"The Transition" by James M. Valdez #0096879

I was living in Medium Custody for years and a couple of months ago, I was told that I would have to move to a Maximum security prison. I didn't even get a major write up. I did receive a general write up for fighting and when I did see the Sanctioning Officers, I was looking at a Major write up for Assault and Battery on another prisoner. When I saw the Sanctioning officers whom were 2 Sargeants, They told me, "You plead guilty to a General write up for fighting, we'll kick you back to the yard (General Population) either today or tomorrow!" As of right then, I was in the Hole for 30 days awaiting this disciplinary hearing.

On the day of the disciplinary hearing, I did not go anywhere, so I had assumed that I would be going back to the yard to try and start fresh and planning to work again earning a small wage. The waiting game would probably take 6-9 months until I could get a job again. 90 days in Level 3, then 90 days in Level 2, and then possibly I could work once I got to Level 1, but most likely another 90 days till a position opened up. But you can't work if you even have the smallest of write-ups. Which in my opinion, you should be able to work anytime unless you get a major write up. A guard could write you up for having a clothesline put up in your cell hanging your wet laundry on it and the place sells laundry detergent on the Canteen list. You can't work because you fail to follow Rules and Regulations?! I get written up because I don't wanna send my clothes to the laundry on the account my laundry bag gets misplaced or my clothes come back dirtier than when I sent them or that I just don't wanna have smelly clothes lying around my living area? There's gotta be some discretion. But sometimes, if not most - situations handed to me are unfair in my mind.

So it's the day after my hearing and I've been up early and I'm packing up my things thinking that I'll be told to, "Roll up your things - You're going back to the yard!" I've been staring at the ceiling on a naked mattress

for hours. 11:15 am count passes and hoping that when the count clears, I'll be told what unit I have to walk and move to. It's about 1 pm and the Swing shift C.O.'s are at work. One of the guys has a clipboard with printed names and cell numbers. By the time he comes to me at the back of the hallway of my wing, he asks, "Valdez? - That's you? - You wanna see the Caseworker for your 30 day review?" I tell him, "Yeah! - I'm supposed to be gone by now. Don't tell me he never even submitted my paperwork?!"

There were a few other guys that saw the Caseworker before me. And those guys yelled to me out their doors to tell me what happened to them. They told me they were getting kicked out back to the yard around dinner time. A couple of the guys were involved in the same fight as me and they are my friends. So I thought that my fate to be the same and nothing serious. So I had to get cuffed with my hands behind my back and get escorted to the Caseworker's office that was in the center of the triple winged unit. Once I sat down in front of the Caseworker's desk with the C.O. escorting me standing up behind me, the Caseworker asks, "What's up?! - What do you wanna know?" I tell him, "I saw my results for my disciplinary hearing. I wanna know if I can get back to the yard today. The Sargeants told me to plead guilty for a General Fighting write up and that I'd be able to get back to the yard yesterday or today at the latest." He asked me for my last name and I.D. number. So once he pulls my file, he's staring at his monitor. He tells me, "You can't go back to the yard. You're on Maximum Custody now. Your Security points are too high because of the fight." I have to ask him to explain this to me because I was told I was gonna go back to the yard right away.

He tells me there's 2 types of points to Classify my housing. He says, "there's regular yard points and there's your security points. Based on the kind of crime you were charged with (Murder Case), you're always gonna have 8 security points. To be on any Medium Security yard in this state, you cannot go over 10 security points. Because of the fight, your points went

to 11 security points - 1 over the maximum points allowed to be on a Medium Security Yard. Your paperwork was submitted for you to be shipped out to Ely State Prison. That is the only Maximum Custody yard in the state of Nevada where we can put you."

All of this is sinking in and I ask him, "So I'm over one freakin' point?! - You telling me I gotta go to Ely because I went over 1 point? I can't be housed in the Hole here till the points drop down? That's a waste of taxpayers money to transport me up there and for me to come back here or another Medium security yard in a few months." He then adds in, "But you're put on Maximum Custody. In us doing this, You'll have to be housed at Ely for 5 years no matter what and only if you stay out of trouble for 5 years then you can get back to a medium security yard." I'm so angry because of the answers I got from him. So once I get out of the office, the escorting C.O. tells me, "That sucks. Your other buddies get to go back to the yard and the guy you guys beat up, owed all the other races money for dope debts. You shouldn't get what you got. Kinda bullshit." Once I got back to my cell, the guard uncuffed me through the door slot. He closed the flap and left.

