This letter was written by a person incarcerated at Pleasant Valley.</br></br>

Lauren…</br></br>

First and foremost I want to introduce myself. I’m 42 and have been incarcerated for 24 years. At an early age I was in an unfortunate situation in which my life was in danger. As a result I killed someone in self-defense.</br></br>

Obviously, the jury did not believe my account. I was sentenced to death by incarceration and without any chance of parole or rehabilitation. In regards to the pandemic and the stories you’re interested in, well I can surely help you.</br></br>

Before we start, I’d like to say thank you and your staff members for taking the time in hearing my story along with the rest of the inmate population. Honestly, I didn’t think my life mattered.</br></br>

The pandemic is by far one of the worst experiences humanity has faced. I truly hope everyone of your staff and friends, oh and family, have made it through. It’s a terrible feeling to lose a loved one and if anyone did suffer such, my condolences and prayers go out to everyone.</br></br>

Fortunately, my family suffered no tragedy and my friends, well I have none. Mostly, the majority of my friends no longer see me as a human because I dropped out of my gang and chose to ask for help in changing my life.</br></br>

There is only one way to express my predicament without getting into details that are extremely difficult for me to talk about. Imagine your life the way it is today and the way it’s been the past 21 years, now imagine everyday you went about your business with a vest on, filled with explosives.</br></br>

Every morning was like getting up, putting this vest on, and knowing someone had the detonator. And I had to walk around wearing this vest, living my life on edge because it was only a matter of time before its activated. I dealt with this for 21 years.</br></br>

Around January, 2020, the news had finally reached the institution concerning the COVID-19 virus. Many people didn’t take it seriously but after people started realizing it was real, people started being more cautious.</br></br>

I realized the severity of the pandemic right away because I have valley fever. In 2014 I coughed up blood because of it and was hospitalized for 3 ½ weeks. And for this reason I was well aware of the danger.</br></br>

The protocols in place were so bad that we went from no cases, to nearly 2/3 of the population being infected. The people in charge decided to isolate anyone who came in contact with someone who’d been positive for COVID.</br></br>

And it sounded good but they failed to follow through with their own policies. For instance, contact tracing was flawed because if someone had contact with a staff that tested positive, they would move the individual to a so called, “COVID block” but leave his celly.</br></br>

Then some people ended up not having the virus and were forced to move in with someone that did, and they ended up getting it. It was a complete failure all the way around.</br></br>

Another example is, someone had tested positive in the morning but they still let him out and ran yard, dayroom, business as usual and then the next day, they locked us down because that person was positive. It made no sense at all.</br></br>

Before you knew it, they started moving people around to and from the COVID blocks and that’s when it got out of control. It became clear to me and everyone, that they wanted to achieve herd immunity. We couldn’t believe what was going on.</br></br>

Finally, the majority of the people were infected. There were about 30 to 40 people in my block that didn’t get sick. But for the most part it was everywhere.</br></br>

Luckily for me and my celly, we didn’t get it. I took extra precautions and quarantined myself. And I did that because I knew the prison had no clue about how to deal with the pandemic.</br></br>

If they would’ve listened to us when we expressed concern about moving people around, it wouldn’t have been out of control. If you were to investigate this prison and pay attention to all the moves (cell moves) that they did, it’ll show you that it was at that precise moment the virus spread.</br></br>

When they took our visits, my mom was planning to come see me from Mexico. But, when the pandemic hit, that plan had fallen through and was no longer possible. I’ve met my mother only three times in my life.</br></br>

When I was 10 my mom passed away. Or so I thought… At the age of 17, my godmother pulled me to the side and asked if I knew the truth about my mom? And I replied, no…</br></br>

She said, “Well, your mom is alive and your dad is in Missouri and you have brothers and sisters. Your mom and siblings are in Mexico.” And I couldn’t believe it. All this time I thought I was the only child and experienced the loss of my mother and it wasn’t so.</br></br>

Shortly after, I was arrested (1997).</br></br>

Before I found my mom and siblings I was at a point in my life where I felt hopeless and tired. I always had an obligation to the structure of prison life which expected me to do anything at anytime. Usually it meant getting in serious trouble, trouble I couldn’t afford to get into.</br></br>

And for the most part, in 24 years, I have two serious 115’s (write ups misconduct). Which is amazing really… but the presence of my mom changed my perspective on everything and really saved my life.</br></br>

In 2018, the day had come, the vest that I’ve been carrying for 21 years was activated. A red light was blinking and it was only through the grace and mercy of God that I was able to see it flashing and feel it.</br></br>

I was asked to pass a piece of contraband, and as soon as I touched it, I felt a strong sense of danger. I knew in my heart this is it, the detonator. My obligation was to go to yard and be brutally stabbed to death. That is what was expected of me by my own friends…</br></br>

I survived but it took a devastating toll on my mental health. By 2021, I was barely starting to get a little better but then the pandemic hit and I was regressing. Not being able to see my mom devastated my morale and I became worried she or my family would get sick.</br></br>

The only thing that helped me was college kept me busy. I am a student of College, I have a 4.0 GPA and I am a good person. I made mistakes and am truly sorry. It is people like you that make me feel human and I appreciate you all.</br></br>

Sincerely,</br></br>

P.S. I asked my mom what happened, how we were separated? And she said my aunt, r.i.p., stole me. She was at work and came home and I was gone. I was about three years old.</br></br>

My aunt was my mom’s sister and I thought she was my mom. She couldn’t have kids. They used to tell me I was the only child she had but as I grew older something didn’t make sense.