

“The Living Breathing Bodies of Unit 5D”

By James Blake Beene

The Bexar County Adult Detention Center defines each inmate as a living, breathing body. The following narratives, both written and dictated with minimal editing, are first-hand accounts of living, breathing bodies residing in Unit 5D of the Bexar County Adult Detention Center in October 2013.



Warning: The following accounts may contain strong language and graphic content. Discretion is advised.

4:30 AM Wake-up call, fluorescent lights, trays, the guards, shouts. 32 bunks, two rows, 2 bunks in each row.

Tennessee, a Caucasian man, also known as Mississippi, had reddish blonde shaggy hair, a full beard, and a mouthful of rotted teeth. Once I got store, he tended to hover around me, anticipating another opportunity to ask me for coffee; the dirt-cheap stuff that turned hot water into coffee-flavored water at best.

I swapped coffee and other commissaries for stories. If I were to be stuck in this place for ten days, I was determined to make it mean something, and Tennessee was happy to oblige me with his thick southern drawl, but this time I asked for something in writing.

“I was asked to write a little bit on my life and what has been the main factor in my life that has led up to this point in my life of being locked up. Going back to the early years of my adolescence in life, my very first experience with alcohol or drugs is with my dad. He would let me and my brother have a beer after work when we were like eight and nine, and it began from that point on. I haven't ever really liked beer. The taste, I guess, but liquor, now that's a whole different show, especially mixed drinks. I would drink my fill of mixed drinks and be the life of the party. Until...

I remember my dad calling out to me from the back door of the house where I grew up. Stopping me from what I was doing, which was rolling a tire down the hill for him, and as I stopped, I remember him just saying to me like it was really nothing *John Henry just got killed this morning*. Then turned and walked back into the house. I think I was maybe 12 or 13. Anyway, the news John H. was dead really blew my mind out of this world. I had never known anybody, old or young, who had died. And the way he had died was very hard for me also.

John was a cousin whom everyone thought was my brother. I have a brother. He is 11 years younger than me, but when we were kids, I liked John better than I did my own brother, still do. I've learned in the 47 years of my life how the most damaging and life-changing events that I've experienced through the years have all been directing due to or caused by the use of drugs and or alcohol. My most recent event and life changing experience with drugs has landed me in the Bexar County Adult Detention. Look at a two to five-year stint. All because I didn't use better judgment and stick to my guns and do what I should have done. And that is to use what I have learned in life. Always, and I mean always, stay true to what I believe in and to let my yes be yes and my no be no! To stay clear of people, places, and things that are going to lead me into a lifestyle of pain and trouble. I'm all too familiar with and don't wish to return to.”



Refugio L., a tall, lean Hispanic man in his 40s with short, clipped hair and a tattoo of a woman's lips pressed against his neck, told me of his troubles in Chicago before moving to San Antonio, his wife's infidelity and the rage it drove him to. This is his written account:

“Hello, my name is Refugio, an inmate at Bexar County jail. The reason why I'm here is for no proper ID and in the wrong place at the wrong time: a house party, had just came from Chicago from doing so much wrong to my wife and friends, and it all started cause of anger – divorce, did so much wrong but did not get caught at all until I came to San Antonio and if anyone believe in karma it's me so don't do wrong because what goes around comes around. I think by landing here made me think twice of doing wrong, and in my belief, let God take his course and let him take care of your problems. Sometimes, you think you could fix things by violence, but karma is true. Let God do his part because, in the end, he has an answer for everything, and things happen for a reason. Sometimes, we don't understand, but let time take his course and believe there is a superpower in this world, and his name is God. Faith, hope, it's all we have and need.”



HD, or Leemer, a seemingly quiet, soft-spoken young Dominican man, always walking around with this shirt off, a trustee of the unit, steps in to diffuse conflicts between fellow inmates wrote this:

“I started off sellin’ weed, then went to stealin’ cars typically. I was chillin’ sellin’ my drugs and makin’ money. But in the long run, I got greedy and want more money, so I called my bro, and he came to help make more money, but he sold cocaine while I was selling weed. But we stole this car and fucked around and got spotted by the laws, and I got chased on foot, but they hit me with the car and caught me. But my name is HD, and I sell weed for a living and I moved to San Antonio when I was ten, and now my girl is gonna have twins in two months, and I hope to go home November 18th. And I from New York, Brooklyn, and Ima Dawg, AKA Blood for Life. That’s how I ended it in county jail from robbing peoples.”



