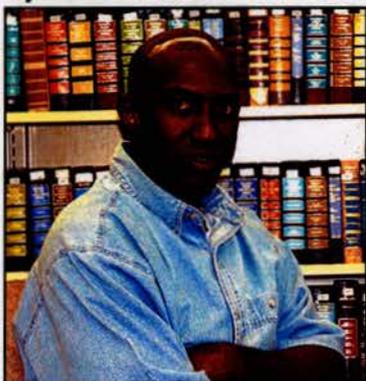


An Appeal to Families of Incarcerated Loved Ones

by Ronald Marshall



Seventeen years ago, I arrived in Angola. I was assigned bed 43, next to an aging, frail prisoner who had been incarcerated longer than the 23 years I had been living. One day he said to me, "Youngsta, if you have family, don't waste their time and resources on bullshit. Doing time in prison is not for any

one."

Basically, he was telling me to use my family for one purpose: to assist in my struggles to regain freedom. In order to do so, I had to educate myself to educate my family on how to help me gain relief in court. That is the utmost important thing for an incarcerated loved one.

Some prisoners get the hang of doing time faster than others, but some prisoners appear to have mastered doing it better than most. But the prisoner serving time without family increases the chance of failure or dying in prison. Omar Burleson, M.C. said it best, "Take the word the family. Strike out the 'm' for mother and the y for youth—and all you have left is 'fail.'"

Your incarcerated loved ones need your help more than you'd like to believe. You may think that the only help you can provide is sending them money, visiting them or accepting their phone calls because that is the extent of assistance most incarcerated persons ask for, though visits, money orders, letters and phones calls are essential to ensure that incarcerated loved ones have the basic physical necessities to endure another abject day in a generally immoral and chaotic prison society. Your letters and visits are vitally important to help your loved ones maintain a robust mental and emotional being.

Believe me most incarcerated loved ones are clueless on how to educate family, so that family can help them survive the criminal justice system. Your incarcerated loved ones, some of them, may not know any better than you do on what is vitally important in terms of helping themselves to get off the prison count. They are afraid, confused and confounded by a prison industrial complex they did not make; that they feel they cannot change. So, they spend their time doing absolutely nothing except arguing with other prisoners, singing, laughing, pretending, and making loud noises so

they won't hear what their minds are trying to tell them. They are trying to forget their problems or pretend that they have none.

Your job as a loved one is to never allow them to forget their problems. Allowing your incarcerated loved ones to forget is to accept the prison for profit business that take advantage of your loved ones and label them very cheap slave laborers.

Prison serves not only as a physical barrier but also a communicative restraint. Prison discourages prisoners from enlisting the aid of family or sympathetic civilians. It is important that you breakthrough these barriers and communicate with your loved ones as much as time and money allow. When you speak to them or write them, rather than telling them what's happening around the neighborhood, ask them about their cases; ask them what can be done to locate witnesses, obtain documents or to get them a court date. Strategizing a viable defense to prevent death by incarceration can be only assured by effective communication.

Encourage your incarcerated loved ones to read and study the laws that govern their freedom. Rather than ordering them subscriptions to hip hop magazines, send them books that would teach them legal writing and legal reasoning and political science. Ignorance of the law is what got them into prison, and understanding the law and complexities of the criminal justice system may be the only viable remedy to get them out of prison and off the count.

In the Department of Corrections (DOC) across America, the head count is the most sensitive and important aspect of the entire prison ordeal. Wherever a prisoner is located during count time, the prisoner does best to be located on a correctional officer's count. A prisoner could likely talk himself out of a disciplinary report for a number of rule infractions, except messing up the count. When the head count is messed up, everything stops: prisoner traffic, movement, phone calls, showers, prayers, defecation, microwaves, cooking, talking, watching television, etc. Maintaining an accurate count is the first order of DOC business, and some super powerful and wealthy associations have a financial incentive to keep your loved ones on the count. The Sheriff's Association, for instance, repeatedly blocks modest legislative attempts to reduce sentences for non-violent offenses or attempts to increase the possibility of earning additional good-time (Connor, 2012). By doing so, the sheriffs ensure that their

(Continued on page 25)

(Continued from page 24)

jails are filled to capacity and prisoners remain on the count or in prison. The development of for-profit prison companies and their vast lobbying and political apparatus doesn't help. Putting people in jail and keeping them there is good for business. So, of course, that's what for-profit prison companies lobby do. Money is the driving force in Louisiana, where the sheriffs profit from the incarceration of more than half the state's prisoners. (Cindy Chang, Times-Picayune May 16, 2012). If the head count dips, sheriffs bleed money. Their constituents lose jobs. The prison lobby ensures this does not happen by thwarting nearly every reform that could result in fewer people behind bars. Chang 2012.

