

Journal of a GRAD Program

Gang Renouncement And Disassociation Program



A first-hand account of a former gang-member as he goes through the GRAD Program. This program is only offered to ex-gang members that “renounce” their membership to their former gang.

By José Angel Moreno, in prison in Texas

2018

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Journal of a GRAD Program

By José Angel Moreno, 51 years old, 33 years in prison, 22 of which on death row in Texas

Drawings (except cover) by J. Collazo, 55 years old, in and out of prison in Texas

April 16th, 2016 – The GRAD Program begins

On this day I made the decision to apply for and enter the GRAD Program. GRAD stands for Gang Renouncement and Disassociation. It's a bit of a misnomer because the program doesn't have anything to do with gangs nor does the program help gang members get out of gangs. Instead, what this program offers is a curriculum of valuable skills that help offenders succeed on the outside so that they don't re-offend and contribute to the high recidivism rate in the state of Texas. It just so happens that the only offenders that are offered an opportunity to partake in this program are ex-gang members. From what I have been told, the program is a huge success with only 22% of offenders that go through this program that eventually come back to prison.

The only thing I had to do in order to sign up for the program is to send a written request to the STG (Security Threat Group) officer.

April 21st, 2016 – The Disassociation Investigation starts

I received confirmation that my request has been received and was notified that my Disassociation Investigation 1 started this day. The DI consists of reading all my outgoing mail to see if I am in contact with active gang members and they will monitor any illegal notes that gangs send back and forth to each other to see if my name is mentioned in their notes. The DI lasts for one year.

May 22nd, 2017 – The interview

After waiting a little over a year I'm finally pulled out of my cell and escorted to the STG office so I can go through the interview process. Getting to the interview varies greatly in the amount of time one waits. Me and my friend Cheeseburger signed up together in the hope we would be in the same class but he ended up in the group ahead of me.

Another guy signed up before both of us and he's still not here in the program. Talking with some of the other guys in my group I've learned that signing up on certain units (like Coffield), the STG officers make inmates wait as long as several years.

The interview usually starts the day before when we are notified that we will be interviewed the next day. We are handed a sheet of paper and asked to write a statement that covers a list of subjects such as any gang hits we participated in, who our sponsor was, dates of meetings, and so on. The interview process is to fill in the details that most inmates omit in their statement. They want the names of the individuals that were hit, when and where it occurred, what criminal activity the gang is involved in, how the gang passes information amongst members, who the leaders are, and any other valuable information STG officers think they can extract from you.

How much of this information is required, is anyone's guess. It's very likely they abuse this opportunity to gather information about what is happening on their unit. STG officers constantly tell you that sometimes applications get rejected for insufficient information. This is probably a psychological trick to get you to open up and answer their probing questions. In my situation, I got out of my gang in 1998. All my information is outdated and useless. Eventually they noticed a pattern in all the names I was providing: they were names of people that were all deceased. Even my sponsor (godfather) was dead.

They thought I was cleverly evading their questions but I then pointed out that I was on death row and Texas was efficient at killing people who were under a sentence of death.

For someone just getting out of a gang, they will have fresh info and these questions are going to be shockingly intrusive. That's why most gangs don't give permission to their members to secretly attempt to sneak through the GRAD Program. The interview process is intended to verify the sincerity of the applicant's intentions by his willingness to answer questions that can be verified right there in front of them when they start digging in their computers and they put photos of people you mention and ask you "Is that him?" I was surprised by the amount of information that STG officers are granted access to. They can find individuals by nicknames, where they've been housed at specific times and they will ask you to verify them by their photo. I know of individuals that were denied at the interview process simply because they refused to provide enough information.

GRAD Program Phase I

August 21st, 2017 – The adventure begins

My adventure in the GRAD Program begins. I couldn't be any happier just for leaving the House of Pain (a.k.a. Eastham Unit). When I arrived at the Ellis Unit, it was like nostalgia and déjà vu – it felt like I was returning to my home. I left this Unit in 1999, after spending a dozen memorable years while I was on death row. The place has changed some after 18 years. The most obvious thing I immediately noticed was a tree that has grown toweringly right behind a guard tower I used to watch all the time. A new dorm was added to the unit. The small recreation yards are decrepit and no longer used. A third fence was installed inside the perimeter, reducing overall space.



