

Humans of Life Row Prompts

Benny Rios

1. What is the first sound you hear when you wake in the morning?

Usually the first sound that I hear is myself moving to get into my first thing in the morning prayer position while I'm still on my bunk and remain covered by my sheet.

2. What makes you feel safe?

Being around good people makes me feel safe. There's something about people's smiles and laughter that makes me feel at ease. However, even when times are rough, having good people around through tough times gives me assurance that everything will be okay.

3. What is something unselfish that you've done?

This is difficult. I've done plenty of things that would be considered as unselfish acts, but I feel wrong about specifying something unselfish that I've done because it feels like I'm giving myself credit, which takes away from the unselfish acts that I did in my life.

4. What law would you change for the betterment of humanity?

Wow, there are so many laws that need to be changed, however, if I had to start somewhere, I'd change the environmental laws into a law that ensures protection against pollution of our water, air, food, etc. and that will protect humanity and wildlife giving all equitable access to the world's resources.

5. If you could change anything in the world, what would that be?

I would change hateful and dangerous religious and political worldviews and ideologies that keeps people in a constant state of polarization. Nearly everything that I read, hear, and see on T.V. and hear about on social media is so devise.

6. What is a position that you've taken that you've changed your mind about?

For the first half of my life (I'm 43 now) I held the position that being in a gang was where I had brotherhood and a sense of family that led me to devote my whole life to the gang. However, my position has changed, not toward the people but toward the gang's ideologies that only lead to destruction.

7. What does freedom smell like?

For me, freedom smells like my wife's scent as I inhale a deep breath from her neck & hair. When I could wake up to that every morning I'll know that I'm physically free.

8. Tell a story about where you live.

Where I currently live in Stateville Correctional Center, C-House, cell 656, it's a place that I wouldn't want my worst enemy to live at (if I had one). However, every week my celly & I make something exclusive to eat (usually burritos with commissary bought junk food) and seeing my celly in action is a sight to see. He really enjoys making these

meals, he made 19 burritos today because we invited other people to join us. One of those people is a birthday boy. After he warmed up all of their burritos he asked if I was ready to heat ours up. I replied that it didn't matter, so he basically implied that I'm good for nothing since he did all the work & I could not even decide on when we should eat. LOL (I decided to wait).

9. What's one thing that you've worked hard to change about yourself?

I honestly don't know what I've changed about myself that I had to work hard at. I've changed a lot of things in my life, but I really feel as if the changes come willfully. I do admit though that being more patient with my wife is hard work, so that is something that's in progress.

10. What does prayer mean to you? What does study mean to you? What does discipline mean to you? (choose one)

Prayer to me means relationship with God. It's where I find strength, comfort, assurance, peace, and a place to dump all of my burdens among other things. Without prayer I don't know where I'd be as a human being, I can't even imagine it.

11. It's been said (by a friend to me) that the most meaningful lessons are those that you have to learn over and over again. What do you think?

It kind of makes me think that if one needs to learn a lesson over and over again that a person may not be fully grasping the lesson in the first place. Maybe the person should consider an alternative way of learning this lesson. However, I find this idea to be positive in that some lessons require daily practice in order to achieve goodness.

12. What are you proud of?

I'm proud of my brother for staying out of prison for 21 years & counting after serving a 17 yr sentence and for taking care of our mom. I'm also proud of my wife for sacrificing so much in order to devotedly maintain our relationship for the past four years that she's been in my life.

13. What is your Achilles Heel?

I would say that, my loyalty to friends. I often find myself in the middle of disputes between people that I love. I'm loyal to and my loyalty protects me from choosing sides, which is usually damaging to me. I just want peace between everyone.

14. What is your superpower?

My superpower is to be there for people when they need me and to help them through whatever they're going through until the end. I'm dependable.

15. "Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word "love" here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace — not in the infantile American sense of being

made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth”
- James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time

What do you think about this quote?

16. Who are your people?

I find it a bit difficult to answer this question because I have a lot of people. By specifying certain people as my people I feel that certain people would be excluded. With that being said, my people are whoever wants to be my people.

17. Who do you claim and who claims you? Who are you accountable to?

I claim Jesus Christ, my wife, my family, and my friends and they all claim me. I am accountable to God, to the people I've wronged, and to everyone else including myself.

18. What are you known for? What do you want to be known for?

I'm known for my big nose. I want to be known for somebody who is loyal, who helps people, who represents God righteously, who unites people, who does justice, who works closely with his and who does all these things with love.