

Parenting From Behind Bars

I believe that people expect something to happen even when they do nothing, but the reality is that nothing will happen unless something is done first.

In some respect, I am still a five-year-old in a 50-year-old's body. I am still the five-year-old little boy who had to watch his father be sentenced to 30+ years in prison for first degree murder. So, for all the other deprived and devastated and neglected children, I will be their voice and help instruct the incarcerated parents on how to be a good parent, active and proactive role model from behind bars. I will let them know some parenting dos and don'ts, and coach them on how to be there and still be a positive influence in your children's life. I was left to feel abandoned because after my father was sentenced for a lifetime, he was also cursed with guilt and depression, asking himself, "How can I discipline my children through bars?" "What could I do that would ever make up for how this is going to impact my family?" And at some point, the asking statement that ripples through the fabric of everything left that resembles family: "How can I look in the face of those that I've let down and burdened?" The family also experiences grief, loss, frustration, fear, and anger that can lash out in different directions, for someone, and anyone to blame. Even though it may be justifiable, it only adds to the division and destruction of the love that's binding and holds a family together. If we want inmates to come out changed for the better, then those outside must find the inner strength to change first.

I will share my experiences with my father, some of the things he's done and let you know what he should have done. My dad was a real man's man, a predator in every way who looked for anyone around him who would show weakness, so he could swoop into their lives and become the model of a man that they didn't know was missing. I saw him as a bully, even though he considered himself a hero. Perhaps I could consider him a kind of ghetto hero, I'll explain that in the book. My dad was first an accomplished boxer who was headed to the Olympics, until Uncle Sam drafted him and sent him to war. He was then captured and tortured as a Vietnam prisoner of war. He came back to his family affected by the agent orange, as well as a drug addict and dealer, alcoholic, and wounded from the inside-out. He was angry, bitter, hateful, and racist, and was a shell of the man, husband, and father that we knew before he left.

Here's how the story was told to me. One day, my father was at a bar drinking like most days, when a guy in the bar who was extra encouraged because of the amount of his spirit juice intake, that made him feel bold enough to challenge my dad in a verbal war, with his three buddies backing him up. This banter went on for a while until the conversation towards my dad turned racist, and my dad got physical. His other three friends jump in, while my dad was in survival and kill mode. In the end one of the guys was killed in the brawl, and because my dad was trained by the U.S. Special Forces, he was sent to prison for assault with deadly weapons, with the intent to kill. This began our lockup and lockdown, for him, me and everyone who loved him.

This book will dive into the lives and minds of nine currently incarcerated mothers and fathers, to try and identify exactly when and where they took a turn for the worst, when on their journey they took the wrong path that led them to where they are today, as ordered guests of their residing states for sentenced timeframes. We will also interview one formerly incarcerated mother and father to see what the situation looks like from hindsight. Those who have been there and done that will also look back as lessons learned, to advise those who have fallen and are currently following in their proverbial footsteps.

I want this book to be one like no other, that would shine a light within the dark corners of these participants' lives, one that exposes the creepy crawlers in your life, like roaches when you cut on the light. These creepy crawlers are the ones that you've allowed in your life that have bugged you with ill-advice, whispered and influenced you and your decisions as they were disguised as friends, mentors and even family. This book is the road map of truth that may navigate you and others who are currently misdirected, lost or heading in a similar direction on the road to hell on earth.

To make sure that we get an accurate picture and roadmap of each participant, we will travel not one step ahead but 4 steps with them to get the perspective of their partner, who are now single parent that remains on their own to try and be both mother and father, nurturer, and provider for the innocent children, who now become the greatest victims of the loss of a parent. The children become vulnerable to the "Big Bad World", that now waits to exploit them and take advantage of the absence of one of the guardians given by God, meant to surround and protect the lives, innocence, and character of our children. We will then hear from the parents of the incarcerated, their in-laws, and conclude with the most powerful word coming from the mouths of babes, the children themselves.

The goal of this book is to not only help those who identify themselves on this path, but to be a warning for people to know what to look out for, and when to take steps of intervention to try and redirect them before it's too late. We also want to recognize and respect the fact that the entire family and community is traumatically affected when a loved one is incarcerated, but even more so when the one being locked up is a parent. We want to give a voice to the key people within a family to be heard and express themselves, including the ones who are most affected, suffering and overlooked, the children. Knowing that as a recourse, the family is usually divided and at odds, but for the sake of the children they will heed to the instruction and examples within this book to make amends, put aside personal feelings, opinions, and history to come together as a family, community and village that it takes to raise a child, whose sole mission is to provide some sense of normality, love, and support to the children.

This book is also a segway to the organization that my partner and I have created, "Prisonology." My partner, Guy Gane, was wrongfully incarcerated for 9 years, and we have come together to create the first pre-incarceration program. We've created a one-hundred-and-thirty-page manual that navigates the journey of prison, from being booked, sentenced and the door slamming behind you, as well as through the dos and don'ts from day to day. This is a definite aid and fight against recidivism. When someone enters prison, they may try to disappear and blend in, but they are susceptible to everything that happens from day to day (The Unknown). What if you had a cheat sheet that told you what was coming from day to day? What if you knew the snares and pitfalls that were ahead of them? Do you think their experience of those incarcerated would be different? What if they know how to get ahead and maximize every opportunity that presents itself? What if they could get the counseling and therapy needed to make interpersonal changes? I see it almost as to compare to going to a public school in the heart of the ghetto, to going to a charter school. By reading my book and taking our course, I believe that those going through the system will have a 100% better chance of getting through it and coming out better than when they entered, and that's an aid to the revolving door, it's and antidote called "HOPE".