

## HOW TO SURVIVE IN PRISON?

During my incarceration I've had to deal with many irritants, deceptions, moments of anger, and bad emotions. I've lived through such situations about twice a year for a bit more than nineteen years of consecutive incarceration.

It is not pertinent to remember which one marked me most. I've erased a lot of them from my memory. It's better that way ... for my internal peace. However, I'll always remember that I never want to live through this again. I've had to find strategies to get out of this curse. I've gotten to hate prison and everything that is part of this penal world so much so that it motivated me to find a defense system which would allow me not to get hurt morally and that would offer me a way out. Never to go back.

Why did I adapt? Simply because I had no choice. The only choice I had was ... the different ways to make the choice. First choice: stay limited, headstrong, unyielding, which turned out to be draining and really slow. Second choice: flexibility, openness, patience, and resignation, which is softer but still really slow. I am not physically free, but I am free to make decisions, to evolve, to look forward, or not.

Irritants and unpleasant situations, there are some everywhere. Everyone is confronted by them one day or another, it does not only happen in prison. So I try to dodge and accept them. Yes, it's not always easy. Some days I'm more fragile but I'm working on it. That way I'll be ready for the outside. After all, they'll only let me out once I've proven to them that I'm able to adequately manage delicate situations.

For me, psychological suffering had a positive impact since it provoked reflections, and attitude, value,

In Canada, a prisoner serving a life sentence (lifers) can be granted parole after 25 years, which means that a prisoner is on parole for life. But under the current conservative government the number of paroles granted has been reduced. Not many get out, and if they do they are faced with a different set of procedures and hard-lined rules and regulations that are still constrictive and repressive. Lifers from inside a medium-security federal prison have written the following testimonials that bring attention to the daily hardship they encounter having lived inside for many years. The authors' names have been left out due to the fact that it could be detrimental for prisoners to share their thoughts and experiences about prison.

and life philosophy changes enabling me to evolve into someone that will never make the same mistakes again.

I've scored many points by convincing psychologists and parole officers that I've changed. But from the bottom of my being I truly believe that I've changed. Actually my work is not done yet.

In conclusion, it took me many years of misery to become aware and decide to change to become a better person. It's a shame that I've caused harm to many individuals in the past due to my previous disregard towards others and my old lifestyle.

If I've lived injustices, abuses of power, etc., it's just what I had coming due to my past actions. For those who believe in Karma, keep hoping, it's never too late to do good. Life will have good surprises for you later on.

## PEPPER STORY

Hey Hal, you know what happened last week after I left the meeting? You gave me those super duper hot peppers from the greenhouse and I had them in my coat pocket. Well, we're on our way out and there's a line-up to go sign out. I ask the guard what's going on and he says that they are checking people's coats through the scanner on the way out. Could you believe it? They've never done that before. Then it strikes me that I have these hot peppers in my coat pocket and I have no pockets on my clothes because we did yoga. I start freaking out! I'm in line with about 20 other people waiting to be processed. I whisper to Pete, "I have those hot peppers in my coat and have no other pockets." He calmly says, "Slowly slip them to me one at a time." Here we are, smuggling hot peppers into his jeans pocket. He saved my ass with those jeans! What the hell? The things they lead us to do. It's like we were smuggling illicit drugs or weapons. It's so ridiculous. We laughed our heads off on the way out.

## SEIZED OR NOT?

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A prison door gets broken in our gym area. Some say it was because some guys were upset that the guards didn't unlock it so that they could use the ice rink. Security used this to flex its muscle. Keepers got going to shops, bothering inmates and staff, asking about tools—maybe the tools used to break the doors.

Not finding anything, they moved on to the hobby shop. Bingo: tools they could take.

They removed tools from inmate lockers without any care, leaving behind paper work to say where they were gone, or why they took them. My tools were taken.

More than a month goes by. I make a formal complaint, asking for the seizure tags and for my tools to be returned.

After two months, I was told the tools were not seized—that I could have them back if I withdraw my complaint. I said I wanted my complaint answered. I was told they were keeping the tools if they had to create a seizure tag.

Bottom line: when personal effects are taken, a seizure tag has to be written up. My tools went to a special room for seized items. But: today they claim the tools are not seized—just being held until they write seizure tags... or until I die and go away.

## MY WEEK IN PRISON

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Hi. I am a minimum-security inmate—oops! Sorry, they call us delinquents now—in a multi-level institution. Multi means it houses both minimum and medium-level inmates. I'm pretty lucky being at the end of my sentence. I get escorted passes to go to community activities such as church food baskets, AA, Recon, and such.

So here is my week. Monday I work at my job. Tuesday I work and have an AA outing at night with a

civilian escort. Wednesday I go home to my daughter for six hours with a guard to escort me. Thursday I go out with five other inmates to work in a church basement, and I have an AA meeting at night. Friday the same.