My neighbor was one of my buddies who got told he could go back to the yard at dinner time. He pounded on the vent above his sink. I jumped on the top of my sink and asked him, "What's up?" through the vent that connected our rooms. He asked me, "What happened?" I tell him what I got told and he can't believe it because he thinks whatever charges he got sentenced to measures up to the same as what I got sentenced to - which is not the case. I had wrote a note (kite) to my friends and told them that for this call, it was not worth getting 3 people sent to the Hole for one guy that was going home in a few weeks. I also told them that I had to go to Ely State Prison (Maximum Security) and could not go or stay anywhere else.

I would later find out that I was not suppossed to "jump" (or get involved) because I had a job waiting for me to work in the Canteen

department. I had good referals from other inmates that when I worked up in the Kitchen as a cook or a baker at High Desert State Prison or at Southern Desert Correctional Center, that I was a hard worker and busted my ass when I was working, so the Canteen Supervisor kept me in mind. I just had to wait a few more weeks, but this fight happened and I was caught up in it.

So two of my buddies that were also involved got to go back to the yard and I'd wait in the Hole till I got transported. Another month would go by and a C.O. came down my wing to ask me, "You got a 30 day review. You wanna see the Caseworker?" I said, "Yeah." The guard told me to get ready. He came back in like 5 minutes and he cuffed my hands. With my hands behind my back, I would get escorted to the Caseworker's office, but now there were two Caseworkers. The one that I never ever seen on the yard was the other Caseworker's superior. Now this Caseworker asks, "So? - What do you wanna know?" I ask him, "What is my status on going to Ely State Prison?" He says, "You are approved." - as he looks at the monitor with my last name and inmate I.D. number. I still ask, "I can't stay here for twelve months or at High Desert State Prison for my points to drop? Really, it's a wasted transport." He tells me, "Your Security points are 14. You're on Max Custody. It'll take 5 years without any trouble up in Ely before you can transfer to any Medium Security yard." I ask him, "Will I be able to work up there or will I have to be housed in the Hole the whole time I'm there?" He says, "It all depends on the Caseworkers up there if you're elligible. I don't ask him where they added another 3 security points from last month, but I assumed they looked at my file and then added the 3 extra points for gang activity and that my file has me listed as part of a ~~Sy~~ Security Threat Group - STG. But they could've just added the 3 extra points to justify the trans-port. Who knows? They know.

Almost another month would go by. I have just found out that one of

my friends had killed someone at Ely State Prison. Now I'm thinking, "How does this all play out when I go up there? Am I walking into a Train Wreck about to happen? Hope all my homies from my group are okay." Once I just found out, the guards were serving some dinner and told me, "Property just sent all your unauthorized stuff you can't have here in this unit. I think you're leaving tomorrow. You're on my transport list."

After dinner was served, I started to pack up my things. I could have 2 Fire Retardant Cardboard boxes that I could take with me on the transport. One was only to be used for "Legal Work" and the other box I could use for my property. I had an old property form that showed what property items I had inventoried from the property room when I got transported to the Hole from the fight. I began folding all my clothes in order to the form and all the property items I had waiting in order, for I thought I had to inventory my things thru the door slot with an officer. I unhooked my T.V. and plastic fan and just laid on a naked mattress listening to my MP3 player. It was 9 pm and one of the guards told me, "Hey! - You're leaving tomorrow! You ready?! (He looked in my cell and saw that I had everything ready to be inventoried in order) I'll be back in half an hour."

The half hour had passed, but another guard had come by. He asked, "You ready?!" (He saw I was ready to inventory my things) I said, "Yeah. I got everything ready to go thru the slot." He told me, "I'm just gonna open your door. Bring all your property up front." My door opened and I didn't need to get cuffed or nothing. He did this because he knew I was never a problem on the yard and that I used to work in the kitchen and that the fight thing was just an internal thing amongst inmates in the same group that needed one of them to get off the yard for his bullshit. I had to make a few trips back and forth from my cell at the end of the wing to the very front entrance of the 3 winged unit.

Once I was ready, I gave him a list on a piece of writing paper

that said how many items I had according to what item started first to the last on the "Nevada Department of Corrections Inmate Inventory Transfer" form. He gave me a triple bagged bag of my property that the property room sent for my transfer. Those were items that I couldn't have in the Hole to their standards on Southern Desert Correctional Center's yard. I had my hot pot, a couple bags of Maxwell House Instant Coffee, a honey bun, a bottle of Pepsi, Razorless Shave Cream, a couple bottles of Lotion, Ajax dishwashing liquid, a norelco shaver, and a couple of nail clippers. Somewhere along the line, I would add those to my Transfer list. It did take way faster - that I had my own inventory list to match the Transfer list. It took about 20 minutes to inventory and repack my things and to put tags and box tape on my appliances and boxes while others would've took nearly an hour without their own inventory list to match the Transfer list.

