

Preface

*God asks no man whether he will accept life.
That is not the choice. You must take it. The only choice is how.*

—HENRY WARD BEECHER

My Life Behind Bars

Hello, my name is Ryan Ferguson. Thank you for picking up my book. This is the story of a young man who came of age within the confines of a maximum-security prison. What makes this story unique is that this man was locked up for a crime he did not commit. In total, he lost nearly 10 years of his life. Friends turned their backs on him. The world called him a murderer and a liar. The experience could have broken him. Yet he chose to fight back and persevere. That man is me, and my story began on March 10, 2004. That was the date I was arrested for murder.

Over the last decade I have experienced more setbacks and defeats than most people experience in a whole lifetime. I have seen the inner workings of the U.S. justice system at its very worst and how the truth comes second to securing a conviction. I *never* gave up, though. I fought endlessly to prove my innocence, and now I continue to fight for others.

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Once convicted, I was faced with two options: fight or flight. I was a terrified 19-year-old kid who had never been in trouble with the law and who suddenly found himself locked up in county jail and later in a maximum-security prison. It didn't seem possible. After the initial panic attacks subsided and I faced the grim reality of a possible life sentence staring down at me, the only thing I knew how to do was fight. Fight for my future; fight for my life; fight for my mind, my body; and, most important, my innocence. I knew I had to find a way. More than that, I had to find *my* way. My way to fight through the stresses, the pain, and the fear in order to make myself tougher.

Throughout this torturous journey I have endured many trials and tribulations that probably should have destroyed my strength, my hope, and even my will to carry on. That is not me, though. Backed by an incredible family and an overwhelming set of documented facts, I refused to allow someone to get away with taking my life for something they knew I did not do. As time went on, media attention rose and my case was featured on several national television news programs. Maybe you've seen these or know my story from another source. If not, I'll start with the basic facts. Here's where it all began: Halloween night 2001.

Around 2:10 a.m. on November 1, 2001, Kent Heitholt, sports editor for the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, logged off his computer and left his office in Columbia, Missouri. Within minutes he was savagely attacked and murdered next to his car in the newspaper's parking lot. A tragic death, Kent's murder shocked the local community.

Sitting in the empty lot that night was Kent Heitholt's colleague Michael Boyd. Boyd claimed the two spoke briefly and then he drove away at around 2:20 a.m. Heitholt, a large man standing six feet three and weighing 315 pounds, was struck

from behind on his head multiple times and strangled with his own belt. Nothing of value was stolen from the victim, aside from possibly an inexpensive watch and his car keys.

The first people on the scene were two janitors, Shawna Ornt and Jerry Trump. Ornt had gone out for a break and observed two figures beside Heitholt's car. As suspicion mounted within her, she quickly retraced her steps and got her coworker Trump. The two peered out into the parking lot but couldn't see anything. Finally, Trump called out and two men stepped out from behind the car. The man at the rear of the car walked toward Ornt and spoke to her, saying, "Somebody's hurt, get help," before calmly rejoining the other man and walking away. Ornt got a good look at the man, including his face, before he left the scene. They then called 911 at 2:26 a.m.

Later that night, Shawna Ornt helped police create a composite drawing of the man who had spoken to her. Police considered her the "sole witness." Her colleague Jerry Trump was also questioned. Trump told the police, and later others, that he couldn't identify or give a detailed description of the individuals. Meanwhile, Boyd, the last known person to see Kent Heitholt alive, was only briefly questioned by the police and never investigated as a potential suspect.

Investigators discovered a trail of hair, blood, and fingerprints at the crime scene. The killer would likely have been covered in blood. There were also two sets of shoe prints leading away from the scene. A police K-9 unit tracked the scent from those shoe prints to a University of Missouri dorm. For the authorities there seemed to be a trove of evidence to follow, yet the murder of Kent Heitholt remained unsolved.

On the second anniversary of Heitholt's murder, the *Tribune* printed an article

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in hopes of gaining information about the unsolved murder. The article displayed the composite sketch that Shawna Ornt assisted investigators with and urged the community members to speak up if they had information about the murder.

