

## INTERVIEW WITH A FELON

David: How old were you when you first got in trouble with the police?

Terry: I got in trouble when I was about nine years old. Bike thefts and stuff like that. But I was never detained overnight until I was about twelve years old.

David: What had you done?

Terry: I started a fire in school. Then I was sent to Menlo Park for diagnostic treatment, to determine if there was anything psychologically wrong with me. I spent ninety days there. Menlo Park suggested to the court that I not be sent home, but sent to a private school, so I was. I went to Philadelphia to private school. I was about thirteen years old.

David: When you did these things, like setting fire to the school, were you alone or were you in a group?

Terry: I was alone.

David: Were you ever in a gang?

Terry: I was in a gang, but the gang members didn't do the things I did. I was sort of the wild one of the gang. That's probably why I did a lot of the things I did. I was always trying to prove myself to the gang. And they encouraged me to do these crazy things. But they never did it themselves. No, it was always me.

David: How long were you in the private school?

Terry: I was there about six months and I ran away. I was going with a young girl in Trenton at the time. We were both thirteen years old and she had got locked up for something or other, I don't remember now. I ran away to go see her. I stole a car and the judge thought that Jamesburg was the best place for me after that. That's why I went to Jamesburg.

David: And how long were you there?

Terry: I was still running, I did about two years in Jamesburg. Out of those two years, I spent maybe six months in jail in Jamesburg itself. The rest of the time I was on the run, going to Trenton. I stayed out two or three months at a time.

David: Why did you run away from these institutions?

Terry: I didn't want to be there. It started as a pattern, I guess. When I was in school in Philadelphia, a friend I had there said, "Let's just run". That was the first time I ran. I liked the freedom, and I just kept it up.

David: Was it exciting to be on the run?

Terry: Yes, it was. I felt free, like I could really do what I wanted to do. Roam the streets, take clothes off peoples' clotheslines, things like that.

David: That sounds like it would be exciting. What other kinds of offenses did you commit?

Terry: After I was sixteen years old, they sent me to Anandale. I was too old for Jamesburg, so they just transferred me to another institution. I didn't know where I was at in Anandale. Anandale is up in North Jersey. That's one of the reasons why I didn't run away. I stayed in Anandale for eleven months, but when I came out of Anandale I was about 17 years old, and there was a new crowd I was hanging with. I had moved out of the old neighborhood I was in, and moved into a new part of Trenton. I started to do B and E's, gas stations, Laundromat machines, milk machines, soda machines and things like that. And I was doing these every night for about a year. Good money for the most part, and I was very active in B and E's at that time.

David: What's B and E?

Terry: Breaking and entering. I got arrested in 1958. I was sentenced to Bordentown for five years. I guess I did about two years of that time in Bordentown before I got out. I was out for about six months, got involved in some trouble in Bordentown and was sent to prison in 1965 and got back in for my last charge which was a homicide and armed robbery. I got ten to fifteen years for that, and did about eight years on that before I got out. I was very easily influenced, very easy to talk into doing some of all kinds of things. Even the homicide.

David: That last crime seemed to be more serious than the ones that you had done before?

Terry: Yes. I think that if you looked through my records it would show some kind of pattern. But I know in my heart that I'm not a violent person, and I never really resorted to violence at all. I never did any muggings, rob pocketbooks, or any of that. I was always a sweet kind of person. It was because of the social pressures that I was under, the group that I was hanging in with. They were all very aggressive physically, and I just had to stay with them. I was just caught up into it.

David: That later group you were with, after you came out of Anandale, was a different kind of gang than the early one?

Terry: Right. In the group between Anandale and Bordentown, we were 17-18 years old. We used to go out and drink, and do B and E's and stuff like that. We were just wild kids. But when I got to prison, I met a different kind of person. We were thinking about robberies and just shooting people for shooting, to show manhood. I did five years in Trenton, and it had a very dramatic effect on my personality and how I thought and did things. I was only out of prison three months when I was busted for homicide.

David: What happened in the armed robbery?

