

Life Behind the Razor Wire L.N.S.

LIFE BEHIND THE RAZOR WIRE

A PLAY

By

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2nd draft (C)

" Life Behind the Razor Wire "

SYNOPSIS:

"Life Behind the Razor Wire"

Once a week a group of men serving life in prison without the chance of parole meet at a Lifer's support group to discuss the issues they face day by day in the state penitentiary. Hoping for a chance at redemption, even with their severe consequences they have to endure for their crimes against society. Death by incarceration. But, still hoping and dreaming for a second chance back into society as redeemed and changed men.

Written by:
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Setting:
A state penitentiary classroom.

Characters:

Mr. Reynolds: Staff group facilitator.
Ash: Lifer.
Bing: Lifer.
Doc: Lifer.
Donald: Lifer.
Steven: Blind Lifer.
Mel: Juvenile Lifer.
Eddie Lopez: Lifer.
Omar: Lifer.
Poet: Lifer.
Leroy: Lifer.
John Franco: Lifer.
Jorge: Lifer.

An original play that brings forth the facts based on the realities of serving a life sentence in prison without the chance of parole.

ACT 1

On the stage is a group of chairs. It's a classroom setting in a state prison. At this time there is no one in the classroom. A song is heard in the background to set the mood of the story that is forth coming on the stage.

After a few moments the song fades out and ends. Then a mid-aged man enters the classroom by stage left carrying a bottle of water and some papers. A brief case he has with a pen behind his ear. He seems to be a man full of stress with his demeanor. He looks around the classroom and then looks at his watch with a sense of urgency. The man's name is Mr. Reynolds who is employed by the state, a psychologist in a state prison. He places the chairs in a semi-circle in the room. He drinks from his bottle of water, looks at a few papers that he pulls out of his brief case. He then takes a seat and tries to wait patiently.

Then after a short moment of time a group of men begin to enter the classroom. An elderly African American man with a walking cane waves at Mr. Reynolds. His name is Ash.

Ash:

(Coughs)

Aggg. Agggg. How you doing, Mr. Reynolds, huh?

Mr. Reynolds stands up and shakes hands with Ash.

Mr. Reynolds:

I'm doing well, Ash. I'm glad your here. It does my heart well.

They break from the hand shake.

Ash:

Well, I gave you my word I would be here and I'm a man of my word. Everybody can they that about me, huh? (Coughs) Agg. Aggg.

Ash takes a seat in the semi-circle. The other men begin to sit down also. A blind lifer enters the room with Leroy aiding him. They sit down next to each other.

Mr. Reynolds:

Thanks for being here.

Ash:

Good to be here.

Other men enter the classroom and begin to sit down. That's when A mid-aged man named Franco enters in the room. He looks around the room somewhat confused.

Franco:

I hope I'm not late, huh?

Everyone looks at Franco.

Franco:

This is the right room,huh? For the Lifer's support meeting,huh? Right?

Mr.Reynolds approachs Franco.

Franco:

I mean,I got the right room,huh?

Mr. Reynolds:

You got the right place,sir. And,what's your name,sir?

Mr.Reynolds offers his hand for a hand shake. Franco looks at Mr. Reynolds reluctantly and then shakes Mr.Reynolds hand.

Franco:

My name is Franco. John Franco. I'm a recent transfer.

Thet break from the hand shake.

Mr.Reynolds:

Okay then. Have a seat Mr.Franco and welcome.

Franco walks towards a seat. Then Omar speaks to Franco.

Omar:

What prison did you transfer from?

Franco turns towards Omar and just stares at him.

Franco:

What's that?

Omar:

What prison did you come from?

Franco just looks at Omar very sternly and then speaks.

Franco:

What's this,huh? A thousand questions,huh? Does it matter? Does it freaking matter?

Omar takes offense towards Franco's remarks.

Omar:

Do you matter?

Franco looks at Omar as he becomes very intraged. He them takes a step towards Omar. Mr.Reynolds steps in front of Franco.

Mr.Reynolds:

Okay,gentlemen. Just calm down here. Everything is gonna be okay. Just relax. We're gonna have a good night and a good meeting.

Franco turns away and sits down. Then Franco stares at Omar with intense eyes. Omar looks back in the staredown.

Mr.Reynolds takes a look around the classroom and waits for a short moment for other men to enter the classroom. He takes a sip from his water bottle once again as everyone sits in silence. Mr.Reynolds looks around the classroom at each man.

Mr.Reynolds:
I guess this is it,huh?

The other ten men in the classroom look around at each other. The blind lifer listens carefully.

Mr.Reynolds:
Well then,we might as well begin. We don't have all night.

That's when a younger man enters the room,out of breath and wiping the sweat from his forehead. His name is Mel,a young lifer in his early 20's. He speaks with a slight studder in his voice.

Mel:
(Slight studder)
This is the Lifer's support group,right?

Mr.Reynolds:
This is the right place.

Mr.Reynolds stands up.

Mel:
(Slight studder)
That's g--o--o--d. I'm sorry I'm late.

Mr.Reynolds:
And who are you if you mind me asking?

Mel:
(Slight studder)
I'm Mel.

Mr.Reynolds:
Have a seat,Mel.

Mel looks at the other men in the classroom with some anxiety and takes a seat in the classroom next to Eddie Lopez.

Mr.Reynolds:
Was there anybody else out in the hallway coming to our meeting?
Did you see anybody else,Mel?

Mel:
(Slight studder)
I'm the last one,sir.

Mr.Reynolds:
Very well then.

Mr.Reynolds starts to slowly pace in the room.

Mr.Reynolds:
I'm very glad you gentlemen showed up here tonight for our lifer's support meeting.

Mr.Reynolds then walks over to his water bottle and takes another sip from his bottled water. Then he looks at the men in the room and counts the group.

Mr.Reynolds:
We got twelve men here,which includes two new men. (Pause) This prison has many lifers here. The most in the state compared to any other state penitentiary. But,only twelve men showed up. Truly amazing. Unbelievable.

Mr.Reynolds looks at each man eye to eye.

Mr.Reynolds:
First and foremost, I want to thank you all for being here. This support group means so much to me.

Mr.Reynolds starts to pace in the classroom once again.

Mr.Reynolds:
I'm Mr.Reynolds. I'm the group's facilitator. Some of you guys I know and some I don't. This is the first time we've met.

Mr.Reynolds looks at Mel and Franco.

Mr.Reynolds:
I'm a psychologist here at the prison. (Pause) This is the lifers support meeting. This is where you guys can talk about the issues and concerns that you guys face as lifers. Hopefully,there will be many more meetings with this group and the attendance will increase. These meetings will be on a weekly basis,depending on holidays,of course. (Pause) There are some guidelines that we all must follow as a group,gentlemen. This must be addressed for you two new guys.

The men listen as Mr.Reynolds paces more in the classroom.

Mr.Reynolds:
First,please give each man a chance to speak if he chooses to do so without interrupting him. That man sharing deserves his due respect when they share with the group.

Mr.Reynolds takes another sip from his water bottle.

Mr.Reynolds:

Second, please be discreet. This is our golden rule. What's shared in the group stays in the group. It's personal. Don't gossip about what's shared in the group. We want men to be comfortable and feel a sense of trust among the men in this group. We want a family atmosphere.

Franco laughs to himself.

Franco:

(Laughs)

Ha.ha.ha.ha.

Mr.Reynolds stops and looks at Franco with glaring eyes.

Mr.Reynolds:

Is there something funny,Mr.Franco?

Franco doesn't respond.

Mr.Reynolds:

Please, share with the group.

Franco:

I'm okay, Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:

Oh,you are,huh?

Mr.Reynolds slowly walks over to Franco.

Mr.Reynolds:

Since you interrupted our group and broke our guidelines, we all would like to know what you find so funny.

Franco looks at Mr.Reynolds eye to eye.

Franco:

I'm alright,okay? Don't push it.

Mr.Reynolds:

Please share with the group,if you don't mind,Mr.Franco. I insist..

Franco:

Okay then. (Short pause) I don't trust anybody in the penitentiary,man. Nobody. I seen the effects of letting your guard down, man. Trust nobody. That's the golden rule,Mr.Reynolds. My golden rule. Franco's golden rule. Trust nobody and I mean,nobody.

Mr.Reynolds slowly responds to Franco's comments.

Mr.Reynolds:

I see then.

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Mr.Reynolds walks over to Franco with sincerity in his words.

Mr.Reynolds:

I truly understand what you're saying. But, we want to try to do something different here. Just try to follow the guidelines.

(Pause) I believe you came to this meeting for a reason,Mr.Franco I believe you're searching for something.

Franco looks away from Mr.Reynolds as he tries to hold back his deep emotions.

Franco:

Yeah,I've been searching all of my life,for something.

There's a short moment of silence as Mr.Reynolds thinks deeply about Franco's response.

Mr.Reynolds:

Haven't we all. (Pause) Then would you like to speak first,Franco? Talk about what you're feeling about prison or whatever?

Franco leans back in his chair.

Franco:

Maybe later.

Mr.Reynolds:

Okay then. (Pause) We know the guidelines of our group. The floor is open. Who would like to start this off? Who wants to speak first?

There's another short moment of awkward silence as Mr.Reynolds looks around the classroom. The men look at each other with very awkward glances.

Mr.Reynolds:

Somebody must want to say something,huh? I mean,everything is going great for you guys. Life is good,huh? There's no major issues you guys are dealing with,right? Everything is good,huh?

That's when old man Ash stands up slowly coughing.

Ash:

(Coughing)

Aggggg.Agggggg. I'll go first. I got no shame in my game.

Agggg.Agggggg. I'll speak.

Mr.Reynolds:

Okay,Ash. The floor is all yours.

Mr.Reynolds sits down. Ash wipes his mouth with some tissue he pulls out of his pocket. Then he puts the tissue back in his pocket afterwards.

Ash:

Yeah,I'll go first.

Ash looks around at the men in the room. He's an elderly African American man with failing health. Prison life has taken it's toll on this man.

