

Judge

The sound of Judge's fist on the old man's jaw was like a slab of meat slamming onto the concrete floor. There was a lot of blood. Judge was the very big black man in the corner bunk in the South wing of Bravo Unit. His voice and presence took up all the space in the wing. Judge was the self-appointed police of the dorm. Old man Anderson was a white sex offender who rolled around in his wheelchair in a mental fog. You might remark, "that really narrows it down".

Anderson had wheeled himself through the hallway while Judge was mopping it - during a move. Judge dressed him down in his blaring voice. Anderson may or may not have made a remark. In any event, after a minute, Judge followed Anderson to his bunk, hauled back, and knocked him out of his wheelchair. Broke his jaw. Anderson left a trail of blood as he crawled to the unit office for help.

Judge was two weeks from completing RDAP to get a year off his sentence and just weeks from going home. He was one of the black guys who liked to taunt me with the name "Bernie Madoff". I kept telling him my name was Arnie and he could call me that or Fischman. In any event, Judge went to the SHU - Special Housing Unit - the hole. As did Anderson, after he got out of the hospital. Standard policy for both parties to an altercation. Standard policy for assaulting a disabled prisoner is five years added to your sentence and being shipped out to a Medium.

Judge was tight with some of the black cops. To our astonishment, he was back in his old spot in B Unit after just a month. And allowed to go back into RDAP. It was said that the Warden approved it. We never saw Anderson again.

Judge returned from the SHU all contrition, sporting a wooden crucifix around his neck and speaking in a temporarily softer voice. For a while, he stopped calling me Bernie Madoff. He began attending, and incoherently dominating, the Bible study circle that meets nightly in the lobby before count. But it was not long before his voice was booming again and he was back to taunting me.

He also came out of the SHU with a violently, body and soul shaking, uncontrollable cough. Ceaseless and frightening. He kept going to Medical, but it got worse and worse. One afternoon he collapsed by his bunk and was carried off on a stretcher. By that evening, Judge was dead.

We never found out what happened to Anderson.

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