The last time I got transfered, it was 2 years ago going from one Medium Security Prison to another Medium Security prison which was a 5-10 minute drive. And on that time I wore my blue velcro belt and my Timex Ironman Watch. I went back to my cell with my boxers, thermal bottoms, thermal top, state blue pants, state blue shirt, my watch, my belt, 2 pairs of socks on to reduce the pain from the shakles to be put on, and a pair of sneakers. I never listed my belt or my watch on my Transfer slip because I had it on me.

It was about 10 pm and I turned my lights off in my cell. I could not sleep no matter how hard I tried. I kept tossing and turning. I kept forcing myself to piss and shit the whole night. It would be about 5:30 am. The C.O.'s served me breakfast (grits, fried eggs, 2 sausage links, potato wedges, and a coffee cake with crumble top) and a sack lunch (bologna, cheese, 2 pieces of bread, mustard, mayo, celery sticks, and a peanut butter squeezable). I just ate the sausage, fried eggs, potato wedges, and grits. I put the coffee cake in the sack lunch because I thought that I had to take it with me.

I kept on trying to piss and shit because it was gonna be a 5 hour

drive to a six hour drive from Indian Springs, Nevada to Ely, Nevada. Before a lot of guys went back to sleep after chow, they told me, "You take care up there, James." I told them that I would and for them to "Take Care" also. A guy that I've known ever since I was locked up from 2004 was a wing porter in my wing. He's been locked up since 2002. He was talking to me in front of my door at 8 am. The guards told him to go in his cell because I was leaving. He put his fist against the glass and I put my fist to fist bump him on the glass as well. He said, "I see you later, James. If not, I see you in Hell." He began laughing silly and smiling. I said, "I hope not in Hell. Maybe outside one day, huh?" He began walking back to his cell and he began saying, "They taking my buddy, man. I knew him since 2004. He a good guy." It was depressing because my Mexican friend was always happy and upbeat and funny when I interacted with him.

The guards came and put belly chains and hand cuffs on me. They let me out of my cell and told me I couldn't take my sack lunch with me. I grabbed it and gave it to my Mexican friend who was the porter to give away to whoever he wanted. He said, "Alright, James!" I told him "Alright, then. I see you later - maybe." One of the guards told me to get on a small flatbed car and to sit on its bench. He put the seatbelt on me and strapped me in. A woman C.O. drove and the other guard sat on the passenger seat. They drove me on graveled roads about 3/4 of a mile and then like 30 yards of asphalt and concrete to get right in front of the property room. They checked me in to the transport officers that were driving to Ely. So I had to strip out and one of the guards said, "Hey, man! - You can't take your belt or watch with you any time you get transported! I can write you up for this!" I said, "I didn't know. I took my belt and watch with me the last time I got transported. My watch is on my property card, but not on my transfer sheet." He was cool with me though. He said, "I tell you what. I'll put your belt and watch in your property bag. Just remember don't do it again next time you

get transported, alright?!" I told him, "I apologize. I'll remember next time. Thank you!" After I was done getting stripped out, I was put in one of 3 holding cages awaiting transport. They were all full. One was going to the Parole and Probation Office in Las Vegas. The other two cages were riding with me. The other cage were Minimum Security Inmates. My cage were Maximum Security inmates. We all made small talk for nearly 2 hours. The Bus ~~was~~ had to gather a lot of inmates at High Desert State Prison up the road. Once the bus was loaded with the inmates' property from Southern Desert Correctional Center, a C.O. started calling inmate last names. We had to yell our I.D. numbers to the C.O. once he called our last names. Once we went out the door, it was cold and pouring rain. We walked about 20 feet to the steps of the transport bus.

Once I got to the top of the stairs, I was handed a sack lunch that was ice cold. So I'm in belly chains, handcuffs, and shakles. I try to look around if I recognize anyone I know since I've been locked up for 15 years. At first, I don't. I'm just trying to find an open seat. I walk to the very back where all the Maximum security and campers who are minimum security are sitting. The bus is also sectioned off. In the middle of the bus, there's a cage to the right where there's a "red tagged" gang member from a White gang. And to the left, was just left over space for guys who couldn't fit in the back section where I was. An announcement was made. "For all you guys who just got on, there was a fight on the bus before we got here. You guys can't stand up to look where you're at out the windows or try to move around and stand up talking to other guys in the aisles. You guys only can get up to go use the restroom or to get water out the water cooler. That's the only movement you guys get."

