

It was a dimension of my life that was unforeseen. It furnished me with thoughts I never would have considered or experienced the lasting nature of. The rising sun had broken through the heavy gray winter storm clouds. Brisk winds high above the ground opened the hole in the clouds wider and forcefully began to usher the grayness away to another place. I found myself upon a small rise, my eyes drinking in the virgin scenery of the heavy snow atop what was once a cow pasture. As far as my eye could see tall straw colored grasses casting fading shadows were bent in contorted shapes under the weight of the fresh snow. There was a forest bordering the eastern side of the pasture and a road way off in the distance running at the farthest reach that would intermittently alight when a vehicle crossed upon it.

*Surely it must be well over a hundred acres I thought.* There was a muffled quality, a natural silencing of ambient sound by the snowfall. A gentle whisper of a hushed wind was in my ears. Small twisting cyclones of snow rose above the fields as crystalline particles spun upward getting caught in the emerging sunlight and exposed in naked nature.

The morning sunlight held a unique quality that would illuminate flaws and imperfections. Michelangelo Buonarroti would inspect marble he sought to carve in the morning sunlight. It alone held the greatest utility for revealing flaws inside the stone he found. The sound of my heavy boots signaled my advance to the point where I stood at the apex of the rise. When my step became silent I felt the sun's rays upon my face with a tinge of warmth. Standing quietly I discovered a truly grand moment worthy of a penitent in ecclesiastical reflection. I became insignificant under the illuminating splendor that was gathering momentum over the snow covered fields. It became a symphony rising up into a crescendo as the movement expanded the frequency of light penetrating the dark shadows and displacing the residual night. It was true darkness can not stand in the light.



The brightening sun expanded over the sky and brilliantly reflected off the snow. The sound of steps arriving behind me became audible drawing closer. It was my good friend Miguel making his way.

"Whatcha doing?" He asked, the haze of his breath flowing with his words as he spoke.

"This is the first sunrise I have seen in 28 years where there isn't a wall or a fence around the sun."

My statement produced a long uninterrupted silence. The gravity of my words united in the realization and splendor of a numinous moment. Heaven provided a unique gift in nature, no two sunrise were alike. The experience in conjunction with the ruling human condition of servitude and never being cognizant that prison did indeed confine the sunrise through established parameters, that in part being the subjugation of all by walls and fences, gave Miguel pause for reflection.

Miguel pulled up the zipper on his dark green insulated jumpsuit. I wore one also. His silence was maintained by a countenance of reverence for the mindful moment and the progression of thoughts it developed. The wind and the sounds heralding its movement became lively, moving snow across the ground in drifts and lofting it into the air like a shamanistic ritual offering tribute via the cardinal points. The wind always follows the sun. It was an immutable law, convection displaces cooler air manifesting the movement of the winds. The sound of a new footfall stir closer. It was Jose. He too wore a dark green insulated jumpsuit.

"What's up?" He asked, allowing his thick brow to arch in a questioning air.

"Greek is watching the sunrise. The first sunrise he has seen in 28 years without a wall or a fence around the sun." Said Miguel with his eyes still facing east as he spoke.



"Heavy Duty!" Responded Jose who turned to focus on the rising sun, a wide smile joyously visiting his face. The sequence of revelation became established in his mind. The density of his thoughts expanded. It became part of his human condition of servitude inside a profound new revelation allowing him to reflect on the road he traveled, his triumphs, and the failures that allowed him to witness such an event.

I looked out over the great distances before me. I was not accustomed to looking out over great distances without an unobstructed view unless I looked upon the sky, or distant trees covering ubiquitous mountains of New York State as I have moved around the state at times for different reasons. The windows of a prison bus or van, in their different constructs had been the only frames for my real pictures of the outside world.

The fields below me became level after a gradual, then abrupt decline, like a flight of broken steps. Those fields once gave nourishment to black and white Holsteins who provided fresh milk to many prisoners. I remember the milk tasted of onion grass the cows would sometimes eat. Nothing was better than whole milk in the morning. The State of New York shut down the farms and one percent milk arrived. *They told us it was better for us, healthier.* It was just watered down whole milk if you ask me.

More footsteps arrived making a wider path around the side of the grounds squad building. It was Antwone, his street name was Black. His jumpsuit was worn a lighter shade of green. Jose quickly informed him of the circumstance. Black removed his green knit hat, leaving his green hood to cover his head. His mind formulated his own original thoughts as he too smiled while his eyes studied the rising sun.

Black stood on the end of the rise lost inside his own ruminations. He had seen many seasons as a member of the grounds squad. He never considered what he just learned about the sunrise being subject to a legal sanction.



There was a new footfall drawing closer in measured steps. It was our boss Corrections Officer Van. With hushed tones and a manner that conveyed respect for the moment Black explained the dimensions of life being realized; with the simplicity of the first sunrise Greek had seen in 28 years without a wall or a fence around it. Feeling speaks with the most power when it lowers its voice.

C.O. Van thought about the urgency in the words Antwone had spoken and witnessed a group of men standing in a line with humility, exhibiting reverence for an unfettered sunrise free from self-imposed restrictions.

No one spoke, each captivated in his thoughts while having respect for a coworker who left society at the age of nineteen and now for the first time in 28 years deliberated on the significance of a sunrise that was free. This was an uncommon display demonstrated by an uncommon group of men shielded away from society above large fields located a quarter of a mile away from the prison building.

We were members of the prison grounds crew. It was 2010 and my first winter storm as a member of the crew. I experienced labor in the late evening darkness free from the familiar restraints which were a known quality of my life. The New York State Department of Corrections afforded us a long moment to consider what it was like to gain an aspect of our former freedom, before our personal falls, and to see the rising sun in the early morning cold while discovering a revelation that fortified our humanity.

The new sunrise gave me a different view of life than what I had known. I found blessings in an epiphany, one of a handful over the years, and I thought of the consequences of my actions in my life with the many contrasts. I had fostered abject pain and sadness in my past and the inner sadness I possessed always remained, never diminishing, only growing more aware with maturity. That moment standing on rise watching a clear sunrise with the grounds squad will remain transfixed in time.