

* My name is Wilson Rivera, MDOC #239567. Today is May 26th, 2020.

BACKGROUND:

* I was born in Detroit on July 17th, 1974, the second of 8 siblings. At that time, I was raised by my mother and father. However, not long after my birth my mother and father separated and several years later I was sent to live with my paternal grandparents in Puerto Rico. I returned to Detroit in 1984. I was 10 years old.

* My early childhood memories are like snippets of video tapes, spotted. They are memories of a violent alcoholic father who was a womanizer and physically abusive. My mother had her ways as well. She was on drugs at an early age and attempted suicide on three different occasions; the third time with a handgun. I was a pretty active child, hyperactive if you asked my mother. I did get into serious problems as a child. For example, at about 4-5 years old I set my mother's bedroom on fire while playing with a lighter. On another occasion, and a bit more serious, my older brother and I walked to the edge of the expressway and pushed a barrel down causing a major accident.

* Prior to my incarceration I lived in southwest Detroit. This was during the early 1990s where southwest Detroit was considered the gang-Mecca of Michigan. In summary it was a dog-eat-dog environment. Either you fend off rival gang members or you were forced to deal with the constant harassment by the DPD. So my perception of the criminal legal system was that you didn't trust them.

* From what I am able to remember, my first contact with the criminal legal system came at about 13-14 years old. I was in the Youth Home for armed robbery, assault, and extortion. Because the Youth Home was filled with rival gang members I was constantly fighting, which caused me to getting placed on isolation numerous times. My last serious experience with the youth authorities came in 1991 when I was arrested for shooting a rival gang member. I was released on a personal bond to the care of my mother pending trial. While waiting for the outcome of those charges I was arrested again for shooting at a member of the Detroit Police. The last two charges lead me to being sentenced to the Maxey Boys Training School. I was released in 1993.

INCARCERATION:

* During my years of incarceration, I have been housed at the Level 4, Riverside Corr. Facility (1994-1996); Level 4, Chippewa Corr. Facility (URF) (1996-1997); Level 5, Marquette Branch Maximum Security ((1997-1998); Level 5, Standish Maximum, (2001-2003); Level 4, St. Louis Corr. Facility (2003-2006); Level 2, Muskegon Corr. Facility (2006-2009); Level 2, Michigan Reformatory (2009-2010); Level 4, Michigan Reformatory (2010); Level 2, Michigan Reformatory (2010-2016); Level 2, Thumb Corr. Facility (2016-2018); and Level 2, Richard Handlon Corr. Facility (MTU) (2018-present).

* Incarceration for me has been extremely difficult. I was arrested in 1993 and convicted in 1994. I was two months into my 19th birthday when I was arrested. Prior to my arrest I had spent almost 2 years at the Whitmore Lake, Michigan Maxey Boys Training School (1991-1993). At the time of my arrival at prison, conditions were pretty harsh. Less than a year or so into my incarceration I witnessed a fellow prisoner get stabbed and eventually bleed to death. The incident left me scarred. I vowed to protect myself against all odds. I adopted a "strike first" mentality if ever a problem arose. That mentality lead me into countless fights and assaults, and eventually to spending time in segregation and level 5 maximum facilities.

* Of all the facilities I've been to, by far the worse environment was at the Michigan Reformatory in Ionia, MI. I spent 7 1/2 years at the Reformatory where I saw the worst we as prisoners had to offer each other and officers whose "let them kill each other" attitudes only helped fuel an already explosive environment. This not only created, but helped maintain an extremely hostile environment.

* My "prison community" varies. I am a member of the Moorish Science Temple of America, an Islamic organization that was founded in 1913 in Newark, New Jersey. The MSTA has functioned in the MDOC since the 1970s and I joined in 1994. We seek to foster a brotherhood where we support and care for each other as was stipulated by the founder and Prophet, Noble Drew Ali. However, like every other religious organization, the MSTA has had its few bad apples who have perpetrated evils against the more vulnerable. Unfortunately, I have been a willing participant to such actions. My survival skills centered around striking first,

as mentioned above. Since witnessing the stabbing in 1995, while the facility was on lock down, I reflected hard on what I had witnessed and vowed to never be a victim.

* Concerning happiness, the truth be told, it seems difficult to find happiness in prison. However, I do receive a degree of contentment reading and doing law work, in particular for those who have been wronged by the system but have no idea how to fight in court. I also enjoy a well-kept library.

REFLECTIONS:

* I have spent nearly 27 years in prison. During these years I have faced countless ups and downs. I have experienced many deaths from family members and friends alike. Furthermore, I have experienced depression, stress, and countless panic attacks while in segregation and maximum security facilities, while receiving no medical or psychiatric assistance. I was forced to read up and, by trial and error, come up with a plan that would help me cope with my prison environment. After nearly 17 years of fights and assaults, while spending time in segregation for an assault that nearly cost the life of a fellow prisoner, I decided that enough was enough. Upon my release from segregation I took a different trajectory in life and have continued on that path since. Although as a "Lifer" the MDOC does not offer us programs, I have taken numerous correspondence courses and participated in the MDOC's legal writers program, which afforded me the opportunity to help fellow prisoners with their civil and criminal cases.

* I have seen the ebb and flow of the prison system. Until recently, the philosophy seemed to be "lock them up and throw away the key." This is what "incarceration has meant to me -- the warehousing of prisoners simply to satisfy the public's "tough on crime" plead. And for inmates like myself, a Lifer, it was worse when it came to receiving programs and counseling. Because Lifers have been condemned to die in prison the MDOC refuses to give us the opportunities to help us develop empathy through proper counseling. The MDOC fails to realize that it is inmates like me that have the influence on the younger generations of prisoners that are filling up these cells.

* Since 2010, I have put forth every effort to take control of my incarceration. Although the MDOC has refused to grant me college classes I have remained diligent in my studies. Because of this, I have been accepted to participate in

the Calvin Prison Initiative. I have been attending Calvin University for 1 1/2 years now and although the highest grade I completed was the 7th, I maintain a 3.83 GPA.

* I would like people throughout the United States to understand that while there are many of us who have offended the rules of society, there are just as many who are returning back to the same community. Invest in US. Invest in lifers so that we can do our part in uplifting fallen humanity. We are the ones that can sway the direction of the youth and if WE are not corrected, we will continue to push the same corrupt behavior. Fyodor Dostoyevsky is quoted as saying, "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged entering its prisons." Enter your prisons and see whether or not you've created a Frankenstein or a servant to humanity.