Persons incarcerated and their loved ones outside must understand from the very beginning of a sentence that the end purpose of serving time is simply to help your loved ones get off the count. In the same moment your loved ones arrive on the prison count, loving families should be formulating a blueprint on how to get their loved ones off the count. A prisoner's blue-print may consist of burning the midnight lamp to master the laws that govern their case; bumping their head on the floor five times a day; acquiring certificate after certificate to show themselves official before the parole board; relying on supportive family or attracting the attention of sympathetic persons to finance an attorney on their behalf. The families' blueprint, on the other hand, should be planning fund raising events to retain a private investigator and an effective defense attorney. If the family or prisoner's plan of action can undercut the amount of time imposed to serve on the prison count, megapower to y'all for you all will need all the power in the universe to detach your incarcerated loved ones from the magnetic pull of the headcount.

I have been fighting, clawing, scratching to get off the count, and my family has been tremendously supportive in my plight, yet I remain wrongfully convicted. Now think about the prisoners who aren't doing anything legally to help themselves and have no family to help them. The brutal truth-if they are serving a life sentence or habitual offender numbers, they merely exist to die in prison.

If your incarcerated loved ones have been down awhile reading prison magazines, they probably can recall the many obituaries of both the ambitious and less ambitious men who entered the count decades ago, only to die in prison on the count. Despite the character evidence of deceased prisoners, their collective memories produce a collage of death by incarceration, synonymous to overdosing on raw, uncut time. Too much potent hard labor (punishment) will weaken the body, eventually killing it. Every family has a duty to preserve their incarcerated loved ones from the onslaught of a deadly count; if the family has the means but does

not attempt to free their incarcerated loved ones, that family is guilty of assisted suicide. Do the math: the more your incarcerated loved ones find themselves being counted in passing years, the closer they are approaching death by incarceration. If you do not at least try to prevent your loved ones from dying in prison then you are assisting in their deaths by incarceration.

No matter how brilliantly smart, intellectual, witty, religious, moral, your incarcerated loved ones might be, if their mental capacity is not equipped with a specialized knowledge to get off the count, then they are colluding with the machinery of justice in keeping their own selves on the count.

So, please encourage your loved ones to educate themselves to the laws that govern their freedom and repel other inmates who draft their time for activities other than getting off the count. Encourage your loved ones to get away from toxic inmates, for they are serving the machinery of justice which does not serve you or your loved ones.

My Dear families, how many years of raw, uncut hard labor can your loved ones withstand before their memories become collaged with death by incarceration? While you're brainstorming an answer, keep in mind that the machinery of justice is not in the business of releasing its' offenders. If you're loved one is short to be released, of course they will be released unless they catch a new offense or lose significant good time credits. But if they are serving a life sentence or virtual life, habitual offender numbers, they will have to claw at their freedom everyday. And they will need family's unyielding support to make it personal and get their message across to the court or the parole board. That way your incarcerated loved ones stand a far better chance of being taken seriously, and make no mistake about it: being taken seriously in the criminal justice system or before the parole board marks the difference, the only difference, between your loved one staying on the count or getting off.

Real talk: every prisoner bearing teeth and clawing to make parole, secure reversal of conviction, to prove actual innocence, or a constitutional violation or to have an illegal sentence corrected, will not get off the count. That's the brutal truth. Some of our incarcerated loved ones will age and wither until they die in prison on the count, despite the fact that they're innocent or can prove constitutional violations. But you and your incarcerated loved ones deserve the strength that comes from the struggle. Believe me, trying to get your loved ones off the count when the alphabets, numbers, aggravated circumstances or for profit prison companies are double stacked against them will likely feel as if you and your incarcerated loved ones are being victimized by the criminal justice system, parole board or victim advocate groups. You and incarcerated loved ones

(Continued on page 26)

(Continued from page 25)

will experience severe emotional trauma: anger, anxiety, depression, shame, humiliation, despair, or even spurts of fear at the prospect of death by incarceration. In whichever mind state you and your incarcerated loved ones find yourselves on the incarcerated journey, quitting is not an option when there is a better life for your incarcerated loved ones after release and reunited with the family.

So, keep the struggle alive and healthy in your hearts. To struggle is to never know defeat, only progress, and eventually victory. Until your incarcerated loved ones have achieved the highest victory any prisoner can possibly achieve, which is freedom, continue to strive with them and chant down Babylon, "We're getting our incarcerated loved ones off the prison count.

About the Author: Ronald Marshall was wrongfully convicted for armed robbery and is serving a 50 year sentence in Louisiana's Department of Corrections. He has entered his seventeenth year on incarceration; he's a self-taught legal assistant and unpublished author of several urban novels. Upon his release, he plans to publish his books and launch his own paralegal service, specializing in criminal law, post conviction relief

and federal habeas corpus practice. He hopes to create a relief generating engine for deserving prisoners and eliminate the practice of duplicitous attorneys who exalt financial gain over ethical obligations owed to the legal profession. He intends to partner with a licensed attorney whose passion and commitment for criminal justice is strong and determined as his own.

If you have any concerns, questions or comments, you may contact me directly at:

Ronald Marshall #336016
Rayburn Correctional Center
27268 Hwy 21, North
Angie, Louisiana 70426

Or, you can email me at Jpay.com. Open an account, search for Ronald Marshall; DOC number:336016; Location: Rayburn Correctional Center (RCC)

Or, you can email me at Jpay.com. Open an account, add Ronald Marshall; DOC number:336016; Location: Rayburn Correctional Center (RCC)