

ARTICLES

Night Time *Lukas Carey*

The toughest part of any jail experience is night time. It is pure hell because it is when your mind sends all of your worries, insecurities and cares flying at you. There are no distractions present, so it is just you and your mind. Speaking personally, my mind does not ever rest. The people close to me, from workmates to my wife, have all told me that I over-analyse everything. I have always had trouble relaxing and my tendency to overthink impacts everything I do. This somewhat negative personality trait combined with night time in jail make for a terrible mix that made my experience very difficult.

Each individual I have spoken to treats night time in jail differently. One of my fellow comrades on the inside has a bad habit of letting the night own him. He often stays awake until the early hours of the morning before he can cobble together a few hours of broken slumber for the next day. Frankly, the night is very hard on him. When I asked him about his irregular sleep pattern, he told me that the night “scares him” due to where he has been, along with the horrible things that have happened to him and others at night. I could see the emotion on his face when he talked about it, so I decided to leave it alone. However, it got me thinking about the things that could have happened to this man while at other prisons serving his tour of duty and the damage those experiences have caused. As a prisoner, there is plenty of time to hear old war stories from many of the legit old-timers. Some of those who want to be old-timers pass on stories about what has happened to others and what they “know to be true”. These happenings seem to occur largely at night time, which explains why some of the guys in here find that time particularly horrible.

To fully appreciate night time here, you need to know what happens during the day. In an institution filled with roughly 150 men there are a large amount of jobs that need doing. The majority of men living here are employed to work within the institution. The workday starts at 7:45am and finishes at 3:30pm, including an hour lunch break in between. Generally, there are programs or recreation available after work ends. Drop in a healthy smattering of musters that you must report to and the day becomes satisfyingly full of things to keep your mind occupied (said no one ever). However, after the last muster and lock in occurs at 8:30pm, you become a

prisoner for the first time in terms of your movement being restricted while here. You are stuck with the people in your room and the social settings that creates. The only way to escape is to retire to your own room and this is where the brain games begin, especially in my case.

I consider myself lucky because my room-bound torture only starts when the people I share with retire for the night. We have a great arrangement that does not see any of us want to rush to our rooms. We enjoy spending time with each other. I call my family on most nights and that generally hits the start switch for my mind to begin speed racing. When the calls and socializing are done, night time sets in and so begins the games with your mind, heart, and emotions.

My family is so important to me that I basically have a shrine to my wife and three kids in my room. I have roughly a thousand pictures on my pin board and about forty more in a folder. As time ticks on and my television viewing habits move on from active to very passive, I think of everything my family could be doing while their dad and husband is not there – things that I should be doing with them like watching television, reading books, cooking dinner and playing with my children. This realization hits me all at once, and that starts the brain and heart games. Each night I scan through every picture I have, both on the wall and in the folder, and smile as I think about the past, present, and future of my family. I think about how I should be with them and how long until I actually will be again. This seems like a common pattern for those with kids and families. However, this is where the quizzing of others ends and my own brain games start to take off. This has been the hardest piece I have ever written to date as it is almost time to face another night that will surely bring tears and mixed feelings.

For some strange reason, I feel safe expressing my emotions to myself in my room at night time. Although I hate doing it and wish each time that the night would pass quickly, I do get the chance to write letters to my loved ones. I made a pact with myself that, each night, I would not waste my time and instead do something that would show my family how much I love them. This is where I write stories for my boys, do colouring to send to them and, at one point, I made all three of my kids a teddy bear. I do not believe my wife would like one because she is not a stuffed animal type of person. The letters I write seem to have a greater sense of honesty and vulnerability than if I had written them during the day. My actions at night seem to be purer than they are during the day because I do not have

to project a demeanour that is not me. However, this facade is what gets me through the days. Although painful, night time is a time of honesty for me.

Here is a secret that only my kids and wife know: every night, I sleep with a photo of them under the pillow and kiss all four of them goodnight. I tell each of them that I love them, miss them and that I am sorry for the pain I have caused them. I tell each of them that I will do whatever I can for the rest of my life to be a better man and a better father. I will try to atone in their eyes for my transgressions. I hope that in some way they read these words and understand the torture a person suffers being in here, especially at night time. After hearing my kids voices on our phone call, this night time ritual more often than not brings me to tears. Night time has its own silent, dark, and morbid way of drilling home for me and many others on the inside how much we miss and dearly love our families.

In years past, a man expressing his emotions through words or even tears has been portrayed as weak, but I would like to challenge that. I believe that my ability to express the emotions that I do during night time makes me stronger. In my thoughts, I spend time with my kids every night and I envision what they have done at school or in the garden during that day. I picture my wife and our family all walking along the beach in my hometown together. I imagine the day I get off that plane at home as a free man. Tears accompany my memories and visions, but I believe that processing my thoughts and emotions make me stronger. Although night time is extremely difficult while I am in here, it is making me stronger so that I can become a better father, husband and overall person when I get home. That is something that night time will never be able to take away from me. My promise is that I will make sure of that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Lukas Carey completed his doctorate in education and has worked in the field for most of his working life as a coach, teacher, trainer and educator. While filling a role in local government he was charged with receiving secret commissions and served time in prison. During that time Lukas used his lived experience and theoretical knowledge to study the lives of the incarcerated, the educational happenings inside the justice system and its influence over future employment opportunities upon release. With an interest in the role previously incarcerated people have in the development

of policy and procedure in the justice system, Lukas is a strong advocate for Convict Criminology. The importance of the lived experiences of previously incarcerated people and people from working class backgrounds drive the work Lukas is doing in the education and research field. He can be reached by email and Twitter at the following addresses:

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