The first sign that my custody status has changed or will change is when I was made to carry my own property all the way from the back gate to inside the building. That's not normal for me as I have spent the last 32 years of my life in Ad. Seg. and officers or their helpers are usually tasked with that exclusive service. After being physically inactive for the past couple of decades this simple, yet strenuous assignment left my heart beating so fast that when I went through the routine medical examinations, I had to be monitored until my heart rate came down to a safe 120 beats per minute.

In addition to medical examinations, I was also assessed by the psychiatric department, I went to a unit classification committee, my property was searched, and I was issued

necessary items – all standard procedures for anyone arriving at a unit. The only GRAD related activity is a short lecture on what is expected from me in terms of behavior while progressing through the program.

This special day was marked with a spectacular full solar eclipse that made its way right down the middle of the United States, hopefully an omen of good things to come.

September 6th, 2017 – Orientation on Phase I

Orientation on Phase I: Today, I finally went through orientation. The week that I arrived here, a catastrophic hurricane hit the south coast of Texas and all the prisons in that area had to be evacuated. Some of the evacuees arrived here and that shut everything down for about two weeks including the GRAD Program. We passed the time doing whatever we wanted just like I was in Ad. Seg, waiting for the electricity to be turned back on. But nobody really cares, everyone is just happy to be here and you can hear the cheerfulness in everyone's voices and attitudes.

Orientation consisted of having our counselors (Ms. Kelly and Mr. Phillips) stand in front of our cells and explain what will happen during Phase I of the program. Then we were all given a big folder with all our 30 lessons and several sheets explaining the GRAD Program in more detail. Each lesson was labeled with a subject concerning either substance abuse or anger management. Each lesson accompanies a video. Finally, we were all equipped with a green bracelet that identifies us as part of the GRAD Program as opposed to another program (Divergence) that is a GRAD Program just with another name. They wear a yellow bracelet and are housed on the same wing.

Everyone was even more excited to be through orientation and learn that we will start classes on the next day. It differs only in that participants arrive straight from the streets via a diagnostic/transfer facility and it's only six months long. They do very similar lessons, albeit slightly different, and even the school class curriculum is similar.

Technically called ASDP (Ad. Seg. Divergence Program). Now there is a third GRAD

Program simply called Population GRAD. This is for members of gangs that are not labeled STG – such as TANGO, Crips, White Knights, etc. – so that they can remove the status from their records. They come directly from G.P. (general population) and failure in the program results in return to G.P. This program is bigger than GRAD and Divergence put together.

September 7th, 2017 – The first day of lessons

The first day of lessons consisted of watching a half hour video and answering some essay-type questions. So far there has been no right or wrong questions just questions that probe into our past life before incarceration and questions that make us think about making the correct changes in our life. Classes are Monday through Thursday and after classes on Thursday we are rewarded with a movie. The movie that I saw today, the first television I have watched in over eight years, was a movie I have wanted to see for a long time: Friday Night Lights. I have a special interest with this movie because I have a friend that played football for the same school in the movie and the second part to this story is currently being written by the original author. My friend will likely be the main character in this story and in several years the movie version will also come out. The movie was played twice and after watching so much television in one day I was mentally exhausted. All in all the first day of classes was a good day and everyone was talking about how much they enjoyed the movie.

September 29th, 2017 – Some don't take it seriously

I'm beginning to notice that not everyone in a class graduates from the GRAD Program. That's because you always have a troublemaker. Some guys just don't take this program seriously. I hear them say that if they get kicked out they can always try it again later. One guy appears to have signed up as a joke to just see what this program is about. Another one is a natural born instigator that will never submit to authority. I have to

admit, even I had my own personal motives for getting into this program (getting off of the Eastham Unit!) but it's nothing like these other guys and I have every intention to graduate from this program.

