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Daniel Wright

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Wright: Punishment



PUNISHMENT

Daniel Wright

It's 106° outside and the thermostat reads 98° inside. Trust me, it feels like 110° inside these red bricks. But this is my punishment for a life revolving around only myself and what I wanted. It took this twenty-five-year aggravated sentence to wake up a 28-year-old boy and turn him into a man. But there are times when I wish the heat were my only punishment.

Ten months after I entered prison, my mom passed away from COVID-19. I was never able to speak with her. By the time I was told, she had already lapsed into a coma and was on a ventilator. The pain of things unsaid and all my past regrets—that is my punishment.

Four months after that, my dad passed away from cancer we didn't know he had. Remembering phone calls between us when my father, one of the strongest men I've ever known, broke down and cried to me, saying, "Son, this is your job; you're supposed to be here. Do you know how hard it is for a man to pick out his own casket?" That is my punishment.

Watching my 10-year-old son grow up through pictures that are getting fewer and further between as the years pass. That is my punishment.

But through this time I have had a choice to make. Do I continue to dwell on all the cruel and inhumane conditions

that we are subjected to on a daily basis, or do I do everything in my power to turn my life around and use my punishment as fuel to help me thrive and succeed?

A month and a half from today, it will be two years since my mom passed. I'm 33 now. I am entering my fourth semester in college, getting two Associate of Applied Sciences degrees at the same time. I already have enough credits for one. And I have a 4.0 GPA. It will take me three more semesters to finish, but hey, two associate's degrees in seven semesters isn't bad. I have plans to get my bachelor's degree in business before I am released. Did I mention I've worked forty hours a week for free throughout all of this?

I have to make the decision daily: Do I gripe and complain that I don't get paid for working, or that there is no air conditioning in the Texas prison system, or do I focus on what really hurts me and do something about it? I chose to give years of my life away to try to atone for my past decisions, but I never gave away my mind.

And it took my punishment for me to realize just how powerful a tool I have had this whole time and to start doing something with it.

This is not a fictitious story. This is my life and a piece of my testimony. I hope it might help someone else see their own struggles from a different perspective.