

## The Prison Library

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I've always loved libraries, and can recount every one I've been in. From my first recollections of going to a library while living in Los Angeles, California, where I checked out my first book, "Where The Wild Things Are", to my regular childhood visits to East Branch Library, in Wilson, North Carolina, and the huge library I spent a lot of time doing research while at Western Carolina University. To me, libraries are a refuge; a place of refreshing.

Oddly, it's the same here, in the prison library, here at USP Tucson. The library here is part of the Education department, but I'm focusing only on the library. It's a brightly-lit room, maybe 50 feet across, maybe 70 feet wide on the sides. With 20 ceiling lights, it's pretty bright, and it has 10 writing tables, seating 8 people each, on round, black, metal chairs that can be quite uncomfortable if you're on it too long.

The walls are painted beautifully on one side with a giant mural of several National Parks, starting with depictions of Ruby Beach, on the Washington coast, on the furthest left side of the wall. From there it flows seamlessly into Grand Canyon National Park, then into Yellow<sup>stone</sup> National Park, then Rocky Mountain National Park. The artwork here is truly amazing; the mountains look almost perfect; the mural is about 10 feet high; you might almost feel like you can step right into the majestic scene.

From Rocky Mountain National Park, the mural flows into General Grant National Park, to finally on the furthest right of the wall, Boston Light, on Little Brewster Island. The depictions are post-card like, in vibrant colors. An absolutely beautiful masterpiece.

I remember the guy who did it, about 2 or 3 years ago. He did an incredible job, and the work adds so much character to the library. A 70-foot mural, running the length of the room, can't be cheap.

Along the bottom of the walls, on all 4 sides, is a painted stone wall, with various colors of odd-sized stones like beige, peach (or flesh), marigold, auburn and other earth tones. The room looks much more vibrant, more inviting, with these art works about the room.

Along one side, by the large windows of the library, are 5 large blue-painted tables, for typewriters. These tables have access to the wall outlets, so those with typewriters can plug them in. There is only 20 typewriters available to the 1200+ inmates, made worse after USP Tucson took out all the word processors, forcing inmates to race for typewriters- but that's another essay.

On the other 3 sides of the library sit about a dozen flat-screened monitors, about 12-14 inches each, mounted on the walls. These are for guys wanting to watch videos, from Nat GEO vids to

old Food Network shows to even travel vids (my fav). I treat myself often by spending an evening watching a travel video on Japan, or on Greece, or Ireland. Travel vids are the most popular genre here, but likely the most popular vids are the Michael Jordan videos. The older guys watch it and glorify their idol, reliving those "good ole' days".

The prison library here is used for numerous purposes; legal, educational, and social. Legally, many guys come to type up legal documents in hopes to get back to court, after finding fundamental issues that their so-called Public Defender failed to bring up...

...I don't get it; if a person with NO legal experience (and for many here, a very limited education), can find fundamental flaws in their case, why couldn't an attorney, with years (or decades) of experience, do the same? It's like me taking court against LeBron James in his prime, spotting him 10 points, and beating him in a game of 21! That's NEVER supposed to happen!

So, you got guys in here, fighting for their lives, to get back to court to correct and clear errors, some intentional, that the court made. These guys spend their time researching, typing and cursing the prosecutor, the judge and the Public Defender, who all work together not so much to do justice, but to facilitate a conviction...

But THAT is also another essay.

Guys also come to the prison library for educational purposes. There is an education department- I will not say it is beneficial. Being brutal for a moment, I believe USP Tucson has some of the most heartless, over-paid so-called "educators" I've ever seen.

Now that's extreme, but hear me out; I have a college degree; a B.S. in Radio/Television, I minored in journalism, made the Dean's List several times. I also taught GED class after I graduated from college, all this long before I came to prison. So, I do have some respect of what education, and GOOD educators, can do. They don't give up on their students.

This place does.

While one staff member is too busy on Facebook to care about her class, the other threatens her class to show up- or else. Morale is pitifully low, and very little incentives. Nearly every teacher delegates to an inmate tutor, who spends about 90% of the time teaching the class. But when inspections come, they break the sound barrier getting to class to pretend to be teaching.

