tell me that I am being transferred from MTU to the Reformatory.

MICHIGAN REFORMATORY (RMI) LEVEL 4, 2012:

I am not back at RMI to finish out my segregation sanctions. A day after I arrive the deputy warden and the security classification committee see me, where I am told that he doesn't care why I have been transferred to RMI or why I am in segregation. After my sanctions are completed I will be released to Level 4 General Population. If I want a transfer, I am to wait until I get assigned to my regular unit and get with my counselor. The deputy said he doesn't care if I am here a day or a year, go see the counselor about a transfer.

After about two weeks in segregation, I find out that the segregation counselor decides what unit you go to when you are released from segregation. I sent him a letter and ask not to be sent up to the 4th or 5th floor when I am released, if possible to stay on the 1st or 2nd floor. A few days later they run short of bedspace in segregation due to all the gang activity going on everyday. They come and tell three of us that we are being let go on early

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 32
APRIL 2020

release and I am told to to to unit J-1 Outside. I report to my new unit and get my bedroll and to set up my new living arrangements.

I now have a single man cell, with my own sink and toilet, just like the old days when I first came to prison. I am looking at this like a vacation from double bunking and dormatory living. They have so much going on with transfers and guys going in/out of segregation, there is a back log of getting guys their personal property. I have to wait until late the next day to get called to the routunda to pick up my property. I am ever so grateful that I asked and was placed on the 1st floor. Now I don't have to lug footlockers and duffle bag up any stairs.

By the time I get back to the unit its late and almost time to lockdown for the evening. I dump everything in front of the cell and go park the cart. I get things moved into the cell and start to see what's missing, or broken since I did not pack my stuff. It was done by staff and MTU has a problem with leaving your stuff unattended and unit porters picking over your stuff and taking things.

The first thing I do is make a cup of coffee, since I have not had one in over a month. Oh what a caffine rush. I feel like the squirrle in the movie "Over the Hedge" when he drinks the energy drink and starts bouncing off everything. Its a good thing they don't care about late night power as I will be up all night putting everything away.

A few days later I am sent to Classifcation to get classified. Now this is the first time at ~~orientation~~/classifcation, where they tell you directly that this facility operates two live fire gun towers and they DO use them. I decide to go work in the kitchen as that's where all the level 4 jobs are located. I get to work for a couple of months with the MDOC food service staff, but December 8, 2012 Aramark takes over with Governor Snyder's great privitization plan to save money.

It took several days for them to figure out who did what job and who was the bullshit artists and who know what they were talking about and who could be trusted as far as possible. It takes a few days for them to figure out that I am one of the smarter ones who knows how things are supposed to be done. My experience working with an environmental sanitarian for six years on an almost daily basis shows when I take responsibility to clean and organize the large walk-in storage cooler next to the serving line.

The cooler is a disaster area, eveyone just piles pans of left over food

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 33
APRIL 2020

on the shelves. There are no labels as to what things are, what date it was opened, when it needs to be used. I find 30 pans of butter with no labels and all of them are partially used pans. No one grabs an open pan to finish it off, they always come grab a full pan. What surprises me is that the cooks and produce workers haven't run out of pans to put fresh food products into for service.

It takes me the better part of a whole day working two shifts, in between working my regular assigned job on the serving line to make a dent on straightening this cooler out. I first had to talk to the new Assistant Food Service Director about what rule of cooler storage they are planning to work with. As the Food Code rule is no more than 7 days can something be held in the cooler from its production date. But some facilities only allow 3-4 days to make sure things are used up or thrown away in a more timely fashion. I am told that we will be using the 7 days rule, so now I can figure out how to start dating all these pans I have in this cooler.

After about three days of work I now had things organized. Because of this they will not let anyone just put things into the cooler. They are old to leave things sitting on a cart outside of the cooler so that I can put them away and after dinner, they just push the cart inside the door for me to take care of in the morning when I come to work. After about a week of all this, I was moved off the serving line and into the job of the Lead Relief Line Worker. Now I have to set up the serving line for breakfast and lunch and change out pans off the serving line while the meals are running.

Now I have to come in each morning and set things up for breakfast, including making orange juice. One morning we go to the holding cooler where the juice concentrate is kept in a locked cage. When we get in the cooler there is a flatbed cart with 30-4" hotel pans sitting in front of the juice cage. So I move the flatbed out of the way, but when I put my hand on a stack of pans to stabilize them while the cart is moving, there is warmth coming from these pans.

When I bring this fact to the attention of the supervisor who is with me and we start lifting pan lids to see what is inside all the pans. We find 15 pans full of baked beans and 15 pans of macaroni and cheese from the previous night's dinner. The further we go down into the stacks of pans, the warmer the stuff still is. When I ask the supervisor for a temperature probe and check several pans, this stuff is still at 90°F. But the supervisor is clueless about what this means and what needs to be done with this food.

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF ME CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 34
APRIL 2020

So I go and get the Assistant Food Service Director and bring her to the cooler to see what we have found. I explain to her that this is left from last night's dinner and has just been pulled from the hot boxes and stacked on this cart then pushed into the cooler. She uses her own temperature probe and verifies this stuff is still at 90°F. The other supervisor asks what's wrong and I have to explain to her that each one of these 4" pans were to have each been poured into a shallow cake pan and these pans separated on a chill rack at least 6" apart and placed in the cooler so the cooling fans will blow cold air through the racks. That we only have 6 hours to get hot food cooled down to 40°F, that anything that is in the temperature zone of 140°F to 140°F past this time line cannot be reused. The potential for the growth load of harmful bacteria is too great and creates a danger of food poisoning. So I have to take all this food and place in in milk crates lined with trash bags so the sanitation worker can get it into the trash compactor safely.

The bad part of this incident, was that the food service supervisor claimed that she had experience as a bar manager and a manager at McDonald's and should have know all of this. But I found out later on that Aramark charged a penalty to any facility that threw out any food over a certain amount of weight. That's why Aramark wouldn't throw out many food items they should have on many occasions.

Another issue that I encountered with Aramark at RMI was while I always had to watch what milk I pulled from the cooler because it would either not be rotated with the older milk that needed to be used first at the front of the cooler, or guys from another shift just would pull milk from whatever skid that they wanted. But the biggest issue was having an overflow of milk and not being able to serve it or use it for cooking fast enough for it to go past its use by or expiration date.

There were times when we had to serve milk for all three meals for days at a time to try and use it up before the next shipment arrived. We were only required to serve milk for breakfast and dinner. It took me a few weeks to finally get an answer from the commissary supervisor as to why we had this problem. Aramark was ordering milk for 1,400 people for three meals a day. But when I pointed out that the menu does not call for milk at the lunch meal at all and that breakfast with the exception of Saturday morning waffles, only averages 500-700. This left a very confused look on her face as it slowly changed to realization that I was right and the solution to this problem was so simple.

Another milk related issue was that instead of ordering milk in single serving cartons or pouches. Aramark ordered all milk in the bulk 5 gallon dispenser bags. These were the bags that had a rubber teat on one end and you cut the tip off and then hung the bag on its end inside of a special crate and placed it in a chilled dispenser box. Then as you placed a cup under the teat that hung underneath the dispenser you lifted a weighted arm that released pressure on the teat and allowed the milk to flow. But the MDOC had done away with these types of milk dispensers years ago because they were deemed to be unsanitary. The reason being that a prisoner could fill his cup, then drink some or all of the milk in the cup, then place the cup back under the dispenser with the teat dangling in the cup as they refill it. Now their saliva has transferred from the inside of the cup to the dispenser teat when the milk touches it during the refill. So we had to pop these teats off the milk bags and pour the milk into a small pan or pitcher (if available) and then fill individual cups placed on a sheet pan. Trust me there was no such thing as any pan that did not have runs, drips, and puddles of milk. Then these unused pans of milk would be placed back into the cooler to be held for the next meal and if these pans were not closely monitored and rotated the same pan may go in and out of the cooler many times before it actually got used.

A milk related issue that created a big problem was before they started to cut back on their supply orders and balance the milk surplus. Some Aramark employees could not grasp the concept that here in the MDOC, it is written in statewide policy directives, that no food item may be sold in the prisoner store or used in food service that is past its expiration date, best by date, or use by date. Aramark held the stance that per the Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration guidelines that fresh eggs and milk products are still okay to use/consume up to 7-10 days past these dates. It took showing them the MDOC policy directives and telling them in specific terms that anything past these dates was not allowed by the MDOC and prisoners consider it to be spoiled and will not touch it when they find out.

It took the involvement of the first shift lieutenant who always ran the dining room to get the Aramark employees to understand in no uncertain terms that she was not going to deal with a prisoner riot in her dining hall because Aramark was stuck on stupid.

One thing to point out, is that when the MDOC left food service, they left Aramark with totally nothing to work with when they arrived. The MDOC

deleted all the computer records of food usage, ordering, recipies, EVERYTHING! They emptied out the file cabinets of all paperwork as well. When we went into the Food Service Director's office to find the manual for a piece of equipment, we found that the file cabinet that held all the equipment manuals had been completely disorganized. Someone had take all the manuals out and just threw them back into the file drawers upside down and crammed into the drawers. When we went to find office supplies in order to type out work reports and job changes for classification, there was nothing. We couldn't even find a single pencil or even a Post-It Note.

The first of many crisis situations happened just a couple of weeks after Aramark took over. There was a bad ice storm and this caused the local power grid to go down. RMI was operating on the emergency generator, so this resulted in a facility lockdown. The control center only allowed about 15 workers to be let out to work in the Kitchen. Fortunately, all of us who were allowed to come to work had many years of experience between us, so we knew what we needed to do. The Aramark employees had no clue as to what to do when they were told that all prisoners (1,400 of them) would be fed in their cells. Aramark had no prior training as to what was to be done for cold meals or how to get them to the cellblocks. So those of us with the most experience got together and explained that we needed to make sack meals and each one gets peanut butter and jelly packets, four slices of bread, a milk and either a piece of fruit or a cup of juice.

Then we have to explain to Aramark that we need to pull all the cook's tables into the serving area to set up an assembly line to fill the bags. But we only have three carts that are used to send trays over to the segregation units, which is fine when there are only two units to feed. We now have 21 units to feed, on 5 separate floors, and in 3 separate buildings. Aramark wants to send the carts to one floor at a time, pass out the bags, then comeback to reload the carts and go again. This process takes us about 6 hours to get breakfast bags to everybody.

By the time we are done with the last unit's breakfast bags passed out, its time to get started doing it all over again for lunch. I have to go back into the experience I had at SMN when we had the Y2K fiasco and had to send sack lunches to the cellblocks. We had all these empty bread racks in the back store room and these wonderful heavy angle iron steel trollies that you can move two stacks of bread racks around. We just need to place XX amount

bags on each bread rack, and stack the filled racks on the trollies. Then a couple of spins of the trollies or walks around the stakes with some plastic wrap to stabilize the load. Now each unit or floor has its own trolley to push across the yard and take up the elevator. As soon as we get a trolley loaded, it can be sent to a floor in the cellblock, we don't have to wait for a cart to come back first. Viola, lunch bags are all passed out and we are taking a break after only 3 hours!

The next crisis we faced with Aramark was just a few weeks later, when we all ~~arrived~~ at the Kitchen and one of the supervisors smelled gas in the back of the Kitchen. So no equipment could be turned on and it would be cold bag meals all over again. At least this time, the supervisors had learned from the last experience and knew what to do and it only took us a couple hours to get everyone a breakfast bag.