Terry: It was a fellow that I had worked for. We stuck him up, and he recognized me, I thought. We went back; I knew the guy; he knew my family. I intended to talk to him and tell him not to press charges. But he was drunk when we got there. We got fighting, and the guy got stabbed. Once we went that far, we had to burn the house down, and try to hide it. But like I said, I know that I wouldn't do that on my own, I wouldn't go out and try to hurt somebody on my own. It's just not me. It's just that you can get involved in those kinds of activities very easily, and not really want to.

David: Who actually did the stabbing?

Terry: My partner did. But, I don't say that he's guilty and I'm not, because I helped burn the place down. I helped hide the car. I had the gun on the guy while we were fighting. So I was right there doing it.

David: Do you think you would have been capable of actually stabbing him?

Terry: I think if it came to my life or his life, it would have been a reaction type of thing. Not maliciously trying to hurt him. Yes, I think that I could have done it under a reaction type of situation.

David: Did that offense have more of an effect on you? It seemed to be more serious than the others.

Terry: After we were arrested and in the county jail awaiting trial, and I realized that the state was going to ask for the death penalty, and that there was a very good case building against us, I realized that I could very easily wind up in the electric chair. I was only about twenty-three years old at the time. It was then that I started questioning some of the influences on me. I wanted to know why I wanted to do them. I was willing to keep on doing them. I wanted to know why. I wanted to feel at peace with myself while I was doing these things. Because of that I started to get closer to my family. I started to ask myself some serious questions. I started to grow up. I was in the county jail two years, and I think those two years were very meaningful in terms of where I am now compared to where I was then.

David: It sounds like after you'd committed the offense, but it didn't upset you much?

Terry: No, it didn't. It didn't upset me until much later two or three years later. Till I really realized that some guy is not living now because of me. Before that I was more worried about myself, what was going to happen to me, what my friends might do to me. Those kinds of ideas kept popping into my head. I wasn't concerned at all about the person who died until much later.

David: You never did anything else that was that serious?

Terry: No. That was the last thing I've done.

David: Did you ever carry a gun before?

Terry: No, just on that one night.

David: Why did you have a gun that night?

Terry: Because the crowd that I was with was into armed robberies. We were going to go at it all the way. We went out and bought shotguns and sawed them off. I had two sawed off shotguns in my car, which is really out of character for me. It was all because the people I was hanging with were doing it. They were the only friends I had. I was really sucked into the criminal code. I lived by that. It was my life. What they thought was much more important to me than what anybody else, including myself, thought. I would do anything to win their approval.

David: Did you find it enjoyable?

Terry: What's that?

David: Well, riding around in a car with a shotgun on the seat, did that give you a good feeling?

Terry: I think having a gun in your possession makes you feel bigger. I'm a small person. I've always known how to take care of myself, physically. But I know that I have to really be conscious of my size. As I grew up, I learned how to see a situation developing before it got to a point where it would get physical, and I'd get out of it. Carrying a gun alleviated all those anxieties. I knew that I could just pull a gun out, and I could stop any situation I wanted to stop. So it made me feel a little bit more secure, for a while any way.

David: It seems to be different from when you were nine. At thirteen, it was exciting and fun, and you were a leader, maybe the show-off in the group?

Terry: I was never the leader. I'm more of a leader now, and it's really surprising me. Because in the last five or six years, I've somehow taken up a leader role. But all my life, I've always been a follower. Always the one to be influenced. If somebody wanted to go to do something, well let him get Terry to do it, and I would go do it.

David: When you think about the offenses you committed, what was really enjoyable about them? Was it the actual commission of the act, or was it the reactions of your friends?

Terry: I don't think it was either, I think it was doing what I shouldn't be doing. There's a sense of freedom in that. I think that, as a youngster, it was just trying out my guardian. I lived with a guardian, and I would just see how much I could get away with. It becomes a pattern. Some of the crimes were enjoyable, but I think it was primarily just being out there running, being loose, and not worrying about restrictions and order. Just doing whatever came to your mind. That was what felt good.

David: What was your childhood like?

