

The Keepers And The Kept  
by Wesley I. Purkey

The opprobrious and appalling ~~dehumanizing~~ abject conditions of confinement permeating the lives of men and women who <sup>ARE</sup> unfortunate enough to languish for years upon years, and for some until death do they part in desolation behind maximum security penitentiary walls is pervaded by the pronounced ~~inherit~~ animosity held against them by their keepers. It is pretty much a given that prison officials believe that they have unfettered impunity to run roughshod over society's most disreputated members who lie utterly vulnerable to their keepers usurp of power and the egregious conditions of confinement that are created by such abusive authority. The core impetus of such malicious treatment of prisoners by prison officials is invidiously fueled by a "hold in abomination mentality". This inherit ossify animosity by prison officials against prisoners was readily identified in a book written in 1971 by Jessica Mitford titled, "Kind and Usual Punishment" a blithering twist on the Eighth Amendment terminology "Cruel and Unusual Punishment". This book was spawned by Ms. Mitford's work on an article anent prisoners rights at the behest of the American Civil Liberty Union in recognition of their fiftieth anniversary program. An associate of Ms. Mitford, a criminologist advised her that her project would not require more than one sheaf of paper because, prisoners had no rights.  
id. p. 1.

Absent the hard fought minimal gains made on prisoners rights since that time by the commendable individuals with indomitable spirits taking on these precipitous battles on behalf of <sup>those</sup> behind penitentiary walls Mitford's book still remains relevant today. Early on in her well written book she identified with perspicuity the main culprit underscoring prisoners "hell on earth" conditions of confinement in ~~some~~ <sup>this</sup> country's most notorious and formidable human cesspools that man has ever witnessed. Unequivocally she identified that culprit being none other than the "hold in abomination mentality" held by the "Keepers against the Kept". That deep rooted animus against prisoners by prison officials unfortunately is still alive and well today causing untold misery and suffering for those who lie in its wake.

Touring one of this country's most notorious and intimidating State Penitentiary's at Raiford, Florida built before the turn of the nineteenth century would of been a sobering experience for even the most tempered person, let alone for a decent and compassionate human being as the authoress of the book "Kind and Usual Punishment". Leading the tour of this grim and dismal fortress was Officer Edwards F. Roberts who with unbelievable candor clarified to Ms. Mitford and others that, "Supervising staff always tells new recruits here that, "they will hate a convict after just one year here worst than anything on earth." Officer Roberts went on to solidify this inherit animosity expected to be held by prison staff against prisoners stating that, "all staff ~~members~~ are expected to feel that



a convict is the lowest thing on the face of the earth. id. Cnp.#1p.7. This bold declaration by Officer Roberts unequivocally solidified the pervasive and ossify animus held by prison officials against prisoners even though it is fervently denied by them, as always actions speak louder than words. Contrary to these patent spurious denials by prison officials the following story gives decisive credence to the inherit "hold in abomination mentality" that permeates every facet of the prisoner abuses behind penitentiary walls today, as it did over four decades ago and was brought to bear in Ms. Mitford's 1971 book documenting this deep rooted hatred by the keepers against the kept.

Working at the Paint Factory situated in the Brick Yard, which in reality was the old territorial prison prior to the building of the now Kansas State Penitentiary at Lansing, Kansas in the late 1800's. They are separated by a gun tower, Tower 10 sitting out-front of B-Cell House which is the same gun tower commandeered by eight convicts in 1981 shooting the guard and escaping with a 450 law enforcement manhunt ensuing. A good friend of mine, Jimmy Sims, also known as Red was the clerk at the Paint Factory who got me a job working there in the mix room with decent pay for penitentiary wages. Being about the same age, early 40's and having served similar amounts of time on our respective sentences, about 12 - 13 years at that time in 1993, and having common interest we hung out together. In fact we worked on ~~at~~ the weights together, ran the track, played cards together and shared other similar interest in different activities and programs. What really impressed me about Sims was not only being well educated and extremely intelligent but was his insightfulness and tremendous ability to work through problems in-lieu of merely complaining about them which was pretty much the rule behind these prison walls. But what I found superlative to even those outstanding qualities was his adversity to playing the typical penitentiary games and being imbued with a penitentiary mentality. Despite criticism by others for not being more aggressive concerning issues that they thought he should be he demonstrated empathy for them, but remain steadfast in his believes. Difficult to do under any circumstances particularly a penitentiary sitting with adverse peer pressures. All in all he taught me some pretty significant lessons, as well as planted seeds still being cultivated today and one of those essential lessons was that, "a person does not have to become a product of their environment." Recently he had become somewhat withdrawn and sad, although when I questioned him about what was bothering him, he kinda shrugged it off telling me that he would workout the issues. I knew that the issues he was referring to dealt with his ex-wife not bringing up his two kids to visit for several months as she had been in the past several years.