The next major crisis we had just a few weeks later, was during the dinner meal one night. We start smelling something burning and at first think the cooks have left something in an oven. But then it gets stronger and more electrical, so we start searching and checking all the hot boxes on the serving line, the ovens, the cooling units in all the coolers, and all the lights in the Kitchen. But find nothing amiss, so the smell gets even stronger and finally reaches the dining room. After a few minutes the lieutenant in the dining room comes to ask what's burning, but when he is told nothing is amiss in the back. He has officers go upstairs and check the gym and also go down and check the basement. That's when they find that there is an electrical fire in a circuit breaker panel box in the basement.

They call for an immediate evacuation of the building. So we have to just leave everything on the line and guys eating in the dining room had to leave everything on the tables. After they got everything under control, the Aramark staff and some officers put meal trays together to finish feeding those who had not got to eat yet. The Aramark staff had to wash all the pots, pans, utensils, and trays so that everything could return to normal the next morning.

My last incident with Aramark here at RMI was when an Aramark supervisor was verbally abusing another prisoner in the middle of the serving area while the meal lines were running. The Aramark employee used extremely vulgar and derogatory language when he berated the prisoner and at one point had his fists

balled up at his sides while yelling at the prisoner to get into the office.

This whole scene caused the meal lines to stop for several minutes. Other Aramark employees were alarmed and concerned about this behavior and it caused concern amongst the other prisoner workers on the serving line. When I commented to an Aramark employee that this conduct was unbecoming and if they allow this to continue, this could create a disturbance and it could get out of control. The Aramark employee agreed and when I pressed the issue that this must go to the shift commander because this wasn't the first time this Aramark employee had done this to a prisoner.

When the meals lines were finished and everything was cleaned up, I was asked by another Aramark employee if I still wanted to see the shift commander about the incident. Believing that many of the other prisoner workers were going to speak up, I said yes. I talked to the shift commander about the incident and related my concerns that this could have gotten out of control if it persisted. I was thanked for my statement and concern.

A few days later I was told by my unit officer on 2nd shift that he received a call from the deputy warden and I was laid in from work in the kitchen. So I stopped at the door to the serving line when I went to breakfast the next day and talked to one of the Aramark line supervisors about being laid in and she knew nothing about it. She said she would talk to the assistance food service director when she came to work and I should stop back when my unit came to lunch. When I came back for lunch, I get the supervisor's attention and she gets the assistant director to come to the door. They tell me that they know nothing about what's going on. They have called classification, the inspector, shift commander, and the deputy ward, and no one knew anything about my lay in from work.

I told them that if this is the case and I don't receive the required written notice in the mail that day, I would return to work the next day. Since I didn't get any formal paperwork in the mail that afternoon, I informed the midnight shift officer what was going on and that since I didn't have anything in writing NOT to report to work, that policy requires me to report to my detailed work assignment or be subject to a misconduct for out of place.

I report back to work and all goes well for several weeks and no body mentions my "lay in " from work again. Until a group of administrators comes to the kitchen and they stop in the assistant director's office. The after a

few minutes, I am called to the office and asked by the deputy warden why I am at work. When I related everything to him about Aramark checking with all possible people about my lay in, including his office and when no one knew what we were talking about and absent the formal written notice of lay in which was protocol for RMI. I was technically out of place and subject to a misconduct report for out of place/refusal to work, which absent any written notice of lay in would automatically have me found guilty.

The deputy warden responded that HE was the one who laid me in from work, and I again told him without the proper paperwork that lay in meant nothing. I will not allow myself to be caught in a catch-22 position. The deputy then went on to say that the incident had been investigated and that the camera footage didn't support the allegations that were made. When I pointed out that there are NO cameras in the serving line area and the three in the dining room are out of position to see through a solid steel door and the surrounding wall where the incident took place. The deputy simply stated that he was the deputy warden and can lay in whomever he wishes. I stated that the MDOC may not use policy as both a sword and a shield, it must choose one or the other. Further, that if the sword is chose, it is always double edged and it cuts both ways as far as following and applying rules and procedures. At which point he picked up the phone and asked what unit I was in and called my unit and informed my unit officer that I was coming back to the block and was no longer working in food service. Then he went to the dining room and got the kitchen officer to shake me down and escort me out of the building.

After waiting the required two days and again not receiving a lay in or termination notice, I filed a grievance for wrongful termination. About a week later I am interviewed by the classification director and shown the response to the grievance stating that because of the investigation finding no support of my statement, I therefore lied and threatened the integrity of the assignment by making a false statement against an employee.

Then when I go to appeal the grievance to the warden and because I refused to sign off the grievance. Two days after the appeal is filed, I am told to pack up my property because I am being transferred to Kinross (KCF) above the Bridge. They are sending me up North!

KINROSS (KCF) LEVEL 2, 2013:

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 40
APRIL 2020

Now at one point in time this was the facility to get to in the MDOC. It was one of the best places to go if you were going a long sentence. They had some of the best food and programs in the MDOC. But that was in the facility's past, it was no longer a destination to try to get to if you have any control over it. KCF had become not a prison or correctional facility, but a complete demilitarized zone.

This was now the most assaultive and violent facility in the MDOC. There were rapes, assaults, robberies, stabbings and face slashings going on a daily basis. The summer of 2012 was referred to as the "no chomo summer", anyone who was or even suspected of a sex crime was robbed, assaulted, and forced off the yard.

Because the facility was so big and this was the year before the big security upgrades to install cameras every where. Staff at KCF could not stop the violence even if they wanted to do so. They were so used to so many years of peaceful prison life, they had no idea how to deal with everything that comes with the modern young gang bangers.

When I arrived at KCF, I am placed in the gym or G-Unit where they place all new arrivals and also those who receive misconducts and are sent to segregation. They come back to G-Unit until reassigned to a room in a regular unit. G-Unit is also used as a transfer unit, as KCF is between the facilities below the Bridge and the rest of them above the Bridge. They use KCF as a halfway point and house prisoners overnight to continue their journey the following day. These guys are told they may go to the yard while they are here overnight, but they go outside at their own risk. But you still have to walk past other units to get to the chowhall, so if you have enemies here, they will see you. If they don't see you, there are guys in G-Unit who keep track of who arrives and report to the gangs what facility you came from and who you are. They have no reservations about coming up into G-Unit and finding anyone who has crossed them and assaulting them with impunity.

My first day here, I walk the yard and find several guys that I haven't seen in years, many of them from my days back at Riverside (RCF). In the few hours of walking around and finding a safe place to sit (any empty picnic table or bench may "belong" to one "organization" or another). I observe at least 2 fights, 3 assaults, and several stabbings. The staff react to none of these incidents! They happen so quickly and these gangbangers use themselves as a

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 41
APRIL 2020

movable wall, it all goes unobserved until the victim seeks medical attention.

I already can see that my stay here at KCF will be eventful and not very long as this facility is out of control. Unlike other facilities, staff search through your personal property outside your presence. They then call you to come to the back room and pick it up after they have taken anything of "contraband" and when you ask about an item, they look at you as if you are crazy and claim they didn't see the item or tell you something is contraband and make you destroy or send it out. Only to go to the yard and see a dozen items that you were just told was contraband.

After a few days, all of us who arrived together from below the Bridge are called to the G-Unit office and given our new bunk assignments. I am assigned to the 3rd floor of A-Unit to a 4 man room. When I finally am able to get an empty cart to put my property in and pull it across the yard. I get to A-Unit and find there are a couple of guys I know from years back. So I have some help to carry my stuff up three floors. Only to find that the room I am moving into, one of the four keys is missing. Apparently two of the guys in the room got into a fight with each other and were taken down to A-1 to segregation and only 1 key was recovered. Because another new guy got to the room first, I am without a key until they get a new one from the locksmith. I must hope that one of the other guys is in the room when I come back from somewhere, or I have to ask and wait for an officer to come open the door for me. After about 2 days of this, they finally get a new key from the locksmith.

I do my best to get settled in at this facility and the level of violence that occurs on a daily basis. There are constant stories of guys who go to pick up their store bag from the delivery truck and get back to their units. Only to be assaulted by being punched or choked unconscious inside the entryways or in the stairwells. When they go to the Quartermaster to pick up their SecurePak orders, they have to be on the watch going back to their units, as gangs will wait for them to get into certain spots and someone will come from behind and slash the bag and then a group runs out to grab everything and runoff.

I get a job in the kitchen, working in the dining room cleaning tables and picking up trays. I find that I could not make too many hopes of getting any type of better job in the production area of the kitchen. The clerk here worked with me as a clerk in the kitchen at ARF (Adrian) and he tells me all jobs in the back are run by the gangs. They decide who will get on what job, despite

the Aramark employees putting you in for a specific job. If they don't want you, they will tell you to move someplace else, set you up to get fired, assault you, or plain just threaten to get rid of you. They may also have you assaulted on the yard or even in your room back in the housing unit.

So I just decide to bide my time as best as possible until I can get 6 months here and can ask for a transfer back down below the Bridge. Things go okay, if not always under the feeling of constant tension that is always everywhere. I manage to get through a few months of existence here, until one day when the wantabe gang banger that has been in the room for a few weeks, shoots his move trying to get accepted by one group or another. He waits until the unit is called to lunch and pick up store bags at the same time.

While I am gone he breaks into my wall locker and steals a bunch of my property. When I get back to the unit, the room door is wide open and he is pretending to be aggitated about being choked out and held hostage while four guys steal my stuff. But I find his story and behavior to be suspect, because he shows no signs of being assaulted.

So the decision has now been made for me and its time for me to leave this facility and force the administration's hand. I pack up and secure the rest of my property and to to the officer's desk to tell them that my stuff has just been stolen and I am not staying here any longer as I don't feel safe.

They call for a sergeant to come and see me and she asks what's the problem. I tell her that this facility is a three ringed circus and they are nowhere close to being in charge. The animals are running the place and I am not going to stay around any longer to wait and see if I get physically assaulted or maimed. That they are making no attempt whatsoever to search for my stuff, as it is somewhere in my hallway in one of five rooms because the unit officers claim that no one has come by the desk leaving the hallway carrying anything.

The sergeant has me escorted downstairs to the segregation unit and placed in a separate room for guys seeking protective custody. This facility is unique in segregation, as they have the standard single bunk cells/rooms, but also have five rooms of 6-8 bunks. What else is surprising, is that the next day the wantabe gang banger is brought down to segregation and for some reason is seeking protective custody. They place him in the same room with me and six others. I am unsure if he is really running from someone, the other two guys that were in the room with us, or one of the gangs on the yard has run him off the yard because they marked me for harrassment and he ruined their plans.

An uneasy truce exists between us in that room for several days until we are seen by the deputy wardent and the resident unit manager. They tell me there is no reason for me not to go back to the yard here, and hey its a dog-eat-dog world out there, go back to the yard. They send me back to the dorm room and about an hour later one of the segregation officers came and opened the door and told me I was going back to G-Unit (the gym) to be reassigned to another housing unit. I told him respectfully that I was sorry but in all good conscience I cannot do that. The officer gives me a direct order to go to G-Unit. I again politely tell him that I have to refuse. So he writes me a misconduct report for disobeying a direct order, a class 2 misconduct but because this happened in segregation, it is automatically elevated to a class 1.