Ash:

Well, you all know me, huh? You all know about who I am. I've been in this penitentiary for 50 years. 50 long freaking hard years in this prison, man. That's a long time, huh? I've never been transferred. This has been my home most of my life. This is all I know. (Pause) I'm a juvenile lifer. I fell at the age of 16 years old. I was just a stupid ass boy. A boy in the big house hell-hole. The penitentiary. (Pause) My big brother Samuel and his homies used me as a look-out man during a bank robbery in Center City, Philly. For me, it was a big thing, man. Like getting layed for the first time. This was a chance for me to prove myself to Samuel. My big brother was my idol. I wanted to be just like him. He was a god to me. This was my first big score with my brother.

Ash looks at the men in the room very closely.

Ash:

Three people were gunned down in that bank robbery, man. It went bad. All wrong, man. My brother Samuel was killed. Shot dead by a security guard. His homies were all killed too. The cops gunned them all down. (Pause) I was alone. I stood alone.

Ash begins to cough loud.

Ash:

(Coughs)

Agggggg. Agggggg. Agggggg. Agggggg. (Pause) Excuse me, gentlemen.

Ash wipes his mouth again with the same tissue from his pocket and then throws the tissue in a trash can by the desk area.

Ash:

Two cops were killed and a civilian. An older women, a grandmother of ten. It all went bad, man. We had a solid plan and then everything went to shit, man. Nobody was suppose to die. Nobody. (Pause) I tried to run, but was caught by the police. Those cops beat me down, man. Beat me black and blue. They took out all their rage on me. A juvenile.

Ash holds back the tears in his eyes. His pain is visible.

Ash:

In the end, I was found guilty of three second degree charges of murder for being an accompish to murder. Life without parole. My public defender did nothing in my defense. A public pretender. That son of a bitch sold my ass up the river. That bastard. Aggg. (Coughs) Agggggggg. Agggggggg. Agggggggggg. Agggggggg. Aggggggggg. Agggggggg.

Mr. Reynolds:

Are you okay, Ash?

Ash now uses a handkerchief to wipe his mouth.

Ash:

(Coughs)

Agg.Aggg. I'm alright,Mr.Reynolds. Agggg.Aggggg.

He takes a deep breath as he holds the dirty handkerchief in his right hand, just in case he has another coughing attack.

Ash:

Over the years I filed all my appeals in every court I could, State,Federal, Third Circuit and the United States Supreme Court. Denied all across the board,man. No relief in sight. I've filed for commutation eight times. Everytime denied.

Ash looks among the men.

Ash:

As you guys can see, my health is failing. I was diagnosed with full blown stage four lung cancer. Those damn cigarette's have done me in,huh? I'm addicted to them. I'm taking treatments. On chemotherapy. I guess,it's helping. Hell, I just got over a stroke a few months back as well. I'm a fucking mess,huh? Soon, I guess, I'll be transferred to the institution for the geriatric and seriously ill inmates,huh? The place where the sick die. (Pause) I seen it all in this joint. I lost it all. My family are all gone, died along the way. I have nobody out there out in society to help me. I guess, the state will have to take care of my remains when I fly away to the land of the great beyond.

Ash coughs again.

Ash:

(Coughs)

Agggg.Aggggg.Aggggg.

He uses his handkerchief to wipe his mouth again.

Ash:

I assume, the state will cremate me when I die,huh? Throw my ashes in the trash,huh? (Laughs) Ha.ha.ha.ha. Good old Ash turned to Ashes,huh? I've heard the storieswho have died in this place without family or friends to collect their remains. Sad story, my brothers. Sad shit.

Ash takes a short moment to gather his thoughts.

Ash:

To be honest with you guys. I'm tired,man. Tired of it all. Living in a cell for all of my life. I'm tired of the lock-downs,the strip searches and working for pennies. I'm tired of all the nut ass shit being behind bars. I'm done with it,man.

Ash coughs again.

Ash:
(Coughs)
Aggggg.Aggggg.Aggggg.

Ash wipes his mouth again.

Ash:
I'm just so damn tired. I mean, what kind of life would I have out in the streets anyway,huh? With my age? My health? My criminal background? I know the fucking end is near. I'm gonna die soon. I'm getting out by being carried out in a damn body bag. Let's get real now. (Pause) I was hoping for some rerlief as a juvenile lifer. It doesn't look good,huh? Each day of my life is slipping away. I'm almost ready to be with my Lord Jesus in God's land of glory. Heaven,man. Yeah,heaven. There will be no more pain,or tears and death. Hell,there will be no more prison,huh? It's gonna be good. Real damn good,huh?

Ash has another coughing attack.

Ash:
(Coughs)
Aggggg.Aggggg.Aggggggg.

He wipes his face once again with his handkerchief.

Ash:
I've done all I can do to better myself. I even got myself a damn good college education. I got a couple of degree's,man. Yeah,imagine that? Old man Ash is a educated man,huh? (Laughs) Ahhhh.Ahhhhh. Ahhhh. I guess, this is where my victory is in education. My faith. What more can I do,huh? (Pause) I just don't know. I don't know anymore.

Ash slowly sits down.

Ash:
One thing is for sure. I am a better person now. I've done some good with my life. I guess,that's better than nothing. It's gotta be.

There's a short moment of silence as the men ponder on Ash's life story. That's when Eddie Lopez stands up and speaks. Eddie a young Spanish man in his mid-twenties.

Eddie:
I guess I'll go next.
(Clears his throat)
Agggggg.Aggggggggg.

Eddie looks at all the men with a cold stare.

Eddie:
I'm not to good speaking in public.

Mr.Reynolds:

Just do the best that you can. We're not here to judge.

Eddie:

That's good. Very good.

Eddie gathers his thoughts together. He's very nervous.

Eddie:

I'm Eddie Lopez. I got a life sentence,been in for seven long years,man. (Pause) I'm from the hood, North Philadelphia badlands That's where I'm from,all of my life. I hustled all of my life, man. That's how I survived.

There's some arrogance in Eddie's voice.

Eddie:

I had my spots. My corners,man. I had my crew. I sold the best coke,crack,heroin,guns and women in the city,man. Whatever you want,I got it. Whatever,huh?

Eddie smiles as he thinks back.

Eddie:

I ruled the streets. My idol,my hero was Tony Montana from the movie "Scarface". That's my man. My shit.

The street thug is heard in Eddie's voice.

Eddie:

If anybody messed with me territory,they were gunned down,man. They faced my fury.

Mr.Reynolds is taking notes and shaking his head as Eddie speaks. Poet speaks up in disgust.

Poet:

You ain't no tough guy,Eddie.

Mr.Reynolds turns to Poet.

Mr.Reynolds:

Let him speak,Poet. Okay?

Poet leans back in his chair with frustration.

Poet:

Right. I hear you,Mr.Reynolds.

Eddie looks at Poet with angry eyes. Poet just leans back and smiles.

Mr.Reynolds:

You can continue,Eddie.

Eddie:

Yeah,I will do just that,man.

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Eddie paces the room with a slight strut.

Eddie:

I was the drug lord,man. I was the man. I had the money,the power and all the women. I had it all. I had a real nice apartment. Ate the best foods. Wore the sharpest suits,man. Drove the best cars and I had the baddest, the hottest women! (Pause) It's always good to have a sexy chick by your side,man. It's a sign of power,man. Presents a good image,huh?

Mr.Reynolds shakes his head again in disbelief.

Eddie:

Eddie:

I have seven children. I planted my seed deep in alot of women, huh? (Laughs) Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha. I love the sex,huh? I'm still a lover,man. (Laughs) Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.

The men look at Eddie like he's a real idiot.

Eddie:

My children are being taken care of,believe me when I say that, huh. My people are making sure of that. My children are getting the best that life offers. Their all getting a good education,man My babies mama's bring my children up to see me every week,man. (Pause) My oldest son wanted to be like me,huh? He just turned twenty a few days ago. He always got into fightsa just like me. Been in and out of trouble just like me. Now,he's serving a life sentence....(Short pause)...just like me.

Eddie tries to hold back his tears as he stands still wiping a few tears from his eyes. Eddie then begins to pace the room again with his spanish gangster strut.

Eddie:

My lawyers are working on my appeals. This life sentence will be no more,man. No more. Money buys the best. I live by my code,look out for number 1!!!! Uno!!!! Me,man!!!!!!!!!! You respect me and I'll respect you. I'm a fighter. I've been a fighter all of my life. I remember seeing my father get gundowned right in front of me. I was just a kid seeing my father's brains blown out by a rival gang leader. I never forgot that sight,man. Never.

Eddie stands still as he looks forwardlooking back at his past.

Eddie:

That horrible day is always there,man. Always,man.

Then Eddie snaps out from that memory and paces the room again.

Eddie:

I'm gonna fight for what is mine,my freedom!

Eddie turns toward Ash and speaks to him.

Eddie:

Let me tell this,Ash, I don't want to grow old in this freaking place rotting away like a piece of trash. I'm not gonna give up, you know,huh? I'm gonna fight to live. I'm not giving up. That's loco. Crazy. I'm not giving up.

Ash points at Eddie his defense towards Eddie's remarks.

Ash:

Neither did I,Eddie. (Coughs) Agggg.Aggggg. Neither did I. Time has away of making things move by, and before you know it,there's no more time. It's over. None of us live forever in this life.

Eddie:

That's not gonna happen to me,Ash. Not me. I always find a way of getting what I want. Always,man.

Eddie looks at Mr.Reynolds writing in his notebook.

Eddie:

Hey,Mr.Reynolds! What you writing a book,huh? You writing about, man? Maybe you can learn more about life from me,huh? The Latin lover,huh? Learn how to treat a women real good. She'll love you all night.

Eddie smiles as Mr.Reynolds looks at him very frustrated.

Eddie:

I'm the spanish love making machine,huh?

Mr.Reynolds:

Are you done speaking,Eddie?

Eddie:

I said what I wanted to say. Next man.

The other men look around at each other.

Mr.Reynolds:

Thanks for sharing,Mr.Lopez.

Eddie sits down.

Eddie:

It was no problem.

Eddie waves at Mr.Reynolds.

Eddie:

No problem at all.

Mr.Reynolds:

Who would like to share next?

That's when Poet stands up fast.

Poet:

I got something to say, Mr. Reynolds.

Mr. Reynolds:

Okay, Poet.

Poet takes a few steps forward.

Poet:

I spent twenty five years on death row. Recently, just had my sentence commuted to life. Coming off death row to a life sentence and walking outside in the yard was like freedom to me. Big-time, man. I've seen many men scream during the midnight hour in agony wondering when they would ever be executed. That thought was only in mind, man. Hell, some hung it up hanging in their cell turning purple.

