

To: The Michigan Humanities Collaboratory
 Attn: Carceral State Project
 100 North Hatcher Gallery
 Hatcher Graduate Library
 913 S. University
 Ann Arbor, MI 48109

From: Taz Morris Darnall #444738
 St. Louis Correctional Facility
 8585 N. Croswell Road
 St. Louis, MI 48880

TESTIMONY

Background:

I was born August 1st, of 1974, in Sid Peterson Memorial Hospital, in Kerrville, Texas. I was raised by my mother, and her abusive boyfriend, until I was 3 years old. Police reports claim that officers answered a call of someone screaming. When the officers responded to the call, and arrived at the residence, they attempted to seek out the caller. After a brief interview the officers, with the help of the witness, knocked on the door of the residency where the witness claimed the screaming had been issuing from. No adults answered the knock, but officers reported they heard the screaming start again. They knocked several more times identifying themselves as law-enforcement, but still received no response, but renewed frantic screaming. The officers, fearing for public safety, broke in the door, to find a 3 year-old male child tied with ropes, and extension chords, to an overturned

high-chair in the dining room/kitchen of the residence. They reported the child having numerous bruises, contusions, abrasions, welts, cuts, and burns over the child's body. The officers immediately contacted Social Services, and a Social Worker came to remove the child from the residence. The child was reportedly hospitalized for severe dehydration, and malnourishment, and was examined for signs of abuse. After the examination, it was decided that the child had suffered severe physical, and emotional, trauma. The reports are not clear whether the child suffered sexual abuse. The child was given over to foster care, and the parents were ordered to appear in court for hearings regarding parental rights, and future custody. The mother, Pamela Joan Morris, voluntarily gave up her parental rights, and the State of Texas took physical custody of the child.

As far as I can tell, this was, literally, my first brush with the law. From what I've been able to piece together throughout the years, my mother, Pam, had gotten pregnant when she was 14. She had me at 15, and while she was pregnant, her boyfriend of the time, left her. She fell into a depression, and started drinking, and abusing drugs. She met Eugene Chamberlain somewhere along the way, but I think it was after I was born, because hospital records report she was despondent, and refused to breast-feed me, or bottle-feed me. She was suffering from severe depression at the time, and I was born premature. To this day, I suffer from respiratory problems, as a result. Hospital records also record no other visitors, besides her parents, during her stay. The records also report that she tried to leave the hospital without me. They practically had to force me into her arms before she left the hospital.

Pam met Eugene sometime, shortly after bringing me home from the hospital. Her mother was my primary care-giver, but couldn't properly care for me, and left it mostly up to my mother, and her new boyfriend. They took turns finding ways to beat, and abuse me. The witness said that I had been screaming for about 5 or 6 hours before they called the police. I think that my mother and Eugene tied me up, hoping I would just fall asleep, while they went out and partied. They probably got a hotel room, and were drinking, and doing whatever drugs they were doing at the time, and never thought for one second that police would be kicking down their door to rescue me. During the course of the investigation a neighbor of my grandmother's said that Pam and Eugene would cut off branches from a tree in the yard and make switches, and take turns whipping me up and down the driveway, all the while, laughing hysterically, at my crying. The neighbor said they witnessed that particular horror several times while they lived next door.

So I was placed in foster-care from the time I was 3, until I turned 6. The Texas foster-care system was notoriously bad at that time, and this was the late 70's, at the height of its depravity. Needless to say, my life didn't get better being in foster-care. In some ways (most actually), it was decidedly worse. My first memories of actual sexual, and physical, abuse were during this time. I guess you could say, the "silver-lining" of my mother and Eugene's abuse, was that I have absolutely no memory of any of it. But I remember those foster-homes vividly. The good ones I can count on one hand, and I was in hundreds. My average stay in one was about 2 weeks. The shortest was one day.

And this went on for three years. At which time I was placed in an Orphanage. At that time, a majority of the orphanages in the U.S. were run, and supervised, by Catholic Nuns. Such was the case of St. Theresa's in Fort Worth, Texas, up until the early 80's when the state took over. I lived there for another 3 years. I had my first crush on a girl there. Lisa Roberts. She was mesmerizing. I was well, and truly, smitten.

