

How Is 40 Years Not Enough?

By J. Fetty

I have a friend who is very known around Ohio Reformatory For Women, she has been incarcerated 40 years on a 15-life sentence. She was 18 years young when an unfortunate event occurred that changed many lives in 1979. The state of Ohio has raised her in a sense, and she was the first to do many things. She always sticks up for the underdog.

She goes forward each day with a light in this dark place that's so inspiring, even when she is in her own pains you'd never know it. I had the privilege of her walking into my life 10 years ago when she returned from Trumbull Pre-Release due to a chemical burn on her lungs (working the spill team for good ol' Ohio) but she overcame it. She's gone on many years inspiring women with her line dancing classes, and bringing smiles to the many lost spirits around here is def her speciality—from the young to the old she reaches them all. So we click'd instantly.

She has mentored me in many ways from guiding me how to 'do my time' from useful advice, how to

conserve, how to cook, spiritually, sharpening my senses MANY ways, all the fun prisony how to's and fix it's; shes done it and shared it with me. We laugh, we cry, we grow, we go forward.

Over the past 9 years shes ask'd me to be her "support person" at her board hearings 3 separate occasions, and this past one was a real hard blow for me. April Fools 2020, another 3 years given after approx 50 days of false hope, no tickets in the past 7 years, I mean when is someone given a second chance? From what I gather is that the state wants to see you change, well this lady is change she will change your mood if you're sad, if you're mad, she will change the direction in mid chaos, she will change your outlook when you are irrational. 60 days, 6 months or 6 numbers, you'll remember her.

My real problem is that the Ohio Parole Board tells her the reasoning she needs to stay 3 more years is the 'nature of her crime', and that will never change, BUT PEOPLE DO. The rehabilitation is here, yes. But no one will walk you through it or hold your hand to sign up for groups to really push open the doors that are closed to us. You must seek your own rehabilitation around here amongst the overcrowding.

After 40 years this lady has literally accomplished everything available. Her mother has passed, her brother as well. Her father is in early stages of dementia and her sister is suffering from severe fibromyalgia, whom both reside out of state. I mention this in view that the Ohio Parole board fails to see after all these years that people's support systems less'n and fitting back into society becomes more challenging alone based on networking alone.

So as a support person who happens to see the changes and fears w/ her own eyes, it's heartbreaking to read about the changes issued by the state parole board, and then hear the same ol' reasoning for denial all in the same year. Nothing has changed in the state's eyes, why can this be?

Ultimately the state has raised this lady, the state has made her the woman she is today which is honest, kind, consistent, resourceful, encouraging. What community would say, "No, we can't have this uplifting type of individual among us"? C'mon, how many years is enough to be "rehabilitated"? How do you admit to all your shortcomings on your panel, see a record that's proven change, and still want her TIME.

They want groups, programming, no tickets, support letters, job security-- done, done, and done. Yet here

is a case I truly believe is the longest living female incarcerated steady serving and following all these rules, still being denied a second chance, hell a first chance really, after all who's really lived a life at the age of 18?

I'm watching my dear friend's light dim. I know the hope being snatched away has caused lifers to take their own lives, they simply give up after years of poor diet, concrete and steel, the giving up seems easier.

Fate Is Never Fair

I do see the 10 years I've been here things change, people change, staff change. A lot of ways that were simple become challenging. There's no way three years from now her reintegration would be smoother. There's got to be some change for Ohio, but when?

While we wait for change I'm going to push with all the lessons and years of admiration to keep celebrating life. Here around us daily is the sick, the damaged, the broken, the unwanted, the feared, and untamed. With no distractions of the world the women helping one another do want change. I pray I'm one who can actually be around to see it first hand.

J. Fetty 4/3/20