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GLASS-ICE WAX, PILLS, AND BLOOD: READING THE FLOOR

by Tracy Lee Kendall (2018)

I stared into the glass-ice wax covering the floor. It was beautiful, although I feel empty for some reason when I describe it as such. Then, a correctional officer from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice began screaming at me to press my genitals up against the garage wall. This was in the late spring of 1999, when I arrived at the Middleton Unit transfer facility near Abeline, Texas to be received into the TDCJ prison system. The glass-ice wax was the result of two prisoners who walked back and forth applying layer after layer of wax and sealant for hours every day to make a hypnotic floor.

The summer heat came quick, and I sat in the sweltering metal buildings abusing whatever narcotic and psychotropic pills I could get my hands on.. I hate pills, but I took them because I thought the feeling would help me be close to someone I lost. As an experienced addict at that time in my life, it was easy to find the pills that saturate Texas prisons after filtering in from mental services that liberally supply and poorly monitor them. So I popped my pills and took my IQ and diagnostics tests and baked in the sun until I was sent to a different unit.

That unit was the Byrd Unit, in Huntsville, or near it. I was just there a couple of weeks until the state classification committee assigned me to a permanent unit. I've never seen so much toilet paper in my life. So much was passed out that it was all over the floors and walls and bars; like living in a toilet-papered cave. So I covered the walls of my cell with song lyrics, as if every song I had appreciated in twenty-five years (at that time) of life flowed out of me onto the cracking paint and concrete. The reason eludes me. Maybe I was trying to wash the filth away from what I saw, or excise the corruption within me. Then I was gone.

And I found myself on the Coffield Unit, and the first thing I noticed



on the floor was a pill, and then more; because mental services in the TDCJ solve problems with pills that few want and few take. So pills get thrown on the floors a lot, and people like I used to be pick them up. People like I used to be also do things like read DSM books and rattle off symptoms to psych doctors who give us more pills. Then we mix them with what we find on the floor and make ourselves crazy and overdose and destroy our own lives in countless other ways.

What is that? Something else on the floor, the next thing I noticed there-- blood, and it was mine. One drop I watched in my peripheral vision fall from my mouth to the floor the moment before I launched into the first fight I had on Coffield. Prison gangs frequently tried to prey on non-gang members such as myself, especially in the days when prison staff used to allow it because federal laws did not make them as accountable. Don't believe me? Just look at the drop in prison violence after the Prison Rape Elimination Act went into effect. The feds did not come into the prisons and personally enforce it, they mandated that prison administration enforce it. So if the administration had wanted to do it before, they would have easily been able to achieve it.

That took awhile to happen. Until then, I saw a lot more blood. Mine, that of others; it was as if the blood staining the floors just rose up to cover the walls and bars and all of us. Somehow I was not broken or raped, but a lot of others were, like a friend named Danny. I believe Danny was in cell ~~321~~ at the end of a run on T-wing. He had a gang-member cellie with 75 agg (that's 75 years, with parole eligibility in  $37\frac{1}{2}$  years). One night after Danny had urinated and began washing off the toilet seat, his cellie came up behind him, held a shank (homemade prison knife) to his throat and raped him. Then, he continued to do so repeatedly all night, with guards walking by to count and check the runs. When Danny got away the next morning, and reported what happened, both he and his cellie were locked up for an investigation



to be conducted.

There was a problem. The PREA mandates the prevention, detection, and prosecution of violent acts in prison. Of course, Danny was raped by a predator virtually in the face of prison staff. So what do prison administrators do who want to escape culpability for that? Simply do a biased investigation to refute a rape occurred, send Danny to a different prison unit, and release the predator back into general population with no prosecution whatsoever. Sure, this puts a sexual predator into a position to easily rape someone else and when he finally does come up for parole, nothing will prevent him from possibly raping someone you know, but no one loses their job. Business as usual in the TDCJ.

Blood does not just come out of human beings that are raped, it also bleeds from wounds inflicted in riots. Riots are noisy, but their aftermath is quiet. When you walk into an empty dayroom after a riot, especially a particularly intense one, its history is written in blood and vomit. Pools of blood on the floor, spatters on bars and walls, even trails of it flung up onto ceilings. Sometimes it can look like a ball of it the size of a basketball exploded on the wall, other times it seems as if it is painted with a roller. I've only seen the vomit on the floor, either beat out of people, scared out of them, or pushed out when they were trying to get rid of tear gas shot into a riot.