Poet:

Poet points to Eddie.

Poet:

You're no Escobar, Eddie. Stop being something your not, brother, huh? What are you scared of, Eddie? You're no tough guy.

Eddie waves off Poet.

Eddie:

You don't know me. You don't me at all.

Poet:

Be you, Eddie. Just be you. That's all I'm saying to you.

Eddie:

Yeah..yeah, whatever.

Eddie just sits there and looks away from Poet.

Poet:

Everyday on this earth is a blessing. Every act of mercy towards others is a blessing. We should never take nothing for granted.

Poet looks at all the men in sincerity.

Poet:

The great creator has blessed me to write poems about my life experiences in this life to help others. I have ten books published of my works. I take great pride in my accomplishments by the grace of God alone. (Pause) My poem "Mercy" has a quote that I speak to myself everyday. "I'm in love with mercy, for mercy first loved me."

Poet holds back the tears from his eyes.

Poet:

I killed a man decades ago.

Then Poet wipes a tear from his eye.

Poet:

This man had a family. Wife and kids. I gunned him down to feed my addiction for money. The devil had my soul, man. I had no regard for human life. For anything. All to get high, man. Some things from our past we can never change. It's something that I'm forever remorseful for. (Pause) I remember seeing my wife and my baby son behind glass for visits while on the row. Every visit I was grateful for. (Pause) The man I killed will never have a visit with his family. Never.

Poet lowers his head.

Poet:

I lost my mother and father over the years on the row. Over time we lose it all in prison. I guess, in life the more we live, the more you lose.

Poet lifts his head.

Poet:

Consequences. (Pause) Consequences in this life.

Poet takes a deep breath.

Poet:

The day I held my wife and my little boy in my arms was a true miracle when I got off the row and had a real visit. My wife has stood by my side all these years. That's a gift from God. I curse the day I went out to get high. I had to work on my recovery to deal with my addiction. The triggers from my past. It's deep...goes deep, man. We all gotta go deep to see the truth. The real truth. (Pause) My son is a teacher. He's married to a wonderful woman and they have a baby girl. I am a grandfather.

Mr.Reynolds:

That's great, Poet.

Poet smiles and points up.

Poet:

All good things come from the father of lights, huh?

Poet sits down.

Poet:

Thanks for listening to me.

Mr.Reynolds:

You're honestly is much appreciated, Poet.

Poet:

If we're not honest with ourselves, than there is no change. That's how I see it nowadays in my own personal life.

Mr.Reynolds:

You're statement is so true. We all have to look within ourselves to change. That takes real courage to do so. Thank you, Poet.

Poet:

I hope I helped someone here. I really do.

Mr.Reynolds:

I believe you have.

Mr.Reynolds takes a sip from his water.

Mr.Reynolds:

Who would like to share next,huh?

Mr.Reynolds looks over at Leroy sound asleep. Leroy is an older man. He's sleeping with a slight snore.

Mr.Reynolds:

I guess he's not gonna share with the group. Leroy's out like a light,huh?

Some of the group laughs.

Laughter:

Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.

The laughter doesn't bother Leroy from sleeping. Leroy sleeps away. Everybody shakes their head and some laugh on.

Mr.Reynolds:

Mr.Leroy must be really tired.

Ash:

Everyday is long in this joint,Mr.Reynolds. Especially at our age. Leroy also takes heavy psych medication that puts him under real quick. Out like a light.

Mr.Reynolds;

I can see that.

Leroy sleeps on without a care in the world.

Omar:

I'll speak next,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:

Okay,Omar.

That's when Omar stands up and speaks. He's a mid-aged Muslim man.

Omar:

I'm Omar. Omar Timmons. Peace unto to you all.

Omar steps forward as he speaks to the men.

Omar:

I'm a devote man of faith. I follow the Koran and its teaching. All praises to Allah. (Pause) I'm a lifer myself. It's been very difficult being a husband to my faithful wife all these years behind bars for something I didn't do. (Pause) Trying to be a good father to my children. It's been so hard seeing them grow up from this side of the fence, from the razor wire and that huge damn wall. (Pause) I am an innocent man. I shouldn't be here. I filed brief after brief, petition after petition. The courts constantly are giving me the run around. I'm dealing with time-barr issues. Evidence proves my innocence, DNA proves this fact. I didn't kill anybody. It wasn't me. Ten years in prison for something I didn't do. It's messed up, man. Wrong on all levels. (Pause) Still, I trust my creator for my freedom. I'm suffering for no reason at all, for being at the wrong place at the wrong time. I was, was identified at the crime scene, but it wasn't me. A witness swears it was me. DNA proves it wasn't. Why am I still here, huh? (Pause) Why are innocent black men being gunned down by the police for no reason whatsoever? Where's the justice when these police officers don't spend anytime behind bars for acts of murder? Where's the justice? Where? (Pause) People think I'm crazy when I tell them I'm innocent, innocent, man.

Omar slowly sits down. After a short moment Franco speaks his mind very loud and rude.

Franco:

Yeah, yeah...I guess we're all innocent, huh?

Omar:

But, I am.

Franco:

That's what they all say, huh? I'm innocent. I didn't do the deed! Stop lying to us and yourself, Omar. Take responsibility for what you did!

Anger rises in Omar's facial expressions.

Omar:

You better shut your damn mouth, Franco. I got no problem breaking your jaw! Your nothing but a damn punk!

Mr. Reynolds:

Calm down here.

Franco stands up ready to fight.

Franco:

Let's see who's the punk, huh?

Omar:

Shut your face, Franco.

Omar stands up.

Franco:
Bring it!!!!!!!

Franco moves towards Omar about to fight. That's when a stressed-out Mr.Reynolds steps between both men.

Mr.Reynolds:
This is not gonna happen!! Not at this meeting!!! Do you men understand me,huh?!!!

Omar and Franco look at each other eye to eye with cold stares.

Franco:
Did you both hear what I said?

Omar:
You're lucky,Franco.

Franco:
I don't believe in luck.

Mr.Reynolds:
I said do you guys understand me?

Omar:
I hear you.

Mr.Reynolds:
You're a good man,Omar. Don't forget that fact. Just calm down.

Omar:
Right...right.

Omar slowly backs away and sits down. Mr.Reynolds turns to Franco with authority.

Mr.Reynolds:
Sit down,Franco or leave. It's your choice. I'm not playing around here.

Franco backs away and sits down. Leroy sleeps on,hearing nothing. Mr.Reynolds stands there with his hands up in frustration.

Mr.Reynolds:
You guys must work together for any kind of change to occur whatsoever. Fighting against each other just makes things worse. You can't get things done being in the hole,correct?

Omar:
Some people have to watch their mouth.

Franco:
I speak my mind,Omar. I don't care what anybody thinks.

Mr.Reynolds snaps out in his frustration.

Mr.Reynolds:

Enough with the crazy talk! We're in the middle of our lifer's meeting!!!

Everyone stays quiet as Mr.Reynolds snaps out. Some men try to maintain their tough attitude.

Mr.Reynolds:

I want no problems here,damn it!! Believe me,the powers that be will have no problem shutting this meeting down. Don't give them a reason to do so. The institution approved this meeting. Let's make it a success.

Mr.Reynolds takes another sip from his water,trying to calm his nerves down. Mr.Reynolds sits back down in his anxiety.

Mr.Reynolds:

Everybody just calm down here. Okay? Calm the hell down.

Mr.Reynolds takes another sip from his water.

Mr.Reynolds:

I need to calm down.

Mr.Reynolds looks over at Leroy,who is sound asleep.

Mr.Reynolds:

And this guy will sleep through anything,huh?

That's when Leroy suddenly stands up out of his sound sleep.

Leroy;

You called me,Mr.Reynolds?

Leroy is in a haze as he stands up trying to maintain his balance.

Mr.Reynolds:

No I didn't,Leroy. Please sit back down,okay?

Leroy slowly sits back down very uneasy.

Mr.Reynolds:

You okay,Leroy?

Leroy nods his head and gives Mr.Reynolds the peace sign with his fingers. That's when Donald stands up very slow and stiff as he looks at the group with crazy eyes.

Donald:

It's my turn to speak,gentlemen. I'm Donald James Everson, and I'm not innocent. I did the crime. It was a miracle that I didn't get the death penalty. I've been in prison for decades. 45 years. I live with the remorse for taking those young lives. I sliced them all to pieces,man. People think I'm out of my mind.

Donald looks at all the men with a crazy cold stare. His body language is very mechanical.

Donald:

They think I'm off my rocker, sicko, killer and a nutjob. I did what I had to do. (Pause) I'm a Vietnam veteran. The war is always on my mind. In my dreams, my nightmares, my visions, whatever you might call it, the war is still alive. I'm always in the bush everyday. The warzone.

Donald shows the group his suicide scars.

Donald:

I tried to committ suicide on many occasions. I was unsuccessful. I've been transferred to many mental institutions across the state. I'm bipolar and afflicted with an anxiety disorder. I can't urinate in front of people. It makes me very nervous. Fear takes over. I have to piss by myself. I can't sleep at all around people. Not even a women. I must sleep with the doors locked. I have to sleep all alone. (Pause) I'm schizophrenia, delusional with a paranoid personality disorder as well. I'm on heavy duty psychotropic medications to calm me down. I've been in the P.O.C. cell many times in the medical department. That's the protective observation cell. They say that I'm truly crazy. I need my medications to be normal. Without it, I could snap again, like when I killed those punks for messing with me. So they make sure that I'm taking my medications on a regular basis. (Laughs) Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha. It's funny to me, huh? Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.

Ash:

You're one crazy-ass honkey.

Donald points at Ash and laughs on. Everyone in the room is taken back by Donald's behavior.

Donald:

(Laughs)

Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.ha. You're a funny guy, Ash. Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha.

Ash:

Whatever you say, Donald.

Donald:

Time has done me in, boys. I wish I was back in a mental institution. But, most of them were shut down due to lack of funds, man. So, they put me on medications and I was placed here to rot away, huh? (Laughs) Ha.ha.ha.ha.ha. Death by incarceration.

Donald looks at everyone eye to eye with intense eyes. Donald has away to make others very uncomfortable.

Donald:

I wish I was back in the mental hospital. The funny farm. The doctors and nurses would talk to me, help me. Treated like a real person.