Dr. High Life, “Chief of Staff” wrote:

“I was born in a poor town in Panama City, Panama in Latin America, I came to the United States to better my life, but apparently, I did not pursue my dreams. I was expelled from high school at the 10th grade. After that, at 17 years old, I attended Gary Job Corps in San Marcos, Texas. I was kicked out of Job Corps because I came out dirty on a drug test, so I came back to reside with my family. I was giving a choice by my father to go to the Army or join college. I decided to go to college.

I started attending Hallmark College in 2010. My major was computer science, and concentrating in cybersecurity I was three courses from graduation when I got caught smoking weed at the campus, so I was terminated due to the fact that the college has a no-drugs policy. I told my father, and that broke his heart marijuana has been messing up my life. He was so upset that he threw me out the house.

I had nowhere to go, so I went to stay over at a friend's house. I was doing drugs daily and drinking a lot. I ran out of money, so my friend and I decided to make some easy money and break into a house. We beat up a guy that was standing at his porch, then we went into his home and tried to find things of value that we can sell, but we found nothing, so that made us mad, and we started breaking everything in the residence. I went back to my friend's house, and about 20 minutes later, the police showed up. They asked to see my ID. I refused. He grabbed me to arrest me, but I fought him back and was not letting him, so another officer ran towards us and said *Shoot that Motherfucker!* He was talking about the Taser gun. They both tried to throw me down. I held both of them, and all three of us went down. I was brought to jail and charged with burglary of a habitation by force. I was released two months later on deferred probation which means I comply with all the requirements. It will not show my record.”



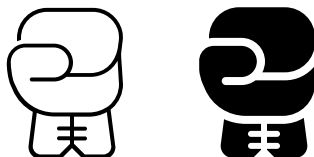
I could see the hurt in his eyes as Coach Jose spoke about his children whom he coached in boxing. His daughter became a Golden Glove champion at the age of 20. He has not had a relationship with them in two years. His daughter, at the age of 21, was going to school and had a boyfriend to Refugio's disapproval. She called the police, asking for a police escort, and her father was subsequently arrested. This is his written account:

“Hey there, to all them youngsters that always think and have the word *Can't* in their vocabulary, there ain't such a word. *Can't*. My name is Coach Jose, and I've been coaching for the past year and a half not much experience but determination to make a champion, but out of coincidence made not one but three. I am a father of three, and with a lot of pushing and scolding, yelling, disciplining my kids, I made my daughter a Golden Glove champion.

But every time she got in trouble. I made her give my lil' one pads. In due time. Six months, she was ready for the ring. Without her even being once in the ring just by pad work and sparring with her brothers.

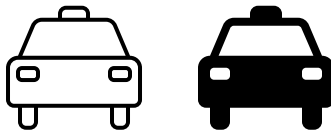
Once in their 30 seconds in the ring, she stopped her opponent. I wasn't amazed, but the words that came out her mouth was. *I can't do it, Dad*. Once won, she said, *Wow, we did it*, and I said, *No, you did it, Mija, I told you, you could*.

So, to everyone, take that word, *Can't*, out your vocabulary proven fact. I got a 17-year-old old, also eight months after the fact, became a Golden Glove champion. Took two kids to the gloves, and they both came back champions. The hardest one to train was my little one, Mr. Know it all, he always thought I was a bully. But as a coach, you train your fighters to not get hurt and discipline. Believe me, he needed lots of that. But in the end, after so much crying and pushing made him silver and junior Olympic at the end, they got McDonald's or whatever they wanted to eat. Amazing but true. If you work hard, it pays off sooner, but no later. Don't never doubt yourself. Have a nice day, and God bless.”



