

Dear Friends:

When the U.S. District Judge said, "I sentence you to a term of LIFE in the Federal Bureau of Prisons," it didn't really hit me until I turned to walk away and saw my entire family in tears. That's one day I'll never forget. In 23 short years, I had went from being a Boy Scout with a promising future to inmate 11907-058 with no future whatsoever to look forward to. This was in May 1996, I was handcuffed and placed into the custody of the U.S. Marshalls.

As a "New Jack" (prison slang for a new inmate) at United States Penitentiary Atlanta, I was a small fish in a big ocean of sharks. The prison had been built in the early 1900s and resembled a dungeon. In the tiny, cramped cell, I met a 30 something year old inmate that told me to mind my own business, get a knife and try not to kill anyone or get killed. Was I scared? Scared to death. On the streets I had a gun, friends - nothing to fear. Now in prison I was all alone. My friends had snitched on me and the police had took my gun. All I had was my mother's words: "God will protect you."

That's sounded good, but I heard some vicious rumors about USP Atlanta. A few years earlier an officer had been killed - something that rarely happened in Federal Prison - so all I could think about was not letting the same thing happen to me.

My first letter was from my mother. My first visit was from her too. My first money order came from her. To be honest, my first everything came from my mother. Even though she was free, she was mentally right there in prison with me. I remember during visits seeing her and my grandmother both trying so hard to smile cheerfully when they really wanted to cry. But being the strong black women they were they said and did everything that they needed to - to make me feel better.

It's been 16 years since I was originally arrested in Jan. 1995. Today I am 38, stronger, wiser and better. Since then I've been to prisons in Florida, Oklahoma, California, Arizona, Kentucky, West Virginia and now I'm in USP Lee in Jonesville, Virginia.

By the grace of God, my LIFE sentence was reduced to 35 years - I have a 2028 release date and a very good chance of receiving another sentence reduction based on the new sentencing guidelines for crack offenders.

Today, I am the author of 6 published books - most notably: How To Save Our Children From Crime, Drugs and Violence and How To Stop Your Children From Going To Prison. Today I have obtained certification through the U.S. Department of Labor to teach classes. Today I have contributed to the transformation of thousands of Federal Prisoners. Today, I teach 6 classes - including GED and Creative Writing. I even conduct seminars on leadership for staff and inmates.

This new blog is going to take you on a journey and show you what my life is like from day to day, working with students, mentoring younger prisoners, my hopes and fears, and etc. I want to give you a close encounter with reality - share things about prison life that every at risk youth, parent, teacher, preacher, politician and police officer can learn from. And this lesson is FREE... My goal is to prevent at risk youth from dying or going to prison.

Here's my daily routine:

6am - workout (I currently workout and train with 28 year-old Shannon Dycus aka Stutta, 30 year-old Brad Hamilton aka LB, and 29 year-old Damar Hampton aka Lil-Hamp aka knucklehead)

(I'll give you all a profile in the near future)

7am - breakfast (Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon - Coffee Cake, Cereal, Fruit) (Tue, Wed, Thrus - Pastry, Oatmeal or Grits or Farina, Fruit)

7:15am - check and send emails to family, friends - send messages for Facebook, Twitter, Newsvine, cedricdean.com and this blog.

7:30am - shower

8:00am to 11:00am - go to work in Education. (I do my lesson planning, make copies of daily GED class assignments, work on upcoming programs and events - i.e. Leaders Breed Leaders seminars - Unity Programs and Community Mentoring Projects)

11:00am - lunch (Mon. Chicken Patties, Potato Salad, Dessert - Tues. Pizza or Meatball Subs, Chips, Dessert - Wed. Fried or Baked Chicken, Mashed Potatoes/Gravy, Dessert - Thrus. Burger and Fries, Dessert - Sat. Bar-b-cue Pork or Roast Turkey, Rice, Dessert - Sun. - Pancakes or Waffles, Scrambled Eggs, Bacon or Sausage, Fruit) all meals vary and are subject to change.

11:45am - check and send emails, make an occasional phone call (this is my break time before returning to work)

12:45pm to 3:30pm - teach GED class of 15 students - Mon., Wed., Fri., 1 to 2pm - Reading and Writing - 2 to 3:30pm - Math Tues. and Thrus. 1 to 2pm - Social Studies and Science - 2 to 3:30pm Math)

3:30 pm - check emails and send messages

4:00 pm - stand up count (all inmates are locked inside their cells and officers conduct a standing count to make sure every inmate is present, alive and well) This is when I receive and read my mail and USA Today Newspaper.

5:00pm - check and send emails.

5:15pm - evening meal (Unlike lunch, this meal constantly changes) The food at USP is good, compared to most of the other prisons I've been to - although the BOP has a universal menu.

6:00pm - mentoring/tutoring (Open house in my cell - This is when whoever needs whatever comes to me. Sometimes I do one on one tutoring or counseling - other times I do group tutoring or counseling. Occasionally I get to watch CNN at this time - that's if it's no drama on the compound.)

7:00pm to 8:30 pm (I teach Adult Continuing Education Classes Tues - Sat.: Tues. How to Teach a Class, Wed. How to Write and Publish a Book, Thurs. Effective Communication, Sat. Music Industry and How To Start Your Own Non-Profit Organization)

8:30pm to 9:00pm - check and send emails, shower

9:00pm - prayer call (I hold prayer call with several other Christian Brothers - we read scriptures, sing a song and pray together)

9:30pm - call my mother (Inmates are given 300 phone minutes - 150 goes to my mother - I call her for 5 minutes every night)

9:35pm to 10:00pm - prepare for lockdown - get ice, exchange magazines or books with other inmates, check and send emails.

10:00pm - bedtime (Read or write for an hour, brush my teeth and call it a day) I sleep to gospel or old school slow jams.

(Next post I'll introduce you to USP Lee's Cast of Characters)