Suicide blood is thicker, at least that I've seen on floors and walls next to stainless steel or ceramic prison toilets. That's where prisoners in cells who are serious about committing suicide cut themselves. The toilets are in the backs of the cells in the older TDCJ units. So prisoners just put a sheet up like they're using the restroom. Then, guards passing by just look in and see a sheet stretched from the wall to the bunk and think the prisoner is defecating or masturbating. So the blood flows and congeals longer than



blood pouring out of a riot victim who gets self or outside medical attention in the relatively immediate future. By the time anyone shows up to clean up suicide blood, it looks like a gob of red acrylic paint that seems as hard as concrete to remove. Hangings usually happen in the front of a cell in the older TDCJ units where there is something to tie off to. The event is so quick that being noticed by guards is less of an issue, unless it's just a call for attention, or a ploy to get pills. That may result in urine or feces on the floor, but that never seems to stain like blood.

As the years have gone by, I've seen less and less blood, and that's a good thing, but there is still a long way to go to clean up the TDCJ so that Texas prisoners are actually rehabilitated. While sadists, extremists, criminals, and emotionally imbalanced people may be gratified by a punitive, rather than rehabilitative prison system, all it does is promote the blood of innocent victims on the street. Think I'm lying? Then look up the crime and recidivism rates in states with punitive prison systems as opposed to rehabilitative prison systems. Have you done it yet? Good. So do you think it's a good idea to waste taxpayer money to keep prisoners in a punitive system so long that they are useless to society and have been made manipulative and dangerous in a defective system?

In a punitive system, prisoners are taught to put on an act. I say this because rather than any incentive to actually change, a higher priority is given to jumping through hoops and putting on smiles and religions for parole. There is no payment for work, there is very little--if any--restorative justice, and prisoners are led to assume that society gets almost an orgasmic gratification out of their incarceration. "Rehabilitation" programs in a punitive system are ineffective and redundant and mostly <sup>Unrealistic</sup> unrealistic, and lead prisoners to see rehabilitation ~~as~~ a game. In extension, they perceive life as a game, no different than prison. The result? Ultimately, blood flows across the streets out there, just like it has across the floors in prison.



Less and less blood flowed across the floors as the years came and went, and it was replaced by things like trash. One of the reasons for this is because the TDCJ likes to use "bandaids." No, not the kind we stick on ourselves; I'm referring to those that politicians use to cover the eyes of their constituents. It all began with the Texas Seven, a group of escapees who murdered a police officer who was initially told to wait for backup until engaging them. I watched his widow on T.V. acknowledge that what the TDCJ did as a result was useless beyond a gesture.

What the TDCJ did about the murder was, as usual, illogical and the polar opposite of reason in light of penalogical science. A new classification was applied to custody status which restricted the jobs and housing for prisoners who have sentences of fifty or more years. So depending upon the sentence length, they have to wait five to ten years before they can get a decent job or housing assignment. Why is this reactionary measure illogical? Because, as The Oxford History of the Prisons, which documents penalogical facts from the Mesopotamian and Greek to modern prisons makes clear: normally, prisoners with long sentences have lower recidivism rates and better behavior.

How did I experience the truth of that? First, trash began covering the runs in front of our cells. Why? Because jobs began being taken from prisoners who wanted them, and given to those who only wanted them to hustle weapons, drugs, cell phones, stolen items, etc. So janitors who do not care about their jobs were hired. Why should taxpayers care? Because when the runs are not swept and moped enough, filth and bio-hazards begin stacking up. Then, prisoners needing medical attention begin stacking up and the taxpayers foot the bill. Additionally, prisoners who do not care about their jobs steal all of the chemicals and materials they can to sell. So things are disinfected less frequently, washed without enough bleach or soap, and less nutritious food is served.

