



Shot Callers:

*who they are and
how they're made*

Mark Crawford

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Part 1

One man alone in the system

For the most part the things you're gonna read are things I've never spoken of outside these walls. Why, you ask. Well, for several reason actually, but mostly because I never wanted my children to hear about 'em. I never wanted them to worry about the struggles I faced simply trying to survive; but things are different now, I'm in a different place, around a different caliber of people. Plus, some of the things you're gonna read about in here are private, top secret, prison stuff, and up until now, I didn't see any reason to bring 'em up. Truthfully, I figured that someone else would write this, in fact I wanted it to happen that way, I even spoke to a few different people about writing this, but, alas, there were no takers, so here I am, nearing the end of my life and I've come to the conclusion that if it's gonna get written, I'll need to do it myself – What? No I ain't dyin', dummy! But I'm in my sixties and I realize that folks younger than me are croakin' off every day. So, if this stories gonna be told I need to take the incentive to get it out while I still can.

My language. Yeah, I apologize for that, Yes, I can most assuredly polish this up and write it in Shakespearian lingo, you know with proper grammar and such, yeah, I can write like that when I want to, check out my book “As A Convict Thinketh”, but, this book wasn'tmeant to be told that way. In other words this book ain't for some soft assed college kid, it's for you and I, and so I'm gonna use my Hillbilly ebonics and tell this story to ya in the same lingo I'd be using If we were sittin' around a burn barrel drinkin' a couple of beers. So, if your gonna read this, you need to stop that High Society act you have goin', and quit actin' like you ain't spent some time on your back, in a trailer park or two, wink, wink ... yeah, you know you liked it! 😊 Anyway, true to my word, I'll start with telling you about “Shot Callers”.

First, let me tell you here, the term Shot Caller, is Hollywood, we don't use that term except in passing conversation. You need to realize that to, call a shot on someone, or group of someone's is a serious matter, one with possible legal ramifications. Therefore no man with any sense, or one who's “actually” running something would allow themselves to be labeled a Shot Caller. Instead what you think of as a Shot Caller, we call, a Speaker. Speakers are the folks who speak for their people.

Every race, gang or car (car: any group of prisoners, often grouped together by, geographical origins such as the city or state they hale from, a race, or gang) have a person who speaks for them. Why? you might ask, well the answer is simple – because every race or group needs ONE person who can make a decision for their respective group without argument, without drama, without prejudice and with finality. For instance, say you have a white guy who hates blacks, or vice-versa, a black guy who hates whites, and this guy is inciting unnecessary tension by making racial comments. Rather than let that tension build up until there's violence, or worse, a Race-Riot, the Speaker for the offended person or persons will go to the Speaker for the other group and lodge a complaint. If the complaint is valid that Speaker will tell his guy that he needs to stop what he's doing, to keep his opinions to himself – and, that person is required to obey, or, the Speaker will take the issue to the Car by calling that group together and explaining to them the issue and possible consequences. Then the group will take action against the offending person, by taking him off the yard – one way or another. It's one of the unwritten prison rules, you must conform to those rules whether you want to or not. To disobey, or to repeat that action

gets you disciplined. In that scenario you can see that no one person called that Shot, therefore it would be difficult to hold any one person legally responsible if something were to go badly.

To be disciplined can be a variety of things. Sometimes a disciplinary action is a simple warning. Sometimes a man is made to put his hands on a table where he is then hit repeatedly in the sides by one or two men until he breaks and asks them to stop ... for the record, I've seen men so badly beaten in this manner that they throw up. I've even seen men take this kinda discipline even though they don't think they were wrong, just because its the rules of the yard. In some cases I've seen men so committed to their actions that, because they refuse to ask for mercy, are beaten so badly that we have to bring them food in their cell because they can't get out of bed to go to the Chow Hall. For the record, these men are revered for their courage. Sometimes, if requested by the offended side a man will be required to go into a cell and fight the man he offended. Sometimes a man is beaten bloody by his own crew, and sometimes, men are even killed. These are the types of things I was introduced to in the Penitentiary in Florence, Colorado. Believe me, a man learns early on to follow the rules, or he ends up doing some hard time.

I know, I know, I hear ya, but the truth of the matter is that there are Rules in place for a reason, rules that were put into place by men of all colors long before I came into the prison system. And, if you think this place is a nightmare now, imagine it without Rules and Consequences. Can't? Well, let me tell ya, it'd be a slaughter house of violence.

I know that what I'm about to say is politically incorrect, but prison has convinced me that there are a hell of a lot of people on this planet who need to be, controlled. Oh stop acting like your somehow to delicate to hear this, it's the damned truth and you know it. Without Law and Consequences people are little more than animals like lions and wild dogs where the strong take what they want from the weak. In prison life or in the free-world you gotta have rules, and you have to have consequences for violating those rules, and harsh consequences is the only thing some folks will adhere to. Sad? Yeah, but also true.

Now, on the surface the Prison Staff are against the whole idea of Speakers, especially Speakers who enforce the rules and "Take men off the yard". Their reasoning is simple and valid, every time a man "Can't walk" a yard, he has to be transferred to another yard. When that happens, well, they have to explain to their superiors exactly why it is that so-in-so has to be transferred – point well taken. But, every Lieutenant in the prison system has come up through the ranks, and they understand how one or two bad apples can inflame a yard and even cause it to jump off. Therefore, in the Penitentiary, MOST, not all, but most of the Yard Brass will look the other way when someone is taken off the yard, or even, in extreme cases beaten off a yard ... they ain't happy about it, and they will investigate the matter, but if its justified, a matter of peace and harmony, of security per se – they'll do the paperwork without retaliation.

That's who Speakers are and a little of what they do. Now, as for how they're made, well, here's the stuff I've been promising for several years now. Unfortunately I can't tell it to you without first telling you a long drawn out sequence of events. Why, you ask? Well, because Speakers are made a variety of different ways. Some guys are given that position because of their gang status. Some guys are given that position by seniority, and others, well, they never wanted to be Shot Callers, but just somehow just fall into it. But the one thing you should know is that being a Speaker one day doesn't mean you'll be the Speaker the next. Speakers, serve at the will of the car they represent, meaning if they don't represent the business of their people, the people will replace 'em. Yeah. Being a Speaker is dangerous in its own right. I've seen Speakers beaten off a yard by their own people, and if something big comes down and one car is attacked by another, the Speaker is the FIRST man they get. Being a Speaker in the Federal Prison System is to be a target from Staff and prisoner alike.

The story I'm gonna tell ya is a true one. Its the story of a man, one man alone in the system, one man who hit the prison system at the bottom of the barrel and who by the grace of God survived some very dangerous situations to eventually become one of the most respected men in the Federal Prison System.

Part 2

I was scared to death.

If you have read any of my books you've no doubt already heard the story about the way I was treated when I was first transferred from the County Jail in California to USP Florence (Big Boy Prison, the biggest), how the prison administration was so concerned for my safety that they wanted to put me into Protective Custody. No, I ain't gonna tell it again, stop bein' such a cheap bastard and buy one of those books! Anyway, to make a long story short, I refused, took my chances and hit the yard.

I think this is an appropriate place to tell you a funny little story. Where? What! ... hell yeah its relevant to this story! It'll give you a little insight as to the reputation that USP Florence had in the prison system ... What? ... well, I'm gonna tell it anyway! So sit down and shut up.

After I left California they flew me via Con-Air (no it ain't nothing like the movie, well that ain't exactly true, it's a lot like the movie, without all the cages and masks) to the Federal Transfer Center in Oklahoma City. This is the place where, if you're new into the system, you're processed into the Bureau of Prisons. This procedure consists of a medical questioner, family contact information, a short psych evaluation where you are asked the ridiculous question "Are you considering killing yourself, today?" They also ask you if you're a rat and therefore need to be separated from the masses, I ain't and said so. Basically they ask the normal things they need to know about a prisoner.

This Transfer Center is also the Central Hub where most prisoners who are being transferred from one prison to another go before being shipped to their new spot. Anyway, about two-hundred of us got off the plane where we stood in two long lines while being unshackled, hands and feet, before being led into huge holding cells where we were forced to stand or sit on the floor awaiting our turn to be processed. I was probably the only NEW guy there, all the others were transfers.

We were called one at a time into a Processing Station and asked all the questions I described. Then the guy doing my interview looks at my paperwork and says with a smirk, "You're going to USP Florence."

I had been to Colorado a few years before I was locked up and had loved it. So I thought, "Wow. Ok. I like Colorado." I filled out the paperwork listing my family contacts, this in case they need to contact your family for any reason – like, if you get murdered! Then I was sent back to the Holding Cell with the others. Hour after hour I stood and watched as each man was systematically processed. During this time I kept thinking about my family.

While in this Holding Cell I noticed that the men in there with me were in groups, Indians with Indians, Blacks with Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Whites, all in groups. Being that I had no concept of the racial politics of Federal Prison, I stood alone in one of the corners with my back to the wall, alone. Now that I look back on it, I obviously looked like a "Fish", a first timer. And even though I was trying to look hard, I probably looked like I was scared to death. No, I wasn't scared to death, but being that I didn't know what to expect, I was on the edge. Ok, I was a little scared.

A couple of hours into this process my attention was captured when one of the White-Boys comes back in from processing looking like Satan had thrown him over a chair and sodomized him; almost hysterical. He was saying to the other white guys, "It wasn't even my knife! And they're sending me to USP Florence!" The other guys not wanting to make eye contact looked at the floor as they tried to console him.

Then one of the other guys said to him, "Damn. I'm sorry to hear that. But don't worry about it, man, you'll be ok!". On and on this guy ranted about being sent to Florence, all the while I'm ear-hustling and thinking, "Holy Shit! That's where I'm going!"

After processing we were divided into groups, put into pods with two-man cells to await the next Con Air flight, or, bus ride to our designated prisons – unfortunately I was not put into the pod with the other guy going to Florence. But, over the next few weeks as I waited transfer I asked everybody I came into contact with about USP Florence. Without failure they always looked at me with this, "What the hell did you do!" look. Never, not once did I hear anything good, always the same thing, "That place is rockin'" meaning it was violent, real violent. It was in one of those conversations that I first heard about "The Cowboys". The Cowboys were a group of prison guards who liked to stage, just to watch, one-on-one prison fights, lots of racial bouts; whites against blacks. Yeah. If you made one of them mad, they'd put you in a cell with someone they'd instructed to beat the hell out you. My councilor at Florence, Mr. Andert, was one of them, in fact, I think, he was the one who finally got disgusted with the over-the-top violence and blew the whistle on them. Some of these animals went to "little boy" jail, others lost their jobs, but most of them went about their business as usual at USP Florence. Yeah, you can read about these guys on the web.

The Federal Prison System has different levels of custody ranging from the fenceless "Camps" where inmates with short sentences are sent. Next you have the "Low Security" facilities which have fences, to "Medium Security F.C.I.s" up to the "Penitentiaries" which are all Maximum Security joints. These "Pens" are called level 4 prisons. At that time, before the riot of 2008, Florence was considered one level above your standard Penitentiary, a level 5 joint.

USPs, United States Penitentiary, is for the most violent, the hardest, the knuckleheads, the real tough guys. Yeah, they're all considered Hard Time, and when you can't act right at one of those other Penitentiaries, they ship you to Florence as a last step before being walked across next door to the ADX Supermax which is a segregation prison. By segregated I mean you are locked down in a cell, by yourself. Now you're gonna hear that the solitary joints are the hard spots, but I will remind you that in those spots, you're alone, safe from the violence of a USP. Yeah, I know a little something about solitary confinement – like 18 months of something! Give me solitary confinement any day of the week and twice on Sunday as opposed to the violence of a USP!

When I first heard all these things I was a little apprehensive, not scared, but alert, confused. After all, there are other USPs in my "Region" even one in Beaumont Texas, so why was, I, singled out straight outta Court and sent there? For the same reason my handcuffs were "Black-Boxed" whenever I was moved from one spot to the next – "someone" high up had labeled me as a troublemaker – I had refused to plead guilty, and had refuse to "snitch" on the piece of shit who snitched on me. SO off I went!

Well, that's my funny little story ... I guess it really wasn't funny after all, maybe you had to be there.

That's what was going through my mind when I stepped out of the Holding Cell in USP Florence only to be told I was in, grave danger, because I'd been a Mayor. "There are men on this yard who'll kill you because of that". Like I said, its a long story, but in the end, I refused Protective Custody, convinced the prison staff I could make it, and hit the yard.

Part 3

UPS Florence: A California Yard

When I arrived at USP Florence it was a California yard, what does that mean? Well, it means that men from California made up the majority of the population. Yes, there were plenty of men from other places, including Texas, but when I arrived and being the majority, the California-Boys ran USP Florence with an iron fist.

This group of guys from California consisted of the California Aryan Brotherhood known in the system as “The Brand”, the California Mexican Mafia of “American Me” fame, called the “Black Hand” as well as the L.A. Crips – California boys ran everything – guys like me walked a thin dangerous line on that yard. I, as an outsider knew that at any given time they could take me down and that there was little or nothing I could do to prevent it. In my book “As a Convict Thinketh” I tell a story about how in my first year there at USP Florence that I unknowingly offended one of the Black Hand by not honoring my word. I was spared because the White-Boy Speaker spoke up for me, by basically telling them I was new in the system, and a dumbass on top of that. Yeah, you learn quick, 'cause them boys ain't playing!

An important thing to know here is, the California Aryan Brotherhood and the California Mexican Mafia run together – if one goes to war, they both go. FYI, the only way you're accepted into one of these groups is if you've put in serious work, no, they don't take everybody who wants to patch up, in this, these two groups are different from all the others, for this reason, they carry a lot of respect in the system. If you want to be one of them, you get your start somewhere else, a sub-group like the Surenos or the NLR (Nazi Low-Riders) among others. But you don't just patch up with the Black Hand or the Brand unless you're a bad mother-F'er. All them boys are the real deal. When I tell you that the Brand, or the Black Hand ran the yard, what I mean is, there might only be ONE of them on the yard! But they run it, because all the other sub-gangs (Family Members) choose to operate under them. Okay, back to the story.

Up until this time there were no Brand on the yard, the California White Boys were run by other Cali family members, but somewhere between 2003-2005, I can't remember exactly, word came down that a Brand member was fixing to be released from the ADX Supermax, next door, to the yard at USP Florence. The rumors were buzzing.

When Ziggy hit the yard I remember seeing him for the first time and thinking damn, that's a tough looking character. He was about 6' 3" tall, heavily tattooed and wore that big thick moustache the old school “Brand” guys are famous for; yeah, one look and you knew he was a tough son-of-a-bitch. Make no mistake here, Ziggy, was famous in the system for cutting the head off another bad-assed dude. No, I don't know if its true, that's just what the fellas were saying about him. So, when Ziggy hit the yard the other family members, regardless of their own patch, gave him their support and turned the keys over to him; the Black Hand welcomed him as an ally, and he was.

I of course watched all this from a distance and was frankly fascinated how ONE man could carry such respect. So this is your first lesson on how Shot Callers are made: some men earn it on other yards and are, because of who they are, and how they've carried themselves in the system, automatically given that title and the respect that goes with it.

As I went about my business of trying to survive the place and the sentence I'd been given I saw Ziggy only in passing, but I didn't speak to him, nor he to me; the gangs ran the yard and I hadn't, "patched up", I was an outsider, and as such my exposure to him was limited. But my curiosity got the best of me and several times as I walked by I took a sneak peek at Ziggy and his crew, and the weird thing was, HE was watching me, too! Yeah, he had noticed me, for some reason, I was on his radar.

A little while after Ziggy hit the yard a youngster from California hit the yard, too. On the street he'd been patched up with a group called I.E. "Inland Empire", on the streets they were associates of the Brand and he quickly became Ziggy's right hand. Now this youngster "Ghost" happened to be in my cell block, and as a result we became friends, not hang-out buddies, he had his own crowd and I was an outsider and a loner to boot, but we were friends who spent time talking in the block.

Among the White-Boy families on the yard at that time was a group out of Utah called S.A.C., pronounced "sack", (Saviors of Aryan Culture). These boys hailed out of Salt Lake City Utah, and are some tough assed-white boys. A side note of interest: One of the two original founding members of SAC was at Florence, and I kid you not, this guy was 6' 7" with tattoos from feet to head – big bastard- but not at all what you'd expect by looking at him, he was a really nice guy. Anyway, my son Marco came to Colorado to visit me and we were sitting in the Visiting Room when he walked in to see his own family, and passed right in front of my son and I. My son looks at him, then turned to me and said, "Holy Shit, pop! Are you alright in here?" I laughed and assured him I was. But lord have mercy, he was intimidating to look at. Later I heard that, at another joint, his own car, stomped him out ... damn shame too, he was level headed, in a group that's not known for being level-headed, or reasonable. To be noted: At USP Florence, SAC, fell under Ziggy.

