

MP3s In Prison

Ok, let's talk a little today about a subject in prison; music. Now, for the purposes of this entry, I'm talking purely about using MP3 players. Now, we know many prisons only allow radios; some allow NO music. Every prison has different rules. But in the Federal Prison System, most, if not all, allow use of an MP3 in prison.

Before I continue, let's clear up something to the "casual" reader. But "casual", I'm talking about readers who come across these entries and are unsympathetic to inmates.

This blog isn't for you.

This blog is for those who have loved ones in prison. Most folks kin society think every inmate should be "bustin' rocks". To those people, I ask, "who are you to judge?"

Now, let's continue. This entry is about MP3s in prison. This is fairly new, and is certainly desirable for inmates. Here at the prison I am in, they do have two types of radios available, or you can purchase an MP3. I've found this MP3 to be quite a blessing to me.

When I first got here in December of 2012, I said I'd buy one by June of 2013. The BOP (Bureau of Prisons) sells the Sansa MP3 (SanDisk) for just under \$70.00. It's quite an investment, taking some inmates months or a year to save up

for it. I wanted an MP3 because I can download the music I like, and listen to it when I wanted to. Here in Tucson, gospel music is virtually non-existent. I used to work for two Christian radio stations; I want gospel music! So getting an MP3 gave me the ability to download gospel and Christian/Inspirational music. I'm also a jazz fan, as well as other genres.

When you buy the MP3 player from canteen, you get it immediately, but you'll have to validate and charge it before you can use it. No problem. If you're not familiar with many prisons, we have very limited computer access, but enough to email, and to use the MP3 music library. Once you validate it and charge it on one of the MP3 chargers in the dorm, you're ready to download music. Here in BOP, you can download a max of 15 songs a day. You can browse the music library for a max of 60 minutes a day, and sample as many as 15 (wait... is it 30?) songs a day. For example, I have gospel songs like "They That Wait" by Fred Hammond, "Don't Last" by Bishop Larry Trotter, and "Faithful Is Our God" by Hezekiah Walker.

Now, I have others songs too, like jazz, meditation and older songs. The advantages give me the power to control what I listen to. Right now, I'm writing this entry while listening to "Don't Last" on repeat. Yet, there ARE disadvantages. First, there's no AM radio, and in this area of Arizona, there's some pretty good stations of the AM band.

Second, the earbuds that come with this MP3 are

absolutely terrible! Every person that got an MP3 had to buy a new pair of earbuds within 30 days because the cheap ones will short out. So, if your loved one is looking to buy an MP3, figure in for another set of earbuds.

Guys, I can't tell you how important it can be for an inmate to have one of these. Imagine waking up in the morning in the cell, and before the day begins, you program a song that gets you off to a positive start? I've started many days that way. Radios are fine, and I still have one, but this MP3 is much better, even though overpriced. For the BOP, they disabled some of the features on the MP3, like voice, and we can't download audio books. We also can't download music that the prison doesn't think appropriate, but for the most part, it's ok.

If your loved one mentions an MP3 player, I personally think it's a great buy. Of course, buying music will be a constant; some guys here have over 500 songs... some over 1000! Me? Well, I've got 33, but I expect to download about 10 more soon. It's worth the \$70.00 to get one, and can add the comfort of having your own music to listen to when you want it. Trust me, in prison, that's a good thing. Until next time...

UPDATE: Since I originally wrote this over a year ago, I wanted to add a short update on the MP3. Since this essay, the prison has changed to a newer model of MP3... and more expensive. The newer model is priced at about \$80.00 (ouch!),

but it comes with better earbuds. I still have my older one, but the display no longer works, so I cannot navigate around normally. I'm literally flying blind on it. So I use it to set all my music to "Play All" and "Repeat". That way, I can find the song I want by going in order (listed alphabetically). I currently have 111 songs, everything from Piano Guys to Sting to Nyoki.

I still love this device, although I still think it is grossly overpriced. Most guys can't afford it, and then to add songs will certainly add to the cost. There is much more to say about this, so if you have any questions, let me know, I'll be glad to share what I can. Until next time...

PS: I write many of these
to try to open lines of communication
between prison & society. Hope it helps,
JH