Donald takes a few steps forward. Mr.Reynolds seems uneasy towards Donald's behaviour.

Mr.Reynolds:

Some people in the system do care,Donald.

Donald looks at Mr.Reynolds eye to eye. Not moving a muscle as he stands completely still as he speaks.

Donald:

The nurses would make me feel real good. At times made me feel like a real man,you know,huh?

Donald smiles with a wide grin.

Donald:

Réal good. (Pause) Hre,all they do is give me more and more medication. I walk around in a dark cloud. A haze of madness. The freaking guards yell at me for being to damn slow. Sometimes I don't understand what their saying to me. I'm so drugged up it's hard to stand up for count in the morning. I can't get up. It's like at times I'm frozen or something. I'm so damn tired. I've been thrown in the hell for not being able to piss in a small cup for piss test's. The medication does that to me and like a told you, I can't urinate in front of anybody. It's a phobia that I have.

Donald takes a few steps back towards his seat.

Donald:

I hate the strip downs for my visits with my brother"and my sister. I hate cell searches. I don't like anybody invading my personal domain. My world. (Pause) At the mental hospital they would try to understand why I killed those young ass punks for making fun of me all of the time. They mocked me. They pushed me to damn far,man. There was no turning back when I snapped. We all have our pushing points. I believe that's true. Right? I am correct,right?

Franco:

We all got our limits,Donald. That's a fact.

Mr.Reynolds:

Still,we need to know ourselves and get help before something horrible happens,you know? We don't want to repeat what may have happened before in our lives. We need to overcome.

Donald snaps out.

Donald:

(Yelling)

Those punks smashed my car apart because I am different!!!!!!!

Anger rises in Donald's facial expressions.

Donald:

(Yelling)

Those assholes shot my beautiful cats to death! They smashed my Mommy's windows, put crap on my doorsteps. Those son of a bitches! (Short pause) I had enough. So I hunted them down like when I was back in the war, man. Back in Vietnam. I sliced them up real quick. It was easy. (Pause) Their world was over, and so was mine. I was imprisoned for the rest of my life. (Pause) I said enough. Thank you for your time. It was a pleasure.

Donald sits down calmly, still and not saying another word.

Mr. Reynolds:

(Apprehensive)

Thank you for sharing, Mr. Everson.

Donald just stays still, quite with his eyes fixed forward. He doesn't look at anyone. Very odd. The atmosphere in the room is very awkward.

Mr. Reynolds:

Alright now.

That's when Bing stands up and speaks. He's a large African American man.

Bing:

Hell, I might as well join the party, huh?

Mr. Reynolds:

By all means, sir.

Bing:

I appreciate the opportunity to express my concern as a lifer, Mr. Reynolds. This meeting is a good thing, I believe.

Mr. Reynolds:

Your support means a great deal also.

Bing:

Well, I just want you to know that I'm very grateful for this.

Mr. Reynolds:

I just hope we make a difference. Please continue, Bing. We want to hear what you got to say.

Bing takes a deep breath and speaks.

Bing:

I have a few things to say. Good and bad. (Pause) The other day I was blessed to graduate. I got my college degree, gentlemen.

Mr. Reynolds:

That's great, Bing. Congratulations.

Mr.Reynolds gives Bing a hand of applause with a few other men in the room.

Mr.Reynolds:
Fantastic,Bing. A awesome accomplishment.

Ash:
Good stuff,Bing.

Bing:
Thanks alot.

Mr.Reynolds:
You're a inspiration.

Bing:
Thank you,Mr.Reynolds. I came to prison without a education and now I have my GED and a college degree. God has been good to me.

Bing tries to gather his thoughts.

Bing:
I'm truly trying my best to transform my life. To better myself as a human being, even with my horrible crime that I committed so long ago that took a man's life. I am forever remorseful. With God's help I am a better man today. (Pause) Still, there are times when I feel hopeless in here.

Bing begins to tear up.

Bing:
Bing:
Just a few days ago my cousin Tammy overdosed on meth. She was just 30 years old. I couldn't be out there to help her. She always looked up to me. We were like brother and sister,man. When I came to prison that all changed. She got messed up with the wrong crowd and I couldn't protect her no more. She got hooked on drugs and started selling her body to get high. (Pause) Now, she's gone.

Tears drop from Bing's eyes.

Bing:
I couldn't even go to her funeral. I'm here feeling helpless. Helpless to help the ones I love.

Bing wipes the tears from his eyes.

Bing:
Another problem I have is that I don't understand the legal to well.

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Bing points to Jorge.

Bing:

That's why I'm grateful for my brother Jorge for helping me with my legal matters. He's really given me sound legal advice. Jorge really tries to help others in need with the legal and civil issues that many face in prison. He's a man with a life sentence also. That say's alot,huh? Thank you,brother.

Jorge:

It's no problem,Bing. I'm glad to help.

Bing:

I'm just trying to do the best I can each day. Trying to better myself as a man and with my faith,education and my character. I'm hanging unto hope.

Bing points up to the heavens.

Bing:

Hope is to be expected,man. Hope is my lifeline for a better future and a better tomorrow. Maybe, I can help others from making the same mistakes I made that took a innocent life over drugs,man. A drug deal that went bad. A bystander lost their life. It's something that I can't take back.

Bing tries to hold back his emotions that are full of regret.

Bing:

Still,hope changes you. Hope is all I have now. (Pause) Thanks for listening to me. I truly appreciate it.

Bing sits down. Jorge then speaks.

Jorge:

Bing is right,guys. We got to hang unto hope,even when all the odds are against us,when everything is stacked against the damn wall,when the courts deny our petitions,when no one takes our phone calls,when no mail slides underneath our door,when no one comes to visit us,when there's no money on our accounts,we need to hang unto hope. Hope from the Lord above.

Franco:

Stop with the bullshit,will you,huh? Some guys here have lost it all,Jorge. They're hurting,man. Some guys have already given up. Death is the only escape for them. A life sentence is really a freaking death sentence.

Jorge:

Your right,Franco.

Franco:

Damn straight I'm right.

Jorge:

But I refuse to give up.

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Jorge stands up and speaks with passion.

Jorge:

I refuse to. I'll keep on fighting till the day I die. Freedom is worth the fight, huh?

The group listens closely.

Jorge:

I've been down for over 25 years. I didn't do the crime. I wasn't the trigger man. But, I was there. I got second degree murder for conspiracy. They gave me a life sentence. (Pause) As you guys know, I work in the law library. I'm always looking at the new cases and laws coming out. Some states do have parole for lifers. This state doesn't. I believe something has to give. The lifer population is at an all-time high in this state. I thank God that the juvenile lifers are getting a play now with parole. Still, there's so many aging lifers about to die, terminally ill inmates waiting die. They should have a chance to spend time with their loved ones before they die. Forty, fifty years in prison, they payed the price for their crimes. Let them have their last days out in society. Something has to change and I believe a change is gonna come. Not all lifers are monsters, just people who made bad choices. If they're willing to better themselves and help others learn from their mistakes, they should have a second chance in the streets. That's just my opinion, that's all. But, they say opinions are like assholes, everyone has one, right? (Pause) I do pray that legislation does change. I believe, it's coming, my brothers. I can see it. I can feel it. The time is coming. Freedom.

Jorge sits down.

Jorge:

If any of you guys need my help with your case, talk to me, okay? I'll help you the best that I can. Okay then.

Mr. Reynolds:

You see, gentlemen, good is coming out of our meeting.

Leroy wakes up out of his sleep, looks around the room and shuts his eyes again.

Mr. Reynolds:

Well, Leroy was with us for a second, huh?

Leroy sleeps again.

Mr. Reynolds:

Leroy the sleep master, huh? I guess, sleep is his escape.

Ash:

It is his escape, Mr. Reynolds. It is.

Mr. Reynolds ponders on Ash's remarks. Then young Mel stands up to speak.

Mel:

Can I speak, Mr. Reynolds?

Mr. Reynolds:

Of course you can, Mel.

Mel looks among the men somewhat nervous. He has a stuttering speech impediment as he begins to speak.

Mel:

I'm Mel, a young lifer.

Mel has a problem making any type of eye contact with anybody in the room. His anxiety is noticeable.

Mel:

I have much to say. It's hard putting it all in the right words. I want to be honest with you guys. But, I'm very nervous.

Jorge:

It's okay, Mel. Nobody here is gonna judge you.

Mr. Reynolds:

We're here to help you, Mel. That's why we're here in this group.

Mel seems scared at public speaking.

Mr. Reynolds:

Take your time, young man. Take your time.

Mel takes a deep breath and then slowly begins to speak.

Mel:

Like I said, I'm a young lifer who was convicted of first degree murder and other related charges. (Pause) I have mental issues myself. I have psychotic disorders. I'm on heavy medication. (Pause) I grew up in a good neighborhood. My family is well off financially. My Father is a doctor. My mother is a wedding planner. Both my brothers and sister went to college. I ended up in prison. My family were so ashamed. Still, they are here for me. I'm very grateful for that. Grateful for the visits and phone calls. The E-mails and the J-pays.

Mel takes another deep breath.

Mel:

Since coming into the state system it hasn't been easy for me. At times I have to defend myself from dudes trying to rob me, bully me, assault me, even trying to rape me. I would rather die than be raped. I will kill or be killed. I'm no punk. These dudes keep on coming at me, trying to rob me of my sneakers and commissary. I have to protect myself by all means. Let I said, I ain't nobody's punk. No way. No way in hell. (Pause) That's why I stay away from a lot of people. I'd rather be in school learning about things. Get a college education.

Mel takes a short moment to gather his thoughts.

Mel:

My mother and Father have stood by my side through it all. I know their hearts break that I'm in prison for life. I know they love me and I love them too. They are my best friends. (Pause) I've become a man in the penitentiary. I have to look over my shoulder all of the time, ready to defend myself at any time.

Mel takes another deep breath.

Mel:

I'm afraid to die in this place. I'm all alone. I don't want to leave here in a body bag. I know I did a horrible crime. I'm hoping and praying for some relief in the courts as a juvenile lifer with the new ruling for juvenile lifer's. I don't want to be in prison when my mother and father die. I don't think I can handle that. It would break me. It might push me over the edge.

Mel takes another deep breath. That's when Franco speaks with a cynical attitude.

