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FOREVER UNFORGIVEN

by

Malakki (Ralph Bolden)

I am a 56 year old rehabilitated Pennsylvania state prisoner. I'm serving a sentence of Life without parole (Death By Incarceration) and I've been incarcerated for over 27 years.

About fourteen years ago, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. The disease has progressed to the point that I now need a wheelchair and I've been assigned an aide (another inmate) to help me.

When arrested at 28 years old, I began my journey to rehabilitate myself by first accepting responsibility for my crime. I was first unjustly placed on death row. After 5 years of solitary confinement, my appeal was accepted and I was resentenced to DBI. During that time, my belief in a forgiving, all-merciful God kept me grounded. And I established a vigorous regimen to educate myself to endure the time I spent in isolation.

As soon as I was transferred to general population, I searched for a job. I assessed that, too much idle time in the new environment could be a detriment. I soon got a job working the prison library.

I kept up my regimen of self-study, armed with ample resources in the library, and the prison's librarian noticed me and asked about my goals. She told me they were looking for G.E.D. tutors and she encouraged me to take an upcoming tutor training course. I wasn't sure if I'd be good at it but she assured me and said that, if I had any problems, she would hire me back in the library.

Through fifteen years of being a tutor, I've helped a great number of men receive their G.E.D.s and trade school certifications. If I'm ever blessed to receive a second chance, I would love to continue passing on my passion for education.

I changed jobs because I was chosen by prison staff to become a CPS (Certified Peer Support) Specialist. I got my training and additional certification in Wellness Recovery. Standing as support for

those with mental health challenges is something I wish I had during the dark times I suffered that led to me committing the crime I did. This is also something I would like to do in my community if I ever inherit a second chance.

I own a sincere remorse for the bad choices in my past. And I'm not writing this to garner sympathy. I murdered an innocent man and severely injured another during an armed robbery in 1994. Because of my heinous acts, I deserved to have been prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

But what the cogency of my experience entails is an examination of "the law" itself. Not so much if it's right or wrong; is it effective? And does the inequities inherent in DBI sentences accurately represent the way we define ourselves?

A prison doesn't lie. It can't. Listen to the gospel given in the scant few circumstances when a person serving DBI gets a chance to lay bare a Stygian section of their soul, which illuminates a cautionary tale of how it feels to be a living, breathing corpse.

For us -- with smashed hope of EVER returning home -- the prison is a living grave. Though condemned, we can still haunt our loving families with missives that manifest to society like scriptures deemed taboo. Or deliver a haggard voice from beyond in the allotted fifteen minute phone call. And those who can afford to travel to the correctional cemetery of lost souls get a few hours to fantasize a fictive forever until they are hurriedly hustled out; back to the real of an actual never.

Even though I'm senior, handicapped and I have remorse for the victims of my crime, by current Pennsylvania law, I will stay in this cell until I die. With no second chances for rehabilitated Lifers, the oppression of incarceration pushes forward without the motive that first made it necessary, lacking the requisite cause for the time and money being spent to sustain it.

I want to end this with a question that must be considered: why have so many of us -- the forever unforgiven women and men serving DBI -- accepted the hard work to not only better ourselves but also mentor and assist others who may only be incarcerated for a few months, when no incentive exists to compensate us? Why do we do it? Doesn't this, in itself, prove we are still human?

Thank you for offering me this opportunity to express my thoughts.

Malakki