For those in the Columbia Police Department who appeared so eager to crack the case that the facts became secondary, a lead arrived in the form of a troubled young man who read the newspaper article. Charles Erickson, a high school friend of mine, saw the composite sketch and thought it vaguely resembled him. He then appeared to have a dream that he was involved in the murder. On account of these newfound “images,” Erickson began airing his fears and his dreams to his friends, including myself. Needless to say, I clearly remembered that Halloween night. Erickson and I had been at a local bar called By George. We left at closing time; I then drove him home and drove home myself. Erickson’s dreams didn’t make any sense. But his story was taken seriously by at least one friend, John Alder, who reported Erickson’s dreams to the police. Following Alder’s tip, for which there was a \$10,000 reward, Erickson was picked up for questioning in March 2004.

What followed was one of the most shocking and disturbing police interrogations ever caught on camera. Erickson had no actual independent knowledge of the crime. He didn’t know what the murder weapon was, how many times Kent Heitholt had been struck, or even where the murder had taken place. And those images from his dreams . . . not one of them fit the actual crime scene. Nevertheless, the police, desperate to clear up a high-profile cold case, proceeded to coerce and spoon-feed Erickson key unique details about the crime.

This, unfortunately, is where I came in. That morning, right outside of Kansas City, Missouri, was like any other. I was attending a history class at Maple Woods Community College and the only thing on my mind was the next day’s exam. I had no worries. I had a decent job, good friends, an amazing family, and what I consid-

ered a bright future. All was going well until I left class and headed home. On the way there, two huge guys in an SUV were riding my bumper. This, of course, happens from time to time so I didn't think anything of it. Just a couple of douches with no respect. Nothing new. Once the lane I was in went from one to two, they stared me down as they passed. I soon turned off into my apartment parking lot, and no sooner had I put the car in park than that very same SUV flew up behind me, essentially blocking me in. My life would never be the same.

What followed was something I don't think I'll ever understand. These people I'd never seen before proceeded to treat me like the dirt on their shoes, rushing at me screaming "FBI," telling me not to move. From the arrest, to locking me in a car handcuffed with no explanation, to instantly and randomly stripping every right I had, things got intense. I didn't know what to make of it. I even thought for a time I was being arrested for a recent bomb threat at our school. I had no idea what was going on. I was totally and completely lost.

Within an hour I found myself in an interrogation room much like the ones you'd see in a bad movie. I told the police time and time again, over multiple hours of redundant questioning, that yes, I had been at the By George bar with Erickson on Halloween night 2001. I stated the obvious, that I had left around 1:30 a.m., when the bar closed. I told them repeatedly how I'd driven Erickson home before heading home myself. These were the simple facts and I never wavered from them.

In a neighboring room, however, while I sat there doing what I could to help, those same police were apparently doing what they could to wring a confession, right, wrong, or indifferent, from Erickson. Even though he had no personal knowledge of Heitholt's murder, and had stated multiple times that he'd blacked out and didn't know what happened after he left the bar, they didn't seem to care.

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After many grueling hours of blatant threats and damning lies from the detectives, Erickson folded under the pressure. Assuming the police were being straight up with him about this false evidence, he figured he must have been present at the crime scene and simply told detectives what he thought they wanted to hear.

Over the following months, as Prosecutor Kevin Crane charged the two of us with murder, Erickson's statements slowly evolved, changing a number of times. Aided by "discovery," which contained fabricated police reports bolstering Erickson's supposed guilt and an exhaustive source of details about this crime, Erickson eventually came to believe his dreams were true; he and I had murdered Heitholt in a robbery gone wrong. Due to these false beliefs, and the fear that he must have committed the crime, Erickson panicked and agreed to a plea deal that would frame me for the murder of Heitholt in exchange for a lesser sentence for himself.

From the time of my arrest in March 2004 until my trial in October 2005, I found myself, a person convicted of no crime, trapped inside the county jail. Apparently those who wield the power within our criminal justice system find the Eighth Amendment of our Constitution to be nothing more than a joke. Case in point, the "Honorable" Judge Ellen Roper chose to ignore the whole "excessive bail shall not be required" part of the Constitution and gave me one for \$20 million. The largest of its kind in history. We sought accountability for what appeared to be an outright senseless and slightly biased decision but found instead what would be the first of many indications that those within the justice system simply will not hold their colleagues responsible for their actions. Many wondered why I was even on trial in the first place, considering that Erickson's story was riddled with inconsistencies and flat-out impossibilities. None of the DNA evidence at the scene matched either Charles or me; there was absolutely no motive; I had no criminal

background; and the ultimate reality was that there was, and would remain, zero evidence connecting me to this case.

