

1 I was roused out of bed by a correctional officer at about 9 AM - early for me - on a Wednesday morning. "Pack up!" I was being transferred. I'd been on the waiting list to go to the hole for a couple of months. That's right, a waiting list. Like it's some kind of privilege or something. Waiting for the hole has its upsides, though. At least I was able to get myself prepared and let my friends and family know what was up. The wait can be stressful though - never knowing when they're coming to get you can prevent you from getting settled in or comfortable. Anyhow, I'd submitted a dirty urine and had to serve a 15 day Isolation sanction, or "hole" sentence, and even though the CO claimed he didn't know where I was being transferred, I was pretty sure that was it. He gave me some trash bags and left me to pack.

2 After packing just a few commissary items in a trash bag, I was interrupted by the same CO who'd returned to tell me that I was needed in Building 24, the hub building that connected the one I lived in with two others. It's where all the offices are along with some classrooms and a couple of chowhalls. I was concerned because I hadn't finished packing, but he assured me I'd be allowed to return to finish up. That may sound like a minor detail, but you always want to pack your own things - the CO's won't give it the same care, and you want things to be in order when it goes to the property room. They go through it and always seem to pilfer something or write you up for contraband - both of which I'd experienced first-hand and wanted to avoid this time around.

3 When I got to Building 24 I was immediately locked in a classroom and told I was waiting to speak with a nurse. Apparently they've got to make sure you're healthy enough to do hold time. Really, it's just a formality that looks good on paper because what you tell the nurse doesn't have any bearing on how you're treated in the hole, and you're going whether you're healthy or not. I told her about the arthritis in my back - which was already in my file - and wasn't given so much as a Motrin while I was there. I don't think she even wrote it down. When she left the classroom I was given an "Inmate Statement" form to fill out. It's just a piece of paper that you're told to write whatever you want on - another looks-good-on-paper deal, I suppose. On mine I explained that I needed my legal work since I had an open case I was working on. I'd be surprised if that statement isn't in a landfill somewhere by now, but either way I never was given my paperwork.

4 A woman sergeant with a pleasant demeanor came to collect my statement and told me they'd be taking me to the hole in a couple of minutes. I started to protest, telling her I hadn't packed my things yet, but then realized it was frivolous. I'd been set up, bamboozled, and all the protesting I could've done wouldn't make the slightest difference. My things were probably packed by the COs the moment I stepped off my tier to go to 24. The few items I was permitted to have in the hole - two t-shirts, two boxers, two pair of socks, a towel and washcloth, and my showershoes - had already been separated, bagged, and brought up to the building. I noticed my legal work and Bible weren't there and asked the sergeant to bring them to me. She told me she'd have my Bible brought to me (and it was) but couldn't do anything about my legal work. Then I was cuffed and shackled and driven to Building 18, the hole.

5 There were two things I noticed immediately when I walked onto the tier - the multitude of fencing, and how disgustingly filthy it was. To my immediate right were two fenced-in rec yards, though they could hardly be called that since they're completely empty save for a pull-up bar in one, and a broken phone in the other. There were dustballs and trash all over the floor, which appeared not to have been mopped in nearly a year. There were food fragments pushed up against the fencing with colonies of ants crawling all over them amongst the dirt and grime. And despite the smell of the COs cheap cologne in my nose, the stench of the tier was an assault on the senses. The cell-block was two-tiered with the cells sitting the closest just beyond the first rec yard, and the second in the far corner beyond the second yard. Both were covered in fencing along the sides and top. While walking to the staircase to get to my cell I noticed the downstairs cells had no furniture whatsoever. No desk, no bed, no shelf. Nothing. Just a mattress on the floor and a sink/toilet combo unit. The upper tier was just a narrow walkway with cells along one side and more fencing along the other.