Today, an inmate in my class got caught making alcohol in his cell. Coincidentally the lessons we are doing right now are about alcohol addiction. But to think of making alcohol in the GRAD Program is just incomprehensible. That's like shooting the finger at the administration. That one guy's actions caused officials to punish everyone by searching all the cells and writing disciplinary cases on whatever they could find just so that those individuals have one strike against them. A second strike results in expulsion. So now several individuals have to be really careful not to get another disciplinary case in the next few months. This tactic by officials teaches everyone that we have to work together as a group. Someone should have told that individual he was insane just to have the idea and quite foolish to actually carry it out. But obviously no one tried.

I've watched two other groups already make it to Phase II and when I compare my group to those other groups I can see how I was dealt a bad hand. My group is constantly getting reprimanded for one thing or another. Don't get me wrong, there is some really good guys in my group. But there's also those that don't care if they graduate and they sometimes draw the attention of officials to the rest of us.

October 6th, 2017 – In case you are kicked out

This is an update on the guy that got caught making alcohol.... Today, him and a couple of other guys from other classes that also got kicked out of the program (for fighting with their cellies) were transferred back to Ad. Seg. This isn't a perfect program obviously but I just assumed that there would be more enthusiasm and cooperation to actually complete it. When you get transferred back to Ad. Seg. you get sent to the unit you arrived from. For me that would be disastrous as I signed up for the GRAD Program in order to get off the unit I was assigned to at the time... The House of Pain.

October 13th, 2017 – Life will change dramatically



I will soon be on my way to Phase II. Life will change dramatically for me. I will have a cellie. I will have to walk to the chow hall for all my meals. I will have to take group showers. I will have to carry my commissary back to my cell, and I will have to continue attending classes in a group environment. There may be other things I may have to do as well such as standing in line at the pill window for my medications and so on. I'm not going to be completely in general population just yet. My group of 17 will be constantly escorted by an officer everywhere we go. I'm losing my luxurious 5-star, personal service

where everything is delivered right to my penthouse suite.

October 29th, 2017 – Completing phase I

Last week they locked down the unit for the semi-annual search of everyone's property. The week practically flew by and tomorrow they will finish the searching with my wing and the lockdown will be over on Tuesday. Wow, I've never seen a whole unit searched in just six days. Another "never" is that we received at least one hot meal every day. When someone told me I'd receive a hot meal everyday on lockdown I didn't believe it.

Tomorrow I'm supposed to do my last lesson and complete Phase I of the program. I will be done with Phase I this week and as soon as cells are available in Phase II, I will have to move into a cell with another inmate. If I get the right cellie it will be nice, if I get the wrong one, it will be not-so-nice.

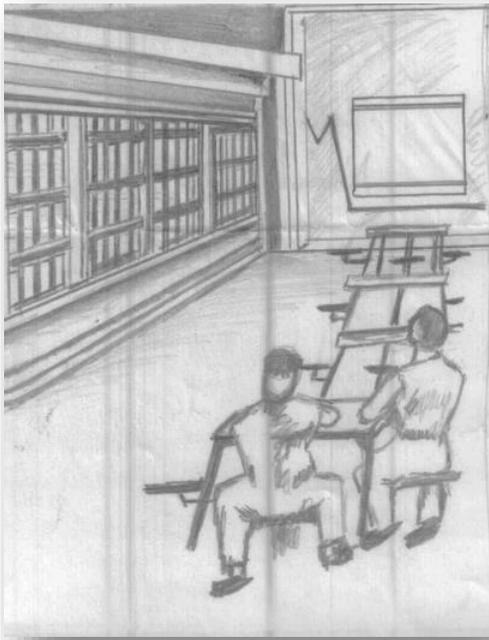
The next class (#167) has arrived and the wing is once again full. It's amazing how many people I know here. It's because ex-gang members congregate together and I met all these guys on the Michael Unit and the House of Pain. Everyone is happy to be here and there is a lot of laughter and playfulness. Officers like to work here because it is such a pleasant atmosphere. I wish I could stay here for the rest of my life. I would be really happy here.

