

"OHIO PRISON LEGENDS"

A legend is either a person, story or both. There are few prison legends now. The computer has fact checked and time has faded them out of existence. Stories about the "old days" are met with disbelief and derision. The rest were beat down. Those few prisoners who stand out, stand for something, those who rebel, use their minds to fight in the court of law or public opinion, or inconvenience, are obliterated. Their friends are crushed for good measure. No organized or individual dissent or brilliance will be tolerated. The state will not tolerate asymmetrical resistance. Their stories are erased.

These lessons and stories were used to teach and warn. A member of the family that feels loved will imitate those that show them love and understanding. They will absorb those lessons no matter how warped they may be. This is precisely why attempts by the state to rehabilitate fail. The state does not love.

In the past prison tales were cautionary, informative and sometimes entertaining. Staff have their own legends. A Chillicothe guard was making a mail run and discovered a prisoner stowed away in the back of the mail van. The guard pulled the van into the sally port of a nearby prison. Another guard, later promoted to Major, handcuffed and shackled a prisoner who had been dead for two (2) days for the ride to the Coroner's Office, because you never know. Now the legends are about creative writing, the twenty something guards, now called, Correctional Officers, strive to write better more devastating conduct reports. Embellished, copied and pasted from previous successful attempts, sharing methods, all to be sure the prisoner loses his chance of early release.

"BOXIN' BETTY"

Boxin' Betty. Everyone was told about him, even on the streets, by the ex-cons to youngsters they wanted to scare straight. When you got to jail you hoped he was somewhere else. Boxin' Betty or "T" as he was called if you weren't stupid, was known in his younger days to ask, politely, to suck your dick and if you refused, knock you the fuck out and take it. As he got older he apparently found other reliable sources and was a protector of last resort.

I saw him at 70 years old, back up six guards at the Toledo Correctional Facility, that wanted to take a shot at hurting him so they would have something to brag about and maybe become legends. They would have but, not the kind they had in mind. Even those six idiots did not, really, after all, want to try him. After that "T" lived in peace until he was released.

"JOE HIGNITE"

The second prison legend I met was Joe Hignite. He was a shot caller at the maximum security Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio. On his word any number of hyper-violent white boys would stab you full of holes. I didn't know this at the time when one of his flunkies came to the electronics shop where I worked and told me that I better tell my boss to inspect Hignites' TV so he can get it right away. I told the dude he would get it when it got done and screw him and Joe Hignite. Some friends intervened so I still have only my original holes. I found out later they prided themselves in being able to get at least 30 holes poked in a victim before the guards came.

Hignite was a piece of shit. When a file cabinet was moved

out of the Deputy Warden's office, paperwork was found containing statements Hignite gave to the Ohio Highway Patrol concerning drugs, murder and assorted crimes at the prison. Included was the identity of the guard who brought in the pistol that was used to murder another guard. I had copies made and sent them all over the joint. A few days later Hignite was shipped out of state. The Deputy Warden most likely put the statements in the cabinet to be found. The cabinet was empty except for them and Hignite was a liability.

"JB, JOE BRINKS"

JB, Joe Brinks or Jew Boy, he answered to all three. Called by the newspapers "The Mayor of Lucasville". His crew drove a loaded Brinks truck right off the Brinks Terminal lot in Cleveland. Got \$2.5 million. Got caught. The money got away. JB got to Lucasville and shortly had a new Cadillac dropped off in the employees parking lot with the keys in it. JB put out the word that if any hillbilly wanted to "act right" he would produce the title. One did.

JB was given a job outside the maximum security prison driving a little green tractor delivering food to the guard towers. His real job was to pick up packages of dope, whiskey and dirty pictures and bring it into the prison. JB wasn't searched because he also supplied bags of "Big Babies" triple cheeseburgers, invented by another prison legend King James. The guards big bellies were called: "State Tumors".

JB made money for everyone, He had a big box of gold under his bunk from buying gold rings, necklaces and fillings for dope, whiskey and dirty pictures. He would have a

portion of the gold dropped off to the man who was keeping his \$2.5. The guards could, at a discount, buy some to be made into gold teeth and fillings, for an additional fee, at the prison dental clinic. Lucasville had the largest percentage of hillbillies in the country with gold teeth.

