



“It’s easy to see that being incarcerated was a blessing for me”

By Donald Dillbeck, 57 years old, 30 years on death row

When I look back on the paths I took as a youth, it’s clear to see that being locked up in all likelihood is what saved my life. Had I been left to continue down the road I was going, the chances of overdosing would have been extremely high, or I would have self-destructed in some way or another. I would have been an alcoholic, been a terrible father if I had had children, and they would have continued the cycle of substance abuse, too. So yes, it’s easy to see that being incarcerated was a blessing for me.

I finally woke up and realized that I and I alone have to take responsibility and yes, I may have had a very bad childhood, and my early adulthood, if you want to call it that, sucked. There just weren’t any excuses to be had. I had to take ownership of my actions. I decided change was really needed and I would change. So, I decided I would live my life much like that of a monk in a monastery and take advantage of solitude rather than fight it. I made this place work for me. Being alone and having all the time in the world.

I learned how to meditate and sit still and face all the inner demons and took opportunities to grow by trying to not only understand myself but others too. So, this place has been a friend, a place that rather than struggle with I grew and became the man I am today. So, I don’t complain about being in here. Nor do I regret the 30 years being in one of these cages. Not at all!

I can’t give the two people’s lives back that I took, there is no going back, that’s totally impossible, but what I can do is make a positive difference in the people’s lives whom I now touch as a way of paying it forward. 30 years ago may just as well be a million years ago. I say this because the person who committed the crimes is so far removed from who I am today, his bones are not even ashes or fragments to be found. What happened then doesn’t mean today, tomorrow or anytime to come that I can’t use that tragedy to bring goodness to the people I can touch.

This place gets a lot of the credit. Yes, I’m the one who had to do all the work, to learn how to raise myself up by my own boot strings, but this place gave me the opportunity, so it’s been a friend and I’m grateful for the experience. although I wouldn’t recommend a place like this to anyone else, but it is do-able, and transformation can be had with hard work and with persistence.

August 2020