

Note! The following is an essay written on an event that did happen. This was originally written, and emailed, to the Warden. Jm

- 1 -

By
Frederick Mason

When Officers Harass Inmates

Proverbs 16:32, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than the who takes a city."

Proverbs 20:3, "It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel."

Inmates are expected to respect the officers at all times, but I temper that with the idea that we, as inmates, should respect the officers WITHIN REASON. This means that although we must indeed respect each officer, it still has to be within reason. When an officer crosses the line to provoke an inmate to respond in a negative manner, that inmate no longer is bound by the rules to respect the officer, if the officer no longer respects the inmate.

I have no problem respecting officers; in the 2½ years I have been here, I have caused no trouble, and have stayed away from officers by doing all I can to maintain a peaceful relationship with the officers. Simply put, I don't mess with them, they don't mess with me.

Yet, as a human being, I have the right to be upset when an officer provokes me. the greater thing is to ignore it, but what if we're in a situation where the officer provokes us, with the intent to get us in trouble? This was clearly the case today, with two recreational officers, one

being Officer Hali-Burton.

Today (Mon, March 16th) I was returning from rec, and going through the metal detector. I had a pair of shades, a pair of glasses and my MP3 player (with earbuds). I was wearing my shades. As I went through the metal detector, I placed my glasses and MP3 on the stand. It was then that one of the officers said, "glasses", likely implying that I should take my shades off. So I did. I took them off, cleared the metal detector, and as I picked up my belongings, (glasses and MP3), I put my shades back on, and began to walk out.

It was then that Officer Hali-Burton called out to me. He said, "didn't you hear the man tell you to take your glasses off?" Apparently he didn't see that I DID take my shades off, and walked through the metal detector with it. I told the officer that I did, but Hali-Burton refused to listen. So I was told to go back through the metal detector (not that it set the detector off, because the shades are PLASTIC), so I did.

I remember saying something like, "this is ridiculous" as I walked through the detector again, as Hali-Burton made some comment that I didn't care to listen. As I was picking up my belongings, I grabbed my shades, and as I was about to step outside, I said, "I am putting my shades back on!" The metal detector was only a couple of feet from the outside door; putting on my shades before going outside could hardly be seen as an offense. Yet, that must have offended Hali-Burton,

because he demanded me to come back in. He chewed me out on "following directions" as he told me to put my belongings on the chair.

I say this to you, I was getting upset. Hali-Burton didn't want to let it go; he just HAD to have the last word, now he's using his authority to browbeat me. At this point, I believe the respect factor is violated, and now it's a simple abuse of authority. I'm pushed in a corner to be insulted unfairly, or defend my integrity, which I have a right to do.

I stood in front of Officer Hali-Burton, angry, but keeping my anger in check; this wasn't about me doing anything wrong, this was about "pulling rank". But I have learned from the military a useful tactic; when you have problems with officers, make them your "best friend", or "your latest hobby". What that meant was that if I TRULY believe that officer is wrong, I will focus my energy on writing essays, letters and anything I can about the situation, with that officer's name on it, to hold him accountable. As a person person once said, "writers ALWAYS have the last word".

I stooped down to pick up my glasses; as Officer Hali-Burton was talking to me, looking at me as if he was expecting me to get physical with him, I put on my glasses, and looked directly at his nametag. I said to him, "I just want your name". To this he curtly replied , "can you spell?"

I hate it when officers insult inmates, knowing if we

did the same, we'd be taken to the Lieutenant's office, where they always defend each other. If Officer Hali-Burton had punched me in the face, I would STILL have been in the wrong. Physical abuse, and verbal abuse aren't too different here.

Office Hali-Burton looked at me, looking for something to criticize me on. He looked at my collar...and told me to untuck it.

Note: I wear my khaki shirt with the collar tucked in, like a banded collar (or as some might say, a "priest's" look.). I am the only person on the compound that wears it that way, and to date, NO OFFICER had ever said anything about it. Not once had an officer told me to "untuck" it. Yet, just because he had the authority to abuse, Hali-Burton ordered me to "untuck" my collar. Had I refused, I would very likely had been run to the Lt's office, or possibly the SHU, or Special Housing Unit, for something so frivolous.

So after ordering me to untuck my collar, he said, "you better wear that collar like that from now on, every time I see you, you better have that collar untucked." Angry and pushed into some verbal retaliation, I said, "not gonna happen", and as I walked out, I said, "I am STILL putting my shades back on!" (It is to note, I did obey the order, and did untuck my collar).

Note also, at no point did I use profanity; I don't curse. At no point did I refuse to do what the officer told

me. But because of HOW I did it, and because Hali-Burton made an error in judgment, I became his abusive response.

Is this a small thing? To you, maybe, because sadly, the staff doesn't think very much about inmates. But if I'm going to do my time here at USP Tucson, there has to be some "give and take". I can (and have) respected officers as much as I can. But I cannot let any officer abuse, harass, or provoke me to anger. I don't need to be harassed by Hali-Burton about my collar every day, whether I go to the library or the recreational area.

When will it stop? If he keeps harassing me, I'll eventually lose my temper and might say something that may get me in trouble. Yet, isn't it HE who provokes me? How can an inmate protect himself from officers that harass inmates? I maintain that I've done nothing wrong, except wear my shirt in a way that looks even MORE professional than the BOP (Bureau of Prisons) guidelines.

As I said, when I get upset, I write. So I am sending copies of this letter to various organizations, to seek advice on what can be done. I shouldn't have to worry about an officer who harasses inmates. The wisest thing to do is walk away...I tried that, but Hali-Burton refused to let me go.

So, who do you defend? Your officer, based on a most frivolous idea, or the inmate, trying to do his time without harassment. Talking to Hali-Burton didn't seem to work, but

rather proved Proverbs to be correct:

Proverbs 26:4, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him."

Talking to Hali- Burton only proved that he wasn't going to listen to reason; he simply wanted to be right.

Proverbs 26:5, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be seen as wise in his own eyes."

Sometimes when a person is wrong, they have to be challenged, lest they be seen as right. Hali-Burton was wrong in this case, and I was not willing to let that stand.

Since then, I went to type this essay. Hali-Burton harassed me again about my collar. As he did so, I told him, "you DO realize that I am going to type this up, and have already sent an email to the Warden?" So I went to finish this work, and sent the letter out that evening. Somehow, there has to be a resolution to this so that inmates can know that officers don't have the right to harass inmates.

We, as inmates, still have SOME rights.

*I'm sharing this to give
a peek at some of the
things that go unnoticed in
prison. I've written dozens of
other essays and journals.
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