

THE LETTER
A SHORT STORY
By Joél Baptiste

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March 23, 2220:

Many things have happened since the Shift, as we call it. There are still a few of the pre-Shift generation among us, but their time has come. With this in mind, I have recorded these events, carefully documenting how things came to be, so that our future generation do not repeat the same mistakes that caused mass incarceration.

In the days of which I speak, some two-hundred years ago, the punitive doctrine of "justice", held our society in a stranglehold. Our forefathers were kept in human storage units called prisons. The decisions, crimes, bad fortunes and even one's mental capacity were deemed incorrigible. For over nine decades, generations of men and women's abilities were squandered and our youth devastated. The erroneous lesson that people cannot change, was being taught to our children by proxy. Through laws and the mandatory minimum sentencing that were rampant, our actions were not only eliminating a possible work force but a well of ingenuity. We were conditioning our citizens to live in a world where change had no value and healing wasn't even part of the agenda.

Rebellion and anarchy became the new norm. The criminal camps eventually became institutions where criminal genius and the networking of gang culture controlled our youth. Our streets became the hostile stages where the misspent dreams of our youth threw away all purpose and promise. Eventually these camps became a society of the condemned, destined to die in prisons. They became uncontrollable, a financial burden on the State that grew every day. Society was so busy looking down at their cellular phones, they couldn't even keep up a personal relationships face to face. Society easily swallowed the sentiment that had been established through the legislators. There was separation and hatred, zero chance for recovery, stigmas followed prisoners as they tried to return to society.

Sometime in the mid-2000's, there were many uprisings and reformation initiatives. The government started to bend. Higher education and real avenues for recovery and release were being offered. Hope became a reality that one could build on and many did. Those prisoners began to engage with local communities from inside their cells. They started to attend college, even reputable universities, where they *outperformed* their free counterparts; some achieving their Master's Degrees. Corroborating with non-profit organizations and engaging with

the world outside; Inmates began to answer some of society's most pressing issues. These individuals began to *earn their freedom*. These former inmates then began to return to the institutions that once incubated them. They began to teach inmates, mentor and give support to the brothers and sisters still trapped in the past.

Base terms and mandatory minimums were abolished in 2035. A strict program was set in place, known as the Civilized Community Reentry Program (CCRP). Advanced technological companies were brought into the prisons and began to transform the mission of individual institutions..

By 2096, the Prison Industry Authority (PIA), and one of the leading non-profit organizations had merged with the University of Southern California's Medical center. New Folsom and Richard J. Donovan, began producing PIA hearts and kidneys. This design was patented by a grad student, while earning his freedom at Richard J. Donovan. These PIA organs had a service guarantee of two-hundred years; everything is produced within one of those two institutions.

One of the stipulations for the billion-dollar merge was the restructuring of the entire rehabilitation system. Northern prisons became institutional advancement centers, focusing primarily on education. Once an individual successfully worked their way through their educational goals, they could apply for training in one of the southern institutions that specialized in medical development and entertainment industry training. A Ph.D. program was made available at Lancaster. The central California institutions were set up to house mental health needs within the incarcerated community. That is also where those who have dedicated their careers to service in the counseling, social services and vocational skills would go to train. But all the institutions were working for the benefit of the PIA medical organ production in some way.

The new criteria for staff employment within the California Correctional Peace Officer Association (CCPOA), became contingent upon where one would be posted and what that institution's mission was. The mandatory minimum was that all staff must have at least an associate's degree in social and behavioral science to work in the Department of Rehabilitation. The days of mindless babysitting were through. Everyone had to work together, the barriers of "us" and "them" had ran it course. In fact, sociologists identified that mentality as one of the chief factors in social separation, preventing plausible reentry and true social change.

Prison as an entity, had ceased to exist in its former punitive form. The former prisons became known as Opportunity and Adjustment Centers. These centers provide avenues for those who have committed crimes and those who have been disenfranchised, to regain their membership within the community, based on merit and work. These new

Opportunity and Adjustment Centers became the safety net for our citizens of lower economic status, those suffering from late-development and dysfunction within the family and to those who experimented with deviance, due to any of those issues.

Today is the 23rd of March, 2220. Our Opportunity and Adjustment Centers now rival our best universities. Education is an option for every citizen, at every stage or circumstance in their lives. Our society has advanced along with all of these changes, change being the core theme. There is much more acceptance and empathy on both sides. The model of *restorative justice* is the norm, it has been the catalyst in the Shift.

My Grandson, I have written this history down for you today because it is your family history. I initiated the reconnect between humanity and justice. These were the things that I learned while studying under the Jesuit Society, but first I had to be open to change. I never could have dreamt that my own family would be affected, but here I am, writing to you while you are in Richard J. Donovan Correctional and Training Facility.

It took me many years and trials to find my way. I was once a part of the problem too and that's why I am supportive of who I *know* you will become. We, as a society have made a way for you to succeed. You have been earning your way back to our family for the past six years. The progress that your team at Donovan is making in advanced genetic oncology has made me the proudest grandparent. I have now reached the threshold of my PIA heart and lived well beyond my peers. I must accept the extent of my human existence. Because we as a society embraced change, I have been given the gift of knowing my great-great grandson. There is a value and potential in every citizen, we just need to find it. The history of this state is our family story. If we open our eyes it is within our daily narrative and decisions that we write the next page. Prison was never a place; *it was the refusal to accept change...* And that, my Son, is how we truly live in a world without prisons.

Seize the day, my Boy...
Love, Your Great-great Grandpa,
Jerry Brown,
PIA heart Recipient #001

-Joél Baptiste