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PRISON BA JOURNAL



Family Communication from Behind Bars

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Editor's Note

Cal State LA's Prison BA Program is supported by the commitments and values of many participants developing academic excellence and student success through collaborative projects between incarcerated students and campus students. This issue reflects our efforts to develop innovative teaching as we build grassroots community and cultural connections, while providing opportunities for the dissemination of voices for social justice. The enclosed writings are testimonies wrapped in communications theories, where individuals sift amongst their past traumas and examine painful moments through the lens of courage, vulnerability, and integrity.

This issue further highlights that people are the sum of their experiences and reveal an honest reflection of how they cope with the environmental traumas that they travel through. Each of these men have failed but have learned from their failures and used that wisdom to succeed. Each of them have lost and taken an incredible amount, and yet, they persevere and make amends because it is the best course for them, not because it is what others would have them do. Each of these men live with the stinging reality of hopelessness and incarcerated death, and yet, they never give in to it—they rise above their confinement in thought and spirit.

One major theme of the current issue is how incarceration, and the distance it creates in every aspect of the lives it touches, affects family communication. The writings emerged from an applied writing course in the spring of 2020 that examined the complicated dynamics of how families

communicate and deal with the barriers incarceration imposes. At the time, we did not know, nor could we imagine, how the pandemic would manifest as a nationwide lockdown of the entire U.S. population followed by protests and uprisings against police brutality, racism, and a new urgency to rethink and reform our criminal justice system, our educational policies, and our economic policies. These writings address the traumas of prison, separation from families because of razor-wired fences and lockdowns, and the continuing need to build resilience in the face of the harsh conditions that have gained a new resonance and relevance to the larger society facing the traumatic effects of living in the midst of a pandemic.

Prison education can be restrictive in terms of options for using traditional methods to teach communication practices and skills. One alternative that helps to overcome these barriers is to incorporate a combination of "Teach-back" and performance methods into our curriculum. These strategies enable students to enact actual and ideal interactions between themselves and their families. As a result, some students experienced an increase in their ability to understand, apply and practice communication concepts and skills, and to plan for and improve future interactions with their loved ones. The classroom activities and students' subsequent reflections generated richly detailed research data for analysis that enabled students to cultivate or develop a repertoire of critical communication competency to use in professional and everyday life encounters.

Not only are our students learning new coping mechanisms from Cal State LA professors, but they also are applying them to everyday encounters reducing conflict in our communities. At the end of this journal, you will be hard pressed not to admit that people incarcerated are better than their worst act, and are, in fact, models of resilience. We thank you for joining us in this conversation.

-- Kamran Afary

-- Daniel Whitlow

-- Clifton Gibson

Doing the Wrong Thang for the Right Reason

MACIO LINDSEY

Characters:

Narrator

Art: 34 years old, served 15 years, D-jays cellmate for 2 years, good friends with D-Jay

D-Jay: 29 years old, African American male, father of Kimmie, serving 15-year sentence. Served 7, good friends with Art

Nikki: Mother of Kimmie, partner of D-Jay

Kimmie: 9-year old daughter of D-Jay and Nikki

Setting: *R.J Donovan Correctional Facility, medium-security yard*

[Kimmie was 2 years old when her father D-Jay went to prison. D-Jay's and Nikki's relationship is strained due to separation caused by imprisonment and Nikki is also shouldering financial hardship alone.]

Scene 1

[Art walks in the cell after getting off work, D-Jay is sitting on his bunk]

ART

Wutz up homie?!

D-JAY

[Low energy and stressed]

W'sup.

ART

What's wrong with you? You ain't got the music on, the TV's off, What's up?!

D-JAY

Homie, I gotta get some bread [money], Kimmie's birthdays next month and she wants this big ass birthday party with all of her friends. She starts naming all this shit she wants. All I could do is say okay. She sounded all excited and asked me to promise, so I did.

ART

Shit, why you do that? You don't got money like that.

D-JAY

Man, when yo baby asks for something, sounding like she did… you can't say no.

ART

So, what you gonna do?

D-JAY

I don't know, but I gotta get some cash.

[Jumps off bunk]

Well holla later, I gotta phone call.

[Y*ells out the cell door]*

Tower! 1:00 phone calls!!!

[*D-Jay walks out the cell into the dayroom to call Nikki]*

AUTOMATIC PHONE OPERATOR

You have a collect call from D-JAY. Calling from R.J Donovan Correctional Facility, press 5 or say "YES" to accept the charge.

NIKKI

[Frustrated and tired tone]

Yes.

D-JAY

W'sup.

NIKKI

I'm so upset with you!

D-JAY

What I do?

NIKKI

You have your daughter all excited about this birthday party and some gifts you promised. She went to school telling all her friends. She really wants to see you for her birthday, and I barely got enough for that. I can't do a visit, birthday party, and gifts. Why do you promise her things you can't give her? YOU IN PRISON!

D-JAY

What the hell you mean!? So what I'm in prison!! Prison or not I'm gonna take care of my daughter!

NIKKI

Well, I been waitin' 7 years for you to help take care of you daughter and I'm still waitin'!

D-JAY

Look, if I told Kimmie Imma take care of her birthday and get her the stuff she wants then imma go do it. I'll figure it out!!

Click

[D-Jay hangs up the phone]

NARRATOR

Later that night D-Jay lays on his bunk and can't sleep and is stressed about how he's going to get some money for his daughter. He recalls his disappointment as a child when other kids had nice clothes, new bikes, and cool toys his momma couldn't afford it and his dad was nowhere to be found. He remembers the shame and cringes at the thought of Kimmie having that awful experience.

Scene 2

[A few days pass. Art comes back to the cell after getting off work]

ART

W'sup homie. You still stressin'? No music on, no…

[Sentence trails off, he points to the empty space on the locker. Where D-Jays Super 3 radio system used to be]

Where's your radio?

D-JAY

I sold it.

ART

Sold it for what?

D-JAY

I told you I gotta make some cash for Kimmie's birthday.

ART

[Shakes head]

So, how much you get for it?

D-JAY

[Reaches down, grabs his boot, digs deep inside, and removes a tennis ball-sized plastic bag]

$300 in trees [marijuana]; I gotta hustle this shit and flip it a couple of times.

ART

Man, you take penitentiary chances right now! Don't get caught up and ride your own shit.

D-JAY

Imma ride my own shit. I just can't disappoint my daughter and not come through for her. What kinda dad would I be if I can't do for my child. Plus, how Nikki gonna respect me if I can't make shit happen?

ART

Keepin' it real, your daughter would be happy just spending time with you on a visit for her birthday. I could have hooked her up with a nice pop-up card with her favorite characters for her birthday. Homie, you tryin' do the wrong thang for the right reason. Just be careful. I'm going to get my worker shower.

[Walks out of cell]

<u>Scene 3</u>

NARRATOR

With mixed emotions, D-Jay divided his drugs into six 50$ bundles. He's anxious and nervous because getting caught selling could get him more prison time and keep him away from his daughter even longer. He thinks, is it really for Kimmie or just some strange way to prove to himself that he's a better father than his so-called dad. What real dad wants to be reduced to just a sperm donor who's in prison? D-Jay shakes the thought from his mind and quickly places three bundles in his boot and three bundles in a secret pocket he's sewn into his boxers. D-Jay hit the yard like a man on a mission. After the yard is over, DJay comes back to his cell where Art is watching T.V

D-JAY

[Cheerfully]

What's up old man!

ART

Oh, you in a good mood. You made it back, so I assume everything went okay?

D-JAY

[Smiling]

Better than okay! I'M ON! That shit went like hotcakes! I made the whole 300$ in half a day.

ART

So, you can send Nikki the money for your daughter's birthday?

D-JAY

Eventually…

ART

[Looking confused]

What that mean?

D-JAY

$300 in one day.. Man, imma reinvest three or four more times before her birthday even get here. I'm supposed to get some more tonight at yard.

ART

You being greedy now…

D-JAY

Naw, I'm being smart. I'm being a good dad. My dad ain't EVER do shit for me when I was growing up!

[Balling his fists while speaking]

I ain't gonna be like that with mine.

ART

So, you willin' to jeopardize your freedom and your family just to prove you a better man than your dad?

D-JAY

Don't try that psychology shit on me! When you have kids THEN you can talk to me about being a dad. Until then, stay out of my business…

ART

Enough said.

NARRATOR

Later that evening, both Art and D-Jay return to their cell after going to the night yard and the day room, they didn't talk much. Art lays back on his bunk with his headphones on watching T.V. D-Jay is milling around, feeling disappointed the way he got at Art. For two years, they have developed a good friendship and D-Jay really does value Arts friendship. He's been like a mentor giving him guidance here and there.

D-JAY

Art, can I holla at cha for a sec?

ART

What's up… my show comes on in about 10 minutes.

D-JAY

Hey homie, that's my bad how I got at you earlier. I know you got my back, and I was thinking...you right...I'm jeopardizing my whole family, trying to bolster my self-image as a good dad. Nikki and my daughter don't even question that. What's that shit you said earlier? Do something for...How you say it?

ART

Doing the wrong thang for the right reason.

D-JAY

Yea, that. That's real. I went to the yard tonight and told ole boy imma pass on getting some more of that shit. I got on the phone and sent Nikki that 300$ for our daughter's birthday. It's the best I can do. Plus, I know neither of them wants me to do anything that's going to keep me in prison longer. Nikki was appreciative and thanked me. You know what I am a good dad, even in prison.

[Holds head up high]

We cool?

ART

Only if you done, so I can watch my show.

[With a smirk on his face]

Yeah man, we cool.

D-JAY

Fo'sho. Can I listen to your radio?

ART

Hell naw! You can rent it for 300$ a month.

[Laughing]

Go ahead.

NARRATOR

At 6:15 in the morning, the cell door slams open and 3 burly goon squad officers and a drug-sniffing K-9 storm D-Jay and Art's cell after receiving a kite [an anonymous note] that D-Jay was selling drugs. After an hour and a half of cell searching, no drugs were found and D-Jay and Art were allowed to go back inside the cell. They dodged a bullet, for sure. D-Jay admits he deviated from the values he learned from his mom, communication, honesty, and spending time together. Values he neglected by coming to prison and adopted the toxic norm of prison culture. D-Jay vows to never use his prison identity to negotiate his parent identity to his daughter.

Who Am I? How Can I Tell You If I Don't Know How

DARA YIN

Characters: Subject A; Subject B; Subject C

SUBJECT A

Fear can stop me from speaking.

[Hand over mouth]

Judgment comes from anger over what I may hear,

[Handcuffs ear]

and blocks certain hearing in some way. Shame too can stop me from even entering certain conversations or spaces.

[Shies away]

Hurt can lead me to not hear a person out.

[Walks away angrily]

SUBJECT B

It can either help me or harm me. If I am feeling good and not angry I will exude a vibe of being in a positive mood.

[Smiling, go-lucky attitude--happy attitude vanishes, replaced by annoyance]

If I am angry then I am more likely to be triggered by people.

[Judgmental look]

SUBJECT C

It allows me to identify and understand others' states of being, which causes me to be more compassionate.

[Waving hands, feeling free]

[The men walk in a circle looking at each other, looking away once eye contact is made. Subject A breaks the circle, moving towards center stage, the remaining two men freeze facing the audience.]

SUBJECT A

I don't share my day-to-day struggles. I try to keep Conversation focused on life outside of prison. I don't cry...

[As he says this in a lower somber tone, he shrinks into a ball, holding his knees.]

SUBJECT B

[Comes next to him facing the stage]

I wouldn't tell them if I was having a hard time. I would keep my emotions to myself.

[Hands in front of chest, holding his head]

I bottled up all my emotions and made it seem like I was okay.

[Starts to shrink into a ball]

I didn't want them to worry.

[In a ball holding knees]

[Subjects A,B,C are still for three seconds]

SUBJECT A

Everything.

SUBJECT B

Around.

SUBJECT C

Me.

SUBJECT A

From feeling safe, the freedom to engage ALL people and know that differences aren't blocking nor hindering us; RACISM.

SUBJECT B

Being around negative people and stressful environments If I see there's no other thing people respond to other than violence then it's hard to communicate with those individuals.

SUBJECT C

Prison rules created by the CDCR that puts the incarcerated population below humanity, which causes an absence of respect towards us. This causes me to try to be invisible so that I don't receive a rules violation for desiring to be treated like a human.

[Subjects A, B, C stand together in a line facing the audience]

SUBJECT C

[Jumps as if he is on a surfboard surfing]

I was surface acting as a way to cope with realistic emotions. Deep acting wasn't permitted in the criminal lifestyle, it came across as weak and I didn't want to be perceived as weak because the weak get preyed upon.

[Freezes as a surfer]

SUBJECT A

[Jumps cannonball style in a pool as if he is in the deep end underwater, slowly moving hands]

I was "deep acting" as my feelings towards once perceived enemies, life, and what's right and wrong actually changed as I embraced ideas in this lifestyle.

SUBJECT B

[Walks toward the audience as if he is on a tightrope]

I was being who I thought people wanted me to be. I became the bad guy that people thought I was. I chose to bear that burden of being that person that was down for whatever.

