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Cooked Frogs

I came from a very abusive single parent home. I'd been beat with hair brushes, appliance cords and slapped. I only stayed as long as I did because I didn't know what else to do. It wasn't long before I was in the company of teens that could and would dare me to do things that would endanger their future. I was their shoplifter, I procured cigarettes, booze and I was the party girl. Funny how quickly the party girl became the fall guy. For all the things that I did wrong, I got busted for something I really hadn't done. I was busted for manufacturing identifications, stealing identifications and credit cards. Oh well, what did it matter, I didn't have anyone that would believe that I didn't do it, I didn't have a real attorney and I could've been busted doing any of number of other things, so I guess I'd just ride out these charges.

I spent a few months in County Jail, the conditions were deplorable but I heard that prison is better because it is tailored for longer term stays. It's true prison is better than county jail, in that there is more freedom and you can start to have a resemblance of a schedule and life.

I remember hearing a story that you can put a couple frogs in cold water, in a pan and put the pan on the stove and slowly turn up the heat in small increments. If done right, the frogs won't even try to jump out and you can go to pick them up and you will get frog skin, because they've been thoroughly cooked. I've eaten frog legs and I'm not sure what good cooked frogs are, but I guess the story of their slow initiation to heat reminds me of my initiation to violence in prison.

My first encounter with prison violence would be when I walked into the chow hall and sat at a table with a woman that was sitting by herself. Some inmates walked by and told me to get up, that I was in bad company. Well, I didn't want to seem like a punk that jumped every time someone said something to me.

I didn't talk to the woman and she didn't speak to me. I finished eating and apparently so had the chick at the table, she was behind be walking out and when I reached the door there were at least 8 inmates waiting there. As cold as it sounds, fortunately, they jumped her and NOT me, but I stood there stunned watching for a second, before I found my legs to carry me forward.

I made an inquiry after seeing the girl jumped and found out she had a child crime and that was why she was jumped. There are a lot of things that no one tells you about prison, but I guess the rumor that child offenders were treated worst, was true.

The prison I was in, was enormous, 5,000 women. Everyone was assigned to school or work. There was a minor wage to be made, and consequences if you didn't work; but I wasn't interested in finding out how much worse things could get for me.

I was assigned to the woodshop. You have to get up at 5 am to pick up your breakfast and lunch box. You go through a work exchange. About 30 women are put in a room the curtains are pulled and all 30 are stripped down naked. We each open our mouth, sift through our hair, lift our breasts, (some have to lift their stomachs). Everyone turns their back to the officer, each of us squats and coughs, then spread your vaginal lips and butt cheeks and cough some more. Show your hands and the bottom of your feet. You can only imagine, that with 1,000 women per yard, the whole morning, all work exchanges sound like a tuberculosis ward.

The bathroom stalls at work were ½ doors, so you could see the male supervisor and everyone while using the facilities. It takes a minute to get used to, even without mush modesty or home training. Many of the offenders at the wood shop come to work high on drugs. I remember one time a pregnant girl was throwing up in the bathroom and another inmate thought she must be sick on heroine and wanted some. I have nothing

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against drugs and would party when I could but I was scared to use on the job. I'd seen the kick back from some of the boards that came out of the planer at 70 miles per hour, still stuck in the back wall.

The next time I was exposed to violence, was at the wood shop. There was a little yard that inmates would take official breaks, but unofficially smoke. The problem with prison in general is that it is overcrowded. There was one wood shop instructor to about 40 students. Most the students were working or pretending to. In retrospect, I'm sure there were some convicts off the record assigned to distracting the instructor. There was a new student assigned to the shop and she was out in the wood shop yard and 3 offenders were raping her, with what looked to be a broom sized board. Looking back, I would've thought it would take more than 3 offenders. I recognized one of the ring leaders nicknamed Sludge, how apropos. I quickly walked back inside. God help me, I had seen the victim's face, I knew she was not a willing participant, but I was in no position to help and again, was just grateful it wasn't me. I may not be popular, but apparently I was navigating prison and not UNpopular.

My next encounter with violence, I saw my roommate beat up like a whining dog by her prison lover. This became a common occurrence. So much so, that one morning I was brushing my teeth and her head landed at my feet and I kept brushing my teeth. At some point, I told my roommate she should try to get out of that cycle of abuse.

I've never quite figured out why one would need jewelry in prison, but everyone is allowed a chain with a religious emblem. A gigantic black chick had her chain stolen and accused and was fighting a Native chick. Presumably they were friends and it was an inside job. I watch the Native shank the Black chick. Eventually the cops attention was aroused and everyone dispersed. The Black chick had patched herself up and continued to work the back kitchen docks. There was a little blood that seeped through the black chick's homemade bandage, but no one was the wiser. A few weeks later, after several bouts and black eyes, the native placed herself in protective custody.

