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after prison

words from former earth & animal liberation prisoners



rod coronado : jeff luers : jordan halliday : josh harper

introduction

The United States has the highest prison incarceration rate in the world. If you live in this country it is likely that at some time in your life either yourself, or someone you know, will spend time locked behind metal doors. There are certain communities in this country that see much higher imprisonment rates than others. Migrant communities, Indigenous communities, African Americans and lower socio-economic communities, for example, all experience much higher rates of imprisonment than most white people. According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, one in three black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. Such communities disproportionately feel the detrimental effects of the prison system, through the incarceration process itself, as well as the stress, trauma and discrimination that continues after release.

Activist communities in the United States have gone through a number of cycles of heavy repression by the State, leading to many political organizers being imprisoned for substantial amounts of time. Over the past decade activists have seen the Green Scare play out, in which environmental and animal defense activists have been targeted for long prison sentences for taking action. Activists have also been targeted by grand juries, as well as experiencing high levels of infiltration, informing and entrapment. It has been a rollercoaster of a decade to see fellow activists being sentenced to many years in prison, at the same time as celebrating others being released.

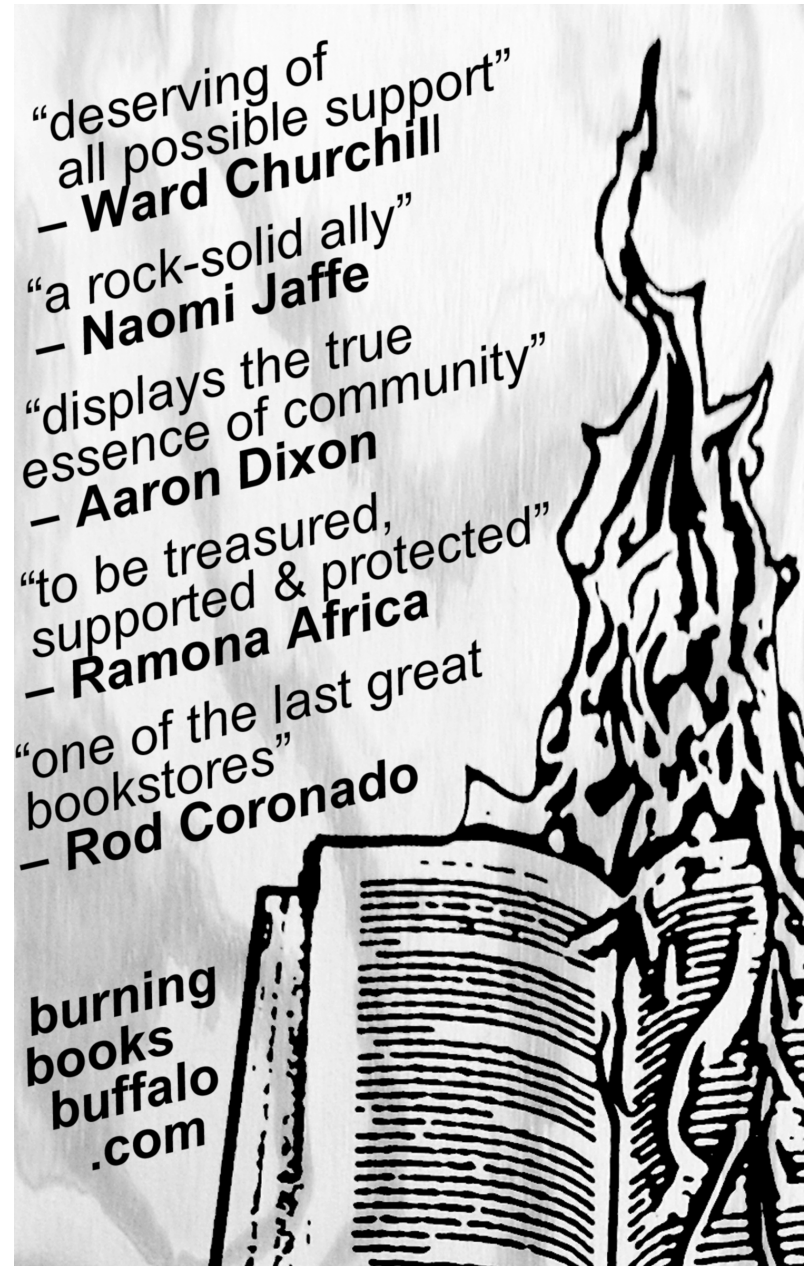
While there is no doubt a lot of joy around welcoming people back to our communities who have spent time in prison, the process of integrating back into the outside world can be a stressful process for some. As is true of many difficult experiences in life, it is hard to truly know what someone is going through unless you have been there yourself. For many activists coming out of prison there are parole conditions that inhibit them from communicating with others who have been through the same thing. Out of this dilemma came the idea for this zine. Through these writings and interviews, former prisoners are sharing their experiences of life after prison with supporters and other former and current prisoners. These voices are not meant to speak for all, but show some of the diversity of experiences and feelings about life after prison.

There are some experiences of life after prison that are very consistent amongst most former prisoners though. Massive levels of discrimination in housing, difficulties in finding workplaces that hire felons, and lack of access to certain resources, are just some of those common post-prison experiences. While all of the former prisoners who contributed to this zine have different stories, and come from different backgrounds, you will notice certain congruent themes in their experiences.

We would love this to become an ongoing project. Please visit the After Prison website for more information. If you are a former movement prisoner and would like to contribute your story, or thoughts on the issue of life after prison, please get in touch. We would love to print future editions of this zine with more stories to share with our communities.

afterprisonzine.org
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Cover image: Resilience by Ali Cat Leeds



resources

All of Us or None

All of Us or None is a grassroots civil rights organization fighting for the rights of formerly - and currently - incarcerated people and their families. They are fighting against the discrimination that people face every day because of arrest or conviction history. The goal of All of Us or None is to strengthen the voices of people most affected by mass incarceration and the growth of the prison-industrial complex. They are working on a number of great campaigns, including 'Ban The Box' which calls for removing the question and check box, "Have you been convicted by a court?" from applications for employment, housing, public benefits, insurance, loans and other services.

Check out all of their projects at: prisonerswithchildren.org/our-projects/all-of-us-or-none

The Fortune Society

Fortune offers a holistic array of programs for formerly incarcerated low income New Yorkers through a "one stop shop" model of services that includes case management (crisis intervention, needs assessment, referral and counseling), housing (emergency, congregate, and scatter-site), education (literacy, math, GED preparation), employment services, outpatient substance abuse treatment, family services, health services for those living with HIV/AIDS, outpatient mental health services, and lifetime aftercare.