I get moved to a regular segregation dorm room now because of the misconduct report pending the hearing. A couple of days later I see the hearings officer and recieve the maximum of 10 days detention. After about a week into my detention, I am told to take the small amount of personal property back down to the storage room and repack my property because I am transferring in the morning. According to the report from the security classification committee and my transfer order, I am labeled as "unmanageable" to be housed at KCF.

ALGER CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (LMF) LEVEL 2, 2013-2014:

I arrive at Alger and everyone has a short meeting with the deputy warden before being assigned to a unit. I am told to go to Spruce Unit as a Level 2. This is the only level 2 unit here, all the other units are Level 4. They use Spruce Unit as a step down unit for those guys coming out of level 4 and as a temporary location to keep those deemed "unmanageable" or problem children.

Things are slightly different here, as this used to be a Level 5 facility, so everything is designed to be self contained. The running joke here is that you never need to put on a pair of pants, unless you go to the yard or the dentist. You eat meals in the three dayrooms, they bring quartermaster to the unit, medication is passed out in the unit, there is a room to see the nurse/doctor for sick call. The only thing to leave the unit for is to go to the dentist, the library, property room, GED school or to plug in your MP3 players.

Another thing is that you have no control over the doors to the rooms, they stay open all day, except for count time and during the night. There is a different vibe to this place, even with all the aspects of prison life, everyone is only here temporarily, be it 6 weeks or 6 months.

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M: CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 44
APRIL 2020

Jobs here are somewhat limited, as they do not allow level 2 and level 4 prisoners to mix at here. I try for either a library or a school tutor job, since they will allow me to earn the most money. I get assigned to a tutor's job after a few weeks. There is not much to do at this facility, so I spend the mornings and afternoons after work in the small weight pit working out.

They have a dog training program in the unit, and they all lock down at the end of the hallway on my floor. I know a couple of the handlers from other facilities over the years. This was a nice unique experience to have the dogs running around. Just had to stop at the doorway and check the hallway before stepping out or might get runover by a couple of dogs chasing each other or a ball thrown down the hall. I get the occasional visit from a dog or puppy, as I sit at my makeshift desk (two footlockers stacked up) working on things. These are the dogs that belong to the handlers I know, so the dogs know where to get a treat when they want one.

The fun part is when they bring in the new puppies that are only weeks old and have just been weaned. The handlers get them walking on a leash and when they get to the bottom of the stairs to to up to the lobby. The puppies stop, sit down, and look up at the handler with this look of, "You've got to be kidding, right?" They wait to be picked up and carried up the stairs. The opposite happens when going down the stairs, if they don't stop and pick the puppies up they will tumble in a ball of fur all the way down the stairs.

It is here that I check into my transfer order from RMI to above the Bridge. I find out that I was transferred up north to, "Make bedspace to accomodate a force feed prisoner from RG&C." Now why would I need to give up my general population bed for another prisoner who clearly will be under constant/direct medical and/or psychiatric observation. Being force fed entails being physically restrained and having an I.V. inserted and/or food forced into the stomach using a syringe and a gastronasal tube. Either of which the person would not be running around out on the yard and in general population. So this clearly goes to show the blatant retaliation by the RMI administration because of the incident with the Aramark employee.

After about 18 months here at LMF, I am transferred to another facility, stil above the Bridge--URF or Chippewa.

CHIPPEWA CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, LEVEL 2, 2014--PRESENT:

My arrival to URF brings me into contact again with guys that I had not seen in sometime and some that it is surprising they are still running around in a level 2 facility.

It is back to community living in 8 man cubicles inside pole barns. These pole barns were labeled and still are referred to from time to time as "temporary" facilities. But some of these have been in existence for 30 years or more, been closed and reopened multiple times. So one is left to wonder just what definition of "temporary" is being used in the context of these buildings.

I find that they don't force you to immediately take a job here like most other facilities where you are forced to choose from unit porter, kitchen, or yard crew in addition to picking the job you really want. So I will go for the library and GED school tutor to maximize my payroll potential.

I get placed in a bottom bunk on the front hall of B-Unit, the one with the farthest walk to anywhere on the compound. When I have to go and pick up my property, I run into one of the idiosyncracies of URF. I have to walk all the way across the pole barn or "westside" of the complex. Go through a security gate and then halfway across the "east side" of the complex to the school building to pick up my property. Then have to push/pull a cart all the way back to get it to the unit.

Since I don't have a job right away, I have plenty of time to work on finding an attorney to look into my case and to put together a civil law suit against the MDOC for the incident at RMI, the retaliatory transfer above the Bridge, the loss of property at KCF, and then the theft/loss of legal books by staff from the mail at LMF. After several months of writing letters, I finally find an attorney who will take a look at my case and to see if there is anything he sees that he can work with. Which leads to several days of putting records/files together and getting copies made and mailed out.

Because I am not working, I take advantage of the free time in the afternoons to workout in both weight pits. After spending the past year at LMF with just a limited amount of weight equipment and having to improvise many exercises. Having two weight pits to choose from is heaven. Only problem is that the small front yard weight pit has a usage schedule and if its not your day to be in there, you are subject to a misconduct report if caught. Of course URF is a place of extremes where this would normally be a Class 3 violation of the yard rules any place else, here at URF it is a higher Class 2 for out of place. Then

again, how would URF maintain its standings in the MDOC statistics for being the facility with the highest amount of Class 1 and Class 2 misconducts written per year for more than 3 years in a row out of 29-33 facilities. They average between 6,000-8,000 per year. It is amazing the facts that you can get when you take the time to read the MDOC's own Annual Statistical Reports!

So only certain days I may use the front weightpit and others I have to go out back to the big weight pit. But the big weightpit is open to all units all day when the yard is open. After a while I find that the afternoons are a bit too crowded making it hard to get what you want to use. I find out that in the mornings, there are less people in either weight pit and also with the exception of only one or two certain yard officers, they don't enforce the specific unit rule in the front yard weightpit. This goes along with there being more consistency to when the open the yard in the mornings compared to the afternoons and evenings.

This is my existence for quite some time, then one day a guy transfers in that I worked with at ARF (Adrian). He is artistic and does sculptures out of crushed soap mixed with water and/or glue to make clay like paste. He then carves them into animals, etc. I start to get the artistic itch to go back to painting, but while I still have canvas paper and tracingpaper to work with, along with many previous sketches that I made while at SMN (Northside) in the 1990s. All my paint and brushes were part of the property that was stolen at KCF.

But before I recommit myself to get back to painting, they guy transfers to another facility. Yet the guy who replaces him can do drawing, painting, and also gets into doing the soap sculpture work. So I commit myself to painting again and resupply all my paint and brushes. I am asked by several people if I will be submitting anything to the U.of M Art Project that I have know about for years. But I don't think I have time to get a selection of pieces completed in time and also have my doubts that I am good enough to submit something worthy anyway.

Now I have my day planned out to workout in the mornings, work on my legal projects in the afternoons, and paint the evenings painting. After about 2 years waiting for a job, I get a call to go interview with one of the GED teachers for a tutor's job. Unfortunately, I don't get the job. But several weeks later I get another interview call from the same teacher and still miss the cut and don't get the job this time either.

I continue my daily routine and put together a few paintings that I think are worthy of submission or at least good enough to get some constructive comments from the curators when they evaluate them.

It is at this time that I get a letter from the attorney that I have been dreading. The one that says he doesn't feel there is anything he can do to help me get a resentencing. As a generous act he returns a majority of the fee that was paid for his services.

I have a discuss with my family about what to do with the money, whether to save it for another attorney or use it to obtain another college degree through correspondence courses. We decide that I should go for another college degree. But this becomes difficult now as most colleges and universities have done away with the old paper correspondence courses and every thing is done online through the internet. There is also the limitation that most colleges and universities won't grant a degree by correspondence without you completing at least some of your credits actually on campus. So its now a tough search, until I find a newly published book that is written just for prisoners who want to further their education. Most of the basic research is done and the information is listed for each school in the book. Now its a choice of what degree am I looking towards getting and what major should I go for.

Because I have an Associate Degree in Business Management and a Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Science. I lean towards Business Management, Psychology, and Criminal Justice as majors. Yet do I go for another bachelor degree (more cost effective to go this route because my core classes apply to any degree, I just have to do the subject classes towards the major) or do I go to the next level and go the graduate school to complete a master's degree.

After many months of writing to various schools and comparing information, tuition, books, degree availability, etc. I settle on going for my Master's Degree in Psychology from a school in California called California Coast University. They offer the best program for me and they will allow the tuition to be paid in installments, not every thing all up front. So I get all the paperwork done with CCU and get things approved to start the classes. Then about that time I get a third call for a job interview as a GED tutor and am simply asked if I still want the job and I will start working the following Monday.

Now my day is full with working out in the mornings, working as a GED tutor in the afternoons and doing my own schoolwork when I am in the classroom

and have nothing to do in between grading papers, and painting at night to relax.

I take my first paintings to the curators from U of M to select any for the art show. I look at other submissions that are preseted and think none of mine are nearly good enough. I submit a tropical catamaran sail boat, a pegasus in gray tones, two three masted sailing ships with one cutting the other off, and two dragons fighting in the air. I get great feedback on all of my pieces, but the one with the three masted sailing ships gets the most attention. This is due to the detailing of all the rigging and sails, and is the one they choose to place in the art show.

The food quality here is horrible as the workers don't care about what they are making and Aramark employees are constatnly trying to figure out how to shave costs and cut corners. It is now that there is a big deal about Aramark finally being gone after the past couple of years with all the negative publicity about dirty conditions and maggot infested potatoes. But here we go again with the great shell game, all that happens is the Aramark employees exchange their red shirts for the Kelley green shirst of Trinity Food Services. Still have the same people in the same jobs and the same or worse brand and quality of food.

Because of how things are running with food quality and portions a boycott is organized here at URF to not go to the chowhall. Everyone stays in the units to eat and pools resources into community food banks for those who have nothing to eat in place of not going to the chowhall. This lasts for about 3 days, which was surprising at this day in age. Most of the younger guys will assault another prisoner before they will stand against the administration to accomplish a unified goal.

The next major experience here ar URF is when the by H1N1 flu outbreak struck everyone. This was not the first facility I have been at where a unit has been quarantined for one reason or another. But it is the first time that I have been in a unit that was quarantined and also where the whole facility was placed under quarantine protocols.

This was a rather unique experience, in that, it seemed like everyday the administration was doing things different and trying to figure out how things should go as each day progressed. Just when we thought they figured out the smooth daily routine, they had to do things different and each shift had its own way of doing things. It was like being stuck in a neverending Chinese fire drill. We were on quarantine status for a total of 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ weeks because the basic quarantine status is for a minimum of 7 days but if anyone reports sick

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 49
APRIL 2020

and tests positive for the flu, then the 7 day clock starts over again.

The only good part of this is that the quarantine took place at the coldest part of the winter when the air temperature and/or windchill was -10°F or more for most of that time. Which meant that there would not have been any yard open for activities anyway!

All this gave me plenty of time to complete my college assignments and work on the next group of paintings to submit for the next U of M Art Show.