Patrick F. wrote:

“I grew up in a world that seemed to be moving faster than my memory could catch, but from the mere images of my mind, I'll try to recall. It starts off as a kid at a train station. No mom, no dad, me and my sister. Crying our eyes out. My whole life changes when my mother came back in my life, I thought the only problem I had was behaving in school, but I was sadly mistaken. Deaths of friends, family separation. A troubled upbringing for any kid, but my downfall was making my own decision. I choose to burglarize houses. No real explanation for it besides wanting money fast and with less work. But with less work comes more risk. I fell into a ritual or, for lack of a better word, addiction that landed me in jail. I've spent eight months to date in here, and I'm not sure how long I have left. I want to change but the scariest thing I fear is getting out and falling back into the same habit until it's too late and I end up in jail for years or laid out on someone's floor matt, my struggle with my demons continue.”



Anonymous wrote:

“So basically, I had a regular childhood, both parents, nice neighborhood, High School graduate in 2001. I had a newborn baby girl. So adorable. But me and the mother as seniors were big into ecstasy, weed, and raves. Upon the arrival of my little girl, I decided I needed to grow up and become a father. I tested and enlisted into the United States Air Force. Had a fun four years while I was in. Even was in line to improve my rank to E-5, which is a Staff Sergeant.

In 2005, they told me due to the Iraqi war, my age and health of myself, and my job, they wanted me to re-enlist into the army, which I had no desire of doing. They also was going to not give me my promotion if I went Army which made my decision even easier to not re-enlist. Once I was honorably discharged from the armed forces, I struggled through multiple career changes, unsatisfied with one thing or another of each choice.

Finally, I found a job which fit my needs as a chauffeur for a taxicab company, Yellow Checker. Few months into the job as my primary hours being 8:00 PM to 8:00 AM, and my primary clientele being strippers, I repeatedly was questioned, because of my youth, if I used or could find cocaine. Fortunately, through my job, I knew a few people who could get it, and I would send business his way. But after a couple months, I realized that if I was the go-to guy I would increase my income greatly. So, I tried to sell cocaine and chauffeur at the same time but was never able to have a large amount of powder to sell and plenty of customers.

One day, I had a client to pick up at 4:30 PM in Helotes, TX. I get to his residence a little late due to heavy traffic that day at 4:40 PM. His destination being downtown Greyhound station during traffic time of departure 4:55 PM. I explained we won't make it, but he has me try.

Arriving, as I assumed, 10 minutes late, my trunk full of his luggage. He offers me an additional \$100 to wait with him at a bar down the road until the next bus. Trip at 9:30 PM. Except we drink, play pool, and chop it up for several hours awaiting his next bus, while unknown to myself, he is frequently using the restroom snorting coke, which is also making him talk more and more. Also realizing he doesn't want to ride a six to seven-hour greyhound to the valley.

Eventually, he proposes to me \$500 to drive him to McAllen. Also, to fill my gas tank and give me a room once we're there for the night. Drunk, I accept, and off we go. During the trip, he's talking a lot about what he does and so and so, eventually asking if he could snort coke in my cab. I say it's OK, then offering me some, and I snort a line. Eventually, we're both talking about our lives and shit. During the four-hour drive, he reveals to me how he drives hundreds of pounds to Chicago by truck twice a month and gets \$30,000 to do it, offering me \$1000 of it to help him get the money through the border. I accept and we have a good business every two weeks.

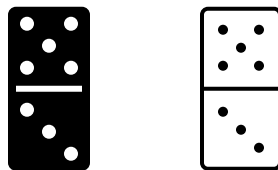
One day, I asked him if I could buy a couple of ounces from him for my strippers, and he gives me the name and number of someone who could help me. I called the guy, and surprisingly, the guy invites me to his home and, teaches me the ropes, sells me the dope, and from that day, I began dealing drugs full-time out of the cab. Business was great for over a year. I furnish a nice house, finance a brand-new car, party, and enjoy life to the fullest. With all the toy I wanted. Life was good.