GRAD Program Phase II

November 17th, 2017 – Phase II begins

Phase II begins. It starts with a traditional ritual of making all the participants carry their property from one end of the prison to the other. Most inmates travel light so it's not a problem. Some inmates are accustomed to having their property transported for them so they accumulate a lot of property while in Ad. Seg. This ritual is done to teach everyone to keep their property to a minimum. Then there's inmates like me who are writ-writers and have an excessive amount of property, because it's mostly legal material. People like me receive a cart to move our property wherever we go. But in the GRAD Program that privilege is not provided. So I have to rely on my fellow classmates to help me carry my extra bags. We all made it but barely. The officer thought I was about to have a heart attack. Others looked just as bad as me.

I finally (!) get a cellie today. I know the guy really well because he was my neighbor for a



while on Phase I. He is easy to get along with but he likes to talk a lot. A LOT!

After putting my property in the cell it wasn't long before they called us for the supper meal and for the first time in my life I ate with 59 others crammed into a small room. We were given about five minutes to eat and the experience was anything but enjoyable.

The next day, a Saturday, there's no classes on the weekend so everyone goes to the dayroom at the same time. This time everyone is crammed into this 40ft x 40ft (13mx13m)

room for three hours. There's ten tables for four inmates each, three benches for four inmates each, and the four stools in front of the telephones that don't work. The sign above the door accurately says: 56 seated occupancies. And by strict policy everyone is required to be seated at all times. If all 60 inmates attended dayroom time then four of them would have to stand.

There's two televisions to watch but with the cacophony of noise it's impossible to hear them. We could ask to have the TVs put on any of the satellite channels available to watch whatever we want. One TV stay on sports and the other on movies. To follow dialogue we "read" the closed-captioning scrolling across the screen and miss all the cool visual effects. Most of the members of my class were just as uncomfortable as me being around so many people. We have to stay sitting on the stools, jammed packed in the dayroom, and not knowing most of the people around us. I even found someone that was in much worse condition than me.

November 18th, 2017 – Sharing a cell

Of all the classmates I talked with, nobody got a good night's sleep. Sharing a cell with someone else is an experience hard to describe. It's an eerie feeling to hear noise in your cell that is not supposed to be there. I have to keep reminding myself there's someone else in my cell now. All night long everyone has to use the toilet and noises constantly wake their cellie up. This is going to take some getting used to.

November 19th, 2017 – I remain vigilant every minute

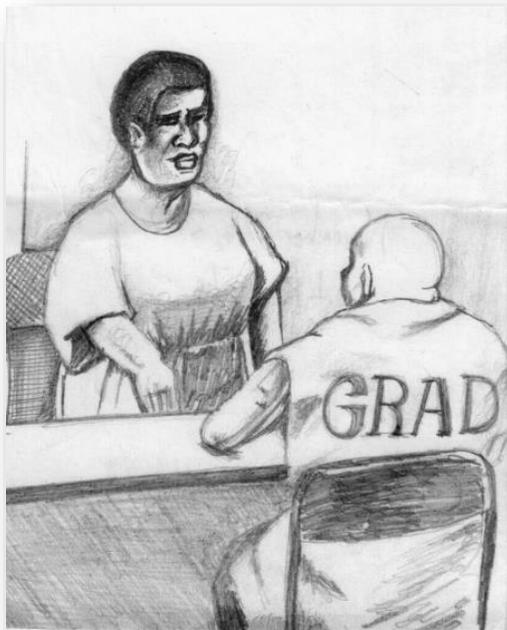
I am now learning that I have to remain vigilant every minute of the day because our cell doors are opened for different reasons and we have to jump out of our cells and be ready to go wherever it is we need to go. The doors only stay open for about 30 seconds. Yesterday, I missed my opportunity to shower because I couldn't gather my shower

things quickly enough. Today I was ready and I experienced my first “group shower” with about 39 other men. Some men were so uncomfortable they showered with their underwear on. The experience is like how cattle are herded through the chutes at holding pens. Everywhere I go I am herded here and there. I get in line for everything; food tray, count, showers, commissary, mail, necessities, recreation, and classes (which haven’t started yet). I no longer get any special treatment and I miss it tremendously.

