

Abolitionist Law Center



2-27-2022

RE: Your letter addressing D.B.I. to the U.N.

Dear A.L.C,

Greetings. May this letter find you all very well and blessed. I am serving a D.B.I. (or L.W.O.F) sentence for a crime I committed at age 18. Recently, my friend, Tyreem Rivers, shared with me the letter you sent him regarding serving D.B.I. sentences. I would like to share some thoughts with you.

Last year, several lifers, myself included, did a podcast with Joshua Vaughn that may be helpful. His website is: www.whatislife.us and his email is: jprvaughn121@gmail.com

I'm also including a poem I wrote which reflects what it's like serving a life sentence. I give you permission to use it as you wish.

I would also like to direct your attention to the website: www.fossilsandfeathers.com where several lifers have shared their stories.

Now, I will try to briefly address the prompts that were in the letter.

I grew up on a small farm, I was one of six kids. We were poor. As a teenager, I turned to drugs and eventually

crime. This was in part because I lost my grandfather to cancer and my father wouldn't speak to me. I got in with a bad crowd and killed someone during a robbery. I regret what I did. I'm haunted by it everyday. I wish I could undo it.

Prison has been challenging. I came in at age 19 and had to grow up fast. I gravitated towards education and I've tried to educate myself during my incarceration. It's tough living in a bathroom with another person who has their own issues. COVID has greatly reduced our time out of the cell. We're lucky if we get 1 yard period a week.

Prison is like someone choking the life out of you. Quite literally we are getting older and dying physically. We also lose life in other ways. Our families grow distant. New family members are strangers. Prison disconnects you from your family. We lost ^{contact} visits during COVID and now that some family members got out of the habit of coming to see me I never see them anymore. The video visits seem like a bother to them so I don't get them. Some aren't very tech savvy and can't figure out the system.

We don't get outside for recreation anymore. We're stuck on the block all day with the same people. You can't get away from all the noise, tension and stress of the block. Thank God for ear plugs. But if you have a conflict with someone on the unit now you have to deal with them all day. You don't get yard to get a break from the block.

1

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A guy, another inmate, once told me that "prison is hell." I asked him what he was talking about and he showed me Webster's Dictionary and the definition for the word hell. Sure enough it said a prison. I wish I could make a case against his simple statement but in some ways it holds true.

I have tried to make the best out of my 25 years in prison. I have multiple Doc. educational certificates as well as outside certifications. I am most proud of my work as a teachers-aide for many years helping guys get their G.E.D.^s and vocational training in electronics. I am very proud to have been a service dog trainer in the SCI Dallas "Hounds for Heroes" program where I helped train service dogs for disabled veterans and first responders. I recently left this program to pursue an associate's degree from the University of Scranton. (I couldn't do both.) I'm also proud of the fact that I was on the Protestant Missions Committee and the Character Council. I've tried to make the best out of my time. In my locker, I proudly display the picture of Colonel Dave, the last service dog I trained.

I really don't have much faith in the courts or legislators. Nor do I have much faith in commutation. Guys are being turned down left and right. I actually think that it was pretty cruel when groups came in to the prison and hyped up commutation. Guys got their hopes up but commutation has been a major disappointment.

I do believe the laws need to be changed. There should be no life without parole (life without hope) sentences. I think lifers and long termers should have a chance to have their sentences modified after serving 20 years. To me, a long term sentence can be just as bad as a life sentence. And after 20 years I think individuals should be reviewed again every 5 years.

I also believe that the conditions in prison need to improve. There should be an incentive based system with "honor" blocks and better conditions for inmates that don't cause trouble. I also think older prisoners should have better living conditions. This prison doesn't have AC on most blocks and it gets extremely hot during the summer. It's hard for the older guys. They shouldn't have to worry about problem causing inmates giving them a hard time.

In closing, forgive me for my sloppy and unorganized letter. I just wanted to get something out to you right away. I give you permission to use anything in this letter. I will reflect on your questions and if time permits, I'll get a better letter out to you. Thank you for all that you do. God bless you! Have a great day!

Sincerely,
David Mandeville

David Mandeville #DN7632
[REDACTED]

Doing Life

You are hereby sentenced to life.

Did I hear him right? Life, what's that?

I'm a teenager. Is that like 20 years?

No. It's life. What's that?

Till you die. Huh? How long is that?

20, 30, 40, 50, 60, maybe 70 years.

Life was moving so fast out there.

Trying to get ahead, have some fun,

Impress the girls, find my way.

Wanted to be a fighter pilot, or special forces.

But instead, drugs, burglaries, and now murder.

W.T.F.! How did it get turned upside down?

A father gone, a family devastated.

He didn't deserve that. I had no right.

One horrific moment. What was I thinking?

That's the problem. I wasn't.

Two families now living a nightmare.

For what? Greed, fear, and a few dollars.

How do I right this wrong?

Doing good, helping others? Not enough.

Prayer, fasting, forgiveness. Nope.

Nothing rights this wrong.

Nothing brings back the gone.

Time doesn't heal this wound.

Day in, day out. Summer, Winter. Repeat.
Round and round we go. Year in, year out.
Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden, ...
Time slipping, falling further away
From family. Births, deaths, unknown faces.
Less mail, less contact. ~~Loss~~ Losing life, doing life.

Drowning in time, 25 years gone by.
Walls shrink. Books pile up. People come and go.
A few of us remain, growing older.
Growing grey, fat, and hunched over.
The world moves on, lost
In its gadgets, dreams, and drama.

Is there any hope doing life?
New laws, commutation, death, the afterlife.
Meditation, astral projection, enlightenment.
What will bring relief? God, angels, the Apocalypse.
Legislators, pipe dreams, sovereign schemes.
Will anyone be left who cares? ... doing life.

I give you permission to use this.

David Marshall