Jewels, was a drug addict and owed so much money in the prison; she was followed and beaten and tormented regularly. I never understood why the dealers bothered to extend credit to Jewels. I guess Jewels was cute enough to get guys to send her money and she told some story of getting some kind of cash settlement from somewhere. First, dealers had cut off Jewel's hair. That tactic didn't seem to work nor did it help bring more income with the guys. Eventually Jewels owed so much money that she couldn't pay it and she jumped off the top tier. That initially put her in the hospital, then the infirmary and forever in a wheelchair. She got some drugs legally after that and no one else sold to her.

Skeezzer was such a dope fiend, that she would sell her indigent stuff, steal from other offenders and gladly take the ass whippings, to get more dope. Skeezzer had all her teeth knocked out. One tooth, then another, and within her sentence, her whole front grill was missing. She also had a limp wher her foot had been broken in an attack and never healed properly. Skeezzer probably did dope and walked on it before she was suppose to.

Still, I suppose it's better Sheila, which was shanked in the yard and literally left for dead and died, for what would cost thirty dollars on the streets.

I was standing in the work exchange line and out of nowhere I was punched into the wall, My air knocked out of me and my rib surely broken, I looked up to find my roommate's lover – raging about how I should stay out of her business. She was coming for the 2nd round when out of pure fear and self defense, I raised a leg and kicked her back. She fell on the ground. It seemed that a crowd had materialized and some were yelling that she should beat that white b*tch. She got up and told me to mind my own business, keep my mouth shut and that she knew where I lived. Then she stormed off. I spent the day at work in pain and sheer fear. The worry of having to fight in my own cell, took years off my life. Truth be told, you are on your own

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when you fight in prison. The prison guards get paid the same, whether they respond or not. Technically, they cannot intervene, except to stop it- which by regulation takes more than one officer. Their first line of defense is to tell you to stop fighting, then both inmates, win /lose or draw are sprayed with mace or a chemical of sorts , separated and carted off to SHU (Security Housing Unit/ 24 hour day lock-up). When fighting in prison, one must go for the gusto.

I hardly slept that night, thought about arming myself with a lock, but got scared she'd pry it away from me and beat me with my own weapon. I didn't speak with my roommate, but I wanted to sock her. I felt like she used me to make her lover jealous. The morning inevitably arrived and my opponent walked in like she owned the place, she was lovey dovey with my roommate. Just like that life went on and I went to work, relieved. By then next day, my roommate was getting her ass beat again and I vowed never to play "Captain Save Ho". This type of incident is exactly why people in prison mind their own business.

I was pretty much a loner, but one day I started talking with a petite black chick, nicknamed Q. She was a cutie (QT) and very skiddish about prison. The kind that you wonder how she got to prison. We saw a woman getting her face pulverized. I am a big broad and Q asked me to intervene. I didn't have time to explain my prior bad experience. I merely got between the two and caught the aggressors eyes and told her to find her victim later, when she had regained consciousness. Well, the victim awoke, hid behind me and struck the aggressor in the head with a lock. Blood poured out of her enraged face and yelled at me "You're going to protect that B*tch?" " I tried to reason with them both. Well, due to the blood and crowd, the two in the fight, me, and Q ended up interrogated. It turns out the aggressor was gang affiliated and the story ended up that it took all 3 of us to hold her down and beat her up.

The real story was that the Aggressor and victim were undercover lovers. The Aggressor had a steady woman and the victim was her *side piece* / mistress and had leaked the news, in hopes of moving up the list. My naïve friend, Q, simply didn't want to see people hurt. After that, Q and I had a firsthand understanding that; we mind our own business.

Q and I were having a great day. We had planned a picnic of sorts. Sludge was being released from SHU for God only knows what charges. I mean, I'd seen her involvement in a rape that no one caught, so what did authorities actually catch her doing? Sludge had a cart of her property and her girlfriend, Blondie arrived with her new girlfriend Flip in tow. Flip started fighting Sludge and yelled to Blondie that if she didn't jump in on her side, that she was next to get a beat down. I was witnessing all this. I told Q to pack our snacks, we had to get out of the area. Meanwhile, Sludge was on the floor, getting kicked in the face. A flurry of convicts, like vultures were stealing everything Sludge owned, out of her cart and passing it along. Q and I stepped passed onlookers, blood, and hair; in time to avoid the eventual onslaught of prison guards. Sludge was hospitalized and the other 2 took her spot in SHU.

When Sludge got out of SHU, Flip and Blondie had parted ways and Sludge ended up back together with Blondie. It's like domestic violence in the real world. Why would you intervene, when they'll turn on you and end up back together. To multiply the danger, prison is a closed setting. Truth is there is so much violence in prison that one becomes anesthetized to it. From what I've seen on the news, prison has probably prepared me for a much tougher world.

Since prisoners can be easily subjected to behavior modification, I have never understood why we are not offered options, such as natural disaster jobs, marine corps and hazard duty jobs. I know we have rights but some of us could get staff recommendations and are truly fit for weird but decent paying jobs. I could easily work at a morgue, slaughter house or as a boxing manager, without batting an eyelash.