SUBJECT C

[Profoundly states]

Today, deep acting has affected me positively. My friends and support group within prison are emotionally brave—

[Hands-on hip, chest out, like a superhero]

—with no fear of expressing genuine feelings. This deep acting has become contagious, contributing to healthier communication and a more positive environment.

SUBJECT A

[Yells this]

COMPASSIONATE!

SUBJECT B

[Yells this]

COMMUNICATION!

SUBJECT C

It would make me feel human and equal and provide security so that I don't have to feel like I am walking on eggshells.

SUBJECT A

It would make me feel safe talking with another person. It would help me consider and act upon what is best for others.

SUBJECT B

It would allow me to be able to sympathize with individuals who have angered me and have a better understanding of the person allowing me to seek a better alternative than violence.

SUBJECT A, B, C

[*In unison]*

Our Communication Health is important too!

END

The Gift that Keeps Giving

LARRY L. TORRES

Characters: Larry Torres, J. Hong, G.Tamayo, T. Bell, D. Williams, D. Yin, P. Williams, M. Lindsey

Setting: *Inside a typical corporate boardroom, with a long rectangular table and comfortable chairs arranged about it.*

L. TORRES

Hello, Mr. Hong, thank you for consulting with the Emotional Intelligence Agency. We provide a number of services in support of your emotional needs.

J. HONG

Yes, thank you. Well, I need help understanding the impact of emotional labor on my employees.

I guess I can start by getting an understanding of what emotions are, in general.

G. TAMAYO

Emotions mean everything.

T. BELL

Exactly, they are what make us human.

D. WILLIAMS

To answer your question, Mr. Hong, emotions are a source of guidance. They allow us to internally navigate our external environment.

D. YIN

And I'd like to add how they are something we can fall back on, sort of like a security blanket for our humanity.

J. HONG

Interesting… So, how do you suggest I deal with my employee's emotions in the workplace?

D. YIN

Allow me to suggest that you view emotions as just that, emotions, and then attempt to understand their source.

P. WILLIAMS

If I may further suggest the importance of cognitively appraising your own emotions to understand yourself and others. Then, you'll be able to find where they come from.

L. TORRES

We will provide you with more information on emo-intel and emo-labor with practices you can use to encourage your employees.

G. TAMAYO

An important first step you can take is to stop, think, and proceed from there.

J. HONG

What else can we do?

T. BELL

Well, we have three rules, and rule number one is, experience the emotions, view them as events and observe.

G TAMAYO

This will help you be non-reactive.

L. TORRES

And it will minimize disruptive outbursts.

T. BELL

Rule number two, encourage pleasant emotions, understand them, and cultivate the experiences that give rise to them. I'll allow Mr. Williams to share rule number three with you.

D. WILLIAMS

Oh yes, number three, my personal favorite; make sure the expression of emotions is acceptable and doesn't harm others in any way.

G. TAMAYO

Do this and the organization will run itself.

L. TORRES

Yes, the key is to view emotions as something beneficial whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. Using them properly can be liberating.

J. HONG

I understand what you are saying but how will my employees' benefit?

M. LINDSEY

How will they and you not benefit? Your employees will feel safe and healthy and be free from the dangers of burnout.

D. YIN

Your organization will be an environment in which everyone will be free to express sadness, dissatisfaction, hurt, or fears, and avoid feeling fake or being in overdrive.

M. LINDSEY

Everyone will be more in control, feel listened to, and be a part of the decision process. In a word, Empowerment.

J. HONG

Okay, but I'm still not sure how I can bring this to my employees. What else can I do?

M. LINDSEY

Let me ask you this Mr. Hong, in what ways are you offered support?

J. HONG

I guess there are a lot of ways, but I'd have to say the most significant support comes from my loved ones. My family empowers me.

M. LINDSEY

Yes, that's a form of social support, how can you transfer it over to the way you run your organization?

J. HONG

So, when I think of the ways I'm given support, I see it is a mutual exchange. I can listen and be listened to. It's important to not take sides or be confrontational. Compassion and empathy come to mind.

M. LINDSEY

And how does that make you feel?

J. HONG

I feel grateful and it makes me want to do more for others. I see the interdependence and how it starts with me.

M. LINDSEY

So, let me ask this, what will you do?

J. HONG

I'm going to continue practicing healthy coping skills, show compassion, and gain insight. I will do this in order to grow, become more emotionally intelligent, and lead by example. Be a part of the emotional labor process. If I do these things, I feel I'll be able to model these qualities for my employees, and I'll be more supportive.

L. TORRES

Wonderful Mr. Hong! I can see how you understand how the process of emotional labor works. At times, it can be a sort of trapeze act, and we are the trapeze artists. In order to provide support and stability for others we ensure we have it ourselves.

END

A Need Not as Great as It Once Was

ROBERT PRATT

Characters: Frank, Jeff, Larry, Mark

Setting: *The four men sit around one of many cold, silver tables dotting the dayroom of their housing unit.*

SCENE 1

NARRATOR

Frank listened to the conversation for a while before joining in. His friends had started talking about letters, after one had mentioned how his family had really started to write a lot more now that he was close to getting out. Frank wondered if that would happen to him if he ever got the chance to go home.

[His thoughts are interrupted by Jeff]

JEFF

I'm getting close too, but most of my letters are from lawyers and new friends who want to help. I think my mom's sad I'm getting out; she wrote and told me I'm on my own.

[Jeff drops his shoulders and starts to look depressed]

LARRY

Yeah, but you weren't tight with your family even before you fell. Didn't you tell me your family was dysfunctional?

[Jeff looks up and shrugs his shoulders]

JEFF

Yeah, but we talked about all the problems I had before, a long time ago, when I first got to prison. We resolved a lot of things.

[Mark interjects]

MARK

My family couldn't understand how I could do my crime. For a long time, we talked about the past, my crime, my family problems, and how I was changing. It's weird, our communication with each other got better after I came to prison.

JEFF

I don't see them stopping at your door with mail all that much.

MARK

My family's got their own life to live. They write when they have time. Besides, now that I live closer to home, it's easier for them to come see me every now and then. That, and grandma's getting old, and she prefers to call; it's easier for her.

LARRY

I know, my family doesn't write at all. We're close, they just don't like writing letters. I don't like writing all the letters I do.

[Larry says jokingly]

My girl makes me—it's kind of an obligation.

[Larry speaks no longer jokingly]

It's cool though, ever since they switched to the prepaid accounts it's too expensive to call a lot. I call specific people: my uncle, and a few friends. I keep my circle small. My road dog, my best partner, won't come to see me because he doesn't want to break down.

[Mark chimes in]

MARK

WOW, YOU HAVE FRIENDS? I don't see the guys I used to hang out with as friends anymore. I realized that when I hung out with the guys, I always got in trouble. I used to get a lot of letters from them when I first got arrested.

[In good nature, Jeff retorts]

JEFF

What happened? Did they come to their senses?

[Mark chuckles]

MARK

No, some of them got married, and some just moved on with their lives. Over time, some friendships just faded away.

LARRY

Yeah. I was fifteen when I fell. All my friends were the same age. After a while most couldn't relate to a guy in prison. I still get letters from friends I've met through pen pal sites.

NARRATOR

Frank noticed the theme running through the conversation. Everyone seemed to have a lot of letters early, but as time went by, a lot of friends faded from the scene. It made sense, the people on the streets were living different lives. He thought about his family and how many letters he used to get. He remembered how much that helped, every letter took him out of prison, at least for a little while. He was in a good place with his family, better than any other time in his life. Yeah, they didn't write as much as they used to, but the need isn't as great as it once was.

Life had settled down into normal patterns, a phone call every now and then, just to check in, a visit here and there, and if there was a need to talk about important stuff, a letter.

It even made sense that his friends, who are close to getting out, would be getting more letters. For them, things were changing. Plans have to be made; bonds renegotiated…

FRANK

[Frank comes out of his reverie and notices his friends staring at him. Frank shrugs]

What?

END

Two Approaches to the Same Problem

AARON BENSON

Characters: Captain, Officer John Doe, Mrs. A, Sallah

SCENE ONE

[The year is 2020, and the coronavirus pandemic is in full swing in the United States. In an attempt to protect inmates at California State Prison Los Angeles County, the facility has decided to implement a non-disciplinary modified lockdown. This implementation introduces restrictive measures to keep the virus from entering A-Yard, or limit and reduce the spread in the event that the virus enters A-Yard. These preventative measures include, one building out at yard, no day-room activities, showers and phone calls will be run according to the proper [?] and sign-up sheet, and breakfast and dinner will be cell fed. Cell feeding breakfast and dinner offers a variety of complications. First, the inmate workers and corrections staff are completely different since they are served at different times and during different shifts. This creates two different ways of doing things, since there is not a standard operating procedure regarding cell feeding.

This is where we enter our story. Correctional officer John Doe has worked for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation [CDCR] for 20 years and has worked in a variety of different positions and capacities. Currently Doe is the A-Yard

kitchen officer. On the afternoon of March 20th, 2020, he was called to the program office to speak with the captain.]

CAPTAIN

Correctional Officer Doe, I see you have been with CDCR for a long time and am certain that you have a lot of experience.

OFFICER JOHN DOE

Yes sir.

CAPTAIN

[The captain reclines in his chair]

Starting Monday, the 22nd this facility will be under a modified lockdown in regard to the coronavirus pandemic. I see that you are the third-watch kitchen officer?.

OFFICER JOHN DOE

I am, sir.

CAPTAIN

Well, I called you into the office today to see if you had any thoughts, ideas, concerns, or suggestions pertaining to a dinner being cell-fed. What is the most effective way to approach this task, and how can the remaining yard staff help you?"

OFFICER JOHN DOE

[Surprised that he was sought out by the captain and asked how he thought things would best be ran]

Well, sir, I'm used to being given orders and how to do things. So, first I would like to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to communicate my vision. The way I think things would be run the best is after the count clears, my inmate workers will push five individual carts, one for each building, containing the precise amount of trays for that respective building. The remaining staff will push the carts with the dinner items to the first building to be fed. One thing that I think we should do is alternate every day starting at building one, then two, three, four, and five. The next day we'll start at five, then go to four, three, two, and one. The morning starts at a different building every day when serving breakfast, this doesn't make sense to me because if we start at building two, three, or four, eventually we will have to go back the way we came. Which to me sounds counter-productive, and like more work for no reason.

CAPTAIN

That makes perfect sense. Anything else?

OFFICER JOHN DOE

One last thing, would it be ok if I left one door to the chow-hall unlocked so my workers can pick up dirty trays, and pots and pans, as they see fit?

CAPTAIN

Let me look into that request further, but as for right now I'm going to say no.

OFFICER JOHN DOE

Ok, sir, and thank you again for consulting me.

CAPTAIN

You're welcome.

[As a result of the captain consulting the opinions and vision of the kitchen officer and allowing him to participate in the decision-making process, the correctional officer does feel heard, respected, and satisfied with the outcome. His morale, motivation, and productivity levels increased.]

SCENE TWO

[Cell-feeding meals during the month of Ramadan offers another set of special circumstances. Inmates participating in Ramadan are not allowed to eat until the sun sets. This does not mean that they cannot receive their food with everyone else, it just means that they cannot eat it and have to store it until the sun sets. One of the inmate kitchen workers is a practicing Muslim, and is in charge of preparing, administering, and collecting all the food and kitchen items pertaining to Ramadan. According to inmate Sallah, things have been made much more difficult by the supervising cook. The supervising cook, Mrs. A, only sees things from her perspective. On the first day of Ramadan, she came to inspect the operations of cell-feeding for Ramadan.]

MRS.A

[Approaching inmate Sallah]

So how are you going to do this?

SALLAH

Well ma'am, we are going to have to take 140 trays out of the cart that will be the last building to be served. Those trays will be replaced one the first building's trays are washed…

MRS. A

[*Interrupting Sallah]*

Why are you taking trays from the last building's cart?

SALLAH

Because ma'am, we don't have enough trays on our yard.

MRS.A

So you need 140 trays?

SALLAH

Yes, ma'am.

MRS.A

Ok, I'll see what I can do about that. What's next?

SALLAH

Well, the way I see it working best, and to not inconvenience anyone, I was going to pass out the Ramadan meals at the same time that dinner is being served. My Muslim brothers can't eat at that moment, but they can store their food in a bowl and reheat it later, and I can collect the trays to be washed that night.

MRS. A

Nope, not going to happen.

SALLAH

Why not?

MRS.A

Because you will poison people, the food will sit out too long before being consumed.

SALLAH

But ma'am, we have microwaves in all five housing units, we can reheat…

MRS.A

[Interrupting Sallah]

I don't care about microwaves! Technically, you can't even cook the food for Ramadan until five o' clock.

SALLAH

But ma'am, there are only 15 workers, I am not a cook, and during that time the cooks are serving dinner with everyone else in the building.

MRS.A

Well, you are going to have to figure it out.

