

What 30 Years of False Imprisonment Taught Bruce Bryan

The Joe Rogan experience for everyone to like guys started realizing while you were there your story like the words started getting around the green room And uh it was one of those things like what he just got out three weeks ago wrongfully accused for 30 years and here he is having a good time It was it was a crazy experience to like be sharing the green room with you because you could see everybody like you became like the celebrity of the green room You know what I'm saying Like everybody wanted to hear the story everybody wanted to talk to you Everybody was blown away by it and by the the grace that you displayed like the fact that you could be wrongfully accused spend 30 years of your young life in in a cage and then come out and just be this wonderful fun guy Having a good time Everyone's laughing having conversations It was beautiful it was beautiful Um I look I'm standing next to him last night you know worried most of the night because you know we had got on a plane and that was his first time flying in over 30 years Um there was a lot of stimulation and you know I could tell you that I'm still in shock even sitting here now that we're sitting next to each other because I spent the last several years visiting him at Sing Sing which is um you know not a great place Sing Sing Prison in New York Um but I don't want to throw cold water on anything but you know there there's a lot of stealing yourself for the moment last night going on that people didn't see from you Um I think for Bruce I mean there was one point where we were sitting in the balcony um watching at tell and by the way congratulations on that amazing club An amazing the comedy mothership is uh is really a dream for the comedians Love it The crowd was amazing It was just so awesome to see So congrats on that How is Dave Tell he's my side hurts He's a master He's a master But um we were sitting there and some other folks came in and at some point uh you know Bruce kept looking over his shoulder and you know I realized that he was uncomfortable and uh he switched seats very quickly so that he would be side to side shoulder to shoulder with them I know I think I know why you did it Why did you do it Well I think in prison you become accustomed to not wanting people behind you right And then I got this scar in prison from behind So you're always conscious of what's behind you You know of course no one goes through that experience unscathed right You come out with these uh idiosyncrasies or these quotes

that you these defense mechanisms that you developed while you're incarcerated You know you're in an abnormal environment for decades you're gonna ha it's gonna have an effect on you psychologically How old were you when they put you in I was 23 going I just turning 24 and tell us the whole story of what happened Well I was arrested back in 1994 for homicide I think that everyone knew that I didn't do this case at all Everyone knew I didn't commit the crime I mean I literally woke up that afternoon because my girlfriend wanted to change her niece's costume and she want she also had a taste for chocolate cake So just imagine waking up to change a costume for Halloween a child's costume and then disappearing for the next 29 years of your life right And being being charged with a homicide while the prosecutor involved in your conviction has a history of misconduct And it wasn't until some 2726 years later that he finally gets arrested and gets convicted former Queens prosecutor John Scarpa He gets convicted for the very same misconduct that I've been telling them about that he's been doing for decades So he would just find someone pin it on them Yeah he would concoct this story of theory as he did in my situation and he did this just to just to convict someone Yeah Yeah So it wasn't that he was targeting you just he just decided it was you anybody that he felt was involved in a criminal lifestyle or in drug dealing You it's easier to get someone that has a history of being involved in the streets to put a uh a case on him than it is there someone that doesn't So you know once they find out that you have a record it's easy to say All right Well he did this homicide What kind of a record did you have at the time I had a drug I had a drug sale prior to that So that's enough for him to say ok he's a part of a drug crew and uh you know let's arrest him and lock him up His th this particular prosecutor his thing was bribery Um he would pay off witnesses and he ended up not only getting convicted but went to federal prison for it He was in some of the worst penitentiaries in New York from Attica to I was in Clinton Great Meadows sing sing all maximum securities or maximum security prisons Way upstate in uh in some uh towns that are essentially you know some you know a lot of a lot of racism is pervasive in those towns And the prison is the uh it's the only uh economic development in that town So you got brother cousins aunts and uncles working in the same prison So you get into an incident with one officer you got a problem with the entire system and that's just how it is when you go deeper upstate I mean borderline Canada you know Clinton down in M and Great Meadows and different prisons like that So and the economy of the area depends depends upon the prison because there's really