Since most people are followers, substandard and non-productivity have been normalized because of the predominant example set for prisoners. Combined



with the substandard performance of the average TDCJ employees we see every day, the majority of the prison population is being taught, rather than doing a good job, as long as a mere image of good work is presented whenever a superior is around, there is no need to actually do the job right. So the public is literally paying for a system wherein TDCJ staff and working prisoners defame their bosses to each other while creating an empire of corruption and filth. Then, the same prisoners, mostly the short-timers<sup>are</sup> released to a location near you. Then they get a job making your kids' cheeseburgers. Wonder if they washed their hands--or what non-standard item has been added. Or maybe they built the house over your grandmother's head. Hope no short-cuts were taken that result in it falling on her in her sleep--because that is what your taxdollars have been paid to effect the potential for.

Now, don't make the mistake of thinking that everything is just one big horror story in here. That's delusional--just as bad as the polar opposite of pretending everything is positive here, or "what you make of it." I even stopped taking the pills your taxdollars pay for after I overdosed a couple of times and began reading what I saw on the floor. What I read was the corruption that a bifurcation of people effected. Oddly, the sides of the bifurcation contain few, if any, convicted criminals. "They" are simply a handful of lawmakers and a constituency who chose filter bubbles over reason. The result is that criminal justice in Texas is often steered in light of factors totally outside of reality--delusion.

Think I'm lying? Look up recidivism rates of convicted felons compared to the crimes that higher-recidivants commit. When you do, you'll find that those with higher recidivism rates, and the risk of committing additional types of crimes than those they were convicted of are released more than those with crimes committed by those with lower recidivism rates. That means that the logic being followed by the TDCJ and the Texas Board of Pardons and Parole is putting people on the streets they know will commit further crimes and types of crimes. My rehabilitation began partly due to realizing this, and



consciously choosing human life and progress, instead of participating in the ideological circus that both enables criminals, and provides the logic mechanism for a system that, overall, reinforces criminal behavior. I found this seeing the good and--not good or--bad in all of this.

Is this to say that all TDCJ employees and Texas parole officials are as corrupt as active criminals. Not at all, we need the TDCJ and parole board to scrutinize prisoners to make sure the public is safe; ~~And~~, if we have nothing to hide, there is no reason to protest scrutiny. Sure, there are active criminals who work for the TDCJ, they get walked off units every day across Texas; and unless the world is a perfectly virtuous place, there have been a fair share of corrupt parole officials. However, I refer to an effective corruption not readily apparent that is more dangerous in a lot of ways than obvious corruption.

This corruption is effected through a particular cause-and-effect chain. Lawmakers enact laws that appeal to ideological adherents to get votes. The key word here is "ideology." When ideology aligns with factual reality, rather than opinion based upon personal preference, there are fewer problems. Realistically, ideology<sup>here</sup> is based upon special interests that are purely dogmatic, and dismissive of reality. Whether anyone is directly nefarious becomes irrelevant, because without basing decisions upon facts, there can be no realistic expectations of solving problems. When the decisions have to do with criminals, there can be no realistic expectations of ensuring the safety and productivity of society without realistic decisions either--anything less is delusional and dangerous.

After lawmakers pass laws, officials construct policies to impose the laws. So far, reactionary ideological laws--based upon effective delusion--have become fully operational through policies. The next stop is prison staff who are guided by policies that are solely procedural--and created with little recourse to reason. Without reality, whatever someone writes on a piece of paper can replace whatever actually happens in any instance. Basically, whatever one wishes to be taken as reality can be forged onto a piece of paper or entered



into a computer, and no one will know otherwise without going through a lot of trouble to review a sea of documents, check camera recordings, learn policies and laws involved, and puzzle everything out.

Then come the prisoners, who are watching all of this--and even being solicited by TDCJ staff at times to aid them in what amounts to a vast effort to produce falsified government records, deceive auditors and law enforcement personnel, and evade scrutiny and accountability. Consequently, all manner of corrupt alliances are made, and the records passed to officials, lawmakers, and parole staff range from partially, to entirely falsified. For example, prisoners who are able to manipulate others into seeing them as rehabilitated-- or who curry favor with guards they aid in illegal activities--<sup>often</sup> end up with records that promote their release. Contrastingly, prisoners who are given disciplinary cases for offenses they have not committed as a repercussion for not engaging corrupt activity are denied parole or other privileges due to the contents of their falsified records.

