

## WHAT IS PRISON LIKE?

What is prison like? It's not the same for everyone. The prison I know is different from the one you know or heard about on the TV or on the 2 minute sound bite on the evening news.

Prison is a place where the first person you see looks like an all American college boy & you're surprised. Later on, you're disgusted because the people on the outside still harbor prejudices about the prisoners they once knew about, such as family, relatives, friends, or neighbors who got locked up.

Prison is a place where you write letters & can't think of anything to say; where you write fewer & fewer as time goes by. Finally you stop writing altogether...because you receive few or none in return.

It's a place where hope springs eternal; where each parole appearance means a chance for freedom...even if the odds are hopelessly stacked against you.

It's a place where you find gray hairs on your head, or where you find it starting to disappear. It's a place where get false teeth, stronger glasses and aches & pains that you never felt before. It's a place where you grow old before your time...& you worry about it, sometimes a little, sometimes a lot.

Prison is a place where the flame in every person burns low, for some it goes out, but for most it flickers weakly, sometimes ~~flashes~~ flashing brightly, but never to burn as bright as it once did.

Prison is a place where you hate through clenched teeth; where you kick, beat the walls, & scream & you wonder if the psychologists know what they are talking about when they actually say that you hate your own self.

It's a place where you learn nobody needs or loves you & the world outside goes on without your presence.

It's a place where you can go months or years without feeling the touch of a caring hand or hearing a kind word. It's a place where most or all friendships are shallow...& you know it.

Prison is a place where you hear about a friends divorce & you didn't even know they were married. It's a place where you hear about someones kid graduating from high school & you thought they hadn't even started yet. Then the lapse of time & loss of memory eats at you, until you learn to repress the thought so well...as the days & years blend together, as one...

Prison is a place where you wait for a promised visit. When it doesn't materialize you worry about a car wreck or other serious problem. Then you find out the reason your visitor didn't arrive, you're glad it wasn't serious. Then you become depressed that such a little thing, in your way of thinking, could keep them from coming to see you.

It's a place where you may feel pity towards other peoples lives while feeling anguish or regret for yourself. Then you become upset with yourself for feeling that way, then you attempt to mentally change the subject, sometimes you can...sometimes you can not.

It's a place where you are smarter than the Parole Board because you know which ones will go straight & the ones who never will. You're ~~right~~ wrong just as often as they are, but you never admit...& neither do they.

Prison is a place where you forget the sound of a baby's cry. You forget the sound of a dog's bark or even the sound of true laughter & joy.

Prison is a place where a letter from home or your attorney can be like a telegram from the War Dept. When you see it laying there on your bunk, you're afraid to open it. You do anyway & usually end up disappointed or angry... then you wonder why you were so scared of receiving a bit of good news for a change.

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Prison is a place where you gain a new family in lieu of your old one at home. You'll soon be coerced into thinking you have no need for parents, aunts & uncles, or cousins, nieces, & nephews. Your new family will consist of king pins, shot callers, captains, lieutenants, sergeants, thug life hood rats, & wannabe's. This family will initiate you with open arms through its right of passage rituals & bloodletting. If you survive the beating, rape, or knife fight, you may reconsider your new family's meaning of showing "brotherly love" toward you. You'll soon reminisce of your old family's past & ambivalence. You'll ponder, which family loves you more than the other. Once the denial & warped sense of relativism wears off, you'll soon seek out a new set of relations, if you live that long. If you're one of the lucky ones, you'll use your intellect or street smarts to remain solo/alone regardless of the challenges you must face.

Prison is a place where if you're married, you watch your marriage die in varying degrees & spans of time. It's a place where you learn that absence does not make your heart grow fonder & you stop blaming your wife for wanting a real man instead of a fading memory of one.

It's a place where you go to bed before you are tired, where you pull the blanket over your head, when you're not even cold, to hide the tears & the pain.

Prison is a place where you try to escape...by reading, playing games, by dreaming, or by going slowly & ever so subtly insane.

It's a place where you try to fool yourself, or others, where you promise yourself you'll live in a better place when you get out. Sometimes you do... more often than not you don't.

It's a place where you soon discover you've become a commodity of the state and a recidivism statistic for some politicians ambition & election.

Prison is a place you will most likely leave one day. When you do, you wonder how everyone can remain so calm when you're so excited. When the cab driver goes over 25 MPH you want to tell him to slow down, but you don't because you know it sounds foolish. So you just sit there trying to take in all you've missed of the changes you see out of the window.

\* It's a place where you lose respect for the law because you saw it raw, twisted & bent; ignored & blown out of all proportion to suit the people who enforce it. You're guilty because of skin pigmentation, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, poverty, your innocence is for naught!!!

It's a place where you see people **you** do not like or know & you wonder if you'll end up being just like they are in the future. You ask yourself "Did this place make them that way or did they arrive on the bus in that mental or physical state of being?" Is this the part of becoming what is termed as "THE INSTITUTIONALIZED?" Something no one wants to accept nor talk about, either in prison or the free world. An instance of complacency or denial helps to resolve this dilemma.

It's a place where you strive to remain civilized, but you lose ground. Then you realize the change that has taken place within yourself, in your heart & soul. The reflection in the mirror becomes a constant reminder of what you now recognize of the stranger you've become.

Prison is a place where you don't take things for granted; like you did when you were free. Then you wonder why free people still do, but your inner voice tells you "you were once free".

Prison is a place where you start to realize you need to drastically change your ways...for the better. You have finally arrived at that point in your life where you have gotten sick & tired of being sick & tired. So you try something different...you reached out...you cried out...to God, to Ala, the spirits in the sky, or someone else's name dear to you...

...Then you come to know...

that "PRISON" is really only in your mind...

The question you must ask yourself is "When will you find the courage to break free from the PRISON you hold within your own mind?"

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