
FROM POEM INTO SPOKEN WORD

Jason N. Smith

Everything inside is slow again today,
and we have got through April to May,
but unlocked for showers one by one
and faces reveal that something's wrong.

A prisoner is hanged and presumed dead
Now although CPR there's no pulse read.
While in my dreams and in bed I snuggled
my mate fought for breath and struggled.

Once orderly and cleaner on the servery
now there's crime scene tape barring entry.
I can still see his smiling young face,
and fortitude to get through this place.

We chatted yesterday, he seemed OK,
even touched fist throughout the day.
Happy go lucky when he walked landings,
but going like that defies understanding

Why man? Why? I just cannot get it.
I always thought you were mentally fit,
What took off the hope from your face,
and your presence within this place?

You didn't have to suffer in silent pain,
With lines of mates to listen, explain.
Whatever it was we could have shared.
Maybe you did not know that I cared.

It goes without saying you'll be missed
the brews we shared, us getting pissed.
I'll always look for your bouncing walk,
but I pray you are beyond these walls.

He was born into the world with so much to offer, but within a capitalising mass production of assets off-setting taxes, he become just a number, in a place where men walk shell-shocked and numb, but mentally they are cocked guns expecting hammers to drop. Yet another loss within a prison system afflicted victims, until lying there limp. But let us go back a bit to him sitting in a cell alone amid his hell trying to atone for or flee from inner demons, while unknowingly not seeing three mamba fiends creeping, until he feels that drug-crazed cast glass shattering his visage into millions of fissures and sharp homemade shank knives malicious glint reflecting his tormentors eyes under a harsh prison cell light.

Let's glide on by along his journey down a long dark corridor, because as you now realise he's been through horrid wars, but before that, he would dine on upper crust crumbs descended like dead stars as he stuffed them into pockets and stood looking through scarred eye sockets believing that one day, one day life skies would open wide and he would be allowed to fly across dividing lines, after dragging himself through grit believing he can have much more than this life it seems he's been in since the beginning.

But now he's no longer living as his body lies there limp, and where it should be his family next to him, he's on journey after being zipped tight into a black bag and left on a gurney in an overcrowded corridor before being pushed into that cold sliding mortuary drawer .

But let us pause, let's pause and leave that parked there while we talk about 2062 suicides since 1990, 59 homicides and 1002 awaiting classification. In this nation in 2016 there were 354 bodies lying limp, now with a growing number of mind altering substances, drugs, prison deaths are set to rise higher than inflation ever could.

Hold up, let's pull up and look back a bit to before him lying limp on a gurney and let's reverse the journey back from an overcrowded NHS corridor, to back before being zipped into that black body bag and before he desperately... Wait, let me pause a second and take a deep breath before reliving an etched picture of a hanging corpse deeply scored into thoughts and heart shredding sounds echoing down long linages of unjustly cut short family trees, with deep grief not understanding the loss of life after entering a hungry hole and futile struggle to survive.

It is not right the slashing and burning of budgets and much needed resources for personal causes of political decisions breaking already broken systems, and when presented with facts and figures there on a page they still do not listen. What's with them in this day and age? Is it a lack of strong political leadership that can fix the controversy of prisoners being held in overcrowded conditions, because rising levels of violence show fear is a daily reality for people in prisons.

But how many more body temperatures are to drop morbidly cold into an enfolding embrace and race prematurely away until erased. How much more DNA spread under harsh lights from sharp knives let slip from slick grips to clatter within impressionable minds and reflect a perpetrators eyes.

How many more mother's hands striving to dam leaking out heart shredding sounds echoing down long lineages of unjustly cut short family trees, How many more on fatherless journeys blown here and there like a directionless breeze, and how much more denying the un-hiding of prisons hidden divisions that when revealed can widen realisations, so that the village decides to raise a fatherless child that expects to be accepted, but is institutionally rejected.

Or will more politicking politicians continue picking from a mixed bag of politrix and try to 'tridently' strive out of situations with misfired stereotypes percolating wildly inside and regurgitating behaviours? Institutionalisation in monolithic states relationships dictate, so without healthy communication weighty matters become lost in red tape or hidden away under carpets for another day that may never come.

But gaps cannot be bridged, chasms filled and relationships healed without a two way receptive conversation. Communication break barriers, dictates progression, acceptance, inclusion, support, stability and simple gift of 'being' settled, but there is a term titled resettlement entailing giving advice, guidance and training to help humans re-settle into normal life.

However, for those from broken homes and walking around in states of hyper vigilance instigated by abuse, past trauma, trauma of prison environments, mental illness and never even lived a life of simply being, the term re-settle falls short and another term needs to be coined. Settlement.

Prison should be ascribed a parent role in the context of a parent child connection and then examined to see how does applies for those within the system. If an institution can be ascribed to a parent child relationship, how do we describe effects of actions or inactions to address underlying issues of children in their care who have previously spoken through negative behaviours, and just what are the responsibilities of a parent to both the child and society?