One hot day in, middle of 2007. I make an uncomfortable drug transaction against my better judgment. Later that day, I arrive home to several cop cars and officers at my residence. Knowing more about me than they should, and I'm arrested and charged with selling drugs and guns. Out on bond, I'm fighting the charges. Spending too much on bonds and lawyers and such until I break down and sign on seven years of probation. Low on cash and gaining in debt, I decide to sell drugs once again to pay my fees and living expenses.

One unfortunate day at a club, I'm questioned by the cops, searched and charged with another drug case, arrested, and bonded. Cut warrants for probation, paid up and back and forth to court. It is with me once again. As expected, the judge drops the new drug case and convicts me on the motion to revoke. And sentenced to seven years in prison.

Beginning early 2009, I do my time and make parole and Emma released middle of 2010. Released to nothing. I had lost everything. I had the house, furniture, the car, even the woman I was with. I had nothing but my mother living at home. I decide I'm going to stay legal. I get me a good job, make promotions, rent a nice apartment, purchase some used cars, and do everything legal and successfully. Life was good again. Met a new girl. We did so much together, traveled and just had a good life. Everything was working out. We even just this year got a house together, several vehicles, a boat, two dogs, 2 cats. What more could we want? Well, there was more, drugs.

We decided to try meth together. Ever since that day, everything got worse. We fought more, late to work, less reliable. Well, during our drug-infused minds, cops get called on us the first time she is arrested for scratching me. I bond her out, and she beats the case, the judge warning her that if she does it again, she will place a restraining order on us. So, middle of August, cops arrived to our house after a fight of ours. I have my girlfriend leave out the back door. I answered the door, scratched and bleeding. The officers questioned me and, unsatisfied with my answers, threatens to arrest me if I don't call my girlfriend. So, I call his bluff, and he arrests me. I bond out ready to fight this bogus case when parole puts a warrant out for me and here, I am today, awaiting their decision. Only thing to look forward to though is I haven't lost anything. My cars and toys, house and girlfriend with the pets. Are all waiting for me to come home.”



Looking up from our game of dominoes, he dictated, “Hola mi nombre es Ildefonso. Back in 2011, I was with my ex-girl Kimberly. We were madly in love. Well, me and her were in love. Like I said, we had an abusive relationship, right?

Well, one day, August 29th, 2011. We got into a physical fight that led to the cops being called. Well, the cops arrived on the scene, questioned me about what was going on. I told them that my girl was Loca and that she tried to stab me with some scissors because I told her that I was leaving her. And then I reacted by punching her in the face, and she fought back, and after that ran outside, and the cops were already pulling up to the house.

So that's why we're having this conversation, is what I told the cops anyways,” he laughs.

“I am frustrated. I told the cops I can't be with her no more. She cheats on me; she lies to me; she manipulates any situation. She's a whore. Conniving bitch! Yeah, that sounds good. Put that. Anyways, these cops questioned me about some suspicious trucks that were in the backyard. I told them that I had no idea whose trucks those were or where they came from. I have been staying here at this house for only less than a week. If you need to know anything about them trucks, talk to Kimberly. Because this house ain't mine.”

“Yeah, well there's ten,” I respond, referring to the dominoes.

“Damn, puto.... When the cops told me *Are you sure you don't know nothing about them trucks?* I told them, *Yes Sir, I haven't seen nobody move them or touch them since I've been here.* And they said, *Are you sure you're not lying? I'm sure if you have any questions, ask Kimberly again.* Next thing I know, more cops are called. The ICE agents are called as well.”

“ICE agents?” I asked him.

“Yeah, ICE agents are immigration control something, for the simple reason because all the back seats of each truck were taken out, and they said it looks suspicious, like an immigrant smuggling activity. Um, not too long after that, after immigration arrived, I was questioned again on the scene by ICE agents about the stolen trucks. I told them the same thing I told SAPD, and then I said, *I'm not saying nothing no more without a lawyer.*”

Then I was, um, then I saw helicopter on top of my house. Then I snapped that this situation was bigger than I thought it was. Then I turned and looked at Kimberly and saw that she was crying. It hurt me to see her like that, but what was done was done. At the same time, I wanted to tell them the truth, but I knew what consequences would come of it if I opened up my mouth. Now I'm thrown off because I remember that day, and it pisses me off.”

