

Inside The Box

A Prisoner Tells His Tale

By Matthew Hattley



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Recreation While Incarcerated

Every New York State jail and prison offers some form of recreation for the detained and incarcerated population; indoor and/or outdoor. Some have longer periods of access

to such, depending on the facility. This facility offers both indoor and outdoor recreation. Today, I will be discussing one of the indoor areas within a specific housing unit here at the Woodbourne Correctional Facility.

This particular recreation area is constructed between the second and third floors of the building, measuring about sixty-five feet by twenty feet. Several large windows, over five feet in height, cover the length of the room on one side and partially cover it on the other. Because there are no screens on the windows, the insects infest the area during the spring and summer months. However there are steel bars securing every window. The floor is covered with linoleum tiles, the ceiling is about twelve feet high.

There are two flat screen TV sets, one at each end of the room, positioned on a shelf which is secured to the wall. One is designated specifically for sports, the other for movies and regular TV shows. Several cable channels are available. The cable cost is paid for by the Inmate Liaison Committee — not the taxpayers of New York. A schedule determining exactly what will be shown on either set is prepared in advance on a weekly basis and the selections are generally determined by consensus. There is also a multi-port box connected to the movie-TV to which we can plug our headphones.

There are several picnic style tables provided for us to eat on, play cards/checkers/chess, write, watch TV etc. Plus, we are allowed to bring the metal folding chair from our cell to the recreation area. This ensures that everyone has someplace to sit. The area seldom gets crowded, many choose to either stay in their cell, go to the yard/gym, or to the school building. There are different options altogether, which I may discuss in the future.

We have access to one microwave oven and several hot plates, provided to cook or warm our food. The majority of

the food we consume here is either purchased in the facility commissary or received in a package from our family or an approved vendor. Where the latter is concerned, we are permitted to receive a maximum of 35 lbs a month, in a total of two packages. We can also purchase our own pots and pans. There is also a medium-sized refrigerator to keep our food items and beverages cold. This equipment is shared by 57 individuals and we do our best to make it work without any altercations. Contrary to popular belief we are able to interact with one another in a non-violent manner.

At the far end of the area there's a small separate room, about six foot by nine, which contains two telephones. This is called, what else, the phone room. Basically, we form a metaphorical line to determine who uses the phone next. Surprisingly, there is rarely an argument regarding this process. The majority of the individuals are courteous, everyone receives an opportunity to use the phone on a daily basis. All calls cost about \$1.45 per half hour, and can last no more than half an hour. A prepaid account must be set up beforehand with the service provider (VAC) for each individual number we wish to call. A service charge of \$8.00 is deducted from every transaction unless a check of money order has been sent to VAC beforehand.

The recreation area is open from 6:30 to 11 p.m. seven days a week. On weekends and holidays we receive several additional hours, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. In addition a current movie will be shown every Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening. The Saturday and Sunday movie selections are also shown in the afternoon, and when there is a holiday a fourth movie will be shown on the Monday. All movies are prescreened by a staff member before being approved for us.

There is also a sink and countertop available — similar to what you would find in the average kitchen — where we wash our pots, pans, utensils etc. Everyone is basically expected to clean up after themselves. Unfortunately not everyone is concerned about cleanliness. We can purchase dish detergent from the facility commissary.

I hope this brief glimpse will provide readers with a better understanding of how we utilize some of our idle time in here. The recreation area is actually therapeutic for many. As I mentioned before, this is merely one aspect of many which are available. I strongly believe that the more everyone knows about the prison system, the clearer the general perception of it becomes. Please keep an open mind; rehabilitation is possible for those of us who genuinely desire it.

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