This is not something I have dreamed up. Personally, I have received disciplinary cases falsified about me resulting from not fraternizing with TDCJ guards, to refusing to lie for a Major who was attempting to use me to retaliate a guard who would not allow him to commit felonies. Of course, these were not what the bogus cases were written out as, but those were the reasons for the disciplinary paperwork that ended up in crumpled balls on my cell floor in those instances.

On the other hand, virtual monsters are lauded on paper as model prisoners, released into society--fully trained to normalize and perpetuate systematic fraud and manipulation to hide their activities until it is too late to prevent further victims. Not all disciplinary cases are falsified--most of mine resulted from willing rules infractions--but it is a common practice for TDCJ staff to falsify disciplinary cases on prisoners for various reasons. There are usually no repercussions for this--except for the prisoners who receive them. Then, of course, there are the repercussions on the public by lauded manipulators.



Reading the floor is not always about what appears, what disappears can be just as telling. In the beginning, there was wax--and it was everywhere. And the wax was the image. You see, the wax was there to present an image of purity and beauty to the TDCJ powers that be, public visitors, and various officials. It was meant to speak an image: "Nope, nothing wrong here; not a bit of corruption in the midst of all the shine!" The wax was the avatar of every lie, cover-up, and forgery to hide the true face of Texas prisons. In fact, the stolen wax we used to cover our cell floors with served the same purpose--we were attempting to make things prettier than they really were, to deny the reality of the prison around us.

Then there was none--in our cells anymore. In its place was a message--the truth. Due to mismanagement, misappropriation, fraud, and every other bit of corruption in the vast conglomerate of Texas prisons and satellite industries extending from or because of it, the inevitable budget crisis arose. Little by little, things began disappearing, and amongst the first to go--the wax on our cell floors. Since it was contraband, security simply began writing cases here and there if prisoners had wax over their concrete cell floors. Thus, it became detrimental to have it because a wax-covered floor just resulted in a disciplinary case or a retaliatory destructive cell search.

All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put the TDCJ back together again. So our contraband wax disappeared, and much followed as lost--disappearing!--tax dollars forced the pruning of prison resources to compensate. Most good commissary items, originally name brand, were replaced by lesser quality items that the state could make more money on. The free weights and chapel resources disappeared as commissary and visitation vending machine profits were redirected from the education and recreation budget into the "general fund," and a universe of things disappeared overnight.

Even medical care was not spared. Taxpayers inevitably foot the bill for our medical care. They can thank criminals, mass incarceration, ideologically,



driven sentencing trends, gang proliferation, and the rest of the dynamic monster of this situation. When I pulled up to the TDCJ in 1999, prisoners were charged a three dollar co-payment for each medical visit. However, chronic conditions, and a variety of other things were not subject to the payment. There are gives and takes as to the quality of our medical care, far too many to go into here. Of particular note relative to disappearing funds is our revised co-payment. Keep in mind, Texas does not pay prisoners for their work for the most part, so taxpayers are forced to pay ~~medical~~ <sup>medical costs</sup> already. Everything the TDCJ undertakes is from taxdollars, the profits of which are rightfully the taxpayers'. However, the TDCJ is a job industry, so there is more of a priority given to keeping prisons full to produce jobs and pay staff.

The endgame is that, rather than a self-sustaining entity, the TDCJ inevitably siphons off more than it produces. That means that ultimately, taxpayers are forced to pay for our medical care (among other things). And one day--there was a \$100.00 co-payment fee legislated into being by people that the taxpayers voted into being. The punchline is that since prisoners are not paid for work in Texas, this means that taxpaying families who send money to incarcerated family or friends are paying again each year, rather than three dollars a visit. Many would say, "My medical care costs so much more..." but they don't have the right to play that violin until Texas pays prisoners for their work. As for U. S. families of Texas prisoners living outside of Texas--the TDCJ receives various federal funding as well, so ultimately, you're paying for us too, even if you're not paying Texas taxes--which you do via commissary money you send us anyway. No one escapes prison in reality.