Now, I will not say every teacher is like Lolth, the Queen of Spiders from the Abyss... but sometimes...

So, there are those who come for classes, like GED, Custodial Maintenance, and other classes. But others come to take self-study classes. Simply put, you go check out a video that's listed in the

Self-study courses. You watch the video and answer the questions on a test, and 'viola, you earn a certificate!

It might be a 4-part series from "Ace of Cakes", or a two-part on Mayan temples from Nat GEO, or any subject for that matter. Many guys rack up many certificates, proving that they are "programming", or as the prison sees it, "doing the will of the prison".

I'd like to argue that... but not here. Maybe another essay.

The third group of people who come to the prison library come for social reasons; simply put, to hang out. Some come because it's cooler (or warmer) than being outside. As I write this, it is July 7th, 2019; summer in Tucson, where it reaches 100+ regularly. So, many guys come to the library, hook up with a couple of friends and chill out. I come mainly to try to type out my essays (of which is now over 200), or watch a travel vid- one of my favs is one on Central Japan. I've seen it over 50 times... honest!

But I also come to type legal documents for guys who can't type. I have to charge them though, because using the typewriter means you have to supply the paper, ribbon and correction tape if you're not indigent...

That means if you get \$6.00 or more in a MONTH, you can't get free ribbon or correction tape. You see how silly this is? It implies that if you have a prison job paying \$7.00 a month, then you could afford to buy ribbon and correction tape... but the ribbon itself is \$8.60; the correction tape is \$12.20! How are you supposed to buy that with \$7 a month?? Ugh, another essay...

Anyway, I often type for others, and they pay me in stamps, so I can mail my essays out. Not necessarily social, but hey, it's prison.

Another form of "social" is one I'll tread lightly on... one USP Tucson can frown all they want, but it happens- homosexual relationships.

Trust me when I say this- this is a complicated subject, but I share this part to say that socially, many gay inmates meet here to talk and hang out. It happens all over the yard, especially with the influx of transgenders coming here, but it is what it is. I believe in the "live and let live" idea. I really don't care too much what a person does, as long as it doesn't affect how we all do our time.

For example, I don't drink; only a few beers and a wine cooler while I was in college. That's it. Never, ever did drugs, never smoked anything. But even though I don't like it, guys here do. If a guy wants to pop pills, I don't like it, but it's his life. But when his actions disrupt the normal flow of the prison- like getting into a fight over a debt- it affects my time, because we could get put on a lockdown, or have our cells shaken down. Then, it gets personal.

So, while I don't care about some social issues- because I can't tell another inmate what to do, I take it personal when their actions affects us all. So, guys meeting in the library to hook up don't bother me, even gay couples. Hey, it's their life, and in the past few years, I've met many cool gays and even trans-genders. Hey, we've all got to live with eachother, we might as well try to get along.

So, the library is the place where a lot of agendas are put to task. Whether a guy's researching on Ineffective Assistance of Counsel on an appeal to the courts to get his 290 months sentence reduced to 100 months, or a guy going to his GED class (while the teacher is in the office on Facebook), or a guy watching a video on construction of bridges, or two gay guys talking about private matters...

Or ME typing an essay on prison issues...

Anyway, the prison library, to me, is an exciting place to be. I hold no punches in how terrible the education department is, and I am not lacking in proof or experiences, but they do not deter me from going to this place of refuge and imagination. It's funny, when I hear some guys say, "I hate this library" I wonder why, but I guess they have their reasons.

For one, those doing legal work are exhausted on an almost endless toil to comb through volumes of legal cases, only to submit it to a court that will sidestep the issues just to make you work harder to get the fairness you should have gotten before you were sentenced...

Again, another essay, but surely you can understand the frustration. But, as I sit here in the library, I balance the good with the bad, finding positives to try to be constructive. So, whether I'm working on legal work, watching a video or whatever, I've always found that the library- regardless of where it is- gives me some level of comfort and refuge, a venue to relax and be refreshed by this realm that allows for creativity and imagination, which indeeds helps me in difficult time such as doing time.

Until next time, I'll keep writing my essays. Feel free to write me and ask on any subjects I have written, currently over 200 essays.