

2024  
**Prisons  
Week**

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Letters  
From  
Prisoners

# Prisons Week

Dear Reader,

I have been in prison over 14 years now, and I have been here since I was a teenager. Being sent to prison at 17 years old was a scary experience: not knowing what to expect, or when I would be going home (if I was ever going to get home).

I remember my mum the day I was first in court. She hadn't seen me for two weeks (I had been in police custody for that time) and, because of my age, she had been allowed by the authorities to come down into the holding cells to speak with me. We weren't allowed to be alone however, so my solicitor had to be present.

I remember her eyes, rimmed red from obvious lack of sleep. She was speechless, hadn't the words to express the worry and anxiety she was so obviously consumed by. She sat passively while I assured her I was alright, that it would all work out and that I'd be home soon.

The first while in prison was a bit of whirlwind. Being introduced to the routines of a highly controlled environment was a shock to the system, to say the least. Having more or less all control of your life stripped from you is a unique experience. Others decide when you eat, when you sleep, when you can go for a walk, and when you can speak to or see your family.

Then there are the institution's security procedures which, by their very nature, are incredibly intrusive. No matter how many times you are subjected to it, or how respectful others try to be, you never get used to the humiliation and shame of having to undress in front of two strangers.

Family and friends are a big help. For those of us fortunate enough to have such loving support, they are invaluable. Simply the knowledge that, should I need anything, they will be there for me gives such emotional comfort, and I know I will always be able to talk about anything with them.

Hopefully, in a few short years I will be free of this place, and will get a chance at a somewhat normal life. I am hopeful that I will be able to recover from this experience and ultimately, I hope to repay my family for all their love over the years.

Thank you for reading.

Yours Faithfully,

**A Prisoner**

# Prisons Week

Dear Reader,

I have been confined behind prison walls for the past 21 years. My tariff ended in 2014, so as things stand now, I don't have a release date. For the past nine years, I have faced a panel of three commissioners, and to mine and my family disappointment, my bids for freedom have been rejected.

I am 37 years old, and I have been in prison since I was 17. Over these years I have met thousands of poor souls that society has thrown away, young lives completely wasted. I was one of the lucky ones. I had a great up-bringing with a loving mother and father. Others that I have met have not been so lucky. Some grew up with physical abuse, some with drug or alcohol abuse and even some who suffered sexual abuse.

I have never seen any of them get the help or support in prison that every human deserves.

I have always felt an inner strength and happiness and given that I have endured 21 years of the suffering of being away from my family that could only have come from my faith which I got from my mother. She is 88 years old and has never missed a night of prayers which takes more than 2 hours. That is dedication, and each and every night she prays for me. She tells everyone that her only wish is to see me released from prison before she goes, and I hope that I can get her that wish.

Yours faithfully,

**A Prisoner**



# Prisons Week

Dear Reader,

Life was looking up I had everything I ever wanted. The day I left school and had gotten a job and managed to get my own place. To live was hard as I worked minimum wage jobs that just about paid the rent. The next thing I wanted was to drive so I saved my pennies every month. It took me near 3 months at a time until I had enough money for a driving lesson. A year later after with a lot of saving I was able to take my test which I failed three times before I passed. It took me a long time before I actually got my licence and eventually a car which was a second-hand £500 ford fiesta. I felt so proud of myself that I accomplished all this from the low budget wage whilst living and providing for myself while still a teenager as it took will-power and discipline.

Life went on like this and years later I met a girl and we fell in love. A year later she ended up pregnant she moved in with me but things started to go south. Mostly arguments over money. I was the only one working. Things were hard. She ended the relationship and started going with someone else. She didn't want me to be a part of the child's life. She was asking me for money but the truth was I was struggling to feed myself which she was aware of.

Two years later things were looking up. I had taken my ex to court and the judge ruled I would see her but first I had to do six weeks indirect contact. I was with a new girl. She worked and for the first time in my life at age 26 I wasn't struggling anymore. Together we made each other's lives so much easier. She had a daughter whom I absolutely adored and I was literally a week away from having my own daughter in my new apartment. I was finally driving a car that wasn't a wreck. 6 different apartment later I finally found one I was proud to live in. For eight years I worked hard 6 days a week denying myself the small pleasures most people get to enjoy and it started to feel like it was worth it.

My girlfriend invited some people to my house. But unfortunately some came who weren't invited. I ended up getting bullied in my own home. At the end of the night an argument took place that turned physical making me fear for my life. I killed a man. My life in my mind was also over.