The ghost of the wax past is in the hall. The inmate janitors only do the middle, where guards and visitors walk. And the brick walls? They no longer make an ice cave, but peeling and worn remnants are still there, haunting us with the testimony of a past of corruption and deterioration into loss and question marks and con man excuses and lies to pretend that an empire of corrupt prisoners and staff marching through history are shiny wax knights.



Oh--I forgot about the gas. Every now and then, I'll come across a dark burgandy to black amorphous stain on the floor. Other prisoners have told me these stains are a result of rounds shot out of gas guns and gas grenades burning on the floor as they released their contents into our lungs. While I've seen the aftermath of a guard emptying pepper-spray many times over the years--and that usually leaves a burgandy stain on humans--I've never confirmed whether the tear gas rounds burnt stains in the floor. When tear gas is flooding the immediate premises, stains on the floor are usually the last thing anyone is worried about.

The worst I've seen of that was years ago, it had to be prior to 2009, because I had not done ten years in the system yet. It all began with rivalries among the Hispanic gangs, grew because instead of trying to solve anything, administration tried to use them as control mechanisms--and then it exploded. The explosion occurred because outsiders (i.e., administration) tried to put their hands into something they knew little about and set a torch to it. The result was a war among the Hispanic gangs. So everyone with a Spanish last name was locked into a cell until everything could be sorted out.

Since there are not enough segregation cells on the Coffield Unit to lock up everyone with a Spanish last name, administration was forced to use cells in general population areas as makeshift seg cells [seg cells are those with extra security measures built into them that are meant to contain prisoners who are a potential danger to, or in extraordinary danger from other prisoners]. So the entire row of cells below mine was one of many on-demand seg custody levels on the unit. In seg, prisoners are only taken from one cell at a time to go to showers, medical, or other places they may need to go, this is so they don't kill each other. Some prison units around the U.S. have alleviated this situation by constructing seg custody levels that prisoners rarely or never have to leave their cells (showers in-cell, etc.).



It all exploded at shower time. The officers were supposed to open one cell, let them shower after transporting them to the shower area, return them, and take the occupants of another cell. Instead, they opened the cells of the entire run, and the majority of the occupants of those cells went to war with each other with fists, boots, canes, and whatever else they thought they could kill each other with. Among them was a prisoner who is like a brother to me. He is not in a gang, and so he stayed out of the way. The last I saw of him that night was him run into the dayroom when the gas came.

And it came hard. The guards panicked after they rolled the doors. One of them began screaming, ran all the way down the run of cells, and locked himself in the last cell with two prisoners. The other guard began screaming and shooting rounds out of a tear gas gun and throwing gas grenades. The rounds and grenades went everywhere--and into many of our cells. Then many of the prisoners began screaming and suffocating and cussing.

When it came, I had failed to cover my mouth, so I ended up in the back of the cell jumping up and down, hitting my chest, and punching the wall trying to make the gas come out of me. My then cellie had covered his face and was merely laughing at me. Prisoners in other cells were choking and arguing. The gangs on the run fought for a while and then layed down when the gas overwhelmed them. There was so much gas shot on impulse, many of us thought we were going to die, it was so intense that I could not feel myself punching a concrete wall.

While all of that was going on, my friend was at the back of a dayroom trying to breathe through a broken window. Later, since the guards could not figure out exactly who was and was not fighting, they just picked some people. My friend was one of them. He received a disciplinary case from an officer who placed my friend in a dayroom and knew he was not involved in the riot. Since I had seen him go into the dayroom from my cell, and not engage in the fight, I approached the officer who wrote the case.



To be fair, the officer was actually a kind man. I asked him if he remembered letting my friend in the dayroom and knew he wasn't involved in the fighting. The officer acknowledged he did. Then I asked him if he realized he was about to destroy someone's disciplinary record and get them sent to medium custody, which was extremely dangerous back then. Instead of answering, he just looked down at the floor--I wonder what he read there. When I went to speak on my friend's behalf at his disciplinary hearing, the officer did not show up. A sergeant showed up who was not even on the entire cell block the night of the incident and falsely testified as if he were there--totally lying about my friend in order to create a smokescreen. Why? Because it was the guards who messed up and created the circumstances that allowed circumstances effected by administrative decisions and gang rivalries to explode.

