

"This isn't what I signed up for when I played a game show," says *Survivor*'s Hatch (outside the Providence courthouse after a 2005 arraignment). He's now serving 51 months in prison.

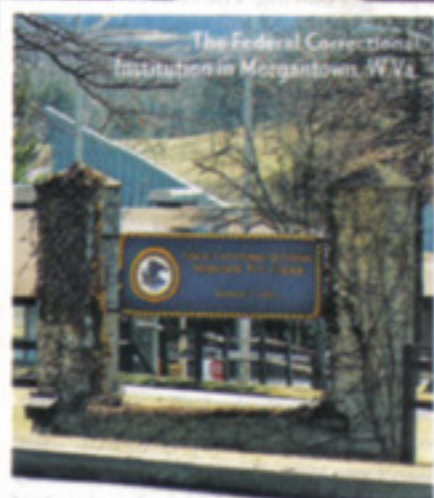


# HARSH REALITY

In an exclusive jailhouse interview, *Survivor* champ Richard Hatch, serving time for tax evasion, talks about life behind bars, his plans for the future and why—he says—he's innocent

**B**ack in the summer of 2000, 51 million people tuned in to watch Richard Hatch receive the \$1 million check that comes with winning the cutthroat reality show *Survivor*. By the end of that inaugural *Survivor* season, Hatch—who proved to be masterful at manipulating his competition—had become reality TV's first love-to-hate-him antihero. "They turned me into a villain, and they did a very good job of it," says Hatch of the show's producers. "When I tried out for *Survivor*, I wasn't doing it to be on

TV. I was doing it for the million dollars. I thought this was a way I could earn some life-changing money." That money turned out to be more life-changing than Hatch could ever have imagined. On Jan. 25, 2006, Hatch was convicted of three counts of tax evasion for failing to pay taxes on his *Survivor* winnings, as well as on other income from a rental property and \$321,000 he received for hosting a Boston-based radio show. Sentenced to 51 months in federal prison, Hatch—who still maintains he's innocent—



currently resides in the Federal Correctional Institution in Morgantown, W.Va., where he shares a room with 11 other inmates and earns \$5.30 a week by tutoring fellow prisoners. Wearing his standard-issue khaki jumpsuit, Hatch, 45, sat down with *PEOPLE*'s Steve Helling to talk about prison life, how he ended up on the wrong side of the law and where he goes from here.

## LANDING IN JAIL

Immediately following his conviction, Hatch was sent to Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Plymouth, Mass. "I was there for six horrendous months,"

he recalls. "We were all in a small room—52 people: child molesters, murderers, rapists and me. For six months I never left that room. There were no doors, no privacy. There were two TVs in that room, so I lived all day long with Jerry Springer blaring. The conversation was inane beyond anything I could possibly describe, which is the mental torture of jail that most people don't understand. There were times my food was spat on by guards. It was one of those nightmares that make you think, 'I'm sure I'll wake up any minute and be at home in my bed.'"

## LIFE IN PRISON

"It's not the lockup or the food or the people you're incarcerated with—the worst thing is the isolation," says Hatch of his experience at Plymouth. "You can't see your family, and when they do come, they're behind a sheet of glass, so you can't even touch them. It was hell." Hatch has a husband, Emiliano Cabral, 31 (they were legally married in Nova Scotia in 2005), and a 16-year-old son, Chris, whom he adopted in 1998.

In August 2006 (after a short stint at the Federal Transfer Center in Oklahoma City), Hatch was moved to the minimum security facility in Morgantown. "Obviously, this is better than the county lockup. There's no fence here. But people think I've come to a country club. It's not. This is prison. Just because it's got a beautiful view of the countryside doesn't make it a

resort. And it's horrendous because I'm an innocent man in jail."

## WHY HE CLAIMS HE'S INNOCENT

"During *Survivor*, I caught them cheating—that's where this story really begins," says Hatch, who contends that he saw a member of *Survivor*'s behind-the-scenes crew giving food to other contestants during the course of the show, on which sustenance is notoriously scarce. "I demanded that something be done."



"This has hurt my family dramatically," says Hatch (with his son Chris in L.A. in 2002, left, and husband Emiliano in New York City in 2004).



Hatch says he had a heated meeting with the show's executive producers, who ultimately agreed to pay his taxes if he'd keep quiet about the cheating. In response to Hatch's accusations, CBS spokeswoman Colleen Sullivan simply says, "The allegations have no merit, and certainly no one connected with the show agreed to pay the taxes on Richard's prize money."

With *Paysa Stockton Rhone* in Boston



"People think I deserve prison because of the way I played *Survivor*," says Hatch (with fellow castaway Kelly Wiglesworth in 2000). Hatch claims the show's producers promised to pay the taxes on his winnings.

As for Hatch's failure to pay tax on his radio show and rental income, his lawyer Michael Minns says, "He hired not one but two accountants, who were unfamiliar with the tax forms and did not know how to handle that income." According to federal prosecutors, however, Hatch purposely disregarded returns prepared by the accountants that showed Hatch owing hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes.

## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

"I don't apologize for anything," says Hatch, who now has served 14 months of his sentence. "I didn't do anything wrong." Minns presented Hatch's case for appeal on March 8, arguing that the trial judge hadn't allowed Hatch to introduce his allegations of cheating on *Survivor*. "We were never able to present our entire case," says Minns. "We tried, but the prosecution kept objecting, and the court sustained it." While Hatch awaits the court's decision, which could come within the next few months, he's spending his downtime in prison "working on a book that I should have no trouble getting published," he says. "It begins with my auditioning for *Survivor*