Anyway, I was told by officers that I was being charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. Then, I was taken to the magistrate DT. Eventually, I was booked in for the first time of my life in jail. Being locked up for the first time made me snap about the mistakes I made out there in the world. Me being away from my kids and my family made me regret everything I did. Couple days after that, after I was in jail, I was taken out of my pod to be questioned again by ICE agents.”

“What are we playin' for again?” Another guy chimes in about the dominoes.

“All bread for tomorrow... They pulled out their badges and told me they were ICE agents. That's how I knew who they were. They pulled out a paper with ten mug shots of different guys. They told me if I recognized any of them. He was like, this nigga right here? I told 'em no, I didn't. They also pulled out pictures of a guy next to a car I recognized, and they said, that *I know that you know who that is*, for the simple fact that they pulled out another picture of this same guy at a horse race with a group of guys, and one certain person in that picture resembled me, but they weren't too sure because they couldn't make out my face because that person's back was facing toward them. I told them I didn't know who that was and that the person wasn't me if that's what they're trying to say. They told me that they couldn't prove that was me, but if they did, that I was going to go to prison for a long time and that's when I told them again, *I am not saying shit no more without a lawyer.* That's when they got up and said, *you'll be hearing from us again.*”

Months pass by, and I'm still in jail, pissed at the world, and my ex-Kimberly's-“

His story is cut off by the guard shouting for us to go back to our bunks. He takes the notebook paper with him to finish and writes the following:

“letter that she wrote me caught my attention one night. I received it the first month I was in jail but never opened it. It said so many things that made me feel bad for what I did to her, but at the same time, I knew that it was her way of getting me back. Well, it worked. And I

ended up writing her back telling her it's OK to come visit me. She came to see me eventually and apologized for everything that happened and for me being in jail. I forgave her and continued to receive her visits until October 31st, the same day I got the last letter from her.

Eventually, I found out she found someone else and moved on with her life. I finally got a visit from my mom, the first time I got a smile on my face was during that visit. I kept on getting reset at court and eventually was as moved to Crystal City and Burnett County on different occasions due to crowding here in the Bexar County Jail. I got called out my dorm to the lieutenant's office, where I received the worse news in my life, that my mother had passed away. I broke down and cried instantly.

I eventually was brought back to Bexar County for court, and March 29th, 2012, charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon were eventually dropped down to a lesser charge of assault and bodily injury. I already served eleven months by that time and got time served on six months county time. I went back to my normal life living in the country this time around. I managed to stay out of trouble until one day, I was with some friends, and we were pulled over. Then I was taken in for a secret indictment warrant out of Bexar County. I was surprised because I never knew nothing at the time about that warrant.

Well, apparently, the ICE agents weren't lying about me hearing from them again. Well, I found myself being charged for the stolen trucks from the year before. Since I still didn't want to say anything. Still, I ended up taking the charge myself. I signed on three years deferred adjudication. Probation. I was already with my new girlfriend, who gave birth to my little beautiful girl, Sarah Lynn. Again, I got back to my life, raising my kids and working. I hung out with some old friends. Who eventually got me back on drugs.

One certain guy said that he wanted to hang out. But I told him I was in San Antonio at the time with my family and that I would call him when I got home. Me and my girlfriend had an argument on the way home. We arrived to the house, and there was my friend sitting on the porch waiting for me. I got in an argument and eventually ran him off. The next day, I was pulled over and the cops told me that I had a warrant for my arrest. The investigator said I was being charged with aggravated robbery with a deadly weapon. Surprised like crazy I told the cops they had the wrong guy and still they took me in to jail in Atascosa County. Apparently, my friend I ran off the day before, said me and some other guys robbed him. But that was a lie.

The investigators said. They know I did it, that's why I'm in jail. I ended up doing 3 months serving the recommended 90 days. Needed to get a PR bond to get out, but since I was on probation, I got extradited over here to Bexar County for the MTR my probation officer gave me. Now I've been here a month and a half. I've been to court twice, both times being reset due to murder trials. I'm set for court October 30th, 2013. Hopefully, my probation is reinstated. My lawyer has come to see me on separate occasions already. The last time he came he gave me good news saying my case and Atascosa should be dropped due to no

evidence and no indictment after being accused of those allegations 5 months ago. Two more weeks and I pray to God that I go home to my family.”