In my cell-block there was a guy called, Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown and I were friends, not close friends, but friends. One day Charlie Brown went to the Hole, I have no idea why; one day he was walking around the cell-block, the next he was gone, happens all the time. In fact, a lot of the time you don't even know a guys gone, until you see him return and realize you hadn't seen him around.

A month or so after Charlie Brown went to the Hole I was in my cell painting when I heard a knock at my door. I look up to see Charlie Brown smiling at me through the glass in the door. I motion him to come in, which he does. We sit and talk for a half hour or so, then we hear the guard holler, "Mail Call!" So, we, like everyone else gathers around the horseshoe shaped counter in front of the guards office hoping to get some love. All of a sudden in the middle of the guard calling the names of those who had mail Charlie Brown starts stabbing one of the SAC members with a hard plastic shank. I won't bore you with all that happened after that, but Charlie Brown, like me, was an Independent white-boy, not gang affiliated, and for an Independent to attack one of the gangs, was a serious violation. I knew this of course, but, even with that understanding, at the time I really didn't give the incident much thought. It was a random incident, and Independents are still men who will occasionally get fed up with a gang member and stab the shit out of him, it does happen. But, like I said, it was a random incident, it didn't involve me ... boy was I in for a surprise! Unbeknownst to me, I WAS involved!

As expected Charlie Brown and the guy he tried to stab were hauled off the Hole and the rest of us went on Lock Down. When the yard opened back up all the gang members went to the yard to fill Ziggy in on what had went down. It came back to me that the opinion on the yard was, that Charlie Brown had come straight out of the Hole, went to my cell, where he stayed until Mail Call, then left my cell to stab dude. That could only mean one thing ... I'd given him the shank he then used on a SAC member. Serious! Serious F-ing violation! In fact, I could be killed for it!

A few years earlier I had a “Hit” put out on me by one of the Mexican Gangs for the exact same thing; for allegedly giving a Bonecrusher to another race who then used that weapon to stab a Mexican family member. Lucky for me, the guy given the job of “Hitting” me, was in my cell-block, didn’t believe I’d do such a thing, and did a little investigating only to determine that it was in fact, another white-boy named Mark, who had in actuality, sold, a piece of steel to an Independent Mexican who then used it on one of the Mexican family members. Now, the guy, Tattoo Eddie, who was supposed to “Hit” me later relayed the story to me about how close I came to meeting Jesus and then gave me the name that I am now known throughout the system as, Mayor Mark, this so I could never be confused with the myriad of other white-boy Marks in the system. And it’s true, there’s only one Mayor Mark in the entire system. Yeah, I was given my moniker by some California gang members. That other Mark? Yeah, they stabbed the shit out of him. A side note: The guy who was supposed to “Hit” me, Tattoo Eddie, later on ran afoul of his own people – the guards said he was stabbed 64 times.

Anyway, here I was again, same predicament, only worse this time, because in actuality, even I had to admit, I looked guilty as hell. Back to the story.

When I heard what was being discussed and what was being said about my involvement, I was almost sick to my stomach , it looked bad! God Damn you Charlie Brown for putting me in a bad spot; you’re laid up in Protective Custody, and I’m in the open trying to survive your bullshit. Truthfully, I didn’t think I could survive it. What happened next, would set the stage for how the rest of my time in prison would go.

Part 4

The Aftermath of Charlie Brown

After I became aware of the accusations against me I had a sleepless night. To say that I was scared would be an understatement ... I was real scared, but there was nothing I could do but wait. Well, that's not exactly true, I could go to the guards and tell them I was afraid for my life and they'd put me into Protective Custody – or, I could stand my ground and go down like a man. For the record, I never even considered “Checking In”, asking for PC. I suppose this proves that pride is greater than fear.

Hour after hour I waited while others I had no dealings with decided my fate. I had already seen that I had been isolated by the other white-boys, I was an island, no one was even getting near me, no one was even saying good morning and the gang-members were circling me with hard stares waiting for the word, to attack. I can't even begin to tell you what this feels like, the waiting, the not knowing when they were going to get you – terrible, terrible feeling – absolutely terrible.

At this time the cell I had was one of the handicap cells, meaning it was a single-man cell; I had the cell to myself, I was alone in it and that I loved. This handicap cell was in the corner of the cell-block under the stairs, next to the phones – I had the cell nobody wanted, the worst cell in the building ... I was low-man on the proverbial Totem Pole.

Even though the cell-block was an open space, no walls, there were some washing machines that set up under the stairs in front of my cell. Every hour of every one of those days as I awaited my fate to be decided I stood in front of my cell door, looking over those washing machines, down the thirty meters between me and the front door of the cell-block watching who came and went. Hours upon hours I stood and watched knowing that whomever came for me, would have to come through that front door. Thirty meters between that door and where I stood, that's all the warning I'd have.

During this time there was a youngster in my cell-block, and outcast of a kid, half Native American, half white, named Vaughn Watrus, (possibly misspelled). Vaughn was poorly treated, not really accepted by the Indians, so he lived and hung out with the white guys. He was seen as a little eccentric and treated as such, but we liked him and completely accepted him. I of course liked him more than most and spent time with him; in reality there wasn't anything wrong with him, he was just a loner, like me.

The second day of this three day ordeal I was standing and watching the door when Vaughn appeared and posted up beside me. When I turned to look at him he just ignored me and stood there looking at the front door. Even though no words passed between us, I knew that he was willing to go down with me. All day long we stood, and that night when the guard hollered “Lock Down!” for the night, Vaughn reached under his jacket and pulled out two pad locks on the end of belts, to let me know that he was armed and dangerous. I smiled, patted him on the shoulder and stepped into my cell for another sleepless night.

That night I thought about Vaughn and I knew that he'd put himself in real danger – everyone in my cell-block had seen him side with me, and that word had without a doubt reached Ziggy. Truth is, a

better man probably would have been more concerned with his friends safety and insisted he leave ... but I didn't, and I've always felt bad about that.

On the third day Vaughn was at work during the day, and at about two o'clock that afternoon, one of the gang-members walked up to me and said, "Ziggy's outside. He wants to see you." Well, this is it I thought to myself. They ain't gonna come in here, they're gonna do it on the yard, smart! They knew, like I did, that to come or go from or into my cell-block required them, and ME, to go through a metal detector, that meant that I at least, would be unarmed! They of course could have Shanks and Bonecrushers from off the yard – all cars had weapons hidden on the yard.

The advantage to being "HIT" on the yard is that it's out in the open and it wouldn't take long for the guards to come rushing in to try and save whomever was being attacked – I knew they'd have, or, more importantly, I'd have about sixty seconds before the first guards arrived. Out I went. Out to face whatever may come. Why you ask wouldn't I stand my ground and make them come to me? I truthfully don't know. That certainly would have been the smart thing to do ... I guess ... I guess, I was just tired of the waiting – that and I suppose, a man in prison, learns to accept the reality of things even if he doesn't understand the why of 'em. Like Karma, the bull shit politics of prison seem to come at you from out of no where ... like they were ordained by some hidden council, or, some spirit beyond your understanding taps out the message of your punishment on the table of life, and then demons beyond comprehension, come for that proverbial pound of flesh.

I don't even understand it myself, and as crazy as it will seem to you on the outside I can truthfully tell you that somewhere along the way, something inside of me, snapped and broke. Somewhere, without my recognition, during those three days of hellish waiting, I lost my fear and became calculatingly angry. My instinctual fear had morphed into instinctual survival. And though I had never contemplated killing before, I can tell you that they and the circumstances surrounding this event, coupled with fear and the impending possibility of being butchered had made me every bit as dangerous as them. Remember, I've told you before – I was trained by Ret. Col. Mark Miles, look him up, and I'm damn good with my hands, I'll leave it at that ... I was totally committed to defending myself, whatever the result might be.

I've told you more than once over the years that, as a person, I've changed, but I've never actually explained how or why, so I'll say it here, this prolonged exposure to certain destruction, to unrelenting fear, was most assuredly a part of the change I have so aptly recorded in my writings. This single event would forever alter the way I would carry myself. Never again would I talk out of turn, never again will I allow myself to experience road-rage, never again will I lose my temper. Yes, something had been altered in me and a calmness came over me as I made my way out to face what I thought would be insurmountable odds, and it has never left me. I am not the man you remember. I am quiet, reserved, calm, sad, respectful and completely aware of life; with shock and confusion the ugliness of prison has awakened me the way a cold glass of water awakens the napper ... shocked, confused, bent and damaged, yeah, that's the right word for this new me, I'm damaged goods, something in me has been broken, the goodness I once saw in humanity has flown far from my clouded vision. For this reason I know in my heart that I could never again be with my wife; nor with any one – I've spent too much time alone, I'd need space, lots of space, more than anyone short of a mental patient could put up with – I'd be a poor companion. I'm a loner who dreams only of painting and writing – I've lost the light of innocence my eyes once held and like I told you a while back, if I was to be released from prison I'd be more comfortable in an ally than in the Mayors Office. I'm definitely not the man you remember ... never forget this, because this is all you need to know about my state of mind: The man I now am, talks to trees.

Part 5

Facing my Fear

“Ziggy wants to see you outside.”

Like I told you in my last posting, part 4, as I began to take that long walk from my cell-block to the outside yard I realized that something in me had changed. I realized for the first time that I was no longer afraid of what might happen – or, more precisely, of anything. I wasn't afraid of anything! Cautious, calculated and even angry, yeah, but not afraid. The most important thing I noticed about myself is that to top it off, I was entirely calm. I was mentally prepared for what awaited me outside.

I had seen it before, multiple times in fact. Scenario #1: You're surrounded by a group of men, someone sucker punches you, or someone hits you in the back of the head with a mace-like weapon in the form of a padlock on the end of a belt to stun you, then the others beat you down and put the “Boots” to you. In this type of attack, you lose some teeth, get a few broken ribs, but you survive.

Scenario #2: a cold-blooded killer, or two attacks you. Assailant #1 has the mace like padlock on a belt or in a long athletic sock – he attacks first. The second man has the “Bonecrusher” (a piece of steel filed down to a point with a makeshift handle of cloth and tape – this weapon is not designed to cut, it's designed to poke holes in the human body, it's deigned to kill). The second man will wait for the padlock to land a couple of times, then he'll attack. I would have about sixty-seconds, could I last sixty-seconds without running? These are the scenarios that were going through my mind that afternoon as I took that long walk from my cell-block to the yard. But like I said, like a man walking to certain death on Death Row, I guess I had accepted that things were beyond my control. I was calm. Not brave, just calm.

In my years prison up to this point I'd seen men die cowering, and I'd seen men die like warriors, in fact, I described one of those warrior deaths in my book “A Poet Dreams”. Yeah, in my mind I had seen my own “Day of Reckoning” a hundred times and I'd vowed to go down in a manner my children and my ancestors would be proud of.

In my life I have always been what would be described as an emotional person, but in prison, as in life, emotions are a detriment, a weakness, and I implore you to think about what I just said, “Emotions are a detriment, a weakness,” they are attachments that a person must gain control over. If you do not learn to control your emotions, you will live, as I did, on an emotional roller-coaster – up, down, up, down, up then down ... from happy to sad, from calm to angry and everywhere in between. Emotions are a weakness, and in prison, they can cost you your life ... I also tell a story in “A Poet Dreams” about how I let my emotions get the best of me over a dude with one leg, and how I was put into check by the reality that I needed to quit worrying about other folks and mind my own business. Hard lessons, and harder to understand ... no this ain't the place to go into all that ... but trust me on this; if you want to know more about the value of self-control check out the “Eight Fold Path” of the Buddha.

I don't think I can truthfully identify the one thing which has brought me to my current level of calmness. I suspect that it is a combination of different things ... one, I have prayed for it, two, I have become a devoted student of Siddha Yoga, Yoga for the mind (see Siddhayoga.org). Three, I've aged, four, I have stood in abject fear of my life for three days – and last but not least, I have been walking the path of

Spiritual Development as outlined in that book, “A Poet Dreams.” So, I cannot honestly say that the gut-wrenching experience of contemplating being killed at the hands of my own people was the sole birther of my present state of serenity, when in reality it was probably a combination of all those things.

To understand me and my present mindset you have to read my prison diary, “Where No One Hears Me.” Yes, I now it’s painful to read, especially if you love me, as my little adopted niece (Gisella Galvan) once said, “It’s so sad, I can’t read it! GIRL SHUT UP”, lol. You ain’t supposed to see the sadness of it, you’re suppose to see the amazing story of how I overcame all that sadness to improve myself as a human being. Anyway, lol, that book illustrates better than any other the mental torture we prisoners experience. It’s funny, the Inmates here at Three Rivers think I’m a “Bug” because I don’t play their emotional mind games, because I’m not running around complaining about everything, laughing, giggling – as if I enjoy prison ... and, because I’m deadly serious about prison politics, but I know things they don’t know. I’ve seen and have recognized the consequences of my past and present actions. I’ve seen things they, or, hopefully you will never see. With that said, here’s the answer, this is what happened to me, this is the reason for my present demeanor, this is what I knew that day as I walked out of that cell-block. This is why, on that day of reckoning, I was fearless – I had come to accept the eminent closeness of death, and I had lost my fear of it!

Maybe it was my studies, maybe it was my faith in God, or maybe it was my recognition that death was ever present in life. Whatever the reason, I had disrobed myself of humanity’s greatest liability, its most profound weakness. I had lost everything. I had been separated from everyone who loved me and had found myself alone, afraid and desirous of a spiritual life, one where there were no prisons, no Cowboy Guards, no sorrow, no anger, no separation. Yes, the fear of death had lost its hold on me and somewhere along that cold stretch of road I was reborn in a way few Christian this century could understand, more like a regeneration, a regeneration through sorrow.

After all these years I tell you again to read, “Where No One Hears Me,” because in that book is a whole section comprising my thoughts and writings on the ever so misunderstood subject of “Death”. So when you ask yourself why I’d even write such stuff, my only answer is: I didn’t set down and write about Death, it just happened one entry at a time over the course of years. It someone else who saw the importance of it and then pulled those separate entries together and grouped them up for the sake of study – Hell, up until then I’d never even realized I’d written so much about the subject!

Ziggy

Walked outside to confront my destiny and waiting for me were, not one man, but two scenario #2, they were gonna try to kill me! Ziggy who’d spent five years in the Supermax for cutting a guys head off – and my friend, Ghost. They were gonna handle it themselves.

I lifted my chin in defiance and I walked right up to them and a tinge of anger surfaced–emotions are a detriment – I fought it down, and waited for them to do whatever it was they intended to do.

Ziggy, with Ghost at his side asked me one question: “Did you give Charlie Brown that shank?” I looked him right in the eyes and responded, “I have a piece of steel this long ...” I held out my hands the way a fisherman does when he’s lying about a fish, then continued, “and I hate that dude Charlie Brown stabbed. If I’d given a piece to Charlie Brown, that stupid son-of-a-bitch would be dead right now! And for

the record ..." why I said this I don't know ... "I've got no problem killin' one of them stupid sons-a-bitches." Yeah, I said it just like that, to the most dangerous man on the Compound! Yeah, I know, so much for civility. But, anyway, the damnedest thing happened. Ziggy actually smiled the way a lion would smile at a mouse who puffed out his chest, then he asked me a question about a Jamaican dude in my cell-block. I answered him, he said, "Alright." Then him and Ghost turned around and walked away.

I stood for a couple seconds and thanked God, then I turned around and went back into my cell-block wondering what would come next. Of course I concluded, Ziggy didn't have to put work in, he'd naturally have someone else do it ... but that smile he gave me was more like a proud father, than a lion to a mouse ... Again I stood in front of my cell door, but that smile, gave me hope.

At 7pm some of the fellas came in off the yard and I immediately saw that things were different, several of the ten or so gang members in my cell-block spoke as they went by, or smiled – and just like that, the tension was gone. My fate had been decided ... for reasons I'd later learn from Ziggy himself, I'd been spared ... I had been vindicated; believed.

Yes. I know, I'm rushing this along, but the English Babe who handles my blog is going on vacation to Turkey, soon. So, I thought I'd get ahead of the curve. Yeah, that was a crazy thing, that. Next time I'll tell you a little about the race-riot of 2008, then about my exposure to the absolute rulers of USP Florence, The Black Hand! and how I came to become, not one of, but THE most respected white-boy, at USP Florence. For the record, it looks like there will be 10 of these entries which will take you up until the time I got off the bus here at Three Rivers, only to be told that "guys like me weren't welcome here". Yeah, you're gonna hear it all.

Part 6

The Texas Massacre

I'll probably never know what Ziggy had told the yard concerning me but it must have been something to hear because after that day, most, of the White-Boy Family Members began to treat me with a high level of respect. If I walked across the yard men spoke to me, patted me on the back, nodded, or in the case of the Cali guys, I was given a high level rank of respect. But the yard population was beginning to change. It was clear that Administration was slowly turning over the White population; the California Boys were being transferred out and Texas Boys were slowly replacing them. In this change a few ABT's (Aryan Brotherhood Texas) began to hit the yard.