nothing there but snow during the wintertime and farming So there's nothing else there So the prison is the driving force behind the economy So everyone's there right Siblings So nepotism is you know is prevalent in these prisons And one of the things that you you encounter is that you know these pri it's not just cold in those areas A prison is a cold environment and it's up to you to create your own heat It's a dark environment And uh somehow you gotta find that light you know that light within yourself in order to uh in order to travel in order to you know to do something with your life more meaningful You know what I mean Um and it's difficult It's not easy Uh you watch guys uh you know guys you talk to today and you know tomorrow they're swinging from the light they're dead right Yesterday they were fine You know the next morning you wake up they they've hung themselves you know and and these are the things that that you encounter day in and day out and you still have to maintain a sense of uh a sense of humanity right You gotta become you could either do two things you could become bitter or you could become better I chose the latter because one of the things I did earlier in my incarceration was make a conscious decision to not serve time but to have time serve me I made up my mind that if you were going to have me incarcerated for a crime I did not commit then I was gonna take this time and use that cell as if it was an office I was gonna use that school building as if it was a university and every chance I had to just self reflect and engage in introspection and and and do the things that I needed to do to protect my soul Um I was gonna do it you know and I made it my business to do so And I started delving into material that I probably would never have read you know being in uh being a free man I started reading you know everything from you know philosophy books to you know very very few novels But I tend to learn from the experiences of others So autobiographies became my thing you know from Quincy Jones to Miles Davis and and just continuously studying Right And then studying the system and what drives the system and and and why it has become what it is you know from education to you know to the whole system of why educational system looks at a guy in the third grade and determines whether or not he's gonna be caught up in the criminal justice system as early as the third grade Right Based on your reading level they can determine how many prison beds that they're going to develop These are things that most people don't know Right The like 50% of the incarcerated people in New York State or probably in the country are living with dyslexia So then so they're unable to learn you know the basics of education like reading and these guys go home and they

commit crimes over and over again because they were never corrected in these same systems that were built on the premise of rehabilitation are draconian in that they do nothing but you know steal a person's humanity and allow them to become or looked at as nothing more than a number right You gotta wake up six o'clock in the morning Sometimes when they're coming around they're asking you your name and they're not asking your name they're asking you you know your numbers what cell location are you in They're not calling you Mr Bryan They're calling you 60 cell right And a lot of people begin to internalize that and lose their sense of self And so I I remained guarded and um and try to maintain a sense of humanity through my meditation right Do fasting every now and then and just do deep introspection and reflection For me that was the hard part The easy part was education and learning The hard part was introspection and fighting a system right Not just a prosecutor or a court but finding a system that was premised on um you know ooooo oppression right I was premised on it's a business a prison industrial complex You got cheap labor You know the 13th amendment says you're allowed to be enslaved if you're convicted of a crime You see and so you know in in a system like that you have to find a way you gotta find it within yourself too to rise above the fray Did you meet anyone else inside that showed you this path Yes Early on in my incarceration there was a group of guys called the Resurrection Study Group and it was founded by a guy named Eddie Ellis who has since passed on And what the Resurrection Study group did was they developed this this program called the Nontraditional Approach to social and criminal justice And it helped them understand why the vast majority of incarcerated people in New York State came from at that time they came from seven basic neighborhoods right And these were neighborhoods that were all impoverished that were all plagued with what we call crime genitive factors from you know substance abuse to dilapidated housing to uh you know just poverty right Um And so you see you see violence and what I've come to realize is that poverty is violence So wherever there's poverty you you're going to see violence because poverty itself is violence And so these neighborhoods you begin to learn and study and you begin to see that this is not by accident These you know these prisons were built for a purpose Um there's a saying they say you build it they're going to come that's the same thing with prisons you build them they're going to come similar to uh the 1994 crime bill that was signed by uh Bill Clinton and authored co-authored by our now President Joe Biden Um and incarcerated more people across the country than in any other time

right I I it perpetuated the three strikes You're out Um you had guys who stole a slice of pizza Third strike he gets 25 to life Um we're looking at cases now where guys he took \$200 he'd been in jail for 20 years Some guy sentenced 70 years for armed robbery like all of these things come under the 1994 crime bill So you've been you begin to see it as a system that was designed to do certain things it's a wake up call for you and you begin to say hold on man Um IFI fell for the trap It's time for me to begin taking a different route and and and and begin educating myself more And so the resurrection study group these guys steered me in that direction It steered me in that direction And I began to learn from another gentleman that was a part of it by the name of Dr Gary Mendez who also died And he had a program called the National Trust for the development of African American men And what it did was it help us restore those values that we strayed away from So this this is what got me on the right path early in my incarceration