Franco:

Because your soft and your weak.

Mel is stunned at Franco's remarks.

Mel:

Of yeah.....

Franco:

You're a rich boy, born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

Mr. Reynolds speaks boldly to not interrupt Mel. Franco doesn't listen.

Mr. Reynolds:

That's enough, Franco. Do you understand me?

Franco:

You act like you're the victim, Mel. Like you got the victim's mentality. You a victim, Mel, huh?

Mr. Reynolds:

Stop it, Franco!

Franco:

What about your victim? What about your victim's family members, Huh? Did you ever think about that? You ever think about them, huh? Because, I think about my victim's and their family all the time.

Franco looks at Mel with crazy eyes. Mel's anxiety is high.

Franco:

No, your just a little lamb going to the slaughter, huh? You a little lamb, Mel? You a little lamb?

Mr. Reynolds gets truly upset at this point.

Mr. Reynolds:

Will you stop it, Franco!!!

Franco keeps on talking more aggressively.

Franco:

You're family has alot of money, huh?

Mel:

That's none of your business, Franco.

Franco:

You had a hotshot lawyer and ended up with a life sentence like the rest of us, huh?

Mr. Reynolds:

If you don't shut your mouth, Franco, your out of here! I mean it.

Mel's anxiety is rising to a boiling point. He starts to shake in his nerves.

Franco:

That means you must of done something sick. Nuts. Crazy. What did you do, Mel, huh? What the hell did you?

Mel snaps out and yells like a madman, rushing at Franco to kill him.

Mel:

You want to know what I did?! I killed someone just like you!!!!!!
A fucking bully!!!

Mr. Reynolds holds Mel back as he moves in between Mel and Franco. Franco stands there ready to defend himself. Bing stands in front of Franco.

Mr. Reynolds:

No, Mel!!!!!!!!!!

Mel:

I can't take it anymore...I can't.....

Mr. Reynolds:

You're gonna be alright, Mel.

Mr. Reynolds looks at Franco with anger in his eyes.

Mr. Reynolds:

Franco! Get the hell out of here now!!!!

Franco looks eye to eye with Mr.Reynolds. The intensity is in their eyes is immense.

Franco:
I don't need this.

Mr.Reynolds:
We don't need you in this group.

Franco:
I'm out of here.

Franco walks out of the classroom quickly.

Mel:
I can't believe this!

Mel's anxiety is at a high point.

Mel:
This is why I'm here at this meeting,for advice and help.

Mr.Reynolds tries to console Mel.

Mr.Reynolds:
Everything is gonna be fine,okay,Mel? Just fine. We're all here for you.

Mel sits down with his hands in his face.

Mel:
I just wanted to make some friends or just maybe to be heard in a dark place. That's all I wanted. That's all,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:
I know,Mel. I'm listening to you,okay?

Mel:
Thanks,Mr.Reynolds. It means a great deal to me. I don't know who else I can talk to.

Mr.Reynolds:
I'm here.

Mr.Reynolds points to the others in the room.

Mr.Reynolds:
We're all here for you,Mel. All of us.

That's when Poet stands up and speaks.

Poet:
I'm here too,Mel.

Mel:
Thanks,Poet.

Poet looks directly at Mr.Reynolds.

Poet:

Mr.Reynolds,I believe Franco is a hurting soul.

Mr.Reynolds:

That doesn't give him the right to lash out on others,Poet.

Poet:

That's correct and without question. But,I believe Franco isn't a bad person. You should let him back in and let's hear what he has to say. By hearing his words, we will see a different side of this damaged man. Let him back in,Mr.Reynolds.

That's when Franco re-enters the classroom.

Franco:

The guard told me that I can't stay in the hallway,Mr.Reynolds. So, tell that guard to give me my pass,so I can roll,okay?

Mr.Reynolds:

You can stay if the whole group agree's to that,Franco.

Mel:

I want to hear from,Franco,Mr.Reynolds. I want to hear what he has to say.

Mr.Reynolds looks among the group.

Mr.Reynolds:

Is it okay if Franco stays in the group,gentleman?

Ash:

It's all good with me.

The other group members nod their head in agreement.

Mr.Reynolds:

Just sit back down,Franco. Don't say a word or interrupt when someone else is speaking. You understand me,Franco?

Franco walks to his chair and turns around.

Franco:

I understand,Mr.Reynolds.

Franco address's Mel.

Franco:

I want to Apologize to you,Mel. I got out of hand. I'm sorry.

Mel:

It's okay.

Franco sits down at his desk.

Mr.Reynolds turns towards Mel. He's very concerned about Mel's safety.

Mr.Reynolds:
I need to ask you something,Mel.

Mel:
Okay.

Mr.Reynolds sits down.

Mr.Reynolds:
Do you feel threaten in anyway? I need to ask you this. I'm here to help you.

Mel:
You know,Mr.Reynolds, danger lurks everywhere in this place. We all know this. You know this. It breeds like a parasite. There's predators all around. I know that for a fact and everyone has heard all the horror stories.

Mel points to Franco.

Mel:
Franco is right. The wolves and vultures are always watching ready to strike. How can I trust anyone?

Mr.Reynolds:
I want to help you,Mel. That's why you're here at this group. You even said it yourself, you're looking for help.

Mel:
Sometimes staff can be just as bad.

Mr.Reynolds:
Not me. I'm here to help you,Mel. I really am.

Mel thinks deeply for a short moment. Then he speaks from the heart.

Mel:
To be honest with you,I was close to getting myself a shank. But,I never did. (Pause) I fought one of those dudes in my cell. I had to. At least they know I'll fight if need be.

Mr.Reynolds:
What can I do to help you,Mel? Do you want me to talk to your Unit manager about your situation?

Mel:
Well, I mean no disrespect,Mr.Reynolds, but I'm not gonna mention any names. I'll deal with this some way. I won't snitch anyone out. I'm not gonna get a shank,okay? Don't worry about that.

Mr.Reynolds:
I'll take your word on that,Mel. (Pause) But, do you feel your life is at danger?

Mel:

As long as I stand my ground, I believe I'll be okay. I'm still standing.

Doc speaks.

Doc:

Mel is on my block. I'll talk to the dudes who are coming at him, I'll tell them to back off from him.

Mr.Reynolds:

That's good to hear,Doc. That's a good thing.

Doc:

I'll take care of it tonight. Mel won't be bothered no more. I'll make sure of that.

Mel:

Thanks,Doc. I truly appreciate your help.

Doc:

Don't worry about it,young buck. Go to school. Get your education. That's how you can pay me back. Better yourself.

Mel:

You got a deal.

Doc:

That's what I want to hear.

Mr.Reynolds:

This is the reason for this type of support group. For someone like,Mel to get somekind of help in time of need. You're not alone in this place,my friend.

Mel:

I see that now,Mr.Reynolds. I see that.

That's when Steven stands up using his guiding cane. He's blind.

Steven:

I would like to share,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:

Of course,Steven.

Steven takes a few steps forward using his guiding cane.

Steven:

I'm Steven Jacobs,just in case you new guys don't know me. I'm a lifer and I'm blind. I was born blind. (Pause) Being a lifer and being blind is very hard. Everything is so difficult to do, getting to any point in here. Going to chow,programs, to the shower or anywhere.

Steven tries to hold in his frustration.

Steven:

I shake my head when I hear guys complain about little things in this institution. They could be in my shoes, huh? Things wouldn't be so bad then. Always remember that someone has it worse than you. Be grateful for what you got. Don't take nothing for granted in this life, because it could be gone in a instant. (Pause) I learned how to read braille while in prison. It's something I needed to do and a tutor has helped me during the whole process. It's a accomplishment that I'm very proud of.

Mr.Reynolds:

Amazing, Steven. That's awesome.

Steven:

Thank you, Mr.reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:

You inspire me, Steven.

Steven:

I wasn't gonna say anything, but fell compelled to do so. I know the system is about punishment and facing the consequences for our action. But, I still hope for mercy. For forgiveness. (Pause) In my case, my victim's family members have found it in their hearts to forgive me.

Steven breaks down in tears.

Steven:

They told me that they forgive me. (Cries) Agggg.Aggggg. They are supporting my commutation. I don't want to sit here and feel sorry for myself no more. I'm trying to stay positive. That's my focus now in life. To do good. To trust God with my everything for the rest of my days on this earth. I beleve these laws are gonna change and all lifers will get a chance for parole. I believe in second chances. I truly do.

Mr.Reynolds:

You're a good role model, Steven.

Steven backs up, using his guiding cane.

Steven:

I'm trying.

Steven sits down.

Mr.Reynolds:

Well, you are, Steven. (Pause) Would anyone else like to speak?

Doc responds.

Doc:

I would, yeah.

Doc speaks with a southern accent. an older man.

Mr.Reynolds:
The floor is all yours,Doc.

Doc:
Alright then. Alright.

Doc stands up to address the men.

Doc:
I do have much to say.

Doc clears his throat.

Doc:
(Clearing his throat)
Agggggggggggggggggggggggg.

Then he begins to speak.

Doc:
I remember as a little boy watching my Mama shoot my father to death when he tried to beat my Mama with a bullwhip when he was drunk out of his damn mind. The beatings were brutal for my Mama and myself. I still have the scars on my back. We were terrified when this abuse would happen to us. Back in those nobody said anything and my Mama had enough of this shit and took the law into her own hands. The image of my Mama blowing my Father's brains out with a shotgun and seeing his brains splattered all across the kitchen walls,seared my mind,man. It's something you never fucking forget. It changed me forever. (Pause) I was a boy growing up without a father. (Pause) My Mama went to prison.

Doc takes a short moment to gain his thoughts again as he wipes a tear from his left eye. Then he clears his throat again.

Doc:
(Clearing his throat)
Agggggggggggggggggggggggg. (Pause) I grew up with my grandparents. They raised me. We lived in the backwoods of this state. Every morning I had to take care of the cows,pigs and chickens. I had to clean out the pig-pens before going to school. I always smelled pig shit. My teachers always made me take a shower at school and made me wash-out my clothers in the laundry room.

Doc thinks deeply.

Doc:
Once a month on Saturday's me and my grandparents would go visit my Mama in prison. A three hour drive. It was a all day affair. In the prison visiting room me and my Mama would play games and eat tons of food out of the vending machines. We would laugh and then cry. When the visit would end, Mama would hug me tight and kissed me over and over again. I loved my Mama. She did ten long years in the penitentiary. (Pause) Mama is long gone now.

