



March 05, 2021

How Did You Sleep Last Night?

Dante McConochie-Sullivan, Salt Lake City.



Photo illustration by Slate. Photo by Getty Images Plus.

by Lori Teresa Yearwood

This is part of an ongoing [series](#).

On the night of Feb. 21, the last night of his 29-day stint in the Salt Lake County Jail, Dante McConochie-Sullivan estimated he slept only in 15-minute intervals. The plastic mattress on top of his metal bunk was approximately two inches thick, he said, and each time the guard made a

round through the medium-security pod during the night, he could hear the jangling of the keys. The sound reverberated through the 6-by-10-foot cell and into 22-year-old McConochie-Sullivan's spinning mind.

Also, he added, matter-of-factly, "There was no pillow and there were no sheets because people hang themselves with the sheets."

McConochie-Sullivan had been incarcerated, he said, for "a second degree felony for allegedly receiving stolen property in the form of a Lexus." Exhausted, but fueled by the excitement of being scheduled for release in the morning, he decided there was nothing better to do with his time than prank the guard on duty. The 22-year-old draped a blanket over his back, put his shoes on his hands, and dropped his pants down to his ankles.

"My cellie was hiding in the back," he said. "I looked like I was humping someone because the shoes were facing out."

The stunt almost got him into trouble, McConochie-Sullivan said. Then why, I asked him —given that his freedom was on the line—did he do it?



Dante McConochie-Sullivan. Lori Teresa Yearwood

His answer came so fast it was as if he had recited the words a million times before: "I'm terminally reckless. Like, I make decisions without my best interests in mind."

The day he got out, on Feb. 22, I spotted McConochie-Sullivan in faded jeans, a Nike sports shirt, white sneakers, and an ankle monitor, walking in the midafternoon sunshine on top of a narrow concrete embankment across the street from the jail. He was waiting for the bus to take him home to his mother and her boyfriend, he said. He had about 20 minutes to talk.

He took a puff from a cigarette, then told his story. He started getting in trouble when he was 12. Back then, he lived in a trailer park, and he and his “homies thought it was cool to get on the roof of every single trailer at night. We called it ‘dominating.’ ”

It wasn’t long before the police caught them. “They, like, snatched my buddy around because he spit in their face, and then they handcuffed us and brought us back to our parents,” McConochie-Sullivan said.

“I have, like, 17 bookings in Salt Lake,” he said. “And I have been to Tooele and Utah County, too.” A police record search validated his statements.

McConochie-Sullivan started doing drugs at 12, he said, when the mother of one of his friends gave him the drug spice to help him get motivated to go to school. “Honestly, it helped,” he said. But he stopped going to school in his junior year of high school and kept getting in trouble for smoking weed and fighting with other guys over girls. “My district got fed up with me,” he said. “It was my own doing. I’m kind of a little shit, from what I hear.”

The 20 minutes passed quickly, and we talked again that night on the phone. In that conversation, he said that he was happy to be home with his mother because she was sober now, he was sober, and her boyfriend was sober. “This is about as much guidance as I have ever gotten,” he said.

His father is in another city, in Sandy, he said. “He’s a good father. He’s just busy.”

I asked McConochie-Sullivan how long he had been sober. “Twenty-nine days,” he said—except for two times in jail when he got “butt drugs.”

“Butt drugs?” I asked.

“Butt drugs—the drugs that came out of someone’s butt,” he said.

He laughed. Then he said he was determined to keep his sobriety streak going. He said he knows he has what his therapist calls suicidal ideation.

He has “officially flatlined” from drug overdoses 14 times, he said. “It feels nice” to be on drugs, and he wanted to see what the other side was like, he said.

“Just my whole life, I never thought I would be older than 18,” he said. “But now I’m 22 and it’s like ‘fuck it’—whatever happens, happens at this point.”

His mother gave birth to him when she was 16. “We grew up together,” he said.

He lowered his voice on the phone and said we could talk more about it after he got off work at his job at the jail in two days—the job was part of his release obligations, he said. “I don’t want her to hear and hurt her feelings or make her feel guilty,” McConochie-Sullivan said, lowering his voice to a whisper.

But minutes before our scheduled meeting time, his mother, Brooke Sullivan, texted me. Her son wouldn’t be able to make the interview, she said. He was back in jail. Her landlord, Skyler Baird—who is also her boss, an Airbnb owner for whom she works as a house cleaner and babysitter—hadn’t given his approval for McConochie-Sullivan to stay in her apartment.

“Dante has never had permission to live here and has shown me that he’s not willing to get off of meth and other drugs, and he has constantly brought stolen things back to the house and continues to get in trouble for doing drugs,” Baird said. “I know that sounds harsh. He has a good heart. But he has shown he’s not ready to change his lifestyle yet.”

Baird said he and his wife have been working for the past year to help Sullivan and her boyfriend recover from their time in homelessness and meth use. Dante’s presence at the apartment “would be a potential reason that Brooke might relapse into using,” Baird said.

So when Sullivan’s son showed up, Baird called the ankle monitoring office at the jail and everyone agreed that the 22-year-old was not able to handle the freedom of being out on an ankle monitor, Baird said.

“He wants Dante to be free one day,” Sullivan said. “And he wants Dante to live. Because Dante has a death wish.”

When he is not incarcerated, she checks on her son every hour with “every single one of his friends,” to see if he is OK, Sullivan said. “And I’ll have them check if he is breathing.”

I asked her why she thought her son wanted to die.

Sullivan, 39, began to cry.

“I got married when he was 4,” Sullivan said. “Not to his dad, to the husband I am separated from. It was domestic violence for me for 17 years. Dante was the only person I had. Dante never had a childhood.”

When her son was 12, that year he first began to get in trouble, her then-husband locked her into a bedroom—a room that he blocked out with black shades—and made her stay there for about a year, Sullivan said. Every once in a while, she was allowed to go grocery shopping with her husband, never by herself, she said. She did not report him to the police because she was frightened of any repercussions.

“My husband told Dante that every bad thing that happened was because of Dante,” Sullivan said.

One night, when her ex fell asleep, she snuck out to a neighbor’s house, determined to find another place for her son to live. After that, he lived with grandparents, or group homes, and in 2018, he lived with her in a domestic shelter for a few months.

“That’s why I think he gets in trouble,” Sullivan said. “He is so worried about me he doesn’t know how to be himself. I feel like I stole his life from him.”

The last time he was in jail, the staff wouldn’t give him his eye plunger to take out one of his contacts, she said, and that resulted in the loss of most of the vision in his left eye. “He told me he was going to learn to skateboard blind,” she said. “Dante loves skateboarding.”

When people steal cars, they give them to Dante, she said. “He was driving to the Volunteers of America”—a Salt Lake City youth shelter—”and picking up the kids who didn’t make it in at night and keeping them warm and taking them to where they needed to go,” she said.

“I used to call him ‘Robin Hood,’ ” she said. But then she realized that maybe that was condoning stealing.

She paused.

“Dante has the biggest heart in the world,” she said. “Maybe I’m biased because I’m Dante’s mom, but I think Dante could change the world.”



Lori Teresa Yearwood. Photo: Cass Studios of Salt Lake City
Lori Teresa Yearwood's work can be found at loriyearwood.com