

## Imagine

Imagine darkness, if you will, and in that darkness imagine thousands of prison cells encrusted with the rust and filth of ages. Imagine thousands of fingerprints gripping cold bars of steel as the forgotten men inside come to terms with their solitude.

Imagine the loneliness, the despair, and the tears that imprisoned men drown themselves in as they sit in decrepit 8x6 foot cells. Cells that have warehoused thousands of men before them. Cells that will warehouse even more after they've gone.

Imagine, if you can, those thousands of men sitting alone, their heads hung low, thinking of the damage they've caused to themselves as well as others. Imagine the shame.

Imagine the remorse that grips a prisoner's soul when self-honesty forces him to contemplate the choices he's made.

Imagine those poor choices haunting the minds of prisoners like a nightmare. Imagine within that nightmare not having an opportunity for escape...not physical escape mind you, but mental escape from the unrelenting message that they've failed life at its simplest terms. Imagine guilt inspired insight being the most brutal of punishments. Imagine.

Imagine the effects of time. Imagine the days, and the months, and the years that pass as loved ones fade away and support systems crumble. Imagine social interaction being reduced to shakedowns and strip searches.

Imagine the long drawn out exhale that comes when a man lowers his head in defeat. Banished. Placed into a warehouse where problems aren't meant to be solved but rather hidden away as though time itself repairs the root causes of failure. Imagine. Just imagine the thousands of men who are lost, destined only to be swallowed up by a raging river of regret, shame, and unrealized potential. It's the river that flows slowly through every prison, methodically stripping the humanness from within just like sediment is loosened and carried away from the muddy banks of a rivers edge.

Imagine self-worth, or for that matter, the lack thereof as thousands of men become more and more aware that society has in large part given up on them and cast them into exile.

Imagine them believing that if they died within the stagnant filth of their rusty prison cells, what they'd be remembered for most is being disappointments. Nothing more than who they were on their very worst day. Imagine.

Imagine that the cell door does open for those that are lucky, five years, ten years, and sometimes thirty years later. Imagine the swell of hope when a man is told that freedom is once again his...penance paid, only to have that hope abandoned when he discovers that a clean slate is just a phrase, not a reality that he'll experience.

My name is James. I've been here since I was seventeen years old. My fingerprints have gripped the same cold bars of steel that thousands before me have held. My emotions have soared and plummeted just as theirs have. My poor choice has filled me with guilt and shame just as theirs surely did. I've struggled within the currents of this rivers punishment for eight thousand, and sixty eight days so far.

I don't know if my cell door will ever open. I don't know if that's something I'll ever deserve. But I'll tell you what I do know. I sure wish I could imagine something different, something better, for the person I harmed with that poor choice made so long ago. Imagine.