

"MY FIRST WEEK OF RELATIVE FREEDOM"

"RELEASE FROM OHIO'S DEATH ROW"

Soon after my release from Death Row I went to L-5 Cell Block, at the infamous Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio, 80 cells, 160 men, two per cell, twice the number of prisoners the facility was built to accommodate, safely. The State does not concerning itself with, "safely". L-5 was mostly maintenance workers. I knew a few people there from the free world, members of the Iron Coffins MC and was invited to socialize in the day-room. This was the first time in almost three years that I was not in solitary confinement, under threat of death. Now I was locked in a day-room with about 40 strangers.

I had heard and witnessed the insane violence of the prison from the relative safety of my Death Row cell for years, so in the day-room I watched everyone. We sat in the corner with our backs against the wall, proper prison etiquette. How can anything be worse than Death Row?

There was a tall feminine looking young man sitting across from a very short older man who was hitting the tall man with a leather belt on the legs, over and over as they sit across from one another on metal folding chairs. No one paid them any attention to them. They did not speak but, they were nonetheless communicating. The rhythm got faster and louder. With no warning that I could determine, I saw the younger man go to the exit door and stand with his back against the wall. Proper good sense prison etiquette. My next sight was of a large shiny knife going through the tall mans' left shoulder, hitting the subway tiled wall with a clink.

I was fixated on the shiny big knife, who had a shiny knife in prison? I didn't see the short man. That's all, no shouting,

nothing, quiet. Blood streamed off the tall mans' pointing finger and made a puddle on the floor. The guard opened the door and let the tall man run down the hallway until he collapsed. The guards' daily amusement had just begun. How did the guard know when to open the door? He didn't seem the least surprised by what he saw. He just stepped aside, and shook his head with amusement. Later, I found out he most likely was told by the short man and gave the okay for him to "handle his business".

Many guards then entered the day-room, ordered us to stand against the walls and stripped searched us. The guards tore up the day-room looking for the knife. They looked outside the windows on the ground, smashed the day-room TV that was on a shelf in the corner. Pissed, they tore the covers off the radiators but, did not find the knife. The danger from the knife had passed and a far greater and more volatile situation evolved as the guards got more frustrated.

The guards couldn't find the knife, in a sealed room and were by definition outsmarted by a bunch of maggot ass convicts. Nothing's more dangerous than a group of pissed off hillbillies with clubs. No one thankfully, laughed. I was told later that the short man's new punk hid the knife up his ass. This evoked thoughts of how, exactly, this was accomplished. I suppose I hadn't seen everything. This was the beginning of a new world. I had missed so much even though I was paying attention. I didn't see what I was looking at and didn't understand what I saw. These lessons never stop and I am constantly amazed.

"MY FIRST PRISON JOB IN RELATIVE FREEDOM"

"COOL HAND IDIOT"

I was on 24-hour call to fix broken telephones and electrical equipment in the prison. Suddenly, there was a rash of broken

phones. These were the old type with a dial instead of buttons. Industrial strength. The phones were broken due to the guards' revised game of "Thump Therapy". This classic game was played using carefully selected prisoners, usually those on Death Row or in the High Security cell blocks. Those prisoners that have limited outside contacts, at least until they have time to heal.

Now that game is centered on one man, [REDACTED]. He would not bow down or give an inch, Cool Hand Luke style and he paid with his head. They would beat him with their clubs until one guard added an innovation to the game: busting a telephone over his head. Desk phones would have to come to him, while wall mounted phones would require his head to be transported to them.

I would be called to replace the broken phones after the game had concluded. The first two or three, I assume were due to vandalism. Guards would routinely break phones so they would not have to make their hourly security call ins and get a few extra hours nap time. Then I ran into one that was bloody. I was later told the guards had determined [REDACTED]'s head was so hard it would take, only, two or three wacks before serious damage was done to the telephone. During the game [REDACTED] would tell the guards: "is that all you bitches got?". Never said he was smart, just hard headed.