In case you're wondering, California guys and Texas guys have an intense dislike, one for the other ... remember, I went from Texas to several different jails in California, so I know a little something about this. FYI: this division is the same with the Mexicans, the California Mexican Mafia and the Texas Mexican Mafia do not recognize each other and are at constant odds. In most cases, they don't even talk to each other. Do not be confused here, the California AB, "The Brand" and the California Mexican Mafia "The Black Hand" are not the same as the Texas AB or the Texas Mexican Mafia.

As the yard began its inevitable evolution Ziggy remained in control. As it would turn out, Ziggy, like me, was an artist and in later conversations I got the impression that this was probably the reason he'd taken notice of me early on; no, I ain't sure about that, it's just the only reason I can come up with. But, as it turned out Ziggy was not only an artist but a guy who was able to think bigger than crime and prison and in the end those were the only things which would make us friends. Yes, Ziggy and I actually became friends.

Later on I learned through conversation, he never said it but I intuited that he didn't actually like most of the guys who followed him around and hung off his nuts. I suspect that he saw them as soldiers and therefore knew that he needed to keep them at arms length, which means, he really didn't have many friends.

One afternoon he invited me over to his cell-block to look at some of his artwork and to just hang out. When I entered his cell I saw that he had a small easel sitting atop his desk with the name "Ziggy" on a small white label stuck to the front of it. He saw me looking at it the way a man on a desert island would look at a poster of Blake Lively – truth is, I'd never before seen an easel like that. When I painted in my cell I sat my canvas on the table and propped it up against the wall. Like I said, he saw me looking at it and said, "Take it! It's yours". That my friends was a huge gift! A huge serviceable, much appreciated, much used gift that I would later carry with me when I transferred to FCI Pollock, only to have it taken from me when I transferred to Three Rivers ... don't get me started on that! Or I'll be ranting for the next three hours.

Ziggy had been in the ADX prior to hitting the yard at USP Florence and over there the only color medium available to prisoners is Pastels, so he had plenty of time to perfect his skills with chalk, and he was good. Ziggy actually did a pastel painting for me of a couple of men pulling a huge fish into a small

boat in a nighttime storm – beautiful work. I sent that pictures home to be added to my own extensive collection. It's very important to me.

A year later, Ziggy was gone, transferred and Ghost had the keys to the yard. But the yard was in that slow transition period I mentioned earlier and the Texas Boys were hitting the yard in increasing numbers. As these new gang members hit the yard they came there knowing nothing of the struggles I'd been through scratching and clawing my way through those early tests. All they knew was that I was held in high esteem by the yard, I was living off my experience and relationship with Ziggy. None-the-less, the new guys simply assumed that I was a bad-ass. Don't let humility fool you here, even though I was in my fifties at this time, yeah, FIFTIES! don't forget that. I was a fifty plus year old man fighting men half my age. Yes, when forced to do so I will fight and fight hard. So my reputation isn't all overblown, most of it, but not all of it.

This story that I'm about to tell you was early in this personnel transition period I've been telling you about. At this time there were maybe twenty or thirty Texas patch holders on the yard. Now that ain't a huge number but it's a hell of an increase from when I'd first arrived. And those numbers were making the Texas car feel a little bold; you could see them grouping up, feeling safe in their numbers.

From the first day I set foot on the yard at USP Florence I felt the need to examine myself, to find out how I'd gotten myself into the predicament I had and so I began an internal spiritual quest. As absurd as it will seem to you, I was trying to make some sense out of my life. Yeah, it seems the joke was on me, I was trying as best I knew how, to find God, in the one place I could see no evidence of His/Her/Its, presence. I was looking for God in Hell; this whole bastard of a quest I have outlined in a part fiction, part non-fiction book entitled "A Poet Dreams". In that book you will find bits and pieces of the things you're now reading. Hopefully this will help you to understand the reasons behind the things I tell in that book. No, as some of my Christian friends have asked, I didn't fall from the roots of my upbringing, I simply turned to the only sources of spiritual knowledge available to me, both good and bad, like Buddhism and Ceremonial Magick.

As part of my spiritual quest and as a benefit of my new found stature on the yard I found a moments peace, Enough that I began a practice of daily meditation. This was a relatively happy time for me. Time passed, things happened around me – my children were happy and I was writing and painting, like I said, it was a happy time.

During this period of respite, Ghost, went to the Hole. I have no idea why; I was focused on fixing myself. Then, one evening I was in my new, highly coveted cell meditating when I was startled out of my reverie by the dead-silence of my cell-block. So rare is silence in this world that it actually caused my sub-conscious to take notice. My mind left its happy place and returned to the awareness of my surroundings. Silence here at USP Florence meant that something was going down. I opened my eyes, removed my ear plugs and confirmed to myself that something unusual was happening, and sure enough, the silence was broken every few seconds with grunts and the sound of bodies being beaten. I jumped up and ran to my cell door only to find that I couldn't open it. Nope, it wasn't locked, someone was holding it closed.

Yeah, to my surprise a friend of mine named John Bent was holding my door closed, a few seconds later the guard who was frantically trying to get as many cell doors locked as possible, locked mine. When my door was locked, my friend turned and walked away. As I looked out my cell door window I saw several men lying on the floor, others were beating them and kicking them in the face and head – blood, everywhere. The odd thing was, there were no guards rushing in to stop the violence. The only

action being taken was the cell-block guard was hollering “Lock Down!” and rushing to lock as many doors as possible to hopefully prevent others from being attacked, or, joining in. In horror I watched through the cell door window as a mixed group of gang-members beat the two ABT guys in my cell-block without mercy. I could do nothing except watch, hoping that the guards would rush in and save them. They didn’t. The beatings stopped when fatigue overtook the attackers.

I would later learn that word had come down to take the Texas Boys off the yard ... except for me.

This coordinated “Hit” was executed in all seven cell-blocks (one block was not open to the yard) at the same time. What this means is that it was timed to happen in all seven locations at once, the desired affect was that when the cell-block guards “Hit the Deuces”, a summoning of all available staff, they would realize they didn’t have the manpower to cover all of the cell-blocks at the same time, and “Stand-Down” until the attacks stopped. Hence when I looked out my door there were no guards to intervene.

When we came off lock down things pretty much went back to normal, except of course, the Texas Boys were gone, along with a shit load of White Boys who’d participated in the attack. Shortly after that someone came into my cell-block and told me that Ghost was outside and wanted to see me.

I stepped outside to see a smiling Ghost still in the clothes they give you when they let you out of the Hole; he had come to see me even before he went to his cell-block. We shook hands, hugged and sat on the concrete barrier outside my cell-block. We talked ... about things I can’t go into, but the gist of the conversation was that “whoever” called that “Shot” did so because they believed that “they” Texas gang-members were “Dropping Kites” on Ghost (sending anonymous notes to the guards, snitching) telling the guards to not let Ghost back on the yard, that he was a trouble maker. Yes, there’s a lot more to this conversation that I will not talk about, but what I can say is that along with the orders to conduct that hit, came the orders that I was not to be touched; if you read “A Poet Dreams” I’ve included a part where my alter ego and I are talking and he makes reference to the fact that some of the Utah boys were jealous of my status on the yard and wanted to take me off the yard. Hence the need to include the order that I was not to be touched.

There’s a lot more to this story that we don’t have time for here, but suffice to say that after that attack, the Cali White-Boys were short-lived at Florence. Within six months staff had transferred most of them out and brought in other cars. The yard was never the same after that and the White-Boys were never again a force on the yard ... This turning over of the yard also included the Blacks, the Cali Blacks were out and they brought in a large contingency of guys who called themselves “The Mid-West Crew”, St. Louis guys. But the yard was run by the, Black Hand.

The Race-Riot

After the above mentioned event and transition we had the Race-riot of 2008 dubbed by the media as the “Hitler Riot”. No! I can’t talk to you about it ... maybe someday but this ain’t the time nor the place for it; you’re smart, you figure it out. What I can tell you is this – after the Braveheart like charge the guards in the Gun-Towers opened up with live ammunition and tons of tear gas, as a result within a short span of time the two sides were separated one from the other and held in check by the guards poring in bullets to

maintain the void in-between. In reality, the White-Boys were so outnumbered that if staff hadn't been so well trained, every White Man on that yard would have been slaughtered ... even with that, it was terrible for both sides.

This was the type of event a man never forgets, and, I guess that's why I am the way I am about prison rules. I firmly believe in segregation, not racism, but segregation in prison, because no one knows better than I what can happen in a split second. Yeah, these youngsters here at Three Rivers look at me like I'm a Martian when I caution them about the way they act and about the company they keep. And if I say, "When things jump off, and the guy you thought was your friend tries his best to stab you because of the color of your skin, then you'll understand why I am the way I am." But, I'm a dinosaur. Guys like me no longer fit in this new prison mindset. Next time I'll personally introduce you to the, Black Hand.

Additional info:

I was on the phone with my son Chris and he tells me that he and some of his friends are following this "Shot Caller" series. He also told me that he went on-line and found the man I refer to as "Ziggy" and reminded me that his name is Gregory Storey. This is the reason I have and will endeavor to put names to events, so that these men will hopefully read my accounts and be willing to fill in some of the blanks. I will tell you however that, unfortunately, I don't remember all of the names of people involved, sometimes I remember only their nick-names, and, sometimes, because of who THEY are I can't use their names without their permission. But when I can I will try to be as forthright as possible. Also, my son chastised me for saying things like "I was a mouse in front of a lion" in my Ziggy confrontation. So, I'll act a little tougher, where I can. Love my boys! :)

Part 7

Mayor Mark Gets "Blessed"

During my time at USP Florence it was the California Mexicans who were the ultimate power on the yard ... and at the head of them were the Black Hand. My first experience with the California Mexican Mafia, known in the prison system as the "Black Hand" was from the movie "American Me"; that before I came to prison. That movie of course was the story, some truth, some Hollywood Bullshit, of their inception. Little did I know as I sat there in that movie theater with my eldest son Marco and his friend Joe Garza that I'd someday be standing shoulder to shoulder with some of those very same men. And though I don't expect you to understand it, I will tell you that I am proud to have stood beside them and to have been counted as a friend by them, it was an honor few know the way I do. Unusual times make unusual friends.

Like most things that occur on this planet the Black Hand, the EMME, was conceived out of a necessity to survive, survive the harsh conditions of prison. No! – that's a lie! You're being taught to demonize these guys when in reality they formed themselves into the EMME to protect their people, Mexicans, in prison from the Blacks who were a dominating force in the California Prison System. The Black Hand, like the California Aryan Brotherhood (formed to protect whites in prison) came about out of a need to protect themselves, and, their people. It is for this reason that the Black Hand and the Brand, first, became allies. Dope? Yeah, of course, later on some of those guys got into dope, but that's not nor was it the purpose of their creation. The harsh and dangerous conditions of the Prison System, created those organizations.

Like the Brand, the Black Hand has sub-groups that do their business, most prominent among them are the Surenos. Yeah, I've seen the stuff put out about the Surenos on TV shows like "Gangland" and I ain't gonna argue for or against 'em – but I will tell you that those types of shows are designed to scare the viewer by demonizing not only the Surenos, but all of the Families they profile; it's not "Fake" TV, but it's over exaggerated TV. Me, my experience, which is extensive, with the Surenos and the Black Hand was different than that. What I saw in them was a strict code of honor, yes, it's that bastard code we convicts use, but in here, with these pirates it's the only system that works. I've talked about it in a dozen other posts. Truth is: some of these Inmates are of such a mind that they only understand retribution in the form of harsh consequences. And when it comes to discipline and a willingness "To go hard", the Surenos/Black Hand, are at the top of the Convict list, make no mistake here they are feared and respected by all Cars in the system ... these boys ain't playin' around!

After Ziggy and Ghost were transferred out I maintained an elite status among the whites – no, I wasn't a bad-ass, its just that as the new white gang-members hit the yard they were told that I was highly respected and they simply followed suit and considered me a solid dude without even knowing how I achieved that elite status. As the folks in the know were transferred out and new guys came in stories were told – over-exaggerated actually, and as a result, I carried a level of rank I didn't actually earn.

Then in 2008 we had the infamous Race-Riot; you know as much as I'm gonna tell you about that. After the riot we were on Lock Down Status (Lock Down means we were locked in our cells for 24 hours a

day, 7 days a week) for about eight or nine months. Then when we did come out the “Independent White Boys” killed an NLR gang member and we went back on Lock Down for another three months.

During this prolonged Lock Down, Administration, transferred almost every white man on the yard; leaving only a few of the original crew, I was one of the ones they kept at USP Florence. During this time Administration was actively trying to change the culture at Florence by bringing in a different type of prisoner. Out went the Lifers and guys with bodies and in came kids with short sentences of ten years and less. Yeah, I know ten years is a long time, but not for the old crews, most of them had long sentences. My point is this: the men who transferred in to Florence in 2008 or after, of all races, were of a different breed, lots of kids – lots of “Inmates” which I clearly differentiate from a “Convict”. The yard was never the same after the riot; it was no longer a level 6 Penitentiary ... and it was no longer a yard to be feared.

After the riot, but while we were still on Lock-Down, Staff decided to try and encourage peace between the whites and the blacks by bringing them together; they wanted to open the yard back up, but they didn’t want the Blacks and Whites trying to kill each other over what had happened. So what they did was to take the top six Blacks and the top six Whites and bring them together to hopefully make peace. How they did this was to put us into cages next to each other for half a day, everyday with the hope that we’d be able to work out our differences. Cages: let me explain.

When you go to the “Hole” you are obviously locked in a cell 24 hours a day. But the Bureau of Prisons, the B.O.P., have a rule that they are required to let prisoners out of those boxes once every three days for some recreation. This out of the cell recreation does not apply to men on “Lock Down” in the cell-blocks, they are given no recreation. But in the Hole you do have this privilege. This out of the Hole cell recreation takes place in cages that are about four meters wide by four meters long. So, part of the Hole Complex is cells and a small portion is comprised of a row or two of these fenced-in cages. It was here, in the Recreation Cages for the Hole prisoners that they took us to work out the politics needed to bring peace back to the yard. In this they lined us up, one person per cage, and alternated us by race; one black, one white, then another black and so forth – 12 of us – no cops! Yeah, the Guards walked out and let us hash it out. Like I told you before, the guards at USP Florence were worried about men killing each other and were more like us, “Convict Guards”, than these FCI guards whose main worry is to catch some Mexican from Mexico stealing milk from the kitchen to trade for a Ramen Noodle! Hell – at

Florence, I’ve seen Guards call out Convicts to fight! Yeah, of course there were some little bitch guards there too, but there were also some bad-assed guards – they pretty much had to be. Over there when a couple of men got into a fight, as long as nobody had to leave the yard to go to the hospital, the guards looked the other way. Yeah, over there most of the guards wouldn’t even do an Incident Report for fights and such, here, you can get written up for having a Calendar hanging on your wall!!! – very different mindset. Please, don’t get me started on the childishness of this place or we’ll be here all day. No. I ain’t complaining, I’d rather put up with this infantile BS and be close to my family, but that doesn’t mean I like it.

By selecting me as one of the top six white-boys coupled with the fact that they came into the cell-blocks while everyone else was locked down and took the 12 of us, black and white, to these get-togethers elevated my status among the other races who simply accepted us, me included, as the Leaders of the Yard. Yes, we opened the yard back up – actually we made peace pretty quick, hell convicts understand shit like that, it ain’t personal – hell, it wasn’t long before we were out there laughing and telling stories ... “Did you see ol’ so-n-so running around trying to keep from getting hit!” laughter ... “and ol’ so-n-so was so scared he pissed his pants!” laughter, yeah it was a memorable experience. Like I said

earlier, we'd been Locked Down for so long (almost nine months at that time) that we all wanted peace, but we were also enjoying our time outside the cell-block cells – well, that and, Holy Shit! – the food. Because they were trying to butter us up so we'd make peace – they fed us like Kings! Yeah, those poor bastards back in the cell-block were eating bologna sandwiches and we were eating steaks! So we prolonged these Peace-Talks for as long as we could.

Every evening after our talks when we went back to our cells the Guards were instructed to leave us out to walk around the cell-block for an hour so we could walk around to each cell and talk to the other Cons. Being that we 12 came out of different cell-blocks, I happened to be the only one from my block. So I went from door to door, to Blacks, Whites, Hispanics – whomever and told them what was going on; “We’re working things out!” etc. To the Blacks I’d tell them that their Speakers were out there and then I’d pass whatever messages needed passing. Standard stuff; making sure that everybody had a voice, a say so in the process, but, like I told you, we’d been locked down for so long that everybody without exception implored me to pass the word that our Block wanted to open the yard back up, and to accomplish this, they were willing to make peace.

Eventually peace was made and the yard was opened back up, but it, The Yard, was different. When we came out the yard at Florence had been subdivided and fenced into individual sections – no more could we mix with other convicts from other cell-blocks – we were segregated one building from the other. Never again could there be a full-scale riot at USP Florence. What had once been an open prison yard now looked like a Concentration Camp.