Doc takes a short moment to gather his thoughts, trying to hold back the tears.

Doc:

Hell, I never knew my father. I just remember the horrible things he did to my Mama. (Pause) Still, he must have had a good side, huh? My MAMA loved him at one time. There was something good about him. There had to be. (Pause) When my mother came home from prison, she lived with me and my grandparents. I was a young man. I went to school, enlisted myself in the army and spent time in the war Vietnam. My Mama and grandparents were so upset that I enlisted in that damn war. But, I defended my country, huh? I fought for a cause. Looking back it seems so damn senseless. Shit, I seen my buddies blown to pieces trying to help children rigged with explosives. We didn't know, man. We were just kids our selves, huh? The enemy would do anything to kill us, even kill their own.

Doc paces the room.

Doc:

Seeing a child's limbs all over the ground changes you, man. Seeing your friends laying on the ground changes you. It changes you forever. It changes you. (Pause) I did things to defend my country that I'm not proud of. I had to survive. I protected my comrades. It was either kill or be killed. That's a damn fact.

Ash starts coughing again.

Ash:

(Coughs)

Agggggggg. Agggggggg. Excuse me, gentlemen.

Doc:

It's okay, oldtimer.

Doc stops pacing and stands still as he speaks on.

Doc:

I came home back to the states even more changed. My Mama and my grandparents were concerned about me. I wasn't the same person they knew. I was different. I would have intercourse with many women to help me forget the pain. I would drink and get high. I love smoking the weed and snorting coke, huh? It would take me to different places. I would fly high, man. Fly over the rainbow, huh? (Pause) Had three kids. I was never there for them. Hell, I couldn't hold down a job. I hooked up with the wrong crowd. My life was a haze. Purple haze, huh? Good old Jimi Hendrix, that's my man, huh? I was stoned out of my mind most of the time. I was at Woodstock, man. That was the time of my life. One big party.

Doc has a big smile on his face.

Doc:

Then that day came. I was low on cash. Needed to do something. I robbed houses late at night on the mainline. That's how I made my living. It was about 2:00 A.M. and I broke into a house through a basement window. I was fucking slick, smooth, quiet and fast. Found me some bigtime fancy jewelry. A lot of cash, man. I love the risk. The thrill of it all. It's like fucking your best friend's wife a hour before the asshole comes home. The thrill gets me off and hard as a rock, huh? (Pause) Well, when I tried to exit the joint, that's when I was confronted by a man with a gun. I could tell he was scared as he yelled, "Stop!".

Doc shakes his head as he thinks back on that fatal night.

Doc:

He screamed out "Don't move!" I was still. Then the thought of going to prison terrified me. That's when I pulled out my gun and shot the man in the chest. I reacted so damn fast. That man never fired at all. I took him down and murdered him on the spot. It felt like I was back in Vietnam. I broke through the window out of that house, running through the dark ass woods. The police sirens roaring loud in the background. I was running for my life in a panic. (Pause) I got away and was safe with one of my lady friends. We got high and made love. It took my mind off the act I committed the night before. I was safe. (Pause) On the news was the crime and about the man I murdered. A husband, father and a wealthy business man. They had a drawing of me on the fucking news, man. The man's wife saw me. Saw my face. I didn't see her, but she saw me, man. It was time to get out of town fast. But, some people I knew rated me out to the pigs, man. Told the cops where I could be hiding out for a bigass reward. My so-called friends. Pieces of shit, huh? I tried to move to different spots. It didn't matter, the cops came for with their guns pointed and ready to gun me down like a wild dog in the streets. I raised up my hands and surrendered. It was over for me.

Doc tries to hold in his emotions.

Doc:

During my trial, I saw my mother's eyes full of tears. This broke my heart in two, man. Nobody loved me like my Momma. Nobody.

Doc wipes a tear from his eyes.

Doc:

I was found guilty of first degree murder during a burglary. I was done. I'll never forget my mother's face. It's seared in my mind till this day, man. (Pause) My mother and grandparents pleaded to the jury for mercy on my behalf to be spared the death penalty. My asshole lawyer did nothing for me. I should be on death row now. It's only by the grace of God, I'm not. I think about that sometimes. I could be sitting on death row, man.

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Doc paces the room.

Doc:

But, I'm not. I always think about that. Waiting on death row, man. Waiting to be executed. That's crazy shit, huh? Hell, even a life sentence is a death sentence. (Pause) I've made the best out of my situation. I'm still fighting my case in the courts for some form of relief as my hair has turned completely grey. I do believe people with a life sentence in this state should have a chance for parole. Let each case be looked at on an individual basis. I know many out in society don't agree with parole for lifers. The victim's family members don't agree with parole for lifers. I understand why. But, people in prison for decades have paid their penance, man. I seen many with sincere remorse in their eyes. Their actions in prison prove this. We are truly sorry for what we did so many years ago. Words can't express our remorse.

Ash:

Ain't that the truth, brother.

Doc:

I know I'm no saint, man. But, I am a changed man. I've lost everything, but my children. By the grace of God, their standing by my side. They are doing real good out there in society. I always told them to stay off the streets and get an education. They listened to me and this does my heart good. I'm even a grandfather. A Pop=Pop. (Pause) I just filed my commutation. Now, I'm leaving that in God's hands for mercy. (Pause) I could stand up here all day and tell you my story and sing you a few tones also, huh? We all got stories to tell, man. We all got a song to sing as well.

Doc has a big smile on his face.

Doc:

Well, it feels good to smile again, huh? Times have changed. I've changed. (Pause) By the way, they call me "Doc" because my last name is Doctor. Joejoe Byron Doctor. That's my God given name. Yes indeed.

Ash:

We all know this, Doc.

Doc:

Maybe some don't, Ash.

Ash:

You do your thing, Doc.

Doc:

Always do. Always do. (Pause) I'm good. Next man, huh?

Doc sits down.

Doc:

I'm gonna take care of that for you, Mel. You dig me, Mel?

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Mel:
Thanks, Doc.

Doc:
What's right is right and what's wrong is wrong. I've done my share of wrong in my life and I've done my share of good in my life. This is a good thing to do.

Jorge:
I agree. I'm with you, Doc. I'll talk to these guys with you.

Doc:
Good looking out, Jorge.

Jorge:
Mel won't stand alone anymore.

Ash:
Count me in too, brothers.

Doc:
I knew old Ash was with us. Crazy old man, huh?

Ash:
I still got game, brother. You know that from the chess board. I kick ass all of the time.

Doc:
That you do, old timer.

Mel is very grateful for the support from the other lifers.

Mel:
Thank you, man. I don't know what to say.

Doc:
Just better yourself as a human being. Stay in school, learn and grow. Make something out of your life. That's a damn good thing.

Mel:
I'll get my education. I promise, Doc.

Doc:
Well, alright then.

There's another moment of silence. Mr. Reynolds then speaks with full sincerity.

Mr. Reynolds:
When I look in this room, I see good men. Men who care. Men that are changed. Men that deserve a second chance back in society., in my opinion.

Franco:
All lies, huh? Bullshit, man! Stop lying, will you, huh?

Franco shakes his head in disgust.

Mr.Reynolds:

If you got something to say, Franco, then stand up and address the group.

Franco sits there, still.

Mr.Reynolds:

What about it,Franco?

Franco still doesn't respond.

Mr.Reynolds:

What about it,Franco,huh? No more games.

Franco:

You may not like what I'm about to say,Mr.Reynolds? You may not like it.

Mr.Reynolds:

That's true. But, you have a voice also. Let's hear what you got to say.

Franco:

I got no problem with that. No problem at all.

Franco looks at everyone in the group.

Franco:

I'm a lifer just like the rest of you guys. I'm doing the wheel. And round and round we go.,every morning,lights on,standing for count,every afternonn,mid afternoon, and every evening. The wheel a lifer rounds. Round and round we go.

Franco stands up.

Franco:

I nobody out there. My wife and kids are gone. Parents are gone. Brothers and sisters. Friends. All gone. I got nothing out there.

Franco tears up.

Franco:

Still I cry in my cell alone. I ain't letting nobody see a weakness in me.

Franco holds back his tears.

Franco:

Because the wolves, the vultures are watching. Ready to strike.

Franco steps out to address the other lifers.

Franco:

I've done the best I can over the years to better myself as a person with education, therapy, programs and my faith in the Lord to understand the full impact of my crime against my victims, victim's family members, society, my family, my children and society

Franco paces the room.

Franco:

I remember in the court room my victim's family members telling me face to face, eye to eye, that we will never forgive you. No-matter what you say, what you do, we will never forgive you.

Franco stops pacing. Heavy emotions on his facial expressions.

Franco:

Those words have echoed in my heart, soul and mind for decades. Decades. (Pause) And now with this sentence of death by incarceration, maybe I can help one person from making the same mistakes I've done. Just one.

Franco looks towards Steven.

Franco:

You see, Steven, you're victim family members have forgiven you. Mine never will.

Steven:

I thought the same thing you did, Franco. But a miracle took place in my life. A miracle by God. It could happen to you as well.

Franco becomes aggressive in his tone of speech.

Franco:

I come from a very abusive childhood. I was raped over a hundred times as a boy by three individuals. They said if I said anything that a cross would burn flaming red on my chest. I was so scared. Terrified. Frozen in fear. (Pause) My sister who was also a victim of this abuse finally told my parents. My parents choose not to do anything about this sexually abuse. They never got me and my sister help. They never pressed charges with the police on these individuals. They told me and my sister that it never happened. It was a bad dream. A nightmare. Just forget about it. It didn't happen. But, it did happen! It happened to us. The pain was there. The fear. Hurt. violation. Mental illness. Addictions. It all was there to effect our future. It was there. So, my sister end up with major drug addiction issues and I ended up with a double life sentence. We didn't see the world with the proper frame of eyes as a child. We saw the world with a tilted point of view. Black and white, not in color.

Franco paces the room once again.

Franco:

So, I pursued a career and had a few girlfriends. I did that.

Franco stops and looks at the men in the room again.

Franco:

I swore nobody would ever hurt me again. Nobody. (Pause) Then I met a girl and six weeks later we got married in Louisville, Kentucky. We had children. I adored her. Loved her with my whole heart. (Pause) And just because I didn't pay her enough attention, she started having multiple affairs.

