

Dear Your Honor Judge Cooper,

I was raised in Syracuse, NY by two lovely parents and after their divorce, also by my wonderful step-parents. They always encouraged me in my sports activities and tolerated my Dungeons and Dragons campaigns that often went late with friends in High School. I didn't pursue team sports and instead I started running. Running gave me time to think about all the books I read so voraciously.

As I got older, I became involved in youth counseling through the local community and I explored leadership roles. In retrospect, I think I should have tried to work this into my career, but I was making good money with home improvement jobs and I valued my independence. Some of my best memories are of the Summers as a camp counselor at Camp Owahtta.

Life took its twists and turns and I eventually settled-in to a pattern of working in the summers in NY, and then spending 5 or 6 months working and living in Hawaii. It turned out to be quite affordable and much more appealing, compared to Upstate NY winter living ! Being so far out from the Mainland and working so much to be able to afford to travel was a good way to keep myself occupied with new hobbies and to stay out of the NY rat-race. But family connections drew me back to Syracuse in 2018 and I decided to be more responsible and to return to Syracuse and settle-down.

I found a permanent job doing office installs all over the Northeast and thought I would slide into middle age gracefully, get a long-term partner, spend time with my nieces and nephews and help my Dad fix-up the old house. I even got into sports to have something to talk about at work!

When COVID came to town, my life was totally upended. Naturally no offices were getting installed, no NBA games were being played, no friends or family wanted to chill or to even talk about the situation. I was living with my twin brother and after he left town, I was on my own. With all that time on my hands and the pandemic unemployment, I started doing more and more research online and eventually took up the anti-lockdown cause, going to rallies and blogging. I had some experience with anti-war organizing against the Iraq war and have always been interested in politics, in my own way. I found that my previous activism experience was quite rare in these new political waters, and I felt needed and affirmed. I was also glad that I could be a part of rallies and events without the anarchist faction showing-up and disrupting things, like they used to when I was marching for "the Left". I've always thought that more can be accomplished through dialogue and community outreach rather than focusing on direct action.

Of course, many of the "Trumpers" who shared my dislike of mask mandates and school closings, also had some pretty outlandish theories about Q Anon and suchlike. In retrospect, I didn't realize the harm that this messaging was doing until it was too late, and I got swept-up into the election battle and the Stop the Steal protests.

Even after the 2020 election was won by President Biden, I was still having fun and didn't think things would come to violence. Also, I was concerned that the COVID election rules might have harmed democracy in America, similarly to how I had seen friends and family go downhill during the tumultuous year. Indeed, I had a drinking relapse, after being sober for years, after getting my back unemployment!

By January 6th the mood had turned a lot darker. I figured Trump could give one last rally and maybe convince congress to do an investigation into what had happened with mail in ballots, though clearly he was on his way out. No one thought that the Capitol would actually be breached! It was shocking how fast everything happened. I wandered up to the entrance and in my excitement I went into the building. I realized almost immediately that there was a violent riot going on and I turned right around and walked out. I returned home and was left feeling very stupid and ashamed

of myself. I feel chagrinned and great humiliation that I could have been so stupid. And I am mortified that my presence gave strength to individuals who may have thought I supported their bad acts.

Thinking back, I should have realized that the police were engaged in a fierce struggle all over the building, since I saw tear gas as I walked around. In that situation it doesn't help to have dumb guys with bear-hoods wandering around the place! I figured I would probably get in trouble for my conduct, and I have to pay the price. I made a choice and I have to accept the consequences. I know I deserve punishment and have had plenty of time to re-think my priorities. I would never repeat January 6th. Never.

Thankfully, in January 2021, I was already in the process of moving out of the politically charged environment of Syracuse and getting a place closer to my church. I am helping with the building committee and have found a community to serve. I also am enrolled at SUNY Cortland. I want to complete my degree and would like to someday help kids who wandered astray as I did. It seems now like my childish behavior was the inevitable result of not following a responsible path in life and blaming the outside world for my own underachievement. Thank God I have found a great community to help me make up for lost time. Also my lawyer Heather has been super great, suggesting reading materials and encouraging me to pursue my goals.

Sincerely,

Macsen Rutledge