During my tenure at Florence there was a consistency among the California Mexicans; at all times there was at least two or three of the Black Hand on the yard. After the yard was split up they separated the Black Hand on the yard and put some on each side of the yard. Two of them came to my cell-block. Over the next year I got to know them both very well – like me, one of them was a serious painter.

In my cell-block there were about 15 whites, 30 blacks and maybe 25 Surenos, the rest were strays from other groups like the Texas EMMÉ with whom I also have many friends ... and others. But we were the three dominant groups. I was Speaking for my cell-block, and, partly because of past events and partly because of Staff picking me as one of the 6whites I carried a lot of respect with the other cell-blocks as well.

The point here is that I got along well with the two Black Hand guys in my cell-block. I was friends with both of them, but one of them, the youngest of the two, a man I’ll call CB, took a real liking to me and we became close. We were so close in fact that he’d invite me into their TV Room to watch TV; sometimes out of respect, I’d go, but not always – I represented my people. This may not sound like much to you, but TV Rooms were sacred space – each race had one and no one violated that space, so for me to go into their TV Room and sit beside a Black Hand, was a statement to everyone ... it was a sign of respect, on both our parts. Needless to say, word spread all over the yard that I was respected by the Black Hand.

Now, the Surenos who were the muscle for the Black Hand, had a Speaker of their own, a fella we called “Chongo”. Chongo and I were also friends. He, like his Big Homies carried me different than they did other folks.

One evening Chongo comes to my cell, sits down and says, “Mark. _____ wants to see you up in his cell – he’s gonna “Bless You” “. To be honest I wasn’t exactly sure what that meant; I had never heard the term before. But when I went to his cell and sat down, the Big Homie, told me that he and his

people were gonna carry me as one of their own. I still didn't fully understand what that meant – not entirely, but I knew it was considered an honor.

As that word went out to the Yard everyone took notice, and now not only the white-boys paid respect, but the California Mexicans of all stripes, the guys who ran the yard, paid me big respect. But it wasn't until a few months later that I'd actually learn what being "Blessed" by the Black Hand meant. You ain't gonna want to miss it.

Part 8

Dirty

One of the biggest negatives about men's prison is, well, it's full of men! No women except for the female guards. Combine that with the fact that some Bible-Thumpers back in the day wrote a thing called the "Zimmerman Bill" outlawing sexually explicit materials from Federal Prison, and you have a situation that creates unnecessary sexual tension – just as women are women, so men are men.

Because of this unnecessary sexual tension men find other ways of release, homosexuals is one way; most men don't go there, but another way is through self-stimulation. We're all adults here so bear with me and you'll see soon enough how this is relevant. Anyway, we have a prison rule which states that what a man does in the privacy of his cell, is his business – but not all men follow that rule. Some men like to do their business outside their cells while staring at the female guards; we call these men, "Gunners". I won't go into all that here, but among the whites, Mexicans and MOST other Hispanics, that kind of activity isn't accepted. As a White Man, I won't accept it from one of my people! I won't tolerate one of ours disrespecting a women that way, just won't, and if we, the white boys, catch one of our own doing it, the first time, we put their hands on a bunk and we beat the hell out of them! The next time we catch 'em, they're done. Mexican of all stripes do the same.

However, among the blacks, "Gunners" are accepted, yep, they're just a lot more liberal in their thinking' than we are – again, I ain't gonna go into all I've seen over the years, nor can I illustrate to you, without sounding like a racist, all the ill-feelings this issue has caused between the races. But, because it is relevant to me and my relationship with the Black Hand, I am gonna tell you this one story.

In 2009 I, along with "Chongo," the Sureno Speaker and two Black Hand guys I have to leave unnamed, were all in cell-block, EA. Along with us were about 15 whites, 30 blacks and 25 or so Surenos, the rest of the 120 men were made up of a variety of others, we however, were the three main groups.

Among the Blacks at that time was a piece of human garbage appropriately named "Dirty". When he first arrived we talked and I found out that he was from Jacksonville, Florida and that he had grown up in the same neighborhood I'd lived in as kid. I remember how astonished he was when I told him the address of the house I'd lived in (319 w. 24th st) and remarked, "Damn, you grew up in the Hood!" I speak about this conversation in detail in my book "Where No One Hears Me". Well, suffice to say, it didn't take long to figure out that Dirty was a serial Gunner. Many were the day when I had to look the other way, when in my heart, I wanted to stomp his guts out; prison rules however, forbid it. And, according to his people, he wasn't doing anything wrong.

Among the whites there was an older man named Frank Alexander. Frank had done a shit-load of time and was generally considered, "Not all there." But that wasn't true. Frank's problem was, he was just way smarter than the rest of us; needless to say, I spent a lot of time listening to him.

In our conversations I learned that Frank had actually been in the French Foreign Legion! Yeah! How cool is that! Anyway, one afternoon Frank inadvertently moved the Unit Laundry Cart, and low and

behold, hiding behind it with his pants down around his knees was Dirty with his eyes locked on a female guard ... you get the message. All this info came to me later.

I was sitting in my cell painting when I heard an abrupt knock on my cell door. I look up and see Dirty. I turn in my chair to face the door and wave him in. Instantly I noticed that he has his hand in his pocket – I'm thinking, knife. I stand up. He's livid and begins to tell me that Frank almost "Blew him up with the cop!" and that "If we didn't run Frank up top (Protective Custody) he'd go to his people!" But all I saw was his hand in his pocket. "You got a knife?" Silence. "Do. You. Have. A knife?" I ask with steel in my voice. He went deathly silent and I saw fear in his eyes. I moved towards him as I spoke, "Did you bring a knife into my house?" I saw that he was frozen, unsure of what he should do; pull it, or deny it. In that moment of hesitation I was on top of him, looking him right in the eyes. On my children's life, I told him, "If you pull that knife. I'll take it away from you and shove it up you ass!" He was scared, real scared, so I open-hand slapped him. I didn't realize how hard I slapped him, but it sounded like a gunshot and my hand hurt for two weeks afterwards.

The second I slapped him his knees buckled and his eyes went wide like someone caught stealing chickens, (don't ask me how I know this) but he never pulled his hand out of his pocket, with, or without a knife. Just then Tom Platte, opened my door and asked, "You want me to handle this?" I shook my head "No", then added, "I can whip this punk with one hand." At that Dirty shot out the door.

The interesting thing to note is, Dirty, had never even contemplated that he was in the wrong. Never even considered it; he was a man without honor. That was his fault. My fault was assuming that he'd be too embarrassed to go to the Black Car and admit that I slapped him, and that he'd not fought. I should have realized, a man with no Honor, has no Pride either.

The Black Speaker in Ea cell-block was a big man from Kansas City everyone called, "Preacher." When I say big, I mean like 6' 2" 285 pounds big. But, in spite of his intimidating size, he was very polite and well spoken. Preacher and I were not friends, but we were acquaintances – we knew each other. Problem was, in my absolute dislike of Dirty I had violated the "Hands Off" rule. The only leg I had to stand on was that he'd had a knife – well, I think he had a knife, knowing Dirty he was probably holding his dick. Anyway, after Dirty took off I didn't think much of it and sat back down to paint.

Among the White-Boys we had an Irishman from Boston in the cell-block – a real paranoid character. Over the prior six months he'd been cutting steel shanks out of the beds and shelving – he had a virtual armory stashed ... did I mention he was paranoid? Yeah, well, he was every Speakers nightmare, an F-ing nut job who lived for the chance to go to war. Sorry but I can't remember his name. Anyway, while I was trying hard to forget Dirty and all that had happened with the end of a paint brush, he'd heard about what had happened and gathered up all the white boys, armed them, then came to my cell and said, "Mayor Mark. I've got the fellas posted up on the Blacks." I just shook my head and thought to myself, "Of course you do." Then I said the F-word out loud and rushed out of my cell, and sure enough the whites and the blacks were all grouped up and facing each other. As the Irish guy and I walked out I looked over my shoulder and saw that he had a look of sheer delight, the look a teenage boy gets when he sees his first set of titties. About the time I reached the front of the whites I hear Dirty holler something at me from BEHIND Preacher and the other blacks. I didn't catch what he said.

We were standing in two groups about five meters apart. Just like in the movies Preacher walks towards me and I walk towards him, the fellas on both sides stay put. When we get face to face we stop. I

begin by explaining what had happened with Dirty. I added that we didn't need to wreck these two cars over an idiot like him.

Preacher listened and when I'd finished he said, "Your man (Irish dude) has been sayin' he's gonna kill a nigga today." I don't know the exact face I made, but it was one that said, "Of course he did, he's a complete idiot." I knew then this wasn't ALL about me and Dirty, I also knew there would be no peaceful solution. Best I could hope for was a one-on-one between my big Irishman and one of them; which would be better than the alternative; of my 15, only 6 would go hard, the others were shitting their pants.

As Preacher and I began to argue about who started what, things were quickly getting out of hand to the point that I felt like he might be getting ready to take a swing on me – then I saw him hesitate. Yes, my eyes never broke contact with his, but I still held a fools hope that we could work things out peacefully.

As soon as Preacher hesitated I saw him look over my shoulder at something behind me. I saw his eyes open up the way a man's eyes would if he saw his wife walk into a restaurant with another man; unsure as to what he was seeing. I could tell that something was going on, I could see it in his eyes, then his face, and then he took a step backwards and stopped. Then Chongo was standing beside me.

I never broke eye contact; that's a sucker punch-move; being tricked into looking the other way. Then Preacher broke the brief silence and said to Chongo, "You backin' the White-Boys?" Chongo answered "Nope. Just Mayor Mark. His business is our business." At that exact moment the cell block was flooded with guards rushing in and frantically hollering "Lock Down!" We all broke up, but not before I turned around and saw EVERY Sureno in the cell-block standing behind me, and when I looked up I saw the Black Hand guy who'd "Blessed Me" leaning over the rail like a general ready to give the attack signal. As our eyes met, he nodded and I finally understood what being blessed by the Black Hand meant ... my business was their business.

Interesting side notes:

In my last posting entitled "Texas Massacre" I spoke about John Bent (JD) the man who held my door closed during that violent attack. Interestingly enough, JD was one of the guys I spoke of in the Charlie Brown incident, he was one of the guys who went after Charlie Brown after he'd stabbed the SAC member. However, as I mentioned earlier things smoothed out for me and JD and during this time of peace we spent many a day talking about spiritual perspectives (JD is a Buddhist) and as such became close. In 2009 JD went home and sent me a letter, I am going to include it here for you to read.

Mark. Greetings and salutations from the "Free World"; old friend. Sorry you haven't heard from me sooner. I actually wrote you after leaving Florence, the letter was sent to my father along with a request to forward it to you, but he refused out of some uptight principle of his.

In that letter I merely expressed that I consider you one of the precious few Lights met along my perilous pathway through the Federal Prison System that I admire the strength and character with which you conduct yourself in that jungle; that I Thoroughly enjoyed our conversations and remain inspired by your work ethic.

Mark, it has been a true honor to know you and I hope our friendship may carry on. Namaste, JD.

Something else I just remembered concerning the Charlie Brown incident. At the time of that stabbing we had some D.C. Blacks in our Block, and I was close to them. When CB stabbed that SAC

member the other gang-members went after him, this to include JD. CB backed up into a shower stall and used his shank to keep his attackers at bay until the guards arrived to rescue him. During this time I stood by and watched. Later one of the D.C. dudes named Keith Kirkland came up to me and said this, "If the right man had gotten involved, we' have jumped in to help him!" He of course was talking about me! Like I said, I was close to him and his cellie "Fats". Unfortunately, these guys were all gone by the time that Midwest crew showed up. I will add that there was another D.C. dude there at that time called "BB" and BB got crosswise with the Mid-West car and I rounded up the whites to back him. SO even though I speak about the segregation in prison, there are some folks who walk around that. I am one of them.

Part 9

My time at USP Florence comes to an end

Yeah, that's what it means to be "Blessed" by one of those guys. Again, I can't stress to you how much of an honor this is in the System, especially for a white-boy.

Because of the way things looked in the surveillance cameras (like something racial was fixing to jump off) they locked us down for a bit while things cooled off. When they let us out I went immediately to the cell of the Big Homie who had befriended me and apologized to him for putting both our cars at risk – truth was, I didn't know that he and his people would intercede in my behalf. But much to my surprise he stopped me in the middle of my apology and said that I didn't need to apologize, that I wasn't wrong. In fact he told me that he owed me an apology for not doing something about Dirty. Then he assured me that Chongo was on his way to Preachers cell to lay down the law. Finally, he looked me in the eye and said, "Remember, no matter what, right or wrong, I have your back". It was a profound statement, one that has always remained with me, and whenever I think about my friend, I remember his words, and they bring a smile to my face. Yeah, that's what it means to be "Blessed" by one of those guys. Again I can't stress to you how important that is in a place like USP Florence ... it can mean the difference between life, or death.

What happened after that was this – true to his words, while I was with his Big Homie, Chongo was confronting Preacher. Chongo made it clear that I was hands off and that if the Blacks didn't deal with Dirty, that they, the Surenos, would. A few days later the Blacks caught Dirty in the Gymnasium and tried to put the boots to him – I was there; he broke and ran to the guards office like a bitch! then snitched on his homeboys. Human garbage. An oxygen thief.

Later Chongo and I sat down and he explained to me a few things about being "Blessed", it means, well, it means forever.

Not long after that my friend was transferred out of Florence, before he left he gave me a hug, then slid a piece of paper in my hand and said that if I ever needed anything to write him. When I went back to my cell, I opened up the paper he'd given me, it was his daughters name and address in Whittier, California. Again, let me say it here, we don't just give out the addresses of our daughters, that alone was the greatest example of trust one convict can give another ... for the record, I have never given anyone my daughters info, it just ain't done. He left that night. Just like that, he was gone ... little did I know, I'd never see him again.

Chongo went home shortly after that leaving me and the other Big Homie (man I wish I could tell you his name, he's an F-ing legend!) to hold down the fort. I will add here that I have given my son Chris his name, and he, my son, told me last night, that he'd found his address; I ask my son to send him this Shot Caller Series, well, the part where I talk about him anyway, to ask permission to tell you who he is.

After that deal with Preacher and the Blacks, I took on a elite convict reputation – all the fellas on both sides of the yard now knew of my unusual status with the Black Hand. Hell, rumors were crazy according to who was telling the story. Some said I'd faced off with Preacher, true. Others said I'd

whipped him in a cell fight – not true; truth is Preacher was a big man, like 6 1 285 big, a tank of a man who could probably rip me in half. Now 'my big Irishman, he would have been a match for him, ,but not me; yeah those Southie Boys are some tough men; for the record, I've never met a Southie that couldn't fight. No, I don't know about Ben Affleck and Mark Wahlberg, but IF they are actually Southies, I'd have to say they're probably tough too, not your normal Hollywood type, anyway. As for the rumors, hell, a couple years after this event, at FCI Pollock for Christ sake, I heard one story claiming that I'd put the steel to Preacher and that the Surenos had butchered a dozen of his crew – that isn't true either. In fact, I've never even owned a knife in prison ... yeah, that day with Ziggy, I was bluffing! 😊 But what is true is that my Big Homie friend made it clear to everyone that he was with me, hell, he made a point of walking the yard with me at his side and twenty or so Surenos walking closely behind. Like I said, it was crazy; everybody knew that I was close to men they could only know from a distance.

These men I'm telling you about are legends in the System and I still to this day hear stories from people who run across 'em. In fact just awhile back I heard from one of the Surenos who recently went home from here at Three Rivers, that one of the two Black Hand men I was acquainted with at USP Florence, the Painter, is fixing to go home. My son recently confirmed this to be true, then added that this man had been in prison since 1984!!!! How in the hell do you justify locking a man up for that long!! I know this man ... he ain't an animal. In fact he's very quite and respectful. It appalls me that GOD believes in second chances, but his people don't! Oh how far we have fallen from the Goodness of our Creator. Shame.

In 2010, after 10 plus years I left Florence and the Penitentiary behind; I had survived. No, I never told another soul, not even my children about the things I've just told you. I didn't go to FCI Pollock or FCI Three Rivers for that matter and tell everyone that I was a badass and had been "Blessed" by the Black Hand, you heard it first in this Shot Caller Series. No, not even the Surenos on this yard, I have never spoken of it before, but as God is good, it is the truth.

Yeah, over 10 years at USP Florence, few men stay there that long, in fact, it might be a record. The thing to remember is this: When I arrived there, Staff didn't think I could make it, I chose not to Snitch, I never ran in the face of uncertainty and I never shamed my children or the people who put their trust in me, and ten years later ... well, I can't say it, but you can figure it out. Suffice to say, the name Mayor Mark carries a respectable reputation, albeit, one I didn't entirely earn.

As for my friend, the Big Homie who blessed me ... well, he was transferred from USP Florence to one of the Penitentiaries up north, where he was killed in battle. Rest in Peace old friend.

