My Name Is Alejo

October 5, 2016 By Alejo Rodriguez

Alejo. The name is a derivative of Alejandro, the Spanish equivalent of Alexander. By origin, the name is Greek and means helper or defender of humanity. Its meaning took me a lifetime to come to understand. This is why, even as I write from behind razor-wire fences, I'm committed to social justice—not as a politician but as a man on a journey, as a father, writer, poet, teacher and organizer.

As a graduate of Syracuse University, with a master's degree from New York Theological Seminar, with several acknowledgements from the Bard Prison Initiative and Drew University, I've sought to arm myself with the tools I need for this journey. Yet I've also been extremely irresponsible with my life and my relationships with others. I've spent more than 30 years in prison, and because of my absence some may consider me to be a "Deadbeat Dad." (Fortunately, the one to whom my absence directly relates doesn't share this view.) I've also been called a "loser" and been accused of being a selfish, self-centered partner.

Actually, there's a laundry list of experiences I've had to overcome. But this is exactly the point. Those experiences—both the good and the bad—were just episodes that I've been through. Those incidents are not who I am. Sure, some experiences require I be held accountable and, for them, I take full responsibility. But none of these experiences define me, the living, breathing person with a soul and senses and whose heart pumps with life.

What these occurrences have done is to help me understand that my quest is for freedom from prison in all its different forms and disguises. I seek a better understanding of my perceptions, language, self-talk and those relationships that are interpersonal and the ones that occur in the world. I don't have the answers. All I possess is the desire to contribute to a broader discussion with others on similar journeys. And so this is why I write.

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