

## **Conversation with the Walls**

The beginning of time. Time after time you ran into me without realizing it. I was created out of your perception of life. Your unwillingness to change, lack of education, and empathy are the core reasons why we met so much without you even knowing. I am at my best when I go undetected and normally it takes a lifetime to realize I exist, but by then it's far too late..they're either dead or in a prison somewhere regretting the decisions they've made up until that point. I am the largest invisible roadblock you'll never understand unless you educate yourself on how I've come to exist, and only then you'll find ways to navigate around me. Inmate."

"Chill out with this Inmate stuff..my name is Joe."

"I call you what you are at the time you are, are you not an Inmate?"

"Yeah, but that's not my name and I think it's borderline offensive."

"I care nothing about being offensive..let your family address you by your name they are the ones that believe in you..so when you want to hear your name converse with them. Now, I'd appreciate not being interrupted again..where was I..uh, I am what you'd call the subjective wall, so please do not confuse me with my brother who is the objective one. I do not discriminate on anyone, I frequent the minds of many people, professional and unprofessional. Just picture me as that thing that most people can't seem to get around, but think they can whenever they feel like it."

"Wait a minute, how you going to tell me what you'd appreciate but you can't even address me by my name..you have some nerve don't you think?"

"I don't think much, I just direct movies."

"What's that supposed to be some sort of joke?"

"How do you think you made it to prison?" The wall let it sink in then continued, "Every time you went to jail and came home all you ever did was revert back to what you were, a drug dealer..yeah that's what you are."

"A drug dealer?"

"Does it sound better coming from your lips?"

"You have a lot of slick words I see."

"My words are as slick as your actions..well, not actually, because you being in jail shows that you're not as slick as you'd like to think..I take that back. My words are much slicker than your actions."

"What happened was-"

"I don't really care to hear your lame excuses, YOU thinking about YOU is what happened. When you realize that, it'll be your first step to taking some sort of accountability."

"Whatever man."

"Whatever man, I'm not the one that's stuck in a jail cell, I've always been free to do as I pleased. You're the one that can't seem to navigate around me. I am the beholder of the golden key you've tried to possess through a life of crime."

"Golden key..you got jokes huh?"

"Yeah..golden key, the one you keep reaching for year after year. If you can get past me it's yours to keep."

"I still don't really know who you are and to tell you the truth I feel a little crazy talking to an invisible wall."

"Well, to be honest you're a little crazy to begin with. You seem to keep taking these shortcuts that you think are going to get you to your destination quicker, but all they ever did was place you miles behind time."

"I know."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah.. you seem to know more than you show. I'm going to be honest with you Inmate, you are one stubborn guy. Tough.. but pretty stupid if you ask me."

"See.. this is the thing, I didn't ask you anything."

"Don't get mad Inmate, the truth hurts...Do you feel it?"

"Feel what?"

"The hurt from the truth you jackass."

"Not really.. jackass."

"Inmate, you're the jackass... jackass."

"No, you're the jackass."

"OK, Inmate, you win. I don't want to argue with you."

"Well, cool out with all the name calling then."

"Alright...Inmate, help me understand some things."

"What things?"

"Like.. what went through your mind when you were first arrested."

"I can't lie, I was most disappointed in myself that I managed to get caught."

"Wow, no remorse for what you've done, Inmate, huh?"

"You asked me what went through my mind, not how I felt."

"Well, your feelings were of disappointment and I didn't hear the slightest bit of remorse."

"I do feel sorry for the person that I hit...I mean, I didn't intentionally do what I did. I was just trying to get away and as soon as I turned the corner a guy walked from in between the cars."

"What happened next, Inmate?"

"Give me a chance to finish, Wallio."

"Who the hell is wallio?"

"You."

"Me...Inmate watch how you speak to me."

"You real funny, Wallio."

"Oh, that's what you think huh? Jail isn't anything to laugh about Inmate."

"Aww, you going to keep going there on me, huh?"

"No, you came here first.. I just followed you."

"What the hell is you talking about?"

"Uh.. jail, does that ring a bell?... Anyway continue Inmate, before you piss me off and then I'll have to do something to you."

"Yeah...yeah...where was I at? Uh, oh yeah, when he appeared I tried to avoid him but it was too late and I hit him with the vehicle."

"What happened after that?"

"I lost control of the vehicle and I wrecked into an electric pole."

"Then what?"

"The airbags deployed and I noticed that the street lights had went out so it was dark. I exited the vehicle in an attempt to avoid capture and was arrested a block away."

"So, take me back to the beginning of that day...How did it start?"

"I can't recall every single detail about that day, but I'll begin with what transpired prior to the arrest."

"OK, you swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth so help yo black ass?"

"You a racist ass dude mannn!"

"Let's get something straight Inmate, I have no genetic background, I care nothing about color so a racist I could never be."

"That's your story?"

"No, it's your story. I just have a leading role in it, Inmate."

"Whatever you say, Wallio. Let me get back to my story because messing with you I'll never get the chance to finish."

"I'm listening, Inmate."