When I turned 9, I was being considered for adoption by a pedophile named James Hellerick. He had an adoptive older son named Doug, who was 16 at the time, and psychotic already. He tried to kill me several times while I was there. I'm not even kidding a little bit. There was an axe, ski-mask, and rope involved, and just use your imagination. It probably pales in comparison to the actual event. But that was it even the worst of it. The worst was James. He molested me, and tried to get Doug to join him. Doug had gotten used to his abuse, and was angry at me, because of his perceived usurpation of his "father". Doug didn't turn James on anymore, because he'd grown "too old". Hence why Doug hated, and tried on several occasions, to kill me. James was the Night Manager of a Lazy-Boy store in Beaumont, Texas, about 45 minutes east of Houston. After Doug's ~~last~~ attempt to kill me, I told James what he'd been doing. James decided to take me to the store with him after that, but I was now more scared, because it was just going to be him, and I, all night. Alone. I had been playing in the recliners (I still can't see a Lazy-Boy recliner without getting flashbacks), hopping from chair, to chair, and generally trying to

stay as far away from James as possible. He called me over to his desk, and, at first, I pretended not to hear him. But I couldn't ignore him forever, so I wandered over with dread weighing down each of my footsteps. When I got to the desk, he handed me his keys, which had the keys to the door of the store, and his car keys on it. He told me to go out to his car and get him a box of his business cards from behind the driver's seat. I went out to the car, and used the key he showed me to unlock the driver's door, but when I was pulling the key out of the lock, I was in so much of a hurry, I bent the key. I got scared, so I thought, maybe if I put the key in the ignition, it would straighten back out, and James wouldn't even know. Well, you ^{can} probably figure out what happened. The key broke off in the ignition. The door key. So, now being super-scared, I did some fast thinking. I grabbed the box of ~~business~~ business cards, and closed, and locked, the car door. Yeah. The door key was now locked inside the car, and broken off in the ignition. I am such a genius. So my fast thinking, of genius proportions, led me to the conclusion that there was only one thing I could do. Lie my little ass off. I started back to the store with the box of business cards in one hand, tucked under my left arm, and was throwing the keys up in the air as high as I could, and letting them hit the ground, while pretending to "accidentally" step on them, giving me the excuse, the key must have broken when I "accidentally" stepped on them, so sorry, bad break. How old are those keys anyway? They must be positively ancient to have broken so easily from little ol' me just stepping on them. I am shocked.

Shocked, I say! It all seemed so reasonable at the time. I had no idea what monster turd was about to hit the proverbial fan. I walked back in, confident as you please, handed him the business cards, and the keys, and turned around like nothing in the world was wrong. I got about halfway down the aisle, when he raised his voice at me. I gave him the-who, innocent little ol' me-stare. He wasn't buying it. I tried sticking to my keys in the air story, but he was beyond pissed at this point. So I did what any kid in my situation might do when faced with an angry adult. I turned and ran. I felt something hit me in the back of the head, and at the time, I had the impossible thought that he'd reached out from behind his desk, and smacked me in the head from halfway across the store. I was of a mind of the scene in which Freddy Krueger's arms grow to graze his "talons" on either side of the alley. I ran so fast, I think the world stopped for a moment. I ran across the parking lot to this cement abutment that separated the off-ramp, or on ramp, for a freeway. I crawled over it, onto the road, and I must have had a concussion, because I ran smack into the side of a dark grey Camaro, with tinted windows, and no lights on, while trying to cross the road. I hadn't even seen it until I ran into the side of it. Must've scared the crap out of whoever was driving. But I couldn't stop, because I knew, I knew, James was coming after me. Like some horror movie, where you know the bad guys coming, even though you can't see him. I hopped over the other side and ran all the way to where the road raised up into a bridge, and I went underneath and hid up between two of the support beams.