“I never intended to become a criminal,” Stephen N. wrote, “I mean that I've never deliberately broken the law. My offenses have been caused by my addiction to alcohol. I am an alcoholic, and my actions, namely drinking and driving, have landed me in jail or to prison. I certainly had no intention of ever becoming an alcoholic, but my lifelong battle with the bottle has had dire results. For the majority of my life, I've lived a fairly quiet existence. Working, going to school, raising children, all of the normal things people are supposed to do. My downfall has been that I've always relied on alcohol to numb the feeling I've tried to escape. Many times, it has worked. However, it invariably leads me to trouble with the legal system. While I am most definitely not looking forward to my prison stay, perhaps I can use this time to finally rid myself of the demons which have haunted me through my adult life. Everything happens for a reason and although I'm unclear as to the reasons for this, maybe some good will result because of it.”



Mario C. aka Sincere, mid-twenties, self-identified as Spaniard or Hispanic, and dictated the following:

“August 30th. 1st day in county jail from booking. 3A was my pod. 3A is the time I laid my head in jail. Day 2 I got raped by A Rodriguez aka Rick. Was morning got introduced to all the 210 homeboys as Sincere. Like that afternoon, a new homeboy came in. We introduced him to the group. And he recognized one of the persons that was in the group to be a MS-13, letra Mexican Mafia undercover. He was the right-hand man of the speaker of the homeboys. He did not know we were gonna smash on him. So, we're waiting till after the freeze. At the same time, another letra showed up to our pod, so we had to smash on two for the price of 1. So, as soon as the freeze was over, the game room was open, the letra sat down by the TV. So, we got three homeboys to jam him up, and me, Sincere, and the speaker jammed up the right-hand man. I hit him in the face. Unexpectedly and at the same time, the three homeboys were jamming up that one letra that walked in. The guard Nunez popped the code too. The guard was screaming *Stop! Stop!*

And we got into the corner wall, right-hand man still beating him up. SERT came in, Special Emergency Response Team to break up the fight. And they tased him in his ass. Took five homeboys to lock down and the two letras to medical. Got my first assault, spent ten days in lockdown. Moved me from lockdown back to annex. After the ten days was going good.

Until two weeks... Got in another fight with the Solano. He was laying down on the top bunk in the corner back wall. He was asleep on his side. I pushed him off his bunk. He hit the wall and hit the floor and said *oh shit!* Homeboy came on the other side, waiting for me to push him off the top bunk. And he stayed on the ground, didn't get up for about four minutes. Beat his ass, at the same time code 2 was popped, SERT took us out of the door. The reason I beat his ass because he was talking shit. He also snitched on me. Now I got two assaults. Third one is a felony. Came into jail with a misdemeanor, but the system might keep me for a felony if I fight one more time.

For now, I'm just trying to take it easy, trying to stay out of trouble. And I only been here a month, and I got five more months to go. So hopefully, I don't fuck up before then, but it's easy to get in trouble when you don't take shift from nobody. More than likely, when I get out I'll be right back in because I'm a menace to society. Since I was a kid. I was going to be a gangster. And always wanted to be like Scarface. Been there, done that, done every drug there is, committed every sin there is. So, I feel like I completed my goals in life by holding myself to the perfect American gangster.”

Looking back at these stories from almost twelve years ago, I'm amazed that I could sit and have conversations with what could be described as violent criminals, but it didn't feel that way at the time. Sure, I was a little intimidated, and perhaps scared at times, but for the most part I sat in the presence of troubled youth with traumatic upbringings, people from poor socio-economic backgrounds often dealing with drug and alcohol addiction, older men some of whom struggled with the vicious cycle of crime to lift themselves back out of poverty. Most of them were remorseful. It didn't always come across that way on the page, but you could see it in their faces. I too was looking for a second chance.

*Stay tuned for more on my story.