The following year, we all expected the flu to hit us again and began to prepare for another quarantine. But as usual they changed up how things are done this year. Now its just this unit, and that unit. Then everything is alright, then another unit here and there. But by the time all is done each unit was quarantined at least once but it was spread out over most of the winter. Then while moving back and forth on the yard, you still crossed paths with guys who were supposed to be under quarantine and kept separate. So how was this a real effective quarantine when you have anytype of contact with those who are supposed to be kept away from you to prevent your from catching the flu?

It always seems like URF is always patching plans together at the last minute and making things up as they go along. Which is what makes it so frustrating for prisoners to deal with things like this. We thrive on consistency, when things are inconsistent, it creates disharmony and results in problems. Its like dealing with a person who is a jerk. As long as they are consistently a jerk all of the time, you know what to expect and how to deal with them. But when they are a jerk one minute and a nice person the next, you don't know how to deal with them .

Which brings us to the current year and the Novel Coronavirus, COVID-19. Surprisingly, the MDOC in its wisdom took advantage of the JPay prisoner tablet system and provided multiple updates to the affect the pandemic was having on MDOC operations and that many things such as public hearings and nonemergency transfers would be postponed until the crisis has past. They were even willing to admit when and where prisoners tested positive for the virus, while these were not specifically mentioned in the public news broadcasts.

What was interesting was the attempts to impliment the many recommendations of the CDC, governor, and President Trump about social distancing and the human tendency to collect in herds and groups. The practicality of some of these new temporary rules of living are simple to put in place in the free world, but

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 50
APRIL 2020

something else entirely in a prison setting. Reduced class sizes of GED students, temporarily stopping non essential visitors, volunteers, and others from coming into the facility, and cancelling large group meetings are the easiest things. Then there came the recommendation for wearing masks by everyone. That was a really strange sight to see after the many years that I have been in prison where staff was always concerned with being able to see your face so they could recognize people.

Attempting to create social distancing for meals is an entirely different animal. Normally when a unit is called to go eat they are released half a unit at a time, about 80 people. Which creates a close quartered group in the hallways, going out the door, walking in both large and small groups across the yard, and then standing in a long line to get our ID card scanned and get through the serving line to take a seat with 4 people per table to eat our meal.

Here they determined that to comply with the social distancing objective is that they will release us to go eat one cubicle (8 people) at a time every 30 seconds or so to create separation. This staggered people enough so that there was no clustering in a long line at the chowhall. You are still allowed to sit 4 at a table to eat. But yet when I go out to the weight pit there are 40 or more people working out, when I come back to the unit and go to the dayroom while its 4 per table, there are 40 or more in the room. Then we only practice this social distancing at dinner, breakfast and lunch are run business as usual.

When staff of the supervisory or command rank are asked to make sense of this they have no rational answers to give other than they have no control over the other shift. Also when they call units to pick up store orders guys are standing in a line of 30-40 people while waiting.

Then when the virus does start to affect prisoners and/or staff at other facilities, they now want to do the extra step of only allowing 2 at a table in the chowhall, meaning only half a unit may be in the chowhall at any one time. Which takes the total time to conduct the meal from about 1½ hours to over 4 hours. Then having yellow crime scene tape all over to direct movement to and from the chowhall. Only to revert back to business as usual the next morning and afternoon. Which makes us question the sanity and sincerity of staff's efforts to protect and prevent the spread of either the flu or COVID-19.

Which brings us to the age old conundrum of just how these viruses get into the facilities in the first place. As much as the MDOC would have people believe, these viruses do not just magically fly over the fence. Yes, our visitors, mail, and other people coming into the facility are effective transporters of these viruses. It is the line staff, the regular yard and unit officers, who are the most persistent smugglers of these viruses. But there are safety protocols of temperature checks and medical questionnaires in place, as long as staff are honest and truthful in self reporting symptoms and contacts.

Yet, at the time of my writing this, my unit is itself under quarantine due to the flu. We had two people require medical assistance due to being overcome by the effects of the flu. With the two positive infection rule here, that instituted the unit be placed on quarantine status. The standard rule is the quarantine lasts for a minimum of 7 days, as long as no further positive cases are detected, otherwise the clock starts over with each new case. But the confusion comes in when no one in an official capacity states the end date when the clock begins. Then medical staff tell people one time frame and line or supervisory custody staff have another time frame in mine.

To add to the confusion, the two people infected with the flu are brought back to the unit from the small segregation unit to ride out the quarantine with the rest of us because, "we have all be exposed." Then the first person claims various other reasons for being taken from the unit. Even through all the evidence points to the contrary of their stories, they were removed from the unit in the middle of the night in full biohazard gear. The next morning your whole cubicle was washed down under direct supervision with bleach. All of your cube mates were sent to medical to take a flu antibody test. As a graduate student and undergrad, I learned and use the scientific method to validate things. I don't need Forensic Files on CNN or old episodes of CSI to tell me to follow the evidence. Evidence doesn't lie, people lie. If it looks like a duck, sounds like a duck, walks like a duck. Guess what? Its a DUCK!

Now the most oxymoronic episode that I have encountered here at URF was where in 2018, I purchased a pair of weightlifting gloves from the Recreation Department. They sell us things like tennis balls, tennis rackets, baseball gloves, and mouth/teeth guards to use in our recreational activities. I have a receipt for the legitimate purchase of the gloves and am allowed to possess and use them for almost 2 years. I have been observed by staff using the

gloves on the yard and they have been in my "area of control" through numerous cell searches and shakedowns.

Then one day, my unit gets a new regular officer on day shift from one of the units on the other side of the compound. He stops me coming through the unit lobby the next day when I come in from weightlifting. He asks me for a personal patdown search. While he starts going through my personal workout gear and says he sees contraband gloves. When I point out that these are perfectly legal as I purchased them here from the Recreation Department and have a receipt. He states I don't care, these are contraband, you're not allow to have leather gloves and ther is no nonleather weightlifting gloves made. So he takes them and writes me a misconduct report for possession of contraband. When he brings me a copy of the contraband receipt, I show him the receipt for the gloves and he still states that he doesn't care.

So I go and talk to the Recreation Director about this issue that afternoon and explain what happened. He tells me the gloves are not leather and are approved to be sold and possessed. But won't contact the officer to clarify the issue, saying that I will get them back when I have the hearing. Then when the misconduct is reviewed by another unit officer, the reporting officer's partner. I show her the receipt and the attachment to the URF policy that says they are approved property. But she says that she doesn't care because she is just reviewing the misconduct report, not the hearing officer, someone else will conduct the hearing.

Finally, the hearing day arrives and an officer in the unit from the afternoon shift conducts the hearing. When presented with the receipt and the policy information he can't believe the misconduct was written in the first place. But he makes the comment that he realy doesn't like to go against other staff because he will catch flack from that other staff. But goes on to say that right is right and discusses this with his partner, who agrees with him. He tells me to come back to the desk in a few minutes and he will give me the gloves back, but he must make a security round.

When I go back to see him, he is no where to be found. Then he comes back from the control center, where to cover himself, he consult/ed with his supervisor and this sergeant gave him reasons to deny returning the gloves to me. Stating that leather/suede palmed gloves are not allowed personal property. He subsequently finds me guilty of the misconduct and has my gloves destroyed.

Yet, the day after I was written the misconduct report, the facility Quartermaster passed out more than 100 pairs of winter mittens to the yard crew workers, each pair had leather/suede reinforced palms!

When I presented the issue on appeal to the deputy warden pointing out that the policy specifically refers to winter gloves/mittens not recreation apparel. That the definition of contraband as is defined in the misconduct/disciplinary policy states that contraband is any item "not authorized to be possessed." I have a receipt for my purchase, they are still selling the gloves and not confiscating anyone else's, so that shows legitimate authorization to possess. Along with presenting two federal court cases where a prisoner was transferred from one facility to another and masking tape was placed on his footlocker with his name and number. When at the receiving facility they later wrote him misconducts for possession of contraband for the tape. The court rules that because the tape was given to the prisoner by the sending facility and the receiving facility (when they gave him the footlocker with the tape on it) this constituted authorized possession and the misconduct reports couldn't stand.

The deputy warden responded that the sanction imposed is at the discretion of the hearing officer and not subject to appeal. No response to the failure to investigate or due process violations were addressed.

WHAT IS INCARCERATION LIKE FOR YOU?

Incarceration is like a cross between being placed on a seemingly endless cruise aboard a ship and the movie "Groundhog Day." Everyday is an almost carbon copy of the day before, just as the day after will be. For me there are so many things that I never experienced because I came to prison at the age of 17. These things are something that I never experienced, so I don't have any type of reference for a loss or deep desire to reexperience many things.

Many of these experiences that people on the outside take for granted, I may never get the chance to experience. The question is because I have not experienced many things or may not ever experience those things, does it make them less painful or desirable. No it does not. When seeing things on TV or in a magazine, those emotions and desires to experience those things are still there. I hope the day I stop having those feelings is my last day, because I can't imagine existing without those feelings. That would mean that I have become numb, bitter, and a grumpy old man and my will is gone.

Many times this existence, and that's what it is being incarcerated, its not living, it is just a seemingly endless loop. The voyage does not stop anywhere, nor does there seem to be an end. Old faces disappear from time to time and new faces appear to replace them. But in many ways the faces are always the same, just a younger version of the old faces.

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO LIVE IN PRISON?

In many ways living in prison gives you the understanding of how smaller animals feel in the wild. Always in a high state of awareness, always on guard for danger, always watching and waiting for something to happen. Many people always make the comment that you could feel the tension and it was so thick you could cut it with a knife. You don't really understand that feeling until you come to prison and experience the large group standoffs. That tension is always there, many times its just a small tingle in the environmental background but still there and because life in a prison makes you hypervigilant you are always aware subconsciously.

While you are watching everyone else, both other prisoners and staff. They are watching you at the same time. You learn quickly to read body language, facial expressions, and many nonverbal cues that give you insight into another person's actions and intent. you feel that you must act a certain role because you are under this constant observation. Many times this is a false role that you must assume in order not to be seen and treated as prey. But the catch is to not lose the real you in this persona that you must adopt to survive.

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO LIVE IN A CELL?

Living in a prison cell, a real prison cell, with bars like the Reformatory or the old Jackson Complex, or even Marquette prison. Makes you feel like an animal in a cage. This was the feeling that I always got when I was at Northside (SMN) in Jackson. Especially so, when they used to run tour programs, where they would bring in new officer candidates for the MDOC Academy or students from a college or university studying criminal justice.

They would look at you like a caged animal on exhibit at a zoo. Many would get as far away as they could when walking by your cell up on the galleries. Some would stare at you as they passed by and many wouldn't look at you, or if they did look it was not in the eyes. Whether or not they were

told ~~negative~~ propaganda by staff prior to the tour or not was always one of our conspiracy theories.

When these groups would come through on these tours, I got an understanding of how some of the animals felt that I worked with before coming to prison. I worked my last year of high school and first year of community college as a veterinary assistant working everyday with animals in the kennel cages. Many were happy to see you because they craved attention and human interaction. While others were at the back of the cages because they were terrified of you as a strange person or because of the strange place. While still others were just distant and aloof of what was going on around them. While these were just dogs and cats, they are still sentient beings and are capable of recognizing and understanding far more things than we give them credit. Living in a prison cell now gave me a greater understanding of their experience that many will never understand.