Sure enough, James came by minutes later. But he thought I'd kept going around, so he followed in the direction he thought I'd gone. I dropped down, and bolted the opposite way, back the way I'd just come. The wall, when it was low enough for me to crawl over, I did. I ran up the bridge hoping I could get far enough up over the hump that he wouldn't see me, when lights came up the ramp behind me. I thought he'd somehow gotten his car, and was chasing me, going to run me over. Another car came from the other direction, and I saw it was a cop-car. So I stopped. I hadn't known it at the time, but blood was pouring down the back of my shirt. I was covered in it. From behind, all the cop could see, was this little kid running, hell-bent for leather, covered in blood, all down his back. He must've thought he was the one in a horror flick. I found out later that what hit me in the back of the head was one of those big silver industrial-sized staple guns they use to staple the thick plastic wrap they use to wrap the furniture in to ship it. It weighed about 3 and half pounds. I did have a concussion. I spent the night in the hospital. James was arrested, and Doug was taken away from him. I pray he never got his grubby mitts on another kid, but I don't hold out much hope. I'm of the firm opinion that all pedophiles should be summarily executed for a second offense. The first offense, they should be "reprogrammed" by C.I.A. "specialists" to hunt terrorists, and roadside bombs. A short, but valuable existence, that could save a lot of service men and women from being maimed or killed.

They're lucky I'm not the President. I'd make it law.

Shortly after that, I was on a program called Wednesday's Child that used to air on P.B.S. I was chosen by a wonderful family, a husband and wife who couldn't have children of their own. And for their first foray into adopting, they get stuck with a demon-child. I was already such a messed up kid, so full of piss, and anger, and hate, that I used violence to keep people away from me. I had no concept of how to be "normal." These wonderful people, who will remain nameless, opened their home, and their hearts, to this violent, demonic spawn. I still feel so bad for them. They had to give me back after only a year of being adopted, because I was just too broken. They had no idea how to help me, and they shouldn't have had to. It was terribly disillusioning for them. They moved on, and made a happy family, adopting a little girl, and a baby. I wish them nothing but happiness, and I envy that little baby boy. To know such love, and comfort before he even understands what they are, he is so incredibly lucky. I hope he realizes just how much one day. Just that one year of being with them, are some of the happiest memories I have of my entire childhood. The things they did for me, the places they took me. I'll never forget it as long as I live. I will cherish these memories, always. But I was just too broken for them. They had no choice but to give me back to the State. I was put in a children's institution. It was not a nice place. I was only 9 years old and they put me on Thorazine. I'm convinced it caused developmental problems for me. They had me on it for years. It's called the "Thorazine Shuffle", and I was doing a Waltz. I went to a ranch out in west Texas called High-Frontier. I liked that place. One of the few I could say that about. They had horses, and the owner let me pretty

much pick whatever one I wanted, and let me ride, groom, saddle, and shoe him. It was Pallameno named Joe. He was a beautiful horse. He had this golden tan hair, with a blonde mane and tail. He was so calm and even tempered. I loved that horse, very much. I was at High Frontier for about 2 and a half years. I wound up running away from there, and getting into some trouble, so I wasn't allowed to go back. I ended up at a kid's shelter in Houston (which I also ran away from). I stole a car, and got caught. I ended up in what they charmingly call "Gladiator School". It was anything, but charming. It's where I learned how to fight. And I got really good at it. The place ~~was~~ like a prison for kids, but more militant. We had to walk in lines of two, side-by-side, wherever we went. We had all the same elements we have here; rapists, murderers, thieves, bullies, and sissies. There was an eighteen foot tall fence that kept us in. The top 4 feet of the fence curved inward and had this thick wire mesh, with holes so small, you couldn't get your fingers into them, and if you managed to actually get that far, the top would collapse, with more than 25 pounds of pressure, ~~dropping~~ dropping you 16 feet down, back inside. You'd be lucky if you didn't break a leg or an ankle. That place was called Gainesville State School. I spent a little over a year there. It felt alot longer. I was released to another "ranch", but this one was just outside of Waco, Texas. It was close to Ft. Hood, the Army base, and we would occasionally get soldiers from the base, who would come out and put us through obstacle course training, and things like that, that the Army uses to hone soldiers. I guess they figured it would teach us discipline. It never did. That place was called Brookhaven Youth Ranch. After Brookhaven, I bounced around to a couple of places and ended up at this place in Richmond, Texas. I can't remember the name of it, but while I was there I stole one of their vans, and made it halfway to Dallas before I ran out of gas. I hitch-hiked all the