Part 10

FCI Pollock

When I arrived at the prison in Pollock Louisiana, it was for all intents and purposes, a new joint. It had been built some years back, but due to Federal Budget Restraints, hadn't been opened until 2010. Pollock was a big yard with 12 cell blocks meant to house 120 men each. When I arrived they had filled 11 of the 12, so when I walked in to my cellblock, F-4, there were only about 40 men in it. Hell, when they opened my cell door the mattresses were still covered in plastic – no one had ever slept in that cell prior to me. It took another two months before F-4 was filled to capacity.

The problem with a new joint is that the prison rules I've been harping on aren't established. For instance, at the time of my arrival there were six TVs in the entire cell block ... six TVs for 120 men! What is supposed to happen is that the TVs are divided up per race, i.e.; the whites have one, the Spanish Language folks have one or two depending on their numbers, the blacks have one or two and so forth ... whites are ALWAYS the minority. But, because those rules hadn't been established, the bullies, were controlling them. I tell a story in my book "Where No One Hears Me" about how a group of young blacks tried to take the White TV – you can read that story there. Point is: by being transferred to a new joint, I encountered a whole new set of unfamiliar racial and political problems.

At my arrival the white boys at FCI Pollock were divided into state cars ... the Texas guys formed the Texas Car, the Oklahoma guys had an Oklahoma Car and so forth; the three major groups were Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana. These groups did not respect each other and there was a constant power struggle going on between them ... the Texas Car had the biggest numbers and were in effect, running the Wood Pile; White Men are called "Woods" in the system ... I have no idea why.

The biggest problem facing the white community was that the Louisiana guys were split into two separate groups that were at constant odds with each other. But it went much deeper than that. Of these two groups one was made up of a lot of white boys from New Orleans, men who grew up with blacks. These men wore their hair in corn-rows, sagged their pants and talked like Hood-Rat blacks. The other group were country and Cajun whites who looked and acted like Trailer Park whites, constant drama.

As a result of prison politics the other white boys on the yard didn't trust these New Orleans whites and didn't want to associate with them and damn sure didn't want to live with 'em. The tension this caused was enormous; they, the New Orleans guys felt threatened by their own kind ... truth is, they were more comfortable around the blacks they knew, than the whites they didn't. There were ill-feelings on both sides and a lot of the Whites drew the conclusion that "When" not "If", but when something racial did jump off, that these South Louisiana Boys would turn on their own people and fight against them. Remember, everything in prison is racial. For instance: if I'm living with a guy, my own race, I have to be able to trust him. I can't live with a man who will set me up and even attack me because some other white dude I don't even know has unknowingly gotten the whole White Car in a wreck. That is why we don't want to cell with other Cars; this ain't just Whites, this applies to ALL of the races, we prefer to live with our own kind. You can't have everything you do and say in the privacy of your own cell put out on the yard,

trust is a must. So the whites who were in the cells with these South Louisiana guys, didn't feel comfortable, and, vice-versa. Lots of tension.

As a result of these different cars and the tension between the North and South Louisiana cars, the white community was a constant problem. It was a bad spot for whites ... no rules, no consequences and no loyalty ... I'm old school, I came up under the rules of the Penitentiary System; I know what can happen when those rules aren't observed.

The biggest problem by far however, was that the White Community as a whole, led by the Texas Car, had decided they wouldn't allow any white gang members on the yard. On the surface of things this might sound like a good thing, but in my opinion, it wasn't – my reasons? Well, first, the white boy gang members are all about white business, just as the Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Indians are about the business of their people. It ain't personal, it's prison business. And in the event that something racial does jump off, The Family Members won't run; I can't say that for all "Independents". So, without going into details here, I'll say that me, the Oklahoma Car and a guy from Arkansas named Marshal Duncan were instrumental in removing from the yard, the man who spoke for the Texas Car, the man who had convinced the yard to adopt this policy.

To get to the point here, the majority of the white-boys on the yard could see how dysfunctional, and therefore unstable the yard was; that it was quickly headed towards a head-on collision with one of the other races. They wanted me to fix it – I was offered the yard for the second time; the first time was when I got off the bus ... people who knew me from Florence had heard I was on my way and wanted us to take over the yard. I refused both times. Why? well, I ain't comfortable in that position. You have to be a complete idiot to WANT that position.

Todd Massey, me and SIS

One sunny afternoon a friend of mine from Houston named Todd Massey and I were walking down the sidewalk headed to the Recreation Yard when we were pulled over by S.I.S. Officer Voorhies. SIS, stands for Special Investigating Services, they are the F.B.I. in Federal Prisons. Any criminal activity that goes down in prison, to include any criminal activity on the part of the guards, SIS handles it. They know the history of every man on the compound, they know every gang affiliation and they deal with the "Rats", they are the top of the heap as far as Prison Officials go. While the upper brass are in their offices watching animal porn on the Internet, SIS is working the yard. You don't become SIS because of some college degree – these men and women come up through the ranks, they're like beat cops, and like beat cops they know their neighborhood and the folks in it.

This man SIS Voorhies is a big bastard, like 6' 5" tall and carried himself like a man who can handle himself in a bar fight, more like a convict than a guard. Up until that moment, I had never spoken to him ... but word on the yard was, he was hard, but fair. So when he stopped us it was a little bit of a surprise, but not totally unexpected.

The gist of the Voorhies conversation was that the new Captain of the Prison Complex wanted someone to step up and take control of the splintered and dysfunctional White Car. He was asking Todd and I to pass the word along ... staff brass wanted a White Speaker. We told him we'd spread the word; we

did, again it came back to me, again I refused the keys to the yard. But, I did ask for volunteers to Speak for each individual Cell Block, as opposed to the individual state-by-state clicks we had at the time. This would not endear me to the individual state Speakers who suddenly had their control reduced. In fact, odd as it sounds, the Texas Car actually tried to move on me over it, but its very hard to move on a man like me – they'd try again later on when a big-time Texas Shot Caller was transferred in from the yard in Beaumont – another story for another day. Time passed and lots of things happened, things I don't have space for here – but at this time, no one was at the head of the white community, but I was the guy the cellblock Speakers consulted when needing advice.

At FCI Pollock the biggest group on the yard were the Paisa's, the Mexicans from Mexico, they comprised about 400 of the 1400 men on the yard. In addition to them were the Surenos, who themselves numbered about 40 or 50, and, who backed them up. So, to take on the Paisa's meant you also took on the Surenos, and vice-versa. Yes, the same Sureno Car as Chongo and the guys at Florence ... only problem was, I never told them about my relationship with their people at Florence – No, it wasn't a secret, in fact a couple of Surenos had been transferred from Florence to Pollock like I had been, and so the Surenos knew my story, but, again, I never spoke of it nor my being "Blessed" by their Big Homies. To this day I'm still not sure how that would have been received ... one thing is for sure, the guy Speaking for the Surenos at Pollock, at that time, Big Homies or not didn't like me, though most of his crew did.

One afternoon one of the fellas came into my cell block in a panic and said, "They need you on the yard! The Whites and the Paisa's are fixing to go at it!"

I dropped what I was doing and rushed out to the Recreation Yard where I saw the Whites and the Paisa's in a stand off. I also saw that men on both sides appeared to be armed – there are weapons hidden on every prison yard. I looked around and saw several of the Recreation Guards watching from a safe distance trying to figure out if they needed to sound the alarm.

I walked up to the front of my people and listened as they explained the issue, from their side. The Paisa's were calling one of our guys, a Rat. They were angry and so were the white boys. When I had all the information available I turned and saw the Paisa and Sureno Shot Callers in front of their men. As if on cue, the three of us started that long short walk to the neutral ground in-between the two cars where I met Gordo, the Paisa Shot caller and the man who spoke for the Surenos, again, I repeat, he did not like me, nor I him.

To make a long story short, the Paisa's believed one of the white boys was a snitch for the kitchen guards and had gotten two of them fired ... no proof, but the two guys Gordo called over to tell me their story, seemed credible. I stood my ground about there being no proof, but told them I'd look into it, then turned around and walked away. When I got to my guys I told them to break up, that there wouldn't be anything happening today, that it was over, and pretty soon everybody broke up wondering what the hell I'd done to resolve the issue. Really, I hadn't done anything except to listen and then dismissed the issue, and subsequently the tension, by saying I'd deal with it. I mean, what were they gonna do? The way I saw it, the Paisa's had two choices when I turned to walk away, they could holler at me to stop, or they could let me handle my business. They decided to trust me.

Later that day I pulled up the cellblock Speakers and told them that I had a funny feeling the Paisa's were telling the truth. I explained to them that we don't automatically assume someone is telling the truth just because they're white and that I wanted them to talk to every white boy who worked in the Chow Hall, to see if any of them knew what had really happened. After a couple of days of investigation,

one of the white boys who worked in the kitchen told us the truth – he'd seen dude finger the two Paisa's ... he was a snitch.

With this info I pulled up Gordo and told him what I'd found, then told him that we'd deal with it. I suggested that he and the two Paisa's who'd been wronged be at the Handball Court after the 6pm move. I had also sent word to the snitch to likewise be at the Handball Courts after the move. As soon as everybody was in place two men put the boots to him as the Paisa's and Surenos watched from afar. Why, you ask? Well, this is precisely the kind of spark that falls into the weeds and becomes a raging fire. Cruel, yes. I called it? Yes. But what else do you expect me to do, let three hundred men try to kill each other?

After that event I, even though I vehemently denied it, was the undisputed Speaker for the Yard. So, in these stories I have now shown you several ways in which men become Shot Callers. One: They are given that respect as soon as they hit the yard because of who they are or what they've accomplished on other yards, like Ziggy. Two: They accidentally fall into it, like I did at USP Florence. Three: They are chosen by the other Cons who willingly follow them. The fourth way is: Sometimes a Bullie will gather a group of his friends and take a yard by force. I have a saying that goes like this, "Any man who WANTS to be a Shot Caller, is the wrong man for the job". For this reason it's important for good men to stand up and take control, if they don't, one of the idiots will, and chaos will ensue.

Part 11

Trouble for Mayor Mark

After that last incident where I'd honored my word to Gordo and the Mexicans, and actually punished the man who was in the wrong, I was seen by the other races as a guy who was fair, and who could be trusted. I was also starting to get a handle on my position; I was making mistakes but I was learning; I wanted the men I represented to feel comfortable bringing a complaint about the way I was doing things, directly to me, rather than run around behind my back and griping. I wanted them to feel comfortable about complaining without fear of ill-feelings developing between us. Like I did when I was a Mayor on the outside, I made myself accessible and always listened, and if I was wrong, I'd admit it. Another thing I did was to accept and even go out of my way to speak to the guys on the yard most others considered unimportant, guys who weren't considered warriors, I always spoke to them and always asked their opinions on issues.

However, I learned early on that a Speaker is always on the "Hit" list, not only in the event of a racial war where the first strike by the opposing side is always on the opposing Speaker, but also that every Speaker has men in his own car that are plotting against him.

Therefore, a Speaker is only as safe as the men around him are, solid. With that, I'm going to tell you about two men who fit into that scenario, one on each side of it; one a problem, and one an ally. I will tell you here that the story I'm about to tell concerning one of these two men is going to ruffle some feathers in Europe, where he has a HUGE following, and maybe even in prison ... but I give you my word as a man, what I'm about to tell you concerning him and I, is the truth. But first, the other man.

We had a man from Utah hit the Yard at FCI Pollock. I will add that this man had been a Speaker at the yard he'd just left, I'll leave him nameless because I know he'd want it that way. Upon his arrival he came to the Art Room where I spent my days painting and introduced himself; it is a form of respect for someone whose had that rank to show respect to others who likewise have or have had it.

He was a real respectful man and I immediately liked him. I told him that I wasn't comfortable being the Speaker at Pollock, and, I actually suggested that he might consider taking the "Keys" from me. He refused. Remember my philosophy, any man who actually WANTS that spot, is the wrong man for it. He, the guy from Utah would have been a great replacement, but alas, it was not meant to be.

I wrote a story about this man seven or eight years ago. In this story I told about how good of a fighter he was, about how he went into the bathroom with a "Hitter" from the Black Car and beat him to a pulp; he asked me to pull that story down and I did. I will add that he has since been released and went home. I wish him the best.

During this time we had a couple of youngsters and an older dude (I'll add it here, he was 10 years younger than me!) from East Texas hit the yard. The two youngsters were members of a gang family called "White Knights" – the old guy was part of a gang called "Idiots"! No, that's not an actual gang, that's just what he was, an idiot whose mouth would get him slapped by more than one person ... did I mention that he was an idiot? Anyway, the yard had a little racial ruckus and went on Lock-Down Status for a week or

so. After a few days of this, the Administration implemented what is called a Modified Lock-Down – meaning, we were let out of the cells, but restrained to the cell block; no interaction between buildings and no one allowed on the yard. During this modified Lock-Down we were walked one building at a time to the Chow Hall to eat a hot meal as opposed to the bag-lunch bologna sandwiches of a full Lock Down.

Everything in prison is racial, segregated. In the Chow Hall for instance there are Black Sections, White Sections, Paisa Sections, Texas Mexican Sections, Asian tables and so forth – everyone had their own tables and we all honor that space. However, being that there were only 120 or so men going to the Chow Hall at the same time, MOST, of the tables in the Chow Hall were turned up on their sides, and as things played out, the Guards righted the tables nearest the serving line for usage ... this was the white section, the white tables. I will add that the Chow Hall was full of Guards directing people to their seats. When we were led into the Chow Hall the other races began to set at the tables that had been set up for usage; the white tables. With that, the old guy began to fan the flames of this potential fire by stirring up the two youngsters who then began telling the Mexicans to get up and move. When I realized what was happening I stepped in and angrily told them to sit down, but the damage had been done.

As soon as we walked back into our cell-block the Paisa's surrounded the two youngsters and were fixing to jump on 'em. I got in between them and put my hand on the chest of the F-4 Paisa Speaker a guy called Kalaca, and told him I'd take care of it. If you remember, I had a good reputation as being fair, and he reluctantly backed off. Tensions were high and the Paisa's wanted to smash the youngsters, but I couldn't allow that, the old guy was trying his best to be invisible.

After everything calmed down I explained to the two youngsters why I thought they were wrong; they explained why they thought they were right. After all that was said, I asked them to go and apologize to the Paisa's we had in our cell block – guys they played cards with and even cooked and ate with in the block! The irony of this was completely lost on them. Anyway, not out of fear, but out of respect, they went and apologized. But, that wasn't the end of it. As soon as the yard opened up, the Paisa's who'd been working in the Chow hall, and had seen what had happened, went to the yard and told the other Paisa's how the whites had acted, which created a strain on the very new Treaty I had made with their Shot Caller, Gordo. In addition to this, I had told the two youngsters that I was unhappy with the way they'd carried themselves, and was considering "Disciplining" them; hands on the bunk. They were not happy about this and went to the Texas white-boys and told them that I was siding with the Mexicans over the whites. I tell you this so you can see how petty and precarious the politics of prison really are.

Before this event, a man named Richard Scutari had hit the yard. Richard is a larger than life convict, a legend in his own right. Richard had been part of the a White Supremist group who'd fought against the American Government, a war in which most of their crew fought to the death, the most famous living member of this Robert Matthews crew was a man I'd know at USP Florence named, David Lane.

Richard will deny what I'm about to tell you, but it's the truth. Richard wanted the Keys to the Yard and resented the fact that they weren't taken away from me and given to him the day he hit the yard. Richard is a legend, he's Richard F-ing Scutari, but he didn't carry more respect, hence rank, than me. Not at FCI Pollock, anyway. The cons at Pollock trusted me to keep the peace, they didn't trust Richard to do the same.

I will add here that Richard is five years older than me and has done, at least, ten years more time than me. I also think that Richard is probably been set free by now, if not, he's close to going home. Last I remember he'd married some babe out of Europe and she and others were writing books about him.

During his many years of incarceration Richard had honed his body into a weapon and even for as old as he was at the time, he was in great shape ... better than me, actually.

He taught Yoga Classes and was the leader of the Odinist Religious Group at Pollock. He was a man of accomplishment and had spent his thirty or so years behind bars carrying himself as a convict should ... but, he was resentful of me. I say this for several reasons, first, when he first arrived he came out to the Art Room and it didn't take long for us to have harsh words, he even remarked, "If you're such a bad-ass why aren't you in the USP!" I'll let you imagine what had been said before and after that, but let it be said here, that he ain't afraid of me, and I damned sure ain't afraid of him. Back to our story.

Like I said, when the yard opened up the two youngsters and the old guy went to the Texas Boys and stirred up a bunch of shit. It was all over the yard and the yard was split on the issue, of course they were only hearing one side of the story, that the Mexicans were sitting at our tables, and tables, like TVs, are sacred space. My position was that those were tables the Mexicans were TOLD to sit at, by the Guards. Suffice to say a big meeting took place on the yard, I was there, the two youngsters were there, the recently disbanded Texas Car was there, Richard was there and the man from Utah was there along with other white boys from the yard like Craig Orler; it was a big crowd.

