Fighting Back Against The Beast

Curtis Braxton

The beast is heartless. It thrives and feeds on the dissension it induces among the populace. And it capitalizes on our ignorance. Those of us within the belly of the beast are being digested and released as human waste.

**Taking Away Our Humanity**

In Pennsylvania, the light is dim. If we decide to work, we receive a job at the starting rate of 19 cents per hour. It rises no higher than 42 cents per hour. Meanwhile, costs for commissary and medical ($5 to be seen and $5 for meds) continue to rise. To cover court costs, many inmates have 10-80% of every dollar we receive deducted, including what our family and friends send. It costs $6 to call a loved one. Often we are shipped far away from our families, so it is hard for them to visit us.

Pennsylvania still has the death penalty and life without parole, meaning *until you die*! In fact, everyone who walks through these gates is a “lifer” until they make it out because there is no guarantee that anybody will leave here alive. I’ve lost friends who died due to inadequate medical care; officers have been known to take lives.

What’s worse is that even children are sentenced to die in prison. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Pennsylvania has more youth serving life sentences than any other state in the U.S. or any country in the *whole world*. Kids who make bad choices still have their whole life ahead of them to change course. But Pennsylvania locks the door on them and throws away the key.

**Resisting in Any Way We Can**

Prisoners work hard to create bonds with the outside world to endure the unbearable and inhumane treatment behind these walls. Mail and visits radiate energy that we feed on to maintain our sense of self. Love is essential to overcome the hate and the isolation in this wretched environment.

The system creates disparities to prevent unity among the prisoners. When we do come together, we are placed in the “hole” for engaging in unauthorized group activity, and we are labeled as organizers.

In 2004-05, my comrades and I organized a hunger strike in the hole to bring attention to the inhumane treatment we were experiencing. 90% of the hole participated on the first day. The administration resorted to repressive tactics, causing prisoners to abandon the struggle. After almost a month, three comrades and I forced the prison to get a court order to force feed us. This brought the hunger strike to an end, but it also brought outside attention to our situation.

Every day, I train and condition myself to overcome this madness. I don’t allow myself to be reactive or to be manipulated by external factors. I refuse to be excreted from the beast as human waste! I was told greatness isn’t what I accomplish, but what I overcome.


Curtis Braxton, 37, has been incarcerated since he was 20. He has been in solitary confinement since 2011. He is looking forward to being released to the general population soon hopefully.