I became an adult, for intents of the law, at the age of 14. In reality, I was anything but. To pay for my actions, I was sent to the state prison. It is a difficult existence, not so much for the privations as the unnatural environment. Everything inside is atomized, isolated, categorized. I live in a state of limbo, unable to fit into this "prize society," unable to return to the society whose values I violated.

From early in my incarceration, I clung to the hope that someday the law would recognize that as a kid, I didn't understand what I was doing. I would have the opportunity to salvage some kind of life. While those hopes have come closer to realization because of legal developments, I find myself struggling more mightily than when release was a distant dream instead of a remote possibility. Twenty-six plus years of incarceration have taken their toll. Hopes which once gave me strength have become tenuous, worn down by the erosion of time.

The years in prison have been a struggle, but even more so the knowledge that I set in motion negative ripples which can never be undone. When I matured enough to appreciate those consequences, prison could not make me suffer enough. I had to punish myself. And so I lived until one day I realized something. While I could never make up for what I did, every day was an opportunity to put something back into the world from which I took so much. It is a great misfortune that I only learned the value of life and society...
after violating their sanctity. But I did learn, and, having done so under those circumstances, I have a great sense of responsibility.

One needn't take my word for it that kids can change. Prison officials are so impressed by my improvement that today I live on the prison ranch, work in the downtown community, and go statewide to fight wildfires. Hard to believe that I once lived in a maximum-security cell twenty-three hours a day.

I attained a college degree in history, literature, and German. I became an amateur ornithologist—birds being wildlife that comes to me since I cannot go to it. (If I could have any job in the world it would be wildlife biologist. Outside in the forest, counting raptors...just thinking about it makes me breathe easy.)

It is my hope the system can be structured to allow for the possibility of change in kids and utilize them accordingly. If returned to the community, I think the biggest asset I bring is a sense of appreciation. I can't take even the smallest things for granted. I can't see for sure what form my contribution would take, but I hope it involves being present for people in a meaningful way. The support of others has helped sustain me these years. I've come to value it and hope to pass it on to others.