

Inside The Box

A Prisoner Tells His Tale

By Matthew Hattley

The Marriott It's Not



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After you are sentenced at your county court, you will shortly be transferred and released to the custody of a "state" reception center. Upon arrival there you are placed in a large holding pen with several dozen other prisoners and your shackles are removed. Then you will be removed to another holding pen and the process of entering the "system" begins in earnest. Most of those around you are prepared for this, since it's not their first time; others are simply scared to death from all the stories they've heard, the majority of which are true!

First: You will receive a seven digit New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision identification number (DIN#). The first two numbers represent the year you were processed (93, 05, 13, etc.), the single letter A, B, or R represents the reception center that processed you. The most common is A, which stands for the downstate C.F., since the majority of the prison population are from NYC. The last four numbers represent the order in which you were processed, 0001 to 9999.

Second: You will receive your standard state issued clothing: four pairs of green pants; three green short-sleeved shirts; one green winter coat— 65 percent polyester, 35 percent cotton; six white T-shirts; six white undershorts; six pair white socks; three white handkerchiefs; one white long sleeved dress shirt; one green sweat shirt — no hood; one pair black 5" work boots (non-descript design) and one pair white low-top canvas sneakers (similar to Converse Chuck Taylors). The pants, shirts and winter coat are referred to as "state greens." All the above are now your responsibility; they will accompany you on all transfers. Said clothing is not only chintzy, but is manufactured in NYS prison industries (CORCRAFT). The footwear, however, is made in China.

Third: You must render all your personal property to the correction officer. Yes, even your underwear. You are given two options. 1) Mail all the items home at your expense. 2) Destroy all items. There is no half and half on this, no mailing some items and destroying others; it's mail or destroy everything. The only exceptions are your wedding band, necklace and charm, if they meet DOCCS' criteria and/or religious items such a Bible, Koran or prayer beads, etc. These items will be placed in your personal property envelope and returned to you at the next facility.

Fourth: Let the process of degradation really begin. After stripping you naked, in plain view of those around you, you are directed to the shower area where you are instructed to apply a shampoo which kills lice into any and all areas on your body containing hair. Then you will take a three minute ice cold shower. After you dry off and get dressed in

your new prison clothing, you are required to sit in a barber's chair to have your facial hair and head shaved bald; the only exception to this being court-ordered relaxation for Native Americans and Rastafarians.

Fifth: You will be placed in yet another holding pen where you will be fed lunch or dinner. Once everyone is finished, they will call you by name to exit the holding pen and received a "set-up," which consists of two full size 54" x 99" white sheets, one white pillow case and one green towel, 20" x 40". These sheets and pillow case are 50 percent polyester, 50 percent cotton. There are no 500 thread count pima cotton sheets in the system. They do not provide you with a pillow in reception.

You will now be escorted to your temporary housing complex. When you reach your complex, you will be assigned a single cell. There you will find a steel welded frame bed, a small locker 22" x 16" x 14", a chair and desk — two separate pieces of steel, which are attached to the wall, plus a light fixture above the chair and desk, and a stainless steel toilet/sink combo with a stainless steel mirror above. The walls are concrete block, and there is one window with steel bars.

For the bed there is a 32" x 75" x 4" vinyl covered foam mattress (no posturepedic in here) and a green blanket. At the sink is a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste, a small bar of soap 2" x 1" x 2". A roll of toilet tissue and an NYS "Standard of Inmate Behavior" handbook complete the layout in your cell. The locker, mattress and soap are made by CORCRAFT. The toothbrush and toothpaste come from NYS Industries for the Disabled, Inc.

Within 24 hours of your arrival you will be permitted to make fifteen minute collect phone calls, and start receiving visitors, up to four at a time. You will be allowed a six minute shower every other day. A corrections officer provides you with a single edge disposable razor once a week during mandatory cell clean up. During the process you are locked in your cell and all supplies are handed to you through the vertical slot in your door. When you have used the razor, you return it to the C.O.

You are required to stand up in front of your door, fully dressed with the light on, during every count. There is absolutely no talking, to anyone, at count time. All conversation stops at 9 p.m.

While at the reception facility you have extremely limited movement. Your daily recreation consists of gallery rec (TV, phones, card games), yard or gym. The latter two are offered on a rotating basis. With the exception of these activities, and the escorted walk to the mess hall three times a day, you spend most of your time in your cell. For reading there is a slim selection of novels.

On average the reception process lasts 3 to 4 weeks. Then you are transferred to one of the many maximum-security prisons to begin your bid.

Unfortunately, the amenities are not even close to the Marriott, nor an Econolodge or a Motel 6. To avoid experiencing all these things for real, do not commit any crimes.