November 20th, 2017 – My life is chaos

Friday 17th I was transferred to Phase II. Since then my life has been pure chaos. One nightmare after the other. Yes, I’ve now had a group shower and that’s a horrible situation. Group recreation is bad as well. The worst part is that my entire day is filled with so many activities that I no longer have any time for myself. Even when I am in my cell, I’m waiting for the next moment when my cell opens up so that I can go somewhere.

I go to recreation with my friend Cheeseburger and he tells me that he used to write his mother all the time and now he hasn’t written her in about a month because he gets so



little time for himself. Every single day is like this. I’ve figured out that I can take my paper and pen to recreation and write at the table. The atmosphere is chaotic but I really need to learn to get used to it. I am no longer handcuffed or restrained in any way. That’s a small benefit for all the crap I have to put up with.

November 27th, 2017 – The first class

I attended my first class today. It's a cognitive intervention program (CIP). There's 17 participants in my class (#166). It's very similar to being back in school, albeit, elementary school. We made a name tag to put on our desk using color pencils and markers so the teacher can learn who we are. Then we did our first lesson on the subject of happiness. Everyone is expected to write all their answers in a journal book and then everyone has to stand at a podium to read aloud the answers. The subject on our very first day was what brings happiness to me? Of course I turned my focus to food and explained how food is always a gastronomic pleasure.

Classes are Monday through Friday. Usually we have another class (anger management) but that teacher wasn't available on our first day. All together both classes last about four hours. My weekdays are constantly filled with some activity starting at 7 in the morning when we go to class and stay there until 11am. Then we eat lunch until about noon. Afterwards we get two hours in the dayroom to watch television. Showers are around 2pm. At 4pm we eat dinner and afterwards we go outside to recreation for about an hour. At the end of the day I have a few hours to do my personal chores. In addition to these activities, I spend a lot of time standing in lines for count time, searches, or in preparation for some event like receiving medication, meals, getting to order our commissary etc. This hectic routine is a drastic contrast to the sedentary lifestyle I have lived in Ad. Seg. for the past decades. It is taking a lot of getting used to. Occasionally someone decides it's too much for them and so they drop out during this Phase II. It's called "crashing out". I am not considering crashing out, certainly not because I can't handle it. I can do this program standing on my head. I don't like it but I will finish it.

I learned that my graduation date is 5-11-18. Graduation dates rarely – if ever – change. They describe them as set in stone.

December 4th, 2017 – Entry in the GRAD journal

The main change in my life was caused by a maturing of my soul. One day, one week, or over a period of time I finally realized how foolish I had been living life and even more slowly I started defining the changes I needed to make and then began implementing these changes.

My previous direction was mostly negative.

After being locked up for so long there's little difference – for me – between one custody level or another, one prison environment or other. Finally signing up for the GRAD Program is a minor change that only affects my comfort level in my environment. I'm not choosing to make a change NOW. The change was made a long time ago. I got out of my gang in 1998 – a few years after I decided to make my change. I have been living in the new direction I choose a long time ago and I am much more happy now.

December 10th, 2017 – My cellie

The class (#160) that graduated started with 18 participants but only 8 graduated! The rest didn't make it mainly because of fighting right here in Phase II where I am at the moment.

I lost my cellie but nobody knows why they moved me to another cell with a psychopath. All the speculation by inmates and staff is that me and my cellie were too far apart in age: he was 32 and me 50. My new cellie has gotten kicked out of the GRAD three other times for fighting with his cellie. I can easily see why. Fortunately he leaves to Phase III sometime this week.



January 19th, 2018 – Entry in the GRAD journal

LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF: Hey dumbass, pay attention here. I know you think you know it all because I am you and I've already been through the things that you haven't experienced yet. You think you have everything figured out. You think you don't need to read this letter and you won't want to believe what I'm writing because you're a dumbass. I can tell you every single thing that we did wrong growing up so that you don't do the mistakes I did but that won't completely solve the problem. You will then make new mistakes, I know because you're a dumbass.

I can give you a plan on how to succeed in life with specifics on what to learn, what to invest in and generally what direction you need to go in. But your dumbass will probably screw that up. So I'm going to keep it simple for your stupid ass. So once again, pay attention here wanna-be Einstein. All of the problems you have experienced so far and all the ones you have yet to experience will all revolve around one single thing.