They have a great collection of resources and tool kits on their website: fortunesociety.org

Phoenix Rising Transitions

Phoenix Rising Transitions is a nonprofit organization in the Portland (Oregon) metropolitan area. They work in prisons and the community partnering with those who are incarcerated to make a smooth and successful transition into the community as they are released. Their goal is to transform lives and reduce the likelihood that people will commit new crimes and return to prison. They do this through skill-building and relationship-building, both before and after release from prison. They also aim to transform the community in order to make successful transition more attainable through community organizing action.

Find out more at: phoenix-rising-transitions.org

Red Lodge Transition Services

Red Lodge aim to prevent incarceration and reduce recidivism primarily among Native American women and men. To provide assistance for individuals released from jails and prisons, who are working on creating a better life for themselves, their children, and communities. To supply transition information, guidance and support, to Native American individuals, families and communities. To prevent and reduce incarceration by breaking the cycle of chemical addiction, violence, abuse, hatred, hopelessness and neglect.

Find out more at: redlodgetransition.org

More resources can be found at afterprisonzine.org

interview with jeff luers

Jeff 'Free' Luers grew up in the Southern Californian anti-fascist punk community. A trip to the forests of Oregon in the late 90's resulted in him becoming the first tree-sitter in the ultimately successful Fall Creek forest campaign. In 2001 Jeff was sentenced to 22 years and 8 months on a number of counts of arson, after setting fire to 3 light trucks in a car yard in Eugene, OR. as a symbolic action highlighting the issue of climate change. There was outrage from civil liberties groups across the globe at the judge's excessive sentencing. Jeff had a strong support campaign while in prison, and regularly wrote personal and political dispatches from prison that were widely read. After 6 years in a maximum security prison, Jeff won his appeal and his sentence was reduced to 10 years. He was released from prison in 2009 at the age of 30 after serving 9 ½ years.

How did you feel when you first walked out the gate after 9 ½ years?

I think 'weird' is really the only term. We use it so much that it might not have the meaning that it should. I spent 9 ½ years having every aspect of my life dictated to me. When I could go to chow, when I could go outside, when I could talk to my loved ones, when they could come see me. While going through that gate didn't mean total freedom – I still had to deal with supervision being told what I could and couldn't do – it was like my prison yard got a lot bigger.

It mostly felt like, okay, so that was hard prison and now this is soft prison. Now I'm out and I can mostly do what I want, but they could throw me back in at any time. I still needed to get permission before I could do a range of things. It was amazing, but it wasn't really freedom.

It was also trying to remember how to be the person I was before I went in. How to not let down my loved ones that were there to pick me up and support me. It was awesome, but it felt like a lot of pressure to make it all work.

Was it different to your expectations of release?

Of course it's different. We all tell ourselves a story to get through prison. Whatever that story is – my life is going to be this, or my partner is going to be this person – we all have this idea of the free world that gives us some element of hope to survive the ordeal that we've been placed into.

The reality is that it never comes true. It certainly wasn't true for me. I don't think it's been true for

anyone I know that's got out of prison. There's always this element of 'wow, this isn't how I pictured getting out was going to be'. The excitement is amazing and I don't mean to downplay that at all, but there's always an element of disappointment.

It's a hard thing to deal with after spending years behind bars, holding onto a dream that doesn't come true. Yet, it's those dreams that make those years behind bars bearable. Without them I would be less of a man than I am today. It's a classic catch 22; we find hope where we need it, but hope is a double-edged sword. Because when hope doesn't come true it can lead to despair.

In the first few months of your release, what did you find the most challenging about life on the outside?

Tolerating people, and not treating this world like prison. There's a fairly strict code of ethics and honor, and standard way of conducting one's life and business, within prison walls. If it isn't adhered to it can result in your community turning on you. In prison if you're not polite and courteous to every single person it can lead to a fight.

It's the most polite place I've ever been. It's amazing, you've never seen anything like it, the most hardened criminals saying 'please' and 'thank you' at every turn and venture and 'excuse me', 'pardon', 'may I?', it's incredible. To not adhere to that creates social disharmony that can result in violence.

Out here none of that exists. Say you're at a crowded cafe and someone bumps into you and doesn't say 'excuse me', in prison I would certainly say something. I might push the guy, things could escalate to the point

where I'd feel like I have to hit him. In Eugene, that'll pretty much just put you back in prison and everyone will think you're nuts.

How do you transition from a world largely dictated by violence to one in which that's not really how people interact? It's really difficult to get the conflict out of my head.

What did you find the most wonderful about the outside world in the first few months after your release?

Spontaneity, I think it's something we often take for granted. The idea that if you want to you can get up and walk down to the store and grab a beer, or call up a friend and suddenly go and hang out, or just go for a walk around the block just because you feel like it. Spontaneity is not something that exists in prison.

I missed all the things that I couldn't have in prison, seeing all the stars, seeing the moon, hanging out in fog. Crossing yellow lines, just because I could cross them. The fact that they were a yellow line had no meaning any more. Door knobs, that was weird at first. Getting used to the fact that I could open doors and I didn't have to stand in front of them until they opened for me. Fortunately I never stood at the entrance to my house waiting to get let in or anything, but you know, there were situations people teased me about.

How do you feel life in prison affected your relationships with people? Did you find different kinds of relationships challenging after prison?

I think that prison actually helped me evolve my relationships. You only have communication in prison, and even that can be strained because of how much it's observed. Words become incredibly important, and being able to communicate and have honest dialogue. Interacting with a whole new slew of people since I've been out, I'm honestly surprised by their lack of communication, their ability to express their thoughts and how they feel about things, and to share.

I find that's really unique, to think that I actually communicate better and more openly than most people because of my time in prison. It's allowed me to say 'hey, I feel a thing, and it's important that I share it with this person that I care about', or 'hey I'm really

angry, and it's important that I tell this guy before he pisses me off to the point that I punch him in the face' and then all sorts of bad things happen. Ideally it's nice to hear when people have something they want to share with you, especially when that's 'stop this or I'm going to punch you in the face'.

But, I think all relationship are challenging when you get out of prison to a degree. I know I definitely had a series of disastrous relationships with female friends of mine. Maybe disastrous isn't quite the right word, we're all still friends. It's tricky trying to navigate the world of love and sex and friendship, and trying to do it when everything around you is so overwhelmingly intense and absorbing. It's a bad comparison, but it's like going to the big city for the first time and seeing shiny lights everywhere, and you just want to take it all in and be a part of it because you haven't for so long. Everything feels so brand new. In a lot of ways it's almost like being a kid all over again, except you're not a kid any more, and it can be a really difficult thing to navigate.

