

Hello ladies and gentlemen my name is _____ and I have been asked to speak today but unfortunately I am unable to attend this event in person due to my obligation to the government. No I am not in the armed services overseas fighting for my country. I am in Federal custody in Pollock, Louisiana and I am in the 12th year of incarceration off of a life sentence. I'd never imagined in my worst nightmare that I would ever have to say something as crazy as that about myself. Unfortunately for my family, friends, and myself my freedom is uncertain at best.

My life was stolen from me. On February 9th 1998 I was arrested by the FBI in front of my home and family on my way home from school with the promise that I would never return to the streets just the same as if I was shot down by an assailant. It came out of nowhere; no warning shot, no cause for alarm but there I was being taken into custody just the same. I had a few friends who a couple of months prior had been picked up for a 3 year old murder but when I met them inside the county jail they were just as shocked if not more than I was that I was now one of their co-defendants. For the first couple of minutes they had the sick idea that somehow I was joking. Can you imagine joking about something like that? This was after all my first time being inside of a jail, so no one could believe that my first time was for one of the worst of crimes. Even the C.o.'s didn't believe me when they were processing me. I could reason that were I still in the streets of New York I might be dead already or on my way to an early grave. I told this line to my friends and family when I got arrested. It was something to help ease the pain of me sitting where I was then but now I tell myself this same line to ease the pain of knowing that I am in fact dead...Dead to the outside world. I say the outside world because this place is a world unto itself. Although we share the same universe and sometimes come in contact with one another the distance might as well be a million miles away from each other.

I envy you if you have never been to prison. I was just like you 12 ½ years ago, and although I occasionally threw rocks at these walls (prison) the stones weren't big enough to be noticed much like most things in my short life. Short being both literal and figurative; I am about 5'1' and I was arrested at the ripe old age of 18.

Buried alive is an expression that I've heard on more than a few occasions since I've been in this human warehouse...Which make no mistake about it is exactly where I am sentenced to die this very slow and painful death. . I describe this as a warehouse because what is being done to countless people amounts to nothing more than storage with no end in sight. The dirt was being thrown on my still breathing body on that doomed day of December 14th 2000 after I was tired and found guilty of conspiracy to commit murder when I was 15 years old and I was promised that at age 21 "I would never have a normal life, and would never live outside prison walls, and never have a family of my own." I ask who can possibly understand the pain that I feel of my life being cut short before it has even started. Nothing or no one could have prepared me for this. When I was younger I lived up the hill from a cemetery and I was scared of zombies. I now no longer fear zombies because I live in the cemetery. I fear dying in prison for a murder someone else plead guilty to. Who can I turn to that will hear my plea? I understand the concept of crime, punishment, and justice, but how I fit into that

equation is still a mystery. How does a person charged with being a lookout receive more time than the admitted shooter?

I'm forced to live here but my mind is not. I use my everyday experiences in this place as a reminder never to return, but also I try to use everyday situations as tools I will need to survive in the real world. My dreams are never of prison, but of what is needed of me in society, and how I will strive to be somebody instead of this number. Prison does not rehabilitate you; you must do that yourself. If you go out just as you entered chances are you will return. Simple enough but true indeed.

I know that opportunities will not present themselves to me upon my return so I must make opportunities for myself. Again I must enter the chambers of my mind to do so and strive to come out on top while the stigma of my conviction presses hard to keep me down. Unfortunately I realize this while my sentence has no ending in sight so I am faced with the challenge of continuing to fight in order to realize my dreams. If only there was some way I could make the government see this.

I'd like to thank you all for all of the work being done to bring a ray of light to people like myself and for all of your support. We will never give up and it is reassuring to know that you will not give up either. Maybe you don't hear it often enough but your hard work is really appreciated; all of the letters, phone calls, e-mails, and visits. It is people like you who make me realize that I will make it home and I have to be a better person and I will be a better person. I am now a man not because of my time in prison but despite it. I have set goals for my education and achieved them and I will continue to leap many more hurdles. I have for the past few years been employed (something I've never done while free) by the Federal Prisons Industries (*Unicor*), and despite some bumps in the road I have been free of any incident reports for some time now in one of the most dangerous United States Penitentiaries in the country (USP Pollock). I have seen many things over the years which I'd rather not recount that could destroy a person and make them turn into an animal or savage but with every fiber of my being I refuse to let it strip me of my hope. Terrance Graham's case is hopefully the beginning of change for this terrible sentence. No child/young person should have to go through this endless stream of hopelessness.

Once again thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