way to (Schednectady?), I don't remember how to spell that, New York. I lived there for about a year. I stayed in a kids shelter, sort of like Covenant House, but this was privately owned, in Albany. I got a job, and I was doing good, until I had the bright idea to contact someone from my past. They called the place back while I wasn't there (we had a community phone), and asked for me by my name, which wasn't the name I was giving the shelter people. The next thing I know, I'm being called into the office of the lady who owned the shelter, and two U.S. Marshals are waiting for me with a Texas Ranger, to take me back. (Yes, they're not just the name of a baseball team, they're actually a fugitive apprehension unit, sort of like the U.S. Marshalls). So I was dragged back to Texas, and put back in Gaineville State School to await court proceedings. This time, however, I wasn't sent to general population. I was put in a program called the Challenge Program. But I wasn't there to complete the program, I was just waiting to go back to court, and find out what they were going to do with me. Most of the other kids gave me shit because of it. They felt I was just wasting space. They were of the opinion that another kid was being denied an opportunity of this program, because I was taking a spot that could have been theirs. I can't say I disagreed with them. I went back to court about two weeks later. The lady from the shelter in New York was there, with a whole bunch of her staff, and some of the other kids. They actually chartered their own plane to make the trip down. When I first saw them, I was shocked. I tried to put on an I don't care face, but I was terrified. The judge came in, sat down, and started picking up file folders about 4 inches thick and slapping them down on the banister surrounding his bench. Thunk!, Thunk!, Thunk!, and then the last one, about 2 inches thick, he slapped on top of those. He said that those files were me. Everything that I had done since being made

a Ward of the State. He told me, under normal circumstances, he would lock me up and throw away the key. But these nice people from New York flew all the way down here, on my behalf, to testify (if need be), that I had changed. That I was a responsible young man, with a job, and I wasn't doing anything illegal, besides living under an alias. The judge granted my release, because, he said, that as a Ward of the State, it was their job to teach me how to live, and function, out in the real world. I had shown that I could do that, and so they saw no need to continue my stewardship. From that day forward, I was a free man, with a clean slate. They sealed my juvenile records, and let me fly back with the people from New York. But I got back, and found out, I lost that good job, for lying on my application. I felt like a failure, so I did what I always did when things got too tough for me to deal with, I ran. Only, this time, I wasn't being chased by anyone other than my own fears, and disappointments. I went all the way back to Texas, and visited the man of the nice family, who I had such good memories of. I talked with him, and told him that I wanted to come home. He said my home was no longer with them. He gave me some money, and sent me to a business associate of his, who owned an apartment complex. They gave me a maintenance job, but I didn't last long. It was just too lonely for me there. I bounced around for a year or two, until I was 18, or 19, then I moved here to Michigan. I came here, originally to get a job at one of the "Big Three", Ford, GM, or Chrysler. That didn't work out, but I ~~wound~~^{wound} up getting married here, and having my son. I came to prison the first time, for a felony assault. I was sentenced to 15 months to 4 years. I wound up maxing out and going home, and trying to reestablish a home with my wife, and son. My father-in-law had my son living with him, in a nice neighborhood in Sterling Hts., and

going to a private school, things I could not do for him. So, as a father, who wanted the best for my son, stability, and a chance at a "normal" childhood, that I never had, I decided he was better off staying with my father-in-law, and I went to live with my wife. I didn't know it at the time, but she had developed an alcohol addiction. She had been living with a man for about 3 years, and they had been staying at a male friend of a friend's who owned the trailer for about a year. He was a former crack addict, and the man who owned the place was mentally challenged. I didn't know it at the time (there was a lot of that) but she had been having a flat out relationship with this man for 3 years. When I moved in to the trailer, I had been staying at a shelter up to that point, I noticed little things that made me suspicious. The way would touch each other when they thought I wasn't looking; how he would barge into the bedroom when she was indecent, like he was used to doing so, and her not saying anything about it. Little things that added up to big things. Then, I knew for sure when he bought her some expensive jewelry, and some lingerie. Suspicious? Oh, hell yeah! I was planning on leaving her the next week, but I was trying to get my driver's license back, so I could apply for a charter's license, to start renting a cab, to start making money. That was my plan. It would have killed two birds with one stone (forgive the utterly tasteless pun here). It would have given us transportation for the house (we had no vehicle), and it would have allowed me to start making money, and saving it. She knew I was going to leave, we had even talked about it, so she orchestrated a fight between

