

James Jeter

We—meaning myself and everyone who suffered from my actions—share a few hard truths. The first being that at the age of 47 I will discharge the CT prison system after 30 years of incarceration. The second is that after 30 years of incarceration, my victim's family will still be dealing with the effect and aftermath of my actions; he will still be dead. There is nothing fair about these facts. My family will get me back, his will never get him back.

I live with this knowledge day in and day out. The permanence of death becomes realer to me with each day that passes. Everyday I grow older, He is still 19. His children are teenagers. His sister's a mother, he is still 19. The pain of my actions—to know that I am responsible for such permanence, for such pain and loss, that there is nothing in this life nor the life to come that I can do to give back what I had no right to take, I carry with me daily. I understand that to what I say some will care less, others will take my word as a plea for pity and sympathy, but I desire neither from anyone. I write these words simply because they are true, and the burden of my actions weigh heavy on my heart, mind, and soul. To know that I am responsible for taking from two children, what drugs took from my siblings and me—a father—eats at me, as it rightfully should.

It is for this reason that I fight daily to grow to be better than I was the day before, better than I was 15 and a half years ago. It may mean little, but it is all that I can do. I am obligated to the my victim's family to change, it is an obligation that has given me a vision to leave here, and save lives, to prevent other wayward teenagers and young adults from

victimizing generations, and keep other teens and young adults from being buried parents that they should outlive.

For me that is the only justification for my early release, not to move on with my life, nor to put the past behind me, but to prevent the past from becoming two other families' present and future. Doing time is the penalty for crime, but it isn't justice, it isn't restitution. These things cannot be measured by the length of confinement because confinements end, but the loss is permanent. What early release does for me is it gives me a chance to let my actions reflect my remorse and my repentance for the actions of a lost teenager.

This may not give an iota of peace to my victim's family, but I need them to see me going, to know that I am dedicated to changing the kind of environments that led to the abrupt and violent end of their son's life. There is no other way for me to relay that than through actions. Words mean nothing without the actions to back them up, and I desperately need them to know this. Not for their forgiveness, that is not something that I can earn, and forgiveness may be something that they will never give. But justice demands that I live a life of servitude, a life of prevention. Restitution demands that I pay back the mercy that I have received by reaching out to those who are as lost as I once was, who feel as disconnected as I once did, whose frustrations and pain have no voice and outlet like mine once lacked.

At my sentencing the victim's stepfather asked me to help young men coming through these doors so that they don't leave and make the same mistakes that I have, cause the same pain that I have. I've spent my time in here attempting to fulfill this request, motivated by this request, yet hurt by the fact in most cases it's too late. More kids are

coming in younger and younger for longer periods of time for making the exact same mistakes I did, for being just as lost as I was, if not more.

Science has proven that teens, like I once was, suffer from diminished levels of culpability due to their not yet fully developed brain. I know and believe this to be true, but I wrestle with it because I am not longer a teenager. I am not a 32 year old man, who now fully understands the things that I couldn't as a teenager. I struggle with the reconciliation of the man that I am and the child that I was. I victimized a family, friends and a community, however, as audacious as it feels, and may even sound, I too was a victim. I was a lost 17 year old in a lot of pain, under the influence of a manipulative 30 year old man who put a gun in my hand and sent me out that dreadful day.

At 32 I understand the effect of the drug abuse I witnessed and physical abuse I witnessed and suffered at the hands of a father who died as a result of his own abuses. I understand the void it left within me that opened the door for me to fall under the influence of a man almost twice my age. At 32 I have an extensive vocabulary, the ability to synthesize all of the social elements that led me here. I am also able to articulate my frustrations and pain. Tools that I did not have as a teenager. At 32 I realize that all this understanding of the past doesn't change the past. Nothing does.

If local authorities find it fit to somehow reconstruct current laws and parole regulations for men like myself. And the parole board finds it fit to release me. Please know that I leave here far removed from that 17 year old kid, yet I carry the burden of his actions within me.

I believe that the God I serve has forgiven me, however, I am also indebted to the victim's family, his friends and community, as well as the city of New Haven. I carry that

debt with me, and I will live then, as I live now; attempting daily to pay it by fighting for young men who live as I lived, fighting for their change, fighting so they will not carry this debt one day and families will not suffer as my victim's family has suffered, nor will other families have to bare the shame that mine has bore because of my actions. I live a life of restitution, and I will not squander this opportunity. Thank you.