

EXILED IN PURGATORY: STILL...

I was originally sentenced to Life in Prison with a 30 year minimum with the possibility of parole after 20 years if I was found by a three person parole board to likely be rehabilitated within a reasonable period of time.

I applied for my rehabilitation hearing, called a "Murder Review" hearing, in September 2014. On September 2, 2015, a year later my hearing was held.

I have been in prison over 21 years now. How do you prove rehabilitation in an environment in which promotes the opposite of rehabilitation? My first 12 years in prison was steeped in racist gangs and misconduct. I had amassed over 60 misconduct reports. When I finally made a decision to change my life's direction it was seriously noteworthy in the last 9 years I've only gotten 5 misconduct reports, 2 of which were blatantly false misconducts written by staff in Florida. Of those 5 only 1 was a "major" misconduct for "fighting", which I received 30 days in the hole and more than 2 years in isolation. The fight was initiated by the other prisoner.

Still, misconduct is misconduct. As I sat in front of the board I was told by one member that I still seemed a threat. Another scoffed at my "claim" I was no longer racist and did not hold those beliefs. She said, in essence, people

like me don't change. Racism is a "core" character trait that can't be changed. Never mind all I've done and fought for since those dark days. Never mind putting my life on the line by leaving the gang life. To the board, that is all for naught.

I learned a lot from the hearing. But most of all I won't let myself be discouraged. Being free does not define me. It does not deter me. I will continue to fight for what I believe is right.

The Board has at least 2⁺ months to make a final decision. I already know that will be "no". I'm almost certain it will be, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Hell No!"

If denied the Board can reschedule a hearing 2 to 10 years from now. I've been told by other Oregon lifers the Board has been using their "10 year rule" to make sure prisoners do at least 30 years. By then I'll be 49. I was 19 when I came to prison, my first adult offence. I'll then have to serve an additional 72 months for Robbery - part of the original crime. Which means I'll be 55 yrs old. Of course, the state could hold me up to 20 yrs on the Robbery. But they wouldn't do that, would they?

I'm at a point where prison is all I know. It's a bitter pill to swallow. It's a slower death penalty. But it's a painful way to die for sure.

But as one Board member said. Maybe the only thing that will make the victims family feel better is if I spend more time in prison.

Thomas a Kempis once said, "Be assured that if you knew all, you would pardon all." The Parole Board would do well to think on that when they review people who have spent over 20 years in prison.

But it isn't the Board that left me with any understanding about why or how I should go on. It was Marcus Aurelius who said, "Think of yourself as dead. You have lived your life. Now, take what's left and live it properly."

And that's what I'll do.