

WHAT'S PRISON LIKE?

A few times people have asked me what prison is like. I've never known how to answer that, it's such a huge question. It's a whole nother world, it would take reams of paper to tell someone what its like in prison, because it's like nothing people on the outside have ever known.

Some people on the outside have queer ideas of prison. They think it's someting akin to a vacation. Let me assure you, it's nothing like a vacation.

Since I can't really tell you what prison is like in terms that you would readily understand, I wont try. I can, however, tell you what a twenty year prison sentence means to me. That's doable.

A twenty year prison sentence means a million things to me because, as twenty years in prison suggests, it's the better part of my adult life.

It means enduring my reduction to a third class citizen in the eyes of most people. It means decades of discrimination from the courts and public. "Inmate," "Prisoner," "Convict" each have a unique, and strictly pejorative use in the media and pop-culture. Those terms slowly work themselves into my psyche and become the defining characteristic of my being, they change me in a way that hurts my soul.

It means the court will turn a blind eye to any act against me unless it causes, "demonstrative and permanent injury." So when I am stripped naked and left in a concrete box with nothing but a toilet for four days without cause, as a prisoner, I have no recourse in the courts. When I am beaten to a bloody mess while in handcuffs, as a prisoner, I'm more likely to encounter a jury that will conclude I deserved what I got, regardless of the circumstances.

It means that if I am killed by another prisoner, my murderer will have twenty four months added to his sentence. The same amount of time you would receive for killing your neighbors dog.

It means that after being spared a life sentence, anything that happens to me is well deserved.

It means two decades of censorship. Where I'm told what books I can read, what photos I can look at, what things I can write, what films I can watch, what clothes I can ware, and even the way I can cut my hair, and where every letter coming in and going out is read and inspected.

It means a complete lack of privacy, and a complete lack of concern for my well-being, for twenty years, it means a cold indifference to my suffering, my physical, emotional, and mental health.

It means three meals a day of the poorest quality food that the least amount of money can buy without killing the "Inmate population."

It means that I am constantly told, in a thousand ways, that I can not be rehabilitated, that I am not even worth the resources to try and help, that I am morally and mentally inferior, and to try and help someone like me is foolish. It's being told for twenty years that i'll never amount to anything.

It means convincing myself daily that my life has value, even when the rest of the world tells me that I am worthless. It's twenty years of wondering what my potential is and yearning to find out.

It means being subjected to incomprehensible punishments deemed, "Necessary to maintain institutional security," such as being sprayed with burning chemicals that blisters my skin and makes patches of my hair fall out, it means being forced into cages for hours that are just be enough to stand in, it means being zip-tied and made to lay face down in the dirt, mud, and snow, stripped naked every day and inspected with a flashlight, placed on "potty watch" with a adult diaper duck taped to my waist and legs, without shred of clothing, bare foot, and belly chained, forced to fill a diaper with excrement three times before they consider my release.

It means I can't hold a woman or experience a gentle loving touch for two decades.

It means being incapable of taking care of my parents and grandparents as they reach their final years. It means not being able to have children or a family.

A twenty year sentence means constant contemplation of a wasted life, a continual despair as to my inability to accomplish anything significant with my remaining years. A life spent watching as each of my family members and friends die, or slowly drift away, leaving me in a vacuum, devoid of any enduring relationships.

It's a persistent dashing of hopes.

It's a permanent experiment in self delusion, as I struggle to convince myself that there is still hope.

It's a compounding of second upon second, minute upon minute, hour upon hour, of wasted existence, and decade upon decade of mental and emotional torture.

These are futile attempts to describe the indescribable. It's like trying to describe a broken heart, or communicate what it's like to mourn the death of your soul mate. The words to convey the pain do not exist. It's as if I'm experiencing the broken heart of knowing I'll never love, or be loved in any normal sense of the word, while mourning the death of the man I could have, and should have been. The only deference is that I can never recover because the pain is renewed each morning when I wake up to realize I'm still here. It's always a fresh day of despair, lived over and over for twenty years.

So, as you can see, not like a vacation

Putting it to paper I can see more clearly, that although you may understand my words, you can not understand the experience and how it effects my soul, and that's probably a good thing.

Verily

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