the owner, and the guy she'd been in a relationship with, so that the owner would kick him out of the house, and she would be free and clear. When he was out of the house, he kept blowing up her phone the next day, trying to come back and get his stuff. She handed me her phone, and practically begged me to talk to him. So I did. I told him that if he could get to the house before my appointment for my driver's exam, he could collect his things, otherwise he would have to wait. I didn't want him there when I wasn't there. I didn't trust him. While he was on his way over, my ride showed up, and I left. I didn't want to miss my appointment, I had already had to reschedule once, and didn't want the people to get ticked off at having to do it again, so I went. He came while I was gone, and she got into a fight with him, the end result being, that he wound up in a coma. When I arrived home she begged me to tell the owner that he and I got into the fight, and because that was her friend, she could convince him not to kick me out. She told me if he found out that she did it, he would kick her out, and I would have to leave, too. I didn't want us to be homeless in the middle of February, so I lied, and told the guy I did it. So here I sit, doing time for a crime I really didn't commit, and she's still free as a bird. My only excuse for being so monumentally stupid, is that I loved her very deeply. I would do ~~anything~~ anything for her.

INCARCERATION

On my first bit, I started out at Hiawatha, which is a level 1 dorm-like setting with open 6 man cubes. Hiawatha has, since, become New Kinross and it's now a level 2 with 8 man cubes. In 2016, the lease for old Kinross, from the Air Force, was up, and they would not renew it, so the inmates were all sent somewhere else, the fences were taken down, and the cameras all taken out. I did about 3 years there, and got into some trouble (refused to lock-down) and they sent me to a level 2 facility called URF (said erf). URF stands for Upper Regional Facility. This has, since, changed, too. It's now known as Chippewa (URF) East, and Chippewa (Straights) West. The West side used to be a level one, like Hiawatha, but now is a part of Chippewa. I worked out from URF in '06. This time around, I started at St. Louis, level 4, and was here until the summer of '08 when I passed a kidney stone. I was hospitalized at the local hospital overnight, then transferred the next day. Back then, the water here was atrocious, and I had been drinking a lot of it, which we weren't supposed to do. Water was being donated to this facility for us to drink, for free, but this facility was taking that water and selling it to us. They weren't giving it to us, like they were supposed to. They transferred me to Carson City, which is what is known as a split-level, a 2-4. Most of the compound is level 2, but they have 2 units that are level 4. URF (East) is the same but it only has one unit (Round unit) that is level 4. Most level 4's are split-levels with 2's. There are very few true level 4's, St. Louis being one of them.

RMI, also known as Michigan Reformatory, or as we call it, Michigan is also a split-level 2-4, but the level 4 takes up most of the compound, and it's the only level 4 in the state with single-man cells. Meaning, only one prisoner per cell. All level 5's are single-man cells. Most split-level 2-4's are double bunks, with two prisoners per cell. All level 5's have level 1's attached to them, because level 5 guys can't have kitchen, quartermaster, property room, or certain yard-crew jobs, so they give those jobs to the level 1 guys. Same with the libraries, and school classrooms, and medical and school posters (read janitors). Majority of level 1's are what's known as a "Pole Barn" setting. It is what it sounds like. It even looks like a barn, somewhat. This is the cube settings mentioned earlier. The way they do things here, in Michigan, is so backwards. The single-man cells should be the level 1's. You have more privacy, and at level 1's, you have more free time outside of your housing unit/cell/bunk. Level 5 guys should be housed at the "Pole-Barns", and as you make your way down a level, you get more privacy. Instead of 7 other inmates, you get only 1 bunk. Then, you go to level 2 and get more freedom of movement with the same bunk system, and then when you make it to level 1, which means you've busted your ass to stay out of trouble, keep a job, take your classes, whatever, then you get your own cell, and access to specialized classes, like Legal Writers, Food Tech, Custodial Maintenance, Building Trades, and others, so that you can get your certificates. Certificates allow prisoners with jobs to earn more money than the average prisoner. This would be