Many people have a halfbathroom in their house on the first floor or near the main living area of a single story home. You have a small closet like room with a sink and toilet. Now if you widen that space just enough to place a single size bed in the room, you have a stereotypical prison cell. Now add to that space a standard full size locker that most of us had in middle school to the space. Then add the amount of clothes, toiletries, and miscellaneous personal stuff that would fit in a standard issue military duffle bag. Now add in a standard issue military footlocker (or two) to the space. Fortunately, the footlocker(s) fit under the bed and the contents of the duffle bag will fit into the wall locker.

This is your living area, provided you are not double bunked with another prisoner. Then you have to double the personal property in the space and add another wall locker to take up floor space.

You feel a bit more human when you are in a room setting. While you don't usually have too much more space in these rooms versus being in a stereotypical prison cell. There is the ability to be in the room and close the door, cutting off all the noise that you experience constantly with an open faced and barred prison cell. You have a lot more privacy as that people waly by, there is only the small window to look in and observe anything. Unlike the cell with bars where everything is visible and the only way for any privacy is to hang a sheet across the cell.

Living in a cubicle with up to 7 other people makes things feel more like living in a small community. Because of all the social interaction that can occur, it doesn't feel like being in prison at times. Although, the more personalities you place in a confined space, the more problems are created. Sometimes the chemistry is just right and it can be a pleasant experience even for being in a prison setting. The sometimes the chemistry can be thrown off by just one single person, that this close living setting can turn into a complete nightmare.

WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNITY LIKE IN PRISON?

There is a larger community that exists inside the prison that isn't much different from that in regular society. But is more concentrated in terms of space and the amount of people's personal space. But this larger community is really made up of many smaller communities. You have the workers who keep the place running, the maintenance crews. The kitchen workers keep everyone fed. The yard crew picks up the outside trash, keeps the grass neat and the flower beds tended. There are tutors who work with students to grasp lesson concepts and help them to graduate. There are other communities of those who like to play basket ball, those who play softball, those who exercise in the weight pit, or running. Many of these small communities are interlocked and some members belong to a multitude of the smaller communities.

While I connect with the education community as a tutor working with GED students. I also interact with the weight pit community every morning when I work out. I also have the community of the 6 other guys in my cubicle. I still have indirect or brief contact with many other of the smaller communities on a daily basis as well.

Then there are those communities in prison that many prefer not to have any contact with at all. They call themselves "organizations" as if to give themselves a sense of legitimacy, but this is an affront to real organizations that exist in the world. These aren't organizations, no matter what label the group attempts to apply. They are gangs or mutual protection societies and nothing more,

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN TIES WITH YOUR OTHER COMMUNITIES?

I maintain my family community ties by email, phone calls, and letters.

With some I am able to use all three methods of communication, some only two, and some only one method.

There are other communities that I maintain ties with from the outside world. There are many professional and non-profit organizational communities that I maintain membership with and stay connected through newsletters and other publications that they use to communicate with members and the general public at large.

In the past, maintaining family community ties also included personal visits. But as time goes on, as family gets older and as the MDOC transfers me farther from home and family. Those visits get fewer and fewer.

HOW DO YOU SURVIVE IN PRISON?

Prison survival is all about basic commonsense, yet nowadays, basic commonsense is not quite so common anymore.

I have always found that you have to keep a balance of minding your own business and still staying aware and informed of what is going on around me. Part of this I learned very early in my incarceration when I was at JCF in Level 4, where I was around many older guys who had spent many years behind the "wall" at Jackson Central Complex.

When walking down the cellblock gallery or unit hallway, you must balance paying attention to a cracked or open cell/room door. But at the sametime you should show respect walking by and not looking into the cell/room as you pass like you are window shopping. You may see something that you don't really want to and don't want to know about.

I have to be very tolerant and patient with those around me and being respectful of others used to go a long way to building relations with fellow prisoners. Nowadays, respect doesn't go as far as it used to go. It was a two way street for many years and was something that was earned and not just given. But in recent years, the newer generations demand respect from you, but don't feel they should have to give it in return.

I always balance staying to myself with being part of the community at large. Many times my social circle is dictated by those I work with, those I see in the weight pit and those in the immediate vicinity of my cell/room/bunk. If I stay completely to myself, then others will see me as a potential victim and attempt to prey upon me.

Another survival tactic is when there is mass movement, like going to eat meals. Stay away from the crowd. Walking with one or two other people you know is okay, but being surrounded by a crowd that you don't know can be trouble in the making. I have on several occasions been on the way to eat at a couple of facilities and gotten to certain points in the route where a blind spot existed. Then all of a sudden tripped over someone who had been stabbed or assaulted. Time just to keep walking, this is not my concern, "there is nothing to see here, keep moving along" as they say.

A few years ago, when going to lunch one day, there was a change in the traffic flow. Where most people would make a turn to the right and then take the "shorter" route across a basketball court. The majority stayed to the left taking the longer route and there was a line of guys all the way across the sidewalk moving slowly. This traffic pattern change triggered me to take the short cut route to the left and speed up to get to the chowhall ahead of the crowd coming the other route. I got into the chowhall and as I got in the door the crowd got to the small hill coming up to the door and a prisoner was assaulted by more than one of these in the crowd.

Its amazing just how much information I can gather about what's going on around me by not actually seeking it out. I hear many things now when I am working out in the weight pit or just sitting at my bunk painting. Guys now days just can't keep their mouths shut and have to brag or put on these displays of what they are doing to make themselves look more impressive than the next guy. Unlike many who go to the yard, I don't wear headphones, earbuds, or even have them hanging around my neck. How can you be aware of what is happening around you if you can't hear what's going on or be distracted by the music. Just another recipe for disaster. That's how comfortable these guys have become inside a Michigan prison.

I have always made it a point to establish a daily routine. Get up and go to sleep at the same time each day. Work, exercise, and read books and magazines in the free time. Watch the news at different times during the day to stay current on events going on in the outside world. Most of all is to avoid the pitfall and illusion about being in control of things. There are very few, if anything, in the outside world that I can control from in prison. When I stepped out of the outside world and into prison life, the world didn't stop out there, its not on pause until I get back. The world has continued

to move on to the future, if I spend all my time dwelling on the past, then I am just setting myself up for disappointment when I find out and realize the world has moved on without me.

This takes a lot of stress off me, as I need to worry about those things that I have control of and allow everything else to just continue. Trying to control things going on in the outside world does nothing but create unneeded stress and waste energy that can be better used elsewhere.

WHERE AND HOW DO YOU FIND JOY IN PRISON?

I found great joy in the past when I was part of an active Jaycee Chapter. When we used to run special events for the holidays, the competitions would bring everyone out to participate or watch. It gave people something else to think about for a period of time and elevate some of the depression that is a part of the holidays in prison.

I find great joy at work as a GED tutor when I work one on one with a student having problems understanding how to solve an equation in math class. To see the expression on their face when you draw a visualization of the problem and go one step at a time, and then the light goes on when they fully understand. Then they stop and tell you not to help them on the next one because they want to do it themselves.

Then when they go and take the GED test and pass. When they find out and they come to you and say thank you for helping them. Then when I go to the graduation ceremony that they run for GED, vocational, and trade students every summer. I get to see guys walk in the caps and gowns and know that my job was worth it.

I get joy out of my painting. Although, I have a general plan for each painting before I begin working on it. Many times the painting takes on a life of its own and dictates how something will go. The blend of multiple shades of blue applied to the back ground mix of their own accord to help define where the clouds should be and their shape. I know how the basic design of each piece will be and the general colorization. Its the finer details and the shading that ultimately define the finished piece.

The constructive criticism that I get at the end of each piece gives me the encouragement to do more and different themes with the next piece. I get the most joy from those pieces that someone looks at and wants to buy them so they and others can enjoy them.

I also find joy in continuing my learning experiences. It is so difficult to find avenues of higher learning in prison, especially at the college level. When I completed each of my college degrees, I was grateful and joyful because I had thought that I had lost that opportunity when I came to prison. Now I have found the opportunity to continue on to graduate school and complete a Master's degree. This was something I never thought or planned to accomplish while in a prison setting.

To give myself a rest from these other daily projects. I get enjoyment out of just reading a good science fiction or fantasy novel. There have been more than one occasion that allowing myself to relax reading a book, I had some inspiration for a painting that I was working on or made a connection to something in the current class subject I am taking.

REFLECTIONS:

WHAT DOES YOUR INCARCERATION MEAN TO YOU?

When I first came to prison, I believed that I was here for the four generally recognized principles of incarceration: punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation. I thought that I was being punished for committing my crime against the victim, his family, the town and society in general. My incarceration was to be a deterrence to others thinking of committing the same or similar crimes in the future. I believed that I would be rehabilitated through various therapy and educational opportunities. That my incapacitation was to protect society until my rehabilitation was complete and I was no longer seen as a threat to society.

My incarceration at the beginning meant that I broke the laws of society where I lived, I broke its peacefulness and its trust by placing my needs, wants, and desires before that of others. I believed that because I broke the law that I should be punished for that crime. My incarceration means that I have a debt to repay to both my victim and society, that at some future point in time, some one will decide that debt is paid and that I am rehabilitated enough to rejoin society.

My incarceration doesn't necessarily mean that I am a bad person, only that I did a bad thing.

HOW DOES YOUR INCARCERATION AFFECT YOU?

At first, incarceration didn't have a large affect on me because I was

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 61
APRIL 2020

still quite young at only 17. The reasons it didn't affect me then as much as it does now is because there was still the appellate process for the conviction and sentence. Getting visits every week and phones were easy to get to and use whenever you wanted. We still were allowed to have our personal clothing back then. So in many ways along with the layout and the way some facilities were ran, it was more like being on a college campus more so than in prison. It was even more so where you had a room and your own door key to come and go as you wanted.

In many cases, I was very naive about prison and being a criminal. I didn't have a criminal mentality when I first came to prison. I can really sympathize now with the character of Andy Duphrenes in the moving "Shawshank Redemption." As I really didn't learn how to be a criminal until AFTER I came to prison. I was just a young white kid from a small town, where there was no real crime to speak of. While I had experienced drinking alcohol before coming to prison, I had never used or been around any drug usage. Where I went to high school the only drug that I knew was around was marijuana.

I never experienced using any drugs until after coming to prison. While I have been exposed to the real dangerous drugs like heroin, I never used anything more than marijuana or cocaine. Prison alcohol is the most substance abuse that I have done over the years. But drugs/alcohol was never really a part of my family's lifestyle while growing up and before I came to prison. So I have never really had much of a desire beyond experimenting with substance abuse. Now had I never come to prison, I may not have done any substance abuse, beyond social alcohol consumption.

Because I was so young when I came to prison, I really didn't have a lot of thoughts about other people, in relation to how my behaviors affected them and in what ways. It took a few years for my physical and mental maturity to finish growing, something that was only recognized and accepted by the scientific and legal communities 20 years later. It was only after I began studying behavioral science for my bachelor degree and learned more about psychology that I came to the understanding that we create many more victims when we commit our crimes than the ones spoken about in the courtroom.

The victims, whether living or dead, are the most obvious ones that everyone is familiar with since these are the ones addressed in the courtroom. But we create other victims when we commit our crimes. There are the family and

friends of the victim(s), yes: they are victims too, while not directly involved in what took place, what we did does affect them in a negative way.

