

It was July 18th, and all I knew, was that today my sentence in "solitary confinement" had finally expired. I couldn't wait to be released from this oppressive hellhole. In this place, in addition to the stressful restrictive living conditions, the guards used tactics to make a person feel subhuman. If you aren't strong enough...well? You might just lose it. I spent the last few weeks of my life reading and writing for twenty-three hours a day. I was burnt out. I guess that it could be due in part to the fact that I'd been in "seg" the last three quarters of the past year and now, everyday I felt as if the walls were closing in on me.

After breakfast, I washed my face and brushed my teeth. I packed my few belongings as quickly as I possibly could. I stood by my cell room door waiting to be escorted to "general population". My anxiety and impatience begin rising as I wondered what was the hold-up.

I was pacing back and forth in my cell when I heard a nearby guard's radio suddenly explode with a gut-wrenching cry for help; "Staff! We need staff! Oh my God...he's hitting him...[crying] He's hitting him with a hammer! Oh God! Oh God!...[heavy breathing] We need health services here in L-shop immediately! Please hurry..."

I couldn't clearly make out what was happening but, I did notice that the facility's main operations begin to urgently shut down. I could sense the state of emergency in the air. The window in front of my cell provided a limited view of the prison's grounds which I used to look out and see the "whites shirts" (Cpts.&Lts.) in deep discussions. I watched the MN's BCA crime-scene truck arrive and enter the prison's Sally port. I also learned from the brothers, who were in seg with me, that a helicopter with newscasters was here. We began to ask the guards questions about what was happening but, they completely ignored us and kept walking.

As the day proceed, indeed I remained in seg and the guards continued acting odd, ignoring me and the brothers. Their actions screamed disgust, disregard, and bitterness towards us. But what was new? Their demeanor didn't bother us, we were so use to such treatment we just kept persistently pressing guards for answers to our lock-down status.

After dinner, a guard finally explained what happened. Apparently, while at work, in one of the prison's sweat shops, a brother used his assigned work hammer to beat a guard to death. Whoa! I was stunned speechless. It's the first time in history a guard has been killed in the MN prison system. I sat back on my uncomfortably thin mattress and grimly begin thinking about the last lock-down because intuitively I could feel an administrative long-term lock-down closing in.

A month prior, a lieutenant had been stabbed so severely, his injuries forced him into early retirement. A week afterwards, a desk sergeant caught the blade of a convict's razor across the face, as well as a ride to the ER. But the ground breaker was a few weeks before any of these events occurred; our state's super-max which is across the street, sent a strong message of unity and rebellion. The spark was when a highly respected brother was put into a coma at the hands of guards. Which in turn, triggered a calculated revenge. Bound by retaliation...brothers came together and lured guards into the gymnasium; giving guards the false impression of inmates fighting each other, ten guards rushed to the gym only to fall victim to a mass ambush attack. A few of the guards ended up getting seriously injured. The message was clear; WERE'RE FED UP! We demand our dignity or we'll unite to fight for it, regardless of the circumstances and consequences or cultural differences. This clever display of force by convicts infuriated the institutional administration because it showed that their security procedures can be outwitted. This incident also hurt the facility's credibility and image of being invincible. The revolt led to a statewide two week prison lock down but, I never once complained because I really dug those brother's courage.

Although this incident might have been marked as a historic day in MN DOC records, it didn't come as a surprise to many. Most people with a good understanding of Minnesota's criminal justice system are aware of it's major flaws. Once the infamous lawyer Johnny Cochran stated, "I'll practice anywhere in the states, except Minnesota". Unlike most states, Minnesota has statues that aren't enacted, meaning while MN may recognize certain statues as laws, federal and state governments does

not. Minnesota has even been criticized by CNN and other media networks for refusing to amend its harsh and unconstitutional 'civil commitment' laws. And despite being one of the smallest prison populated states, having only 7 prisons and housing about 11,000 prisoners, according to The World Almanac, within the past decade Minnesota held one of the highest incarceration-rates in the nation. Not only does MN DOC think their policies are above the constitutional laws but, when it cuts into their pockets, they can even be shady towards their very own staff. Many lawsuits against the MN DOC are filed by correctional officers. I can't say what the main reason is for litigation but, I do know that it speaks volumes to MN DOC values.

As a repeat offender and a lifer, I write from experience, regarding the ins and outs of MN criminal laws. And I know, if the MN criminal justice system wants to truly offer offenders a fair chance at rehabilitation, there's only one way; consider reforming its policies. All my life I've witnessed this system break up homes and destroy communities. Growing up, I've seen the detrimental effects that a bias and unjust criminal justice system imposes and it's truly life changing. I wholeheartedly believe, if MN criminal justice system goes unchallenged it will continue to become worse before it gets better.

TITLE: If These Walls Talked

TYPE: Creative Nonfiction

SETTING: Max Prison

BY: MINISTA L