

Jarrod A. McQueen  
# BL5004  
San Quentin State Prison  
San Quentin, CA 94974



SAN FRANCISCO CA 940

28 APR 2020 PM 5 L

Prison University Project  
Post Office 492  
San Quentin, CA 94964



94964-

Monday April 27, 2020

To the Prison University Project/  
Mt. Tamalpais College Staff,

I received the care package today from all of you and so did my cellmate. I can't speak for anyone else, but my initial reaction was a combination of "What is it now?" and genuine curiosity... First let me explain that for anyone who's spent long enough in jail or prison that the monotony of the day to day and week to week program can be mentally exhausting and the constant interruptions when it comes to basics like "razor exchange" and "laundry exchange" can be annoying and frustrating - so when I say "What is it now?" it is coming from a place humorous standpoint - as one of the best cures to combat insanity is to be able to laugh, even in the worst times.

After opening the package and going through its contents, my cellmate and I were surprised to receive brand name snacks, the beef jerky especially, writing pads, pens, and even envelopes with stamps! (Of which I am appropriately using to write 'Thank You' letters.) Yes, I mentioned "letters", plural, because I glad to inform you that you all are not the only ones thinking of us

- in here. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic we have had The Science Policy Group at UCSF send us an information pamphlet about the virus along with a bottle of hand-sanitizer. A few weeks later we got a memo and packet from Options Recovery Services out of Berkeley with a thoughtful collection of exercises to practice to help us in stressful moments. I will be using the other stamp and one of the other envelopes you all sent to write Program Director Kathy Narasaki, since she provided the address on the letter-head, to write the staff at Options Recovery Services to also thank them for their thoughts and positive advice.

Receiving this package really made me think even more than I did after receiving the other care package / pamphlets. Realizing how many people that are out there that really care about other people they don't even know. These are the types of actions that helps to restore my faith in society when it is all too easy to become cynical and negative - being on this side of the law.

I can't speak for other inmates, but I was genuinely touched by the

- absolute kindness and concern people have. I have tears welling up in my eyes, but I have to fight back the breathing and all because showing any emotion in here is a "sign of weakness" - and it is only my reluctant conformity to this prison mentality - that I am not crying because of my need to survive here; and so I am still holding my hand, the one I was dealt, and I am still bluffing - careful ~~to~~ not to reveal my cards... That I am a man, tough enough, but I am a human being and I have feelings.

They added the "Rehabilitation" part to CDC - and in a lot of ways it's a step in the right direction, but there are still a lot of the old ways and mentalities of judgement and punishment stained into the fabric of the American Justice System.

People who don't understand what it's like to have your liberty and freedoms taken away - who live in their comfortable bubbles and assume that anyone who's been to jail or prison belongs behind bars and deserves the punishment. Those people don't understand that for a lot of convicted felons, the American has died and the dream

- system has failed us long before we ended up here. California has 35 prisons, and I'm struggling to name 10 Universities.

Others in here were dealt worse hands than me, so it's no wonder their lives took turns for the worst. I at least had a chance. I wasn't a troubled youth and I got good grades in High School and College and I still ended up with a CDC number. For those who harshly judge people like me who have a criminal record, all I have to say is that I used to be a good, law abiding citizen like them, so given certain life circumstances and a few life altering events, and my existence could very well be someone else's. I remember being on the Golden Gate Ferry and looking up at San Quentin, seeing all the prisoners - wondering if I'd ever end up in there, telling myself I wouldn't. I was just going to a Giants game, enjoying life. Now I go out to the yard and look outside the barbed-wire fences and watch the ferry go by, wondering how my life got so messed up that I allowed my fear to rule me and cause me to make poor decisions,

- costly decisions.

People don't realize that when they react to things in the world with panic and fear, and let that fear be the guide to overreact and write laws and lobby for stricter punishments and penalties, and devastating statutes with crippling long term damages to a person - where you took someone that did something wrong and who made a mistake, and the answer was relentless punishment, and residual hidden punishments, blockages, restrictions, more laws, walking on eggshells while trying to regain a dignity - society has failed here.

A lot of people who commit crimes have mental health issues and don't admit it, so they never get help or address their internal issues which cause them to act out. A lot of us in here deal with substance abuse, and we've resorted to one drug or the other, alcohol and pills to self-medicate and dull our pain and help us to temporarily forget that we regret a lot and do not have a time-machine...

We're locked down, at least here in Reception Center, almost 24/7. For a period, maybe 2 weeks, we didn't have yard access

- and the only time we could leave our cell was for 10 minutes, 3 days/week to shower, so we get to walk about 10 steps out on the tier to the shower and back, otherwise we're in here practically the entire time while on quarantine/"modified program". Meals are brought to the cells and depending on how long they sit out, could be cold by the time we get them. We have been getting our yard time back, which is 3 hours on Saturdays and supposed to be 6 hours on Tuesdays - but sometimes that is cut short.

With all that said, I really appreciate the items you all sent. It's the little things that help us get through the day and especially during this tough time when our families are out there and we are worrying about them as they are for us.

Hopefully, during this time where people have been under Shelter-In-Place and stay at home orders, they will have gotten a little taste of what it's like to lose your freedoms and being told what to do... Well, that has been my life for the better part of a decade; in and out of County jail, on and off Probation, supervised felony Probation, wearing an ankle monitor for months,

-years at a time, and trying to work and keep a good job to survive, but having background checks, legal barriers, and restrictions keeping me from succeeding, and keeping me at near minimum wage jobs, trying to play "catch up" - but catching up to what?

Soon I will be released to Parole, at least by August, and what's sad is that I'm more frightened of going back into society and struggling, with my fear of failure than I am of being here where I could be stabbed...

I'm not trying to spell "doom and gloom" to you all. I'm hopeful. I've used my time productively, writing a novel and drawing a lot as well as reading. Ironically, I enjoy having all the spare time to be able to do what I love to do! It's just a shame I have to come to prison to have that time. When I get out, it's work, work, work, pay bills, tired, eat, sleep - bye bye drawing, bye writing, bye bye reading... Hello internet, social media, facebook, dating sites, and distractions...

At least for now I've been able to focus and rediscover my passions and talent. I plan to continue my writing and drawing on the outside. I know I will have to be

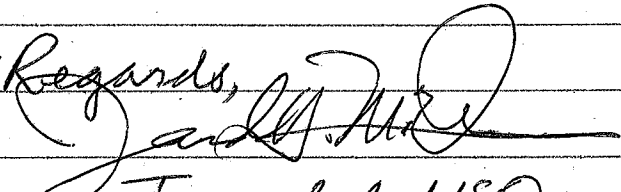


- disciplined and practice time-management in order to complete my projects, but at least that is my goal, if I don't get any big publishers to print my novel, I am at least going to self-publish, both my novel and a graphic novel.

This letter is already too long, but then again I am not known to write short ones, or anything for that matter. Good for an author, bad for Twitter.

I'm really grateful for the kindness being shown to all of us here in San Quentin. These have been stressful times, for some more than others. Our time here will go by a little better, especially with the information, the articles you sent, and even the bar of soap to go along with the article about soap.

I hope Arundhati Roy is right, that the pandemic is a portal, and that we will transcend into the future a better world.

My Best Regards,  
  
Jarrod A. McQueen

P.S. It's okay to share my letter... all 8 pages...