6 Every cell had a metal flap adjacent to its door that was about a foot wide by five inches tall. This was a multi-purpose flap that opened onto a small shelf inside the cell to serve meals through, or anything that wouldn't fit under the door. It also served as a doorstop. The COs carried a crude metal pipe that fit over the flap's handle, that when in place, obstructed the door from opening more than eight inches, or so. When I got to my cell I was told to step in, still cuffed and shackled, while they put said pipe in place, then, through the eight-inch opening they removed my cuffs and shackles and slammed the door behind me. They ~~was~~ were supposed to take my bag of extra clothes and strip-search me, but they didn't. It worked out to my benefit because I still had on my watch and a pair of shorts under my pants, though the shorts didn't make it past the

[OPPOSITE THE REC YARDS TWO STAIRCASES COULD TAKE YOU TO THE UPPER TIER;] 1, 15, 18, 21

first strip-search.

My cell, about 7' by 14', was just as filthy as the rest of the tier. Squalid, even. There were countless dustballs and hair everywhere; piles of black dirt in the corners; and dried, crusty semen covered the walls in several places. The toilet and sink didn't appear to have been washed in eons. My mattress was heavy and felt more dense than it should have like it had taken on moisture. The air conditioning was turned all the way up and was extremely loud - to the point that it was difficult to hear anything outside of the cell - and incredibly cold. I had to keep all my clothes on all the time. I had no soap or toilet paper, or any hygiene products. I wanted to clean up a little, but didn't have anything to do so with. I had only one rag that I needed to shower with. I would've torn a blanket to use as a rag, but hadn't been given any linens yet, and wouldn't get my one sheet and blanket until later that evening. Luckily, since the COs had been negligent and forgotten to take my extra clothes, I had two pair of extra socks and decided to use one of them to get up some of the dirt and wipe the cell down so I'd at least feel comfortable sitting down. When I was finished the sock was completely black.

2 Just after I finished wiping the cell down, a sergeant and CO came on the tier to do their hourly rounds. The sergeant noticed that I had all my extra clothes still and ~~asked~~ me give them to him along with my shoelaces and showershoes, and put all of it outside my cell door. I told him that i needed my legal work, linens, toiletries, and some cleaning supplies for my cell. He didn't seem in the mood to do any work that day because he basically gave me an excuse as to why he couldn't meet any of my requests. He said I couldn't clean my cell except for the days that I had rec (Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday). He claimed that he didn't have any toiletries, but that I'd receive them along with my linens on the next shift. And he said that he couldn't get my legal work for me. There was a person who was in charge of determining if inmates met the requirements to possess their legal materials while in Isolation and he said he would talk to them. I had asked what kind of hygiene and toiletries I'd be provided and was told I'd receive one small bar of state-issue soap, a state-issue toothbrush and toothpaste, and a "wrap" of toiletpaper, which is about a third of a roll. However, the only thing I'd be allowed to keep in my cell was the toiletpaper. The rest of it would be kept outside my cell and I'd have to ask a CO for it as needed, and give it back when I was done using it. Luckily, an inmate a few cells down heard our conversation and gave him about a half a wrap for me or I'd have been left with nothing. Still, I wasn't able to wash my hands when I was finished using the toilet. A couple of days later when I asked the same sergeant about the status of my legal work, he told me that it'd been decided that I couldn't have it because I didn't have a deadline with the courts - which I did. I'm pretty sure nobody ever looked into the issue, including the sergeant.