Terry: I came from a broken home. My father was from the West Coast, and he came here during 1941, when war broke out. Fort Dix. I had diabetes and rickets. I was very sick. They took me to a doctor, and the doctor's nurse took me in. She became my guardian. My father went overseas when my father and mother split up. So I lived with her since I was about six months old, until I got married. Except when the state had me, which was most of the time. I think that she did a good job on me considering. She took care of me. I was physically healthy, but she used to beat the hell out of me for some things. When I got to be twelve years old, I realized that her name was different from my name. A lot of guys in the neighborhood used to tell me that she wasn't my real mother, I think that really bothered me. I felt rejected.

David: When did you find out first that she wasn't your real mother?

Terry: I think when I was about twelve years old. Right about the time I started the fire. There is a very close correlation there, and I really can't believe in my own mind that it developed that quickly from the realization, I think it was a very slow process. But there is a very strong correlation between when I found out that she wasn't my parent and when I started the fire. I thought about it quite a bit, and I know now that I did have a lot of hurt feelings from my childhood. A lot of this came out through therapy.

David: Your offenses seem to become more serious once you found out that you were adopted. Is that right?

Terry: It had more to do with getting incarcerated than finding out I was adopted. When I was finally incarcerated, I almost immediately drew a very quick attachment to the guys that were in jail with me in Jamesburg. I met a lot of the guys in Trenton I had been running streets with who were there also. We were all losers in one sense, and we formed a common bond. Because of the acceptance that I experienced in that situation, I realize now that that's why I kept going back to that situation so quickly. I would go through four or five years of being locked up, telling myself everyday that I wanted to get outside. I wanted to see the world. I wanted to go back to school. I wanted to lead a normal life. As soon as I got back outside, in about a month or so, I got back into the same thing I was doing before, to get back to jail, because I couldn't handle that life for some reason. I wasn't willing to try to handle it. I was happy in jail for a long time. And it's not only me, because I observed a lot of people coming back for the third and fourth time to jail. In quarantine they'd have big smiles on their faces, carrying five and ten years. They're happy to see you. I think that jail is a haven, and helps people to feel happy about themselves, because they're with other people they like. It's just a rut that's very hard to get out of.

David: You mentioned that your adopted mother was brutal?

Terry: She wasn't really brutal, she used to beat me up pretty good though. I used to get the cat o' nine tails, as she called it.

David: She used to whip you?

Terry: Yeah, and it got to the point where even though I knew I was going to get a whipping, that she was going to beat me, I used to go and do what I wanted to do anyway, and come home and take the beating. They were very ineffective. She would whip me harder and harder. It would hurt, and I would dread them. But I would still go and do what I wanted to do.

David: How about emotionally? Was she warm and loving?

Terry: I don't remember any real affection in my home environment at all. I don't remember any warmth at all. She took care of old age pensioners, and she had about four or five people at the house all the time. There was a lot to do. Too many demands were on her to take care of these people, to make beds, to cook food and to do this and do that. She just didn't have time to give me what I really needed. I was a weak person myself, we were both weak persons in the same boat.

David: Did anyone else abuse you as a child?

Terry: Not really. Like I said, very early in life I developed this ability to detect danger. I learned how to sidestep it very quickly, and I became a manipulator. She had a

son who used to try to be like a father to me. I manipulated him very well in terms of getting whippings off him. He belted me a few times, but I used to avoid it pretty good.

David: How would you describe yourself as a kid? What kind of kid were you?

Terry: Very immature, very easily influenced. I think that I can understand why people thought that there was something psychologically wrong with me. I went to all kinds of counselors for treatment, and I can understand, looking back on some of the things I did, why they thought there was something wrong with me.

David: Do you feel angry?

Terry: I feel angry towards myself because I cheated myself out of so much in my life. I didn't get a hold of myself until many years went by. I missed a lot of my teenage life, a lot of teenage experiences, a lot of foundational things that I'll never be able to gain now.

David: But you didn't feel angry then? Were some of the things you did, acts of rebellion?

Terry: Sure they were.

David: Who were you angry at?

Terry: Probably my parents, myself, my guardian, probably a combination of all those things. Probably myself than anyone else, because of the weak character I was.

David: You mentioned that you set fire to your school once. What kind of reason motivated that?

Terry: I was going to a Catholic school, and I was kicked out of the school. About two weeks after I was kicked out of the school, it burnt down. My cousin was still going to the school, and they had days off from school, I wanted off from school too, so I set a fire to the school.