That one important thing is disobedience. I know the problem you have with it. And I know you will eventually get over it. Don't wait dumbass. Do it now. Start obeying. Obey mom and dad. Obey rules, policies, and most importantly laws. Do not break any laws, particularly felonies, because then your dumbass will have to learn to obey prison rules. And learn you will. That's all I have to help you out. Good luck dumbass.

February 4th, 2018 – Phase II is okay

Phase II of the GRAD Program is okay. That's because I don't have a cellie anymore and I don't have to work. That will change in Phase III. Do I see some good in this new life? Of course. But I can't focus strictly on that and ignore all the bad that also comes with it. I have to weigh it, accordingly and see which outweighs the other. I won't be able to do that until I get to Phase III. I also won't know if I have any fears that didn't come true until I get to Phase III. Right now I'm in a privileged situation. When I get to Phase III then I'll be able to better answer your questions.

Let me be crystal clear: There will never be a phase when we will actually talk about gangs. Like I wrote in my previous letter, the GRAD Program is not about gangs. It's about teaching inmates the skills and tools to succeed in life and never return to prison.

I don't know what the recidivism rate is in Texas but I'm sure the number is much higher than 22%. There is no contract to sign that I will never join a gang again. It would be totally useless because that would not stop someone from joining a gang again if that is what they wanted to do and there's no way they could punish them if they did. Right now, gang officers keep an eye on all ex-gang members while in prison. If they join another gang and they obtain the evidence to prove it they lock that inmate up in Ad. Seg. just like any other gang member. But they won't get another opportunity to go through the GRAD Program again.

February 24th, 2018 – The completion ceremony

I am now about two-thirds of the way through Phase II. Since my last entry, I was terribly sick with that potent flu virus that killed thousands of people in the U.S. this past season. So I wasn't up to much writing. I am back to myself again so let me tell you what I have been up to: I have been to three GRAD completion ceremonies so far. I will likely attend two more next month.

They are an hour long and it consists of several speakers, including an offender representing the graduating class. Family members of those graduating are allowed to attend and it's held in the 120-seat chapel on the south end of the prison. All of the other GRAD classes in Phase II are required to attend. Afterwards, we all return to our cells but those graduating stay to visit briefly with their loved ones and to eat cake and cookies.

Apart from attending graduation ceremonies, we are also required to attend seminar-type meetings where special guest speakers give lectures. Furthermore, we had both the unit warden and the assistant warden come to our class – on separate days – to give some

really good speeches. I was most impressed with Warden Roesler's speech. He is very articulate and makes a great public speaker. When he asked if anyone had any questions, the class used the opportunity to make complaints. He then would think about the issue and proceed to graciously dissect the problem into such a petty and trivial complaint to show everyone that there are bigger problems in the world and that everyone else – including people on the outside – also has to deal with similar problems on a daily basis. But his point was always that we shouldn't let these inadequacies and minor policy violations side-track us and keep us from completing our main objective graduating from the program.

Our class (#166) has really come together. We've only lost two participants from our class and the second one just didn't want to be in this program so he "crashed out". The material that we are being taught is really good. Right now (and for the last two weeks) we have been studying The Franklin Reality Model. For those that know what that is, you'll realize that it's a valuable tool for everyone to have. Corporate employees, lawyers, doctors and other executives pay lots of money to attend seminars to hear people like Hyrum Smith, teach them this very simple technique. In class we got to watch his three-hour seminar on television. Next week we will begin studying Abraham Maslow's Pyramid. It's the exact same concept but Maslow takes it to greater depths, including the top of the pyramid which is self-actualization and finally what he calls transcendence. It's all very interesting and yesterday we found out how wonderful our teacher is when we had to endure another teacher until our teacher finally arrived to class.

The class I have described so far is cognitive intervention. Another class we take is anger management. We watch a lot of videos and movies in that class. Coincidentally, right now we are half-way through watching the movie "Anger Management" with Adam Sandler, Jack Nicholson and Marisa Tomei. We have seen some really good movies that have made many of us, myself included, cry.