3 In order to prepare myself, I'd been almost overly inquisitive about the conditions and nature of the hole. I'd learned that three times a day - once per shift - every cell was shaken down, and every inmate strip-searched. Lunch was still about an hour away and I wanted to hide my watch before the afternoon shake-down. I took the band off and hid the watch in a hole in my mattress. Then I discovered that the door, which is hollow, had a couple of small holes on the bottom, facing the floor, and hid the band up inside the door. Someone else had already hidden some string and a toothbrush there, too. Had I never discovered this hiding place I could potentially have been written-up for contraband that wasn't mine. Anyway, holding on to the watch was priority; it would be an invaluable asset. This wasn't my first time in a "hole" - I'd been in two others in the two prisons I'd been in before this one - and not knowing the time can be frustrating. This was easily the worst isolation unit I'd been in, so anything to make the stay just a little more comfortable was welcome. I didn't have to wait too long before lunch was brought. It was served on styrofoam plates wrapped in saranwrap. The sides had been put in small plastic cups with lids to keep from merging with the rest of the meal. The food was always cold, and the portions inconsistent. Sometimes there was hardly any food on the tray, and other times the portions were even larger than other places in the prison. I suppose it depended on the inmates making the trays - some may have had more pity on the unfortunate. Without fail, every time our meals were served, the steel flap was opened and closed with unnecessary force. Same with the doors anytime they were opened. The flap and the door make an obnoxious metallic clang. Other places in the prison, like where I'm at now, the COs don't slam the flaps with such force; it's just another measure taken to ensure that inmates in the hole are fully degraded. Back to lunch: I had my watch, so I'd often time the meals. I'm pretty sure policy says we're allowed ten minutes, maybe 15, to eat meals, but we weren't given this much time. Most meals were between seven and eight minutes. On days we had one of the tastier meals it was usually less, a few times less than six minutes. Only when we had the most disgusting meals were we given ten minutes or more to eat.

4 We weren't allowed to save food of any kind, and the shake-downs were always shortly after meals to ensure we didn't try. It was hard for me not to think about how ridiculous it was - every time I was strip-searched, then cuffed while officers searched my cell for some morsel of food or hidden soap I would wonder how people could bring themselves to treat others like this. A few times I made my thoughts known, telling the

officers that one day our nation would look back on this era and question how we were ever allowed to treat our citizens with such malice. Normally, if they responded at all, it was usually to the effect that they were only doing their jobs. Didn't they realize that that was the problem? Once, I got into a decent conversation with one of the COs who was searching my cell. When I spoke about how inmates were being mistreated, his sergeant chimed in saying he never saw inmates being mistreated. It became apparent to me in that moment how truly blind many of these people were to the injustices that they themselves committed.

1 On my second day I was able to have "rec". I already told you about the two inside cages, and the outside ones were mostly the same. There were three cages outside, but only two were used. Apparently there'd been issues in the past with inmates performing sexual acts through the fence when someone was in the middle rec yard. Only one of the cages had a pull-up bar, the other was empty. The outside yards were also quite filthy. To go to yard we were put in handcuffs which were removed once we were locked in the cages. I hadn't spoken to any inmates the first day, so took this opportunity to talk with the other guy I was on rec with. I could've talked to him through the cell vents, but the AC being so loud and cold makes it difficult to have long conversations at the vent. He was actually a former cellmate of mine. Like I mentioned, I'd already done some research, if it can be called that, about what the hole was like, but things are constantly changing, so I had a few questions for him. In the other holes I'd been in we could buy basic hygiene and stationery to write and send mail. He told me we weren't allowed anything like that here, though we were allowed to receive mail. Once we read it we had to give it back and it would be kept in a folder and given back to us when we left the hole. So, no hygiene products, save for the state-issue items I already mentioned, and no writing materials of any kind.

2 After 45 minutes of rec, I was cuffed and taken back on the tier to the showers. The showers all over the prison are pretty grimy, and these were no exception, though they weren't any worse than normal as far as I could tell. I was locked inside one of the few small showers, and after letting out the next rec group the COs left the tier. Showers are supposed to last 15 minutes, but we were always locked in there much longer. If you were on the first rec, you'd be left in there until the second rec was over - 45 minutes. If you had second rec, it could be even longer depending on when the officers felt like coming to take you back to your cell. It's frustrating standing around in a small, dirty shower while the officers are sitting around doing nothing. One day, right after an officer told me he had the "easiest job in the world," he refused to let me use one of the upstairs showers because he didn't feel like climbing the stairs an extra time.