This is what happens when people fail to read and/or take heed to the writing on the floor. The corruption their rises and actuates into the lives in here. It grinds good people, like the decent guard who had to follow orders he knew were corrupt, and my friend who ended up in the hell that was medium custody, into virtual stains on the prison floor. Sure, a few people are strong enough that this place--or rather, the corruption allowed to proliferate here-- does not flow into them and change or destroy them. In fact, many people walk into and out of prisons in Texas every day with no obvious changes, because they exchange their masks at the door.

Prison can be challenging, even horrifying, to deal with. One way people cope is with "masks." Basically, they adopt one character while in prison, and another while outside of prison. The prisoners are the obvious examples. Many (although less and less as time goes on) put on masks for more innocent reasons, such as acting aggressive out of fear that they will get victimized. Then there are the cons that act nice trying to get things from people. Then there are the monsters that feel being in prison is justification to rape, rob, and all the other things they only do in the free world if they don't



believe they'll get caught, except when they just don't care.

The mask exchange of staff has a seemingly different nuance. Many would say they are virtuous people--PTA members, church-goers, involved in various upstanding fraternities and civic organizations. Apparently, virtue is just too hard to act in accordance with in prison. Not to worry, it's just a mask away to relief. Why deal with problems when you can just say whatever it takes to get people out of your face. Sure someone's life may be in danger, in or out of prison--but why deal with it if you don't have to, right? Especially when you need the time to hit on that co-worker you've been trying to cheat on your wife with.

And since everything is already so corrupt--and the public seems so happy to pay for it all, why not use those prisoners to make us look better? For example, the recent media exposes about officers falsifying disciplinary cases and planting evidence on prisoners at the Ramsey Unit and a few others. It seems they wanted to look good for an audit--wherein they are scrutinized to make sure they are performing their actual duties to the taxpayers. The only reason anything was done was because the public found out. Prison staff already knew about everything, but the mask had not been taken off yet.

See, all those little masks come together to make one big one, where all manner of atrocities can be covered up. For example, it was reported that only twenty-two Texas prisoners died in Texas prisons due to heat over the last decade or two. That's laughable, especially when at the first weeks of summer every year on Coffield, seven or eight prisoners would die. Of course, this was usually attributed to heart attacks or adverse reactions to psychotropic medication, but I doubt it would be hard to ascertain that a lot more people were dying in the heat due to the effect on existing health conditions--which is the same as the heat killing people. One mask neutralizes many lawsuits (aside from those existing).



Are you confused yet? Does this seem all over the place? Congratulations--you're starting to get it. After all, did you really think that a prison system with well over 100,000 prisoners, thousands of staff and volunteers, numerous departments within departments, and a supposedly separate entity called, Texas Correctional Industries, along with all of the contractors and who knows what else is so connected to the TDCJ that it all effectively is the TDCJ. Can you even begin to capture the countless lives, situations, interactions, and everything else here? No, the big picture is a collage stretching back centuries through even more lives and times and circumstances. You're not going to understand it through a prisoner's complaint about his cellie, or a releasee's puffy story about how perfect everything is and some idealized success story, or some disgruntled prison guard's rant about how evil prisoners are.

You're not ever going to understand the entirety of the picture that is the TDCJ. However, it is easy to see the damage that the TDCJ (and its previous incarnations) have done to society--and continues to do. It simply takes scrutiny, and a willingness to hold officials and politicians accountable who have either allowed, or directly caused the mess that is not only adverse to the rehabilitation of criminals (and thus, the safety of society), but it detracts from society itself. Of course, that might matter to you if you don't care about the quality of your kid's education, health care, or future. Where do you think the money for the TDCJ is coming from? It doesn't grow on trees. Remember, next time you vote, you might think you're voting for some type of ideology. Well, it hasn't worked yet--that's why you're still pissed off. The truth is, you're voting for your kid's future, and the safety of society, and the money that falls in--or out--of your pocket. More, importantly, you're voting for the quality of life of everyone you know.

The most noticeable thing on the floor is not a thing--it's people. Whether you like it or not, their future is directly tied to yours. So how much are you willing to pay in resources and safety for those of us wasting away in a system that is ultimately destructive to everyone in and out of prison?