To make a long story short, the youngsters were trying to avoid being disciplined, the Texas Car was trying to use this issue to discredit me as a way to get back on top, and Richard was taking his best shot.

We were in a large circle with me on one side, my opponents to include Richard on the other, with everybody else filling in the circle. The youngsters had their say, then Richard stepped into the middle of the circle and in the style of a circus Ringmaster, declared himself with the youngsters; "They did what was right. Mexicans were sitting at our tables!" he preached. And, in the crazy world that is prison, they were right, and I was wrong ... and I knew it. The fact that the Guards had made it so those were the only tables open for use; the fact that every other cellblock had also been seated exactly the same way as we had been - with blacks and Mexicans; the fact that I'd been a champion of my people with an impeccable reputation, meant nothing to those my detractors, and ultimately Richard Scutari who was using these two youngsters and this incident to try and take me down. No, they couldn't attack me, that was forbidden, I carried too much respect for that, but what they could do was to use the issue to turn the yard against me and ask for a vote on a new Speaker. Like I said, I was in the wrong. I had committed the unforgivable sin of appearing to side with the Mexicans against my own people, it was an indefensible argument, and Richard knew it.

Just as things were at their worst and the consensus was being reached that I would "not" be allowed to discipline the two youngsters without a struggle ensuing, the guy from Utah took center stage, looked at me and said, "This is your yard! If you say they get disciplined. They'll get disciplined!" and everything stopped! This man was respected and I had his unconditional support. Truth is, out of the 150 or so whites on the yard, only about ten of 'em matter, everyone else will fall in line behind them, and the guy from Utah was one of those, most respected guys.

In order to keep the peace, I simply told the crowd that I stood by my convictions that the youngsters were wrong, but being they'd apologized for their actions, I no longer felt they warranted a discipline. Yeah, I backed off what I thought was right, and I never really got over the deceit I experienced that day. I learned a real valuable lesson; as a Speaker you have to always watch your back, even among your own people.

As time passed I became friends with the two youngsters from East Texas. The old guy and I ended up cellies – I never did learn to like him, still don't. The guy from Utah would remain a close ally and be instrumental in helping me hold the yard a year or so later when a few of the Texas Boys would get behind a big-time Texas Shot Caller who'd hit the yard and thought that he should run it. Richard Scutari and I became, marginal, friends, you can see photos of us together on my FB page, I think! So everything worked its way out, but not completely, because I knew from then on, to watch my back.

Forgive me for not following up on the issue of the South Louisiana boys, I try to get to it next time.

Side Note: In my experience with both men, David Lane and Richard, I can tell you that they really didn't care for each other. Like I said, both men are legends, and, well, it really ain't my business, I don't care. I will add that in the prison system almost all white gang members have an identical tattoo that reads 14/88. If you are curious about the meaning, I'll tell you that it's something that David Lane wrote and published years back and represented his beliefs, beliefs I can testify that he lived by in prison. David died of natural causes in prison a few years back. Rest in peace.

Part 12

Tommy Fiore and Why We Fight Over Dumb Shit

A little additional info on that last incident with the Paisa's: I had completely forgotten about that day, so much of what has happened these past 22 years of prison has faded away into the insanity of this daily struggle to maintain some form of decency. Sometimes my memory concerning things like that will get jogged by something I see, and other times a memory will resurface when someone else tells the story – the one I just wrote about concerning the Paisa's and the white snitch was one of those, that story came back to me when I heard it told by someone else. Let me fill in the blanks.

There's a guy here named Chris DeraLeau who went home and then came back for violating the conditions of his probation. When he returned to Three Rivers he sought me out and told me this story.

I was on the bus from the Oklahoma Transfer Center to FCI Three Rivers along with a group of other prisoners. Sitting in front of me was another white guy – we sat in silence as most do on those miserable bus rides.

“About halfway to Three Rivers the white guy in front of me turned around and asked me if I was going to the Camp at Three Rivers, or, the FCI at Three Rivers. I answered that I was going to the FCI. He then introduced himself as ‘Goldberg, a white, Mexican Jew.’ Then he told me that there was a man at the FCI that he wanted to send a message of “Respect” to. He told me that this man had been the Shot Caller for the yard at Pollock, then he began to tell me stories about this man and some of the things this man, Mayor Mark, did while at FCI Pollock. I then told Goldberg that I too knew Mayor Mark, we spent the remainder of the ride telling stories about him – one in particular that Goldberg told me was how Mayor Mark walked in-between an angry crowd of men and prevented a race-riot.”

From the things Chris told about the story Goldberg had passed on to him, I suddenly remembered which incident he was talking about; hence the story in my last entry. As I told you earlier there are a great many stories I will never tell, because the men involved in those events need to remain anonymous, sometimes I don't tell a story because that story might be construed to have some sort of legal liability, and sometimes I don't tell 'em because if I did I'd sound self-engratiating (for you Hillbillies, that means a braggart: OK. I might have made that word up, but I like it, so I ain't gonna remove it!), which I have tried not to do. But, rest assured that the stories I do tell are ones where there are witness, names of men who stood beside me, and even some times, in front of me. This next story is about one of those men, a man I've spoken of before, in fact, he's the man whose face I used for one of my paintings of Jesus (see blog entry 11-7-17).

Soon after the event I spoke of in the last entry we had several problems between the blacks and the whites. First, there was a black guy in the cell-block adjacent to mine who would change the White TV at Rack-up (Rack-up is at 9:30pm; we are locked in our cells until the following morning at 6am) so he could watch Black Entertainment Television (BET) through his cell door window. The men in that cell-block, F-3, had asked him not to do it; to change the TV of another car is a serious form of in-your-face, disrespect. Why, you ask? Because that is the first step in someone making a move to TAKE your TV from you.

The white Speaker for that block was an ex-military guy we called, "Sarge". Sarge had personally went to him and asked him not to change the TV, but this youngster had a crew he hung around with and he felt safe in their numbers, so he decided to ignore anything the minority said. So Sarge came to me with the problem. I am a reasonable man, cunning even. It is for this reason that the men trusted me over men like Richard Scutari who would more likely than not, have wrecked the whole white car over this incident. And, he would have been correct in doing so; my gift is not to lead men into battle, but in finding ways to avoid that battle, if possible.

In a situation like this there are several possible option – but only one acceptable outcome – he could not be allowed to change our TV. Option one was to tell Sarge to take a couple of the white guys in that cell-block and put the boots to this guy; like I said, we would have been justified in doing it. But had we done it that way, we would have lost, not only the men in that cell-block in the insuring brawl, but, more likely than not, this would have rolled over into other cell-blocks when the blacks could have used this as an excuse to attack whites, and lots of folks would have went to the Hole. Not my first choice.

You on the outside might think that something as trivial as a TV is not worth fighting for, and, maybe in your world you are right. But the problem with passivity in prison is that we prisoners ain't dealing with reasonable people, in fact we are dealing with, for the most part, unreasonable people. Bullies is the proper word for a school yard, not the proper word here. The proper word here is "Predators". These predators start by testing you on something like a TV, then they come to your cell and take your property, then they extort you for your money, and if they get away with all of that, they rape you! It ain't the fact that he was changing the TV, it was what was down the road that I was trying to prevent. Understand this, white-men in prison are preyed upon, oftentimes by their own people; we are the minority in here and if you ain't willing to stand up, you'll be trampled into the dirt. I wish I didn't have to tell you all these things, but, in truth, without men like Richard Scutari who believe in absolute war, none of the rest of us could even walk a yard in Federal Prison. So, let me say it here, that ain't necessarily MY way, but the ONLY reason the rest of us even have a TV to watch, is because of men like Richard. So hate him and his politics if you must, but I tell you that there are things happening in here, that you're blind too. You're right, a TV ain't worth fighting over, but DIGNITY is. The point here is: this dude was aselfish, disrespectful, racist asshole who was daring us to do something, and his Speaker, by extension was aiding him.

A point you need to understand here is this: the TVs in our cell-blocks do not have operational speakers, if you want to listen to one of them you are required to have an FM radio to do so. I had been told that his justification for changing the TV was that he had a cell in front of the TV and none of the white boys did, therefore it didn't matter what was on the TV. I understand his bullshit logic, but some of the white boys liked to put the News on the TV and then listen to it from their cells. No, they couldn't actually SEE the TV, but they could listen to it. So a man could be in any cell in the dorm and LISTEN to our TV; likewise HE could have been in his cell and listened to BET on the Black TV. But, like I said, this wasn't about the TV, it was something else.

Prison is full of men like this, they come in all sizes, colors and religions – the predators of the world congregate here. Let it go you say! Take a seat you think! It ain't worth it, you add!. Well, I live with a plethora of men who think the same way – they think it more noble to sit than stand. They think that if they do the right thing others will follow. They have been taught to turn the other cheek and to offer their cloak. But I tell them, they are wrong, that there, kindness is considered weakness. I tell them that if they turn the other cheek expect to get hit on it too, and if you offer your cloak to some folks on this planet

they'll take it and spread it upon the ground and use it to keep the dust off their knees while they sodomize your child. Yeah, the bed of prison reality doesn't acquit virgins; it has "Siriusly Bent" me. I have become a product of an ugly world and this TV example is only a fragmented piece of an ever present even uglier side of humanity.

With this in the matrix of my reality I chose option two, which was for me to go and talk to the man myself, if this didn't work, then I'd go to his Yard Speaker and site the rules. The danger in this of course is: if this guy tells you to go "F" yourself, war then becomes the ONLY option. I wanted a peaceful solution, if possible. What I did was to have the guys point the perpetrator out to me. Then I waited in front of my cell-block to see if he and his homeboys would follow their daily routine of going to the Recreation Yard to workout. They did.

Sure enough they came out of their cell-block, him and five or six of his homeboys. Being that our cell-block was parallel to theirs I shadowed him down the stairs; we met at the sidewalk-crossroads between the two buildings. I walked up and nudged my way to his side – his homeboys didn't even notice that their space had been invaded- he did! He looked at me, then looked away. I was on his right side. I looked back at him and said, "How ya doin'. I'm Mayor Mark.

"Without looking at me he replied, "I know who you are."

We continued to walk the sidewalk towards the Recreation Yard, side-by-side. Looking forward but watching each other out of the corners of our eyes, I said, "I hear you're changing the channels on the white TV."

He answered, "Yeah. One of the white boys told me I could watch it after lock-down."

Without hesitation, I replied, "Well, whoever gave you that permission had no right to do so. And when I find out who he is – I'm gonna put two big white boys on him with padlocks and boots."

At this point in the conversation we had reached the gate of the Recreation Yard and along with a crowd of about a hundred other men, waited our turn to get through the metal detector blocking the entrance to the yard. Being that we were stopped and in a crowd I turned to face him directly and added, "I'd appreciate it if didn't turn that TV again." He looked straight ahead but didn't say anything either way. When I turned to walk back towards my cell-block he turned to watch me go, and it was in that moment that we both saw, for the first time, that Tommy Fiore was standing right behind him. When I saw Tommy I hesitated and in that hesitation I saw surprise in his eyes, just like that, surrounded with his homeboys, he'd been caught sleeping. It happens JUST like that, when you least expect it – one of the things convicts should always be aware of ... anybody can be "Hit" at anytime, including him, including me.

No, Tommy and I hadn't planned a "Hit" on this guy, hell, I didn't even know that Tommy was aware of what was going on, but he was, and while I was stalking dude, Tommy was stalking me, and had things went bad, he'd of been there for me. Good friends are hard to come by. FYI: dude never touched the TV after that.

Tommy and I went on to become great friends; never even once did I doubt his loyalty. Tommy eventually left Pollock and transferred to a Low Custody Prison in Mississippi; I suspect he's a free man now; probably living back in Miami.

Over the next few months, thanks to the help of youngsters like Craig Orlor and Marshal Duncan, I settled into my new position and when some gang-members did hit the yard they too counted

themselves as allies. I have sent pictures of all these characters to my son Chris for him to post along with this so you can see the faces of the men I'm talking about.

But, it wouldn't be till nearly a year later that I'd be able relax and not have to watch my back; this would coincide with the arrival of two men who would become my closest friends – Alaska Mike (Michael Barnes) and Chopper (Colt Marlin), rest in peace old friend. Next time I'll introduce you to them.

Well, even though I promised to do so, I obviously ain't gotten around to telling you about how we resolved the problem with the Southern Louisiana guys ... nor have I introduced you to some of the guards at Pollock, maybe next week ... maybe not, lol.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: I received a message from a good friend of mine named Boon concerning the last entry where I had the problems with the youngsters and Richard Scutari; we were at Pollock together; Big Boon has since went home. Boon is a man of fewwords, his message read this way. "I WAS THERE", yeah, lol, that was the whole message!! 😊 Boon is from Oklahoma, and I'll tell you here, that the Oklahoma Car always had my back.

Part 13

Solid Ground... sort of

I have promised you three things, one to tell you what happened with the South Louisiana Guys, two, I promised to introduce you to some of the S.I.S. guards at Pollock, and three, to introduce you to some friends of mine – well, believe it or not, today is the day – maybe!

I want to start this by telling you that the stories I've told you so far are a little out of sequence; I apologize for that and will try to correct that here today by saying that before the event with Richard and the Youngsters, before the TV drama and before I had a solid handle on the Yard – the first thing on my agenda after officially accepting the Keys to the Yard was to deal with the issue of the white guys from South Louisiana. The result was that we, them and I had a meeting. Most of these guys had been in State Prison before but never Federal Prison. In State Prisons men group up together, not by race, but by city ... it's this way in all State Prisons, but in the Feds, because of the diversity, men group up by race, this was the first thing I explained, then I went into details about why and how important these rules are to all of us regardless of skin-color – then I asked them to pick a side. You ride with us, or you ride with the blacks, “The men around you need to know where you stand.”

I didn't tell the ones who chose to ride with us that they had to change the way they dressed, talked or wore their hair, but I did explain to them how their appearance reflected upon what I considered a culture that I believed had destroyed the black family and by extension, them. I told them that the way they were carrying themselves would insure that they remained poor and suppressed their entire lives, and then I pointed out to them that they had the power to change not only their lives, but the lives of their children as well. I spent at least an hour with them huddled around me as I sat on a bench and spoke to them like the father most of them never had ... I'll add here that some of them did stay with us, and I was happy to watch them over the next few months as they, probably because they were ostracized by the blacks, saw the wisdom of changing their appearance.

Like I said, most of them chose to ride with their homies – but even those who chose against me, remained close, and went out of their way to speak to me whenever our paths crossed – it was these men and their black homies who eventually gave me a new nick-name, “Mr. Mark”, and that name has followed me here.

Over the next year following this event with the New Orleans guys, other men began to hit the Yard who would become my closest companions; the men that all the others knew they'd have to go through to get to me – men tougher than me. The closest of these men were men I've spoken of in prior blog entries; I'll come back to them, but first I'll tell you about a couple of other guys, one a Buddhist, and one a Hillbilly from Arkansas.

Ben and Odin

In the Federal Prison System you encounter a lot of different religious practices, everything imaginable. To accommodate this wide variety of beliefs, all of who want their own space to worship, the Chaplain will schedule rooms and times for different practices. For instance: The Wiccan's might have a room to do their rituals in from 7am till 8am and then the Baptists will have the same room from 8am till 9am; etc. this gives everyone equal access to practice their beliefs. The bigger groups, like Christians and Muslims will have more time slots than say, Buddhists. Anyway, the Buddhists had a weekly time-slot scheduled – I went to it, generally alone. At that time there were no practicing Buddhists. No I didn't know what the hell to do, I was a prison convert with no one to lend instructions so I went during that time-slot and meditated.

One morning I'm in the chapel preparing to meditate when an Asian guy shows up, truth be told, he wasn't happy to see some white-boy there, lol ... yeah we had a little tension going when the female guard walked in, and seeing the tension between us, asked if everything was, ok. I replied, "Yeah, we're Buddhists, and Buddhists are non-violent," this while he and I shot daggers out of our eyes at each other. The irony of course was, that I could tell that he was very capable of extreme violence, as am I, but in Federal Prison, everything is racial, I understood this and turned around and walked out, and did not return.

I would learn that this man's name was Vo Tran, but everyone called him "Ben" – hell I don't know how he got the name Ben, I was afraid to ask! 😊 Anyway, Ben and I became close friends and remain so to this day. He later on invited me to return to the Buddhist service where I continued my meditation and even joined him in his worship service. That's a brief introduction to him. The Hillbilly I spoke of was a man named "Odin" like the Norse God.

When Odin hit the yard I took note of him, he wasn't tall like Chopper, he was about 5'11", about the same height as Ben, but where Ben was a hundred and ninety pounds from years of working out, Odin, was like two-hundred and forty pounds of just big, that Farm Boy big you see ever now and then.

