

Dear Judge Peterson,

I imagine this is not the way most letters like this begin, but I want to start with something that has been on my heart for well over a year. Parts of our criminal justice system are broken and I hate it. I don't hate it because I am in jail and afraid of prison, although I am afraid. I hate it because I have wanted to apologize to my victims from the beginning and I feel like the process has only stifled their ability to heal.

Right away, I wanted to say that I was so sorry - to beg forgiveness and fall on the court's mercy. But Joe and the lawyers before him all said I couldn't. I had to wait, let the process play out, the time would come when I could apologize and bring closure to the victims. That was almost two years ago. And not a day has gone by that I have not wanted to take responsibility and say there is no excuse for what I've done. To allow them an outlet to yell, swear at me, or whatever they need. One of the first things I asked my lawyer was how I could apologize to the victims and start trying to make up for what I've done. I have written many letters apologizing and asking Joe to give them to the victims, to share with the prosecutor my remorse. But he'd always tell me I have to wait. The time would come.

But here's the time, and even now I feel like I can't read them or send them because it seems manipulative. I even fear that anything I say in court will be seen that way - as just trying to escape responsibility. It's all so distorted and I hate this. The victims deserve much better.

I do, however, hope that my punishment will bring them closure and healing and that they will know that I am sorry it has taken so long to get to this point. That is the first







thing I want you to know, your honor, Sentencing was not the first time I wanted to apologize to my victims or accept responsibility. And now, I fear all my words at sentencing will seem self-serving and marked by self-interest, which is not what I want at all.

The second thing I want you to know about is I have struggled with voyeurism for a while. But my spying was never about using people as sexual objects, especially minors. My crime was an escalation of poor judgement and risk-seeking behavior that affected all aspects of my life - my marriage, my relationship with my family, and my ability to function as a teacher. But "spying on people" was not my original motivator in life, especially my career. It was something that started small and I didn't think a big deal but soon became a bigger and bigger part of things until it was out of control.

My life was always about my family and my students. I was proud to be an educator. I taught because I wanted to help my students and improve their lives by providing opportunities, guidance and friendship. I genuinely cared about my students and tried to help them achieve their goals and become the best versions of themselves. I knew the difference that a good teacher can make in students' lives, and I threw myself into being that sort of teacher. I ran many clubs, I spent my weekends planning and facilitating school events, and worked to grow programs I believed would have a positive impact on students' lives and career opportunities. I felt like I achieved a lot. I was twice awarded at the state level for my work with extra curriculars and financial literacy







programming. I am not saying that to brag, but to show that my desires, my intentions and the fruits of that commitment were real and they preceded this criminal behavior. In other words I am not a predator who decided to become a teacher to be close to kids.

That leads to the third point I want to make. Over the past twenty months reading the discovery and student interviews, I see that over time and over the past couple of years, I did not keep the boundaries with my students that I should have. I am not referring to my crime, I am talking about relating to them. I got too comfortable with looking at students and former students as peers.

I honestly felt that if I could relate to them as a peer/friend it would allow me to counsel them through their problems. There were many times I did. I helped students handle significant stress and trauma. But what I now understand is that by crossing the barriers of our student-teacher relationships even just slightly, I inappropriately looked at the students who confided in me as friends. And once I started blurring the lines, looking at them as friends, I lost sight of my sacred duties and responsibilities as a teacher.

As I already mentioned, I don't have a simple reason for what went wrong, and even if I did, there is no excuse. But I think that I owe you the insights from the last twenty months of self-reflection on what went wrong with my life and everything that led me here.

Despite loving my job and my family, I became depressed. For one thing, I spread myself too thin. I took on too many







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extra responsibilities, like advising five clubs, coaching, planning events such as prom, homecoming and back to school night, and supervising the school store. I was in a constant state of stress. I kept a good face and tried to push on. In the past, I had always been an adrenaline junkie looking for adventures from skydiving to backpacking to endurance racing. I don't know if that was a coping mechanism for me or just an outlet, but it was a large part of how I managed life. When we started having kids, my added professional and family responsibilities dramatically cut back those opportunities. While many people deal with these issues healthily, I coped by turning to alcohol and other destructive behaviors. Removed from it now, I can see the spiral very clearly.

I believe I started spying to deal with stress and fulfill a need for adrenaline. It was a slow evolution. I had always been interested in snooping on people. I was curious and wondered what they were doing when I wasn't around or what they were saying about me. That was always a thought in my mind. I snooped on family and friends in various ways that I am not proud of. I would look through phones or use a key grabber on my wife and family to monitor emails. I know it's very creepy and I am very ashamed of it all. But this is how it started and where it escalated from.

As this fixation of spying consumed more of my life, I bought cameras and set them up to see what our pets did during the day. It was harmless in itself, but if I am honest the signs were there that this would escalate quickly. Eventually, I started spying on family and friends with cameras. I hid them in common rooms and would see what was going on when I wasn't around. I got hooked on the rush of sneaking around setting







up and viewing the cameras. I knew there was a camera there and no one else did.