"Alright, so I was in West Philly and I had called some girl that I used to deal with so I met her at her mom's house."

"Where at?"

"In West Philly...not far from where everything happened at. We chilled for a little while then we drove through Upper Darby."

"For what?"

"Because where her mom lived at there were too many cops driving around and it made me uncomfortable."

"Why.. if you were just chilling like you said why would the cops make you uncomfortable?"

"Because I had a gun and some drugs on me...plus I had warrants out for my arrest."

"Wait a minute...now we're getting somewhere Inmate. We'll get to that later though, keep going."

"So, while we was chilling I got a phone from my little cousin saying something about my other cousin got pulled over. So I was on my way to drop the girl off so I could see what was-

"Wait...so you telling me that you left one area because cops made you uncomfortable. But on the other hand, you were ready to rush to be around the same people that made you uncomfortable...cops? Why? Does that even make any sense in that bean of a head you have there, Inmate?"

"I didn't really think about it."

"Inmate, considering the things you've been through it don't seem like you think about much, but keep going."

"So, after I got off the phone I was on my way."

"Where?"

"To drop the girl off at her mom's."

"You mean the place that made you uncomfortable."

"Yea.. I was driving up Marshall road to get to Cobbs Creek. I made the left and took that up to like Race street and made another left. I took that to 64th street and made a right. I drove up 64th, crossed Vine and was approaching Callowhill. As I was stopping I noticed a cop sitting on the left hand corner facing 64th."

"Facing 64th?"

"Yea, he was at the stop sign."

"So what happened?"

"I was driving kind of fast so when I stopped I was a little across the walkway. Then I kept going and the cops turned right behind me."

"Were you still driving fast?"

"No, I was driving slower. I knew they was going to pull me over."

"Did they?"

"Hell yea they pulled me over. As soon as I got halfway into the block they activated their sirens."

"What was the first thought that came to your mind?"

"The warrants."

"Why the warrants?"

"Because I knew if I gave them my license they would have pulled me out of the car and searched it."

"So what happened next?"

"I stopped briefly, then I took off."

"Where was the girl?"

"In the car."

"What was she saying?"

"I don't remember her saying anything."

"She didn't tell you to let her out or anything?"

"No, I don't recall her saying anything."

"OK, so you eluded. How far did you make it?"

"I made a right onto Girard then I made another right onto 63rd followed by a left, that's when the guy appeared from between the cars and I hit him."

"So that's when you lost control of the vehicle?"

"Yea."

"So what happened to the girl, was she injured?"

"No, she was cool.. I think she broke her finger."

"Inmate, do you understand what you just said?"

"Yeah."

"If you understood what you said you wouldn't have said she was cool and broken finger in the same sentence. Inmate, take your time speaking so you can understand what

you're saying before you say it. Remember that words are the verbal seeds that grow internally, so be careful where you plant them."

"I get what you saying, Wallio."

"Here we go with this again."

"With what again?"

"You. All you been doing is disrespecting me, Inmate."

"I know you not talking about disrespect."

"Anyway, let's not get off track. How did you get the warrants?"

"Alright, I was on house arrest for two drug cases that I had and I violated."

"How did you violate?"

"I came in like 8 minutes late and they sent the warrant unit to arrest me."

"So, walk me through what happened...like what was going through your mind. Wait a minute...Were you even in the house?"

"Yea...I was in the house."

"So you left before they got there?"

"No, when they got there I left."

"Now I'm confused, so they just let you walk past?"

"No, they didn't let me walk past. Alright let me break it down. When I came in late the first thing I did was call the emergency number that I had for house arrest."

"Why?"

"Because I was late and that's the number I was instructed to call if that ever happened."



"Okay, so you called the number?"

"When I called the number I spoke with a lady. I can't recall what her name was or if she even gave one, but I know that she was real nasty."

"Could it be that she was just doing her job and that's just the way you perceived it?"

"No, she was nasty."

"That's your story Inmate.. but tell me more I want to hear it."

"Okay, so after I got off the phone with her, I couldn't shake that feeling that she left me with."

"What feeling was that?"

"That feeling of going back to jail"

"Why did you have that feeling that you were going back to jail? What did she say that made you feel that way?"

"She told me to take my issues up with my house arrest officer in the morning."

"And you're saying that gave you the feelings of going back to jail?"

"Yea."

"Could it be that the guilt from your actions gave you those feelings?"

"Absolutely."

"Now we're getting somewhere, bonehead."

"Cool out, Wallio. Let me finish breaking it down. I realized that she wasn't going to flat out say sir we're coming to get you. That's why I felt the way I did and later that day I noticed a Ford Explorer sitting some houses down in the middle of the street."

"So?"

"That's when I realized I had to get out of the house."

“How did you know they were coming for you and not someone else?”

“Alright, I didn't know for sure so I just kept my eyes on them to see where they were going.”

“And where did they go?”

“At first, they were standing around setting up, I guess. I noticed that one of the guys was on the phone so I grabbed the gun that I had under the couch and I ran to the back door of the house to see if one of them had come through the alleyway.”