Then there is our own family who are also victims. Most of us never consider that but our family are victims just like the family of the actual victim because what we have done negatively affects them as well. They must deal with the shame or our criminal behavior with their friends, coworkers, and society in general.

Then it must be considered that the community where the crime was committed are really victims that are affected by our actions. The fear, anxiety, and other negative feelings they experience caused by our negative actions are the after effects of our crimes. These are the unknown and unseen victims of our crimes that are affected by our actions.

Incarceration gave me the time and solitude to do much soul searching and introspection. It was during this time that I was able to reach these conclusions. Most of us go through life not caring about anyone other than ourselves. We don't understand other people and how what we, ourselves do, affects them because we lack empathy for others. This is even more so with younger generations as time goes on, they are all about me, me, me. They want what they want and they want it now, there is no understanding about delayed gratification. I have seen many of this younger generation who wants something, but can't wait to get it on their own or wait to be able to afford it, so they either go out and just take it from somebody or take something from someone else to use in getting what they desire right now.

My incarceration has also affected me in negative ways, which I have discussed earlier in these writings. As much as I have tried not to become a product of this environment. There have been those times when I had to allow myself to lower my moral beliefs and to fight fire with fire in order to resolve certain situations where there was no other alternative.

While there are many who do things with impunity and without a second thought, due to the fact that they have been this way all of their lives. There are many who allow themselves to fall into these thoughts and behaviors as a simple means of survival in here and always try to excuse this by stating that everyone else is doing it. To this I must reply with the question, that if everybody else was a herd of lemmings running off a cliff are you just going to go along with the herd over the edge of the cliff too?

WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS OR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CARCERAL SYSTEM NOW?

The carceral system in the U.S. is broken, in serious disrepair, and needs to be brought kicking and screaming into the 21st century. Society has evolved in its enlightenment with regard to corrections. Most industrialized nations, both east and west, have evolved past the U.S. and its antiquated and draconian thoughts or corrections.

I am appalled at what I found when researching the area of juvenile brain development with regard to "criminal" behavior and corrections. There are multiple pieces of legislation, resolutions, conventions, and treaties that have been created and passed by the United Nations, but the U.S. refuses to be a signing party to or ratify. Excuse me but isn't the U.S. the leading nation that is always talking about how much needs to be done to preserve a person's civil and human rights?

Michigan is one of the states that when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its ruling in Miller v. Alabama that said with very few exceptions, it is a violation of the Eighth Amendment and unconstitutional to sentence anyone under the age of 18 to a sentence of life without parole. Which meant that anyone who met this criteria needed to be resentenced in accordance with that ruling. Michigan's courts, prosecutors, and its Attorney General refused to comply with the high court's ruling. It was not until the U.S. Supreme Court issued a second ruling in Montgomery v. Louisiana that told Michigan and other states that the Miller ruling was to be a new procedural rule, its retroactive to affect anyone sentenced before the ruling came out and you will comply with this mandate. Even now all these years later, Michigan is still slow rolling dealing with all these guys who were affected by this new perception on juvenile justice treatment.

Michigan still has on the books that a prisoner must complete their GED prior to being paroled. For years this was strictly enforced, but at some point in the process the Parole Board allowed exceptions to this rule, and further down the line that exception has become the rule and ignores the GED question altogether. This now causes chaos and confusion in the classroom, where you have those who aspire to learn, pass their GED in order to get a job to become more self sufficient in here, or go on to take a technical trade, sitting in a classroom with those who do not care about getting their GED EVER.

These guys constantly disrupt the teaching lesson or distract those on

self study during class time, turn in no assignments to be graded and logged on their plotter to show progress, they sleep in class, or do anything to try and get out of class early. But yet then they cry, whine, and complain that the teachers will not put them on the list to take the GED test. Then when they are placed on the test, the score a 120 when a score of 145 is needed to pass the subject. Now they blame the teacher for not holding class sessions, are never here to hold class or are not actually teaching subjects.

If these guys don't want to learn and get their GED for whatever reason, usually because it means they must now get a job, get up in the morning, and start paying off some of their restitution to their victims (or victim's families). Then put them on room restriction (what is referred to as "DD" double D) and make room in the classrooms for those who want to learn. The MDOC needs to go back to making it mandatory that one complete their GED to get a parole.

Another thing that I encountered in dealing with the MDOC and the Parole Board was when I filed for a commutation of my sentence. Now while a commutation application is only four questions and what one should think is a fairly simple thing to complete. The system makes it anything but simple. One of the questions regards where you will live and what you will do if you are given a commutation. So naturally at this step one needs to be concerned about things like Relapse Prevention Plans and a Parole Plan to show the Board that should they decide to consider the application. That you have given thought and preparation for many of the what ifs one is to encounter in living a rehabilitated life on the outside.

Now in addition to this, to give examples of showing my rehabilitation and advancement of developing empathy and remorse. I also thought it most appropriate to write letters of apology to my victim, his family, and also the community for what I had done. But when I submitted my commutation application, it was returned to me with a short terse note stating that the application was being returned to me because these items had been included and were not part of what was being asked for in the application questions. So just how does this make sense, they will only basically grant a commutation and recommend you a favorable recommendation to the governor if you have positive showing of rehabilitation, acceptance of responsibility, the showing of remorse and growth of maturity. But you say that a relapse prevention plan, a parole plan, and letters of remorse are not part of what information is being sought. Make this make sense,

now granted I am merely a product of a public school education. But are they really serious here?!

Michigan, whether by legislation or the governor needs to make a change in how the MDOC and the Parole Board works. In keeping inline with an evolving and maturing society, something needs to be done to look at how those sentenced under the age of 19 to long sentences, and especially to those like me who are sentenced to life with the possibility of parole. More needs to be done with respect to the "meaningful opportunity" for parole as specified in the U.S. Supreme Court case of Graham v. Florida that deals with nonhomicide juveniles being sentenced to life without parole when they were under the age of 18 at the time of their crimes.

In Michigan, because I am sentenced to life with the possibility of parole, I only am dealt with by the Parole Board after I had served 10 calendar years, which has since been changed to 15 calendar years. Before I became eligible to be considered for parole. But then if denied, only to be reviewed again every 5 calendar years. This review is to be a paper only file review, not a face-to-face interview, unless they see something extraordinarily spectacular. Then my file is sent to the full Parole Board and if the majority feel there is nothing to merit further action. They send me a response of "No Interest" at this time and my next file review date. Now because this is legally not a "decision" they don't have to give me any comments or insights into what they would like me to accomplish in the following 5 years or what I need to correct from the previous 5 years.

So I am left to ask, just how as a "juvenile lifer" am I being granted the "meaningful opportunity" for parole as mandated by the U.S. Supreme Court? Because with very few exception, Michigan has the concept that life means life.

The carceral system needs to refocus back on rehabilitation as part of the ongoing philosophy of its correctional system. Michigan has taken the first few steps by taking the ordinal concept and physical plan design of MTU and making it into a "vocational village." Where they are recreating a multitude of various vocational technical trades and several college/university degree programs.

But to be eligible for all or most of these programs you must be within a specified amount of years from your parole eligibility date. There are a few of these college programs that will allow lifers to apply. But when you

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 66
APRIL 2020

do, you are usually denied entry because they say your Assaultive Risk Classification is either high or very high which makes you ineligible to participate.

Now consider that these assaultive screenings are done at the time you come to prison. You are rated based on past behavior, present behavior and future behavior that happens anytime after the original screening. In my case because my first arrest was before my 15th birthday, that puts me in the medium level box. Now my current crime is assaultive, so that placed me in the next level box, high. Then because I received a misconduct for assault and battery while in quarantine reception, I am placed in the next level box, very high. This all happens when I am 17/18 years old and are static factors that I can never change. But now when I am 51 years old and have greatly matured, these risk screenings cannot be changed, ever and are still used all these years later to judge my character for eligibility into many different rehabilitation type programs.

Then you have the MDOC Classification Handbook which states that all prisoners serving life or long indeterminate sentences should be given the lowest priority for all programming. Unless the programming is a prerequisite for job employment or the training would benefit the institution. They are to be placed at the bottom of all waiting lists for educational and technical training programs. They qualify this by saying that technical training and vocational technology will change over a period of 3-5 years after completion, making their knowledge obsolete and therefore a waste of time, space and resources.

The MDOC does little, if anything, to encourage higher education outside of the few college degree programs that it allows to be offered at one of its few "vocational villages." Granted there are very few old fashioned correspondence programs that go through the snail mail. There are even fewer that will allow you to complete a degree program or grant you a degree unless you attend a required amount of classes on campus. There are plenty of online degree programs out there from familiar universities and colleges. But the MDOC won't allow prisoner's to utilize any computers or staff and equipment in pursuit of these programs, with the exception of allowing a school staff member to act as a proctor to supervise a physical exam for an approved correspondence course.

Then even if you do find a complete degree program and finish all the course requirements and are granted a degree. The MDOC won't recognize it as a mitigation element for your annual statistical risk screening and may not

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 67
APRIL 2020

recognize it for you to qualify for advanced pay levels on work assignments such as clerks and tutors.

HOW DID YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD CHANGE AFTER BEING INCARCERATED?

Prior to being incarcerated I had the belief that the criminal justice system always worked and that only the actual guilty were punished by being sent to prison. I believed that any mistakes at the trial would be addressed and either corrected by the next higher court or sent back to the trial court and fixed. I thought the system was fair and just in its sanctions being applied to those who are convicted.

But I have learned that the system will not fight itself. For the longest time, you could not find an appellate attorney who would make an argument to a higher court about an attorney's conduct or lack of action at the lower court. You had to file a supplemental brief on your own to address the issue to an appellate court. Even if you did have an appellate attorney who would raise the issue, they would only make a half hearted attempt at doing so and again you had to file a supplemental brief on your own.

Then you had appellate courts who when they would actually agree that there is an actual error in a case that did occur. It was harmless in that it did not affect the outcome of the proceedings, or they would actually agree that yes an error has occurred here and there is a genuine issue at hand here, but we don't feel the time is right or the topic is not ripe to be addressed at this time.

I have also encountered a few guys who protested their innocence to the crimes for which they were convicted and sentenced. I personally knew one guy who was accused of arson and murder because he was the only survivor of a house fire that killed the rest of his family. An expert witness fire inspector testified that accelerants were used and his tests verified this fact. Only later, 20+ years later, it was proven that this testimony and evidence of accelerants was wrong. He was finally exonerated and received some money from the state for the wrongful conviction and years of incarceration. But he is one of the few that wouldn't let the system completely break them and not give up fighting the system.

Granted no criminal justice system in this world is perfect, to expect so would be an exercise in insanity. But for many who are part of this imperfect system to make the comment that this is the best we have to work with, need to experience the otherside of the system they work for and protect with these comments. After being incarcerated and experiencing our unjust legal system, trust me it is a far cry from how its propogandized on TV with the multitude of police dramas and legal procedural shows that networks have shown us for decades.

I had thought that not much good would come along again, with the drastic changes in the courts, swinging back and forth from liberal to conservative and back again. It was not until the issue of juvenile brain development was brought to the U.S. Supreme Court several times that some positive changes happened for some of us. This was met with great resistance from other parts of the legal system that didn't want to accept that things need to change in an evolving society.