But these same people had underestimated the indifference of the Columbia Police Department and an ambitious prosecutor, Kevin Crane. After multiple coaching sessions in Crane's office, the Charles Erickson who appeared before the jury was a new man. Confident and assured in his testimony, Erickson took the stand and pointed me out as responsible for the murder of Kent Heitholt. In so doing, he and Crane reenacted the supposed particulars of the murder, details Erickson had no knowledge of just a year earlier.

It was still far from an open-and-shut case. My attorneys fought back, barely. Partially because they didn't properly prepare for trial, a sad reality that plays out all too often once attorneys get your money, and partially because they weren't given all of the evidence to fight this case to begin with. This last issue of the defense not getting all of the information is actually illegal, but because our Supreme Court won't allow the law to hold police and prosecutors accountable for hiding evidence, it tends to happen in a vast majority of innocence cases. It's similar to making laws against drinking and driving where, instead of prosecuting those who are caught breaking this law with a felony and possible prison time, the courts would merely say, "Well, I'm sure you didn't mean to get drunk and run over those kids. How can you be responsible for them being on the road in the first place?" There is NO accountability. Just as drinking and driving would never stop if we didn't prosecute the offenders, police and prosecutors will continue to hide evidence and destroy countless lives if they know they won't even get so much as a slap on the wrist.

Nonetheless, Prosecutor Kevin Crane had a new "star witness" to place Erick-

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son and me at the scene: janitor Jerry Trump. Though Trump had previously admitted he couldn't identify anyone at the scene, he now pointed me out in front of the jury as the man he had seen the night of the murder. Even more interesting was prosecutor Crane's choice *not* to ask Shawna Ornt, the police's "sole witness," if she could identify me as being there. Why ask Trump, who stated multiple times that he couldn't see the people in the parking lot, and not the sole witness, Ornt? Shawna Ornt later testified in a 2008 evidentiary hearing that she had met with Prosecutor Crane about three times prior to my trial. In that testimony, she said that she had told Crane numerous times that the men she saw that night were neither Erickson nor myself. Apparently, this information was not good enough for my attorneys or the jury to be made aware of.

After hearing just five days of evidence, which grimly coincided with my 21st birthday, the jury took the case into deliberation. Hours later they delivered their verdict. They found me guilty of first-degree robbery and second-degree murder. My sentence . . . 40 years behind bars. Happy 21st.

Instead of leaving 18 months of hard time in the county jail to the beauty of freedom, I'd instead be going to a place I never thought I'd see the inside of: state prison. I was shocked, betrayed, scared, lost . . . You name it and I was feeling it. It was a flood of the emotions you attempt to avoid in life. I could do nothing. I was powerless. I felt like the whole world was against me and the only people who could change that were the very ones who chose to defy the facts by choosing to put me in prison. I was left with so many questions. How could a jury convict me with no evidence? How long would it take to right this obvious wrong? How could those with the authority to serve and protect ignore the facts, and fight for what the documented evidence proved was so blatantly wrong? And the most pressing question, which may never be answered: How could they live with themselves?

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This, thankfully, was not the end of my journey. Incensed by the jury's verdict and knowing I was innocent, my family made it their mission to uncover as much evidence as possible to prove my innocence. Devoting his life to the case, my father, Bill, eventually uncovered a shocking series of facts that would help prove that I should never have even been arrested, let alone tried or convicted.

Following my conviction in 2005, I was back in court several times over the years in a series of hopeless appeals. Each time the local judges ignored the facts of my case and, unsurprisingly, ruled against me. Unwilling to challenge the authority and judgments of their colleagues, none of these "ministers of justice" would be bold enough to stand in opposition to their peers. Sadly, as statistics show, this is typical for small-time judges. So, I sat in prison for years while these local hacks callously carried on with their country-club lives. This continued throughout many years of appeals, even though the only two witnesses against me would eventually take the stand, admitting to perjury. Remember, there was never any physical evidence linking me to Heitholt's murder and the "sole witness" to the crime scene had said I was not the person she saw in the parking lot. Could this really be how our justice system works?