They would hog tie him and drag him down and up the stairs, bouncing his head on each step, then down the hall to the prison infirmary. The nurse would certify that he needed to be transported to an outside hospital. A good four hours overtime for the guards that did the damage. It don't get much better than this. [REDACTED]'s trip in the prison ambulance to the Portsmouth Receiving Hospital, went down the bumpy country roads, with a 12-gauge Remington pump shotgun stuck in his mouth with instructions not to say anything at the hospital. The

preceding was just a game, had he said anything he would most surely die. [REDACTED] was eventually released and later got caught with a carload of automatic weapons. Don't know if the Fed's play "Thump Therapy". Never said he was smart, just hard headed.

"THE FIRST MURDER IN RELATIVE FREEDOM"

"TRYING TO GET SOME SUN & AIR"

So much has happened, I almost forgot this one. A friend and I tried to go to the yard for the first time, not knowing what to expect. We hadn't had much fresh air or sun for months and that alone will make you do stupid things, like go to the prison yard. There was a small mud room with a door on the far wall leading outside. It struck me that the doors opened from the inside out. Just like any school gym, we were locked out, not in. Not like you would expect at a maximum security prison. Were we in the wrong place? Maybe this is where the guards go out. Shit, what now? By going out those doors we would be locked outside and could not come back in.

We were looking at the coats hanging on hooks around the room, didn't know if they belonged to somebody or if they were clean and should we take one. Had to be cold outside. Then we saw, through the small windows in the exit doors, a man running around the corner of the gym heading in our direction chased by two dudes that were stabbing him. We froze when he ran straight into the closed doors, hard to be finished off. Blood smeared on the windows left no doubt as to what we just saw.

All we had to do was open the door and maybe he would have lived. And we could have died in the process. We didn't open the doors, we just turned around and walked away, trying not to run. The coats did not seem important. Did the killers see us? If we had opened the door, how to let the dude in and keep the other

two out? What if the dude getting stabbed, deserved to get stabbed? Then we would be messing with the rules of prison Karma.

Later we went with the last one, adding that most likely the dead dude had touched one of the killers kids and they were getting even. That made us feel better. We did the right thing after all. Back to our immediate worries, what if the guards made us turn around and continue back to the yard, not letting us go back to our cells? What then? Should we tell what we saw? We would be sure to get killed then. If the guards remembered us in the hall way, they would know we were at the murder scene. We just got off Death Row, that wouldn't look good.

If the guards stopped us we were screwed. But, hillbillies being hillbillies, they were talking about hunting dogs as we went by. We got lucky, again. We walked down the longest hallway ever. We didn't know it at the time, the guards could not have cared less who killed dude or anyone else, just as long as they were not disturbed unless it led to overtime. All we were trying to do was get some sun and air. It got complicated. This was one of my first lessons, that even something very simple in prison can cost you your life. We had got as far as the door to the yard, at least we now know how to get that far.

Should we try to get our own knife, just in case? Do we need one or two? Who should carry it? We just got off Death Row, that wouldn't look good. Dead would look worse. We couldn't ask if anyone saw us. Who could we ask? Maybe we could ask around and see if anyone knows what happened? Just asking could get us killed. This was like a flow chart with every arrow ending at: Killed!

What about the dead dudes friends, never thought about that, maybe they are pissed that we didn't help? At least they were

all white, we don't have to worry about that racial shit. But, there are different kinds of white, and cities come into play too. I hope my friend keeps his mouth shut. All this happened before lunch, maybe going to lunch will be easier. Didn't know it at the time, that I would still be asking these questions 41 years later and that so much has happened that I almost forgot about this incident. It seemed so important at the time.

Richard W. Arterberry #A146-762
North Central Correctional Complex
P.O. Box 1812 (NCCC)
Marion, Ohio 43301-1812