“Why did you grab the gun?”

“I was stashing it because I didn't want to risk leaving with it.”

“So you had a gun?”

“Yea.”

“This is like something out of a movie, keep going.”

“When I noticed that no one was back there I ran back to the front.”

“And what happened?”

“I noticed the guy that was on the phone was ending the call, then he and two other guys began heading towards the house I was in.”

“Seeing all of this happen...what went through your mind?”

“My adrenaline was pumping, but I remained calm so I could think of a way to get out of the house.”

“Why not just let them take you to jail, it was only a violation?”

“I had just got out not even three weeks prior to that.”

“Whose fault is that?”

“It was mine.”

"So you didn't want to go back to jail and you decided to make matters worse by fleeing arrest."

"Basically."

"So how did you get out?"

"When I seen them walk up the first landing and approach the front door I began walking up the stairs and they started knocking on the door. As they were knocking I was entering the middle bedroom so I could climb out of the window."

"So you could climb out of the window?"

"Yea, so I climbed out of the window and it was a ladder on the roof in between the houses."

"You just said you climbed out of the window, so the roof is next to the bedroom?"

"No, it was like a small area that connects in between the houses."

"Next time say that, remember what I told you about the words inmate."

"Alright so I tried to grab the ladder, but when I grabbed it it was chained down or something and it made a little noise. Fearing I would be heard, I jumped up and grabbed the ledge of the roof and pulled myself up."

"So you were on the roof?"

"Yea, I was on the roof, that's how I seen that the other warrant unit guys was out back."

"How'd you get down?"

"I ran across the roofs towards the post office and I jumped off...well I jumped from the third to the second, then to the first, a yard."

"Where'd you go after that?"

"When I jumped off the roof I broke my foot so I hopped up the street to the next hundred. That's when I called somebody to come pick me up."

“And that's how you ended up with the warrants?”

“That's where one of the warrants came from.”

“Where did the others come from?”

“I got the other ones because I couldn't go to court with the warrant from house arrest so I didn't go.”

“What do you mean by you couldn't go to court...you mean you didn't go. Nothing stopped you from going to court. You had free will to go, you just didn't which was your decision.”

“You're absolutely right, I did make the decision not to go.”

“So Inmate, what would you have done differently?”

“As far as?”

“As far as this whole situation that you're in.”

“For starters, my current circumstance is a build up of my past troubles. It is the results of the decisions that I've made thus far.”

“So you're taking accountability for your actions?”

“Absolutely...I have to take responsibility for the roads I've taken because I was in the driver's seat. Let me explain something to you though.”

“I'm listening.”

“If you cover a diamond with shit will it still shine?”

“It depends on how much shit you cover it with and what angle you look at it from.”

“I like that answer.”

“Of course you do, but what is your point?”

"My point is that...the drug selling.. the gun carrying, and the violence I've seen growing up was the shit that covered the educational institutions and blocked them from shining to me."

"Whose fault is it that you didn't know how to weave through the shit to see the shine?"

"It's definitely my fault, but at what point am I considered responsible?"

"When you know right from wrong."

"I'm glad you said that because through this time I've learned the error of my ways."

"What errors?"

"The criminal acts that has brought me back to jail time after time...that whole mentality I was trapped in for years."

"Give me an example."

"Alright, before I came to jail this time I didn't see nothing wrong with what I was doing on the streets. I didn't see nothing wrong with selling drugs. I'm not saying that I loved the occupation itself, I'm saying that I loved the money that came from it."

"What makes things so different now...what if you go home and there are no opportunities? What if a buddy of yours says *hey I got something for you*, and it turns out to be drugs?"

"I have no time left to waste on this so-called game that is incapable of loving back. As far as opportunities, I know that things won't be easy, but I'm up for the challenge. I have short term and long term goals that I have no doubt in my mind about reaching and they don't involve me reverting back to things that will remove me from society again. Through this time I've learned how to dedicate myself to whatever the task is without giving up and going back to the streets is giving up to me."

"Inmate I'm going to hold you to that...I've never wished this for anybody, but I'm actually hoping to never cross paths with you again."

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me, it's you that has to put in the work. I knew everything you told me, I just wanted to see if you'd be honest with yourself by telling the truth and accepting responsibility."

"So how did I do?"

"Don't push it, bonehead, and do yourself a favor?"

"What?"

"Don't make the same decisions and think that the outcomes are going to somehow be different."

"I got you."

"No Inmate, have yourself first because prison and death are two things you count on if you don't."

With that last sentence my conversation with the wall ended. I was stuck staring at the ceiling as a fluster of thoughts ran through my mind like they had legs on them. I couldn't quite wrap my head around having a conversation without ever opening my mouth. I was stuck with questions that I had no clue of answering without a witness, but wait...my cellmate. Could he have heard something? Was it he that I had a conversation with? What if I ask him and he doesn't recall this ever happening with him or anyone else? Would he still look at me the same? Was I really in a conversation with a wall? Did I imagine this? The deeper I thought about the conversation I had, the more unreal it appeared to me. But it felt so real...it felt so real.