Thankfully, back in October 2005, a few months before my trial, the media started to take an interest in my case. Over the years, three major news magazine shows ended up highlighting my family's extraordinary efforts, and their attention would prove invaluable in securing my eventual release. CBS's *48 Hours* and NBC's *Dateline* each ended up airing four episodes on the absurdity of this case. Later, ABC's *Nightline* also aired two detailed segments. I have since been interviewed by *Today*, *Good Morning America*, *The Early Show*, and *Katie*, Katie Couric's show. Beyond that were countless newspaper articles and posts written about my struggles and my family's. The world of fighting for yourself in the media is a

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story unto itself. It is a strange and difficult one for sure but ultimately gratifying once all the facts are exposed. All the media attention eventually attracted the interest of prominent defense attorney Kathleen Zellner. An extremely well-respected lawyer who focuses on appealing wrongful convictions, Kathleen and her brilliance and incredible work ethic were essential for the fight to come. In the fall of 2009, Zellner and her law partner, the unassumingly tenacious Doug Johnson, met with me and my family, examined the evidence, and realized there had been an obvious miscarriage of justice. They took my case pro bono, no expenses, and worked tirelessly to prove my innocence. Shortly after they came on board, an incredible break occurred in the case. Out of the blue I received some unexpected good news. In early November 2009, Charles Erickson had decided to come clean. In a handwritten statement, Erickson admitted he had lied under oath at trial!

Finally! After years of attempting to prove what was so obvious to a bunch of courts whose members wouldn't even listen to the evidence, the truth would reveal itself. I was still a bit frightened since I knew how these courts operated, but it felt like this hellish journey would soon come to its long-awaited conclusion. How could they *not* give me my life back when this man admitted to lying and all the evidence backed it up? For the first time in years I began to dream again. Later, things began to look even more promising. My defense team ended up speaking with the other witness, Jerry Trump, who confessed that he, too, had lied during his trial testimony under pressure from Prosecutor Kevin Crane. Apparently Crane had told Trump it would be "helpful to him" if Trump could place me at the scene of the crime, which clearly led to Trump's contrived story. Trump was fresh out of prison on an unrelated charge, and he was on parole when he was called into Kevin Crane's office. A classic scenario for the state to drum up false testimony. During his 2012 sworn habeas corpus testimony, Trump stated he was

“scared out of his mind” during that unfortunate meeting and he was “under the guidance of the prosecutor’s office.”

When Erickson and Trump took the stand at my habeas corpus hearing in April 2012 and admitted they lied at my trial, both men subjected themselves to perjury charges. This had never happened before in an American courtroom during a habeas hearing. Recanting witnesses may give affidavits admitting perjury but they rarely take the stand under oath and admit perjury because this act can carry with it a potential 30-year prison sentence. Powerful! How else do you describe a moment like this in a case that was built on nothing more than words? What could possibly be more reliable than witnesses subjecting themselves to a veritable lifetime in prison just for coming clean?

This was it. My time had come, vindication had begun! It was a watershed moment in my case. Or so it seemed. Six months later, almost to the day of the 11th anniversary of Kent Heitholt’s murder, Judge Daniel Green denied my appeal in the Cole County Circuit Court, stating that Trump’s trial testimony had no weight in the jury’s verdict and that Erickson’s habeas testimony was “unreliable.” What? Turns out Green had confused quite a few facts of my case, not to mention Missouri law. He didn’t even understand the testimony in his own courtroom. A prime example is how he completely misstated a witness’s, Kim Bennett’s, testimony about where my car was parked at the By George nightclub in his 2012 finding. I was appalled. It felt as though he was intentionally attempting to alter the facts. What came out of the courtroom was so bad that I simply assumed he was completely out of touch with the facts he was ruling on. And that’s being nice. How could a man given the responsibility to determine the course of another’s entire future not even take the time to get the basic facts correct?