3 When the officers came to get us from the showers, I was cuffed and taken back to my cell. It was laundry night so I told the officer to send out my towel. Normally I'd wash it by hand, but didn't have enough soap. He warned me that laundry usually returned with a brownish tint, but I had him send it out anyway. As it turned out, I shouldn't have sent it out not because it came back brown, but because it never came back at all! When I filed* to be reimbursed for its cost (I'd bought the towel), I was told that the officer working that night would not verify my story and was never reimbursed. I never found out how it got lost - probably an inmate in the laundry room stole it, or the officer simply lost it.

4 Since I'd been told I could only clean my cell on days I had rec, I made sure to request cleaning materials. I was told I'd be brought a sponge, bucket, and detergent ball, which surprised me because I'd been told by other inmates that we weren't allowed to clean our cells at all. In fact, when another inmate who'd been in the hole for some time heard this, he muttered, "I wish I'd known that." The cleaning situation is pretty flawed and follows the pattern of how the hole is run in general. Inmates are never told what the rules are, or what they can or can't have without asking these things specifically. Access to cleaning supplies is always apparent in other buildings - there's always a mop bucket and broom in sight. Most inmates in the hole aren't even aware that they're allowed to clean, or have access to materials to do so. Anyhow, after a couple of hours and several reminders, an officer brought me only a sponge. He claimed he couldn't find a bucket or detergent ball. During my time in the hole, I requested cleaning supplies four more times - every time I had rec. Twice I was given nothing, and another time I was given only a napkin with some Comet inside. Only once was I given all the supplies necessary to adequately clean my cell. Despite this, I was often told during shake-downs that my cell was the cleanest they'd seen in the hole - a testament to the fact that inmates had no clue that cleaning supplies were available.

5 I didn't want my two weeks in the hole to be a complete waste of time. Even though I spent most of my waking hours trying to make the time pass quickly, I also made some good use of it. I collected data, so-to-speak; watching the officers behavior and the way they treated inmates. When I could, I talked to the other inmates and asked questions about how long they had to stay and what they'd done to get there. I also tried to identify some systemic flaws in the way the hole was run.

6 As for passing time, I tried several things. I'd originally been given a 90-day sanction, so had given some serious thought as to how I'd pass my days. The plan consisted of meditation, exercise and Bible study. On

* a grievance

sunny days I'd planned on standing at the window for a few hours since I couldn't get outside much, and couldn't get any sun out there anyway due to the high walls. That didn't work out, though. The cell window faced east-northeast, so the sun would only shine weakly in the cell for a short time in the morning while everyone was asleep. I wondered if this was merely coincidence or by design? I did meditate, though not as often as I'd intended or wanted. I did study a decent amount of the Bible. I exercised every day which was inconvenient since I couldn't keep any soap to wash up with afterward. I tried timing my workouts according to when the COs did their rounds so I'd finish just before they came on the tier; that way I could ask for my soap and rag soon after I was done. Sometimes it worked. I figured how many back and forth laps was a mile (165, diagonal) and walked about two to five miles a day. I'd also do about a half hour of stretches in the morning and before I went to sleep. And even though I couldn't get any sun, I'd still spend a lot of time at the window watching gaggles of geese or whatever other animals were out that day - usually just birds and deer. The days still dragged by, but having a routine, however loosely structured, helped some.