March 17th, 2018 – Our journal

Every day we have an essay-question to answer. We write the answer in our journals. Then everyone has to take a turn at the podium reading what they wrote. Unless you get called out for medical. Three of us in our class don't bother writing the answer in our journal anymore. We just go to the podium and improvise an answer. My answers usually incite or provoke more questions than anyone else. Sometimes it becomes an insightful class-wide discussion that can last a half-hour or more. Mainly because those questions don't apply to someone that will spend the rest of their life in prison.

So, my classmates sympathize with me and so they try to encourage and inspire me to do something in prison. ... What the class wants me to do is sign up for a program or class where I can mentor other inmates. This requires a commitment to go someplace every day and be there for several hours. I will have very little time when I have a job. If I can substitute it for a job assignment then that would be great. But all those classes are after work hours. I care for others but not so much that I will devote that much time.

April 1st, 2018 – Transition to General Population

The first day of this week marks my 32nd year in an Ad. Seg. environment because I still haven't made the complete transition to general population. The day we transition has become a stressful trigger (in class we learned it's called a "stressor") to many in my class because the school administration has changed it more than once already. We are already past the four months allotted to Phase II and just this week they added another couple of weeks to our completion date of April 13th to April 27th. When administrators saw the reaction from our class they immediately started reconsidering their decision and so they modified it to April 16th.

Last week we almost lost another class member when he was caught out-of-place in another inmate's cell getting a tattoo. He argued that he was covering up a gang tattoo so they allowed him to stay.

Yesterday, I attended the completion graduation ceremony for Class # 165. The next one (Class # 166) will be mine on May 11th in just five weeks. This has been the sixth graduation our class has been allowed to attend. Before us, other classes were allowed to attend a maximum of one graduation. This program is changing in many ways during the time I have been here. Before the ceremony I was even allowed to go to the area where the graduates were sitting so I could hug and talk with my friend Cheeseburger! His class graduated with 13. If everyone in our class makes it to graduation, our class will set a record with 17 graduates.

April 15th, 2018 – The new custody level – GRAD Program Phase III

We finished everything at school on Friday. Took all our tests, brought back our journals, etc. But we were told that we still need to attend on Monday. Either way we will have nothing to do.

Afterwards we will probably get assigned our new clothing (two-piece instead of a jumper) and be escorted to the unit classification committee where I will be given my new custody level (S3), assigned my new housing area (G3) and assigned a job.

April 16th, 2018 – General population

Today was the big day. With my school finished it's on to general population. The day started with a hearing before the Unit Classification Committee. It's a procedural process that must be done and the administration uses it to assign a job to us. I was originally assigned to the chair factory after I mentioned my experience with wood working. However, the administration was in such a hurry to move me and the rest of my class to general population that they made many mistakes – including giving me a job assignment that requires me to be a G2 status because the chair factory is located outside of the prison building. Another mistake they made is that I was assigned to a housing

area with everyone else in minimum custody when I'm supposed to be living with nothing but offenders that have long prison sentences. So I went to the wrong cell, spent several hours cleaning it and putting my property away only to be told to pack up because I'm moving to another cell... all that work on the same day.

Just from all that activity on the first day I was sore and hurting. I immediately received my new job assignment – working in the kitchen – but I was too sore to go to work. I have 72 hours to report for work so I waited until the second day. I'm assigned to share a cell with a 64 year old man who is very respectful and pleasant to get along with. The wing I am assigned to is calm and peaceful. The overall experience of getting released into general population is mixed with both pleasure and trepidation.

G.P. (general population) is like being free again because I can go anywhere I want, within the prison building. That is one of the very few benefits I gained from transitioning to G.P. and I have to admit that it is a pleasure. The trepidation comes from the fact I will now have to change cellies constantly, I will have to deal with many individuals daily. I will have to work, and I will have to put up with the guards in charge of movement. But the movement is sooo annoyingly controlled. I'm constantly waiting, waiting, waiting in line after line after line. The huge crowds of other offenders doesn't bother me like it should to anyone that's been in solitary confinement for 32 straight years. The GRAD Program helped to get me adjusted.

