

I lay restless in my grandma's small apartment where I occupied the let out couch ^{crack} indefinitely. I lay on my back agitated, staring up at the white plaster ceiling. I set up in the dark hugging my knees tightly against my chest, trying to guard against the silent anxiety creeping into my gut. I rocked myself back and forth how a mother does when she tries to calm her baby. It didn't work. I threw myself back into the lumpy mattress in frustration.

There was an ominous feeling beginning to settle over me I wasn't going to make it. I had been "home" from the joint ^{managed to stay} seven months and had only ~~been~~ employed for two of those. My first couple weeks at a grocery packing warehouse called the dice on me, despite my record. The only problem was it was a train trip and two bus rides out in the suburbs. It seemed like I spent more getting to and from work than I actually earned at work. After a few absences and tardies they let me go. I began to cringe everytime I had to check the "dreaded box"! "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?" ☐ yes ☒ no

After that, the door of opportunity slammed shut in my face over and over again. Temp agencies wouldn't even hire me. I violated me and sent me back to jail; my grandma was threatening Everyone was growing impatient; my parole officer was threatening to throw me out; and my pregnant girlfriend ^{wanted} ~~wanted~~ to know what my plan for our baby's future was. I was beginning to feel desperate.

I had saw a commercial for Job Corps earlier that day offering. I saw a way out. An escape from this suffocating environment and a legit way to elevate myself financially. I

A representative answered and began asking me a series of questions. Everything looked promising! I was old enough, I had a high-school diploma, but I never made it past the third question. "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" My heart sank in unison with the phone into the receiver.

I wasn't going to make it!

~~When~~ This is the aftermath of the war on drugs and mass incarceration where one can be legally barred from employment, housing assistance, professional licenses where one can be self-employed, voting, jury service etc. Some of the most fundamental rights of a citizen. The ~~every~~ scary thing is, that the narrative above is that of 1 in 31 adults who are behind bars, on probation or on parole. To put that in even ~~more~~ greater perspective, is the ~~real~~ North Laundale neighborhood on the Westside of Chicago, where 70% of that community is ex-offenders.

Employment satisfies a basic human need to be self-sufficient, to support one's family, and to feel purposeful and ~~like a normal person~~ valuable. It helps instill self-esteem and to lower the chances for re-offending. How are the hundreds of thousands being released from prisons every year, be able to move forward when the invisible hand is holding them back?