What do you feel were the most useful forms of support that you received?

Space, and money, sadly. I think one of the reasons why my transition was so successful was that I had a plan before I got out. For me that plan was basically going back to school, which allowed me to apply for financial aid and a bunch of other things. The timing of my getting out worked out really well because it was only 2 weeks away from a financial aid check. Here I am, I get out, I have a source of income. That's a challenging thing for a lot of people getting out.

I was also incredibly fortunate that because of my support campaign I was able to parole with several thousand dollars. It was more than enough to give me a few clear months to get my shit together, and not have to worry about if I was going to eat or be able to pay rent. That was absolutely huge.

Space was critical. I loved the fact that I had great friends that were there and supportive, and we'd hang out and do things. But all too often it really felt like there were a lot of people that seemed to demand my time. There were people that weren't key supporters of mine, and I didn't know all that well, or maybe I hadn't even got a letter from in 9 ½ years. Yet they just felt like

beliefs. Now that I'm out, I'm struggling to reclaim my emotional as well spiritual self. We do this by talking about our traumatizing experiences and by re-connecting with the world we love. Not just the natural world, but our friends as well.

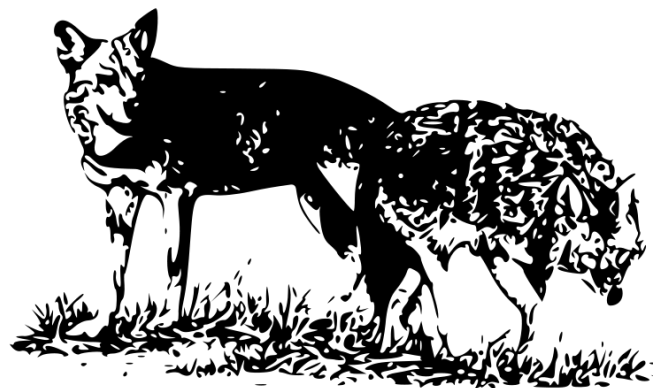
Last summer, I went to a former prisoner's wedding held on the shore of a lake in the southern Cascade Mountains. It was the very first time I was allowed to travel outside of my home state of Michigan and visit other former prisoners. After 8 years of federally prohibited association with my former friends and allies, we were able to hike a mountain, share food and laugh. We were able to talk and recognize that it's a little harder to laugh than it used to be, but if we love each other and allow nature to help us heal, we can claim victory over our captors by showing them and ourselves that we are still very much alive and a part of the struggle for a better world.

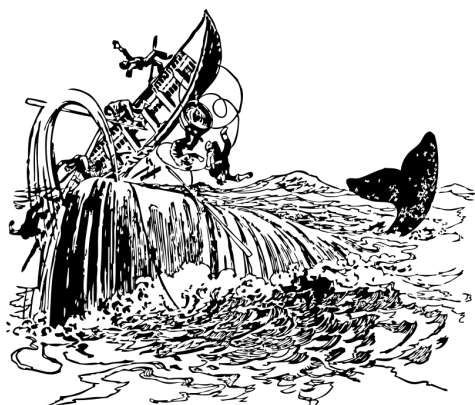
We still have our competing world views. We have the world that creates whales, wolves, ancient forests, and we have the world that turns those things into products. If you belong to the latter, then things have been good. But for the rest of us, like those nations of indigenous peoples believing similarly, we've been

shown the door and the lock is on the outside. Now we must be smarter and even stronger and recover from the suffering inflicted on us and in good emotional and spiritual health, find a way back to the struggle.

For me that means getting back involved on a grassroots level with the struggles to protect wild nature. I know what tactics will lead to what results and I know that I will forever be on their watch lists. But as I begin to brainstorm and organize with all the good people out there who want to join this effort, I begin to feel a type of happiness that I haven't felt in a long time. No longer am I being forced to only think about my own survival, but as I spend more time out in nature, among my friends, and around campfires, I feel alive. I feel like myself.

The greatest lesson I have learned from my experience in prison has been to never let them through suffering convince you to believe in something other than what your heart tells you is right. Never let them change you into a person that cares more for yourself instead of someone that measures their worth through actions that help others, whether its animals in the wild, your children, neighbors or friends. I guarantee you that if we all did this, then we will have won.





But life didn't have to be that way. I believed that maybe I wouldn't stop the world from killing the last great whales, or ban the steel-jaw leg-hold trap, but I sure as hell could sink a whaler and rescue a few mink and bobcats. So that is what I did. I found a way to honor the relationship I believed we should have with the natural world, by recognizing that world as our own. A world denied to us by a violent society that teaches us to use ignorance and denial as a coping mechanism to rationalize things we know in our hearts are wrong. I found a way to satiate my own pain and find hope. Of course, such a path cannot be without great consequence, and that is what I began to contend with when I first went to prison.

Prison for people like me, call us animal rights extremists, radical environmentalists, eco-terrorists, whatever, can be a unique experience. We are people who took risks not to better ourselves, but to help others, and that is not what you see a lot of in prison. What you see is a base level human nature, where survival of the fittest still reigns among people who for the most part, have been treated like animals their entire inside and outside lives. People who never get a chance to see a psycho-therapist or address their traumatizing experiences. Hell, many of those people are masters of traumatizing experiences, and I'm not talking only about the prisoners.

Not that we are better than other prisoners, but we came into this struggle that led to prison because we feel. We allowed our hearts to soften, not harden and because we took action against the violence in our society out of that love, we began to feel great

empathy and connection to all the beings whose suffering we had been made aware of. We went to prison out of a great love and desire to allow love to exist in others despite what species they were.

I am blessed to have such people as my friends. Friends who demonstrated courage and bravery in battle, not by hurting others, but by risking their lives to stop others from hurting. People who would help the rescued find safe homes where they would never be tortured again, people who would cut through fences and climb into alarmed buildings, all in the name of alleviating some of the violence our society told us was necessary. Let me put it this way, the most compassionate, sensitive and loving people I have ever known were the kind of people doing prison time for A.L.F. And E.L.F. actions.

It's been 20 years since I first entered a federal prison. Fortunate for me, only six of those years were lost to that traumatizing experience, but the damage will last the rest of my life, and if I'm not careful, maybe the lives of my children too. When you're in prison, it is difficult to say the least, to stay connected to your former "outside" world. However strong your connection might have been, those are not the type of people you are around now and it is not the world you are living in or that threatens your very own ability to live. Just as society forces us to disconnect from the violence caused by our way of life, prison forced us to disconnect from a lot of our deepest sense of self and stay there for years.