Sound good so far? Oh, but I forgot to tell you every time we come back to the joint from a visit outside, we go through a routine metal detector, an ion scanner—which tests for illegal substances—the dog sniff, then a strip search. Not bad for a minimum-security inmate!

But the last Friday I came in after this hectic week, lo and behold, the ion scanner goes off on me.

Well, then it was a strip search in handcuffs, and seventy-two hours in a dry cell. I'd never seen the inside of the prison's dry cell before. It's about six feet wide by ten feet long, with a twelve foot ceiling—with very bright lights. There are two cameras inside and a toilet on a giant throne. There are three steps that lead up to the toilet, and the toilet cover makes a beeping sound when opened. When you sit, your waste goes through the pipes to another room next to the cell, which has a window so you can watch them go through your feces.

Well, being the good inmate that I am, seventy-two hours later, after many times on the toilet, they find that I have nothing in me, and they let me go. Not just that—they cut my codes to go outside, and I have to explain or prove to them that I did nothing wrong.

Oh, I forgot. This cell has no windows and lights are on twenty-four hours a day. No walks. No books. No radio—nothing. They even search the rest of your food when they come by after meals. If you want a drink of water, you have to ask and all this time you are only wearing jockey shorts and a t-shirt.

Happy Happy!

DOUBLE TROUBLE

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Twenty square feet. That's the room I have to move around in my cell. Of course, my cell is larger than that. But once you put in a bed, a desk, a chair, a toilet, etc... you're left with an area that has the advantage of not taking too long to clean.

Not being a big man and not being too claustrophobic, I can manage to live in a room with twenty square feet of usable floor. Of course, the configuration of the room is such that every time I need to open a drawer or the window, I have to move the chair out of my way. But I got used to it. Like I got used to taking the same chair to reach one of the shelved. But these are only minor aggravations.

The problem starts when they decide to put a second bed on top of yours, plus the inmate that comes with the bed. All of a sudden, those twenty square feet look awfully small. For two people to move about in such an area you almost have to design a choreography. And to avoid physical contact, you have to be some kind of contortionist. If you sleep on the top bunk, you will have to add gymnastics to your credentials. Double-bunking is perfect for ballet dancers and cirque du soleil performers.

If you're lucky, you'll get a cellmate who is clean and respectful. If you're less lucky, he will be a slob who never shuts his mouth, who watches TV til two in the morning, and who will snore when he finally falls asleep. The problem is that you rarely have the choice of who you will be stuck with. It's somehow like those forced marriages in India, minus the sex.

Physical intimacy is not the only thing you lose when you're double-bunking. There is also the psychological aspect. Just knowing that every time you go back to your cell "he" will be there—it makes you frustrated, depressed, even angry. You cannot enjoy peace of mind when there is constantly someone in your bubble.

I started doing time more than twenty years ago. Back then, they were saying that double-bunking was an exceptional measure. That is was in response to a surplus of a carceral population. Twenty years later, they say the same thing. My question is: how long does it take for an exceptional policy to be called a norm? Twenty-five years? Fifty? 100? Double-bunking is bad enough. Please don't rub it in by saying it's only temporary.

One final comment: I know that there are a lot of countries where conditions of incarceration are 100 times worse than here. Knowing that there are people worse off than me puts things in perspective. But still it doesn't make my pain and discomfort disappear. Canada always boasts of its human rights record. It would have more credibility if it would stop stripping its inmates of their privacy and dignity.

#### TESTIMONY OF A MADMAN

I'll try and focus on a narrow slit of the abuse that a life sentence has evolved into.

I'm in my twenty-eighth year of correction, the past twelve have been in minimums facilities and transition houses. I have completed around 800 escorted passes, ninety-five percent with civilians where I'm brought outside as human traffic to provide free labour. There I drive loaders and machines on farms and on the streets of Kingston, I'm in the community at a daycare centre, and so on.

In June 2009 I was released on day parole where I was forced away from all my family and support because of falsified documents and police pressure. I was muscled out of my province to one where I don't speak the language. Within six months on day parole I had a full-time job, a car, and I was approved for another six months of day parole with the permission to have my own apartment where I could stay during the weekends.

## Testimonials

Unfortunately, I broke conditions. As a psychiatrist pointed out to me, "Mr. P is of metis descent so clearly his risk to reoffend is greatly increased with any substance abuse." This, coupled with the fact that my victim was a police officer, and now I'm on my fourth year of what looks like will be a total of eight years before I get another chance at day parole. I've seen others come and go more than five times in this time.

I've had three hearings with full support from five of their professional colleagues to return to day parole. However, with two police traveling from Ontario to "observe" every hearing they have had the chance to observe the Parole Board say "no."