If it takes a village to raise a child then by extension in the topology of a world community what are the responsibilities of all other parents/institutions to underprivileged, traumatised and disadvantaged parts of its body? In a society of community, relationships are paramount in success or failure. How we relate to others can determine acceptance or rejection and unhealthy perceptions stemming from under developed relationship growth is born out broadly both inside and outside the justice system.

Healthy relationship growth promotes trust and a sense of safety which helps to walk confidently, how is it for those traumatised and living in an environment that is not safe and trust is rewarded with negative consequences. One consequence is released prisoners do not make long term plans because of unpredictability and fear instilled within hostile environments.

Another consequence is lack of relationship ties causing an 'everyman for himself mentality,' which works contrary to a community society. In prison institutions prisoners do not have access to internet, have to pay above three times the rate for telephone calls and are unprepared for society in its current state; there is a social divide with demarcation lines between those linked into community via ability and experience and those who do not.

People living before internet or mobile phone technology communicated and established face to face relationships. However, in this millennia isolation and depression is increasing and attention spans are decreasing in a click get linked quick mind-set mentality. Societal progression is now a networked relationship and without necessary education, skills and experience the unprepared do not progress and are cut short like Wi-Fi signals turned off.

The prison system is currently reacting to matters trying to contain while working with budgets in deficit rather than proactively equipping necessary skills, education and experience to bridge divides, despite the good will of

many working within the system. With austerity, inflation and the nation struggling to maintain a grip on world economical markets, societies eyes and resources will continue to have a blind spot for those beyond the margin.

Comment

Congesting negatives into one place breeds and condenses even more negativity.

A prison environment conditions behaviours and people establish ties that re-establish outside prison; whether individuals are aware or not, environments influence. Too much prisoner stimuli are a promotion of crime, drugs, money, hostility and mistrust. Inevitably prisoners are conditioned with only a minority truly able to break free. Some offenders enter prisons never having used harmful substances, but leave in cycles of addiction. The drugs problem further aggravates the problems of prisoners addressing offending.

The onus is on individuals to stop offending behaviour and re-enter society successfully however, when the self is buried under substances, getting lost in both uniform and wild environments, self-identity becomes lost. Many 'bury heads' under prescription medication to deal with ups and downs, this stands in the way of 'self' improvement. It takes great strength to focus on self-identity, self-control and self-progression amid atmospheres of so many negatives.

Eliminating factors precipitating offending needs addressing before 'offenders' are imprisoned. Instilling moral values cannot be programmed with positive and negative reinforcements, this only ensures compliance. Good moral values come from the heart however, prisoners have difficulty with open hearts in prison; this takes a strength and understanding many do not realise amongst influences of environment.

Prison dehumanizes, strips self-respect, buries identity and disengages people from responsibility; deprivation of interaction with communities only reinforces this. There are many in prison coming from dysfunctional families and/or have learning difficulties. It is beyond probation's scope to reach a people who have buried themselves, prison is far from a place conducive to restoring trust; therefore prisoners and ex-prisoners live isolated (even around close ones) and continue similar patterns.

Rehabilitation revolutions cannot work without policies beyond the prison gate. Fear, cynicism from prisoners, government and society, will keep offending rates static or in escalation. There cannot be uniform formulas for human needs. Prison tries to prepare people for release and there are increasing numbers of positive initiatives striving for inroads however, this is curtailed by lack of funding, budget cuts, punitive philosophies and prevalent concerns of security.

Programmes promoting true self-reflection and creative expression needs to be driven. Society living evolves while people are inside prisons. For those warehoused, bereft of homes, jobs, relationships, social structures and routines, the challenge of stability amidst pressures of society living becomes harder; even those with jobs struggle, so it is that much harder for those facing the stigma of 'ex-prisoner.'

Too many are being released unprepared and fall back into negative conditionings. Without fundamental changes allowing precedence of positivity and a cohesion of both society and prison, prisons will continue to fail offenders and society. The system is on the 'back foot' and reacting to pressures rather than being proactive with unified agenda for change.

Hard to reach offenders need to be guided to see the need for change and desistance from action or behaviour can only lastingly be done by showing another way through opportunities. Opportunity changes futures. Released prisoners should have PTS counselling like returning soldiers from active service, but this. When sentencing mothers judges need to be more considerate because they not only sentence a mother, but their children too. The incarcerated should be trained from day one of imprisonment in preparation for tackling universal credit, housing and how to stop re-entering this revolving door. There are many more strands synapsing along neural paths and exploding within grey matter. After the shock wave has finished rippling within my subconscious I will revisit ground zero and present salvaged gems.

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| JUSTICE REFLECTIONS: 2019 | ISSUE 52 |
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