The incentive to get down to a level one setting. Anyway, I digress. After Carson City level 4, I was transferred to M.F. level 4. I had been incarcerated for a little over 2 years at this point. When a prisoner with alot of time comes in, he or she usually starts out at level 4. When the prisoner has 7 years, or less, left on his minimum, he has been incarcerated for more than 3 years, he can go down to a lower level. I did a little over a year at M.F., and hit my 3 year mark, so I went to level 2 there. I was then transferred to U.K.F., where I had maxed out from on my first bit. They remembered me, and it put a target on my back. The c/o's wrote me a bunch of bogus "Threatening Behavior" tickets that got me sent to the hole each time, so I earned the only actual Threatening Behavior that I've ever gotten, by telling them that if they kept messing with me, I was going to hurt one of them. They decided to beef it up, and said I told them I would kill one of them. So they sent me to level 5 Marquette. I did about a year and a half at Marquette (which looks like an old mid-evil castle), and they sent me to Baraga level 5. I actually liked level 5 Baraga. I went the longest I ever have, ticket free, there. It was just a little over 3 years. I would honestly rather be there, than at most level 4's, and some level 2's. They sent me back to Carson City when my points went down enough, and I got into a fight with another inmate (it happens occasionally, there's nothing you can do about it, but bite the bullet. It just comes with the bit), and they sent me to I-Max level 5. Ionia Max is another very

old facility. It's run down, and nasty looking. I did 18 months in the hole there. My points were still low so they didn't put me in gen. pop. at I-Max. Instead, they sent me back to M. R. I was only there for 3 months and I went back to I-Max for 2 months, and they sent me back to Marquette, who sent me back to Baraga. I did 2 months in segregation at M. R., another 2 months in seg. at I-MAX, 6 months in seg. at Marquette, and another 4 months in seg. at Baraga, before I was allowed to go back to gen. pop. at Baraga. I did another 3 years there and was sent back to this facility where it all began 13 years ago on this bit. The only thing that's changed is the water. They fixed it. Other than that, it still sucks here.

Incarceration, for me, is like a slow death. Death by a million cuts. When I'm at lower levels it's not so bad, because I can get out of my cell more. I have more freedom to run around, and do things to occupy my time. When I'm stuck at a level 4 like this one, time just seems to drag by so slowly. I have a job, but they never let me out for work. Most people would say, "Oh, but you're still getting paid, you shouldn't be complaining." Well, that's not the point. The point is to be able to get out of the cell, and to get away from my bunk. I imagine, for a moment, that you were forced to take on a roommate. But you weren't allowed to pick who it was, you don't know anything about this person, but you're just thrown into a 5x8 room, that you couldn't leave anytime you want, or needed to, and you're just expected to live with, and get along with, each other.

And every 6 months, they stick you with somebody else, and you have to start all over again. You're stuck in that room, with no way out, and if you have no one out there to send money, you basically have nothing. No way to occupy your time. How long do you think you could last before something your bunkie does, or says, gets on your nerves enough, that you can't stand it anymore, and you either want to punch them, or go crazy and start hurting yourself? Trust me when I tell you, it would be a lot less than you think. I would rather work all day, from 6 in the morning, to 11 at night, for free, than sit in a cell all day, with a bunkie who has nothing, and I have nothing.

The grievance system is a joke. It's run, and operated, by the same people being written up. Think about it rationally for just a moment. How much sense would it make if your rights were violated in some way? You were dragged out of your home in the middle of the night, and beaten in front of your parents/kids/wife/husband/siblings. Then, when you sued the police officers who brutally attacked you, they were appointed the judges and jury, for your case. Tell me how you could ever get justice in that situation. If M.P.D.C. violates my civil or constitutional rights, they couldn't admit any wrong doing even if they wanted to, because it would open them up to libel, and their admission of guilt could be used in a law suit. So why would they ever admit to doing anything wrong? The fact that they control the grievance process is like you committing a crime, then you being your own judge, and jury, for the crime. Are you

going to find yourself guilty of the crime? Of course not! The only way to fix the grievance, ^{process} so that it's completely unbiased, is to take it out of MDOC's purview. The whole process is biased from the beginning, and can never, therefore, be fair, or just. ^{there}

Health care is just as bad. Proof is right out for everyone to see in the major class-action lawsuits the attorney Dan Manville has filed against M.D.O.C. It pretty much tells you everything you need to know about "Healthcare", as administered by MDOC. If you want further proof of the dire state of our healthcare, read the most recent suit of Nicholson - bey vs. M.D.O.C.