SALLAH

And ma'am, what am I going to do with the trays? If we don't serve until after seven p.m. my co-workers won't get the dirty trays until eight p.m. That isn't fair to them.

MRS.A

Again, I don't care, figure it out. If I find out you are going against what I told you, I will fire you and write you up. I'll be back with trays.

[Twenty minutes later, Mrs. A. arrived with 200 new trays. Inmate Sallah was frustrated and very upset with how the process played out. He didn't feel respected, heard, or valued by the supervisor, and as a result of her not allowing him to participate in the decision-making process, his morale and productivity has gone down significantly]

SALLAH

Man, Ramadan is supposed to be a joyous time of celebration, and she is totally trying to ruin it!

KCON Panel – Separation and Family Communication

ANDREW KICKING HORSE MCCARTER

Characters: Host, Ruiz, Andrade, Caller 1, Caller 2, Caller 3, Caller 4, Caller 5

Setting: *In a small recording booth, inside the KCON radio station, within the walls of a prison.*

HOST

Welcome to "KCON," an institutional radio program dealing with prison issues and reform. One of the most stressful aspects of incarceration isn't just the isolation from society, but also the separation of family, added to this weighed burden is the difficulty of maintaining communication with family members, along with your absence creates an overwhelming emotional impact.

Today, this show will be about communication of the incarcerated. Our guest panel contains two incarcerated gentlemen who will engage in our topic on this subject. I would like to welcome Mr. David Ruiz and Mr. Art Andrade to today's show. Let's start with you, Mr. Ruiz. Is it okay if I call you David?

RUIZ

[Smiling]

Sure, that's cool.

HOST

Being formerly incarcerated myself, what do you feel was most difficult in communicating that you experienced while being incarcerated?

RUIZ

[Looking a little uncomfortable]

Just being able to set up an account to be able to call, along with the lack of interest from my family.

HOST

What was your primary method of communication?

RUIZ

[Nodding]

Usually, the occasional phone call or a few letters.

ANDRADE

I was lucky, I got visits along with calls and letters.

HOST

Would either of you describe your relationship prior to prison as being stable or unstable?

RUIZ

[Wavering tone of voice]

It was work due to resentment. Not one to talk a lot, things were continuous for me.

ANDRADE

It wasn't perfect but there was a little communication with us.

HOST

Okay. Do you think that communication played a major or significant role?

ANDRADE

[Nodding head]

I just wanted to say also with the last question, that even though it was little, it would have been harder now that I'm in prison to start.

HOST

I get that.

ANDRADE

[Re-adjusts in seat]

The significance is that it brings us together.

RUIZ

[Smiling]

I agree, it helps to keep a bond.

HOST

What were some of the obstacles you overcame in family communication after coming to prison?

ANDRADE

[Fidgeting in chair]

I guess me having to listen more, aside from the limitations on communication.

RUIZ

[Melancholy looking]

I had to be okay with losing relationships and divorce.

HOST

I understand, it's the separation and abandonment issues I had to deal with. It's so sad.

[Faraway look]

Speaking of obstacles, does the institution make it hard to stay connected or communicate with family?

RUIZ

[Stern look]

YES!!!

ANDRADE

[Lowering tone of voice]

This institution offers a lot of benefits, so it's an exception to the rule. Generally, you are far away from your family. Here, I am close.

HOST

Here's a hard one for one or both of you. How can you solve problems or offer advice while separated?

RUIZ

I try to encourage my relatives to do good for everyone and to be humble but firm in their standpoint.

ANDRADE

I think my incarceration unites my family. My parents are divorced but my family unites to help each other. I remind them…

[Leans forward]

…I'm here to help with my siblings.

HOST

That's really admirable of both of you, to put others before yourself. What has been the most difficult obstacle you had to talk about with your family? Would it be easier in person?

RUIZ

[Shakes head]

Losing close relatives, divorce and also separation. I think that if I was there, it would be a different outcome in our relationships and death is always hard to talk about.

ANDRADE

[Worried look on face]

Probably my plans for work and how I want to get out before I get too old.

HOST

I was always afraid of dying in prison or getting sick. Does a 15-minute phone conversation allow you enough time to connect or discuss problems or does it make it more difficult?

RUIZ

[Looks frustrated]

No!

ANDRADE

It makes it really difficult. Not near enough time to even find out how they are, let alone find their goals.

HOST

Okay. I appreciate your honesty, guys. Let's talk to one of our callers now.

CALLER #1

Hello. I was wondering if you are a parent and what advice you would give to people about the importance of family communication.

HOST

Great question, caller. One or both of you want to answer?

ANDRADE

[Nodding head]

That it's necessary because we never know what awaits our future.

RUIZ

[Leaning forward]

That one has the unique power to share the mindset of our children, and that how one values this life is going to determine how our lineage is to walk.

HOST

That's true, tomorrow is not promised so it's so important to pass on lessons learned in life. Next caller.

CALLER #2

Being incarcerated and with the groups you've been a part of, to what extent have your experiences reflected different stages of socialization in communication?

HOST

[Laughs]

This sounds like an academic question from a professor.

ANDRADE

[Sad look]

It does, huh? It has in the sense of I'm not a member of the workforce, so it can't contribute financially. I feel less of a person to add to the family.

RUIZ

My life has been very abrupt. Moving a lot throughout my life never allowed me to anticipate socialization. I had to go through "encounters" because I had to adapt to change, like coming to prison. That adaptation changed me and my perceptions.

HOST

Next caller please.

CALLER #3

[Middle eastern accent]

How could the connection process be improved so it would be more productive and less stressful for all involved?

ANDRADE

[Folds arms]

To communicate through programs. Being a part of graduations and events for prisoners.

RUIZ

As I mentioned earlier, change for me has been uncertain but constant and abrupt, but it all begins with ourselves. Staying true to ourselves and being a kind and loving person, can take us far beyond our limits.

HOST

That's great advice. Can we have our next caller, please.

CALLER #4

[British accent]

Has your experiences represented aspects of the anticipatory socialization process of being a parent in prison that will reenter society?

HOST

Wow! Great question. Who wants to take this on?

ANDRADE

[Sighs]

I guess preparing by bonding is my effort. To not just arrive and expect a welcome.

RUIZ

[Stern look]

At this moment, it's far-fetched for me, but I do plan to be the best father to my children. My mindset is all about growth, but you can't grow nothing without seeds. So, learning skills as to how to parent is key for me.

HOST

Okay. We have time for one more caller.

CALLER #5

Assuming there was good communication through calls, letters, or visiting, how do you anticipate your relationship will be when you go home?

ANDRADE

[Smiling]

Good.

RUIZ

Healthy. To look for a relationship with lots of love and support, which might not be the case for me. While trying to sustain relationships, it's not if you are absent in my life with the exception of my children.

HOST

I would like to thank our callers and both of you gentlemen for your participation today. Until next time, this is KCON radio and we're out!

END

In a World of Thorns there is No Painless Path

ARTHUR ANDRADE

Characters: Angela, Professor Mejia, Alex, Gabriel, Erica, Edwin, Rodger, Mary (John's mother), Diana, John

[Society is changing and gaining understanding of cultures, and subcultures that are now more socially acceptable and less obscure. However, these cultures and subcultures had much resistance in understanding them initially and the coupling of resistance only made these obstacles more cumbersome. Obstacles can only be overcome by addressing them directly and not sweeping them under the rug. The discussion of prisoners and their effort to make successful reentry in society is an obscure topic. Furthermore, dissecting how stigma affects the discussion and participation to better understand the topic. Also, to relate to prisoners' uncertainty in their future, as we are all experiencing in the COVID 19 pandemic. To better communicate and pay attention to Gatekeepers of prisoners' children, which are the mothers, and the financial aspect of stress, uncertainty and creating programs to reduce it.]

SCENE ONE

[Angela is parking her 2006 Honda Accord at her Community college parking lot]

ANGELA

Just two more semesters and I'll have my A.A.

[She hooks her college parking permit to her rearview mirror, picks up her backpack and puts alarm on her car]

PROFESSOR MEJIA

Angela Garza!?

ANGELA

Here!

PROFESSOR MEJIA

Ok, today we will be discussing voting in elections. We have discussed the electoral college, Senate, house of representatives Now how about Voting rights for prisoners. Should they be allowed to vote for policy and candidates?

[Angela cringes, she has a child, Edwin, and Edwin's father is serving a long prison sentence.]

ALEX

No, because if a person does the crime, they should do the time. Giving voting rights to ex-prisoners. will result in lighter policy, lighter policy consequences, and less consideration of laws can lead to chaos.

PROFESSOR MEJIA

Possibly, but this is not a far-fetched idea. I mean advancements are and

have happened. Take for instance, the contrast to white and other cultures and subcultures. Women and minorities have dealt with a glass ceiling. Discourse and Equal pay Act in 1963 by Kennedy and in 2009 Obama signed a bill, The Lilly Ledbetter Pay Act [218]. This increasing pay and easier to produce suing for unfair pay also both these cultures once not allowed to vote.

ALEX

Yeah, but women are different from criminals; they didn't breach laws.

GABRIEL

The point is discourse on change, how women surpass their household expectations. Also, how minorities face adversity and how the Equal Employment opportunity commission helps reduce discrimination. These cultures faced resistance. And yes prisoners are a subculture but are gaining support, so the chances of voting - not so beyond unbelievable.

PROFESSOR MEJIA

Great understanding, Gabriel.

[Angela feels uncomfortable and refrains from the topic. Class is over and it's 9:30 p.m.]

ERICA

Angela, do you want to grab some Starbucks?

ANGELA

I'm tired Erica, work was rough today, and I could barely stay awake for our poli-sci class.

ERICA

Yeah, ok well how about the weekend?

ANGELA

I can't. Edwin needs a haircut, and my mom can't watch him.

ERICA

Babysitter? Can't Edwin's dad watch him?

ANGELA

No, he works on the weekends.

ERICA

Ok, well let me know when you can, okay?

ANGELA

Ok, bye.

[Angela lives with her parents and is struggling financially.]

EDWIN

Mama!

ANGELA

Come here, baby.

[Edwin is 5 and is told his father is away at work.]

I don't know how to deal with all this.

[Angela doesn't get too close to college classmates because of her baby daddy, and she feels excluded.]

I wish I could talk to my classmates, but I don't want them to pity me and Edwin.

[Angela is frustrated because the exclusion and inability to participate in informal groups after class activities.]

I hate not having any idea how to deal with this. Money is short and It'll be best to have Edwin not continue to know his dad, John.

SCENE II

ROGER

I miss John, he was funny. He always had jokes, Tia.

[Mary is John's momma.]

MARY

Yes, well tell your mom to text me bye.

[Mary is still uneasy about her son's prison sentence and does not know how to cope when

he is brought up.]

DIANA

Mom, have you sought support groups on how to deal with John's incarceration?

MARY

What? Don't talk crazy.

DIANA

You need to-

MARY

I need to do what!? Tell people my son is in prison?! And what else? That I drive hundreds of miles to see him. And also that they search me and degrade me to see him! Tell who!?

DIANA

A support group.

MARY

This isn't AA. What group? There's no such thing!

SCENE III

JOHN

Look, Angela I'm in college, I finished my computer vocation—

ANGELA

(*interrupts*)

Good, but I'm struggling, John. I work, go to school, I can't take Edwin to see you. It's too expensive. These calls are expensive too.

[robotic voice over the phone: "you have 60 seconds"]

JOHN

When I get out, I'll be able to work. Tell Edwin I love him. Bye.

ANGELA

Ok, bye.

[They never speak again]

END

Higher Expectations

BALEEGH BROWN

Characters: Brown, Interviewee

Setting: *A sunny weekend afternoon in spring smiles it's warmth down on the men as they converse.*

FIRST INTERVIEW

BROWN

Hey, how are you?

INTERVIEWEE

I'm doing fine.

BROWN

Good. I would like to ask you a few questions pertaining to your experiences of being incarcerated and being released. Is that cool with you?

INTERVIEWEE

Yes.

BROWN

Have you paroled from prison before?

INTERVIEWEE

Yes.

BROWN

How long did you serve before you was released?

INTERVIEWEE

Let me see, from 2004 to 2015. I did about 10 years and 8 months.

BROWN

What custody level did you serve your time on?

INTERVIEWEE

I started at level 3 and went all the way up to camp, then went back to a level one facility.

BROWN

How long did it take to adjust to living in prison?

INTERVIEWEE

I think it started in the county jail. That's where you learn all the rules on how to live in prison. So, for me going to prison was just like moving to a new dorm, the rules don't change at least coming from LA county.

BROWN

When you paroled was it to a transitional house or family household?

INTERVIEWEE

Family household.

BROWN

How many people lived in the household with you?

INTERVIEWEE

Four.

BROWN

What were some of your anticipatory expectations of living in this household and how did they compare to real life?

INTERVIEWEE

I really didn't have many expectations, something I noticed was that when I came home it was things that needed to be done and they expected me to get it done. I expected things to go smooth. I was really hopeful but then I had like, a reality check. What I hoped to achieve didn't come so easy, I had to figure out how I would bring in a steady income.