But now we are out. And like all prisoners, we must struggle to create a new life because what has happened to us will never allow us to return to the world we knew before. All struggles for liberation have cost their participants prison if not death, as a punishment. Ours is no different. We were subjected to a level of institutional violence that often causes its victims to become violent in order to survive. What we must do is return to all the good things that gave our hearts life before prison. We have to prove to ourselves that the strength of our hearts cannot be defeated with the violence of our prison experience.

For me, it meant while I was inside, to never forget that I was in there because of my love for others and that was something sacred. There was never a night that I regretted my "crimes" and wished I hadn't acted on my

they really needed to engage with me and take of my time, and ask me how I was. Frankly, I didn't talk to you for 9 ½ years and I really don't need to tell you how I'm feeling today. It doesn't mean I don't want to have a conversation with you, but please back off.

Was there any forms of support you found particularly unuseful?

I think people sometimes need to understand that their good intentions are their good intentions, but they don't need to be accepted. I had a number of people – very well meaning, and I absolutely appreciated it – offer me types of support that I just didn't want. I didn't want counseling, I still don't want counseling. I might have my problems, and I'm happy to work with them and talk to people about them, but I'm not going to talk to a stranger.

Being able to accept when your offer of support isn't going to be accepted, that's huge. At the same time, maybe asking before you offer support. I found a lot that people liked to think that they knew what I needed. More often than not these were people that had very little direct communication with me while I was locked up. Which isn't to negate the fact that they might have done huge amounts of support for me, but they didn't communicate with me so we didn't have a relationship. I don't think many people tend to take personal support from people that they don't have relationships with.

How do you feel that prison has affected you in the long term?

Violence will always be an inherent part of my life. It's hard for me to be around loud aggressive men, or to be walking down a street at night and see two guys walking opposite from me, without me very clearly imagining how I'll disable them and where I'll hit them. For 9 ½ years of my life I was conditioned to be a combatant.

My prison experience was not a mellow and tame one. My prison experience, like many people I know, was one that was constantly full of violence. I saw violence every day. I've seen multiple people get stabbed, and people get hit in the head with padlocks. I saw my friend kill a man in front of me. I've stepped out over a dead body full of blood and got caught up in the

murder investigation. I've attacked people, I've confronted people. I trained for 5 ½ years with an amazing crew of very talented fighters and martial artists in a semi-full contact mode. I knew that we'd be ready to fight against prison guards, or prison gangs, or anybody that we needed to.

I had a very solid crew of individuals that were doing 20 years-to-life that were amazing friends. We went through everything together, and sometimes that meant that when one person had a problem, we all had a problem. The formative years of my life, all of my 20's, were conditioned by the violence around me and how I'd respond to that with violence.

Now I live in a world where I'm trying to not let that be the basis of my life. I'm not ashamed of that, and I don't want to forget it, and I certainly don't want to hide it. I definitely feel more disciplined, more safe, and ultimately more dangerous because of it. I honestly think that gives me a level of confidence that I don't see in many other people. Although that could largely just be attributed to martial arts. I frequently find that I have more in common with combat veterans than I have with the average person. I think it's difficult readjusting back to a way of life that doesn't include violence as a daily ritual.

As someone who was politically active before and during your prison term, how do you feel about engaging in the struggle since you left prison?

I think sadly more than anything the word is disappointment. I went into prison at a time when struggling meant fighting back. When struggling was more than words. I think that the vast majority of activism today is talking about activism. It's about saying the right thing to the right people so that you can raise your status in a social group. The vast majority of activism I see today is replicating the same hierarchies and the same culture that we profess to be against, by recreating these systems within our own little cliques. I think we find our empowerment by disempowering others. I find it sad and disappointing that my 9 ½ years in prison did nothing at all to further change.

I've had a lot of amazing dialogues with people since I got out. I know that my words have reached a lot of people. I know that a lot of people think differently. I

what your heart tells you is right

by rod coronado

think that's amazing and it makes every day I did worth it. Yet the world is worse off today than it was the day I went to prison. Our communities are more divided today than they were when I went to prison. I think that's a sad, sad state of affairs. It makes me not want to participate with movements that I've historically affiliated with. It makes me not want to engage with people who define themselves as activists.

I often find that for many people it's all just words. It's just getting together and talking about ideas and not acting on them. It becomes being able to feel better about ourselves because we can see there's problems, rather than doing something about it. I feel like by and large we've simply tried to find a way to carve out our existence within the dominant paradigm, without challenging it any more. Which isn't to say we're not getting repressed and there's not amazing people out there doing things. That's certainly not what I mean to imply. But I think we would all be foolish and blind to not recognize that we're losing.

What would you say to someone who is hoping to be able to support someone coming out of prison?

That it's not about you. It's not about 'ooh, you're friends with this political prisoner' and you can talk to your friends about it. It's not about whether at the end of the day you can pat yourself on the back for supporting the person that just got out. It's not about a scene. It's about someone coming home who has been to war, who has faced an ordeal, who has suffered.

That doesn't mean that I want pity, it doesn't mean I need your empathy. I just need you to recognize that it's not about you. It's not about a movement. It's about me being able to smell a flower again, to be able to share a bed with someone, to visit a grandparent that I haven't seen in 9 ½ years. It's about me remembering how to be human, and what that means.

I think that too often political prisoners, and even movements to a larger degree, get iconized and put upon a pedestal, or turned into something more than just 'Jeff'. What's important is trying to be a friend, trying to see what the individual needs, rather than what you need to give. Which isn't to suggest that you don't offer support, but it means that for however many years we've been locked up, everyone's been telling us exactly how it's going to be. Getting out is

about being able to make some determinations for ourselves. While we might need encouragement, we're capable of asking for the things that we need.

What would you say to someone that is struggling with life on the outside after a prison term?

If you can do prison, you can do not being in prison. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves of that, I know I have. There's these times when it feels like the weight of the world is incredibly intense and unbearable, and then I go 'oh, wait a minute, I did 9 ½ years in prison, I can get through this'. It might suck, I might not like it, but if I'm strong enough to survive the worst that my enemies can throw at me, I'm strong enough to survive life.

It certainly didn't hurt that I had friends to help remind me of that as well. I think sometimes we just forget our strengths. That doesn't just happen to people getting out of prison, that happens with anyone. In extreme hardships we can forget how strong of a person we are. For me, I know what I've experienced, I know what I've been through, I know how strong of a person I am. When I forget I remind myself to take a deep breath, remember my victories, remember my strengths, and remember above all that if there is one trait that I and every other die hard revolutionary and activist I know has, it's determination.

