

The Convict and the Snowman

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It was a snowy day in Boston, which could mean any day from October to May. That's just the way it is in the East — snow and cold. School was not in the plans this day. I had a few dollars in my pocket, so I am doing big things! I'm wearing some clothes I had gotten out of a Morgan Memorial box. You see, my Dad would have me jump in and grab some clothes, we bring them home and see what would fit us. With seven kids to dress, I figure he had the right idea. You know, you've got to do what it takes.

Every morning, up at 4:00 a.m., and out the door by 4:30 a.m. He had the trash routes down, so it was off we go! He and I, sometimes my brother, Jake, but more often than not Jake had either run away, or was in Juvie. We hit the route — I called it, "Junkin'!" Little did I know, to my Dad... it was survival! My Dad's truck could hold a ton of newspapers, I know 'cause I stacked that thing before 6:00 a.m., more times than I can remember! "Papers, Tommy, my side!" I jump out, take off to his side of the truck, dig the papers out and stack them in the back of the truck.

"Papers, Dad, my side!" I remember the first time I said that, I was so proud of myself. Off like a shot, pick 'em up... stack 'em in the back!

"Papers, my side!"... I came to hate the sounds of those words! A time or two, I even tried not to see the papers, but a backhand is a fast way to let you know that ol' Dad can see both sides of the street... in more ways than one.

We take the haul to "Mel's Salvage", and get \$78.00 for the load, which was a hard-earned ton! I got the \$8.00, big money when you're eight years old... young.

On the way home, we'd hit a Morgan Memorial box; they kept them on the side of churches, so I figured... so long as we brought back what did not fit anyone, it was cool with God. Even if a lot of times, not one thing fit me. So waiting on a hand-me-down, which some other family had already handed down, then gave to the church. My family would take them, then I would have to wait for my three older brothers to hand them down the line. Man, that was about-a-bitch!

My Dad would leave for work, and I would be cooking the oatmeal, or boiling the eggs; one for each pocket to keep the hands warm on the walk to school, then you save them for lunch. Near the end of the month the welfare peanut butter and cheese is long gone. So it was oatmeal and eggs... "Yee-haw!"

So on this day, I'm going to see who's hookin' school. I take a corner and I see a snowman in front of the Clancy's house. Something about that snowman hurt me in a way I did not understand until years later. All I knew at that time was "that" snowman had to go... and it did. Right to Snowman Heaven! I broke the arm branches, tore off the head, smashed the body, and turned it back into a pile of snow. I even ate the carrot nose! I ruined that snowman and did not understand the anger, and the more I ruined it... the madder I got!

Little did I know, Mrs. Clancy had seen me, called my house, and when I got home my Mom gave me a beating. Then when my Dad got home... I got the real beating! I'll tell you, one thing worse than getting the beating; it's waiting for your Dad to get home and give it to you, because you live out that beating a hundred times before actually getting it, all the while trying to figure a way

out of it. But for hookin' school and ruining a snowman... ain't no way out of that one. Imagine getting a beating for messing up a snowman; kind of hard to figure. All I know is that I hated that snowman!

Well, time, as life, goes on, and twenty-five years later I'm sitting in a cell lookin' at thirty-five years to life on a plea bargain; where the bargain is on that, don't ask me. The eight year old youngster went from stacking newspapers on the back of a truck, to looking at that much time for robbing bags of money out of the back of an armored truck. A life of jail, drugs, and crime in between. A hero to the wrong type of people, and a zero to the right type of people. At this time, I took stock of my life, knowing that if I lost this case I'd be sixty-eight when I got out, and I came up empty.

Sure, reading books, I had gone all over the world, and even out of it. I had spent money on the things that made me a ghetto and Project hero. I made many a drug dealer a lot of money. In short... I had been no place, and did nothing.

My Projects were three blocks from the beach and I had only been there at night, most times in stolen cars with what we used to call "Hood Hoes". I mean, it's kind of sad when one of the only things you have to brag about is a girl giving up her virginity to you in the back seat of a stolen Fleetwood at three in the morning at the beach.

Reality setting in, I had done nothing in my life that meant anything. When people I know would ask, "Hey, Tommy, let's go to a hockey game, a concert, or skiing," I always had a reason. I mean, c'mon, that shit's for lames. I thought life got no better than have new kicks, a new outfit, and a pocketful of money — it was the best. A few lines with the girls, shooting up with my crew... late nights in the Projects. I was a Project dog; knew every hallway,

cellar, and roof-top, but could not tell you one thing about anything outside of them.

In learning this about myself, it was like taking a test and thinking you knew all the answers, only to find out that you got it all wrong.

I will forever remember the night it sank in, in such a way, that it can only make one realize that life has a way of coming full circle on you in ways you will never see until it puts you on your knees. I'm going through this epiphany and all this is setting in on me. I am watching TV, it's a night not unlike any other, and a Hallmark Card advertisement comes on and it's a kid; it's snowing out and he's building a snowman.. and BANG... it hits me so hard, for a second I can't get my breath! Oh man, it hurt all the way from my soul to my heart... and many places in between.

I never made a snowman! I lived in a world where it snowed seven months a year and I was never a kid enough to make a snowman. How innocent and free it must feel. I never knew what a kid thinks about when he is doing it, what is that mind-frame about? Why was I the kid to ruin one? Did I realize it was that I somehow knew I had already lost that part of me that could find the wonder and joy in something as innocent as building a snowman?

Here I am, a thirty-three year old drug addict, criminal, and hardcore convict and I'm crying over never having built a snowman! Better yet, who would think you could learn so much about life from a pile of snow... a few branches... and a carrot?!?

You know the beating I got that day did not hurt near as much as what I felt twenty-eight years later. Yeah, a snowman made a convict cry; made a criminal start to turn his life around, and help a grown man wonder what it would be like to be a kid and

make a snowman. Twenty-eight years later, that eight year old youngster is a convict that finally loves that snowman!

The beginning...