BROWN

Was there any conflict behind differences in ideas of how something should be carried out?

INTERVIEWEE

It wasn't really my place to say how to run a household, but I'm going to do what I got to do. I guess it could have been cleaner, it was really disorganized.

BROWN

How did this make you feel?

INTERVIEWEE

Like I needed to move.

BROWN

What was your approach to solving this conflict?

INTERVIEWEE

I just let it be, as long as it wasn't immediately in my way. You are not in prison doing what you want to do. You just gotta focus on what matters.

BROWN

What influenced the way you observe, approach, and resolve conflict?

INTERVIEWEE

I'm not really sure I think each situation is handled differently. It could be culture, that's just how I am.

BROWN

What is your level of comfortability in that household on a scale from 0 to 5. 5 being the most comfortable.

INTERVIEWEE

I guess somewhere around 4 or 5.

SECOND INTERVIEW

BROWN

Hey what's up?

INTERVIEWEE

Whats up?

BROWN

I'm going to ask you a few questions for some research I'm doing.

INTERVIEWEE

Oh alright, that's cool.

BROWN

Have you been paroled from prison before?

INTERVIEWEE

Yes.

BROWN

How long did you serve before you was released on parole?

INTERVIEWEE

Five years and eleven months.

BROWN

What custody level did you serve your time?

INTERVIEWEE

I spent my first three years on level four and two years 11 months on a level two.

BROWN

How long did it take to adjust to living in prison?

INTERVIEWEE

I'd say like the first 30 days in county jail but once I got into prison, it was right away.

BROWN

You paroled to a transitional or a family household?

INTERVIEWEE

Family household.

BROWN

How many people lived in the household with you?

INTERVIEWEE

Three, both my parents and me.

BROWN

What were some of your anticipatory expectations living in this household and how did they compare to reality?

INTERVIEWEE

My parents were a lot stricter than I expected.

BROWN

Was there any conflict behind differences in idea of how something should be carried out?

INTERVIEWEE

Not really just when I used to smell like weed.

BROWN

How did this make you feel?

INTERVIEWEE

Like a minor.

BROWN

What was your approach to solving this conflict?

INTERVIEWEE

I just complied with what they wanted. Didn't want to be confrontational.

BROWN

What was your level of comfortability in the household on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 being most comfortable?

INTERVIEWEE

Five.

END

So Close and yet So Far: A conversation about Family Communication from Behind Bars

DAVID E. RUIZ

Characters: DAVID, DAMIEN, LEO, ALBERT, JAKE, JACOB

[For this assignment, I interviewed 5 individuals at separate times. For sake of length, I will be writing it as a group interview, even though it was a one-on-one interview for each participant. The participants are not aware who the other participants are, though they may know each other independently. A total of 15 questions were asked, 10 questions for Dr. Afary's assignments, and 5 questions for Professor Black's assignment. Dr. Afary's questions will be addressed as Part I and Professor Black's question will be addressed as Part II.

The setting of the yard was appropriate for external validity. Since we all spend long periods of time in our cells, people are very social in the yard, which allowed us to converse better than usual. I gave pseudonyms to the participants for the sake of confidentiality.

I will begin with Part I of the interview. As we are coming out to the yard, we meet outside and greet each other. We pick a table; once seated, I get all the materials ready and comment on yard gossip and updates. Once settled, we begin.]

DAVID

So, first off, I will be writing as we speak so please bear with me.

DAMIEN

No problem.

LEO

Take your time.

ALBERT

I ain't tripping.

[Jake and Jacob did not respond but showed no frustration.]

DAVID

Okay, this interview is being conducted for an assignment for Cal State. We were asked to gather data for a possible play, but I also am doing it for personal research. Are you okay with me sharing this information with my professor?

ALL PARTICIPANTS

Yes.

DAVID

Thank you. Let's begin. The first question is: Do you have any family, if so who? For example, your mom, dad, siblings, etc.

DAMIAN

Yes, I have both my parents, and a stepmom. I also have an older brother, older sister, and younger brother and younger sister.

JACOB

Yeah, I have a father, mother, 3 sisters and 1 brother.

JAKE

Sister, mother, g-mom, 6 aunts and uncles.

LEO

I don't have no immediate family, only children and grandchildren, I have friends and cousins.

ALBERT

My mom, 6 brothers and 4 sisters, one baby boy and one baby girl.

DAVID

Good. Question 2 is: What are some of the hardest things that you have to deal with when it comes down to familial relationships?

DAMIAN

The deaths of my loved ones, not being there to comfort and console my family. Oh, the financial strains that I put on them. The avenues that we

don't have, which cause a lack of communication. Not being able to raise my kids, and not being able to protect them.

ALBERT

Trying to be a good father to my kids while being separated from them. Coping with the loss of loved ones, definitely.

LEO

I feel the separation is the hardest for any person in prison. Also, having to deal with different personalities from both sides of the fence; it makes it harder for our family relationships.

JACOB

It's hard not being able to be those when things get tough, also not being part of family functions, milestones, and weddings. Uh, father-daughter activities of school and graduations.

JAKE

Family dying is always hard, but aside from that, communication is difficult with one call a day.

DAVID

I feel you; it sucks, doesn't it? Well, how has prison affected your relationships?

JAKE

I rarely talk to my extended family. I talk to moms and my sister regularly. My grandma too, we're still close.

JACOB

For me, it has been good. We communicate more, especially with my parents. Before, I took my family for granted. Now, I have mature conversations with them, and we bond better.

LEO

It has caused cracks in relationships, plus it caused hardships on family by means of visiting restrictions. Lack of family correspondence or phone calls or the stress from guards.

ALBERT

I can't communicate with my family when and how I want. Sometimes, it feels like out of sight, out of mind.

DAMIAN

We have grown apart in some ways. We don't tend to speak as openly as we once did. They don't rely on me as they used to due to my absence.

DAVID

How has communication changed?

DAMIAN

We talk less, and when we do talk, they seem to hold back a little on information that they think will hurt me emotionally.

ALBERT

Letters can't capture the same emotions as face-to-face communication, so your messages get lost in translation. The same thing with 15-minute phone calls.

LEO

It's hard to communicate because in the prison world, nothing changes but the faces. On my side, not being included in daddy activities, the ups and downs, the intimacy with my wives, interactions with my kids deeply affects the communication.

JACOB

When my parents come to visit, I speak as the man I intend to be. I am no longer afraid or avoid talking to my parents. My identity crisis made me reclusive. Communication has grown.

JAKE

It's just more sporadic.

DAVID

Have your bonds changed? In what ways?

JAKE

We have gotten much closer, actually. We learned a lot about each other as we got older.

JACOB

Me and my older brother are not so close because he has schizophrenia. It makes it hard. I've got closer to my dad the most.

LEO

Being absent deteriorated our bonds. For example, I have three daughters and wasn't there for their weddings, children being born, or special days. That changed my relationships.

ALBERT

Well, specifically, when it comes to my children, I feel more like "daddy" than a father. Because I haven't been there for them and missed so many important moments.

DAMIAN

I would have been closer to my family if I hadn't come to prison. We all still maintain a small bond, but it's just not as strong, because I got locked up. I've been locked up for over three decades.

DAVID

How does communication work between them and you?

DAMIAN

I write letters, communicate via phone calls, used to do a little facetime back in the days, family visits and regular visits; we talk, I listen to them and vice versa, we ask questions and what not.

ALBERT

I talk to them on the phone when I can and I send letters, but I don't usually get a response.

LEO

The only communication I have today is through mail and the occasional phone call.

JACOB

I get to call my father all the time, and my mom too. I write letters to my sisters and sometimes I see them when visiting. Once in a while I talk to my brother.

JAKE

We talk over the phone, letters if I'm on lockdown or ask the homie to shoot me.

DAVID

Can communication improve?

JAKE

Of course, if the institution approved better means to.

JACOB

Always, I used to get mail all the time, but as years went by, it slowed down. If I was able to talk to them more often would be good, that would help.

LEO

The CDCR can modify their policies to allow longer phone calls or at times of day where our people can actually talk. Honesty is one way, where many times people hold back on information to not burden us.

ALBERT

Yes, but nothing compares to face-to-face- communication.

DAMIAN

Man, communication can always improve. I would love to get more visits and letters. Ultimately, I would like to be free, so I'll be able to improve our communication.

DAVID

What can be done to improve your relationships?

DAMIAN

Listen to one another and not be too quick to criticize or argue with each other. We should be more caring, man. We could show even more concern. Look, once I'm out of prison, my relationships are going to be way better 'cause I'll be there.

ALBERT

Being present; but until then speaking to them more often.

LEO

I can make an effort to correspond, ensure phone calls at one point, and make sure all my family and friends know I'm there even though I live in prison.

JAKE

Give us JPay tablets so we can email each other or institutionally approved cell phones! Of course, letting me out of prison early would help.

DAVID

How has your family been affected by your incarceration?

JAKE

It makes them really sad, but they're hopeful because I have a release date. They know they don't have to worry about me so that relieves a lot of the stress.

JACOB

My daughter doesn't have her dad, so her life is definitely affected in many ways. My family got closer. My mom was depressed at first but now she's got stronger.

LEO

Mentally, they are probably embarrassed, and hardships for all of them. I imagine that emotionally this incarceration is the hardest.

ALBERT

My children face many challenges in life without their father.

DAVID

What are the hardest things you've dealt with due to your incarceration?

DAMIAN

Life without the possibility of parole plus five years. It's like a slower death sentence. I was commuted though to 27-to-life. The hit and run murder of Maccaia in 2011, and the tragic shooting of my boy, Miles, in 2016. I still have trouble with the last two.

ALBERT

The loss of close family and being absent from my kids' lives.

LEO

The crossing of my mother into the spirit world and divorce.

JACOB

Being separated from my daughter and family. Coming to prison for a crime that I did not commit. The separation of my baby's mom and me. No one likes to feel lonely and that's how I feel.

JAKE

Probably SHU time [*segregated housing unit*], isolation is pretty boring.

DAVID

So, the first question is: are you commonly included in familial decision making?

JAKE

Hell no! not at all. With my wife, yes, but not with my family. I'm the youngest, no one listens to me.

JACOB

I am not included in any family decisions.

LEO

I do provide prayers, financial skills and conversation when possible to ensure that my opinion as a father, grandfather and elder is known.

ALBERT

Nope! I don't learn about most decisions until after they are made.

DAMIAN

Ah, not really. They actually make good decisions but sometimes they do ask for my opinion.

DAVID

How do you prefer decisions to be made, as a family?

DAMIAN

I trust my family. I would prefer that they would consider everyone in the decision-making process.

ALBERT

I prefer to have more input. Especially when it comes down to my kids. For example, if I had any input, I would have said that my daughter, who is 12 years old, doesn't need a phone.

LEO

By talking, to make sure that I understand all sides then make my position known.

JACOB

I prefer decisions that are made for the good of the family. I have never been included in a family decision, but that is how I would do it.

JAKE

Fortunately, my family does pretty good for themselves, I trust their judgment.

DAVID

Do you have any beliefs concerning the way that your family makes decisions?

JAKE

I believe that they are intelligent and competent. I'm not worried about their decisions.

JACOB

Yes, my dad is very traditional and conservative, so I find myself adopting some of his beliefs, but I'm a bit more liberal.

LEO

I believe strongly in prayer, like people say, "A family that prays together, stays together." Even after divorce.

ALBERT

Same as the other question.

DAMIAN

My belief is this: Do what you got to do to get things done as long as it's ethical, legal, and moral.

DAVID

Well, what's the most important aspect of decision making?

DAMIAN

Trust, accountability, risk-importance. Whatever decision you make, I think that we should involve the input of everyone involved.

ALBERT

To make a decision that is beneficial for all parties involved, and to go through a process in a fair manner.

LEO

Being responsible for the decisions that you make, putting thoughtful input in, considering the pros and cons.

JACOB

Being selfless, not thinking about yourself but the whole family. Being unbiased and being in agreement. Like being on the same page.

JAKE

Using logic and facts, not emotions. If you don't know, find out. If you still don't know, ask me. I know everything.

DAVID

Alright, the last question is: Is there a hierarchy in your family when you identify, assess, and apply solutions from decisions made?

JAKE

My mom runs her affairs, my sister's the same, and I run my own. If there was a need for consensus, we are all pretty smart so we would choose whatever solution that would put our family in the best situation. My mom would assume the head of the hierarchy though since she's the matriarch of our little mafia.

JACOB

No, everyone is included, but my dad's opinion does carry a lot of weight, though.

LEO

I believe in traditions, including mine. Fathers are usually the head of the household, but in Choctaw, Indians have a matriarchal system so females, especially grandma's rule the roosts.

ALBERT

If there is a hierarchy, it definitely feels like I'm at the bottom.

DAMIAN

The older generation usually has the say so, unless their decision is irrational. Then, the family chimes in to get a better solution.

DAVID

Well, this concludes the interview. Thank you so much for your help and being patient.

This concludes the interviews.

END

Father Figures

DAVID LEE JR.