Determination can see us through a lot of things. It won't make things more pleasant, but it will give us the fortitude we need to overcome and ordeal and become stronger and wiser because of it. We're not defined by our hardships, we're not defined by our obstacles, we're defined by how we overcame them. We defined by how we choose to define our own existence.

I went to prison because I believed there were things worth fighting for, regardless of their consequences. There's right and there's wrong, and there's inherent truths in this world that can't be argued against. That same principle and strength that allowed me to do those things is the same strength I rely on to be a good person, a good partner, a dedicated student. Not just in school but of life, with a constant desire to learn and improve myself.

I think that we need to remember that the same courage that we found to stand for the earth, or stand

Rod Coronado is an indigenous environmentalist who is best known for his direct action activism against illegal whalers, fur farmers and animal researchers in the 1980's and 90's. He was active in both the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, Earth First! and the now deemed terrorist organizations, Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front. Coronado spent six years in federal prison for his role in ALF and EF! actions related to fur farming, animal experimentation and a government lion hunt. In 2006, he was sentenced to a year in prison for a lecture about his past crimes.

Coronado is now returning to the lecture circuit to talk about his life as a so-called "eco-terrorist," though he is addressing the challenges many activists face as they continue to organize against environmental destruction in an era of anti-terror legislation, FBI infiltration, and government spying. Coronado is currently helping to build a citizen-led campaign to stop the hunting and trapping of wolves in his home state of Michigan, where they were hunted in 2013 for the first time since their recovery from near-extinction.

Rod Coronado is 47yrs. old and lives in West Michigan. He is descendent from the Yaqui tribe of northern Mexico and incorporates native American spiritualism into his life and activism. He is currently touring the country giving lectures after an 8 year hiatus, where he was federally silenced; forbidden from writing or speaking as part of his conditions of release from federal prison.

A few days ago, I was listening to the radio as I was driving and listened to the story of a woman who had spent more than ten years in prison. As she spoke of some of her traumatic experiences, I began to realize just how much prison had also affected me. But what was really surprising was how easily I have avoided addressing such experiences, let alone healing from them.

There are some things I realize are emotional souvenirs from prison, my irritability with people who cut in line, the immediate suspicions of being hustled when someone on the street asks for help, and possibly worst of all, a general lack of empathy for my fellow human. If I could, I would go see my psychotherapist more often, as opposed to only when I could afford it. Hell, I wish I could afford a whole team of therapists to help me deal with the trauma related to prison which I am only now beginning to address.

What sickens me the most about this is that I never used to be that kind of pessimistic, apathetic person. I joined the struggle to defend Earth because I loved the natural world more than anything else. Animals in the wild were the beings on this planet I most connected with. Their strength of love and wild freedom was a

mystery to me that I yearned for, as I grew up in a small nuclear family of working parents in a metropolitan suburb. So when I discovered what our society did to animals and nature, my heart broke for the first time ever. I cried rivers of tears, as I watched whales being harpooned until the sea around them turned red, and watched young almost luminous harp seal pups brutally clubbed in front of their mothers.

I thought, "What kind of world is this that I'm growing up in?" That is the moment when I joined the struggle. If that was the world I was living in, and the natural world was dying from, then I wanted no part of it, and would instead dedicate my life to trying to stop such gratuitous violence. Luckily I found others, and when I reached adulthood, I launched into a world that provided my depression an avenue for action to change the things that I knew were wrongs against nature and ultimately ourselves. I say ourselves, because now that I begin to call out this institutionally imposed sickness, I realize that the only way most people deal with the daily violence around them is to disconnect from it, to rationalize its presence in our daily lives, and accept it as a necessary consequence for the world we want to live in.

The most useful thing, however, was my friend Nadia helping me navigate the maze involved in finding counseling for mental health. I wasn't in a state to do it myself, and I hope that every former prisoner who needs that kind of assistance is as fortunate as I was.

Was there anything you found particularly unuseful?

Yes, advice on coping with post-prison trauma from people who have never done time. If you haven't been there, you don't know. Listening is helpful, reassurance is helpful, talking shit about things you have no frame of reference for is harmful.

Have you found that there are any particular activities, endeavors, health services, hobbies, etc that you've found particularly positive since you got out of prison?

Beyond the mental health care that I hope all prisoners will one day have access to, I have found that finding a safe way to keep contributing to the movement is very therapeutic. We all know how hard any level of participation in resistance movements can be though, so I also tell everyone to find something that you love to do that doesn't involve politics at all, and allow yourself to become as immersed in it as you need. For me, that thing is skateboarding. I read all the magazines, watch all the videos, and I never judge myself for shirking responsibility to do things skate related.

In the first few months of your release, what did you find the most challenging about life on the outside?

The first few months were relatively easy, actually. I was just so happy to be out. I did have some residual aggressiveness towards other men, and some issues with the way people on the outside enter each others space. For example, a guy bumped into me on the bus

and I lost my mind, screaming in his face that he needed to respect me and apologize. I also found it hard to deal with people's perception of prisoners. I was staying with a family when I had gotten out, and they were raising a child. His biological father had found out that I was moving in and told the kid to be afraid of me because "prison changes people," and that ex-cons couldn't be trusted. I was devastated when I found out, but that was just the first of several such encounters.

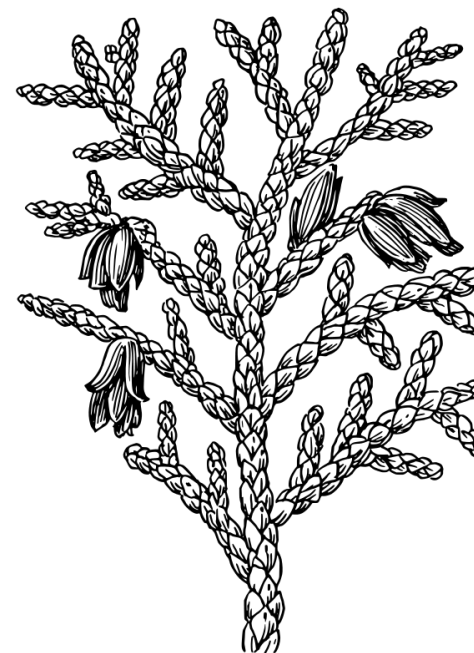
What was your experience with probation like?

Ha ha. Not fun, but workable.

