- Inmates or the families of people who have loved ones in trouble with the law, so they will know what prison is like. I wanted people in the lay world to see it also. Unfortunately, the middle class today is deceived by our politicians as to what prisons are really like. Prisons are in every way schools of everything that we say would be despised.

- Well, according to some politicians and a lot of talk show hosts, they're relatively luxurious, nice places that people wouldn't mind spending vacation. I had a victim's rights person on the show, said she wouldn't mind spending her vacation in prison. She'd visited several that week and said, it would be a nice place to go to relax.

- I have a sneaking feeling she would change her mind if she were obliged to spend a few months in Mountain View. She would-- might be forced to engage in a few sexual acts that she disapproves. She might meet some wonderful people called building tenders. She might be worked after death in the fields or whatever they do at Mountain View.

- Yeah, they work them in the fields, as we found out. I had a good program on women recently and--

- And when she came out of prison, she might--

- Have calluses on her hands.

- Right. And have a few confrontations with victims rights people who would tell her to go to the back of the bus.

- Yeah.

[LAUGHS]

- Not exactly a funny situation. She might be shocked to find out that her family is broken up.

- Throughout the book, you sprinkle incidents, certain things that you witnessed and things that happened to you and other inmates while there. And none of them are pleasant.

- Absolutely.

- Why do you suppose so many of the people that we did time with are so anxious to go back?

- For one thing, Ray, prison becomes a way of life if you've been there after a while.

- Well, I have. And I wasn't there but for four years. But it became a way of life for me.

- When a person goes to prison, their ties with the outside world are severed. If they are fortunate, they might maintain family ties. Unfortunately a lot of them are not so unfortunate. Their families break up. They get out of prison, they are stigmatized. They cannot get jobs. They literally have no place to go except back to prison.

Many times, the prison has taught them to rely on authority figures to make their decisions for them. Making day-by-day decisions in everyday life becomes very uncomfortable for people having lived for so long in that situation. And hence, they long for the painful security of a prison.

- You say in your book that your period of incarceration was 17 years.

- Yes, sir.

- And during that period of time, was that-- were you afraid?

- I was very much afraid. The first three years in the Harris County Jail was dreadful for me. We literally wore rags all the time. Violence was replete in the county jail.

- And you and I were there together.

- Yes, we remember that it was hard. And back in those days, and that was the early 1970s, you went into the jail tank, you might remain there for at least two years. And you did not come out, except to go to court or to get beaten up by the--

- Brought the pill lines.

- --goon squad, yeah.

- You didn't go to the pill line.

[CHUCKLES]

- It was simply an iron cavern.

- All right.

- And--

- As a matter of fact, you were there when we clicked on the building. As a matter of fact, you described that in the book.

- Oh, yeah, I think we did that several times, Ray.

- Yeah, right.

- See, what happened--

- We had revolutions going on while we were in prison.

- Because the guards do not supervise properly. At this time, they assigned building tender inmate overseers over the tanks. And we were--

- The Captain Cleveland Higgins building too.

- Yeah, and the rule of--

- What?

- It was-- Captain Cleveland Higgins was captain of the county jail or the rehab. Sure.

- The role of the building camp, yeah, was to enforce discipline.

- Yeah, he was the guard.

- At any price, at any way, even if it meant stealing inmates' things.

- Well, they did that. They supported themselves living off of other people's [INAUDIBLE].

- Right. And we couldn't do anything at all when the situation got intolerable, except the clique then beat him half to death and throw his mortal remains outside the tank. But see, what usually happened is the strong guy of the clique became the new building tender. And then, we would be happy for a few days then--

- You described that very accurately in the book. It was a wonderful, wonderful passage in your book. But you refer to inmate society as a, kind of, cult. Could you share with us how you come to that comparison? Because I found that an interesting comparison.

- Interestingly, I speak of a cult meaning a sense of exclusiveness from the rest of society that comes about through some special rite of passage.

- Sure.

- The tough guy image, the criminal image, the special knowledge of the world, this--

- The value system.

- Yeah, the type of macho that develops in the prison frequently comes about because the inmates' ties with the outside world have been severed. Unfortunately, many times, he's been divorced. His friends have little in common with him anymore.

- Except those few that are in there with him.

- Oh, yes. This is especially true of young inmates. So many times, I've heard them come down and say, man, don't mess with my food. They'd kill you at Gatesville for that.

- [LAUGHS]

- All right. You said that, hey, I've been to Ferguson, man. We'd kill you for that. Don't do this to me. I've been to Gatesville. This perverse--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- --Gatesville, for those of you who are not here, where it's the juvenile prisons that we used to have.

