

Marcellus Earl Phillips

Lifsmithing

An old cliché states that figures lie and liars figure. I estimate somewhere between zero and 100 percent of the stories told in prison are hogwash. For instance, if you take the word of those incarcerated, nine of every 10 are innocent. But, this is all beside my point. What I want to discuss is the beauty of the clink. Unlike “Cheers,” nobody knows your name. You are able to reinvent yourself with any identity you can imagine. The Army is limited to all you can be. In the calaboose, you can be all you can manufacture.

In 18 years, I have ran into only a handful of men from my hometown. It isn't a small burg and sits just outside of an urban zone that provides plenty of fodder for the justice department coffers. Still, only a few guys I've met knew people I knew within two or three degrees of separation. So, with no Google, who could fact check the background of anything I had chosen to tell everyone?

If I had the desire to convince the hoi polloi I was a highfalutin businessman, none would be the wiser. If I claimed to be the kingpin of my village, who could debate me? Granted, the fact that I am walking around mooching ramen noodles might cause some to wonder about my suspected hidden finances stockpiled in the care of a loved one.

By hitting the right pit or track, you can make quick strides to become what would appear to be a former high school superstar in the days of yore. Just look at the lineup of experts on ESPN who never played a day in the sports they expound upon, and you know you could convince a pack of sycophants you were once all state by breaking down the week's mistakes on television.

If I had wanted to be a Golden Gloves boxer or a cage fighter, who could argue the fact without engaging me in a bout of fisticuffs? Attempts to doubt my stories could be pounded into submission by informing them of the added risks I face if I were to use my hands to inflict any further injury. Therefore, part of my penitence is learning to handle myself without bullish physicality.

Be forewarned, getting caught in a military fabrication isn't as easily dodged as others. Those boys don't take their sacred oaths lightly. And, they know how to grill you into inaccuracies with their insider jargon.

To fulfill a drive to be a car guy, just relay anecdotes about growing up monkeying around in grease refurbishing classics with Dad. Who can refute how many hot rods we had in the garage? Plus, I can give you a list of my friends back home that will vouch for the fact I had NASCAR-level mettle with the pedal. The only thing that held me back was the politics of

sponsorship connections.

Had I the appetency to expostulate on my extensive erudition, all I would have to do is emulate Oswald Bates from “In Living Color” by assimilating as many sesquipedalian lexical constituents as attainable. I could iterate Freudian ideologies, orate Shakespearean colloquy, and put on airs. Be not qualmish if you use them incongruously, the majority of this rabble will be awestruck at your audacity and the expediency with which you wield such linguistic refulgence.

Do you wish you had been married? Did you yearn to be more of a player? How about a pimp? Who’s to say who you were involved with that have since decided to go their own way while you serve your time? They love me, so when I let them know I’m free, they’ll be back.

When you’re thrust into a new society with no familiar history or ties, what’s to stop you from creating the most outlandish glory for yourself? Scruples? Integrity? We’re talking about a collection of convicted criminals here. None of these examples, which are only the tip of the iceberg, are anything I’ve made up without having heard them ad nauseam.

In closing, I want to ask you a question: just how much stock do you want to put into anything I’ve shared with you here?