Here is my advice for anyone getting out of prison and onto probation: wear your probation officer out with kindness, concern, frequent phone calls, and abundant honesty when you first get out. My probation officer was a hard ass, but in my first few weeks I called him about everything. I asked questions about the littlest things, like if signing up for iTunes was a violation of my probation clause not to sign contracts. I showed up at his office randomly "just to check in and make sure I completed my reports on time." When he asked me if I had drugs in the house, I told him about the ibuprofen I had, I told him about the pepto-bismal my house mate bought. I did everything in my power to act like I was eager to see him and assist him- and within 2 months that guy was so sick of me that I barely saw him at all for the next 3 years. Remember, these guys have a huge case load. They want to know if you are going to be trouble, and if you show them right from jump that you won't be, they'll mostly leave you alone. That doesn't mean that the conditions of your probation won't chafe you. They will. It's going to suck, but you can get through it with minimal discomfort and without violating.

against injustice, or to defend animals, that's the same strength that inspired us to take the action that led to our incarceration. Or inspired us to participate in movements that were targeted because they're effective. It's the same courage that we should be cultivating in our communities and ourselves to just live. It takes courage to live free. That's why it's so hard for so many people to do, because the shackles aren't just something that the State puts on you, the shackles are things we put on ourselves.

We need to remind ourselves that the thing that brings warmth to our hearts and inspires us to resist is the fire that's burning inside of us, yearning to be free. When we learn to cultivate that personally and as communities, look out, because then we'll be remaking the world into what it should be.



post traumatic stress after prison

by jordan halliday

Jordan Halliday is a long time activist. He believes that total liberation includes the liberation of Humans, Earth, and Animals. He identifies as a vegan atheist anarcho-syndicalist with green tendencies. He currently hosts Which Side Podcast and helped found the Which Side Media Collective.

Jordan was indicted by a federal grand jury in 2009 on charges related to resisting a federal grand jury investigating local illegal animal rights activities under the animal enterprise terrorism act (AETA), mainly concerning fur farm raids in Utah. He was jailed for nearly four months under a contempt of court order to compel him to testify. He was later released and indicted on criminal contempt of court. He pled guilty to "Criminal Contempt of Court" on July 27, 2010. The charge was a unique one in that it is sui generis, meaning it is neither a felony nor a misdemeanor.

Jordan was sentenced on November 3, 2010 to 10 months in prison with 3 years of probation upon release. He filed an appeal with the 10th circuit court, which was denied. Jordan was accused of violating his terms of parole by allegedly associating with "the vegan straightedge" by giving an interview to a clothing company. A dozen armed FBI agents raided his house and he started serving his sentence early on January 9, 2012.

Jordan was released on July 20th, 2012, his civil time running concurrent with his criminal time. He was released with 3 years of probation. On August 8th, 2013 he was granted early termination of supervision after filing a motion with his lawyer.

Serving a prison sentence is an experience in one's life that cannot be compared with many other things outside prison itself. Prison is a very dark and depressing place with a culture of its own, and it can really get into your psyche. You begin to experience a heightened alertness to attack and aggression. Many will bottle up and suppress emotions while creating a hard emotional/mental exterior to hide behind. Some experience a total loss of humanity.

When a guard instructs an inmate to strip down for a search they must comply. You will often come back to find your room, bed and locker in disarray after a guard has come through to check for contraband. To put this in perspective, this is the only thing you can really call your own. It is your place, your home. It can feel like a complete violation of personal space and property.

You can also feel under threat of attack from other inmates if you fail to provide paperwork proving why you are incarcerated. The prison will often not provide this paperwork in an effort to even the playing field for inmates who may have snitched, cooperated or been accused of a crime of a sexual nature. Some inmates

will have to learn to eat fast and cover their food to avoid theft from other inmates. Each prison and jail has its own set of inmate created politics and rules you must abide by in order to make it. This will often involve the way you eat, sleep, shower, brush your teeth, watch TV or even use the restroom. These are only a few examples of life in prison.

When a prisoner is released from prison into society it is usually with little or no preparation for what the outside world expects. Adjusting to freedom and to the stress, demands and expectations of others can often be difficult. I want to touch on a subject that is not often talked about when a person gets out of prison. This is the fact that when released many of us have experienced signs and symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress & Post Incarceration Syndrome. Nicole O'Driscoll, a qualified nurse who manages a mental-health crisis house, explains that "Post-traumatic stress disorder is characterised by traumatic memories and flashbacks, emotional numbing or episodes of anxiety and depression, difficulties managing mood and behavior, and problems with normal daily activities such as eating and sleeping."

interview with josh harper

Josh Harper is an animal rights activist who spent 3 years in federal prison after being charged with conspiracy to harass using a telecommunications device (sending black faxes) as part of the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign. Josh wasn't actually charged for sending black faxes, but for simply speaking about the tactic. He was also charged with conspiracy to violate the Animal Enterprise Protection Act, which has since developed into the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. Five other activists, and the SHAC campaign, were charged alongside Josh. They collectively became internationally known as the SHAC 7.

Since being released from prison in 2009 Josh has been keeping busy helping run the Talon Conspiracy online archives; an incredible historical treasure trove of animal and earth liberation related publications (thetalonconspiracy.com). He also enjoys all things skating.

There is quite a bit of information out there about preparing for prison, but I'm interested in what preparing to get out of prison was like for you. How did that look for you, and did you have support?

My release date was up in the air for a long time, so my process wasn't as smooth as it could have been. In short, the Bureau of Prisons doesn't send inmates back to where they were arrested, they send them to wherever it was that they were indicted. In my case that was New Jersey, a state whose only redeeming quality is that it isn't prison.

I filed to go to Oregon, but their probation department declared me "too high profile" and "a danger to the community," so I had to forego months of half way house to put in a request for Washington. Luckily they accepted me, but only after I agreed to restrictions more stringent than those issued by my sentencing judge. By the time they agreed I had only one week to find both a job and a place to stay.

The staff at Food Fight! vegan grocery put out an alert on my behalf, and one of the owners of Wayward vegan cafe saw it. She had never met me before, but she took the risk of allowing a stranger to both work at her restaurant and live at her house. I'm forever grateful to everyone who helped me during that tumultuous time, it could have gone bad for me so easily.

I recommend that people incarcerated in the federal system start looking for work and a place to stay 18 months before release. Try to find possibilities in more than one state, that way if one probation department

rejects you you will have a back up plan. Setting things up as far in advance as possible also increases your chances of maxing out your halfway house time.

Do you feel that the people supporting you during your time in prison were aware of the importance of post-prison support?

Prison was pretty rough on me, and while I think that my support team wanted to do their best for me upon my release, they couldn't be expected to know how to cope with the mental health problems I had when I hit the streets. What I experienced wasn't a failure of my support team, it was a failure of the way prisoner support is framed in general.

People involved in prison support work have experience with helping those who are still behind bars. Most efforts are concentrated on letters, books, legal aid, and so forth. But we need more than that, and that is going to mean setting up support funds for counseling and medications. It also means that supporters might need some training in dealing with common post-incarceration disorders, such as depression and PTSD.