All those hopes and dreams about the future I thought I’d soon be having . . .

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gone. Taken away in an instant. It looked like my future would be that of the only person in the United States to still be imprisoned with absolutely no evidence and with the only alleged eyewitnesses, whose testimony was key in my conviction, recanting in open court.

Nonetheless, we fought on. On January 31, 2013, my attorney filed a petition requesting a writ of habeas corpus from the Western District Court of Appeals, challenging Judge Daniel Green's ruling. At this time I was a bit wary and had little faith in Missouri courts. Even with no evidence and the only "witnesses" of this case recanting, Chris Koster, the Missouri attorney general, opposed the petition, calling it "a waste of judicial resources."

What could be worse than that? One no-name judge not doing his elected duty is bad enough, but the attorney general saying that he quite simply didn't care . . . heartbreaking. At that point, it really didn't feel as though anyone inside this privileged little bubble could have cared less about getting it right. Justice didn't exist. They essentially told us: "We'll never listen to your facts and arguments no matter how much proof you've got. You might as well get comfortable in your little cage."

At this point, I almost lost faith . . . almost. Even then I figured I'd give it one last shot. Oral arguments were just around the corner and this was pretty much the end of the line for me. If these people didn't feel it necessary to listen to the merit of our facts, no one else would. Chances were I'd spend the next 30 years listening to my celly snore as I attempted to sleep while a corrections officer shined a light in my eyes.

On September 10, 2013, my case was heard in front of the Western District Court of Appeals. I wasn't there but everyone I cared about was. It was a huge day. All the media even flew down. Looking back on that day I remember my girl-

friend's phone dying just before the hearing started and a new friend of mine, film producer Andrew Jenks, giving her his so that we could finish our frantic conversation. Needless to say, it was a crazy time in my life.

Although the judges would not decide on anything during that hearing, I couldn't wait to hear how things went. After that phone call to my girlfriend, as everyone I knew went in and listened to my attorneys fight for my life, I had to go sit in my cell and hope to hear from someone soon how things transpired. All I could think was how surreal it was to have the center of my world so far away from me. I even wrote a post on Facebook about it, one of the many that would highlight my thoughts and feelings at the time. Don't get confused . . . I didn't have access to the Internet the entire time I was in prison. I recited a post to my girlfriend over the phone, so she could type it on her phone and then post it on Facebook. Anyway, later that day I received an ecstatic phone call from Kathleen saying that things went great. Better than even she could have hoped! I felt nothing. Maybe fear, sadness, or bewilderment but nothing like peace or joy. Even as I was able to speak to all those I loved and cared about, my emotions never changed. Everyone sounded great and felt more confident than ever, but for me it was just more of the same, I'd lost all faith. Hope no longer existed.

A couple of months went by, and on November 5, 2013, after I had spent nine years and eight months behind bars, the Western District Court of Appeals panel of judges ruled. It *finally* happened, they overturned my conviction! A week later, on November 12, 2013, they unexpectedly released me. I was a free man for the first time in nearly a decade! Chris Koster, the same attorney general who nine months earlier stated my case was a "waste of judicial resources," decided not to retry or pursue further legal action against me. Justice had finally won! I was

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19 years old at the time of my arrest and released nearly 10 years later, less than a month after my 29th birthday. In total I spent nine years, eight months, and two days in prison for a murder I had no involvement in.

There are many blanks to fill in during those years, but that's for another book. What you've just read is the meat and potatoes of the life I was forced to endure. Every day I lost was a day I would never regain. While high school friends went off to college, graduated, pursued careers, married, and had children, I was behind bars. I missed the college experience, friends' weddings and the births of their children, celebrations, and even my grandmother's funeral. I eventually lost touch with many people whose lives had moved on while I remained falsely imprisoned. Life would never be the same.

My trials and conviction, however, are not what this book is about. The pages that follow are not about dry facts and the workings of the legal system. Instead this book is about my journey in prison and my experiences as one of the many wrongfully convicted men in America's justice system.

Prison is a severe form of mental torture. Through the days of this mental oppression and the physical hell of those first few years, I somehow managed to find a balance and was able to maintain most of my sanity. In this book, I highlight what I did to keep moving through the most oppressive time of my life, how I stayed focused, and what I learned along the way. I emerged from prison after almost 10 years not just unbroken *but* also stronger physically and mentally than I ever thought possible. This is the story of how I did it.

