

2/24/22

[REDACTED]

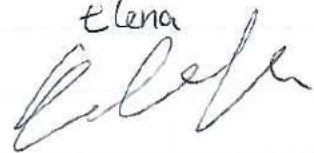
To Whom It May Concern:

Included is my letter in support of Amistad's push to end Death by Incarceration. I hope it is of some help. I give my permission to use my letter in total or part for any relevant application or campaign. I also give permission for my name (Elena House-Hay), my DOC # (PA4953), my age (26), my location (SCI-Muncy), and my sentence (20-40 yrs) to be used.

Thank you for this opportunity and have a nice day.

Regards,

Elena



P.S. If further communication is necessary or desired, please contact me at the above address. Thank you.

Elena House-Hay PA4953

20-40 yr sentence

Prison is an assault on dignity, accomplished by unknowing and isolation. It's hard to feel that your dignity, your personhood, matters to anyone. Each day, you must brace for the assault, must gather all your strength, to keep even part of yourself intact.

To manage the indignity, the day is compartmentalized. How else do you greet your family with a smile in the visiting room having just heard and followed the command, "squat, cough, and spread your cheeks?" How else do you comb your hair, wash your face, compose yourself after a viscious comment from a misogynistic officer? How else can you snap out of a fugue in which you mentally recalculated the days, the months, the birthdays, the holidays you've missed while incarcerated? We need the compartments to lock away the wounds and to keep our damage separate from who we love and from who we want to be. It is how you survive.

The worst days are when the isolation and senseless restrictions cause your brain to froth and seize. When one more second feels like death and you want to cease existing. The only thing to do is to dive for a scrap of purpose and promise yourself that the time will not destroy you. You tear apart your existence to piece together a resolve that's close to your idea of "enough."

Still, even in times of resolve, you wonder what "enough" means. How battered do you need to be? How low must your dignity stoop? How many pieces will you crumble into before you deserve relief? Who will tell you when you're altered enough to be free?

In my case, I will get some of these questions answered in about fifteen years; I've served five years of a twenty to forty year sentence. By that time, I'll have spent half my life in prison and it's anyone's guess to as how much of me will be left. And yet, I'm still one of the lucky ones.

For the women sentenced to die in this hellish exile, the answers to their questions, those questions that slip into prayers, are never a guarantee. Instead, "lififers" find a murky purgatory that will reveal nothing, where every direction is an eternity of gray and black. What route do they take? What lengths must they travel to meet another soul who will resurrect their dignity?

Prison is the ultimate unknowing. It is the ultimate isolation.

It is cruel. No society should do this to their own people and it's time to release us, to restore our dignity and stop the shameful assault. We need help to do this, and I hope that you, the reader, will be an advocate so that we may stay intact. I'm calling on everyone, anyone, to dissipate the purgatory so that our collective humanity can be sound and whole. Please. And thank you.