Franco becomes very emotional as he speaks.

Franco:

It took me back to that little boy being abused all over again. I had to fix my marriage, by all means possible. It became an obsession of mine. (Pause) So, we went into therapy. I thought things became better. I got her pregnant again. I thought we were happy again. But, she aborted the baby mid-way through the pregnancy because she was sleeping with my best friends. I realized I married someone like me who was damaged. I left her. She begged me to come back. I did. Then she left me. I begged her to come back. She was with this person, that person, my friends.

Franco starts to tear up.

Franco:

That's when I ended up with a double homicide.

Franco raises his hands up to his face and looks at them in distress.

Franco:

I should have walked away. Why didn't I walk away? Why couldn't I walk away? It was a psychotic break. I lost control. A mental breakdown.

Franco lowers his hands.

Franco:

I'm so sorry for what I've done. So damn sorry, man. I wish I could take it back. I should have killed myself instead.

Tears flow from Franco's eyes.

Franco:

I don't deserve a second chance. There is no forgiveness for me. I know God has forgiven me, but, I can't forgive myself. (Pause) The one thing I dream about the most, is when I was a kid at the ocean with my mother, father, my sisters and my little brother. Then with my wife and kids and my dogs running along the beach catching frisbee's. It's a place I can never get back to. A memory caught in my mind. A place I can only dream about. A place I wish I can get back to. (Pause) There is no second chance for me.

Franco wipes the tears from his eyes.

Franco:

This is it. Life behind the razor wire. This is the last stand. The final rodeo. This is it. (Pause) There is no second chance for me. There is no forgiveness. I don't want to be forgiven. I don't deserve to be forgiven for what I did. This is the end of the line. There is no second chance. None at all. (Pause).

Franco sits down.

Franco:

Thanks for letting me share.

There's a short silence in the room among all the men.

Mr.Reynolds:

Thank you for sharing,Franco. It's very much appreciated.

Franco doesn't say a word.

Mr.Reynolds:

Would anyone else would like to speak or add more to our meeting?

Mr.Reynolds looks among the men in the room and then he looks directly at Leroy sleeping.

Mr.Reynolds:

Definitely not Mr.Leroy,huh?

Leroy shakes his head and sleeps on.

Ash:

Let's see,huh?

Ash claps his hands real hard towards Leroy.

Ash:

Hey,Leroy!!!

Leroy shoots up very quick like a drunken madman.

Leroy:

What happened?! Did anybody see Dorthey?

Leroy staggers around the classroom.

Leroy:

Did anybody see Dorthey,huh?

Mr.Reynolds:

Who's,Dorthey,Leroy?

Leroy staggers even more in the classroom.

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Leroy staggers around the room in a panic.

Leroy:

She's my daughter! I got to talk to her! Did anybody see her, huh?

Eddie responds with a cynical remark.

Eddie:

She went to see the wizard.

Leroy snaps out in extreme madness. She screams loud at Eddie.

Leroy:

What's the matter with you?! Why would you say that?! Tell me!!!!

Eddie is taken back by Leroy's insanity.

Leroy:

Tell me Why?! She committed suicide because of me! For what I did! It's all my fault!

Eddie lowers his head in regret.

Leroy:

Do you have a promblem with me,huh?! Do you,huh?!!!

Eddie:

My bad...my bad.

Leroy looks at Eddie with crazy eyes. Tears flowing from his eyes.

Leroy:

I need to tell her that I love her. I need to tell her that.

Leroy backs away from Franco and staggers around the room again.

Leroy:

I never got a chance to tell her that I'm sorry. I never got a chance to say goodbye to my baby girl.

He looks up at the ceiling as tears flow from his eyes. He see's something beyond the ceiling. The men in the room are stunned.

Leroy:

Lucky!! Lucky!!!!

Leroy kneels down to pet an invisible dog called "Lucky".

Leroy:

That's a good boy. Lucky, find Dorthey for me. Go get her for me. Bring her to me,Lucky.

Leroy cries bitterly.

Leroy pets the invisible dog.

Leroy:

Find Dorthey,Lucky. That's a good boy. Good boy.

Leroy slowly stands up. He looks around the room. He looks at the men in the room. It's like he's coming out of his mental trance.

Leroy:

This is a damn good meeting.

Leroy smiles as he looks among the men in the room.

Leroy:

Damn good meeting. I'll be here next week,for sure.

Leroy slowly walks back to his chair and sits down. Mr.Reynolds slowly turns towards Leroy.

Mr.Reynolds:

You okay,Leroy?

Leroy looks at Mr.Reynolds with confused eyes that are in a deep haze.

Leroy:

Yeah,I'm okay.

Mr.Reynolds:

You sure?

Leroy smiles.

Leroy:

I'm sure,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds looks at Leroy with great concern.

Mr.Reynolds:

I'm gonna have you called down to my office to talk,okay?

Leroy:

Okay.

Mr.Reynolds:

We gotta make sure your medication is working for you.

Leroy:

That's good.

Mr.Reynolds:

Alright then.

Mr.Reynolds looks at his wrist watch.

Life Behind the Razor Wire L.N.S. (C)

Leroy sits there dazed and confused.

Mr.Reynolds:

Very well then. I would like to say something before we wrap-up our meeting for tonight.

Ash:

We're all ears,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds slowly stands up.

Mr.Reynolds:

Thanks, Ash. I'm grateful for your appreciation.

Ash:

We appreciate you.

Mr.Reynolds:

Thanks again,Ash.

Mr.Reynolds paces the room and then addresses the men.

Mr.Reynolds:

At one time in my life I didn't agree with the idea of a second chance for lifers. I didn't. Lock them up and throw away the damn key. Let them burn in hell for what they did. (Pause) I just saw the crime that took a life. I saw the grief and suffering the victim's family was going through. (Pause) I've been there myself in my life.

Mr.Reynolds stops pacing the room and looks directly at the men with eye contact.

Mr.Reynolds:

My cousin was murdered at the age of 17 by his girlfriend and his so called best friend. I had so much hate for those who took my cousin Lenny's life. I saw the loss my aunt and uncle were going through. The tears kept on falling like rain. It's a horrible thing when someone loses their life by the hands of another. I was for severe punishment for any crime or offense. You do the crime,you gotta do the time. That's it. I didn't see redemption. I didn't care. No mercy at all.

Mr.Reynolds takes a few steps forward towards the men.

Mr.Reynolds:

But after dealing with my drug and alcohol addiction, in fact, I almost killed someone while under the influence of an illegal substance. I could be behind bars, sitting right with you men for murder. Vehicular homicide. I was cheating on my wife and I was stoned out of my mind and almost killed my mistress.

Mr.Reynolds starts to tear up with painful emotions.

Mr.Reynolds:

I was a mess.

Mr.Reynolds wipes a few tears from his eyes.

Mr.Reynolds:

Sexual addiction was another problem I was dealing. I had a beautiful wife who adored me. But, I was looking for something to feed the beast and desires from with-in. Deep hurting issues. This was the lowest point of my life. Everything was exposed. I was in the county prison for a time. The judge had mercy on me. I was ordered to get therapeutic help and counselling. By the grace of God alone, my wife forgave me. We went into therapy. We attended Celebrate recovery together. Now after years of help, I'm the husband God wants me to be. The father to my children that God has ordained me to be. All this acts of grace has opened my eyes to my judgmental attitude. I was given a second chance by God, my family and society and got the proper treatment for my substance and sexual addiction and from my abusive background that I too, never dealt with in my life, till it all came to a boiling point. My wonderful wife and children stood by my side through it all. I was being redeemed. (Pause) If I was being redeemed, why couldn't anyone be redeemed? Who the hell was I to judge anybody,huh? Why couldn't you guys as lifers be redeemed by society,huh? Why couldn't you? (Pause) I believe it should be so. People need to hear your stories. They need to hear your cries for redemption. Society needs to see the change in your lives. I support a chance for parole for lifers. Ler each case be looked at on an individual basis. You desreve a second chance in life, just like I was given a second chance. Society needs to know that in this state a life sentence is actually a slow death sentence. Even the Pope, came all the way here from Rome and declared that in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a life sentence is a death sentence. Death by incarceration.

Mr.Reynolds moves towards his seat.

Mr.Reynolds:

I'm an advocate for you men. For every lifer in this state. Male and female. My voice will be heard beyond these prison walls.

Mr.Reynolds sits down.

Mr.Reynolds:

I'm gonna fight for you all. I'm truly grateful to be the facilitator for our Lifers Support Meeting. I applaud you men for being here. For being honest.

Ash:

Thank you,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:

Thank you,Ash, for being a honest man. A good man. You guys touched my heart. Please keep on fighting for your freedom, because I'm gonna fight for your freedom with you.

Ash:

It's good to have you on our side,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:

This is the right thing to do, in my heart.

Mr.Reynolds tries to hold back his emotions. He wipes a tear from his eye.

Mr.Reynolds:

Keep on fighting,Ash.

Ash:

I'm doing my best.

Mr.Reynolds:

That's good.

Mr.Reynolds looks at his watch. Then looks up at the men.

Mr.Reynolds:

It's that time. I hope you guys will be here next week.

Doc:

You can count on it.

Mel:

I need to be here.

Steve:

So do I.

Ash:

We all do.

Franco stands up.

Franco:

All be here next week,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:

You're welcomed here anytime,Franco. Anytime.

Franco:

That's good to know.

Franco exits the room. Mr.Reynolds stands up.

Mr.Reynolds:

Please get the word out about our meeting. There's strength in numbers. Have your family and friends support all the legislation regarding parole for lifers. The time is now,gentlemen.

Ash:

Without question. Yes indeed.

Mr.Reynolds:
You guys have a good night.

All the men stand up. Eddie exits the room real quick.

Eddie:
I always do.

Eddie steps into the hallway. Leroy helps Steven exit the room.

Steven:
Thank you,Mr.Reynolds.

Mr.Reynolds:
Thank you, Steven for being a man of true faith.

Mr.Reynolds shakes Steven hand.

Mr.Reynolds:
Thank you all for being here.

Doc:
This is a good thing,Mr.Reynolds.

Doc exits the room. So does Steven and Leroy. The other men exit also. Only Ash remains in the room.

Mr.Reynolds:
Take care of yourself,Ash.