My "prison community" is not even a community anymore. The majority of the prison population belongs to one gang or another, and they're always fighting, even amongst themselves. I don't belong to a gang, so I have no "community". It's not like other states, where, when one prisoner stands up, all prisoners stand up. There is no unity here, and M.D.O.C. likes it that way. It allows them to get away with a lot more than they should. I have no ties to the community outside of prison, because I have no one out there.

I survive in prison by filing bidigent, and trying to "hustle". What I mean by "hustling", is finding a way to (technically illegally) make money. Not actual currency, but "prison currency". Taking a bag of instant coffee that I bought for almost \$4 and breaking it down into "shots" (enough for one 22 oz cup full), and selling shots of coffee. Or making cards (greeting/holiday), and selling them. Tattooing is also a major industry in prison. I've written to the Governor

several times to try and get them to let us start tattoo parlors, and apprenticeship programs in here legally. My proposal is that M.D.O.C. set up "shops" where inmates can "apprentice" under an established artist (there are lots of them throughout the system), for 3 to 4 months, learning from that artist, and building a portfolio of work, then switch to another artist after those 3 months, and spend time learning from them. Each "apprenticeship" would last a year (longer if an artist, or even more than one, decide that ^{the} apprentice is not ready to graduate to full artist yet) as an apprentice, then graduate to artist (taking on his own apprentice) and start doing their own work. Tattooing is a legitimate legal profession. It's only illegal in prison, and it just creates a "black market" for it, that has no regulation, or safety protocols. M.D.O.C. could make money off the industry by "booth" rentals for the artist, and "shop fees" would provide funds for supplies. M.D.O.C. wouldn't have to spend hardly anything up front to start the program, and it would all be reimbursed by the artists, anyway. It would go something like this: A prisoner who wants to be an artist would have to prove they are qualified by presenting a portfolio, and doing a practice tattoo on pig skin, or some leather equivalent. Once an artist establishes his bona-fides, he can take on an apprentice, and immediately start charging for his work. If the artist owes the courts, or M.D.O.C., any money, that money is taken from their accounts regularly. Policy is already established for this. Shop fees would be a certain percentage ^{of} all incoming (net) funds, and booth rentals would be set at a certain amount per week.

bi-weekly/monthly etc. If a new artist didn't have their own gun, MDOC could supply the inmate with a loan, or the artist could purchase one from the funds (if any) from their account. Initially, M.D.O.C. would have to provide each facility with enough guns, inks, needles, and the essentials of a legitimate parlor, but all those costs would be reimbursed by the artists, and after the initial costs are paid back, MDOC immediately starts making profits. The shop, and the artists, wind up paying for itself. An artist can even have MDOC set up a "relese" account, and a percentage of the artists' earnings can go into the account, to be saved for their release. Obviously this would not apply to lifers, but they could still stack money in that account to have it given to family, or a beneficiary, upon their death, or incapacitation. It cuts out the black market, and unsafe practices of amateur artists, while teaching inmates a valuable skills that they ^{can} take to the world, and immediately start making money. An apprentice would learn from several different artists during their apprenticeship. In the meantime, they would be paid MDOC porter wages while building their portfolio. They would be in charge of making sure their artist had all their inks, needles, etc., that they needed to work, and they would be responsible for keeping the artist's booth clean, and sanitized. There could be a "shop manager" to ensure the shop stays clean, and sanitary. The shop manager would also be responsible for taking pictures of an artist's work to add to their portfolios. Artists can take these portfolios to the world to any tattoo parlor,

and immediately start working. Certificates can even be issued to apprentices who graduate to "Artist" for them to present with their portfolios. This plan can actually make MDOC turn a profit. The money an artist can make, can go to pay off court restitution, giving a boost to the, already strapped for cash, legal system. It gives prisoners a chance to become self-sufficient, and teaches them a valuable trade that they can take outside the prisons to, literally, anywhere in world. It's literally a win for ~~everyone~~. It doesn't make sense not to do this, when the benefits are abundant for all of those involved. The only thing holding it back is the outdated belief that only prisoners get tattoos, and criminals, but that is no longer the case. Our culture has progressed to the point that tattoos are an accepted, and even celebrated, form of art. The proof of this, is all of these numerous shows on T.V. dedicated to tattoos, such as Inkmasters, Miami Ink, Black Ink, Black Ink-Chicago, How Far Is Tatto Far?, and many, many, others.