I went to prison. I thought life was tough on the outside but the things that use to stress me out I would do anything to have back. I use to hate being rushed off my feet all day long but now when I'm alone and bored in my cell I wish I had it back. I miss working. I miss saving. I miss being able to be a part of someone's life. I had went to the Mourne mountains one time on a camping trip and the thought of it fills my head with resentment that I never done it more. I was

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always feeling sorry for myself because I had no money and had to work hard for every small thing I had. I thought I had it tough but nothing is more depressing than having your freedom taken away. I realised in here that anything I missed or wanted to do wouldn't have cost me a penny as all the things I wish could be true are the things that come free to us in this world. I hate that my daughter isn't a part of my life but I have to live with fact that my victim will never even see his daughter and his family are going through more hurt than I could comprehend and which I pray I will never have to endure.

Yours Faithfully,

**A Prisoner**



# Prisons Week

Dear Reader,

What jail means to me is a question I've asked myself many times, and I have come up with numerous different answers over the years. My individual circumstances set me on a path of self-destruction and even though I was sentenced to life in prison, coming to jail actually saved my life, but being here is a different story altogether.

Something that I will never forgive myself for is the fact that my mum was dying of cancer at the time that I committed my offence and I wasn't there for her when she needed me the most. I always prided myself on looking after her all of my life and was always there for her, except for this time. I was able to get out for the funeral but this is something that will haunt me for the rest of my life.

The ripple effect of what I have done and who it has affected has been massive. I have lost my relationship with my son recently because of me being in prison, and the fact that he is struggling out there and I am not there to help or guide him, which is my fault but I know he loves me but I don't think he can forgive me for making the choice I made to end up in prison and in turn leaving him out there on without a dad. This is something I will work on until I'm able to reconcile with him.

I have great family support, I've two sisters who mean the world to me and give me more support than I deserve. They recently ended their relationship as sisters due to a stupid argument which I could have sorted out had I not been in jail. I also have my nephew who is starting in Leeds University who I am very close to who has just moved from Dubai. I have a great relationship with him but don't get to see him very often. My brother who is also my co-accused is also banged up with me, which has its ups and downs. The good thing is that we have each other for support but the bad thing is, I have to watch him go through the same turmoil that I am going through every day. As for jail itself, the hard thing for me is watching loved ones come up on visits and you can see how much it's hurting them seeing me in here. They put on such a smile when they first walk in but when it's time to go I see the sadness in them that devastates me every time they have to leave.

I have never been more ashamed of anything in my life than my offence and it eats away at me every day. I have asked for help with healthcare in prison for my mental health but to date it's been almost two years from I contacted them and I still haven't had anyone come to see me. This is not unusual in here, with self-harm often the only way to get attention. It shouldn't have to come down to this but this is just the way it is in here.

I see young men coming into prison for minor offences and leaving as

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addicts. They start taking drugs in jail just to try and get through the day, which is wrong by any standards but with the lack of any help this is the only way some guys can cope. In prison its seems to be the case where prisoners are just warehoused, as long as they are away from society, the powers-that-be are happy for things to go on without change. The amount of people committing suicide in prison is steadily rising and I personally can see no way this will get any better unless massive changes are brought into effect. How can prison still be classed as necessary when it is creating more problems than its fixing?

Yours Faithfully

**A Prisoner**



# Prisons Week

Dear Reader,

Just before I was sent to prison I spoke with my 13-year-old son and I could see the fear in his eyes as he was looking at his father at rock bottom, until then we had a great life together with no major problems. That day I looked at him that day and I said,

“Look son, until now life has been good to us and I have shown you many things, I want you to watch me very closely over the next while and I’m going to teach you an important lesson in life.”

“I’m going to show you that no matter how low life gets or how big the mistake you make, there is a way back.”

“The main thing is that you don’t just lay down and roll over and give up, there is a way back.”

“I’m going to teach you that no matter what life throws at you, you just keep getting back up, I’ve made a mistake, but what is important is that I do not keep making the same mistake, the important thing is what I do now to correct my mistake.”

A few days later I was sentenced to 2 years and 3 months in prison and to say it was a culture shock is putting it mildly. I sat back quiet at first to try and find my place among this sea of lost souls. I listened to sorry tale after sorry tale and saw prisoners at their lowest points begging for help that was not there. The conversation with my son was still ringing in my ears and I decided that was not going to be me, I was going to go for it and see just what you could do within prison if you really got stuck in.

I’ve just completed 18 months and I’m heading into the last part of my sentence, I decided to write down what I’ve done so far and my list consisted of 40 significant things, everything from learning how to play chess to education to writing a book to becoming a Samaritan listener...

I was speaking with my son the other day and told him a piece of my artwork that I created in prison was being exhibited in London, he told me he was proud of me.

Yours Faithfully,

**A Prisoner**

# Prisons Week

Dear Reader

Losing your liberty is one of the hardest things to deal with, being away from your family, partners, children and friends for any period of time has a real impact on you and some days it's hard to keep going, but I know in my heart that there's light at the end of the tunnel, as I'll eventually have my time served and be a free man, which is what motivates me to keep going.