Characters: D, R, A, Guy at Phone 2

Setting: *At a table in a prison dayroom near a pair of phones attached to the wall.*

TOWER OFFICER

[Speaking· over PA system]

11:15 phone calls! Make sure you step out with your mask on!

[D and R *sit at the dayroom table playing chess while waiting for phone calls and showers]*

R

This is crazy, they trippin' on us about wearing our masks and they don't even wear theirs. They gonna probably be the ones to bring that corona stuff in here.

D

Yeah but these masks are doing more harm than good anyway.

R

Here you go!

[Sighs]

Why you say that man?

[Rolling eyes]

D

Man, ain't nobody washing they mask, and they touch the mask then touch other stuff which causes cross contamination.

R

Blah, blah, blah!

D

Blah., blah, CHECK!

[Animated]

R

So what, that's a frivolous check.

D

We gonna see.

TOWER OFFICER

[Speaking over P.A. system]

211 put your mask on or lock it up!

['A' walks over to the table where 'D' and 'R' are playing chess, sits down motion to the guy on Phone 2 and points to his watch.]

A

What's up y'all, who been winning?

D

[Sarcastically]

Really!

R

He won one game!

D

It's about to be two! CHECK!

['A' faces Phone 2 and stares at guy on the phone; 'D' looks at 'A' and then looks at 'R']

D

Damn "A" what time you got on the phone man?

A

12:00pm.

['D' and 'R' laugh hysterically]

D

Calm down 'A', it's only 11:20.

A

I know, I just want to make sure nobody goes over their time.

R

You a phone bandit, and you gonna get in a wreck over that phone.

A

I ain't no phone bandit, it's just because of the Corona virus the phones are free and everybody want to use them all of a sudden.

R

So what people want to call and talk to their families, ain't that why you want to use the phone?

A

Yep.

['A' looks at the guy on phone one and points to his watch again.]

D

Bro, stop doing that, let him enjoy his call.

A

I just don't want him to enjoy none of my call.

[Tower officer comes to side window.]

TOWER OFFICER

Hey, are you gonna shower?

D

Who me?

TOWER OFFICER

Yeah!

D

Yeah, but I got an 11:45 phone call, can I get my call first?

TOWER OFFICER

Alright.

A

You got an 11:45, you better not go into my call!

R

You just want to call and make sure Sancho not with your girl.

A

[Sarcastically]

Ha, ha!

[Conversation interrupted by guy on phone 2 crying and blowing kisses into the phone]

D

[Talking to 'A']

That's how you gonna be when you find out Sancho is at your house.

R

She probably breaking up with him.

GUY ON PHONE 2

I'm sorry boo-boo, I miss you, love.

['D' and 'R' snickering]

A

That's not funny, that could be y'all.

R

Not me, I use these free calls to call my kids, not a woman.

D

Me too.

D

'A', do you have kids?

['A' ignoring 'D' and staring at the guys on the phone; 'D' and 'R' continue to play chess]

R

Check, and give me your queen, or checkmate.

D

Check? Alright, I'm outta check, now what?

R

Ya girl chose me, gimme ya queen.

D

Man, you will fall for anything.

R

Huh!

D

You got my girl, but I got checkmate.

R

Damn, I didn't see that.

D

I did.

R

Hey, what time is it?

D

11.

[Tower officer interrupts]

TOWER OFFICER

[Speaking over P.A. system]

11:30 phone calls, make sure you have on your masks.

GUY ON PHONE 2

I'm so sorry babe, I really love you, daddy's gotta go, but I will call you tomorrow. Okay, kisses.

[Guy hangs up phone and walks to table where 'A', 'D', and 'R' are sitting]

GUY ON PHONE 2

[Approaches 'A']

Hey 'A' sorry if I went a couple of minutes into your time, but my daughter had a surgery a couple of weeks ago and this was the first time I got to talk to her since her surgery.

D

Man don't trip off of him, it ain't even his phone time next.

A

It is next after next.

GUY ON PHONE 2

'A' you need to kick back.

[Walks away]

A

Damn bro, why you gotta throw me under the bus like that! You guys were the ones laughing when you thought he was talking to his girl. I bet you feel stupid now that you see it was his daughter.

R

Whatever.

D

It's a trip how many people don't get to talk to their kids on a regular basis especially with this coronavirus situation.

['A' looking at the new guy on phone 2 and points to his watch]

A

I don't care as long as they don't talk to their families during my phone time.

D

'A,' do you have kids?

A

Yep.

D

I know 'R' has kids too, do you think I can ask you guys some questions for my class?

R

Questions! Who are you, Lester Holt?

D

Man seriously, it's only 20 questions.

A

Look, I ain't got time for 20 questions because I'm not gonna let you be late to your phone call because then you gonna try to cut into mine's.

R

Yeah, I got a 12:00 call too so I can't answer all of those questions.

A

How about two questions.

D

It's 11:38, how about I ask questions until it's my phone time?

R

That's cool.

A

A'ight!

[Reluctantly]

But I'm gonna face this way so I can watch my phone.

R

Yo phone!

[Scoffs]

D

Okay, first question: How many kids do you have?

R

13.

['D' and 'A' simultaneously]

DAMN!

R

I started young, but at least I claim all of mine's!

A

What you tryna say.

R

Baby mama drama! That's what I'm saying.

D

Focus y'all, we don't have that much time.

A

I have two.

R

That you claiming.

D

Boys or girls?

A

Two boys.

R

I have 11 girls and 2 boys.

D

What are their ages?

A

My baby is 56, and my oldest is 56 and a half.

D

What!

R

What he saying is that he wasn't faithful to May Jean.

A

Her name is Opal.

R

Same thing.

D

Come on, be serious for ten minutes.

['A' looking at his watch]

A

You mean 4 minutes.

D

'R,' I don't need you to tell me all your kids' ages, are they all under 21?

R

Except one, He 24 and he in the military.

['A' mocking 'R' by saluting him]

D

Next question: How much time do you have?

A

I only got 48 years left.

R

He will never make it.

A

I'm in good shape to be 72.

R

Not good enough to do 48 more years!

D

'R' how much time you got?

R

18 months left.

A

He will be back.

D

Fellas just focus for five more questions, please.

D

How often do you communicate with your kids?

R

With the free phone calls, every day now.

A

Me too.

D

Has it made your relationships with your kids better by talking to them more regularly?

R

Yeah, I really feel closer to my kids when I get to talk to them.

A

My kids are grown, but I have been here most of their lives. So, I have been more of a father figure than a father, and now I use these calls to try to be there for them as much as possible.

R

That's real talk, no matter if it's phones, letters, visits, or even family visits, I never get a chance to be a real father in c here like 'A' said I'm more of a father figure, but from a distance.

D

When you do get to experience the different modes of communication with your kids, which is the most effective?

'A' and 'R'

[simultaneously]

FAM BAMS!

D

Why, I'm not married so I haven't had that experience, what makes it so special?

R

You get to hold your kids and show them how much you love them.

A

My sons don't do the family visits that often, but my wife bring my grandkids up here and for a person in prison it's a one-of-a-kind experience.

D

Alright, two questions left, anyone can answer them for the sake of time. What has been the most challenging?

A

For me, it's been losing loved ones and missing that opportunity to really tell them how you feel about them.

R

Also, missing so many milestones in my kids' lives has been really tough. I don't have life, but I have been in and out of the pen for most of their life and I've missed so much.

A

I know exactly what you going through, I've been through all of that.

D

That leads me to my final question: What advice would you give someone who is in a similar position?

A

I got this one, being in prison seems like an impossible obstacle to overcome, but you have to be dedicated to being a good father and you will be.

A

If you have to only rely on one form of communication to be a good parent then you have to use it to the best of your ability. Just because I feel like a father figure at times, has never discouraged me from trying to be the best father I can.

D

That's deep. Look we have about a minute left can I ask one last question?

A

What?

R

Cool.

D

What can be done to make communication with families better? It doesn't have to be limited to your kids, but family in general.

A

I think it's simple, we need to get with the changing times and have more access to technology. Everybody has some sort of mobile device out there and that's how they stay connected, we need the same thing in order to stay connected to them and to reality.

A

Alright, thank both of y'all for your ti—

[Tower interrupts]

TOWER OFFICER

11:45 phone calls! make sure you step out with your mask on.

['A' grabbing 'D' by the arm]

A

Come on, man, it's your phone time don't be a second late!

Recorded and Monitored

DEON WHITMORE

Characters: Narrator, Operator, Protagonist

Setting: *The Protagonist sitting at a phone in a prison dayroom, first reading a letter, then calling and talking on the phone.*

NARRATOR

[voice of young woman]

Dear Deon,

I hope everything is going ok with you. I missed your phone call yesterday. I was at the store and our son had the phone. I was hoping you'd called back because I really wanted to hear your voice. Well, your family is doing all right, missing you a lot and wishing you were here. I know I tell you that a lot and I don't mean to stress you, but I know you being here will make everything better or at least that's what I think. I really wanted to talk to you about your daughters. I've been really trying to figure it out and I don't want you worrying, but I don't know what else I can do. I need help badly because everything I tell them they act like I'm trying to ruin their life. The

first thing they say is my dad would let me do it and my husband, I know for sure you will not approve of our son's bullshit they are doing. It seems like you are the only person that understands them and I don't get it when I'm here with them every day. It feels like I'm failing as a parent, but I'm sorry for telling you all this. I know there is only so much you can do in there. You need to write them and tell them about themselves before I hurt them. Well, your son is getting big, his counselor came by the house and he did a good job. They diagnosed him with Autism, so he is going to require a lot more time. I'm gonna do whatever I can to make sure he is all right. I am so overwhelmed, but I know I have to do this or no one else will. Hopefully, we can visit soon. I miss you a lot. I just wanted to write before I go to sleep and first you know what's going on with your family. Please call soon. We got a lot to talk about.

Love,

Suga

OPERATOR

You have a collect call from …

PROTAGONIST

[recording of Protagonist's voice plays over the phone]

"Your husband, babe."

OPERATOR

If you wish to accept this call press now, if you wish to block any future call press 9 now. Thank you for using Global-telink.

PROTAGONIST

How you doing babe, I really miss you. Well, I was just chilling in my cell thinking about you, I knew I had a phone call coming so I rushed out here to call you. I'm good babe tell me how you've been doing? How is work

going? How was your day? Oh wow I'm sorry, I know I'm talking fast. I just don't wanna miss nothing. Do you miss me like I have been missing you? I can't wait to come home and be with you. I feel like a lot of things will be easier on you. I know…

OPERATOR

This call is from an inmate in a California state prison. This call is being recorded.

PROTAGONIST

Babe, did you hear what I said. I was saying, I know having me by your side is gonna make you feel better. I need you to keep it together for us, my time is getting closer. What's wrong I can tell when you are thinking about something. My daughter has been getting in trouble doing what? Is she there now, let me talk to her… What's up with you, daughter, how have you been doing? How is school going? Why are you getting in trouble? I know you hear me talking to you, you not gonna say nothing? Did you get the letter I wrote you, are you gonna write me back?

OPERATOR

This telephone call is being recorded and monitored.

PROTAGONIST

Babe you still there can you hear me? What you over there doing, I can tell you doing something. I miss you every day and I know it's hard on you with your father being away. I wish I could change the past and instead be right there with you. Your momma told me you keep talking at school, but when I ask you a question you don't wanna say nothing. I only got a few minutes left. Let me talk to your momma. I love you.

I don't know what's wrong with her. I used to be able to get through to her, but now she doesn't listen to nothing I said. She started liking boys now

huh ain't she too young for that. Why would you even let her think it's cool to have a boyfriend. She should be focusing on school. You need to be harder on her, stop always buying her stuff when she doesn't deserve it! She ain't got no reason to be doing all that you buy her whatever she wants.

OPERATOR

This is a collect call from an inmate in California state prison. This call is being recorded.

PROTAGONIST

Damn that operator, keep repeating the same shit over and over. They only give us 15 minutes and 5 minutes of that is reminding us we are being recorded. Sorry babe you still didn't tell me how you was doing? Please don't give up, you are the glue that keeps this family together. When this all over I'm gonna let you take a vacation, you can relax and do absolutely nothing. I'm gonna be your personal maid and chef but hold on I just need you to tell me what to do. I promise I'm gonna make it up to you. I know that's gonna make you happy.

OPERATOR

You have 60 seconds…

PROTAGONIST

That's my time, I love you, babe, don't forget to call about my package, send those stamps off tell the kids I love them, I'm gonna call you tomorrow. Have a good night.

OPERATOR

This phone is disabled.

Letting Go of Stoic Masks

GUSTAVO J. TAMAYO

Characters: Gustavo, Francisco, Macio

Setting: *At a table on the yard, mostly cloudy skies block and obscure a dull yellow sun.*

SCENE I

GUSTAVO

It all started during childhood, and we weren't even conscious of it.

