

"Thump Therapy"

When I returned to the county jail from court after receiving the Death Penalty a guard asked if I needed a cigarette? No, I said, I'm Good. He said maybe I should start. I was saving smoking for when things got real bad.

Guards, not yet elevated to the status of Correctional Officer (C/O), were called HACKS (Hillbilly Asshole Carrying Keys) or Turnkey, self explanatory or Roller (for the police cars the real cops rolled in) or 6-5 (never understood that one) or Five-Oh (after Hawaii), .

1975, 44 years ago, the two and a half years I spent on Death Row in one of the most repressive and violent prisons in the country, were still not enough to get me to smoke.

Death Row (always capitalized) was located in a wing of the prison that was also used as the hole. There were many suicides, not of Death Row prisoners, rather Prison Activists, Jail-House Lawyers and Trouble Makers.(always capitalized) These individuals had a habit of hanging themselves a day or two before there were scheduled to be released or transferred. Some squirted lighter fluid on themselves while hanging with their hands secured behind their backs. The trick was to light the fire. Most likely they were smokers. We watched from our Death Row cells through the window. Later someone

would always ask, quietly, so as not to draw unwanted attention: Do you need a square?

Cigarettes were called squares for the shape of the pack. TM's for Taylor Made's, Cadillacs were name brand TM's. A Box was a carton of squares. Cardinal was the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Corrections' Penal Industries brand of "bug dust" also called Red Bird or just Bird, it was given away free. Bird was packaged at another prison in the mattress factory. Stale, dry, reclaimed tobacco was stuffed into waxed paper pouches after the good stuff was stolen. Chewing tobacco was the same dust with gallons of black strap molasses mixed in. The bug outs or mental patients got free store bought tobacco, they are Federally Funded.

Friday nights after the shift supervisors went home, some of us participated in "thump therapy". This is when the HACKS with nothing better to do would start a confrontation with a prisoner, then pull the man from his cell and beat the shit out of him with their PR-24's (24-inches/24-OZ clubs) the sound was a satisfying thump. One guard used his personal and cherished Louisville Slugger which provided a more satisfying, resonating thump. When the man returned from the infirmary, someone would, quietly, so as not to draw attention, ask if he needed a square?

After ten years and a U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning Ohio's

Death Penalty, I was transferred to a minimum security prison. I had ten more years to do before I would be eligible for parole. Still no need to smoke. Just before I was to see the Parole Board, (always capitalized) Ohio changed its law mostly eliminating the need for the Parole Board. This did not sit well with them. At my hearing I received twenty more years. Securing their jobs for at least that long. I was told I was lucky. Others received 30 or 40 years. Before the law changed most Death Row Prisoners were released, at thier Parole Hearing, none had re-offended.

When I returned from my hearing someone offered me a cigarette, no thanks, I'm good; Then when I finally understood that the Parole Board just sentenced me to Death-by-Prison, (always capitalized), I was not good and haven't been since. First chance I bought a pipe and a big can of Captain Black pipe tobacco. I had just turned a corner.

Years later the prison system, in an effort to modernize, with mock concern for our health, put in place a heart healthy diet. They replaced prison grown beef and pork with store bought chicken and turkey innards and by-products and then banned tobacco. Black market cigarettes were soon \$150 a pack. Many new shiny Ford F-150's, (always capitalized) were seen in the parking lot.

A friend of mine was pissed because he was doing life and read that every ten cigarettes smoked took a day of his life. He felt he was

just sentenced to 15 more years. He was working towards a goal and they just moved it further away. I told him he was full of shit. At that time I really didn't understand. Now I do, too well, There is nothing left to offer. I am now in a private prison slash warehouse, corporate managed by the Morton Salt people for profit (make no mistake, state run prisons are also run for profit) named the North Central Correctional Complex. Lowest common denominator prison.

I am wondering, when does the punishment stop? It should stop at some point. Some of the Lifers should at least ask that question. But they are too tired. So am I. No outside help or interest. Just time. The corporate guards are paid next to nothing. Corporate profit comes not by better management, it comes from paying workers next to nothing in a right-to-work state where they can be fired at will. I noticed some older Ford F-150's in the parking lot.

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