

Initial Letter the American Prison Writing Archive

July 22, 2016

APWA,

Hello, and Thank You for the opportunity to tell someone, even if no-one in particular, the conditions of the Dept. of Corrections in Oklahoma. I have read in more than one article or publication that we are ranked #1 for incarcerations for men and women in the world. This is NOT a statistic to be proud of, considering the population of our state. It's shameful.

This letter will not be in essay form, it will merely be informative on many subjects. Future letters will be about individual subjects concerning the institution I happen to be in. - James Crabtree Correctional Center, a medium security prison with mostly open dorms. It is intended for a population of about 750 but is now holding approximately 1300. I only hope you receive this letter. I know of mail being stopped from leaving the facility.

Sources of Stress

Beingⁱⁿ prison, I know it's not supposed to be a joyride. But, it is called the "Department of Corrections" for a reason, It was not intended to be a pan. We have virtually no programs and the ones offered are given as a formality. No one takes them serious (including the instructors) and we take them mostly to get the earned credits. They say it helps for parole but nobody ever makes parole. Prison in Oklahoma is a ~~training~~ place for criminals to improve and perfect their choice of crime. It gives drug addicts and drug dealers the opportunity to make new contacts. This is only a training ground for the new and improved scumbag. That is my greatest source of stress.

Overcrowding is another. What do you call 10lbs of shit in a 5lb. sack? The Oklahoma Prison System. Yes, I realize where I'm at but I am not part of the problem. Naturally, when you're elbow to elbow in 105° weather with NO AIRCONDITIONING and 2 ice machines for 1300 men, tempers will flare between inmates and correctional officers. They

flare between everybody.

The sources of stress are too many to number but overcrowding tops the list. Lack of programs (legitimate programs), lack of jobs for inmates, poor food quality, and decrepit living facilities follow closely behind. Not all prisons in OK are decrepit, just the ones owned by the State. In 1994, (then) Governor Keating welcomed a new industry to the State - Private Prisons. These prisons are in fair shape but mass incarceration and warehousing men by minimal standards is always going to be troublesome. But, I digress...

Ways of Coping

After 17+ years of incarceration, I have found several ways of coping. For me, Church or religion do not make the list. Chapel services are a control mechanism for the institutions. Christianity promotes peace, love, and rainbows, so what better way to control a large population of potentially dangerous and/or violent men? Chaplains and religious volunteers do more to keep offenders under control than guards do. At this facility, there is 1 chaplain. Yet, there is at least 1 chapel service every day overseen by outside, unpaid volunteers. In essence, much of the work DOC guards should be doing is done by volunteers and it is totally unknown ~~to~~ to them. I'm not saying this is wrong but it proves there is a better way than "traditional" or conventional prison practices. However, with most ~~inmates~~ offenders, religion doesn't "take" or "stick." They are only religious or pious until they get their release papers. Religion makes a good baby-sitter for many offenders. I'm just "keeping it real."

I practice Buddhism. I don't call it a religion, only a practice. Since during meditation the focus is on myself or breathing and not a deity, I don't call it a religion for at least my religion. It does, though, make a good baby-sitter for me. You wanted firsthand testimony, right?

In 17 years, I've used many coping mechanisms. Alcohol, drugs, work, isolationism, ... Now, I "unplug." I pretty much stay to myself. They say there's safety in numbers, hence, gangs. I find safety in #1 - **ME**. That's not to say I'm not disliked by some. People fear and even hate what they don't understand. Since they don't know me, they don't understand me. And since it's well known I'm a combat vet and have been to prison 5 times for violent offenses and I run 3 or 4 miles a day, it leaves enough question in the back of their minds as to whether they really want to try me or not. Plus, this is an open-dorm and an open yard so if you don't kill me and they don't ship me, you'll have to wonder where I'm at and what I'm thinking all the time. Just sayin'....

Coping mechanisms for me include reading (everything), writing, and trying to educate myself. Not educate myself with their Mickey Mouse Programs, I mean college. There's no funding right now so I'm not taking courses. Here, they only offer business degrees. ~~But~~ I want a Sociology Degree. Money is not what motivates me other than the amount needed to survive. What makes people and groups tick fascinates me. Ironically, I've found that here it's money. Maybe that's everywhere. Sad isn't it?

I'm sensing more racial tension than I ever have in my life. Maybe it is just a prison thing because we're packed elbow to elbow but I don't believe so. There has been almost a complete role-reversal between blacks and whites. And it's not just in prisons. I see it on TV, too. Nuff said. But what kind of coping mechanism do you use for physical intimidation? My coping mechanism is to not be intimidated and stand my ground. Kill me, ship me, or keep one eye on me from now on.