When Odin arrived they put him into the same cell-block as Ben; they might even have been cellies, I will add that this was also the same block that Richard Scutari lived in. Yeah, a big ol' thick white boy named Odin! Hell that was too much for Richard to pass on – the perfect recruit, and Richard went after him. But that wasn't Odin's thing, he was really a peaceful, simple person.

At this time, before I became the lazy bum I am today, I had developed the practice of going outside at 6am and working out, that was generally the only time someone could catch me alone.

There was this isolated corner on the Recreation Yard, down past the Basketball Courts where I'd go and sit on the bench closest to the fence and talk to the trees on the other side ... what, yeah, I worked out, too! No I really did! But, before I started my workout, I'd sit and look at the trees, do my prayers, then I'd get up and workout ... those were beautiful days ... When I eventually did start my workout, I'd put Krishna Das on my MP-3 player, contemplate nature, my children and how blessed I was; that spot was my sanctuary, my temple. Pollock was nice, I was close to God there.

One morning as I sat admiring the trees and wishing to God that I could walk out past this fence and touch one of them I saw Odin heading my way. Hmmm, what could this be about? I'd already heard

that Odin and Richard weren't getting along, I took a swig from my coffee cup then sat it down on the bench, stood up and watched as he approached.

He introduced himself then went on to tell me that he was new in the system and didn't really understand prison politics. Then in his simple almost childish way he told me that he'd do whatever it took to "Protect me." This of course, from him, someone I didn't know, was a complete surprise – so I asked him why, if he was unfamiliar with prison politics, he'd make such a commitment – you're gonna get a kick out of this – he lowered his eyes as if thinking about how he should answer, then looked up and said, "Well. Ben told me not to let anything happen to you." The funny part of this was, he was dead serious. I had to smile – Ben was one of the guys I trusted and I could hear his voice in Odin's words.

Odin wasn't there very long and I'm a little embarrassed to say that I don't know what happened to him ... I never took advantage of Odin, nor did I use him as a torpedo ... Torpedo? Well that's the same thing as a "Crash Dummy" ... Some Speakers consider guys like Odin "Expendable" and send them out on missions, to do the dirty jobs, like smashing someone. No, it ain't always cruel to send someone on a mission some men want to go on missions, that's how men earn rank, status in here, they go on a mission, smash somebody and earn a name for themselves ... there's a certain bastard honor that is afforded these men who "Put Work In" and that honor follows them wherever they go. I'm not one of those guys and I hope that you've not been misled by my stories, I'm a peace keeper ... at the conclusion of my time at Pollock you're gonna hear more about that, so I'm not claiming anything, I'm just telling you how it works in here, but even had I sent someone on a "Mission" it wouldn't have been Odin; he was capable, but his heart wasn't geared that way, plus, like I said, there are guys who like that kinda stuff.

Mikey and Chopper

Somewhere slightly before or after all this a guy hit the yard who went by the moniker of "Mikey, I call him Alaska Mike, Alaska Mike is from California ... yeah, I know, it's a long story. When he arrived they put him into cell-block F-3, yeah, the one that had the TV issue. Honestly, I can't remember how Mike and I became friends, but however it happened we became friends and are to this day.

Shortly after Alaska Mike arrived Chopper also arrived at Pollock, I actually have a picture of Mike, Chopper, Ben and I somewhere in my stuff. Chopper likewise was put into F-3, so him and Mikey were together. But, yeah, there's a fly in the ointment – remember the South Louisiana Boys, yeah, I thought that issue had been put to rest, but, alas, it was not to be.

In F-3, along with Chopper and Mikey was a white guy from, of course, New Orleans, let me add it here, Mike and Chopper literally hated this guy. With that as a lead-in, I'll tell you his story.

After the meeting with the South Louisiana guys, where they chose their sides, one of them, this guy from New Orleans came to me, introduced himself and told me his story.

Right off I noticed that he wasn't like most of the others, no sagging pants, no corn-row hair, well spoken, educated and ... he had a pleasant spirit about him. I liked him.

This man whose name I can't remember went on to explain that even though he didn't act like it, he'd been raised in the "Hood" the ghetto by a black family and that the black man who'd raised him, also

lived in F-3, and he wanted to move into the cell with him. I listened, he told me, “I’m white. But I love this old man and I want to cell with him.” Of course you can see the dilemma here, in the Federal System, the only whites who live with blacks are Homosexuals, whites in Black Gangs, or whites who consider themselves Black. To my knowledge, he was none of these things; he wasn’t asking to be exempted from the rules, he knew that he’d have to eat with the blacks and to be subject to their rules, he just wanted me to know where he stood; that he wasn’t ashamed of his race, he knew what color his skin was, and wasn’t ashamed of it.

I listened to his story. As I’ve already stated, I liked him and the fact that he didn’t try come off as some kinda bad-ass or even worse, “A Victim”, but as a nice quiet, humble man who had, with his adoptive father (don’t get me started on the bad influences of that ghetto culture) been caught up in the ghetto game of selling dope. I, of course, completely understood and gave him my blessing to move in with the old man. Did I mention that Mikey and most especially Chopper hated this guy! Whoops!!! Yeah, well that ain’t the half of it. What I’m gonna tell you next, not even they know about.

Part 14

The Mayor of Corpus Christi

With the arrival of some solid men things began to level off for me and I found an element of comfort in my daily routine of writing, painting and contemplating the wonders of life. It was during this time that I was introduced to Lynn in England and with her help started this blog. Like I said, these were relatively good times for me, but alas, reality happens.

One afternoon one of the Louisiana Blacks walked up to me and tells me there's a big problem between the Blacks and Whites, "Shit's fixing' to jump off!" Then he put his hand on my shoulder and added, "I told the Big Man that he should speak to you first. I told him I trusted you. He wants a meet on the sidewalk at Chow Time." With his words I got that sick feeling in my stomach, the one I had with Ziggy, Preacher, Gordo and a dozen others when something like this happens. But the good thing about this was, I didn't have to wait very long to see it play out, one way or the other; nothing worse than having to wait all night for a meeting the next day.

At FCI Pollock there are sidewalks that lead from the cellblocks that all meet in the middle of the yard at a large circular feeder you walked around until ultimately spinning off to go whichever direction you chose. Well, that circle was also a meeting place, sometimes guys from different cellblocks would walk around and around that circle and discuss business, it was a neutral spot.

I was told by my friend that his Shot Caller would meet me halfway between that circle and the Chow Hall, on the sidewalk in-between. At that time I had no idea who ACTUALLY spoke for the Blacks, it's never the guy you think it is; there are guys who are out front, but they ain't the guy, "The Guy" is usually undercover; it's harder to "Hit" him, if you don't know who HE is. There's a division between blacks and whites, one that's kept active and even compounded by men on "both sides" who hate the others. So none of this was unexpected.

Whenever there's a scheduled meet like this, one car to another, especially between Blacks and Whites, the rule is – their Speaker, or someone they designate – shows up with half-a-dozen of his best guys, and you show up with a half-dozen or so of your best guys. These guys will all stand around and stare at each other, pop their knuckles and do all the other flexing that goes on when men are at their most primal – you get the picture. Show of strength? Yeah, and as much as it shames me to say it, I've been counted among their numbers.

A scheduled meeting like this one is very different from the chaos of the one I spoke of between the Whites and the Paisa's – those almost always result in violence. A, scheduled meeting, means, there's a problem, but we want to resolve it. The third type of course is the one you don't know about – this one was potentially like that – I had no idea there was a major problem between us until told so. A lot of times you don't even know there's a problem, one minute you're going about your business, the next, thirty guys run in your cell-block and attack.

Show of strength? Yeah, you bet your ass! You gather your guys, put your boots on and buckle up, that's the norm ... but once I matured and actually took the "Keys" to a yard, I rarely followed that rule ...

I think there's a better chance at a peaceful solution, without all the posturing. That day, even though I had a long line of tough guys I could have called to stand my back, I went alone.

I'm standing alone at the designated spot looking for some muscled-up front man who'd fit the movie image of a Shot Caller, when I noticed a group of Black men standing at a distance around two older men. One was about the same age as me; a couple of inches shorter. The other one was maybe ten years older than me, about the same height. I looked around and saw the normal half-dozen, then as I looked around again and saw another dozen or so standing inconspicuously in patches here and there, close, but not too close. The older man, he was the one.

Black folks respect their old folks much more so than we do. With the Blacks they take care of their elderly, they listen to them and for the most part, obey them, we, white folks, for some reason don't have that same code of honor. For the most part, old white guys in prison are ignored, past over and even preyed on; I have been a champion for the older men around me ... what, Hell NO, I don't consider myself old! I was only makin' a comment about how one of the old black guys was my age ... Damn it man! ... I just admitted it, didn't I! Well, don't get it messed up here. I ain't old like most guys my age! Anyway, as I made eye contact with the guy TEN years older than me, we began the ritual of meeting in the middle, along with him came the other older, I mean, middle aged guy.

Now, I'm from the South, and that means I have good manners. I was taught to always respect my elders, always, and I've lived my life by that rule. I saw their guy and I recognized he was older than me, considerably older, so when we came face to face, I smiled, stuck out my hand, and said, "Hi. I'm Mayor Mark. I speak for my people." After a brief moment of hesitation he responded in kind and shook my hand. I then asked him how I could help, opening the door to his concerns and letting him know I preferred a peaceful solution, most men do. He then told me that he spoke for the Blacks on "The Yard" and then introduced the other man with him and told me that he was an old friend of his from New Orleans ... what? No, not OLD like in years, but OLDDDD like a long time friend! You need to get over it. For the record, the next one of y'all who says I'm old, id gettin' the boots! Anyway, the Shot Caller for the blacks went on to tell his side of a story I'd actually heard from the White Boy perspective, so I wasn't caught off guard by what he said. But I was caught off guard when he added, "I'm willing to go to war over this." The issue he was willing to go to war over was this.

Remember the white guy from New Orleans I told you about in Part 13? Well, the black man who'd adopted him as a child was the MIDDLE AGED man with him. Well, what I didn't tell you is, for reasons unknown to me, a couple of the guys in that cellblock couldn't stand the guy from New Orleans who'd been adopted by that family. Since THEY and he, all lived in F-3, they gave him hell. The two white boys I'm talking about were Alaska Mike and most especially Chopper (RIP). Chopper, literally hated this guy.

I told you before that Chopper was 6'-3", tattooed from head to foot and rode with "The Banshees" Motorcycle club; he was big, tough, and, sometimes a bully. But for reasons I never really understood, he loved me, and right or wrong, I, in the end, would've been with him. I cried when I heard he'd died. Back to the story.

A few days earlier Chopper had told me that this guy from New Orleans had been out on the yard asking for a shank – supposedly to use on him. When Chopper heard about this he went ballistic and basically threatened to break his neck if he even thought about pulling a knife on him. So when Chopper told me the story, I, of course agreed that he'd had every right to go after the guy, but then I added that, in my opinion, he had some responsibility too, because he had in fact given the man a hard time. Then I

asked him to do me a favor, and to forget that incident and leave dude alone ... he reluctantly agreed. But, obviously, the damage had already been done. This guy was obviously terrified of Chopper, who wouldn't be!, and went to the Blacks for protection; hence the meeting.

When the Yard Speaker for the Blacks finished telling his rendition of the story I saw the surprise in his eyes when I answered him with a "Yes, sir. I was familiar with the event," rather than a simple "yeah" or "yes"; my good Southern manners, a phrase I'll mention here is unused among men of equal status. Later on when I replayed that meeting over in my mind (to make sure I wasn't miss-interpreting the outcome) I concluded that that one gesture of respect for him as my elder, was the thing that softened him and swung the result in my favor; like I said, I'm from the South and manners are a part of my upbringing and a testimony to my people. It ain't a black or white thing with me, it's a man thing, it's how men, real men, carry themselves.

When he had finished I agreed with him and told him he was right, that my guy had been wrong for dogging his guy and that I'd already asked him to stop. But, I saw the flash in his eyes when I added this, "But your man was out on the Yard asking for a shank to use on my guy. And, by the Rules, I have the right ... and so does Chopper – to put him down." Like I said, I saw the flash in his eyes that let me know, he, hadn't heard that part of the story. "But," I continued, "that ain't necessary. I've taken care of the problem from my end, and I trust you'll take care of it on yours." After some unrelated conversation, we parted as friends. In fact, him and I made a treaty between the blacks and whites that said we'd never go at each other without first trying to talk things out. Literally and figuratively we became friends. No, we didn't hang out together, but when we saw each other we went out of our way to always let others see us shake hands ... in here, little things like that, are what mountains sit on.

At FCI Pollock there were three SIS Officers, that I knew about; I've already mentioned Voorhies, the other two were both Lieutenants; Lt. DuCote and Lt. Transou.

One day Lt. Transou was showing our new Warden around the cell-blocks when he sees me sitting and watching TV. He leads the new Warden, a female, over to where I'm sitting and says to her, "This here's Mayor Mark, he was the Mayor of Corpus Christi, Texas." I nodded and said hello; she of course looked at him, and then me, like he'd asked her if she wanted to see my penis ... and she wasn't quite sure whether she should admit that she did! You see, according to Staff Protocol, Transou was out of line by calling me "MayorMark" instead of the condescending and intentionally demeaning term, "Inmate Crawford." Yeah, as strange as it sounds Transou gave me a hell of a compliment that day... one I'm obviously still talking about. Yeah, these guys were different than your normal guards; and as inappropriate as it to say, I liked all three of the SIS guys at Pollock, they were like me, old school.

Mayor of Corpus Christi, yeah, I know. I was the Mayor of Ingleside, not C.C., but somewhere along the way half the folks in prison have made that same leap. Hell, I kid you not, some folks have even claimed I was the Mayor of Texas, but, I've told you not to be surprised, because a lot of the stories about me are exaggerated.

After my meeting with the blacks I decided since I was right outside, I'd go ahead and go to the Chow Hall.

As I came through the line Lt. Transou pulls me up and asks me how things are going between the Blacks and Whites. "Fine" I reply. He looked at me like I was crazy, then added, "You do know what I'm talking about, right?" I replied "Yes". Someone, an informant among the Blacks, had obviously told him that they were gonna go to war against the Whites – so he was skeptical thinking maybe I didn't know

how serious things were. Finally he says, “If you know what I’m talking about then tell me which of the Blacks has the issue.” I gave him a reassuring smile and replied, “The Louisiana Car.” He responded by saying, “You’re telling me everything’s okay between you?” I smiled again and said “Yes,” and walked away. And it was.

Never once in my three years at FCI Pollock did the Black and Whites go at each other; we always kept it one on one. I’m proud of that.

Part 15

Oh Yard Politics

In my three years at Pollock I was given unrestrained control by both my peers and, the Prison Staff. Yes there were some bumps along the way which I've tried to outline with the stories I've told you; I admit, I made some mistakes, no one is perfect, but I always did what I thought was right. Yes, there are those who resented me, and probably still do, that's the price of leadership. But, in the end, even though some of the men I've mentioned could never admit it as so, I like to think that these men learned something from their experiences under my leadership ... peace is possible, if you look for it, even in here. That was my strength, I always believed that in spite of our differences, differences I would fight and die for if needed, that we are not animals, and that our real enemy is not our different skin-tones and racial politics, but those on the outside who are getting rich as Race Baiters like Al Sharpton, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson and that whole cabal in Hollywood who keep lying to the Black Community about WHO TRULY are the Racists in this world. Something I will talk about at a later date.

I always tell folks that men choose to follow another man for one of two reasons; one of course is they "Fear" them; the second reason is because they "Trust" them. I am the second type. Men don't fear me, they trust me, and I never took advantage of that, or the rank I was "given" by my peers.

Over those three years at FCI Pollock lots of Shot Callers came and went in the other Cars; remember the Shot Caller from the Surenos I spoke of earlier ... well he ended up Checking In (asking for Protective Custody) to keep his Homies from smashing him for stealing money that was designated to go to the Big Homies, and in hind-site I now understand why he disliked me so much; I because of my relationship with his Big Homies, was a threat. Even though he was gone and another guy took over, the relationship I had had with Chongo and the Surenos at USP Florence never materialized at Pollock. Though I was close to the Surenos in my cell-block I was never able to trust their Car as a whole ... truth is, without the Black Hand to intercede, we had no common ground, they represented their people and I, unapologetically, represented mine.

With the Paisa's it was different. A year or so into my being given the Keys to the Yard, Gordo left and a new guy named Tino took over. Tino and I were good friends, he'd actually sneak over to my cell-block and we'd talk about things without the distraction or the normal rumors that would ensue if we were to meet on the yard. Plus, remember that the Surenos ran with the Paisa's – more than that, they ran "Under" the Paisa's, so, more importantly, he kept them in line where me and my people were concerned.

As for the Blacks on the yard, well, we were able to maintain a peaceful relationship with them, like I said, even though their leaders came and went we were able to remain cordial to each other and they always honored the treaty I had made with their predecessor. The Blacks at Pollock picked up the name "Mr. Mark" from the New Orleans Crew and that name stuck, as a result of that, I'm still called "Mr. Mark" by the Blacks, even on this yard.