- Right.

- It's now where we keep the women. I don't know what symbolism is involved in that. And Ferguson was the gladiators farm.

- Right. It's for youthful offenders. But see, it's not a deterrent. It's a how-to school for next time.

- Well, in my interview with Jack Kyle, who was the guy who conceptualized the idea of Ferguson, he is literally prototype master of the boot camp theory.

- Oh, sure.

- Because folks at Ferguson didn't walk anywhere. They ran to chow. They ran to shower. They ran to the field. It was the expanded boot camp.

- Oh, sure.

- And the only difference in the boot camp things we hear about today is boot camp is usually about a 90 day thing. Ferguson was time.

- It is. See, the problem, ironically, with a lot of the penal institutions, including the boot camp idea, is the fact that the discipline is not constructively goal-directed. It's discipline for the mere sake of discipline. And it just builds repressiveness. And if I could take these young offenders out of boot camp, discipline, discipline them to discipline themselves, that is a different story. But there is no follow-up, really, for these boot camp situations.

Now, and when I was interviewing Jack, the whole character of his voice changed. We started talking about the Ferguson experiment because that's the proudest part of his criminal career, of his criminal justice career. And Jack's not an ogre, Jackson. But it occurred to me, and someone on the internet put it to me, [? Marvin. ?] And he says, Raymond, you just don't understand that the relationship between the sadist and his victims is a love relationship.

- Sadist is kind to a masochist.

- Obviously. And it's difficult to think of that. But Jack drove those kids, literally drove them. Now his intentions, no matter how good they were, left scars on those kids.

- Oh, sure.

- And that showed up in your book--

- Definitely.

- --of those people in that.

- The one thing that the lay people on the street do not understand is the fact that the authoritarian personality is an amoral personality. It is not sufficient today to conform to an authority in order to have moral values. You have to think in terms of moral values. You have to be inner directed. Pure authoritarianism, such as what you find in a militaristic organization like a prison, preempts. It displaces the moral judgment of the individual.

And when they get out of prison, they don't know how to make decisions. They long for someone to make decisions for them, especially when they have a crossroads in their life as to whether to go back to a drug problem or whether to go straight, whether to get a job, whether to go back into crime. They don't know how to think in moral terms because the prison has displaced their judgment, so to speak. They become dependent on the person.

- Well, you certainly talk about the ethics in chapter eight, where you talk about corruption in the system.

[LAUGHS]

- Oh my god.

- [LAUGHS]

Moral issues notwithstanding, there are ethical issues there.

- Well, let's put it this way. My job at the wind unit, I was the bookkeeper in the food service warehouse.

- All right.

- And I had to bring in the refrigerated items.

- You would be distributing [INAUDIBLE] if you were there today.

- Gah.

- [LAUGHS]

- So see, we would bring in these 20 pounds boxes of meat from USDA, put them in the vault, and dispatch them out according to each unit to have need. I could never balance the books. I came up short every time. And we would often find these boxes of meat at the back door toward the open field, where some boss' car could come by and pick them up. I couldn't balance the books. But believe me, I can't get in the back gate--

- We gave one of them old things a pack of cigarettes. And that got him delivery.

- Sure. But see, they blame it on inmate theft. But I can't get in the back gate with a 20-pound box of meat.

- [LAUGHS]

- I can see hauling the thing by the prison picket boss and saying, don't worry about it, boss. Just a few items from the warehouse. That isn't going to work. Construction materials, I remember in the 1970s, it seemed like every brick in the state of Texas was going to the Cofield unit.

- [LAUGHS]

- And finally, they investigated and said there were some rebates going on back and forth. And they got that. Of course, in the trusty dorms at the prison, you can't breathe on weekends without getting high.

- Really?

- You can't. It's replete with drug trafficking. And once again, they say inmates and their families. Nonsense.

- No, there's been some research on drug trafficking. Dewey wants in here. And I've got another ex-convict. And he wants to get in the middle of your interview.

- Yeah, John, I have a mental image of you going back to the cell block with a 20-pound box of meat, sneaking it past the search to get it in your cell block. I just have a mental image of that.

- Can you imagine the stinger necessary to cook it?

- Ooh.

- [LAUGHS]

- I'm going to use it for a weapon I guess.

- [LAUGHS]

- But when it comes to stealing the construction materials, I never figured out what an inmate is going to do with bricks and mortars in his cell.

- [LAUGHS]

- Build a barbecue pit, maybe.

- Well, at one point, a Caterpillar came up missing. And the warden on the unit suggested that the inmates cut it up, a Caterpillar tractor. I'm talking about a big Mojo--

- It's a big D7 bulldozer.