I have been in prison since 2019, so I have experienced being in prison during the Co-vid pandemic which was really tough, as all visits were stopped and I went almost 18 months without seeing my family's faces. Being in prison is hard enough, but not seeing my family took my anxiety to another level, but thankfully things are back to normal now and I get regular visits, usually weekly, with my family which helps my mental health and also helps them have some peace of mind, as they can see for themselves that I'm ok and not being harmed by anyone whilst in prison which lowers their stress levels and worries about me.

I have no children of my own, but my niece and nephew regularly come to visit with my sister, and always ask me when their uncle will be home. Which I can't give them a definite answer to, as I have to go through the parole commissioners process to be released, so I just have to keep telling them I'll be home soon and I can see the sadness in their eyes when I tell them this which breaks my heart.

The crime I committed has had a profound impact on all my family particularly my father, as he witnessed it and the guilt of that eats away at me every day and I've come to realise how lucky I am that my family have stood by me.

During my time in prison, I have educated myself and become a better person which my family praise me for and when I'm released I will be determined to never let them down again and make them proud of me, as I honestly don't know what I'd do without them.

On an end note I'd just like to say thank you to the people taking their time to read this.

Yours Faithfully

**A Prisoner**

# Prisons Week

Dear Reader,

Sadly, it has taken fifty four years for me to be incarcerated. Sad, not because I wanted to be jailed earlier, but due to many people saying it was inevitable, including me. For all that time I have struggled with mental illnesses. However, I am not blaming my health issues, or using them to fully justify my actions. The fact is that my poor mental health is one of the reasons. Why am I here? I had a psychotic episode and hurt the only person I ever trusted, who understood my illnesses and cared for me for twenty years. We had our ups and downs, mainly ups, I can count the serious arguments on my fingers. No hands were raised only voices, tears were kept for laughter or grief. Yet, here I am at fifty eight inside a cell, hundreds of miles from my origins, family and friends. With no visitors or phone calls I am left only with my thoughts for company, some days I cannot even look in the mirror, wash or speak to others. My life is one of confinement and self-isolation, reading, writing, watching television or listening to the radio. Excitement comes twice daily, when the food trolley arrives, full of just enough to survive. After standing in the queue with my plastic plate and mug I return to my cell to be locked in again.

Mental health is a huge issue inside, with a lot of inmates suffering mental illnesses. Since being inside I have made five attempts on my life, they were not cries for help, all I wanted was to be out and death was my only doorway, although even this seems to be blocked. Weeks of being confined to a 'safe' cell and months of being escorted everywhere in the prison, including to shower. Thankfully I am in recovery and after moving prisons I joined a creative writing group, which is helping me enormously by enabling me to express my thoughts to the world outside my headspace. I have opened up more about my mental health and life experiences. To me and my recovery this is invaluable and I will miss the sessions when I get out.

So, what is my take on prison life? To be honest after the first six months of trauma, due to my own actions, life inside is not as bad as I first feared. There are opportunities to discuss and improve your issues, with specialist staff and fellow inmates who are trained Listeners. If you are able to talk and express how you feel, it helps enormously. My advice, keep your head down, do not waste your energy on anger and try to use this opportunity to explore your own mind, focussing on the positives, like getting out in your shoes and not in a box.

When I get out in six months I will be homeless, jobless and stranded away from my family and friends. It is a scary thought, especially at my age. But, I do not have any addictions and my will to live is improving every day. Life out will be more chapters that I will write as I go on my way.

Yours faithfully,

**A Prisoner**

# Prisons Week

Dear Reader,

I now belong to a small community within Magilligan Prison. I'm personally serving a life sentence for a painstaking moment that shadowed over one of the darkest mornings of my life. I not only let myself down but also my victims and their community alongside my own.

Being my first time in prison I struggled not only with the crime I had caused but also with my new accommodation and the dramatic change to my life, however the clergy reached out to me and never judge me for what I had done. In a way, being confused as of why, as I believed I have broken one of the most severe commandments, however the priests and chaplains explained that there is no commandant greater than another. A sin is a sin whether it's a minor one or more severe one. Only you can show reconciliation in the eyes of God. For many years living in a strange accommodation, I struggle with these words while not understanding their inner depth but thankfully through the help of the clergy I have managed to understand and thrive on building a better further for myself and those I managed to hurt.

Yours faithfully,

**A Prisoner**



## Feedback from 2023

Dear Prisoners,

I would like to thank you for the letters you shared with us. Your stories were very moving. The fact that so many lives are affected sometimes by one moment is so sad. I will keep you in my prayers.

God Bless,

A Friend

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