My hope is that this book will inspire you in your own life, too. It was initially written during my last five months of incarceration and much of it concerns my physical growth as I transformed myself from a skinny 19-year-old student into a wall of muscle. I had to in order to survive. Along the way, I'm going to explain,

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step-by-step, how I transformed my body, from exercises and routines to diet and daily habits.

But this isn't your typical fitness book. Sure, you'll pick up all the methods, tips, and ideas you need to get into the best shape of your life; but that ultimately is not what this book is all about. Many of you reading it will already be in good shape or may have no interest in packing on muscle. That's fine! I didn't set out to write a standard fitness book. I'm also *not* your typical fitness expert. I'm just giving you my personal experiences of how I transformed my body. If you want a typical fitness book, trust me, there are countless options on the shelves or online. *This, though, is better!*

Ultimately this book is about one word: GROWTH. If I can grow during what has been in many ways a truly terrible decade for me then so can you. Wherever you are, whoever you are, the only limits on you are the ones YOU impose on yourself. I was stuck in a concrete box for years and certainly had no advantages. This is the story of perseverance and determination, one celebrating our collective capacity to excel.

I *did not* give up hope, and I was not going to let the Missouri justice system define me. While in prison, I exercised my mind and body daily. I went to the physical extreme and fed my brain with knowledge. I wrote this book highlighting what got me through and gave me the sanity to continue my journey. For my last six years in prison, I even worked as a tutor three days a week helping other inmates study for their GED. Helping others helped keep me going.

My intention is for this to be the first of a series of books I plan on writing as I continue my personal journey. I will also highlight my efforts on my Facebook page (Freed Ryan Ferguson), which has over 100,000 (and counting) amazing supporters. Newer are my Twitter and Instagram accounts (@lifeafterten) and a

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website (www.RyanFergusonFitness.com). I now have a tremendous opportunity to reveal the ins and outs of our criminal justice system. I will use these platforms to help expose other cases of wrongful convictions, as well as to update people on my own life and personal growth.

Many people have wondered why I am writing this book now rather than simply telling the story of the last 10 years in a straight autobiography. The latter will share a story that will take time for me to tell properly, and there is also a great deal I must process in my own mind. My story is quite dense and complex; it's not one I want to rush. Don't worry, though, I'm working hard and it's coming. For your sake, for mine, and, most important, for all those who are currently wrongfully convicted, it has to be done right.

My point here is to prove that if I could make it in prison, where you're seen as nothing more than a number in a system that herds people like cattle through an inefficient, nonsensical bureaucracy, then you, too, can achieve great things no matter what life hands you. To the people who controlled my life for 10 years, I was little more than the dirt on their shoes, carelessly pushed around while they cashed a paycheck or scored a promotion. But that didn't stop me—and NOTHING in this world should ever stop you! Whatever we face, we can always find ways to become better.

I *know* my future is going to be amazing. I have been blessed with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, which I am committed to making the most of. I have a great support team: an incredible family, a wonderful girlfriend, fantastic friends, and countless allies in the legal and media worlds. I also know that I must take action in order to grow, and I want the same for you, too. So don't just read this book. **USE IT!**

There is no stopping you. The choice is yours. Take action. Take control of your life! Make every moment matter!

3

*Rowing harder doesn't help if the boat
is headed in the wrong direction.*

— KENICHI OHMAE

The Big Six Moves

Fall 2005. After almost two years of being locked away from my family in what can only be described as a massive stack of cinder block, it was time for the next stage of my physical development. Getting big in a hurry. The reason: my life depended on it. In prison the stakes are truly life and death. Here's an example.

One day I was preparing to go to the gym when I became aware of a “code red,” high alert. Cops were running, lights were flashing, and COs (corrections officers) were yelling at us to lock down immediately! Something was happening and it felt big.

Now, in prison, getting locked down from time to time isn't a big deal. But this one was different. The timing was off, the actions of the authorities were strange, and EVERYONE was sent back inside their cells. That was a bit unusual. I didn't know what to make of it.