- Right. Bulldozer. And they chopped it up and made shanks out of it.

[LAUGHS]

So everybody in the prison had four, five knives.

- It keeps them doing. Oh, Lord.

- Now it is-- well, you see, that's why I question the inmate code because it's really the prison cult, because everybody there has the same value system.

- Oh, sure. Just like Winston Churchill once said that if you want to see the dregs of society, go to the prison at shift change.

- [LAUGHS]

- See, it's one big morass.

- Yeah.

- You see, a lot of inmates get this idea. They learn to think of themselves as worldly-wise in proportion as they can beat the system. And if they're in league with the boss, the corrupt boss, you see, that's a type of macho exploitative predatory image.

- Yeah, it is. It's the old gang, yeah.

- It's the old predatory idea. But it just builds cynicism and a lack of confidence . And they get out and say, why should I abide by the law? The fat cats don't either. Why should I?

- John, how do you shuck all that when you get out?

- It's hard. You just have to bear down as hard as you possibly can. I am a fortunate man in that I had a support system when I got out of prison. I could do it.

- It was one that you put together while you were there.

- Right. I met my wife Pam through writing to the newspapers. I picked my friends very carefully in prison. That can be done at the wind farm because it's a very big prison. There are lots of inmates who take advantage of the rehabilitation there. And we flock together and try to help each other. We formed a Unitarian church group for that purpose and tried to form contacts into the outside world. It was very difficult and you--

- Just maintaining sanity is not easy.

- Right. It's--

- It's so easy to get lost in it. Pam, I gave you a good reference. You asked me about him right after you started corresponding, said, do you know this guy, John Indo?

- [CHUCKLES]

- And I said, yeah, I did. So I was able to give you a reference.

- Oh, sure.

- It's been a long journey, Ray.

- It has been.

- Very long. 12 years. And we have our three--

- Get a little closer to that mic.

- It's been 12 years since I met John. And we got married in 1984, June. And we have a three and 1/2 year old son named Michael.

- Michael is three year going on six. This is the most grown up three-year-old you will ever see. And I'm surprised because I didn't think we're going to put him down long enough for him to learn how to walk. But apparently, he runs rather well.

- Can you say Merry Christmas to everyone? Say Merry--

- Merry Christmas.

[LAUGHTER]

- Again, Merry Christmas? No?

[LAUGHTER]

- Yeah, he's going to do what I did. He's going to hit his head on the microphone. See, that's how I communicate.

- Mikey.

[CHILD BABBLING]

- But you had--

- Shh.

- John, you were locked up a long time.

- Yes.

- And that generally leaves scars of bitterness and anger. And you do-- well, you've always had a frown.

- Oh, yeah.

- Your forehead furls easily. But I think you're startlingly sane.

- Well, I question that myself at times.

[CHUCKLES]

But let me tell you, Ray, in all honesty, there are times when it came very close to just breaking down in tears when I get being denied for parole.

- Yeah, that was a long struggle. And Pam and I communicated a lot through that period.

- Absolutely. I did a lot of crying myself.

- It is painful. If the parole people could only know how their cat and mouse games wreak havoc in the lives of inmates and their families.

- As a matter of fact, under the rather innocuous title, the patrol-- parole system, you not only expose the capricious and arbitrary nature of parole decisions, but you have your own plan on how to put due process into the parole system, which you say does not exist now at all.

- Certainly. I think that we ought to do this by viewing parole as a contract between the individual and the state. We'll have a presentence investigation. And we will contract with that individual, proscribing what that person must do in order to make parole. And then, we'll put a social worker on that person's case to help that person plan to get out of prison.

If the system is subject to due process of law, we will have the ability to enforce these strictures once we get on the street. I realize that is almost utopian right now. Maybe it would be dreadfully expensive to do, but not quite so expensive as building prisons on every street corner.

- Well, that's true. Dewey, out there on the table, I have got a printout from my-- on prison population. Would you bring that to me? Because it's got some statistics.

- No.

- Thank you. Dewey, still have-- actually, I was shocked to hear that you had been involved in an escape from prison. I knew you well. And we wanted to get out.

- [CHUCKLES]

- But going over the fence was not the lucrative way to do that. But you assisted Old Frisky.

- [CHUCKLES]

When I was at the sentry unit, I met a cat. And he has an interesting story too. He was a survivor. His litter of kittens died in the warehouse. And I adopted a cat.

- A [INAUDIBLE] owl got his mother, and brothers, and sisters.