April 26th, 2018 – Wasting time

My job assignment and my experience in G.P. doesn't really have anything to do with the focus of this GRAD article but I will elaborate briefly. My first day on the job went fairly well. I do detail work which means I clean the things and areas that others are supposed to clean but the stains are difficult to remove so it's left to the detail crew. It's a fairly easy job but I was once again sore after my first full day of work and I needed the

weekend (which are my days off) to recover. I've now worked an entire week and I'm certain my job is simple.

My frustration is how I waste so much time going places. My job is the perfect example. I wake up at 5:30 in the morning, I have to go to the dayroom at 6:00 to wait to be picked up for work. The kitchen supervisor picks me up between 6:30 and 7:00. After searches, waiting in lines, counting, putting up my shower things, getting my work gear, I usually don't start working until 7:30 to 8:00. Then I work until 9:00 for the big count. I eat at 9:30. Then I stand around to leave the kitchen at around 11:00 so I can be escorted to the bath house. I eventually get back to my cell around noon and I just spent a quarter of my day just so I can perform about an hour and a half worth of work.

I like the assignment I have because I get back to my cell early in the day. I could then spend the rest of the day outside on the recreation yard, the gym, at church, or wherever I can obtain a pass to get into. Eating a meal at the chow hall can take more than two hours because I have to wait in the dayroom just to go and when I return I have to wait in the dayroom until the wing officer allows everyone to return to their cells.

June 29th, 2018 – My graduation ceremony

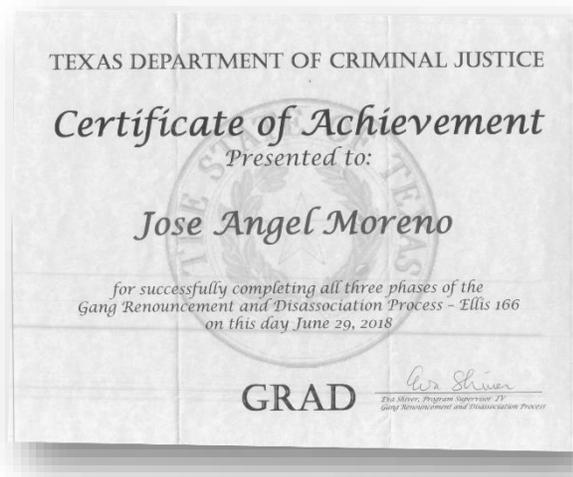
Today is the culmination of the reason I was transferred to the Ellis Unit. The day started anticlimactic and I was even feeling a little sad that it was all over. I thought of all my classmates that would have family members attend the graduation ceremony and it was a little depressing because I wouldn't have anyone there. I even joked with my cellie, telling him that I would rather go to work, than attend my own graduation ceremony.



Immediately I started questioning myself, if I really felt that way.

Well, I'm glad that I did attend the graduation ceremony because it was a very special experience. I attended a total of seven ceremonies and not only was it unique because it was my own graduation but it was different from the others due to the tremendous speech by one of the speakers that made our teacher start crying.

And of course that made several of my classmates shed some tears too. I didn't know anyone else was crying (because I didn't want to turn around and let everyone else see me) until after the ceremony when they admitted it to me. Ironically, someone in our class once asked our teacher if she had ever cried at a graduation and she responded that she has not cried. After the ceremony I spoke with our teacher and the first thing I said to her was, "There's a first time for everything". She knew exactly what I was talking about and immediately agreed.



The only thing remaining to write about is whether I will remain in general population or if I will return to Ad. Seg. After all, I only signed up for the GRAD Program to get out of the House of Pain. Now I am fully immersed in being a general population inmate. I have a job, and I have a cellie. The two things I hated so much that they kept me in Ad.

Seg for so long a time. I still don't like giving my free time to provide labor for the prison without getting wage compensation. And not all the cellies are as easy to get along with.

I've decided to continue to postpone my decision even more on this dilemma. In seven months I will be eligible to be promoted to G2 custody status and as a G2 I can obtain a better job with less hours and I could move to a dorm where I would live in my own cubicle without a cellie. Semi- privacy. So things in my life can improve enough for me to stay in general population. My adventure has only begun. Again. * * * *