Two and a half hours later, with no word as to what was going on (we were usually left in the dark), normal movement was back and all was fine . . . kind of. It was 6:30 p.m. and I was due to be at work tutoring other inmates. Something I greatly enjoyed volunteering for as it helped others attain their GEDs. On this night, though, I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to leave my cell. Things just felt a bit *off*. It was as if the administration was *trying* to be normal. Instead . . . it just felt spooky. You see, prison is a strange little world where word often travels fast. Sure enough, on my arrival at school, everyone was talking about that afternoon's incident, a brutal murder that had supposedly occurred in the house next to mine, Six House. Not that a murder in prison was uncommon. When you force two strangers to live together in a 10 × 10 concrete box, and one, the other, or both are killers or, at the very least, criminally violent lunatics, you can figure out what might happen. In this case the murderer had beaten his cellmate to near death and stuffed his body under the bunk to die a lonely, terrifying, slow, and painful death.

At the time, my immediate thought was, "That could have been me." And the frightening reality was: this almost *was* me, multiple times. Seven House ("the hole") was bad, and Six House, a "better part of the hole," was far worse. Thankfully, toward the end of my imprisonment I was in Five House, right next door but worlds away in terms of mentality, violence, and stress levels. This wasn't by accident, either. I worked hard to get into this housing unit and even harder to stay there.

In short, I had to endure a yearlong intense program where my life was essentially under the control of the administrators. We marched, went to classes and group sessions from five in the morning to nine at night, got five minutes to shower, and followed more rules than could fit into this book. It was crazy, but still a good thing. I believe it's actually even helped a few people. If only prison focused more on simple solutions to *correcting* people's bad habits and behaviors

than locking them in a box for years on end, then it's possible that some good would come out of the incarceration part of our justice system.

Anyway, this living situation hadn't always been an option. Years earlier I was forced to share a tiny cell in those obscenely oppressive housing units with a bizarre mix of random psychopaths, everyone from carjackers to robbers to merciless killers. Some were smaller than I was, most were larger, but ALL were undoubtedly crazier, and in prison, that's what you've really got to watch out for: the nuts. So when I heard about this brutal murder, all I could think was the next time it could well be me stuffed under that bunk. I was struck by a moment of total and complete panic. The reality is, as long as you're stuck in prison, you just never know what might happen next.

Which brings me back to the beginning of my prison journey. My first celly in a maximum-security prison was Markis. He was one bad dude. In prison for robbing dope houses in Kansas City, Markis was a seasoned vet. Prison was his second home and, by all accounts, this was his world. Fortunately, Markis and I got along . . . most of the time. Not good but well enough to keep the peace. I'd like to say the peacekeeping was mutual, but to be honest, it was mainly due to my grudging acceptance of the things I could not control or change (primarily his massive size and intimidating demeanor). Needless to say, I had to make many frustrating concessions. Wipe down the sink and leave it looking pristine (he was OCD). Read facing the wall instead of out toward the room (his paranoia told him I was watching his every move). Don't breathe too loud. (Apparently I did this on purpose? A complaint I'd never heard prior to or after this nut.) The list goes on. I'd love to say I did it simply because I was the "bigger man," which I was inside, but my choices were slim, and he was without a doubt the *bigger man* in that cell.

At six feet three inches tall, packed with 230 pounds of pure muscle, and cov-

ered from head to toe in demonic tattoos, made all the more intimidating by the scars from the shotgun blast that had rearranged the upper left side of his face and body, this guy was not someone I wanted to have problems with. Especially not while I was trapped in our temporary concrete cage, where help may as well have been miles away. Worse still, my new “friend” Markis had been medically diagnosed with bipolar disorder and rediagnosed by me to be totally and completely freakin’ delusional.

Yep, if there ever was a welcoming committee to prison, it would be this guy. I hated to admit it, but I was powerless. This guy may as well have been Mike Tyson standing in front of me. All I knew was: (1) I was way too small to deal with this guy; (2) I’d fight to the death if this guy tried anything (not like it’d be much of a fight but I really had no choice in the matter); and (3) well, he knew 1 and 2. Right away I knew my first three months in prison were guaranteed to be interesting.