Observing the behavior and conduct of the officers was heart-wrenchingly disappointing. The mistreatment was vast and disgusting. Depraved. On a large scale the things I witnessed may be considered minor, but when you consider the effects it would have on the average person if they were treated in a similar manner you begin to understand the extent of the depravity. A psychological beating can often do more damage than a physical one. The officers were largely indifferent to the needs and requests of inmates. Because we weren't allowed to keep soap or a toothbrush in our cells, we were at their mercy. Yet, when inmates tried to get their attention they often walked right by as if they heard nothing. Once, I was told by an officer that, because he wasn't technically working that tier, he wouldn't give me my soap. If an inmate ran out of soap or toothpaste before the weekly supply day, his request for more would be met with condescension instead of the requested supplies. Compassion simply did not exist. I saw an inmate who hadn't received his daily medication and was ignored for hours when he requested it. Another inmate who'd become upset when, during a shakedown, his medication was confiscated, was threatened with being put in a four-point restraint. He was emotionally distraught and the reaction of the guards, a group of about six to eight of them, was to laugh at his misery. He never was given back his meds. I saw inmates whose mattresses were taken from them every morning at 9 am and not given back until 9 pm - always in cells with no furniture - leaving them to sit or lie on a dirty floor the entire day. One inmate's Bible was taken and never returned simply because an officer found a pack of sugar amongst its pages. There were days when the officers didn't feel like passing out the day's mail, so they would claim that there was no mail. I couldn't prove at the time that they were lying, but when I left the hole and got all my mail there were several pieces I'd never been allowed to read. Some of the mail I had been allowed to read was missing, and some of it wasn't even mine. The officers were careless, disorganized and irresponsible.

2 One day, during the afternoon shake-downs, I was standing at my door waiting to be shakedown. When the officers made it around to my cell, while waiting for the door to be opened, one of them, CO Shaw, stood leering at me through my cell window with the most evil stare I think I've ever been met with. He was rapidly clenching and unclenching his jaws in an unsuccessful attempt at intimidation. He looked so ridiculous that I couldn't help but laugh and shake my head. Apparently, he knew, too, how absurd he looked because his response was, "What, motherfucker! You think I look like a clown?" This wasn't the first time I'd seen him try to intimidate or bully inmates. He obviously enjoyed mistreating people and being rude. When he finished searching my cell, he moved on to my neighbor's. This particular neighbor was heavily medicated and spaced-out. He couldn't keep up his hygiene or function in any significant capacity. Shaw apparently found humor in his plight and began insulting him for how he smelled. He even tried to get me to join in, looking at me while laughing and making gestures to indicate how badly he smelled. It was appalling how cruel he was, and I was left in a state of disbelief that individuals like him could even be trusted in a position of power.

3 Sometimes, in a spell of apparent laziness, the overnight shift wouldn't perform their obligatory shake-downs (no complaint here). But even when they did, oftentimes they would only shake-down the bottom tier. The downstairs inmates were always treated more severely than the upstairs inmates, and the disparity was senseless. It was as if some of the COs simply enjoyed mistreating them. It was obvious by their demeanors that some of the officers enjoyed the strip-search/shake-down process. A few of them would search every conceivable space and seemed to get pleasure if they found something so small as a pack of sugar or other contraband. They never stopped to consider how they may feel had they been on the receiving end of the petty tyrants such as themselves. For one downstairs inmate, the mistreatment and cruel conditions were too much. He'd suffered through having his mattress taken every day and even gone on a hunger strike. Unfortunately, it was all too much and he attempted to hang himself to escape his tormentors. The officers' reactions in the aftermath were to joke about it and compare the situation to one of another inmate's who'd successfully taken his life just days before in another isolation unit.

When I talked to the other inmates in the hole, I was shocked at how long their sanctions were. The maximum amount of time an inmate can receive in the hole is supposed to be 90 days. That kind of sanction is meant to be reserved for the most severe infractions, such as stabbings and rapes, and so forth. Yet there were guys serving 75-day sanctions for being caught with cellphones. Two of the guys I talked to were serving 70 and 75-day sanctions for phones that they were never caught with; it was only assumed that they'd had them. One of these men had been written up for Assault and Disorderly Threatening because the officer, irritated that he was unable to find this alleged phone, fabricated a story in an attempt to support those allegations. Even so, there was no evidence to support an assault, so he was found guilty of the threatening - an infraction that usually carries a short loss of privileges sanction, not holetime - and was given a 70-day hole sentence. Another inmate claimed he was given 90 days for a verbal assault on a sergeant who he'd seen spit in his food. Another was given two 90-day sanctions for extortion. As I mentioned, my write-up for, "Substance Abuse," had originally earned me 90 days. Yet at the following classification my most serious write-up was possession of a tattoo needle - an infraction that earned me just ten days loss of privileges. Other inmates received 30 to 45-day hole sentences for possessing shanks or assaulting someone.

