

Disproportionate Sense of Duty and Honour

Norman A. Bristol

In 1995, my friend and brother in arms asked me to do him a favour, he asked me to help him die. He was in a bad way, both physically and psychologically, and wanted to end it all. To enlist my help he reminded me of the fact that he had saved my life twice and that I owed him. Back then, I was somewhat of a mess personally and psychologically, and was also on the road to self-destruction. My disproportionate sense of duty and honour led me to make the worst decision of my life.

It was not long before I was confessing to my crime and pleading guilty to murder in the second degree after almost one year in pre-sentence custody. This was in 1996. Even back then the presiding judge felt it necessary to ask me three times if this was truly what I wanted to do. After answering, he told to me that he wished he would not have had to give me a life sentence, but since the law was equal for all, he had no choice. He then said he would give me the minimum possible sentence given the circumstances; life with parole eligibility set at 10 years. The last words that he spoke were, “I hope Mr. Bristol you will find the help you need on the inside”.

Well as it turns out I did. From 1996 to 2008 I had access to many different programs which were tailored for my needs, education, and professional training in different fields. All these things contributed greatly to my self-esteem and my self-worth, not to mention my employability when I returned to society. In 2011, I had another, somewhat of another lighter breakdown. I was feeling like I could not cope. I asked for help. In fact, I asked to go back to prison because I felt I would be safer there. It was very hard for me, but it was ultimately a good thing because I had access to a psychologist and I also undertook professional training in body work and obtained my diploma.

As it turns out, all of this was made possible when the prison system was still *somewhat* functional in the means of rehabilitation. Also, the prisons used to have well equipped hobby shops where many talents were discovered and exercised. At one point, prisoners were encouraged to get up and go to work because they could gain bonuses for their well rendered services. Most prisons I went to would have a music room where one could also indulge and purify one’s soul through the art of music, not to mention the shows we used to give during the community visits and other events.

These are but a few things that are no longer possible thanks to all the cuts and changes made in the past few years (see Shook, 2018). I can only speak for myself, but as it turns out, it is the third time my friend saved

my life. Prison has done me more good than it has bad. Then again, I have never made crime my full-time occupation, but nonetheless I do believe in the goodness of people, no matter what, and I also believe that one can be over-rehabilitated. I think once one has been paroled, one should not be subjected to reincarceration for minor faults, especially after one has been out for many years and has proven to not be a risk for society in general.

REFERENCES

Shook, Jarrod (2018) “Trudeau government should rethink how it pays prisoners”, *Ottawa Citizen* – February 1. Retrieved from <https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/shook-trudeau-government-should-re-think-how-it-pays-prisoners>

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