In JB's later years, which is remarkable to say, because according to him, he was dying daily for 30 years, he would pay a couple young boys to rub his feet. One boy each. the Parole Board finally gave up asking him where the money was and let him go. JB immediately regained his health, bought a black Cadillac Escalade with gold spinners and sent in a photo wearing a big smile. I guess the hillbillies acted right.

"THE 22 CALIBER KILLER"

One of my first cellmates was the "22 Caliber Killer", Thadeaus Lewingdon. He and his brother Gary terrorized the Columbus, Ohio area killing nine people. The police never determined the reason but, Thadeaus did tell me. A genuine serial killer who was a mild mannered, quiet, fifty plus year old little man. If you were searching a crowd for a killer, he would be the first one dismissed. Most prisoners recognized him from the news coverage and were correctly terrified. I was 23 and didn't know better.

Chuck as he was called, kept his maggot ass brother Gary, as he called him, locked in protective custody for almost twenty years until Chuck died. Chuck wanted the top bunk, he said it would be easier for him to kill any asshole who came into the cell uninvited. I took the bottom, I was 23 and didn't know better. A year later after I moved to the honor cellblock, Chuck

tried to escape. This story was also never fully told. Chuck and a young man worked on the steam lines and heating system in the prison tunnels. Chuck's civilian boss, a licensed power plant engineer, was by all accounts a paranoid schizophrenic. He accused the Chief Engineer, his boss, of having helicopters follow him around and causing his son to wet the bed. Being a good union member, there was little to be done, so he was told to work inside the prison, away from the power plant, in the tunnels of the maximum security prison. Someone else's problem.

The tunnel originally ran from the prison to the power plant outside the fence a quarter mile away. The state had poured a concrete wall to block the access. The integrity of the wall was to be checked visually once per shift and recorded in a log. It wasn't.

Chuck and his coworker tied up the engineer and stashed him in the electric chair equipment room and started to beat down the wall. On the half hour Chuck would make the engineer call Central Control and report that all was well. They didn't get through the wall on the first day. Chuck untied the engineer and informed him that people were watching his family and to keep his mouth shut. He did.

The second morning the engineer was sitting in the prison lobby by the time-clock when the warden asked him why he was not at work? He said he was afraid. The warden told him to go to work or quit. He went to work. The second day was a repeat of the first. The engineer went home, did not say a word, or at least one that was believed. The next morning, again in the lobby, this time he told the warden that the prisoners tie him up at work. The warden

put Chuck and his coworker in the hole. The guards never checked out the story. Never walked down to inspect the wall. Chuck and his co-worker were released back into the wild. Waiting the next day to go to work when the engineer saw them, he screamed and ran out of the front gate. The wall was checked. Chuck was almost through the wall. On a hill behind the power plant a motorcycle was found that Chuck arranged to be hidden for the getaway.

Nothing was reported to the news.

When I was on Death Row about three years before Chucks' attempt, there was a actual escape. The prisoner crawled under the rear gate where the mud had washed away. The prison, located in a valley, made it impossible to get away and he was caught a couple days later. Guards hid him in the bucket of the prison cherry picker truck and snuck the escapee back in though the same rear gate used as his exit. He was "found" inside the prison, having indeed not escaped. Another walked out the front doors in a guard uniform he took from the prison cleaners where he worked. Got out, didn't know what to do and just went across the road and sat down until they noticed him. Again nothing in the news.

"GEMINI"

Some people are legends only because of their unique situation. The people are legends but, they are not unique.

Gemini was a young male prostitute, convicted of killing a trick. He found his way to Lucasville. Everyone in prison has heard the following story, the story is as common as it is true. Gemini was soon "turned out" and auctioned

off in the cellblock dayroom to cover his "mans'" poker debts. Gemini was one of many, he was most memorable because he was treated the worst. It worked like this, someone would buy him, rent him or just take him from his current owner. He would be moved into the new owners' cell or into the cell of one of the prison "girls" for safekeeping and further training. Gemini would have to do anything he was told to or anybody. You might find him turning tricks in the shower, or cleaning cells naked or doing laundry to get money for his man.

Gemini was obligated to sit behind his man at the dayroom poker table for hours while the game was going on. He would ask his man for permission to use the restroom or was sent running to get coffee, food or turn a trick if ordered. If his man was loosing, Gemini would be put up as collateral. Much discussion would ensue as to the monetary value to assign to a worn out punk.