My incarceration means that I've missed being a father to my son. He's now 18 years old. At that age I believed I was a grown-ass man. Couldn't nobody tell me nothin'! It also means that I never got to pursue my dreams. It means that I'll most likely die in here. It means that my life was wasted. I didn't make the world a better place than I found it. It means that this is my home now, and what does that say about me that I have no other?

How does it affect me? How does it not? How could it not?

The system is broken, and needs a complete overhaul. We need to figure out how to turn someone we consider a "criminal" into productive members of our society. The only way to do that, is to make the disenfranchised feel that they are a part of that community. Easier said, than done, right? But is it, really? One of the worst things we could have done as a country is to take away the opportunity for prisoners to educate themselves. It's a proven fact that education reduces recidivism. Close to 80% of prisoners who recieved a degree, or some form of education (secondary) were less likely to reoffend. How is it that we can overlook statistics like this. The answer is right there in our face, why aren't we basing policy, and law, on these statistics that are showing us how to improve our society, and reduce our prison population? It's a roadmap for change, but as long as we have fat cat politicians who are only interested in keeping the status quo, we are going to continue to fail to change the policies that got us here in the first place. They don't want things to change because their meal tickets go away. And heaven help you if you get between them and their money!

As far as how my perspective changed from being in prison: I can tell you this much, I recognize bullshit alot easier, and faster now.

REFLECTIONS

I want people to know that we may be prisoners, but we are still people. We are brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. We are not pieces of garbage to be thrown

away. We are human beings, and we deserve to be treated with dignity. Most of us have never had anyone to show us what that even is, so if you want to change a "so called" "criminal's" opinion of the world, who he doesn't believe gives a shit about him, show him dignity, and watch his opinion of you change.

I want scholars to know that it's great to postulate, and pontificate about the carceral state of the country, but if you're not going to actually do something to affect change, shut your fucking mouth, and get out of the guy or gal's way who is trying to actually change things.

I want policy makers to know: **YOU FUCKING ASSHOLES HAVE NO FUCKING IDEA WHAT THE FUCK YOU'RE DOING!** You're just making shit worse! Stop trying to get your name in the paper, and actually look at the statistics that prove that what you're doing doesn't work! Get a fucking clue!

I want members of the community to know to give an ex-con a chance for success by hiring him/her. That one chance may be the just the thing he/she needs to turn their life around, and you'll be responsible for that success. Be proud of it. You did that!

I want activists to know to keep fighting with everything you have to end mass incarceration. Keep showing the ~~statistics~~ down their throats until they choke on it.

Then replace them with people who know better, and will act accordingly.

To the people in government who can actually change things for the better. Bring back voluntary service for first time felons, and for some 2nd timers. I would have chosen service over prison, even if it was the bomb sniffing dog's butt-sniffer. Approve conjugal visits for Michigan prisoners. By not having them you are promoting homosexuality. When someone has no way to get that release, they will find a way, trust me on that. And statistics prove that sex (heterosexual) relieves stress, and promotes good health and peace of mind. Want to make people less angry, and violent? Let them have lots of sex, and see if it doesn't calm them down! Nobody's going to risk their conjugal, so you'll have better behaved prisoners all around. And bring back good time for everyone. Repeal Truth In Sentencing. Drop the % of time done on a minimum to 35 to 45 % with good behavior, and completion of recommendations, classes taken, jobs held etc. These are things that can and should be done. The only reason not to is so people in our government won't lose their Cash Cow, that they've milking for the last 50 years. These are all common sense solutions to common sense problems that your forebears (some who are still among you) created when they did away with these options. Learn from their mistakes, and change the status quo for the betterment of all.