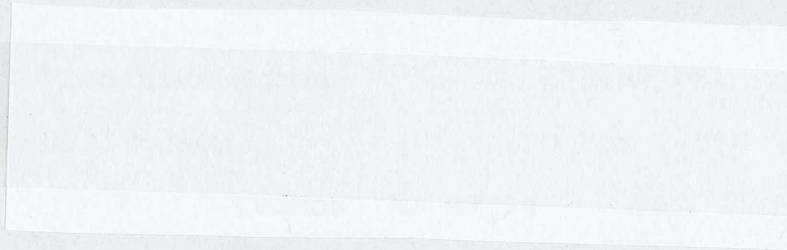


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Famine 2016 At USP Tucson

(On A Lighter Note)



Before we begin, let me note, this is a slightly lighter side of prison, so don't get lost in what I'm sharing. I find that if you don't find some humor while doing time, you lose a good part of your humanity. We all need to laugh at ourselves a little, and this might be one of those examples.

What then, is "Famine 2016"? It is a term I use here at USP Tucson when inmates don't have the opportunity to go to commissary (or canteen, as I will note from here on). Every prison operates differently, so I have to speak only on what goes on here.

USP Tucson allows inmates to go to canteen to buy hygiene, snacks, clothing and the like, much like every other prison or jail. Here, inmates are allowed to go once a week, to buy things like coffee, soap, ramen noodles, candy bars and many other items. I think I did an essay on canteen; it may be online if you can find it, look for my essays and journals on "Prison Chains Broken" or "Prison 101" with my tag name, "Nolaw". If you can't find it, write me and I'll be glad to write one.

Anyway, once or twice a year, the inmate canteen had to do inventory, which shuts down the canteen for a full week. That means no one is able to buy anything. The week AFTER the inventory it opens back but you are limited to only 10 items. So, in effect, the canteen is closed for 2 weeks. That is 2 weeks inmates can't buy snacks, coffee or hygiene.

So, before the inventory, guys try to stock up as best they can, before the... Famine, as I call it. I call it that because when the food runs out (and it always does) and the coffee runs out (and it always does), then inmates are looking to see which inmates have "store" or have food to sell.

"What's STORE"?, you may ask.

Store is a shorter word for "storeman". Every dorm usually has at least one guy who super-stocks on stuff, to sell at a higher price. Yes, it's higher, but many inmates can't afford to go to canteen, so they use the prison currency- stamps- to buy food from these "storemen".

See, not everybody gets money from the outside, so many inmates who need things have to rely on hustles or prison jobs to make a few dollars (although we don't have real money on the compound). Guys who can't get money have to hustle to make stamps so they can buy the things they need, since the prison most times don't provide it. For example, they don't provide athletic shoes...only boots. You can't get exercise in boots, and it can't be good for your feet to walk around in it

for months and months. So, guys need storemen, who charge "storeman prices"

Against the rules? (ahem...)

Anyway, these storemen provide items to inmates who otherwise can't go to canteen. Some guys I know haven't gone to canteen in years. I wrote an essay on how much of a moral boost it is for inmates to get money, imagine the frustration of NOT being able to do so. Personally, I don't have a problem with storemen selling food or stuff to guys that can't go to canteen.

But during the "Famine", prices soar. It's simple supply and demand. Like right now, as I write this, we are just getting through the "Famine". It's Tuesday, and the two weeks have passed. Last week inmates were allowed to buy only 10 items. ONLY 10; 10 ramen noodles is 10 items, but a case of soda is one item. It's in the packaging. Still, because there is a huge supply/demand issue, prices for coffee, chips and the such have gone up.

For example, a bag of Keefe Columbian coffee sells for \$3.40 in the canteen. But if you bought it from a storeman, it will cost you \$5 in stamps. But now, as the Famine reigns, it may sell of as much as \$8, or even \$10. TEN BUCKS FOR A BAG OF COFFEE??

Yep.

And that goes for any snacks. Dinners here are often light, so many inmates get the munchies after 7pm... like me.

I kinda have this... addiction... to Pop Tarts and Nutella...and cookies... (:

So during the "Famine", many inmates are looking for food, like wolves in the tundra. I find it humorous what we do when we run out of food. Food can be a comfort, but without it, we seem to lose that comfort. So the Famine is a test of wills; who can endure the 2 weeks?

Personally, I have almost NEVER bought food from a storeman; if I didn't have food, I just dealt with it. We still get 3 meals a day, and I'll live. But many guys can't deal with that, and they don't have a problem buying snacks, or going into debt to get a bag of chips or some ramen noodles.

Hungry for a Snickers bar? \$2.00. Two drink packs of Hawaiian Punch? \$1.00. A bag of Cheetos? \$4.00. A pack of Pop Tarts? \$1.00

Hold up... I keep saying "Pop Tarts"... that's not what we are buying here. They sell us "Toast Ems" for \$1.70 a box, but they put "Pop Tarts" on the canteen sheet. Pop Tarts are the A brand... Toast Ems are like the B brand, though we are paying A brand prices.

So the Famine has begun; stomachs will growl, ribs will be exposed, debts will be created and gentle poverty will reign for about a week or so... until normal canteen resumes and all returns to normal.

I joked with some guys, "Lets have a Pre-Famine Celebration Party where we have a big feast"... which only accelerates the Famine. As it stands now, I have enough food to easily make it, but I dare not let people know that, because when they start getting hungry, it'll be a scene out of "The Walking Dead" towards my cell- or anyone else's who has food.

So, as I wrap this up, remember, I'm looking at this in a lighter note. But I can be more sincere when I say this; guys who get to shop are in a higher morale than those that don't. So, if you have a loved one doing time, consider that, and if you can, put a few dollars in his account so he can buy something for himself. It really makes all the difference when you're going through a very tough time.

But for right now, the Famine plays no favorites; we'll all be in lack for awhile, although now we are back on regular canteen schedule. My dorm goes to canteen tomorrow, so we're still in lack...I'm ok though. The trick is to have a strong enough will to get through it, and not go into debt for a bag of chips or some snacks or coffee. Sadly, many do.

Oh well, until next time...

(He said, munching on his last Snickers bar...)

Paul M.