The stories of Francisco Herrera and Macio Lindsey both emulate a key difficulty of family communication for incarcerated individuals. The key difficulty is that of negotiating their identities as convicts with their identities as family members [son, father, uncle, husband, brother]. Their experiences in prison all resonate with the struggles of being in the dark shadows of captivity while learning how to maneuver around that darkness when communicating with their family [as best as they know how]. I first

interviewed a man I've come to consider a friend and someone I can come to for guidance. His name is Francisco Herrera, he has been incarcerated for 30 years with a prison sentence of life without parole. Interestingly, Francisco was as candid as can be when expressing his remarks and thoughts on negotiating his identity as a convict and a family member.

FRANCISCO

Homie, I remember my mom staying up till one, two in the morning until I got home. I'd tell her, Mom, what you doing up? Go to sleep! And she'd reply, "Ya comiste? (Have you ate?) Ay comida en la estufa! (there's food on the stove)". She'd still show her love knowing that I was out and about, up to no good. And it continues in prison. I'm in here turned up ready to hurt the next man and my mom writes me letters talking about how much she misses me and loves me and hopes I'm staying out of trouble.

GUSTAVO

Okay, so have you ever withheld information from your family due to prison living?

FRANCISCO

[Without a blink in his eyes and a firm tone says…]

All the time. It's like this - prison is a dark, lonely place. But you can't let those thoughts consume you. You need to be focused on your surroundings. So that's why we're always wearing that stoic mask and that goes when you're talking to your family too. You tell them about how you played in the softball game at yard, about how you work out/exercise, and educate yourself.

But you ain't telling them how two dudes OD'd *[overdosed]* in two block, or how so and so got whacked on the yard, or how there's tension with the blacks in four block. And then there's times when you want to ask them for money to go to the canteen or order a package, but you hear them talking about their financial struggles they're going through out there. So how can I ask them for money? Instead, I lie to them, if they ask if I need anything, I tell them not to worry about me, I'm good.

GUSTAVO

Do you think you've had to re-develop your identity as a family member due to your incarceration?

FRANCISCO

[Francisco looks at Gustavo for a quick second and with the same sincerity in his look and posture, he expresses…]

It took years, but through self-reflection and understanding I figured out how I wasn't just harming people I considered enemies…

I was harming my family with the bullshit. And then you hear it when you finally see them face to face like they'd ask me, why haven't you called us? or why haven't you written to us? And the best thing I could tell them was, I'm not trying to be a burden.

But I'm telling them that my mind is on getting ready to go to the hole cause some shit gotta get taken care of. So I had to learn that even though I wasn't telling them, I was still dragging them down with me. And these self-enlightening thoughts helped give me clarity on how I was causing the same type of pain since I was a kid. Like how I told you my mom would stay up late waiting to see if I'd make it home?

At that moment, I wasn't tripping on the pain I was causing mom, I was tripping on why she was up waiting for me. It took me years, like decades, to realize that I was bullshit for making them go through the madness I was involved in. But that's just how it was.

As the years went by, I started learning how to communicate better by talking to my little nieces and nephews. I'd seen them as kids and then to see them years later and realize they ain't four- or five-years old no more. They had a growth spurt and everything. They were still kids, but I wouldn't talk to them like how most adults talk to kids, I talked to them like adults and told them the truth with hopes that they wouldn't get caught up in life, like I did. I'd give them their space in the world. Cause I remember when I

was a kid visiting my Dad in San Quentin and feeling like I was being dragged. And that's how I'd relate to my little nieces and nephews and communicate with them whenever they came with my sisters and mom to visit me. I'd tell them something like, "I know you guys didn't want to come, so I just want to thank you guys for being here. You really make me happy when I get to spend time with you."

SCENE II

GUSTAVO

My next interview was with a genuine, cool minded individual and fellow Golden Eagle, Macio Lindsey. I interviewed him through the side of his jail cell door while he was locked in, I was outside of my cell and on my building porter duties. I couldn't get a visual of his facial expressions or body language, yet his serene and calm tone of voice presented an obvious sincerity behind his words. I began with my first question, asking, "Have you ever faced any difficulties in negotiating your identities as a convict and a family member while in prison?"

MACIO

Well yeah. As a family member you try to be the way you were on the streets, like being self-sufficient and independent. But then you learn the restricted limitations that prison presents which makes it difficult to be self-sufficient or independent. So now I have to rely on my family, like my brother, to accept my collect calls, if I ever do need anything.

GUSTAVO

Do you also withhold information from his family?

MACIO

You know, there's situations that arise on the yard you're not telling them about, you're not telling them about the politics on the yard because you don't want to alarm them. So, what I learned to do was to prep them ahead of time, you know what I mean? I let them know, "If you don't hear from me in a couple of days, if I don't call, we might be on lockdown or I might be in the hole, so have some stamps and envelopes ready to send me just in case."

It makes it more difficult when you're on lockdown, you know what I mean? There's no access to the phone or visits. And as a father, losing those privileges makes it harder for me to communicate with my son and maintain our relationship. Cause I can't even be there for him, and you can't compare letter writing to seeing each other face to face. I'm so used to seeing him every other week and looking forward to seeing what's going on with him in his life. It was almost like a ritual for us, you know what I mean? So, when a lockdown comes, you start feeling like you abandoned that ritual due to circumstances beyond our control.

GUSTAVO

Do you think you've had to re-develop your identity as a family member due to your incarceration?

MACIO

[With clarity, Macio dives right into the question.]

Yeah, I had to re-develop from hands-on assistance to, now through incarceration, more effective communication through the limited channels we have. My son understood these limitations and how we had to rely on communication as a trust essential. Cause prior to my incarceration, I could threaten him with a whooping if he did something wrong and it'd be effective, you know what I mean? But I can't be the disciplinarian from prison like how I was out there, so I have to rely on my communication, as well as my communal support you know - like my mom, wife, aunty, and brother. I could reach out to them for the disciplinary aspect of things if need be, but even then it's not the same as me being there as a father to my son.

GUSTAVO

These interviews were heartfelt conversations held by men whose incarceration has played a pivotal role in their identities as family members and convicts.

END

Stuck in Prison

JASON KEATON

Characters: J, Protagonist 1

Setting: *A young man sits in a darkened room, listening to a voice speak from a distance.*

J

I could sense a slight discomfort in the protagonist when I asked her to reveal her inner thoughts, private fears, worries, joys, existing and not. The truth lay in her answers, as my questions have long since become a silence I fail to remember. Time has lost its focus, and these thoughts are all that remain.

PROTAGONIST 1

[speaking in earnest tones]

…especially during the holidays when I just want my man home so we can be a complete and happy family. I want my sibling home, enjoying life. It sucks knowing that he's stuck in prison for the time being. I never thought

about it. I guess it does each time I put on this uniform that says correctional officer. To be honest, yes there has been a time or two. I think everybody in this situation has been tested but I thank God that I was able to overcome it because we're almost at the finish line…

…I like that I get to see, touch, smell, and be close to him. I love feeling his vibrations. And I enjoy watching him eat. I just like being able to spend time with my little brother and catch up on topics. Also, I like to physically see that he's doing good and not just hear him say so…

…yes, work can definitely be stressful and mentally taxing. Each day presents something different. One day it's calm, one day all hell is breaking loose, and my life is on the line. I hate that at the end of the visit I can't take him home with me. It tears me up having to leave him and watch him walk back through those blue doors. I hate being processed in. You would think by now it would be more efficient and smoother. But it's still technical and frustrating. Yes, defiance, frustration, long hours, and lack of sleep…

…I love letter writing because we're both poetic and get to flex those skills. Cry, then go shopping to get him new clothes. Yes, that's when I usually take a vacation and spend time with my family. Yes absolutely! Hell yeah it has been there from the get go, throughout his evolution. I even changed his diapers back in the day. Well, when I feel stressed, I'm usually frustrated. When I feel burned out it's because I'm overworked. And when the combination of these things happen, I'm no good for work, self, or family…

END

Communication and Conflict: A View from the Dark Side

JEFF AYERS

Characters: Lucifer, Jeff, Vader

Setting: *The characters casually sit in soft chairs around a wooden round table in the middle of an otherwise unadorned, plain room.*

JEFF

Hello again, everyone, and welcome to another episode of "The Dark Side." On today's show we'll be discussing communication and conflict in group settings like families and organizations. With me in the studio today are some regulars to the show; please welcome the Prince of Darkness himself, and no, I don't mean Ozzy Osbourne! I'm talking about everyone's favorite fallen archangel, Lucifer!

LUCIFER

[Steeples his fingers]

Thank you, Jeff. I'm very glad to be here.

JEFF

It's always good to have you, Lucifer. And now, how about a hearty Dark Side welcome for the darkest of the Sith Lords, Darth Vader!

VADER

Thank you for having me on the show again, Mr. Ayers.

JEFF

The pleasure's ours, Lord Vader. So, gentlemen: Communication and conflict. Let's start by looking at it from a familial perspective. Who wants to go first?

[Lucifer raises his hand]

JEFF

Okay, Lucifer, the floor's all yours.

LUCIFER

Thank you. Well, in my family, conflict was an everyday kind of thing. My father had expectations for my life, I had mine, and we didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things.

JEFF

Like what kind of things?

LUCIFER

Well, my father always told me I was his favorite son, but I noticed my brothers could get away with a lot more stuff than I was allowed to. I used to think to myself, "Okay, Dad said I'm his best and brightest, but then why does he come down so hard on me when I don't meet his expectations? I do everything he wants and more, but when I try to do something I want, it's like the end of the world." Did you know my brother Michael got a girl pregnant, and my father didn't flip out as much as when I brought home a "B" from school? True story.

JEFF

Wow that's some pretty heavy stuff to deal with, Lucifer. I'm guessing that was a big source of conflict between you and your father; his seeming preferential treatment of your brothers. How did you deal with it?

LUCIFER

That's just it, though: there was no dealing with it, at least not in my family. My mother was gone at an early age so my father had to raise me and my brothers solo. Since he was the only parent in the home, he became kind of a super authoritarian figure, you know? "My house, my rules" type. It became pretty unbearable after a while.

JEFF

So how did you deal with the conflict?

LUCIFER

Well, that's just it; I figured there would be no reasoning with my father, so I just did my own thing. I didn't deal with the conflict so much as avoid it. Looking back, maybe that wasn't the best idea, because I ended up getting kicked out of my father's house not too long afterwards. Then again, my life has been pretty stressful since, so maybe it all worked for the best.

JEFF

I see. Do you and your father still talk?

LUCIFER

Not really. I mean, things are cordial at the moment, but I have a feeling that one day it's going to come to a head, and when it does, it's going to be apocalyptic.

JEFF

Well, I think we all wish you the best, Lucifer. Lord Vader, do you wish to weigh in on the subject of conflict in families?

VADER

Yes, I believe I will, Mr. Ayers. Contrary to the experiences of Lucifer there, my family consisted of just my mother and myself. My father, whoever he was, was absent as Lucifer's mother. That said, conflict didn't arise much in my family. I think since it was just my mother and I, we took on the attitude of it being us against the world, and that went a long way towards alleviating any kind of problems between us.

JEFF

You said there wasn't much in the way of conflict in your family, Lord Vader; When It did arise, what was it over, and how was it resolved?

VADER

Much of the conflicts occurred when I was very young. My mother was the sole provider, so that meant I had to do many of the chores around the home when I would've rather been playing.

Sometimes I felt like I was a slave in my own home. That said, I eventually grew to understand it was necessary, because it was unfair of me to expect my mother to come home after working hard cleaning other people's homes and then clean our house as well. After I came to that understanding, everything worked itself out.

JEFF

So the conflicts were resolved amicably, I take it?

VADER

Maybe not right away, but after my mother and I would talk about our differences, they usually got resolved. In fact, when I told her I wanted to pursue a different type of religion, one that I had a strong connection with, she supported my decision wholeheartedly.

JEFF

Sounds like communication was a key factor in maintaining the equilibrium in you and your mother's relationship, Lord Vader. And I think that's a good segue to our next topic: organizational communication. Now, both of you are near or at the top of your respective organizations. And let's be honest, these are some wide-ranging organizations, whether they're galactic…

[Gesturing at Vader]

or … shall we say, Universal.

[Gesturing at Lucifer]

So, from what I have here are some questions for the both of you randomly selected from the submissions sent in by our viewers. Are you gentlemen up for a quick Q and A session?

[Lucifer and Vader both nod and gesture for Jeff to continue]

JEFF

All right, Question Number One: How is conflict resolved in your organization? Lord Vader, would you like to begin?

VADER

Certainly. Conflicts are brought to the attention of a supervisor, who tries to resolve the situation. If that doesn't work, the next higher level of supervisor or manager is brought in to address the issue. Rarely does anything reach the level where I need to become involved. I think the employees prefer it that way; my resolutions can be … final.

JEFF

I see. Lucifer, how about you?

LUCIFER

My organization is a little less rigid. Employees are encouraged to seek solutions on their own before involving the higher-ups. The company feels that giving them a certain level of autonomy promotes better results. As long as the I's are dotted, the T's are crossed, and the contracts are signed, that's all that matters.

JEFF

Good answers, gentleman. Question Number Two: What is the most prevalent type of conflict in your organization? Lucifer, why don't you start us off?