From there I started spying on my wife more and more. Then it was babysitters, rationalizing that I was keeping my kids safe and seeing what was going on. And then I started to go off the rails. I set them up in the bathroom at home. Then at my parent's cabin. I taped family and friends, I even taped my elderly godparents. The rush wasn't the image that I got, it was the rush of having spied. I hope that makes sense. The videos were people going through every day activities like sitting on the couch or using the bathroom. But the videos were intrusive and they were criminal.

After a while, I started spying on my students. I made excuses or found justifications to tell myself - to see if the kids had alcohol in their rooms or if they were sneaking people in. This escalated as well with more cameras and more brazen placement to increase the rush. The adrenaline combined with my obsessive urge to know what everyone is doing all the time became bigger and bigger. Despite these factors, there is no rational or justifiable reason I did this. I knew it was wrong and I hate myself for it. It was selfish and a complete invasion of everyone's privacy. It was a terrible, terrible thing to do.

While I obviously targeted my students, and I clearly knew some were underage, that's not why I was targeting them. This was the snowball effect of bad decisions. I taped my students because they were there, just like I did with my family and friends. And







when it came to students, I taped both girls and boys. I was spying on everyone. That doesn't make it right, but it is the truth.

Now, I clearly created nude images of underage teenagers. That is terrible and criminal and I am going to prison and registering as a sex offender because of that. But that was not my goal when I went into teaching, and it was not my goal when I started on this course of behavior. My goal was not a collection of child pornography. My interest in these voyeuristic videos was not to capture students engaged in sex acts, my interest was the same it was with my godparents, and my pets and my wife - to see what people do when I'm not there. I'm not claiming there was zero sexual component in seeing people in their most private moments or that I never found any victims (whether my students or friends) attractive even if that wasn't my initial motivation. That would be a lie.

But I want you and everyone to know that my motivations were not that of a pedophile. I was not spying on everyone in my life just in hopes of getting nude images of teenage girls. I believe I would never hurt anyone intentionally, but the reality is I put my need for adrenaline and fulfilling inappropriate curiosities above the potential impact on the victims and their families. This violation ended up hurting many good people and it is entirely my responsibility that I let my own problems manifest in this way. While I went through some explanations because I felt I owed it to everyone to try, I want to make it abundantly clear these are not excuses or justifications. It doesn't really matter what my reasons or mentality was, I still invaded the victims' privacy, betrayed their trust, broke the law, and







hurt them in a way I can never fix, but I hope that in time they can forgive me. I'm truly sorry.

I know this probably rings hollow or premature, but I am adamant, as I have been since the beginning, that I want to engage in restorative justice with the victims - if they want to. We were big on that at East, and I was always impressed with seeing the healing that it brought. And I want to help my victims heal. Reading the victim impact statements brought me to tears. Harder than anything I've gone through personally is seeing the devastation and sadness this has caused the victims and my family. I sincerely care for these kids and am so sorry I hurt them. Even though this is all my fault, I also feel that this pain was exacerbated by a legal process that took so long and denied the opportunity for immediate healing and restoration. I am firmly committed to that happening, at any time, if any victims want it to. Of course I can't force that, it's not how restorative justice works. As part of the conditions of supervised release, I would ask that community service be included. I want to give back and contribute to the community. If this is part of my conditions, everyone can know these are not empty words.

Recently, I read a quote that said even on your worst day there is always something good you can do. Even on the days I feel helpless, I try to remind myself of this, and try to help those around me. Whether it's helping fellow inmates study for the GED, or learn to read, or just listening, I am trying to use this time to atone and become the sort of person I used to be. The strong support I have from my family and friends has kept me in a positive mindset.







I consider myself religious and over the last twenty months I have become more so, speaking weekly with my pastor. I believe in penance. In many ways we all look at the number of months and years I'll spend incarcerated as my penance. I wish to spend my time in prison taking advantage of the time. I want to better myself by doing counseling and programming to provide myself with better coping mechanisms to deal with stress, depression and alcohol abuse. I also want to serve those I'm incarcerated with through tutoring. I believe in some ways, however, the hardest time will come after I am released. Many of my dreams and goals, especially related to my career are over. And it is my fault. I will need to adjust and find a different outlet to make a difference and rebuild.

But I hope that through doing my time, committing myself to community service when released, leaning on my family support, and utilizing my skills, I can still rehabilitate and be a productive member of society. I desperately want to be useful. In so many ways, I know that I will be atoning for my crime the rest of my life, far beyond the years you impose. And for the rest of my life, I will sit and live with the harm I caused. From the bottom of my heart today and tomorrow and until I die, I am and will be sorry.

Paul Kuehlter