- Yeah, that was too bad. But--

- And Frisky survived by stealth.

- Yeah, that's right and--

- He's on the patio right now, as a matter of fact.

- You find it.

- Thank you.

- I smuggled out to my warehouse sardines and cereal for my cat to eat every day. And I grew attached to the cat. And my supervisor, he was a decent man. He made a deal with me. He said, the day after you make parole, I will meet you at the corner of Highway 6 and US 90, and I'll give you your cat, which he did. And my cat is with me today. Of course, he's no longer a cute little kitten.

- No, he's--

- He's just an old redneck tomcat.

- [LAUGHS]

- Just says, give me my cat food and leave me alone.

- Yeah, leave me alone.

[LAUGHS]

Well, a lot of old convicts get that way.

- Yeah, but--

[CHUCKLES]

--he's a good old cat.

- Good old cat.

- And he was something to love while I was in the central unit.

- That's-- and he's with you yet.

- Yes, he's still with me.

- Well, tell me-- although, I'm not entirely convinced that-- of who you wrote this book for. It appears to me-- and I may be way off base. And if I am, you can slap me down--

- Well, he might.

- [CHUCKLES]

That some of this is catharsis. You're--

- Oh, undoubtedly.

- You're empty. I think you really wrote the book for John Indo.

- Sure.

- And in the process, you come up with something that's interesting. I wanted to save until toward the end of the interview before we got into something we might disagree on. You take the medical model of crime pretty much to task.

- Very much so. Very much so.

- And of course, what John and I are talking about is as the world turns today, you divide those up into the medical model and those up in the punishment model. And never the twain shall meet. But you think that the medical model is so far off base that it needs--

- All right. You can look at it this way. The strange thing about the extremists, the punishers, and the medical rehabilitators is the fact that they look at each other from two sides of a mirror. The punishers are saying, your good behavior is determined by the threat of punishment.

The radical rehabilitators say, your bad behavior is determined by some pathological event in your past. Both argue each other and leave the individual in a state of moral bankruptcy.

Determinism, or better still, reductionism, is a fallacy. And I think it will probably be viewed as one of the greatest intellectual blunders of our 20th century. Rehabilitation is certainly a reality. And it cannot be denied that events in one's past play a major part in what we do with our lives.

But nonetheless, it's not the final word. The individuals are able to think. We must be trained to think, make moral decisions in life, and rehabilitate ourselves. People say, what is the purpose of prison? And they say, well, is it punishment? Is it rehabilitation? I say, prison is simply isolation for all practical purposes. The state may supply the resources. But the individual must rehabilitate himself or herself.

- It seemed like I've heard that before.

- Yes.

- Unless you're ready to be rehabilitated, it ain't going to work.

- Now here's the fly in the ointment. What determines whether a person is going to try or not is their self-esteem. And it is very, very difficult to elevate the self-esteem of an inmate when they are in such a depraved situation.

- [CHUCKLES]

- This is why--

- Yeah, it seems to me that you're not one of these bleeding heart liberals, who think that everybody ought to be cut loose and--

- No, no one should be cut loose. But I'll certainly be fair with everyone. When you-- you can't cut people loose for nothing. That leads to corruption. But I will certainly allow people to earn a parole, assist them in every way possible to do better for themselves. I think a lot of penal officials hold this view today, except their hands are tied by the rednecks in the legislature.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- Yeah, that's where the rednecking contests are going on. They're going on in the legislature.

- That's where it is.

- Actually, I think that, probably, the penal officials and the inmates have more in common about what works and what doesn't work than they would let on. There are some notable exceptions.

- Sure.

- I run into them on the internet, as anybody that's engaged. But most politicians are worse than the worst prison officials.

- Sure.

- You go to Angola, for instance. And you go down there. And you talk to the wardens. They got too many convicts. They want to get them convicts off their hands. They want to do away with three strikes, you're out. They want to do away with life without parole. Maybe we'll give those convicts opportunities to organize and hold meetings. They even go to banquets down there. The legislatures in Baton Rouge are not doing that. But the prison officials see the problem because they have to live with it.

- Sure.

- John Indo, you have poured your guts out in this book.

- Sure.

- And I think that it is a valuable asset. It is self-published.

- Sure. And how do we-- let's deal with people who correspond by mail first. Who do they to?

- Write to me, John Indo. That's I-N-D-O. Post office box 61, Bellaire, Texas, 77402.

- That's John Indo, I-N-D-O.

- Post office box 61.

- 61.

- Bellaire, Texas.

- Bellaire, Texas.

- 77402.