LUCIFER

I'd have to say the comparatively slow promotion rate. One of the complaints I hear most often is how you either have to kill the person ahead of you or wait for them to die in order to get ahead.

JEFF

Lord Vader, how about you?

VADER

I'd have to say the biggest conflict I hear about, when I actually hear about them, deals with the way employee concerns are handled. Some of them, particularly new or low-level workers, feel they cannot bring their issues to their supervisors because doing so will invite unwanted attention from the head office. Frankly, I don't see what their concern is since I handle that personally.

JEFF

[Clears throat]

Right. Question Number Three: Which conflict management style do you employ, and why? Lucifer?

LUCIFER

[Laughs sheepishly]

Well, I kind of hate to admit this, but I've grown accustomed to the Compromise style. The way I look at it, trying to win against my own workers isn't conducive to productivity and in the end, I deal in a volume business, you know? It's all about the number of contracts that get signed, and the number of people we sign up to our side, so if my being flexible from time to time keeps those numbers up, well, that's just smart business if you ask me.

JEFF

And we did, didn't we? Lord Vader, may we have your response?

VADER

My own style is a hybrid of Compromise and Competition. I attempt to find some middle ground whenever possible, but there have been times where an underling has continued to press me on an issue I'd already deemed closed. Perhaps this says something negative about me as a leader, but I feel that once I render a decision on an issue, that should be it. When they press me, I get the mentality that it's crossed from business to personal. I always find that disturbing.

JEFF

Good insight, Lord Vader. Gentlemen, we're down to our last two questions. Question Number Four: How do you think conflict could be better managed in your organization? Who wants to go first on this one?

LUCIFER

I will. If nobody minds. [pauses] No? Okay, then. Part of the problem I see is the organization I run is so vast that a lot tends to get overlooked. Regrettably, that also includes conflict management and resolution. I think this is a problem prevalent in any large bureaucracy, though. Maybe if I broke the organization into smaller chunks, conflict would be easier to deal with effectively.

JEFF

Lord Vader, your thoughts?

VADER

I have to agree with Lucifer; the large size of the organization I work for tends to inhibit effective conflict management. Unfortunately, as large as it is, there really isn't a way to improve it without making it small, at least that I can see.

JEFF

Okay, last question. Question Number Five: Do you think your organization deals well with conflict?

VADER

Ironically, I think this is something it does well on the inter-organizational level, so I would have to say yes. From the intra-organizational viewpoint, there might still be work to do, but that's why they pay me the big bucks; to handle that whenever it arises.

LUCIFER

I kind of agree with Lord Vader. However, I think a little conflict can be a good thing, because that's how new ideas sometimes come about. Again, it's all about the bottom line for me, so as long as everything's in the black, or if you'll forgive me, the red, I'm happy.

JEFF

Great discussion as always, gentleman. Thank you for your contributions and thoughts on our topics today. That's about all the time we have, so on behalf of my guests, Lucifer and Darth Vader, I want to say thank you for watching, and join us next time when we'll be discussing parent-child relationships with Lizzie Borden and the Menendez brothers. Till then, I'm Jeff Ayers, reminding you to take a walk on The Dark Side! Good night, everybody!

Two Character Studies

THAISAN NGUON

Characters: Michael, Terry

Michael

Michael's family composite consists of his father, mother, and younger sister. His father was a very strict and harsh man who regularly used physical abuse to discipline him. Michael never felt close to his father because their relationship was based on fear and violence. Michael often got whooped for the most trivial things. His relationship with his mother was a different story. She was loving, caring, and nurturing; everything a kid could ask for in a mother. Michael would best describe her as "All Love". The relationship he had with his sister was a combination of scripts he learned from his parents. He loved her the way his mother loved him, and he used violence to defend her honor like his father used it to discipline him. Her health issues were a big reason why he was so protective over her. His role in the household was to obey his father's commands and accept the whoopings he was given, to be a good son and do household chores for his mother, and to be both teacher and protector to his sister and little cousins, as he often baby-sat them. Being incarcerated altered some of these roles, created new ones, and had a great impact on the relationships he had with his family.

The role of being his father's punching bag ceased to exist as his parents divorced and he opted to be with his mother. Michael's interaction/communication with his family was minimal at best and whatever little interaction he and his father had before his incarceration diminished even more after he was incarcerated. The fact that he seldom speaks to his father now underscores the kind of distant and fractured relationship they have had his whole life. Unlike his father, Michael has kept steady contact with his mother throughout his incarceration; a stark contrast to what it was like before his incarceration. Their primary form of communication was letter writing, and as phone rates got cheaper, phone calls became more frequent. As the years rolled on and their conversations got deeper, Michael's role of being a good son took on new meaning. It meant being more open and honest with her about everything. Like the reason he was in prison in the first place. He admitted to her that he was guilty of the crimes he was convicted of and apologized to her for carrying on that lie for so long.

Without skipping a beat, she forgave him and told him that she had suspected as much, stating how she always knew when he lied to her. Nevertheless, she also added how grateful and proud she was of him for coming clean. This new meaning of being a good son created two new roles for Michael, confidant and best friend, and their relationship has grown stronger because of it. The relationship between Michael and his sister got stronger as well during his incarceration and there are two major factors that contribute to it. First is the unbreakable bond of love they created through their shared childhood, where Michael always made time to come to his sister's rescue despite his tendency to minimally interact/communicate with her and the family. On a rare occasion when Michael's sister was able to come to visit him in prison with their mother, she shared one of many memorable stories of him defending her.

She had just started High School and a group of kids were bullying her because of her ethnicity. True to form as her protector, Michael confronted all the boys who were bullying her and fought every one of them. The second factor is that their mother keeps each one of them updated on the other because she speaks to both of them pretty frequently. Every so often their mother would convey specific messages back and forth for them. This form of indirect communication was able to keep the both of them relevant in each other's lives and maintain a familiar presence with one another, so

much so that on the occasions when Michael is able to speak to his sister on the phone or during a visit he does not ever feel like he is overstepping when he offers advice into any aspect of her life, in fact, she welcomes it and often takes it. In that respect, Michael is still protecting his little sister by providing her with different perspectives and sound advice to make good decisions in life.

Terry

Terry grew up living with his grandparents, older sister, and younger cousin and his childhood was a mess. Except for the handful of times he has met his mother, she has been absent his entire life, while his father has been present, albeit not living in the same household with him. The adults in his life (grandparents and father) were verbally and physically abusive to him. His grandparents used abuse as a teaching tool to mold him into a "good grandson" who helped around the house as well as a "good Christian" who got involved in the church community. Terry went to church every week with his grandparents where he was an usher and choir singer.

His father used abuse to control and manipulate him into subserviency. He berated Terry about how he should behave as a man and whooped him to reinforce these ideologies. He was whooped for anything and everything his father wanted to shape him into. Terry communicated with his grandparents and father on a minimal basis due to how they treated him. In contrast, he communicated with his sister and cousin more often because they were in the same age group, shared the same interests, and experienced abuse from the same abusers.

They would have lively discussions about their favorite shows, video games, and social lives. They also compared their experiences of whoopings to figure out ways to make it end quicker and be less painful. For instance, they found that if they cried less, then the whoopings would be over soon and by removing the stems of the switch the beating would hurt less. Sometimes, Terry even took whoopings for his sister and cousin because he felt it was his responsibility to protect the two people who meant the most to him. However, after his incarceration the interaction between him and his family would change and so would their relationships.

The adults would no longer be able to whoop him anymore, so Terry did not feel obligated, or better yet, intimidated to fulfill certain roles they cast him in. Although he kept God near his heart, he stopped being an usher and singing in choir. He also no longer felt compelled to be the man his father forced him to be. As a matter of fact, the toxic relationship Terry had with his father only got worse as he continued to try to intimidate and control him behind bars. Terry would finally decide to cut ties with his father after he threatened to kill him. That is the last memory he has of his father. However, had it not been for the strong relationship between him and his cousin throughout his incarceration, he might not have been able to salvage and recreate a healthier relationship with his grandparents and stay present in his sister's life.

That development was spurred by his cousin's insistence for him to call her every day or every chance he got to use the phone. His cousin was determined to not let him feel alone in prison and, because she still lived with their grandparents and his sister, she made sure to pass the phone around to every one of them before they settled into their conversations. Although the conversations Terry had with his grandparents and sister were brief, they were still able to rebuild steady relationships out of it. Terry's grandparents routinely expressed how worried they were for him and how guilty they felt for him being in prison. He would always assure them that he was doing well by mentioning the positive things he was doing in prison. He would tell them how his relationship and faith in God remains strong through prayer and about his academic and rehabilitative success. Terry and his grandparents were able to reconcile their past relationships through the constant process of their interactions.

He was able to maintain a steady relationship with his sister as well, even after their conversations occurred less frequently. Nevertheless, decreased frequency in conversation did not mean decreased connection for Terry. His cousin always kept his sister updated on his current state. The things Terry talked about with his cousin would naturally get around to his sister and vice versa. His cousin is not only his best friend, but she is also the intermediary who keeps him connected to his family. The very few things that Terry's family might not know are the specific details of his life that only his cousin is privy to because of the deep conversations they share on a regular basis.

Lost in Translation, Recovered in Time

NINH NGUYEN

A Monologue

I'm a son of Asian immigrants. When my family first arrived in the United States, we didn't speak a word of English except for my mom who spoke a little bit. After decades in the states, my parents knew just enough English to get by and had to depend on my siblings to read all the documents for them. In addition, my parents spoke English with a thick accent. When I was young I was embarrassed to go anywhere with them, because I was more concerned with what people thought of me and afraid of being teased by others.

At home, I speak my birth language to my parents and English to my siblings. Over time I find myself speaking more English than my birth language because I don't have enough vocabulary in my birth language to communicate effectively.

Growing up my dad was very strict and had high expectations that I do well in school. The problem was I wasn't an 'A' student. As hard as I tried I just didn't have the I.Q for it. And I was afraid to tell my dad. So, I cope with it by engaging in dangerous activities and drinking alcohol. At least I had an

excuse now for not doing well in school instead of not being smart enough. Naturally, my dad was disappointed in me and didn't talk to me for a long time.

Now, as an adult, I have come to realize I love my parents even with their thick accents and I don't really care about what other people think. I was able to talk to my dad and mom and let them know about my shortcomings. I was glad my parents relaxed their attitude and accepted me as I am, as their son.

A Day in the Life of Big Rock

RISALA ROSE-AMINIFU

Characters: Big Rock, Lady Patrice, Officer Good, Risala Rose-Aminifu, Cee

Setting: *Big Rock is a convicted felon who has been incarcerated for nearly three decades. This play follows a day in his life as a convict trying to understand how communication plays a role in his daily dealings.*

ACT I

It is early in the morning and Big Rock has the first phone call of the day. He decides to call his long-time lady friend to delve into how she has managed to cope with his incarceration and how communication has potentially affected their relationship.

[The phone rings and Lady Patrice answers]

BIG ROCK

Hey Babe…How did you manage to cope with my incarceration and the visiting process early on?

LADY PATRICE

I managed to find different ways to remain upbeat and positive so that I would not bring you down. I pray often, sought help from my psychiatrist and received counsel from other people who also had loved ones who were incarcerated. This helped me deal with everything, so that when I came to see you, I could be a pillar of loving support for you.

BIG ROCK

What was one of the most difficult aspects in communicating with me?

LADY PATRICE

The thing that bothered me the most when you first got locked up was the time that it took for the mail. I would write to you and sometimes it would take a week or so for you to receive my letters.

[Sighs]

The collect calls were ridiculously exorbitant, but I paid the high cost because I wanted and needed to hear your voice as much as possible. We tend to keep each other balanced.

[Big Rock then asks his final question to his friend]

BIG ROCK

Is it possible to maintain a healthy relationship with someone who is incarcerated?

LADY PATRICE

Not fully! You can maintain some respect and dignity, but the reality of the significant other not being physically there eventually takes its toll. The regular visits, family visits, and phone calls are just Band-Aids for a much deeper wound. The effects of this social distancing usually become rather cancerous.

[Big Rock has a worried look on his face after that answer]

BIG ROCK

Did you ever seek any advice from other visitors about what you could or could not do during visits?

LADY PATRICE

Oh my God…yes! I would always ask the other women in line waiting to come into the prisons for information. I would want to know if the c/o's inside the visiting room were real strict or lenient. At first, I did not know about the visiting room rules, so other people would enlighten me on the "what and what not to do," so that our visit would not get canceled.

[At this moment, Big rock notices that his phone call is almost over with. He asks his girl…]

BIG ROCK

Do you feel that the visitation process is emotionally draining? And why?

LADY PATRICE

[sighs deeply]

You know it's emotionally draining, Babe. Every time I come to visit you, it tears my heart apart when it's time for the visit to be over. WE can only hug and embrace at the beginning and end of the visit and we have to sit in the chairs a certain way. The thought of you having to go through a dehumanizing strip search afterwards is itself depressing. I think that CDCR tries its best to discourage the whole visitation process, even though they say that they wish to encourage it.

