

## **Mirrors**

When you look in the mirror... Who do you see? Do you see a new you, or the person you used to be?

I have to be honest, when I look in the mirror, I'm proud to say that I see a new me. I arrived at SCI Graterford on January 23rd, 2013. I was given a 4-10 year sentence, and I still had a case pending. While at Graterford, I ran into many people that I hadn't seen in years. These were people that I've known since childhood, who seemed to have disappeared, and I had no recollection of where they'd gone, until I came to prison. The prison blocks were packed with people; some were back on parole violations, and some (many), were new commits—like myself.

Two months after arriving at Graterford, I was transferred to SCI Camphill, where—after a long wait—I had surgery on a hernia I'd been dealing with for quite some time. In order to have the surgery though, I was transferred to SCI Somerset's hospital. Shortly after I returned from surgery, I was again transferred—this time, to SCI-Benner Township.

Once there, I reunited with many people that I've known for years. We spent lots of time catching up on events that had taken place over the years, which we'd missed out on. Conversing and strategizing with a criminal mentality became a component of my prison existence.

In retrospect, I placed far too much thought into the negative activities that ended in lengthy prison terms and the intense trauma which will forever impact my life. Around the end of 2013—or the beginning of 2014—I signed up for a fitness program called 'Insanity.' This program kept me busy, and after it ended, I started my one-and-only mandatory prescriptive program, which was called 'Thinking For A Change.'

Honestly, I learned many things from this program, but I learned much more from the fitness program. I realized that fitness isn't something that happens overnight. It is a lengthy and transformational process that one must go through in order to achieve the ultimate goal. It teaches you to commit to yourself and to have patience.

Birthered out of fitness was a series of small challenges, meant to test my internal strength, challenging me on my dedication to accomplish the task at hand. I didn't realize it then, but this would be a pivotal moment during my incarceration. In 2015, I was in the Crossfit Class and finished fourth overall. I worked out two or three times a day; I jogged miles daily, and at the end, wound up being a coach on Crossfit

until my Incentive-based transfer in 2017. Let me just say that, working-out helped me to avoid all of the negativity that stagnates growth.

February of 2017 was also a pivotal moment of my incarceration. I was transferred to SCI Chester, shortly afterwards, I signed up for an Inside/Out Program from Swarthmore College, which I proudly completed.

That class was the mirror, and I was forced to look into it, in order to see a true reflection of myself; I was forced to acknowledge the state that I was living in. In that reflection, I realized that something had to change and that change had to come from within.

Since that class, I've participated in—and completed—many other classes and programs, which I know will help me as I move forward. What use is an Inside/Out College Exchange Program—or any other program/class—if you're not learning anything from it? If you're putting your best foot forward, but climbing the ladder to nowhere, what good is all of your effort?

We're in prison for the poor decisions that we've made. Sadly, some of us continue to make poor decisions, and those people will swear that they're destined to be successful once released. But if your poor decisions have brought you nothing but failure, chances are you'll continue to make them, unless you change something.

What we, as incarcerated men, rarely factor in, is the effect that our actions have on our families and friends. We don't realize that they suffer just as much as us—if not more so—though we're the ones serving time. It may not seem like it, because we've learned to adapt to what our reality has become, but many of our loved ones will never adapt to our absence.

If the road ahead of you is filled with the thoughts and actions of someone who believes they'll live to be a thousand years old, you have a lot of growing up to do. If you don't think so, keep up the great work, because you have time to spare... I guess they have it for sale. Let me know, because I'll start saving up now.

I present this question to you: Is there dust on your mirror? If not, why can't you see yourself for who you are? I know that when I look in the mirror, I see more than my physical features; I see a reflection of my inner-self and my transformational challenges along this journey that we call 'life.' It all boils down to who you are when nobody's watching. Be your best self and let your mirror reflect who you say you are.