Brick Yard workers are always let out of their cells first for breakfast so they had time to eat and check in for work underneath Tower 10 before mainline workers. Staying up late watching Monday Night Football I was slow getting myself up, dressed and out of my cell for breakfast. Living at the very end of the top range in B-ch in contrast to Sims who lived at the very front of the range near the barbox, which was constantly being open and shut making all kinds of racket - how he dealt with that



constantly banging and racket I have no idea and everytime I asked him about it he merely shrugged it off with a smile saying that it wasn't a big deal. Still half asleep I began casually walking toward the front of the range tucking my shirt in and putting on my coat. Looking down the range it was a little odd that several members of the goon squad (prison parlance for S.O.R.T. members) was standing at the front of the range at 5:45 a.m. Sims hadn't come out of his cell yet which was odd as well because we generally always walked over to the chowhall together and then to work after eating. Puzzled, I started to ask one of the cop's I knew standing out front of Sims's cell 'what was up', but I was stopped dead in tracks seeing him hanging from his cell bars obviously dead wearing jeans and socks. The look of horror on his face made me sick to my stomach and it is deep in my memory today. Looking at Mike Falary the Supervising Officer of the goon squad I told him that, "someone needs to take him down, there is no need to leave him like that." A goon squad member standing in his cell taking pictures said, "there will be one less mouth to feed this morning," which was followed by laughter from his fellow cop-friends on the range. "This is bull shit," I told Falary, "you need to get him down and at least show him some dignity." "Get a couple of extra pictures of that comical look on his face so we can hang a couple of them up in the squad room," Falary said. "If you are not going to take him down then I am," I told Falary and stepped in between him and another goon squad member brushing up against them trying to get inside Sims's cell door. Simultaneously they grabbed me throwing me up against the outside of Sims's cell bars pushing my face into Sims's chest on the other side of the bars where he was hanging. His chest was cold. Handcuffing me behind my back and continuing to push my face in to Sims's cell bars Falary odiously told me that, "your friend was a piece of crap the same as you are, and no one gives a damn about what you feel about that piece of crap hanging there and now you are going to jail for assault."

Being escorted to the A&T Building (segregation) the two escorting cops continued the mockery and ridicule of Sims hanging in his <sup>cell</sup> obviously to provoke me, but their stream of ignorance couldn't penetrate the sorrow that saturated my every breath. A short time later I was given a fabricated disciplinary report for assaulting Falary and the other goon squad member. Despite the fabricated disciplinary report I was able to find a certain amount of solace in my bare bone segregation cell knowing now that my friend was free of the debilitating loneliness and suffering that was consuming him and had for many, many years. He was now free!

A few months prior to this tragedy of Sims's death a riot broke out on the recreation yard in the recreation shack, where inmates played cards, worked out and showered. This building was torn down after this incident took place and the carnage left in its wake. A fight had broke out between twenty or more prisoners leaving two inmates dead, several seriously injured and the guard working the recreation shack dead as well. No deliberate intent was taken against this staff member who as far as I knew was a decent guy and treated people fairly without acrimony. Eventually thirteen inmates were charged and convicted of these murders and remained in the A&T Building for well over a decade



Because of the killing of this staff member Mike Falary and his crew run rough-shod over any inmate they perceived making disparaging remarks about the killing of this officer, but of course these same sentiments were not reciprocal of the two inmates killed. The emity shown by prison officials anent this officer being killed were appreciated, but hardly justified seeing that a small percentage of the entire inmate population committed such act and yet were being subject to a myriad of reprisals for such. My friend Sims' deserved the same respect and dignity shown the slain officer in-lieu of the scorn and ridicule given to him by the very same people who now demand at the risk of punitive actions respect for one of their own. Whether they realize it or not, Sims' and the slain officer had something irrefutably in common; they were both human beings even though one was a 'keeper' and the other was the 'kept' behind penitentiary walls.