Ash:
You do the same,my friend.

They shake hands. Ash exits the room with the aid of his cane. Mr.Reynolds is all alone in the room. He takes another sip from his water and looks around the room filled with emotion. Then he sits back down in his chair. There's a sense of accomplishment on his facial expressions that's so overwhelming that it brings tears flowing down his eyes. He tries to gather emotions that almost get the best of him. He rubs his eyes and picks up his papers, brief case and water bottle.

A song is heard in the background "I can see clearly now" as Mr. Reynolds stands back up and then slowly exits the classroom. The lights dim on the stage.

The song plays on in the background.

The End.
Larry N.Stromberg
(C) 2017

Life Behind the Razor Wire L.N.S. (C) 2017

"Life Behind the Razor Wire"
An original play written by:
Larry N.Stromberg (C) 2017

Dedicated to those who I love. My family and friends. To a
awesome and loving God above. Thank you, Jesus. My redeemer and
Lord.

RUNNING WITH THE DEVIL

Written by:
Larry N. Stromberg
(C) 2017

Setting:
Prison Cell.

Characters:

Fred- A long term offender dealing with the extreme pain of being in prison serving a life sentence and the guilt from his crime.

Johnny- A PV who keeps coming back to prison due to his addictions and personal struggles.

Written by:
Larry N. Stromberg
(C) 2017

A mid-aged man enters his prison cell from stage left with some books in his hands. He places his books on his desk and sits down in a chair in his cell.

He takes a deep breath. He rubs his eyes from the stress he's dealing with being in prison. His name is Fred.

Then he looks up to the heaven's and prays.

Fred:

(In prayer)

Please Lord, send me a decent person to be my new cellie. (Pause)
I'm dealing with enough stress in my life, Lord. I'm asking you,
Lord. Please.

There's a moment of silence. Then a knock is heard on the cell door.

SFX- Door knock.

Fred turns his head towards his cell door. That's when a younger man enters the cell carrying a box.

The younger man's name is Johnny.

Johnny:

How you doing, huh? I'm your new cellie.

Fred stands up.

Fred:

Okay then.

Johnny places the box on the floor and extends his hand to Fred.

Johnny:

My name is Johnny.

Fred shakes his hand.

Fred:

I'm Fred.

They break from the hand shake.

Johnny:

My uncle's name is Fred.

Fred:

Is that right?

Johnny:

He's a real asshole and a damn drunk.

Johnny looks around the cell.

Johnny:

You keep a clean cell, Fred.

Fred:

I like to live in a clean environment. That's all.

Johnny:

I can see that.

Fred:

Well, you got the top bunk, Johnny.

Johnny:

Sounds good. Alright then, Fred.

Johnny walks over towards the bunk in the back of the cell.

Johnny:

You seem like a good dude, Fred.

Fred:

I appreciate that. Thanks, man.

Johnny:

Just stating what I see. (Pause) You going home soon, Fred?

Fred doesn't respond.

Johnny:

Are you, Fred?

Fred slowly responds.

Fred:

Hopefully someday. But, not now. It's all in the good Lord's hands.

There's a strange awkward moment of silence.

Johnny:

You ain't doing life, huh?

Fred:

Damn, you ask a lot of questions, don't you? I don't know you at all.

Johnny takes offense to Fred's remarks.

Johnny:

My bad then. I didn't mean no harm.

There's another moment of strange silence. Fred then responds to Johnny to ease the tension.

Fred:
The answer is yes, Johnny.

Johnny:
What's that, huh?

Fred:
I am doing life.

Johnny:
That freaking sucks, man.

Fred:
I've been down over twenty years now. I'm still fighting.
Hoping for a second chance someday.

Johnny:
Shit, I couldn't do life, man. I'd hang it up real quick.

Fred:
Well, I seen many who did over the years.

Johnny:
I'm sure you have.

Johnny starts to slowly pace back and forth in the cell. Fred looks on concerned as Johnny changes in his behavior.

Fred:
Everything okay, Johnny? You okay, man?

Johnny:
Yeah, I'm okay.

Johnny begins to pace at a faster pace.

Fred:
Are you sure you're okay?

Johnny:
I need a cigarette, man. You got any smokes, huh?

Fred shakes his head in disgust.

Fred:
I don't.

A form of anxiety rises in Johnny as he paces on in the cell.

Johnny:
That's a damn shame, man. I need a smoke to calm down my nerves.

Fred begins to feel a sense on tension even more.

Johnny:
Hey, Fred?

Fred:
What's up, Johnny?

Johnny stops pacing for a short moment.

Johnny:
You got any coffee, huh?

Fred:
I don't drink coffee.

Johnny:
That's not what I freaking asked you! Do you have any damn coffee, Fred? That's what I asked you.

Fred:
What I'm saying to you is this, Johnny., I don't have any coffee.

Johnny paces the cell again even faster.

Johnny:
That's a fucking hurt piece, man. Bullshit! Screwed up, man!

The anxiety becomes even more extreme in Johnny.

Fred:
What's the matter with you, huh? Calm down, man! Calm the hell down.....

Fred is stunned at Johnny's behavior.

Johnny:
You take any medications, Fred, huh? You know, any psyche meds?!!!!

Fred:
I did at one time. But, not no more. I think you **nedd** psyche meds.....

Johnny snaps out and yells loud.

Johnny:
Get me some damn meds, Fred!!~ Now! I said now, Fred!!!!!!!!!! Now!!!

Fred:
I don't play that game, Johnny.

Johnny:
I'm not playing any fucking games, Fred!! I want some meds!!!

Fred shakes his head in disgust. Johnny begs for medication.

Johnny:
Help me, man.

Johnny:

Come on,man!!! I need something to take the edge off!!!!!!

Fred:

Listen to me,Johnny. I don't take medication now,okay? Even if I did,I wouldn't give you any medication at all. You understand me,huh?

Johnny:

That's screwed up! That's freaking messed up,dude! Out of pocket! Bigtime,man!!!!

Johnny's hands shake as he still paces the cell.

Johnny:

Do you have any homies that take medication,huh?

Fred:

Don't go there,man.

Johnny:

Yeah,Freddie.....can you talk to your homies,your road-dogs on the block about hooking me up with some meds,smokes,coffee and some weed,huh?

Fred becomes even more offended.

Fred:

Are you out of your damn mind? I ain't doing that.

Johnny:

Come on,man. Do me a solid,will you?

Fred:

You're a freaking junkie!

Johnny:

Yeah,I like to get high and stay high. I like flying high,man.

Fred:

You come in my cell like a freaking madman. Demanding like a real dirt bag. You're a messed up,dude.

Johnny:

Talk to your boys for me,Fred.

Fred:

I said no,man. No way.

Johnny:

Come on,I'll pay them back.

Fred:

How,huh? You're broke. You got nothing.

Johnny:

I'll have my wife send them something.

Fred:
I ain't playing that game.

Johnny:
Then I'll have my brother send them something. My money is good, man. Always right on time.

Fred:
You addicts are all the same.

Johnny:
My word is as good as gold, Freddie.

Fred:
I've heard that crap over a million times in this joint. My word is as good as gold. I give you my vow! It's all bullshit, man. You got nothing out there, Johnny. Nothing.

Johnny:
I need a buzz on, man.

Anxiety rises high in Johnny.

Johnny:
I just need a fix of something, man. Anything, you know, huh?

Johnny paces the cell even more.

Johnny:
Anything, man. Something.

Fred:
You're a damn freaking mess, Johnny.

Johnny:
I just want to get high. That's it. K-2 sounds sweet right now.

Fred:
People have over-dosed and died from that shit in this place.

Johnny:
I don't care. I just want to fly high. What's wrong with that, huh?

Fred:
That's your problem. Not mine.

Johnny walks over to Fred with intense crazy eyes.

Johnny:
Listen to me, Fred. If worst comes to worst. I'll give them something else for some smokes, coffee, weed and meds.

Fred:
What's that, huh?

Johnny:
Whatever it takes, Freddie.

Fred looks at Johnning with confusion.

Fred:
What are you saying, huh?

Johnny:
Whatever I have to do, Freddie. Whatever, man.

Fred looks at Johnny with disgust.

Fred:
That's crazy, man. Crazy.

Fred is stunned.

Fred:
So, you're willing to degrade yourself like that to get a fix.
You've hit rock bottom, Johnny. Fallen from grace.

Johnny stands there on the edge of insanity.

Johnny:
I got nothing left, man! Nothing!!

Johnny paces the cell again full of anxiety.

Johnny:
My wife threw me out of the house! I lost my kids! I lost my damn
house! I lost my job! I need to get high and I'll do what it....
I'll do what it takes, man! Whatever it takes, even in prison!!

Fred:
You need real help, Johnny.

Johnny:
Whatever it takes.

Fred:
You need help.

Johnny:
I've done those nut-ass programs! I've been to many freaking
re-habs! Nothing really works!

Fred:
Because you don't want it to work.

Johnny:
Get me some weed, Fred, huh? Coffee! Medication! Something, man!

Fred:
You're twisted, man.

Johnny:
Get me something!

Fred:

I told you, Johnny. I won't do that. That's final.

Johnny gets to the point of extreme anxiety.

Johnny:

What good are you then, huh?

Fred:

Don't go there.

Johnny:

Don't tell me what to do, old man!! Nobody tells me what to do. Nobody!

Fred:

You got real problems. You're screwed up in the head. Bigtime!

Johnny:

You're a piece of trash.

Fred:

You better watch your mouth.

Johnny:

What are you gonna do about it, huh? What are you gonna do?

Fred:

Don't push it, Johnny.

Johnny:

Freaking murderer!! Scum bag! Old man!

Fred stands there trying to hold in his emotions.

Johnny:

Screw you, asshole!!!

Fred snaps back at Johnny.

Fred:

You better get the hell out of my damn cell, Johnny!! I've been down to long for this garbage! I'm sick and tired of junkies and freaks like you trying to get over on me! Yes, I'm doing the wheel and I got a lot of issues myself! But, I don't need this crap in my life! So, get the hell out of here! Now! No more games!!

Johnny paces the cell even more like a madman. Insane in his actions and body movement.

Fred:

Did you hear what I said to you? Don't make me say it again!

Johnny:

Go to hell!!!!!!

Fred is even more stunned at Johnny's remarks.