

## THE OFFICE

For over two years I've gotten up each morning and walked the short distance to my office. This is a special place, exclusive yet ominous, with an odd and interesting history. It had been built several decades ago, a 12' x 12' cage of sturdy metal diamond grating. It was originally an observation post but later reduced to a dark and dusty storage for paperwork and unused furniture. When the office became my own personal work area it was my responsibility to equip accordingly, with no money. There was only a long extension cord and 25-watt lamp used for power and lighting. After months of submitting work-order requests, memorandums, and some cunning finesse, I got the place plumbed with electrical outlets, light switches, and the brightest bank of fluorescent tubes of any other office in the building. The discarded pile of junk was replaced with like-new furnishings that I "appropriated" from elsewhere within the building: Two hardwood desks; two padded, swivel chairs, and a filing cabinet. I also acquired a brand-new word processor right out of the box. It was outdated of course, but the best I could do. Later I finagled a computer and printer which ran Windows XP. Even though the surrounding area was extremely noisy and trash often rained down from above, my office is a place of solace where I can get away to be alone from the normal stresses of everyday chaos. I have no set schedule, I come and go as I please. I love going to my office and staying long hours because it's better than the alternative.

I've been so blinded with the excitement of having my own office that I have overlooked what was going on around me and what this place truly is. Now I see more and more people using wheelchairs, walkers, and canes. Others carry oxygen tanks and don masks to breathe with. And others are reduced to wearing adult diapers because of the humiliation of incontinence. It seems the entire population around my office has turned more into a convalescent rest home than what it really is: San Quentin's aging Death Row population. It was once a death watch cell, but now it is my office.