David: It wasn't that you were angry at the school?

Terry: All these things that I know now as reasons are all rationalizations. Things I know in my conscious mind. I think that there are other reasons in my subconscious. I know they are, because I have felt them. I'm not able to tag a lot of the things, but I felt them. I felt the hurt of them through therapy.

David: But at the time, it was just that you felt like a week off from school.

Terry: Right. That is what was in my mind when I did it.

David: You mentioned you were glad to be in prison. Were there any negative things about being in prison that you didn't like?

Terry: Yes. I got locked up at night. There were no girls. There was a lot of authority around me. Although that's a tricky thing too, because I think I needed the authority at the time, even though I outwardly rejected it. I think that it was good for me, that I wanted it. But I remember laying in a cell and really feeling a burning in my stomach, a longing for a female companion. You learn to suppress that and to fight those things. You learn a lot of negative things in jail. When you get out, and you're out for a little while, you forget all about those negative things, all those hassles, and all those petty things that go on inside the jail. You remember the card playing, TV, and playing out in the big yard. You remember all the good things. And that happens very quickly, when you're out. So jail doesn't seem so bad in comparison to the struggles of getting a job, having responsibility, supporting yourself, and things like that out here. It's very hard to come out here and do all those things.

David: Did you ever start finding jail unpleasant?

Terry: Yes, I did. When I was in Bordentown my second time.

David: After you'd been convicted for the armed robbery and murder, you said your attitude towards your life changed and you wanted to try and understand yourself better. Did you find it easy to use the prison facilities to change?

Terry: Not at first. First, I was looking for something that I couldn't get. I was looking for the institution to give me something. They call it rehabilitation. But it took me about a year or so to realize that the change had to come from within. It had to be some kind of thing inside that said, "Okay, you want to change Terry. Now you can go out and use the facilities that are there". You just don't go into a program and come out the other end cleansed. It takes a lot of desire in your own self, a lot of will, and a gamble. You have to be willing to sacrifice or to give up something that you've been living with all your life and try something new.

David: Was there peer pressure against it?

Terry: Yes, there was. Not necessarily for therapy. I never had therapy until I went to Bordentown my last time. The therapy helped me a lot, and there was no peer pressure against that. But I started to go to college, and initially there was a lot of pressure from the guards. In Bordentown, a lot of people thought that the inmates were getting a free education and they really didn't deserve it. I think that education, the insights I got from education, the things I got from the teachers who taught me, were more valuable than any therapy sessions I ever had. Therapy was good for introspection. To go into yourself, to hear other people talk, and say,



"Well, Damn! I feel that way too, " or "I've experienced something like that too." But education, getting in social science programs and psychology programs, and learning the real dynamics of what makes people think, how they think, problem-solving, things like that, they are of great value to me.

David: Were those opportunities always there, and it's just that you decided to make use of them at that time?

Terry: No. When I was at Bordentown this time, in 1965, there were no college programs at all. G.E.D. was the highest they had. The County College had just opened up in 1969, so a few of us, who had our G.E.D.'s already and could go no further educationally inside the institution, put pressure on the administration to let the college come in. They gave in, and the college program developed. But it was primarily because of our desire to do something about getting out of jail. We saw education as a means of getting out of jail.

David: So there was a small group of you that pushed for this and that gave you the peer support?

Terry: Right. And that's when I started becoming a leader. When I started pushing for the college. I started going around recruiting and selling the guys on the college program, getting involved in what courses would come in and funding sources, things like that. I just kept going from there. So the college experience has been the catalyst for all my growth.

David: Since you've been out, have you found there's much stigma attached to your being an ex-convict?

Terry: I let people know that I am an ex-offender. It's my livelihood now. I'm very much involved in penal reform and penal education. I let people know this. This is a strong point. I don't see being in jail as a negative factor in my life anymore. I see it as a positive factor. I had experiences that were very bad for me. But I've gone through them and survived. I think that they're experiences that I can benefit from now. And I can relate to people and help society come to grips with the problem of crime. I think we have to find some other means of dealing with criminals.

David: So now you're secure and more self-confident, what society thinks doesn't really matter to you so much?