ACT II

[As Big Rock hangs up the telephone with Lady Patrice, he notices that everybody is wearing face masks and there are bottles of hand sanitizer all around the day room. He decides to talk with a c/o who is pretty fair with all the inmates. Big Rock wants to know about the situation with this Covid-19 and what's being done to combat it. He sees Officer Good and decides to inquire about this latest pandemic.]

BIG ROCK

How did the staff mobilize to ensure the safety of themselves and us inmates in this current Covid-19 pandemic?

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER GOOD

We are currently following the advice from Sacramento and our local authorities. We have decided to implement the measures of social distancing, mandating that all inmates wear a face covering every time they exit their cells and, have banned all large gatherings. The inmates only go out to the yard with other inmates in their own buildings, they are being cell fed inside the buildings and our medical staff conducts all checkups inside the cell blocks. We are trying to do all that we can do to curb the spread of this virus inside of our prison.

BIG ROCK

What measures did the institution take to make sure that the staff did not come to work sick?

OFFICER GOOD

The institution had medical staff at the front gate when we came into work. These medical personnel would ask us if we were sick or had any signs of Covid-19 symptoms. We would then have our temperatures taken to see if we had a fever. If we were sick or had a high temperature, we would be asked to leave the prison. We would have to take off of work for fourteen days and get tested for Covid-19 to see if in fact we were positive for this virus.

BIG ROCK

What measures were put in place to make sure that the inmates would remain as safe as possible?

OFFICER GOOD

Well…CDCR has canceled all visits to ensure that the possible transmission of the virus can be mitigated in that respect. They have also canceled all face-to-face school classes, vocational training, and non-essential programs to help curb the spread of this virus. Inmates have been given cloth facial coverings to wear anytime they exit their cells, and they will be given hand sanitizer and soap to help combat this pandemic.

BIG ROCK

[smiles]

Have these measures been effective?

OFFICER GOOD

So far, we only have cases of Covid-19 on 'D yard.'

RISALA ROSE-AMINIFU

[Breaking the fourth wall]

This is not the case now. One inmate has tested positive for the virus in the 3-building .. Others have shown symptoms and are being quarantined in buildings 4 & 5.

OFFICER GOOD

I believe it's something like ninety inmates who have tested positive here and twenty-seven staff members that tested positive.

RISALA ROSE-AMINIFU

[Breaks the fourth wall again]

These numbers will surely rise in the coming weeks/months.

OFFICER GOOD

Our mitigation efforts seem to be working at this point.

RISALA ROSE-AMINIFU

[*Breaks the fourth wall]*

It is my personal opinion that CDCR is not doing enough to protect us inmates from this potentially deadly virus.

BIG ROCK

How do you envision CDCR post this pandemic?

OFFICER GOOD

Maaan....I don't really know…that's a good question. I can see a lot more safeguards being put in place to try to prevent the spread of infectious viruses. They may invest in more cleaning and disinfectants, they may implement some form of protective barriers around crowded areas like visiting rooms, ect., they may even make face coverings mandatory in some areas. Who knows? One thing is for sure though...their new normal will be nothing like how we operated in the past! I think that CDCR knows that this environment is a powder keg for viruses to spread, so they will do whatever it takes for us staff and you inmates to be as safe as you possibly can be.

ACT III

[Big Rock then goes back to his cell and talks to his cellmate, Cee. Cee is a gang member that does not like the c/o's. He has had a bad track record with authorities. Big Rock is curious about Cee's outlook on c/o's and what he thinks. Big Rock begins to question his cellmate.]

BIG ROCK

How do you deal with an abusive and disrespectful c/o?

CEE

Ahhhh mannn…Once I notice that a c/o is the asshole type, I just walk away. I don't want to fuck mines off on no weird acting c/o who is having a bad day. I have too much to lose. I was taught that I either take off on um [assault them] or leave 'em alone. These days…I try to think more than I've ever done. I can see where the situation may go if I don't not keep my cool and exit stage left. The best way to deal with them is complete silence.

BIG ROCK

[Big Rock nods his head in agreement, then asks]

Do you think about the goal of getting released from prison vs. the continued cycle of negative behavior?

CEE

Hell yea…This is my everyday waking thought…Are you kidding me? I think about how my life will be outside of these concrete walls; this propels me to act in a humane fashion and view everybody as a child of God, no matter how much I may dislike 'um. This way, I can refrain from the bullshit and stay focused. The more that I mature, the more that I can see that the negative behavior of the past only gets me into further trouble. I want to be like you, Risala, with an opportunity to go before a parole board and earn my freedom back.

[Big Rock can notice the maturity in Cee's posture]

BIG ROCK

Does the fact that a c/o has a certain amount of power over our circumstance influence your decisions?

CEE

[Cee scratches his chin and looks up in the air.]

Humm…It all depends on how they use this 'so-called' power. I mean they do have a certain amount of say so over my choices, but I would not go to far as to call it a power. I alone have all the power over my thoughts, actions, and decisions. Now, if I'm given a direct order, then I will do as instructed, as long as it's a rational thing. I know that I am in prison and that certain liberties have been removed outta my life, that's a given. What influences my decisions these days are "right & wrong." If I know it to be the right thing for me to do, then that's what I do. If I know some bullshit will come about if I make a certain choice, then I will not do it. I understand that the c/o is just here to do his/her job.

RISALA ROSE-AMINIFU

[Breaks fourth wall yet again]

Most of them anyway…some make it a point to harass us and break us.

CEE

So, I do not sweat it. Once a person can learn to see the trees amongst the forest, then the rest of it is just some simple mental gymnastics.

[Big Rock can remember a time when Cee was a total fuck-up and is amazed how he's transformed for the better. Big Rock knows that Cee is into his African culture, so he asks]

BIG ROCK

Since you are African American, do you culturally feel that some Black c/o's treat you differently than other raced c/o's?

CEE

Damn Bro…This is another good question! I sometimes feel a kindred connection to some Black c/o's who I can tell have been raised in the hood, like me. This does not mean that I am treated differently, but we may converse differently or understand certain slang words. They do not bend any rules for me, but they may understand my upbringing and plight because they may have experienced the same thing growing up. The only difference between us is that one is a convicted felon, and the other is not. You also have what I call "House Niggas" or boot lickers. These are the ones who hate anything that resembles them! They go over and beyond the call of duty and try to administer as much pain and dehumanization as they possibly can. When I notice them, I usually walk in the other direction and avoid them at all cost.

[At this moment, Big Rock can tell that Cee's visibly shaken at some distant memory of a past trauma, thus he only wants to pose one more question to Cee]

BIG ROCK

Do you feel like Black inmates are viewed as more aggressive than other inmates by the correctional officers?

[Cee nods his head in agreement and smiles]

CEE

Sometimes…yea…racial profiling does exist. This kinda goes back to the slavery days and the notion that Blacks were savages and stupid. As we all know, anybody has the potential to be good or evil. I think that the way an office treats and talks to any inmate has a direct bearing on their upbringing. Racism is a learned behavior. Any inmate can be aggressive. Most rational c/o's do not view the color of an inmate's skin to determine if they will be a problem. I think that they look at how we respond to their commands. As with anything, you have your good ones and your complete assholes! That's just life, Bro!

[Big Rock decides that he's gotten enough information for the day and asks Cee if he's ready to start doing his homework]

CEE

Man, I thought you were never going to shut the hell up.

[They both break out their textbooks and assignments. The play ends with both inmates doing their homework on their bunks. Lights fade to black]

Shame

JUSTIN HONG

Characters:

JOHN: Struggling, emotionally, defensive, coming undone

CARL: Late 50's, loud, friendly

JASON: Compassionate, intellectual, well-spoken

Setting: *A room with a table of donuts and coffee, chairs positioned in the form of a circle.*

ACT ONE

Scene 1

JASON

[Pours his coffee and walks to the circle from the table, he takes a seat. He looks around and notices only two people and lots of empty chairs.]

Well, it's just the three of us gentlemen. Shall we start with the serenity prayer?

JASON AND CARL

[In unison]

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

JASON

Hey Carl, good to see ya.

CARL

Jason… this coffee… is the worst cup of joe I have ever had… and these donuts! You know I can't resist a good jelly donut!

[Holds up a jelly donut and takes a bite]

Are you trying to kill me?

JASON

[Smiles and looks at John]

Welcome. Would you like to introduce yourself?

JOHN

John. I'm John.

JASON

Hi John. I'm Jason.

[Looks to Carl]

Carl, would you like to share first?

CARL

[Carl wipes his mouth with his sleeves]

Sure. I'm Carl – I'm a shame-aholic.

JASON

Hi Carl.

CARL

Shame has basically ruined my life. I mean, my life is good now. But I mean my past life. Not like I was reincarnated or anything, I don't believe in that hocus pocus. I mean no offense if you do, higher power is your higher power. Anyway, I was molested as a child by a relative but the shame of it, I carried with me for 30 years. 30 damn years. I couldn't, I wouldn't dare tell a soul. Couldn't tell my family. Played football all throughout high school. All American o-line. Best in the district. A real man's man. But one time in the locker one of my teammates slapped me in my backside and I nearly ripped his head off. Times is different now but back when I was growing up, if you were gay you were basically the devil. The molestation really messed me up. I was confused and the shame of it was like a stain I couldn't take out. Shame has a way of doing that. It traps you. Isolates you. And someone slaps your rear and you're that helpless kid that got molested for a split second and next thing you know you're ramming the head into a locker... shame ruins relationships. I mean, my ex-wife, she put up with me as long as she could, but she had no idea. She left me. Then someone told me about Shame-aholics Anonymous. I figured out that what happened to me is not who I am. Shame is a good liar. I thought I was weak, so I had to

be the baddest player on the field. I was just insecure really. Like I said, confused. I mean, there's nothing I can do about what happened to me. It happened. Not my fault. But the years of holding it in. letting it fester and grow. I gave it more power. I was doing that to myself. Shutting myself out from my family. I was doing that to myself. But these meetings, they help me get it out. The shame, talking about it in a safe space. It seems that every time I share those shameful memories, little by little I reclaim myself. As if I take power back.

JASON

Thank you, Carl.

[Looks to John]

Would you like to share, John?

JOHN

You know, I don't see the point of all this. Things that happen in the past are the past. Talking about it doesn't change anything. If anything, it makes things worse. Bringing your family into it. Putting that burden on them. That's selfish if you ask me... I actually told someone before, you know what happened? I was a kid. I shared something shameful with an adult. The outcome was not what I expected, which led me to think that it was pointless to share shameful information.

JASON

You know, shame ultimately made me feel as if I was not a part of my family. I felt out of place and disconnected from other people and I began to believe that I am the cause, I have a problem. Sometimes sharing shame, we don't get what we expected. There is fear and anxiety. The fear is mental, and I believe is fear of judgment and unlimitedly rejection.

JOHN

So, you're a shrink.

CARL

Look, it's not that easy. But the man is just trying to help.

JASON

Is it alright if I share my story with you John?

[John sits quietly and doesn't respond]

In my culture, I'm Mexican American, we didn't talk about emotions, let alone shame. Anything shameful was bottled up and buried deep. My family made it hard to speak to them. We became so distant from each other that we hardly spoke at all. When I did share that I was cutting my wrists I was challenged to finish the job and it was never spoken of again. I felt judged. Like I was seen through a dirty lens. I felt guilt and distanced myself from them. I also began to resent my family for judging me.

JOHN

…. So, what happened?

JASON

With the cutting? Or my family?

JOHN

Both.

JASON

Well, I got some help. I talked to someone. I saw a therapist. Started going to these meetings. Met people like Carl and realized I wasn't alone.

CARL

Hate to break it to ya kid, you're not the only one that's screwed up.

JASON

With my family, although it hasn't been easy, we are making some progress… How are you feeling John?

JOHN

I feel my heartbeat rising. I'm sweating.

CARL

You're safe, kid. No one's gonna judge you.

JOHN

[Breaks down into tears]

When I was 10, I watched my father molest my sister. I didn't do anything. I'm so weak. I hate myself. I even tried to kill myself and I couldn't even do it. I was too scared. Just like when I was a kid. Now my sister is a drug addict, and her life is in shambles. It's all my fault. She knows it too. She blames me, I know it. I don't deserve to live.

[Sobs]

[Jason and Carl sit beside John and console him]

JASON

That wasn't your fault.

CARL

Yeah, that's not on you kid. That's not on you.

[John looks up and tries to pull himself together]

JASON

That shame… that secret … it doesn't define you, John. You are so much more than that.

JOHN

It feels like it does.

JASON

Dr. Brene Brown once said that shame is like a fungus. It thrives in isolation and darkness. The only way to kill it, is to expose it to light. You just did that, John. That's how you take your power back.

CARL

[Theatrical and amusingly]

Let there be light!

[Everyone breaks out into a nervous and light laughter]

JOHN

[Visibly relieved]

Same time next week?

JASON

Same time next week.

CARL

I'll bring the coffee!

[Stage fades to black]

END

Call for submissions

to future issues of this journal

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