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WHAT WOULD KEEP DEREK OUT OF PRISON?

DEAR DIARY, I asked my friend Derek who's been banged up several times what would keep him out of prison.

As far as Derek's concerned, being locked up goes with the territory. He says it's simply an occupational hazard. He's been locked up for theft, burglary, fraud, deception and drug offences. He's never worked, says that if he could just get focussed, he'd love to start his own business and doesn't want his son to grow up to be like him and he would dearly love to make a change before little Taylor grows up to know that his dad spends most of his time in prison.

I never visit Derek when he goes to prison, but I do write to him and he calls me. I wanted to know what sort of punishment would keep him out for good and he said he really didn't know but it's something he thinks about because for him, it's simply punishment and not rehabilitation. He said in his heart, he'd like to come out and have skills, motivation and the strength not to go back in, but he normally starts breaking the law within seven days of release.

Last year, Derek complained about the Christmas dinner, but he said it was still turkey and stuffing, it was still potatoes, carrots and brussel sprouts. He's allowed to make phone calls and receive parcels. He watches TV and videos. He gets to go swimming every day and is as fit as a fiddle, in fact, Derek said that he's now so toned, he's getting wolf whistles from gay and straight men!

He's learning psychology and the place where he's spending time in her majesty's prison right now, he's having a physical relationship with one of the tutors. Apparently, she was the one who made a pass at him so she provides him with miscellaneous favours; both physical and otherwise.

I asked him if he were housed in dormitories, would that put him off going back into prison and he said no not really because as much as it would be off-putting at first to be around so many people all day every day, he could live with it. I said what if the food was insufficient and he said that it would be an infringement of his human rights! I said what if you were given a longer prison sentence and he said he might consider being a bit more careful, but it

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wouldn't stop him committing crimes, because committing crimes to make money is all he knows. He says he hasn't got blood lust, he doesn't want to attack people, cut people up, violate women & children or commit murder, he says he just wants money and doesn't ever see these sorts of crimes being given long unmanageable prison sentences.

I said OK; say you weren't allowed visitors or phone calls. He said again, this is something he would get used to. He would develop friendships like he already does with the inmates. Derek admits that the time he spends in prison is fairly easy. He says it p*sses him off when he misses birthdays, especially the birthday of his son. He says he misses socialising and going clubbing. But he said you just live a prison life and end up getting by committing other little crimes inside. Derek gets weed, he smokes it and sells it. He commits as much crime inside as he does on the outside. He gets contraband from visitors, bent screws or people who have been on home leave. He also has a mobile phone. He watches smuggled-in blue movies and they get regular pirate films. He's living a good life.

Derek said that one of the only things that would keep him out of prison is public humiliation. He said if there was a choice to either do time, or serve his time doing public work in high visibility jackets amongst the general public, he'd much prefer to do his time in the "privacy" of a prison. He said that he'd feel so embarrassed if he had to do painting and decorating, road sweeping or gardening wearing bright yellow overalls with the words PRISON INMATE emblazoned on the back. He said he'd be open to ridicule, people would be offensive towards him and his family would be ashamed. He said that this kind of punishment would probably be the one thing that would keep him out of trouble. He said the thought of doing eight hours work wearing high visibility clothing with people thinking you're a paedophile or a murderer and on top of that not being paid is something that would probably be a deterrent!

I ought to write a letter to John Major

August Mayfield