

Surviving & Growing In the New York State Prison System – Part 2

By Matthew Hattley



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On the flip side, there have been days where I woke up and just felt like giving up the daily struggle for a better tomorrow, and simply blending in with my environment... abandoning all or my morals, principles and dreams. Feeling alone will do this to you; this is where some will join a gang or start doing drugs. In the past, I would turn to my family for additional strength to get me back on track. Today, I basically rely on the knowledge that a large percentage of society honestly believes that “all individuals convicted of a violent offense are not worthy of receiving a second chance.” In reality, many of us simply made some terrible/wrong choices. Therefore, I must continue to remain strong and focused so that I can return home and prove these individuals wrong. Yes, I can show them better than I can tell them; actions speak louder than words.

Also, today’s youth must realize that coming to prison should NOT be perceived as a “badge of honor,” but rather as a “badge of dishonor.” There is absolutely nothing to be proud of concerning a stint in prison. Honestly, it’s a living hell, especially if you have to spend 10, 15, or 20 years in here. Being removed from your family and loved ones for such an extended period of time is extremely painful. You exchange your freedom, just the ability to move around as you please, for a life in a controlled environment, always having someone tell you what and when you are allowed to do the things you do. It’s a place where someone is always watching you and privacy no longer exists — not a pleasant feeling.

Then you have to consider the visits and correspondence that don’t happen and never arrives, even though they are promised. People out there in society get caught up in their own lives; we cease to be a priority. So, feeling depressed and lonely in prison is neither new, nor an

exception; it’s the norm. There will be many nights when it’s impossible to sleep because you are confronted with your own demons and you can’t escape them. These events can drain your energy and your desire to keep moving forward... but you must not allow this to occur! The daily struggle to regain your liberty is anything but easy. However, if you remain strong, you will eventually be rewarded with your freedom.

I yearn for the opportunity to sleep on a real mattress, instead of a piece of cotton-filled plastic; to walk down neighborhood streets instead of these concrete halls; to go to the mall and the park with my grandchildren, not just some razor wire enclosed area; to go shopping at an actual super market, not the facility commissary; to be able to call or visit family and friends whenever the urge surfaces and not wait for designated times and days; to eat my meals on a table in a dining room, not a mess hall; to drive a vehicle again, not just ride a state bus; to take a trip on public transportation again without wearing handcuffs and shackles; and to be able to sleep next to a woman on a daily basis, not just the three or four times a year that those lucky enough to receive conjugal visits can. These are just some of the things we took for granted until they were no longer a part of the equation. Welcome to the frustrated reality of the prisoner.

The bottom line on this is that our life on earth is far too precious and short to be wasted. Crime and violence really do not pay. Take my personal experience as your example: do NOT make the same negative decisions. Be conscious of your actions. Take advantage of every program and educational opportunity available to you. If they aren’t there, work with your community leaders to restore them. Collectively, anything can be accomplished. It merely requires hard work and dedication. To learn more contact Prison Action Network at (518) 253-7533 or check out their blog at prisonaction.blogspot.com. They have a Facebook page, too, though, of course I have never seen it.

And to anyone out there who doesn’t believe me, or

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who thinks they will be the exception to the rule and beat the odds at doing wrong, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision has a secure cage waiting just for you. The alternative to that cell is your local cemetery, of course. I strongly urge you to reconsider all your options. The choice is yours to make... Choose wisely, my brothers and sisters; you only get one life to live, don’t waste it in here!

I look forward to having the opportunity of living a prosperous life with my family, especially my grandchildren, as a FREE man. Where I can finally become an asset to my community, as opposed to a liability. To live a normal life after 25 years of incarceration.

I know there will be challenges, but I look forward to them, too.