When I began to research this subject for possible use in some regards to my own life sentence, albeit one with a chance of parole, and a supposedly "meaningful opportunity" to be given a chance. In addition, I was also looking at the subject of juvenile brain development in regards to my thesis project for my Master of Science degree in Psychology.

My perspective of things changed even further upon finding that many other countries in the world, do not allow juveniles to be sentenced to life sentences of any kind. I also learned of several conventions, resolutions, and treaties amongs other member nations of the United Nations and the U.S. refuses to either ratify or be a signatory to these, even though we are always expressing concern about civil and human rights. Which gives the rest of the world the message of do as we say, but not as we do the exact opposite.

I had a change in my perspective of the world when some psychologist with faulty data and a skewed assumption created a great panic about the "super predators" threat regarding young juveniles becoming extremely violent and were going to commit a never seen before level of criminal violence. The public and the criminal justice system were sold on this idea and bought it, hook, line, and sinker. There was no studies done to confirm this hypothesis and no peer review of any type using legitimate science to confirm or refute this erroneous theory that took years for some one to realize the big crime wave

of violence was nothing more than a ripple on the ocean of society.

The world when you are a part of it on the outside, sees everyone's individuality but once you are inside the carceral system there is only one view and everyone is seen as the whole larger group. We are seen as criminals, not worth redemption, not rehabilitatable, and a waste of public resources for our welfare and upkeep. It is extremely hard not to allow yourself to begin to believe this after so many years, some give in to this perception and become the stereotype that is the public's perception.

The world in general has no idea of what really goes on in the carceral system, until such time as they themselves, a family member, or a close friend has to go through the criminal justice process. Only then does their perceptions change because their blindness have been removed. Now they see what people around them have been telling them but because they were not or had no reason for personal involvement, paid any attention to the carceral system.

WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES?

People need to come to the realization that the carceral system in the U.S. is old, outdated, misguided, and in many ways downright draconian. With the progress and evolution of a modern society, an enlightened approach to its correctional system must follow suit.

The old theme of more guards, more bars, and more prisons no longer is sustainable in modern society. Looking people up, and throwing away the key, or warehousing them, is not the solution. Some states, like Michigan, finally started to figure that out after the Blanchard and Engler administrations. We need to stop spending money building more prisons and start spending it on mental health treatment, substance abuse programs, educational programs, and skilled trade instruction for those who are already incarcerated, to break the revolving door sequence of recidivism. We need to spend more money at the juvenile facility level and get into public schools, with more diversion and educational programs about the reality of being in prison.

Many youth, especially those of the inner cities and outlying areas, see coming to prison as a right of passage, something to use as a status symbol. They don't see it for the harsh reality that it is because their friends or family have "done a bit."

When all the states, in the 1950s and 1960s, began to close mental hospitals because of the shift to treatment with medication for many disorders and the

shift in philosophy from inpatient to outpatient care. Many of those people in some shape or form ended up in the prison system. Where for many reasons, budgetary, staffing, or a general lack of compassionate care, have been allowed to languish in our nation's prison systems.

People need to come to the understanding that you can't keep everyone locked up forever. At some point in time, you have to let some of them go. Granted there are some who should never be allowed to rejoin society, but those are not the majority of people who are in prison.

While incarceration is a part of any society as people need to be punished for transgressions against that society's mores and rules that can be dealt with in no other way. But that punishment must be just, fair, and equitable. Granted that for many crimes, especially those of extreme violence and crimes against another person, a one size fits all punishment scheme is not appropriate. The federal system, as well as most, if not all of the state systems, now have some sort of guidelines for imposing punishment. While these are not perfect, and some allowances have to be accepted to individualize sentences to a particular offender. There are some aspects where there are still abuses that occur where possibly too much personal judgment or bias can be brought into the mix by the judge presiding over the case.

In general, people of the U.S. need to come to the understanding that in the long run, the more money that is spent on stopping recidivism and preventing the young from coming to prison in the first place. Means spending that much less on corrections down the road.

WHAT DO YOU WANT SCHOLARS TO KNOW?

Scholars need to know that there is a treasure trove of data and information inside the prison systems of the U.S. Especially, from those of us who are older and have experienced many of the harsh and intolerable conditions over the years of our incarceration.

The solutions to many, if not most all, problems in the carceral systems of the U.S. reside in those who have first hand knowledge of what is wrong. We have a much better idea of how to solve those problems, more effectively and more efficiently, than those from the outside of the system. You don't have to have a Ph.D or more letters after your last name, than is in your last name, to have the solution to many of the problems in U.S. corrections. Sometimes all the booklearning in the world is trumped by just plain old commonsense and

a lifetime of experience by those who are not blinded by the multitude of theories and are able to see that single tree in the forrest of trees.

Scholars need to conduct more projects, like this one, to elicit that wealth of knowledge and experiences. The history of our species is replete with a multitude of examples where someone did not take the time to learn from the historical past and was doomed to repeat the earlier failure. A classic example of this illustration is when Napoleon decided to attack Moscow in his war with Russia. He chose to do so and the wrong time of the year and was caught in the middle of the frigid Russian winter. This resulted in many of his troops dieing from lack of food, disease, and most of all exposure. Then in World War II, Hitler decides to begin a two front war, against the advice of his military commanders. He makea a deep run into Russia in an attempt to capture Moscow and is defeated by the harsh conditions of the Russian winter.

Scholars need to examine how the carceral systems of other industrialized nations such as the Netherlands, Scandanavia, Germany, and other nations who have made a more modernized approach to corrections. They need to see how they have rethought their approach to the treatment of prisoners, their educational opportunities, opportunities for parole release, aftercare programs, and corporate and community support. Other countries have figured out how to make their carceral systems more human and more effective. Its time that the U.S. took some lessons from these more modern approaches to corrections.

WHAT DO YOU WANT POLICY MAKERS TO KNOW?

Current policy makers in Michigan need to review the way in which they are treating and/or allowing to be treated, juveniles in the corrections system. The State and the MDOC just settled a law suit, Does v. MDOC, recently and agreed to payout millions of dollars to victims of sexual assault and harrassment at the hands of staff (who have a duty to protect) and other older prisoners. This was the result of a misguided mindset that took place many years ago to house juveniles as young as fourteen in adult prison settings.

It would go a long way to solving many issues that both MDOC staff and prisoners have encountered for many years, if the MDOC would readopt the philosophy of keeping certain prisons age specific. They need to return to housing only those who are 21 or younger in separate facilities as was done in the past.

While the philosophy, and statistical analysis bears out to some degree, of placing younger offenders and older offenders together in a mixed population

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 72
APRIL 2020

does promote some degree of stability and the older offenders can be seen as role models for the younger offenders. When you place a 17 or 18 year old in a room with a 50 or 60 year old. You are creating a recipe for friction and disaster.

I personally experienced this theory being attempted to be put into practice in the early 2000s at Carson City (DRF). They had such a young population in the level 2 pole barn units, that things were literally out of control with theft, assaults, and violence. The warden had the idea to move volunteers, specifically, those with life sentences who had a lot of years served, to the pole barns so they would be a stabilizing influence. All of the unit counselors called the lifers in their units to their offices asking for volunteers. To a man, no lifers volunteered to participate in this "experiment."

Just as in the policy when I first arrived at Gus Harrison at Adrian (ARF). You had no say in who would be your roommate. So if there was any type of conflict, race, age, crime, anything. If you attempted to address it to the unit staff, you were told to deal with it. Which lead to many fights, thefts, assaults, and rapes. It wasn't until the issue was pressed with a new warden that it was stated that if a period of time went by with a drop in critical incidents and remained low, that "friendly" moves would be considered. Fortunately, the critical incidents dropped and the new policy was put in place. This new policy solved a lot of underlying issues at that facility that had been going on for years.

Michigan needs to reevaluate how it deals with juvenile offenders, those who were under the age of 18, past, present, and future when sent to adult prisons. The legislature, governor, MDOC, and especially the Parole Board needs to change its mindset in how these offenders are dealt with when it comes to the parole process.

Whether a separate review panel of three or more members needs to be created as a stand alone entity, or as a clearing house to make a recommendation to the regular parole board. A rotating panel of three of the current parole board members could serve a similar function. In either case, those who are sent to prison under the age of 18 need to be reviewed under a separate set of criteria when it comes to parole review. The elements of youth as outlined in the U.S. Supreme Court cases needs to be taken into account, along with the abundance of scientific research studies that supported those court decisions.

Juveniles are more amenable to the aspects of rehabilitation than adults

who come to prison for similar crimes and similar sentences. They should not be held to the same standards as adults, they are not miniature adults. This should and does not mean they should get a free pass or be paroled at their first eligibility date. It means that their age, mental immaturity, and lack of risk analysis, should be given some weight in the mitigation of their crimes and sentences.

The Michigan Parole Board needs to change its draconian philosophy when it comes to reviewing prisoners for parole. The current parole process fails to take into account the prisoner's juvenile status at the time of the offense, and effectively forces these juvenile offenders to serve a disproportionate amount of time when compared to adult offenders. This is especially evident in cases like mine, where I was a 17 year old juvenile sentenced to life with the possibility of parole. When the parole board denies parole based on the severity of my offense, they are essentially converting that sentence to life without parole. This action displaces the role of the sentencing judge and the state legislature. Which places such action at odds with the Supreme Court's requirements that sentences for juveniles must provide a meaningful opportunity for release based on demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation. In doing so, the parole board when using the severity of the crime to deny release renders the opportunity for parole meaningless and trumps any evidence of rehabilitation. The Michigan Parole Board violates the Eighth Amendment by denying parole to juvenile offenders on this basis. The Michigan Parole Board gets ready to conduct a review or interview, it performs a risk assessment using a commercially produced software program called COMPAS by a firm called NorthPoint. This is a nationally used risk assessment tool based on a sample size of only 30,000 offenders between 2005 and 2005, designed to help criminal justice practitioners to determine placement, supervision, and case-management of offenders in community and secure settings.

The questions are either answered by the offenders or extracted from their files. An interviewer administers the questionnaire and is allowed to have some leeway in asking the questions in order to build a rapport. Some questions are answered with a yes or no, while others are scored on a numerical scale.

These risk scores are intended to predict the general likelihood that those with a similar history of offending are either less or more likely to commit another crime if released. However, COMPAS does not predict the specific likelihood that the individual will reoffend. Instead, it provides a prediction based on a comparison of information about the individual to a similar data group.

The tool used by COMPAS is based on a regression formula, meaning that the weights that COMPAS attributes to an offender's various characteristics is based on group variables. This conflicts with the jurisprudence that group based stereotypes, even if some statistical evidence can be posited to support them, violates the equal protection doctrine.

Independent studies have generated conflicting results due to the small sample size and incomplete data used by COMPAS. Further the tool focuses on criminogenic needs (static factors) which are relatively unchangeable while serving time--criminal involvement, relationship/lifestyle, personality/attitudes, family and social exclusion. By concentrating release determinations on these static factors and immutable characteristics prevents offenders from reentering society.

Because the algorithms used by COMPAS to determine the scoring results are proprietary, there is no way to know how much race plays a factor in scoring. Also how does the fact that an offender was a juvenile at the time of the crime being committed be calculated on a data set of adult offenders. Because youth may have been included as a factor that increases the offender's risk and therefore decreases the likelihood of parole.