- 77402. And if you want to get fancy, 77402-0061. And so if you're out there, since you are the publisher of this, you would mail copies of this to people. There is a cost for that, right, John, for information regarding cost? Or you can have someone in the free world call John. And, John, how would people in the free world get in touch with you?

- My phone number is area code 713-541-5742. That's area code 713-541-5742.

- Now the introduction to your book is written by a Professor Larry Flowers, doctor. Who is that?

- Dr. Flowers is a former psychiatrist for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. He is also a psychiatrist with whom I work in a psych hospital out in North Houston.

- And the prologue is written-- Marilyn Gambrell has something in here somewhere, doesn't she? Where's Marilyn's piece?

- I dedicated the book to Marilyn Gambrell.

- [INAUDIBLE] preface. And she wrote the-- Flowers wrote the preface. And you dedicated the book to Marilyn. Why did you dedicate to Marilyn?

- Marilyn has done a great deal of work in community corrections. She's definitely on the right track. And she wants to help people make something of their lives. She is a very, very loud voice.

- No More Victims [INAUDIBLE].

- Right. No More Victims Incorporated. Marilyn is the director of that organization. And our purpose is to help parolees, probationers, or just anyone who needs help in dealing with the criminal justice system, or anyone who needs help who is pending high-risk for getting in trouble with the law.

- Is that part of the territory [INAUDIBLE]?

- Certainly. It certainly is.

- Going back and--

- I think the only relief from our prison situation today is community corrections, the only relief. We have got to start taking to ourselves to deter crime by positive means, not by threats of punishment. We have to involve ourselves in constructive activity. We have to improve our school systems. We have to eliminate destructive environments like ghettos, gang lands.

- Manipulative families.

- Yes, definitely. We've got to restore a sense of community. Some people suggest that it's very difficult to do that today because we're so open and culturally diverse. That's true. But if cultural diversity is to maintain itself in a democratic society, we have to have a common ground too. We have to have a system of shared--

- Yeah, for democracy to function at all, we've got to understand that we're all in this together.

- Right.

- I think one of the most significant things that we did about crime prevention in the Montrose is some of us erased the boundary between Montrose and Third Ward and Montrose and Fourth Ward, and took down the social picket fences around where the Hispanics and the Asians lived, and begin to think of our community as this diverse group of mixed people as opposed to rich white middle class and gay folks gentrifying an antique neighborhood. I think that did create a long way to actually reducing the crime in our neighborhood. Crime in Montrose is now imported.

- Oh, sure.

- [CHUCKLES]

We don't raise our own crime anymore.

- You know that, overall, the crime rate in the country is going down.

- It has been for several years.

- While the prison population is going up and the recidivism rate is going up. Post-war baby boom is aging. And that is most likely a major factor involved.

- And economics. You can graph it on the total population numbers of the baby boom era, which you were doing. You can also graph it on economic conditions.

- Oh, sure.

- In hard times, there's more crime.

- We're undergoing a lot of economics [INAUDIBLE]. Blue collar workers have wages that are stagnating right now because we're--

- Have been stagnant since '70s.

- Right. Or else going down because of the shift toward a high-tech service economy. That's another fault with the prison. They're not training people adequately. Sometimes, they train for blue collar labor. They don't train for high-tech labor. Well, when I was at the wind farm, they taught us to do data entry work. And we thought we were slick because of it when we got out. Every secretary does that--

- Yeah, I mean--

- --for $3.25 an hour.

- Sure.

- That's their money-making project. That's nothing to help us. But that is a social problem.

- And then, that's true of prison industries, whether they're actually manufacturing industries or not.

- Oh, I see.

- Job preparatory.

- I think that we have every potential in the world to supply a better route for our young people.

- Who's going to do that?

- We have to.

- You mean ex-convicts, prison guards?

- Ex-convict, lay people, media, anyone who is interested. Anyone who--schools, especially. I mentioned in the book, one of the most dreadfully shocking experiences that I had was moving from the wind unit in 1986 to the central unit. Central unit is reserved mostly for young offenders.

- Sure.

- And here I am a baby boomer. I went down to see Baby Buster's.

- Oh, next generation.

Right. The next generation at the central unit. In a dormitory of 150 men, only a few pieces of mail got in there every day. And most of that was mine. I was shocked to learn that most of these poor fellows cannot read and write effectively.

- And they're too macho to admit that.

- Yeah, they stay glued to a television set. I get the impression that they feel that they're better off in prison than out. But they're making parole.

- Well, a bunch of old prison guards and a bunch of old prison convicts got together recently in Huntsville. And I was there. And the old prison guards were complaining about how dangerous--