Health Care

What health care? They go through the motions without actually doing anything. They refused to add me to their "Chronic Care List" knowing I have a chronic and debilitating disease. Under the 8th Amendment, I'm supposed to be provided with treatment. I've asked for treatment but am ignored. Offenders here have no way of making them do the right thing

and there is no one to enforce laws and regulations. A man here (name withheld) caught pneumonia. He was older but not in that bad of health. He was sent to a hospital for several days and came back to the facility. Within 2 days of returning, his condition worsened to a point where he couldn't breathe. He informed the officer working the unit but was told there was nothing he could do and to "go lay down." He went and layed down. He never got up again. The Captain on duty walked around the unit laughing and making jokes. The fact of the matter is, that man would still be alive today if 1 officer would have used some integrity and done the right thing by making 1 phone call to the ER. The behavior of the correctional officers here today closely resembles the behavior of Nazis during WWII. The comparison may be extreme but the similarities are there. During War Crimes Trials, most of the Nazis best excuses was that they were just doing what they were told to do.

So, what do you do when you are flatly denied medical attention or treatment? Who do you call to ensure your rights are granted? Who do you write to when your outgoing mail is closely monitored against just such complaints?

Another man here with some serious mental issues was suddenly taken off his meds. He weighed maybe 130 lbs. When they took his meds, he began to behave bizarrely. He took property and pictures from other offenders claiming it was his. Sadly, he believed the property was his and even gave names to the people in the pictures claiming them to be family members. A white gang member much larger than him began beating the deranged man about the head and shoulders. He went to the officer working and tried to "catch out" (be removed for his own safety) but was not allowed to leave. Gang members beat him over night and part of the next day.

Health care here is atrocious. These are merely a few examples of how offenders are NOT cared for. DOC Health Care Workers (for the most part) do the bare minimum. This behavior is not

restricted (is that the word I'm looking for?) to just Health Care. Programs instructors, Case Managers, Unit Managers, and even Correctional Officers (C.O.'s) are all guilty. Programs instructors and teachers do in fact put the info and lessons out there for you. But in many cases become hateful or very gruff in tone if you don't understand something and ask too many questions. The teachers here are not terrible but there is room for improvement. An example being trying to help get additional funding for would be college students. I pretty much keep a 4.0 GPA if I can get funding for courses. The instructor was able to get me a tuition waiver for 3 credit hours which would have been a tremendous favor. However, he failed to tell me about an additional \$200 or \$300 fees and costs that I do not have, therefore making it prohibitive for me to take courses. An educator who wanted us to be educated might search out sponsors willing to cover these costs to and for offenders who really and truly want to further their education. I am one of those offenders. But, I can also understand their side in that many offenders want the credit without actually doing the work so they drop out, I'm NOT one of those offenders.

There are good and bad Case Managers. Mine will lie and tell you anything to get you out of his face. Others here are very good and I commend them on their jobs. Same goes for Unit Managers.

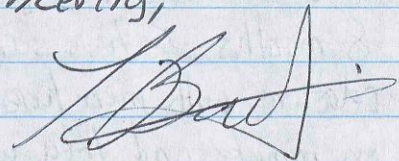
C.O.'s come and go. Female C.O.'s do not belong in Men's prisons. In 8 months, I have seen 5 or 6 (I lose count now) be terminated for having relations with men here. At another prison, the Warden's wife absconded with an inmate and they were eventually caught at a chicken farm in Texas years later. A Chief of Security's wife here was escorted off the premises for fraternizing with an inmate. Every prison in this State has multiple examples. Nepotism is another problem. If all the staff and C.O.'s are related, when one of them does something against an inmate they cover each others backs. I'm NOT making up stories - I've done so much time it almost doesn't matter to me. But I do believe in right and wrong and almost every aspect (?) of OK D.O.C. is wrong. How many other states have botched multiple executions? How do you

do that?

So you can see that OK Offenders have much to be frustrated about, The public should be just as frustrated. The Governor gets on public TV and frequently lies to them and most of the public eats it up. No one gives it any real thought. They blindly accept what they see on the news. The thing is, they see nothing, only hear what they want them to hear. It's not only the integrity of media that is low, it's state gov't in the courthouses to the capital from the janitors to the judges. Even our governor (a female) had to ^{have} an RV ~~removed~~ removed from the mansion. ~~Since~~ Since it was kept hush-hush and I can't actually prove it from here, it is rumored the governors family member had an RV parked there and was forced to remove it from State property. Talk about traitor trash....

So you can expect formal essays in the future on various problems in OK D.O.C. In closing I would like to remind you that Okla is ranked #1 in the world for incarcerations of men and women. (Source OK C.U.R.E.) It's a sad "state" of affairs. Cherish your freedom and be thankful for it. But just remember - if you come to Oklahoma, you probably won't keep it!

Sincerely,



TEDDY BARTLING #212101
J.C.C.C.
216 N. Murray St.
Helena, OK 73741