Khadafy

Among the blacks at Pollock were a large contingency of “Crips” who were separate from the multitude of other Black Cars on the yard. No, they hung out together, but the Crips had their own Shot Caller; he was an old timer, like me.

I remember when he hit the yard my good and loyal friend Tommy Fiore came to me and told me, “There’s a big time Crip Shot Caller who just got off the bus.” Sure enough that first weekend I saw this older cat walking around the track with thirty or so youngsters walking around him; hell, most of them were Crips from Louisiana, Texas and whole bunch of other off-shoot cliques who had never actually met a big time Crip from Los Angeles, so man, they were in awe of the man they called Khadafy, like the general. I of course took all this in from a distance, but I was impressed.

A few months later Tommy introduced Khadafy to me and we became good friends. He told me that his name was actually Karl Watson and that on the streets they called him “Kilowatt”. He, like me, was a writer and later on I would help him with his own writings. Karl was a fascinating man, a Second Generation Crip, no, not second generation in one of the off-shoot organizations, but a Second Generation L.A. Crip, meaning he grew up with the original guys like Tookie and Monster. Man the stories he told; yeah, it was a site to see, me the PROUD speaker of my people and him a Legend in Crip history, walking around the yard talking about our families ...

Before Karl left Pollock we took a picture together shaking hands. I’m proud of that picture and what it represented, you can see that picture on my FB page. Karl also gave me his sisters address and told me to stay in touch; for a couple of years we wrote back and forth to each other, but, somewhere along the way we lost contact. But, one of the things we promised was if I ever got out, I’d come to L.A. and we’d go to Dinker Park (where the original Crips hung out) sit on one of those park benches and smoke a big long cigar. Imagine that, two old men, one black, one white, sitting on a park bench smoking a cigar together ... people passing by having no idea that those two old men were old warriors of the likes they can never even imagine. Crazy as it seems, I can envision this happening.

I have come across lots of men like Karl in the system, some like Richard Scutari I’ve mentioned, some like Kirtsey Nix of Dixie Mafia fame I haven’t (now there’s a character for sure. Look him up), but I remember them, and refer to ’em as “Legends” and they are. But of all the men I’ve met none was I more honored to know than, Gene Gotti.

Gene Gotti

I was exiting the Chow Hall one afternoon when one of the SIS guys I’ve mentioned pulls me over (I will not name him) and tells me that trouble is on its way, a man was coming who could disrupt the whole yard ... Gene Gotti. Like I’ve told you, I’ve had some big shot guys come at me, some you’ve not even heard about, but Gene was big and actually carried the status, the rank, to supplant me, or so I thought. But, unlike Richard, Gene never once tried to run anything ... he liked me, trusted me and always had my back. I’ve told you the story before so I won’t repeat it here, but right before I left Pollock, Mr. G and his

right hand man, Anthony Pica (probably misspelled) snuck into my cell-block and shared a meal with me and a few close friends. The fact that he showed me that honor, was a thing to brag about, so I am!

How Things Work

My last year at Pollock I had a solid hold on the Yard; the other Cons gave me complete control. In addition to that trust from the Cons, SIS also gave me unprecedented respect and trusted me in all matters when it came to the politics of the Yard. Like I mentioned earlier, Pollock was run more like a Penitentiary, more like Florence, than a Medium Security Prison. I think this was due to the fact that the guards at Pollock were all required to work shifts at the USP next door, so they knew how volatile things can get, in retrospect, the Yard at Pollock was run by a bunch of Guards who actually had USP experience. It is for this reason that “they” gave me such unrestrained control. What do I mean by that?

On every prison yard there are two types of people, good ones, and bad ones. Good ones are of course the guys we refer to as “Solid”, bad ones are men who are Rats, Child Molesters, Rapists, Junkies and Gamblers who run up bills they can’t pay, then “Check-in” (ask for protective custody), thieves, gunners and every other kind of deviate imaginable.

Of course these bad eggs need to do their prison time somewhere, so when they hit a Yard, SIS puts them into general population with the rest of us. Of course they don’t tell us that this one or that one is no good, we have to find it out on our own; usually this happens when the Shot Caller for another Car comes up to me and says, “So-in-so owes us a thousand dollars for dope, or gambling” That’s how I usually hear about this kinda guy. Hell, it happened here just yesterday. A guy comes up to me and tells me there’s a white boy in another block who owes seven-hundred dollars for dope. For the record, we don’t pay any dope or gambling bills. If another Car is dumb enough to give a man that much credit, far as I’m concerned, they’re beat out of it! Now we Cons have a rule that we won’t let another race beat up one of our own; there’s too much risk of it escalating tensions and creating bad blood. So when a white boy gets into that position – we, his own people take him off the yard ... sometimes that miscreant is allowed to walk off the yard, sometimes he isn’t, sometimes he gets a “Beat Down”. But we deal with our own.

When a man is taken off the yard, SIS always wants to know why. Sometimes the guy himself will tell them the truth, sometimes they lie about why they had to leave the yard. But in either event SIS has to determine if its SAFE for him to return to the yard, or, if they need to transfer him to another spot. To ascertain which it is, one of the SIS would stop me on the yard someplace, usually in the Chow Hall, and ask me a carefully worded question like this. “Inmate so-in-so ended up in the Hole. Can he come back out to the Yard?” I would respond with a carefully worded answer, in one of two ways. One, “Yeah. He’s good,” this meaning that that individual was a GOOD guy and was welcome back on theyard, so “Yeah. He’s good.” The other response would be something like this, “Yeah, but I can’t guarantee his safety if he comes back out.” This of course meant that dude was not wanted on the yard – he’s no good, and a possible threat to the peace of our community.

That’s the way things are done in the Penitentiaries, the Cons are tasked to keep the peace and to keep their Cars clean. As I’ve told you, FCI Pollock was run like a Pen. Here at Three Rivers, if a White Boy was walking around here pulling his dick out on folks and I put the boots to him, or told him to get off the Yard, they’d put me in the Hole and then transfer me ... and put dude back out on the Yard. Whole

different mindset. Those are the BOP rules for every prison, the difference is, that on some Yards, like Pollock, the upper brass has decided the Yard runs more efficiently with Shot Callers, and other Yards, like Three Rivers, don't. Knowing the BOP rules is the reason for the coded questions and answers; if I was asked if a guy could return to the Yard, I always answered, "Yeah. Of course he can." ... WHO AM I TO SAY HE CAN'T... "But if he does, I can't guarantee his safety" meaning of course that dude is a piece of shit and if he does come out ... SOMEBODY WILL PUT THE BOOTS TO HIM...

Now, most of the time I wasn't personally involved in what happened. Someone from one of the other cell-blocks would come up to me and let me know that they had "Run-off" this guy or that guy, and explain their reasons. Yes, I had the Keys to the Yard, but I didn't micro-manage the little bullshit stuff like who was a rat, who was selling pictures of kids on the computer or who had run up a thousand dollar dope bill – I don't care about all that, it was MY job to keep MY PEOPLE safe; to get as many of them home as possible, to teach them things that maybe their fathers didn't, about how to carry themselves as men. That was my job, to be a man, and to teach these lost souls that as a man, you're expected to behave a certain way.

Each individual cell-block decided who stayed and who went according to a set of rules older than me. They decided who stayed and who went. They trusted me, and I trusted them. Truth be told, I've only ever personally run one man off a yard – he was a bigson of a bitch too. If your interested why he chose to get off the yard rather than break myneck, you can read about it on this site, entry dated 5-9-16. But, anyway, over the course of my time at Pollock I might have been asked by SIS thirty or forty times if someone could return to the yard ... remember this ... it's the whole reason I decided to write this Shot Caller Series and violate the rules by actually admitting that I'd been a White Boy speaker for my people, something only an idiot would do. Since I ain't an idiot ... well, not a complete idiot anyway, you can be assured I have a hell of a good reason to do so.

Part 16

The End of Mayor Mark

I was happy at Pollock, but, I missed my children, so I put in for a transfer to be near them. About a week after I'd applied for that transfer I was called to the Lieutenants Office. When I walked in I saw Lt. DuCote waiting on me. He was alone. We were alone, him and I ... not supposed to happen that way. On paper, I'm a convicted murderer. He trusted me.

Lt. DuCote told me that my Transfer Request had come across his desk and he was thinking about denying my request. "You're important to the peace on this yard." It was a great compliment he had given me and I very much appreciated him saying it. But I asked him not to hold me there. I explained how much I loved my children and that I was getting very few visits from them in Louisiana, and even if I couldn't see them as often as I liked, at least I'd have the comfort of being near them. I explained that I had six grandchildren ... and so forth ... he nodded, and with a hint of emotion in his voice, said, "Okay, I'll let you go" ... some tough guys we are, right! And that was that. With his approval my Transfer Request was sent to the Regional Office and eventually approved.

A Month Later

I was sitting in the Chow Hall on the afternoon of my early morning departure from Pollock to Three Rivers when SIS Voorhies walks over to my table and right there in front of the other Cons, in front of his peers to include the prison brass, sat down across from me. This is not done, not by SIS. Voorhies didn't sit down to ask a question, or to feel me out on an issue, he sat down across from me out of appreciation for the work I'd done on that Yard – he sat down to show respect. We sat there, him, Chopper and I, talked not about prison or prison politics, but like men. And though he didn't go into any great detail about how much he appreciated me, he didn't have to, him sitting down with me while I ate my meal said all he needed to say. I wasn't a snitch, an informant ... I was just a man. He sat with me through the meal and when I got up to leave he got up with me and walked me out the door and halfway back to my cell-block. We said "Goodbye" to each other, simple as that – two men who by Fate had ended up on different sides of the Law, but who, had things been different, could have been friends. I know you can't really grasp how far out of character his actions were, but, trust me, this never happens. Suffice to say, I will never forget how much respect I was given at FCI Pollock by those three SIS officers ... they treated me like a person, not an animal.

After leaving Pollock I spent three weeks at the Oklahoma Transfer Center; this time I didn't stand in the corner, hell I knew people there, some I hadn't seen in years ... Prison is a small place and I doubt if there's a Federal Prison Yard in the whole country where I don't know at least one person.

Three Rivers

Upon my arrival at Three Rivers I, along with twenty or thirty others were put into a Holding Cell to await processing. When my turn came I was led into a room to meet my new Councilor. He told me that he was from this area, that he was familiar with my case ... then in a slip of tongue said, "How did you get here?" My first clue that I didn't belong here. Then he added that I had friends here, other cons who knew I was coming and were waiting for me. With that he welcomed me and sent me back to the Holding Cell. About fifteen minutes later I was again summoned, this time by one of the SIS Officers here at Three Rivers.

When I walked into the office he was reading something on the computer, he motioned me to sit down. I did and waited for him to finish what he was reading. Suddenly he turns from the computer, and with a flash in his eyes, says, "So. You're one of those guys who likes to run people off the yard!" He was making a statement not asking a question. Then he forcefully added, "We don't tolerate that here!" Remember, I had just left a place where SIS had wanted me to run the yard and understood exactly what that entailed, so I was completely taken aback. "I have no idea what your talking about," I responded. And I didn't.

He looked at me like I was a liar, then looked back at the computer screen and said, "So you didn't run off..." and started giving me names, names I didn't know, or, more correctly, didn't remember. But as he read off the list I had a sudden realization; every time SIS at Pollock had asked me if a guy could come back out on the yard and I'd said, "If he did, I couldn't guarantee his safety" that somehow, someway, on paper I was listed as the person responsible for him being transferred. How many there were, I have no idea, but a bunch would be accurate.

It appears that the whole time I was doing my job, keeping the peace, I was, on paper anyway, being branded as a Trouble Maker; that was now being made very clear to me. "You're kind is not welcome here."

No, I don't believe that Voorhies, Lt. DuCote or Lt. Transou deceived me. No, they were all three men of character, who probably didn't think it mattered what they had thought was the price of transforming a violent yard into a peaceful yard would look to some "pencil dick" in the Regional Office. But, it obviously does. I, a man who put down riots, not my words, but the words of Staff and the words of the men I've done time with, was, on paper, a Trouble Maker. To make a long story short, this SIS Officer here at Three Rivers decided to give me a CHANCE to stay here, but it was made abundantly clear to me that any kind of problems I had, I be shipped out of here.

Well, here we are, five years later and I'm still here. Oh to be sure when I first hit the yard the fellas here tried to give me the "Keys" to the yard, I declined, and in time I came to prove that I wasn't a Trouble Maker and have become a positive influence on my companions. For the most part the Guards treat me well, and SIS has given me a little leeway here and there. So it has all worked itself out. Even still, here, I remain a fish out of water.

Well, here we are, at the end of this Shot Caller Series. In this series I have taken you back with me to when I first came into the system and outlined my time since. No, it hasn't been an easy path, but, it's my path and I accept it as such. Yes, there are a lot of stories I've not told, some funny, like the "Phantom Shitter" (see "A Poet Dreams"), some horrible like the guy I was on my way to get, but who was stabbed by one of his Homeboys and died as I was climbing the stairs to attack him, (see "As A Convict Thinketh").

Some I'm proud of like the time at Florence when I jumped two Gang Members for flipping over an old man in a wheelchair because he wouldn't give them ten dollars, and, some I ain't so proud of, like the time I spent feeling sorry for myself, but, if you have read my books you can find the bits and pieces of these stories and more in them.

As a Freeman I believed and acted as freemen do. But now, I'm a Convict and so I act as Convicts do. As a Freeman I learned certain disciplines, here I have learned others. Freeman have their faults as well as their noble qualities and likewise the convict too has his or her own set of words and actions which are deemed undesirable or honorable. We are not without honor! So never think for a moment that all of the men here are worthless, for we are not.

I have learned these ways, and those means of convict reasoning. I am here, and so it is that I must be here to the best of my ability, yet, never will I believe that I can be nowhere except here. Nor will I allow myself to become the animal I have been made out to be by my Prosecutors. Do not think that prison has made of me a prisoner. For it has not. It has only revealed and brought forth that strength of character which had previously lay hidden within me. It has only shown me that a man can live with in the worlds most violent of societies and not be moved to violent thought, nor violent actions short of self-defense. Prison has taught me to think from a new perspective, to see with eyes which no Freeman can possess. Prison has taught me to examine myself, leading me to conclude that "Sinfulness" is not the taboos taught by Religion, but instead the weakness of the mind which allows one to become enslaved to that which is not progressive, to be limited and less capable as a result of some vice. It is not prison which has enslaved me and my prison companions, it is instead a lack of personal discipline which has brought us, each and all of us, to the selfsame gallows in which we presently swing.

So, here we and I have broken my silence and told you some inside stuff about prison, things I will no doubt be criticized for revealing. So why did I do it? Well, for several reasons really, First: The Laws are changing and there's a chance that guys like me will someday get out ... well, not exactly guys like me ... remember, when some pencil dick in Washington looks at my record on the computer, it's not going to say, "He put down multiple riots", "He saved this man, or that man", "He was highly respected by the Prison Staff for being a Peace Maker", nope, I now know, it's gonna say that I was a Trouble Maker, and that alone will quite possibly keep me from ever getting a break. Nope, no one is going to pick up the phone and call Voorhies, or DuCote or Transou and ask them what kind of man I am. Nope, they're just going to look at the paperwork. I ain't crying about it, Fuck 'em in the ear! I just wanted my kids and my friends to know the truth about how I've done my time.

Second: I'm going to shut this blog site down, yep, I've told my last story. Why? you ask. Well, I guess I've come to the conclusion that I no longer want to fight for my innocence; it no longer matters to me what others think. It only matters what my children and grandchildren think.

Third: the other day I told the head of the SIS department here at Three Rivers, that my days as a Speaker are over; likewise I've told the men around me the same thing. Yep, this is the end of ol' Mayor Mark.

Third: I'm going to shut this blog site down, yep, I've written my last entry. Why you ask? Well, I guess I've come to the conclusion that I no longer want to fight for my innocence; it no longer matters to me what others think, it only matters what I know.

Final Words

If you ask my children who I am, they'll tell you I'm a loving father. If you ask the men around me who I am, they'll tell you I'm a man who always has a positive word to share. If you ask the Government who I am, they'll tell you I'm a Killer. But if you ask me who I am, I'll tell you that I'm a man that has taken the life I've been given, and did the best I could with it. But what does that all boil down to? Well. I guess it boils down to something one of my sons said to me awhile back, "You've had a rough life. But I've never heard you complain about it."

What better legacy to have than that.

I am loved by my children. I am respected by my peers and I have always tried, not always successfully, but always tried to do the right thing, and I always understood when I did wrong. So, here we are. This is what I am, this is how I've lived my life. With that final word I'll leave you with this ...

If Heaven is living outside this prison as a normal person, and Hell is living behind these bars with the respect my peers have given me, then I am compelled to quote, Milton.

"Tis better to rule in Hell, than to serve in Heaven."

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