There are two primary problems with using risk assessments for juvenile offenders: (1) they have been tested and validated for this specific population and (2) by relying on the static, unchangeable factors, their rating scales fundamentally conflict with the Supreme Court's acknowledgement that juveniles are uniquely capable of change as they mature.

Accordingly, this conflicts with the Supreme Court's reasoning that age should be construed as a mitigating rather than an aggravating factor. Because the way COMPAS works being a juvenile at the time of commitment to prison increases the offender's score under many of the risk assessments. By relying on these static, unchanging factors, contradicts the core assumptions expressed by the Court, that young people are uniquely likely to change as they mature. Thus by continuing to use risk assessments designed for adult offenders

is in conflict with the spirit of the Court's decisions in Graham and Miller.

The clinical assessments used by the Parole Board are also problematic because they do not lend themselves easily to any review or validation process. Because each clinician is relying on their own subjective method of clinical analysis, and its difficult to determine their accuracy--there are not likely to be any articles on Dr. XXXXXXXX's particular subjective method. The individual clinician is also unlikely, to know how accurate they are, especially in criminal predictions of future dangerousness. Unless they keep track of an offender's subsequent criminal history or lack thereof, they will recieve no feedback on their prediction.

WHAT DO YOU WANT MEMBERS OF YOUR COMMUNITY TO KNOW?

What my community needs to know is that when I committed my crime the person who I committed it against was not the only victim. There many other victim that were not so obvious and tend to be overlooked. Members of the victim's family are victims too, they are indirectly and directly violated by the crimes that have been committed against a member of their family.

The members of my family are also indirect victims in my crime. They were hurt by the public's opinion and ridicule for my crime. They had to be out in the community as an almost constant reminder of what happened.

By far the biggest indirect victims of my crime, are those of the community. My crime affected the community in an untold number of ways. This could have been anything from being afraid to stay alone at night, afraid to wait alone for a bus. They may have been afraid to go out in public and become hypervigilant of people "staring" at them or walking behind them.

To all of these people, I owe them a deep, heartfelt, and sincere apology for the direct and indirect fear, anxiety, and alarm that I caused by committing my crime. While they were not the actual victim of my crime, it still touched them all in unknown ways that may have lasted for an extended period of time. There is no way for me to really know just how much emotional damage I created when I committed my crim. I can only imagine the psychological trauma that I caused them all.

For all of that I am deeply and truly sorry for what they experienced because of me and my unthinking actions. There is not a day that goes by that I don't regret the actions of my crime and how if affected all those both directly and indirectly involved. Mere words cannot express enough of how sorry I feel

for what everyone went through, and there is no way that I can express that enough to them all.

WHAT DO YOU WANT ACTIVISTS TO KNOW?

What activists need to know is that just because there has been overwhelming success in reforming the criminal justice and carceral systems in the U.S. by making the sentencing of any one under the age of 18 to the death penalty or life without the possibility of parole a constitutional violation of the Eighth Amendment. The fight for juvenile justice reform in the U.S. is far from over. Yes, we have made progress to make a difference in those juveniles under 18 at the time of their crimes from being and/or remaining sentenced to death or life without the possibility of parole. There are still those of us juveniles who were sentenced to life with the possibility of parole who need to be looked at next. In some states, like Michigan, those life with parole sentences are defacto life without parole sentences.

Just because on paper the sentence says that we are eligible for parole does not mean that's how policies and programming are applied to us. Meaning this opportunity on paper does, in fact, provide a "meaningful opportunity" as defined by the Supreme Court.

People like Barbra Levine of CAPPs--Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending and Marsha Levick of the Juvenile Law Center, have done so much in representing juvenile lifers in the nation's courts and being a driving force behind the multitude of research studies.

Groups like the ACLU, the Phillips Black Project, The Pew Center on the States, Citizens Research Council of Michigan, the Marshall Project, and the Sentencing Project have all done such hard long work to get us where we are today. But again, I state the war is far from being over. As long as there are juvenile offenders sentenced to life sentences, whether they be life without parole, life with parole, or defacto life sentences for those of us incarcerated when we were less than 18 years old. We need to carry on the important work while there is the support and momentum.

The scientific research of such scholarly research scientists as: Beatriz Luna, Elizabeth Scott, Laurence Steinberg, Elizabeth Cauffman, Thomas Grisso, Jay Aronson, William Berry, III, Barry Feld, and Jeffrey Arnett, to name a few. Is still on going and we are learning new things everyday about juvenile brain development and its affect on their behavior. This new information needs to

be looked at and used to continue the work to get life sentences of any type banned for anyone under the age of 18 at the time of their crime.

Every year from about 2015, there has been a provision section in the Michigan State Appropriations Budget. In Section 615, of all subsequent appropriation bills it states for the MDOC:

Sec. 615 (1). The department shall submit a report detailing the number of prisoners who have received life imprisonment sentences with the possibility of parole and who are currently eligible for parole to the senate and house appropriations subcommittees on corrections, the senate and house fiscal agencies, the legislative corrections ombudsman, and the state budget director by April 30.

(2). The report shall include the following information on parolable lifers who have served more than 25 years: prisoner name, MDOC ID number, prefix, offense for which life term is being served, county of conviction, age at time of offense was committed, current age, race, gender, true security classification, dates of parole board file reviews, dates of parole board interviews, parole guidelines scores, and reason for decision not to release.

But yet in the more than 5 years this report has been being generated and filed each year, nothing happens, it gets filed and never read. These activist groups need to get these reports and get the legislature to start asking questions as to why juveniles are being made to serve up to 50 years before they receive any type of serious consideration for possible parole.

Based on a review of statistics from the MDOC Statistical Manuals from 1998-2015, shows that there have only been 293 people sentenced to the MDOC for my same crime. Out of that 293, only 13 are serving a life sentence, which clearly shows a grave disparity in sentencing. There are also only 86 juvenile lifers who were under 18 at the time of their crimes. Only 9 of these are serving life sentences from the county in which I was sentenced.

There are limitations to the prediction of behavior in juveniles and examining the limitations of adult behavior is a place to start. If judges, juries, and psychologists cannot reliably predict the future behavior reliably or the likelihood of rehabilitation in fully developed adults, then they are less likely to be able to predict the future behavior of juveniles. Ample research has demonstrated that predicting adult behavior, especially decades into the future, is incredibly difficult at best.

Both courts and commentators alike acknowledge that predictions of future

dangerousness are unreliable and inaccurate. Even the Supreme Court itself acknowledged that psychiatric predictions of future dangerousness were wrong one out of every three times. Long-term studies of juveniles who commit crime demonstrate this impossibility. Despite rich longitudinal data, researchers struggle to predict which children will persist with criminal behavior in the future.

The differences between adult and juvenile behavior has been documented by scientists along several dimensions. Scientists have found that adolescents as a group, even at later stages of adolescence, are more likely than adults to engage in risky, impulsive, and sensation-seeking behavior. This is, in part, due to that they over value short-term benefits and rewards, and are less capable of controlling their impulses making them more susceptible to acting in a reflexive rather than a planned voluntary manner. Adolescents are also more emotionally volatile and susceptible to stress and peer influences. In short, the average adolescent cannot be expected to act with the same control or foresight as a mature adult.

Behavioral scientists have observed these differences for sometime, but only recently have studies provided an understanding of the neurobiological underpinnings for why adolescents act the way they do. Brain imaging studies reveal that adolescents generally exhibit greater neural reactivity in areas of the brain that promotes risky and reward-based behavior. These studies also demonstrate that the brain continues to mature, both structurally and functionally, throughout adolescence in regions of the brain responsible for controlling thoughts, actions, and emotions. Together, these studies indicate that the adolescent period poses vulnerabilities to risk-taking behaviors but, importantly, that this is only a temporary stage.

The imposition of life sentences, defacto, or the functional equivalent to a life without parole sentence on juveniles violates the Cruel and unusual Punishment Clause of the Eighth Amendment. As the Supreme Court has held, juvenile offenders are categorically different from adult offenders in constitutionally relevant ways. According to settled research, juveniles are immature in their judgment and decision-making capacities, they are especially susceptible to negative peer pressures, and they are uniquely capable of transformation and rehabilitation.

Culpibility is a cornerstone of our criminal justice system and it is

central to ensuring that sentences are rational and proportional under the Eighth Amendment. Traditionally, the Supreme Court has looked primarily at the nature of the offense to assess proportionality. In the case of juveniles, the Court modified its traditional Eighth Amendment analysis to focus specifically on the unique attributes and characteristics of the juvenile offender in reviewing constitutionality of sentences. This reduced culpability of juveniles renders any type of life sentence inherently disproportionate under the Eighth Amendment and thus categorically impermissible.

While science cannot gauge moral culpability, scientists have shed light on some measurable attributes that the law has long treated as highly relevant to culpability and the appropriateness of punishment. A juvenile's profound difference from adult's undermine the possible penological justifications for punishing a juvenile offender with a sentence that guarantees he will die in prison without any meaningful opportunity to obtain release. The signature qualities of adolescence reduce juveniles' culpability and increase their capacity for change. Condemning an immature, vulnerable, and not-yet-fully-formed adolescent to live every remaining day of their life in prison--whatever the crime-- is thus a constitutionally disproportionate punishment.

Another thing that most people outside the MDOC and many of us inside the system is the monopoly that has developed between the MDOC and certain specific companies. Take for instance the new privatization of all the MDOC prisoner stores into a contract with Keefe/Access. It used to be each facility maintained its own prisoner store and could contract with whatever vendors it wanted to, including in state and local vendors. The overall profit margin could not exceed 8% profit annually, which meant that come September of each year, if the profit earned exceeded the 8% limit, the store had to sell items at reduced cost to balance the excess profit with losses to maintain the 8%.

But now the MDOC has privatized the contract and that 8% has disappeared from MDOC policy. Now that we have only one single vendor for our store goods, they can charge whatever price they want. For example, the average rate of increase that is used by the MDOC and Keefe/Access is to charge 1.5 times the wholesale cost of each item and use that as the retail price prisoners and their families pay. The average bag of freeze dried coffee costs Keefe/Access \$2.42 per 3 ounce bag, but they sell it to prisoners at a cost of \$3.63, that's 1.5 times the wholesale cost. So as a percentage, that's 150% mark upon each item.

LEO MICHAEL AMBLER #A188312
U OF M CARCERAL STATE PROJECT
PAGE 80
APRIL 2020

Which leads us to a related issue, that the MDOC has not increased the pay rates for prisoners since 1990, when they gave prisoners a .BIG 5% pay increase. This was after the MDOC took away pay for overtime (time and a half) and holiday (double time) pay, and worker compensation when we used to still receive our base pay while on medical lay in due to being injured on the job.

While the rest of the world gets periodic cost of living increases to their pay to compensate for the rise of inflation and increased cost to produce consumer goods. We here in the MDOC only have the buyingpower of the 1990 dollar valuation. So because our buying power is so low and to top that off with many prisoners having to pay some sort of restitution. That only allows them to receive a maximum of \$50 per month from any source. Then anything in excess of the \$50 limit is taken at a rate of 50%. It is no small wonder why there is so much violence and theft in the MDOC, than there was in the past.

This testimonial was written during the month of April 2020 at the MDOC Chippewa Correctional Facility.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leo Michael Ambler

Date: 4/30/20

Leo Michael Ambler #A188312
Chippewa Correctional Facility
4269 West M-80
Kincheloe, MI 49784-0001