What were the most useful forms of support that you received as you were getting out of prison, and since then?

Again, I was very lucky. People took me shopping for work clothes and assisted me in paying for them, helped me find an apartment during a time that no one wanted to rent to me because of my criminal record, and tried to help me reintegrate socially.

support of people on the outside. I received books and letters, and it made my time that much easier. This should just help illustrate that even with all the support that political prisoners can receive, PTSD can still occur and it shouldn't be taken as a lack of support from the community. I believe that for many without the support, PTSD can be much worse.

Flash forward to my release from prison. I was sentenced to 3 years of supervision after release. I was assigned a new Probation Officer. This is the point where I really felt my PTSD at its worse. I think the courts could sense it too. They required that I attend mandatory mental health counseling. Something to cover themselves I am sure. Although anything I said to the therapist would be given to the probation officer, so this wasn't the ideal situation. During this time people would comment on how my mannerisms had changed. I would now cover my food while eating it. I'd flush the toilet multiple times. I would spit in the trash after brushing my teeth. I eventually got over many of my prison habits.

However the constant fear of going back was a daily occurrence that never fully dissipated. I would get severe debilitating anxiety multiple times a day. It got to its worst point when my partner bought tickets to visit me again. It was almost the same time of year as the last time she had bought them. I was still under the supervision of a Probation Officer. It all felt exactly the same and I was irrationally expecting the FBI agents and US Marshals to show up a few days before she got

here, just as it had happened the last time. I think that was the peak of my PTSD. When I finally picked my partner up from the airport and was holding her in my arms that's when I think the peak started to decline again for me. Even though she was with me during the next few months I still had the daily, pending fear that they would snatch me up. I think the fear and PTSD only got to its lowest point once I was off of supervised release (which thankfully I was able to get off of early). It still took me a while to actually feel like I was free. But I was able to quickly tell myself that I was and that there was no reason to worry about violating or being sent back anymore.

I feel that for the most part my PTSD is very minimal now. While writing this, however I actually got a reminding dose of its existence when I saw searchlights in the window of my new place and looked outside to see a cop car parked in front of my place shining a light around my house, and all of my neighbors houses. I had no idea why they were looking around, but this sent me right back into a panic attack that I was eventually able to overcome with the help of Mariana. I think that is the key too. PTSD may never go away for me or for other ex-prisoners, but having the courage to admit to our community and loved ones that we have these issues after prison, and not feeling like it makes us weaker by doing so. For them to understand that these issues happen, and to be there for support even after we get out of prison, and understand that just because an ex-prisoner says they are ok, it might not entirely be the reality all the time.



For myself I still get bouts of anxiety from things like the jingle of keys, which subconsciously remind me of when the guards were close and walking towards my room or down the hall. I've also had debilitating anxiety from loud sounds, and the sight of authority figures, or even black or white cars that were parked outside my house or behind me in my car. These things have gotten better for myself overtime but haven't ever fully gone away.

Some inmates may have been a victim of violence, abuse or other traumas while serving their sentence, and this isn't always from other inmates. Terence T. Gorski who wrote an article on Post Incarceration Syndrome noted that it can be "caused by constant fear of abuse from both correctional staff and other inmates." As I mentioned, most of my symptoms are brought on by an association with authority and/or correctional staff.

These traumas are not always only the result of being incarcerated but also with experiences leading up to incarceration such as arrest as well as many other things. For myself it is definitely a combination of many things. I feel I need to add a little background to give context to my personal experiences dealing with PTSD.

During the summer of 2008 I experienced a lot of strange harassment outside my home. Some of this harassment I believe was coincidental, while others were more directed. During that time I was heavily involved in animal rights activism and my name would sometimes appear in newspapers. I believe it was shortly after my name appeared in a University of Utah newspaper in regards to anti-vivisection demonstrations that I received a decapitated rat head in the mail. I had a pet rat at the time and the fear that it was him only added to the trauma of the situation. During that time someone also spray painted the word "MEAT" all over my street, delivered extremely hardcore pornographic videos (which had really explicit titles that could have been taken as threats), and woke me on a regular basis with loud knocks on my window and/or searchlights in my windows, followed by screeching tires from a fleeing truck. Over time I've tried to put all the harassment together and come to conclusions about who might have been behind it. But I haven't ever come up with anything concrete.

Living with these fears of constant harassment definitely increased my own personal anxiety. To add salt to the wound, I found out that my parents were visited by the FBI who asked them questions about me. After not returning their call I was kindly visited by the FBI at my work a few days later. This ended with me storming out of an office while the FBI trailed me and told me that I was making a big mistake by not cooperating and that they would subpoena me to a grand jury, in front of corporate management and for all the customers to hear. They followed through on their promise 6 months later and again visited me at my work to deliver my subpoena.

After refusing to cooperate with my first initial grand jury & filing a motion pro-se declaring their subpoena invalid as it wasn't properly filled out, I was once again visited at my work by at least 12 FBI agents and the lead United States Marshal to make sure the subpoena was properly filled out this time. Every visit certainly increased my anxiety and fear of authority.

I ultimately was arrested and sent to jail for my refusal to cooperate with a grand jury. This process in itself is enough to break some people emotionally and mentally. Besides the thorough body search which requires you to strip completely nude, bend over and cough – which is extremely humiliating and can make a person feel subhuman very quickly – there is also the contempt and force in which the people in authority feel and use towards you. Just a routine fingerprint can be aggressively done. For myself the US Marshals made fun of my jacket and pressed my fingers extremely hard against the fingerprint scanner before leaving me in an isolated cell for a few hours. I was eventually moved from federal holding to a county jail where the entire process was repeated over again. While at the county jail I spent over 72 hours with 12 other individuals in a holding cell designed for 5 as a temporary place to keep inmates for a couple of hours when moving them to another facility or courthouse.

The jail was overcrowded as they had just mass arrested over 800 homeless individuals that night from a local park (mostly on vagrancy charges). The holding cell had no beds, just a toilet and sink. I ended up having to sleep next to the toilet. Constantly being moved around and staying in cells without beds caused

hours of sleeplessness. No sleep (nor food as they would not provide me with vegan meals) is extremely draining on the body and mind and can break down an inmate, further affirming the feeling of being less than human.