Often there would be an impromptu auction in the dayroom. If Gemini was to be sold outside the cellblock a more organized, advertised auction, would be held in the gym. It was common to have more than one boy for sale or trade at a time. There was a lucrative business ran by the "real" prison girls, that were well paid to turn out the young boys and instruct them in the finer points of prison sex and hygiene. If the punk was trained by a "star" girl he would be worth more. Reputations were at stake and the girls were paid as consultants before the bidding began.

You would find Gemini in his prison panties standing on a table turning or bending over as instructed, while the bidding went on. One can only imagine what was going through his mind. Of course it was a festival atmosphere, with shouted comments and arguments about the nasty ho'

with the blown out ass. Gemini was both, that is why he was auctioned off more often. That's why he is a legend of sort.

I ran into Gemini again about thirty years later at the Marion Correctional Honor Dorm. I hardly recognized him. He smelled because he was afraid to shower. He collected anything of value and hoarded it. He was also innocent of the crime for which he was convicted. His codefendant killed the "victim" while he was raping Gemini all those years ago. No prostitution was involved. The Toledo Blade did an investigation, not mentioning its role in the original conviction, this caught the Parole Boards' attention. Gemini was paroled into an alien world. The state took the cowards way out, they did not take Gemini to court, proclaim his innocence and give him restitution for the years spent in prison. They just kicked him out. Now he is where he should have been all along, free. I wonder if he is able to take a shower.

"KELLY CHAPMAN & PEARLY WILSON"

These are convicts. Not offenders, inmates or residents, one step up from prisoner. They started the Law Library at S.O.C.F. in Lucasville, Ohio, the replacement for the Old Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, where if you got caught with legal papers other than your sentencing entry, your head got cracked by the "Goon Squad". Before long through donations and forcing the State to do the right thing, they had ample legal books, research material, typewriters and trained workers. And more valuable, they had respect.

When I was on death Row fighting for my life, they arranged for a runner to visit the Row three time a day, dropping off legal books and answering our questions. It was dangerous for them to visit the Row, because that area

had the most violent and sadistic guards. They came anyway, seven days a week.

A few years after the prison was opened as the first "Correctional" and "Rehabilitation" based new prison in the country, the State did what it always does, stopped all pretence of rehabilitation and ordered double celling. The prison was specifically built for single cell occupancy. Lucasville, quickly turned into one of the most violent prison in the country. Stabbings, rapes and murder were a daily occurrence. There was no real punishment for these crimes. The State would not prosecute in outside court. The hole was always full of prisoners who had pissed off or inconvenienced staff. There was little extra room. The State did not care if a prisoner raped or killed another prisoner, they felt if it happened more often the world would be a better place.

"Chapman versus Rhodes" was the name of the case. A landmark Federal prison conditions lawsuit. I helped in a small way, calculating the square footage of prisoner living space. Kelly and Pearly won a Restraining Order, requiring the State to revert to single occupancy celling. The violence went from insanity to quiet and tranquil overnight. Kelly and Pearly won again, on their own, in the Federal Appeals Court after the State appealed.

The State appealed again, to the U.S. Supreme Court. The ACLU and others took over the case. Too important for prisoners to handle. Let the Big Dogs handle this, you were lucky to get this far. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed and wrote one of the worst prisoner rights decisions, ever. The ruling was devastating. The Big Dogs did not really understand how prisons worked. The State lawyers did. The Big Dogs were too arrogant to ask. I was

working in the Warden's office when his secretary rushed in to tell him, "We Won!" The Warden said, "I don't think so". The Warden knew how prisons worked. The Warden ran the "Goon Squad" at the Old Ohio Pen years before.

The overcrowding and violence culminated in the Easter, 1993 Lucasville Riot that killed eleven. Now finally the prison is single celled again. I lost track of Kelly. Pearly ended up in a small prison near Nelsonville, Ohio called Hocking. It was a converted tuberculosis hospital, not fit for human habitation. Pearly filed a successful prison conditions lawsuit, "Wilson versus Seiter". The State lost and renovated the prison. They don't make convicts like that anymore and if they did, the last place they would be allowed to work is the prison Law Library. The State has learned its lesson well.

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