I had full support for my fourth hearing, but my case manager pulled out two months before the hearing because a "secret investigative convict" told them I brought tobacco inside, with absolutely no evidence. A psychologist I did counseling with wrote a report saying I complain too much (shortly before she went off work with a mental breakdown). It's been six months now and she hasn't been back. Maybe she was too stressed having to listen to such complaints.

So the Board used these "crimes" to put me off for at least another year and a half. The other psychologist paid to do an assessment concluded that I was calm and that it was time to move on and let me return back to day parole. This assessment did not appease the police on their fourth trip to Quebec, so this Board ignored this report. The Board instead told me to come back with a more realistic slow gradual release plan.

In short, I am inside for another year and a half doing free labour. Then I'll have to ask for unescorted passes to spend three days at a time at a halfway house. Then maybe I'll get a closed halfway house for three to six months where I'll end up doing free labour. Then I can ask for an open halfway house for a year and a half to two years where I'll be able to find a job when I'll be nearing

the retirement age by then. After all of this I'll be able to ask for full parole. All of this, of course, depends on whether an investigative convict tells them that I am up to no good. At which point I'll have to start over.

So I sit here in a "minimum" that recently doubled in population with medium inmates. My pay got cut to \$3.50 a day. Doing free labour in the community and stripped naked at every return. I'm denied access to my family even though I've been eligible for unescorted passes since November 2006.

Luckily my family has money so I can call my seventy-six-year-old father daily and hear how he cares for my eighty-year-old mother with Alzheimer's, how he is out of firewood for the winter. I also get the chance every day to hear my mother ask me why I won't come to see her. I am their only child.

So maybe soon you'll hear of the result of Mr. Harper's C-10 and it won't be pretty thanks.

## I'M JUST ANOTHER NUMBER

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I've been caged now for eighteen years, having visits with my wife and son, raising him from a child to a young adult. Through it all, we tried to keep our little family as sane as we could. I was doing what I could to become a better man for myself and my family.

The controllers now got the idea to cut the wages of the con man, and with this collapsing system the effects are drastic.

I was not able to accumulate a lot of money over the years mainly because I took care of my family. So today when I want to go to a private family visit I have to go without pay for six weeks to accumulate the money to pass a weekend with the people who have been supporting me all this time. I have a real hard time asking my wife to spend money, even if it is for us. There are too many things that she has to pay for just to survive as it is. So I get

#### Testimonials

the feeling that I am being punished for having a family.

The man does not understand that this visit program is more than just a place to get laid. As inmates, we are so deprived from any kind of affection that it is hard to maintain any type of relationship. With the inflation of food and commodities over the years it is just so hard to get by on \$35 every two weeks. And worse if you can't spend it because you choose to keep it for those who have been and will continue to be there for you.

I'm getting out one day! Doesn't the public want me to have a good connection with my family so I don't come out of here with my hate-filled and angry at everyone? If I didn't have a family maybe I wouldn't care about people so much.

#### THE VALUES OF CSC

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Two years ago I got into an altercation with another lifer. The other inmate pissed me off in the range right in front of other inmates but I stayed calm. The day after, on Friday, I asked to transfer out of the range. On Monday, we had a meeting with our parole and correctional officers, we both have the same. The minute I walk into the office, he puts all the blame on me saying that I pissed him off and invited him to fight, completely the opposite of what happened. My PO and my CO decided to back him up. Two days later, I get all my outings suspended. He doesn't. Two weeks later he receives a gift, an exterior placement. Meeting with the warden his response astonished me: "It is entirely normal to put up with injustice in CSC." All of this pissed me off. Two months after the initial altercation, the other inmate made death threats against an inmate in front of two COs. Nothing happened and five months later he is in a halfway house. A year after the altercation, my PO asks me to trust him, no way I'm doing that.

Two years after the altercation, I get a new PO. Same thing, she doesn't trust me, I don't trust her. She

does not want to give me back my outings. I'll have to pass in front of the Board to obtain Escorted and Unescorted Temporary Absences.

Why call this text "The Values of CSC"? In CSC's manual there is a question as to which values should be taught in inmates.

During the last two years, I had a lot of feelings, more time spend mad than good. During this last year I've been putting a lot more thought to answer why my PO and the warden always try to put a stick through our wheels. In the last two months, I've been asking myself which values are being taught to us. I can't answer for certain but these last two years have certainly been hypocrisy, dishonour, arrogance, definitely not trust or compassion.

They dare to talk to us about empathy, respect, dignity, and modesty. It's easy for them to tell us about this, they've never had to deal with themselves. They ask us to let go of past situations but they never forget, they never let go. With the current changes in the system under the Harper government, there is no place for rehabilitation. There are no good values being taught. When I talk about good values here is my list: honour, dignity, modesty, compassion, respect, good manners, trust, loyalty, equality, lenience. That's the kind of values that would create good programs. But the one value that has to prevail is integrity.