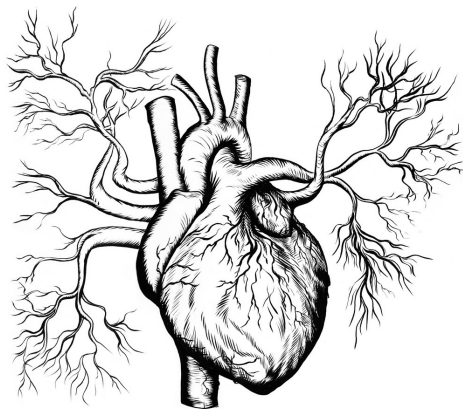
While inside a county jail in Cache County, Utah I was placed with someone who asked me directed questions that I later found out in legal documents was working with the government. This person would often get violent and even choked me when I refused to “accept Jesus Christ”. In this jail I was also moved into another cell with a black inmate. The white guys tried to move me and I refused because the alternative was a gross old white man named “grandpa”. I was cornered, choked, punched and nearly beaten up for not complying. At one point the guards tried moving me back in with the inmate who was working with the government, which I refused to do (I didn’t know for certain he was working with the government at that point he had just given me so many red flags that I knew something was up) to which they threatened to forcibly remove me with taser shields. This is the jail I also quickly learned to not use the restroom when someone else is eating. All of these things increased my already heightened anxiety and fear.

Fortunately for me, I was released during my initial incarceration after about 4 months as the grand jury had expired and we had filed our 3rd motion for release. But unfortunately the government decided to charge me with criminal contempt of court (something they had only ever done twice before in United States history). So the whole process started over again. There was also a large falling out within my local animal rights community as friends of Nicole “Nikki” Stanford (formerly Viehl), who was the other individual subpoenaed to the same grand jury, whom I had called out for choosing to testify, created threats and general animosity towards me. They defended her with the typical statements of “she didn’t tell them anything they didn’t already know” and that she had the defendants blessing to testify. This caused a rift in our community as some individuals felt ignoring the situation instead of dealing with the confrontation was the best route. This was extremely damaging to me emotionally. I felt I had lost a large amount of support because I wasn’t willing to deal with the people who refused to address the situation. I remember leaving a

collective house crying, telling a few activists that I couldn’t be a part of an unsafe community that allowed people like her to be a part of it.

I spent the next few years on pre-trial probation while I was fighting my charge, in which I ultimately took a non-cooperating plea deal. During that time an officer was allowed to search my home, car and myself at any time without a warrant, and could and did show up unannounced to do so. This added even more stress and anxiety as I was in constant fear that a probation officer would come over and for some reason decide I was doing something which violated my probation and put me back in jail. Although there was no reason for them to do so the worry was still there. This worry turned out to be not far from the reality. After writing a comment on a blog in favor of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) I was brought to court with the prosecutor and officer claiming this was an association with the ALF (something that my probation strictly prohibited). Luckily I had a great lawyer who got me out of it claiming that my support was simply free-speech and didn’t constitute an association. This was still obviously not the best way to start things off. As time went on I was assigned new officers and I was eventually sentenced to 10 months in prison. Things were starting to shift towards me self-surrendering as soon as a date was provided.

During this time I fell in love and started dating my now wife Mariana, online. As soon as it was becoming clear that I was going to go back to prison soon, we decided



that we should meet in person. She bought plane tickets from Colombia to Utah and was just finishing up a week away with her family before she visited. While she was away with her family I saw some men looking into my window one morning. I opened the door to see what they wanted and was immediately surrounded by a dozen armed agents all pointing weapons at me. Then they started piling out of my backyard and I was arrested. In the year prior I had given an interview to a clothing line that happened to sell Vegan and Straight-Edge apparel. The court claimed that this was in direct violation of my probation which prohibited me from associating with “ALF, ELF, and VSE (vegan straight edge) animal groups [sic]”. This was obviously a tactic to break me by my probation officer who knew that my partner was set to visit in just a couple of days.

This incapacitated me emotionally, mentally and physically. I spent that night in my jail cell crying. I was transferred from facility to facility at that point. Something referred to by some inmates as diesel therapy. Wikipedia describes Diesel Therapy as “...a form of punishment in which prisoners are shackled and then transported for days or weeks. It has been described as ‘the cruelest aspect of being a federal inmate.’ It has been alleged that some inmates are deliberately sent to incorrect destinations as an exercise of diesel therapy.” During my entire experience being incarcerated I was moved to and from at least 7 different facilities. The process of being stripped down and searched being repeated every time I was moved, even if it was a move from one cell block to another in the same facility.

One facility was a privately owned prison from Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) in Pahrump, Nevada. The blocks of this prison house 100 inmates each with 50 bunk beds in the middle, 25 tables in the front, and a few toilets and showers in the back. No walls, no privacy. During my stay in this facility, I was denied access to vegan food, threatened with charges of additional crimes, and placed in a Special Housing Unit (SHU) as a risk to security when supporters called in demanding I get fed, and denied access to any exercise, books, or television (as they had no more radio sets to give to inmates). I sat and slept, and this was the extent of my stay. At this CCA I also first witnessed someone getting stabbed over the television (for the few inmates who were able to obtain radios). I

also witnessed someone hit someone over the head with a sock full of batteries. This led to a full on riot between two prison gangs which ultimately ended with a tear gas canister being lowered from the ceiling and sprayed on all of us.

During my stay at another facility someone had heated up petroleum jelly in the microwave until it was a liquid and threw it into someone’s face. This coupled with constant fighting and sights and sounds that you would walk the other direction from and pretend you never saw if you stumbled upon them added an overwhelming amount of anxiety and fear. Probably one of the most emotionally draining experiences for me involved being thrown into solitary confinement for 24 hours for wearing my hat flipped up. Solitary confinement is a horrible place that can take you to the ultimate point of feeling subhuman and I am fortunate that I wasn’t there for as long as some other people have to be. The Center for Constitutional Rights states that “Solitary confinement is torture” and “The devastating psychological and physical effects of prolonged solitary confinement are well documented by social scientists: prolonged solitary confinement causes prisoners significant mental harm and places them at grave risk of even more devastating future psychological harm.”

Researchers have demonstrated that prolonged solitary confinement causes a persistent and heightened state of anxiety and nervousness, headaches, insomnia, lethargy or chronic tiredness, nightmares, heart palpitations, and fear of impending nervous breakdowns. Other documented effects include obsessive ruminations, confused thought processes, an over-sensitivity to stimuli, irrational anger, social withdrawal, hallucinations, violent fantasies, emotional flatness, mood swings, chronic depression, feelings of overall deterioration, as well as suicidal ideation.” They also claim that “Exposure to such life-shattering conditions clearly constitutes cruel and unusual punishment – in violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Further, the brutal use of solitary has been condemned as torture by the international community.”

For the most part I was pretty accepted in prison. People respected the fact that I didn’t testify. I had it a lot easier than many people, not to mention I had the