The silver lining to this situation, if there was one, was that Markis worked out hard, and knowing this helped motivate me to do the same. Not necessarily because I wanted to, but because I *had* to. Living with an unstable individual like Markis, danger was always right around the corner, so it was in my best interest to “keep up.” I use the phrase “keeping up” quite loosely because even after ten years of dedicating myself to fitness, I still can’t necessarily say that I’m all the way caught up. Fact: you can’t beat crazy!

I came to realize quite quickly that my single most imminent danger was not, as I had thought, out on the yard around all of the crazies, thugs, and creeps, but rather in what should be my “safe zone,” locked up with a madman behind an impenetrable steel door, with nowhere to run. Trapped like a rat with the craziest, baddest people on earth. Help would never come. It’s you against psycho roid rage over there and that’s it. Battle royal, baby, a fight to the end.

So while I had made modest gains at first, gains that most people would have been proud of, I still had a long way to go. Staring at the image in the mirror, all I could think was: “Who’s going to be afraid of your skinny little ass?” So I ate more, I worked out harder, and I hit the books.

Ultimately, I came to realize that much of what I’d been spending my time on in the gym was quite useless. Lesson #1: All workouts are NOT created equal. Things really began to change for me when I learned this important lesson.

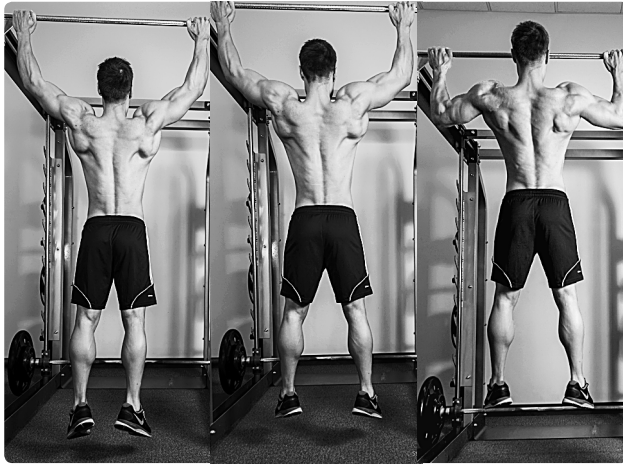
My breakthrough came when I learned about compound moves, the basis of this chapter. Now there are many compound moves out there, but we’re interested primarily in what I consider the Big Six: the squat, deadlift, pull-up, bent-over row, bench press, and shoulder press.



Legs: Squat



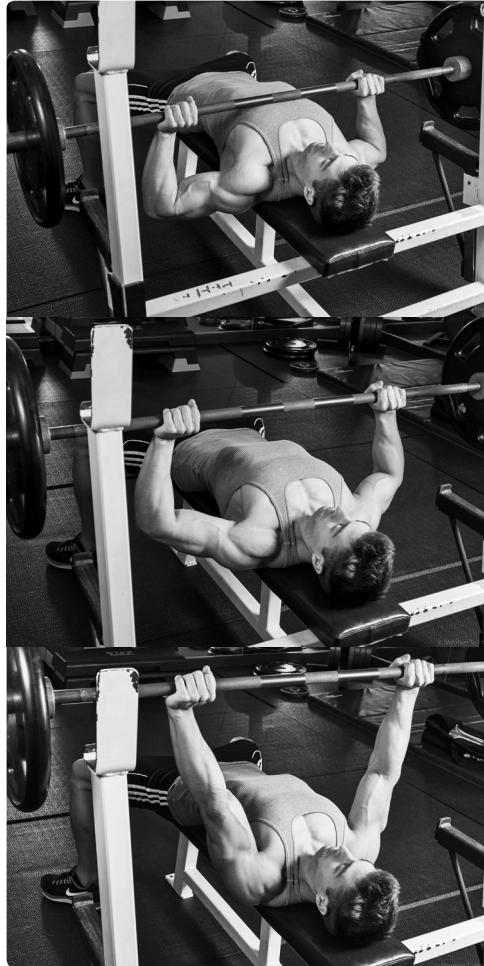
Legs: Deadlift



Back: Pull-Up



Back: Bent-Over Row



Chest: Bench Press