2 The striking disparity in sanction times, when compared to the alleged offenses, isn't the only systemic flaw in the disciplinary process of hole conditions, though it is a major one. The individuals handing out these sanctions have never had to live in such cruel and harsh conditions. If they had, they would understand that even a couple of days is punishment enough; especially under the current conditions. When an inmate gets out of the hole, it can take weeks, or even over a month, to have his personal property returned to him, so that once he is out of the hole, he's still left with nothing, making it difficult to readjust for some time. Account for the spike in the inmate's security level - which is a further penalty for write-ups and affects what he can spend at commissary - and it's almost as if you're still doing hole-time for weeks after you get out of the hole. The process one has to go through to possess their legal work while in the hole is simply ridiculous. I learned afterward that it needed to be approved by a captain before serving the hole time. But if an inmate goes immediately to the hole for any given infraction, this is impossible. And, if like me, you're aware that you're going ahead of time, it's still extremely difficult because the captains are seriously lacking in the area of correspondence. Plus, no one ever tells you that you must have it approved by a captain.

3 The lack of opportunity to possess basic hygiene and stationery is tantamount to cruel and unusual punishment for countless reasons. Having to rely on officers to give you your soap, instead of being allowed to keep it in one's cell, is a laughable policy. Or would be if it weren't so cruel. The recreation structure is flawed and doesn't allow for the option to take rec outside every time. In two weeks, and five recs, I was able to go outside just two times. Nearly every aspect of the Isolation sanction is flawed and in need of reform.

4 People are aware, I'm sure, that awful things happen in our prisons. Many would like to ignore it, or feel that it is what is deserved for breaking laws and institutional rules. This is what I call the, "Don't do the crime if you can't do the time," philosophy. To a degree, those people may be right - or would be if "justice" wasn't subject to the whim and emotion of hate-mongering prison guards and officials who indiscriminately, or discriminately, abuse the very authority they've been given to punish such wrongs. It is foolish to attempt to teach our citizens not to hurt people and commit crime by putting them into the custody of individuals and establishments that hurt people and commit crime. Crimes against not only individuals, but humanity - and with no remorse, by people who possess no moral compass. This is not to say that all prison guards and officials operate in this manner. Not all do. During my incarceration, and hole-time, I've encountered some truly good officers who are genuinely compassionate. And they do their jobs effectively. But their efforts are overshadowed and nullified by their corrupt counterparts.

5 Abuse, cruel and unusual punishment, and the general mistreatment that are the current norms are not effective mediums for correcting behavior. Instead, they embitter inmates and cause resentment toward officers and the "justice" system they've been employed to enable. Through these mediums we are advocating and perpetuating negative behavior and the recidivism of our people. Admittedly, for some of our people, incarceration is a necessary measure. And, in some cases, even harsh conditions. But certainly not to the degrees that both currently take place. By locking up more of our citizens and promoting recidivism, we're sustaining the economy and creating jobs (not very well, I might add), but look at the cost. We're ruining lives, some of them innocent, and tearing apart families who must suffer by no fault of their own. But this doesn't concern our government. It is their own selfish interests that concern them and negatively effect our country. True reform can not, and will not, be achieved until we are able to show the "lost" children of our nation that there are other options. Options not predicated on hate and fear, but on love, compassion and forgiveness.