Terry: It really doesn't, no. I'm really happy with myself. I've grown a lot in the last couple of years. I think maturity is the key word to the whole thing. I'm married now. I have a little baby. I have a fairly decent job, I've been working for two and a half years now. I'm just a completely different person.

David: What happened to those needs that you used to have when you were twelve, that you used to satisfy by breaking and entering, what happened to those needs now? Do you still have them?

Terry: I still have those longings. I remember when I was talking about my father in therapy, I admitted that I had a longing to have a father-son relationship, a boy and a man relationship. But I was 24-25 years old at the time. I had to come to grips with the fact that I couldn't have that kind of relationship. I had to settle for an adult relationship with my father, if anything. And those frustrations that I had as a child, I've learned to deal with in that way. Who I am now and what kind of relationships rather than look for something that I'm lacking out of my past.

David: What about the excitement?

Terry: When I came home this time, I did a lot of hitchhiking the first month. I went to Trenton, and back to Stockton. I did a lot of hitchhiking. I think that was an expression of those feelings coming out. I think I've given up the excitement of running and being loose and free for the joy of experiencing another person and caring for another person. Having another person care for you. My child means an awful lot to me. These are the kinds of relationships I never had in my life before. They're very important to me and they replaced the freedom and the wildness that was in me before. I've substituted something else.

David: Do you have any resentment or anger towards society and its institutions?

Terry: I think I've benefited from it. Even though I spent some sixteen years behind bars, I think I came out a much better person that I would have ever been had I just remained in society. Because I was hidden from society for so long, I was allowed to become mature very rapidly. I was allowed to establish values as an adult and not have values imposed on me as a child. I laid dormant for some many years that when I did start growing, I did it very rapidly, I think I have a much better grasp on reality than people who lived out here all their lives.

David: How do you think that society could have facilitated the growth?

Terry: I don't think they can at all. I think it has to come from within. The only way they can intervene into a rehabilitative process is to identify the problem at a very early stage and rectify it then. I think that once a person sets up derivative desires he loses track of what the real problem is and he starts saying, "Well, it's because I want more money, or it's because I'm frustrated with my girlfriend, or because of my job." He starts blaming his actions on things that are not related to what the cause really is. Society can't do anything about it at all. You have to realize that you're not going out and stealing cars and money because of frustrations for a girl or whatever. You're doing it because of some problem in you, that happened when you were six years old. I don't think it's really important to find out what the

problem is. I think you just have to come to grips with the situation, and start building from there.

David: With you, it seems to have been the last offense, and then thinking about it afterwards?

Terry: It's very easy to say that. It appeared to be the case. But I think I was just beginning to develop, to become a man, to mature, and to think for myself. I think that sparked some kind of drive in me to find out who I was. But all the things that happened to me after that were very important, maybe more important than the crime itself. Even though the crime did spark that. Taking on responsibility, accepting myself for my faults as well as my good qualities, and realizing that that was me. I had to live with it. I could wear a mask all my life. I could've stayed behind bars all my life. It was a choice I had to make.

David: To go back a little bit, have you ever met your real parents?

Terry: Yes, I met my father when I was in county jail waiting trial for this last charge. I met him. He's dead now. We talked a little, we had a conversation, I learned a lot about him, and he learned a lot about me. But we never really got close, to a father and son relationship. Never at all.

David: What about your mother?

Terry: Not at all.

David: You've never seen her?

Terry: She came when I was about twelve years old. Right about the time I found out that I was adopted, and that's the last I've seen of her.

David: Why did she come?

Terry: She came for my birthday. I think it was my twelfth birthday. She just popped in.

David: How did you get to see your father when you were in the county jail?

Terry: My father was in the service, I wanted to get hold of him so I tracked him down through the service. I wrote letters to different kinds of people.

David: You never tried before that?

Terry: No. I feel good about my relationship with my father. At least I got to know my father a little bit. I got to know what kind of person he was, I can see myself doing the same kind of things that he did with my child. I can see myself getting

into frustrations with my wife, and hassles, and not wanting to live with her, and leaving. I can see that happening to me, it's a possibility. Even though I'm going to do everything in my power not to let it happen. But I could see there is a possibility.