



Fish: A Memoir of a Boy in a Man's Prison

By T. J. Parsell

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When seventeen-year-old T. J. Parsell held up the local Photo Mat with a toy gun, he was sentenced to four and a half to fifteen years in prison. The first night of his term, four older inmates drugged Parsell and took turns raping him. When they were through, they flipped a coin to decide who would "own" him. Forced to remain silent about his rape by a convict code among inmates (one in which informers are murdered), Parsell's experience that first night haunted him throughout the rest of his sentence. In an effort to silence the guilt and pain of its victims, the issue of prisoner rape is a story that has not been told. For the first time Parsell, one of America's leading spokespeople for prison reform, shares the story of his coming of age behind bars. He gives voice to countless others who have been exposed to an incarceration system that turns a blind eye to the abuse of the prisoners in its charge. Since life behind bars is so often exploited by television and movie re-enactments, the real story has yet to be told. Fish is the first breakout story to do that.

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Fish: A Memoir of a Boy in a Man's Prison By T. J. Parsell Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #488700 in Books
- Brand: Parsell, T. j.
- Published on: 2007-08-31
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x .88" w x 5.50" l, .75 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 336 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Now a writer and human rights activist, Parsell's mission to end sexual abuse in prisons gets a powerful testament in this memoir. On probation for entering an empty hotel room, and subsequently arrested for attempted robbery of a photo shop (with a toy gun), 17-year-old Parsell finds himself facing up to 15 years in the Michigan prison system. Parsell quickly realizes his vulnerable state as a young, white good-looking inmate surrounded by more experienced prisoners. When a smooth criminal named Chet invites Parsell to drink with him and a few other seasoned inmates, Parsell eagerly accepts. To his dismay, they spike his drink with a heavy sedative and brutally assault him. After the rape, Chet wins a coin toss and just like that, Parsell becomes his personal property. Parsell is quick to point out that inmates are not the only predators in the correctional system; it was his rebuff of a probation officer's advances that would ultimately lead a judge to hand down a four-and-a-half to 15 year sentence. On top of the almost daily assaults, Parsell must come to terms with his homosexuality and his status as a "white boy" in a majority black community. Parsell does not shy from expressing his raw emotions, realizing his brutal experiences in brave, honest language.

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About the Author

T.J. Parsell is a writer and human rights activist dedicated to ending sexual abuse against men, women, and children in all forms of detention. He is currently President-elect of Stop Prisoner Rape and serves as a consultant to the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission. Parsell has testified before numerous government bodies and was instrumental in passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, the first ever federal legislation to address this issue. He lives in Sag Harbor, NY. Visit his web site at www.TJParsell.com

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