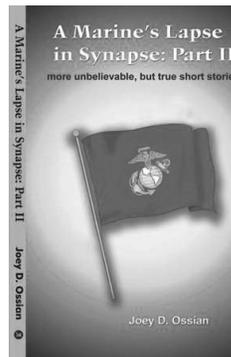
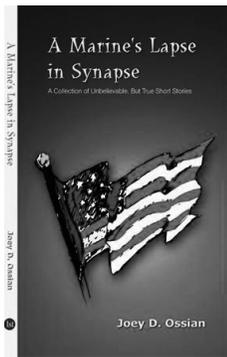


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by

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foreword

I began working for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) in May of 2003, sort of by accident. I had absolutely zero intentions of making a career out of the field. Corrections was simply the instant back-up plan, so I could continue to support my family. You see, my wife and children had become accustomed to eating and sleeping indoors. Oh, we have a very nice tent...but nobody wants to live in it 24/7. Work was the obvious choice.

I had been wrongly banished from a career in education for which I had spent the better part of my adult life preparing. The allegations were multiple; including a great deal of debauchery and malfeasance, and the local press coverage was not helping. It was only a matter of time before I was partly responsible for the Lindbergh baby and the 9.11 terrorist attacks. People frequently asked me, "What the heck was going through your mind when the bomb dropped?" There was no time to sit and stew about it. I was in what politicians call "damage control." There had to be work somewhere that had insurance benefits, and flippin' burgers for minimum wage was out. I have no problem with flippin' burgers. There is dignity in every job. I just needed something that provided more income with a benefit plan. Desperation took hold.

To keep our financial heads above water, I had been picking up some extra active-duty days with my National Guard unit when a former Marine friend and member of the unit, Master Sergeant Tommy Butts, told me about the department of corrections. When it came to the thought of working with inmates, the slight fear and intimidation I felt was normal. The public misconception that 99% of all inmates are cold-hearted rapists and violent axe-murderers was not lost on me. I went in with incredible anxiety regarding how long it would take for me to get a feces bath or a beat-down.

I started my correctional tour at the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center (DEC, or D & E) on West Van Dorn in Southwest Lincoln, Nebraska. The D & E is the receiving facility where all male state inmates are in-processed (diagnosed and evaluated, hence the title). An adult male inmate typically spends up to five weeks here before his final residence is determined, unless he is a county safe-keeper, then his time varies tremendously until he is assigned a state number. At that point, the inmate will be transported to one of the following facilities: the Omaha Correctional Center (OCC), which is an hour drive on the interstate, passing through Carter Lake, Iowa to get there; the Lincoln Correctional Center (LCC), which is connected to the D & E via tunnel; the Nebraska State Penitentiary (NSP), which is about a five minute trip via West Van Dorn, the Homestead Expressway, and Pioneer's Boulevard; or, the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution (TSCI), which is almost an

hour drive, going east down Highway 2 to Syracuse, and then south down Highway 50. TSCI will be on the west side of the road before you reach Tecumseh, a small, mostly-catholic town of roughly 2,000 people. Coincidentally, Tecumseh is also my birthplace.

No one told me, but it did not take long to realize that I was no better than many of the inmates. In fact, a large number of the inmates I have come to know over the past several years are serving time for less serious crimes than many of us get away with on a regular basis. There are some, I dare say, that are flat-out much better people than I will ever be. Eventually, you grow out of the fear, and realize that you are probably as safe on the inside as you are on the free-side, depending entirely on your communication skills, your desire to preserve your credibility, and your ability to respect your fellow human beings.

I have learned that people who are career criminals and suspect that they might commit crimes in their future occasionally move to Nebraska. Why, you might ask? It is widely known amongst criminals that prison in Nebraska is an adult day-camp where their time will be served with ease. The gamble of criminal activity is greatly reduced, because the consequence of prison time is not nearly as severe as in many other states.

The key to getting along on the inside is the same as it is for getting along on the outside. Most inmates arrive with damaged dignity. Allow them to keep what dignity remains, and treat them with respect. The problem with working in

corrections for very long is that you tend to get lazy and accustomed to doing little more than watching people. I am sure it would be very difficult to return to the demands of a normal occupation. A friend of mine who used to work in the department, Mike Jepsen, talked about leaving corrections like this, “Recognize when you need to move on. Once you stop caring about people, it’s too late. You will never start caring again.” Mike is of course assuming that working in corrections will eventually make you stop caring about people.

A rather large concern while writing this book is the observation that some things will not make the transition out of the department of corrections. The sayings, the sightings, the facial expressions, etc. may not have the same impact for readers, especially for those who have never worked in the field. I suppose that problem exists for every writer and every transition. If you think this book is funny, and I hope you do, you will have experienced a small fraction of the humor to which I was exposed.

Thanks for reading.

Joey D. Ossian

preface

What is meeting your potential? Being all that you can possibly be? Who other than the Army in their old commercials does that? It is very unlikely that everyone who has all the snappers and meets all the criteria will turn out to be a doctor, a professional athlete, or an astronaut. Please notice, I did not say lawyer. Sorry John. Sorry Jason. There is more than hard work involved. Luck and money are two huge factors.

Teachers have cornered the market on the phrase, “I do not think your child is meeting their potential.” Hypocrites! All of them! Did they meet their potential? Could they have possibly been more? Who determines what potential is? Is it a dollars driven concept? If money is not involved, is it driven by your impact on the world? Why can it not be the profound happiness we bring to our own surroundings? Our children, our family? What a downer to spend your life thinking things like: If only I would have practiced more; If only I had studied harder; If only I had worked harder. Look, there are only so many people named Pete Rose, Jackie Robinson, Lance Armstrong, and Larry Bird out there. The rest of you need to be happy with what you have accomplished and get over it.

What does it mean to have exceeded your potential beyond what you should have? How is that possible? Are we

talking about when you accomplish things that you should not have been able to accomplish? Are we confusing the term potential with expectation? Is it just semantics, or glorification of an accomplishment to make yourself sound like you have done more with less? Only Marines can do that.

What sort of potential does an inmate have once they are released? Is it entirely up to them? Will they be subjected to the new expectations that our society has for ex-cons? Will they be given the full opportunity of a second chance? When do they really stop doing time?

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