The seats never had ~~and~~ any cushioning and were very hard plastic. I started to get nauseous. There was the smell of stale car freshner, the body odor of sweat and bodies that never showered in days. People from the last stop already ate from their sack lunches and they threw their bags on the floor. I could smell the aroma of spoilled pink slime meat and the phomaldahyde liquid

preservative it sat in. I wanted to puke right then and I almost shit myself. My stomach was acting up. Then I began to have a migraine headache from the different unpleasant aromas.

The bus ride was insane. Even though the bus had big tires, it felt like sitting in a pick up bed in a dropped low rider hitting speed bumps constantly. Any time the bus tried to get on a sharp turn off ramp, I almost slid off of my chair and fell into the aisle. So many times I tried to close my eyes, but once I was about to pass out, we'd hit a big bump, or I'd slide off the chair a little, or somebody was trying to walk down the aisle past my shoulder to get to the rest room in the back or trying to get water up front. There were a couple of times that the guy sitting next to me had to grab my forearm from preventing me from sliding off the seat we were sitting on. Then there were guys yelling out noises for no reason and talking all crazy shit degrading women.

We had to stop at a gas station probably doing like 200 or so miles on our journey. Once the bus started rolling, the guards got the red tagged White dude out his cage and made an announcement, "All you guys - Do not move while we take this guy to the restroom! You guys try to get in the aisle, She's gonna shoot you!" (She - meaning a gunner in the back in an elevated podium) Everyone was quiet and complied. Once the guy was done, I recognized the dude because I played poker with him in a couple of units at Southern Desert Correctional Center. So the guards escort this White guy back, but somebody in the aisle hits the dude with a small little kick. The White guy hits him (another white dude) back with a shot without any power from his hand. As the 2 guards grab him, the Gunner fires a shot from her gun. The guy gets hit in the back and the guards open the cage and push him really hard into it and slam the door shut and lock it.

The gunner lady calls the other white guy, "Hey! - Come back to the back! Give me your I.D.!" Bumpy, roady, roady roads and sharp turns. I'm really getting motion sickness. We hit another 80 miles and we stop at a Fire Camp in Pioche, Nevada. We drop off and pick up a couple of people.

The guard is telling the gunner lady, "This guy's not gonna get any yard time for a month at him being at camp! Fuck that! I almost got shot!" He was talking about the guy who got his I.D. taken. He was getting dropped off at Ely Camp - a Minimum Security Facility - our next stop from Pioche.

It would take another 45 minutes and we dropped that guy off. I'm hoping I wouldn't puke or shit my pants until I got to my cell at Ely State Prison. My head's rocking and my stomach's acting up some more. From Ely's camp to its Maximum facility, it took about another 20 minutes. We had to go on gravelled road and they took us to a loading dock for the prison's intake area. I was the 4th one off the bus. Once I told the guard my Inmate I.D. number, a couple of Black suited guards grabbed my arm on each side and escorted me into the building. They opened a holding cell and I had to face the wall. They took off my restraints but I had to put my hands over my head. Then I had to take off my clothing one by one and hand it back to a guard so he could check if I had any contraband in my clothes. They told me to put my clothes back on and they slammed the door shut on me.

By now, I felt better. Probably from just getting off of that shaky and smelly bus. 5 minutes would go by and a couple more different guards came to see me. This was a gang unit. They came to photograph my tattooes. So I had to strip out again and give them a wiff of my boxers that smelled of sweaty butt crack from the ride and funky toe jams from sweaty socks sitting in older sneakers for about 8 hours. So once they photographed my 2 ~~tattoes~~ tattooes, they said I could put on my clothes once they left the cell and closed the door on me.

I would wait 10 minutes and was seen by a Classification lady. She asked who I ran with and who I housed with and if I was a validated gang member. I gave her my answers and then was asked by a doctor questions if I had any medical problems or ~~psy~~ psychological mental health problems. The mental health questions were odd because one of the questions were, "Do

you have excessive sexual urges?" I told him, "No." After all the questions were done, the Classification lady gave a guard an Orientation Handbook with the unit number and cell number marked on it. That's where I was going.

The guard gave me a laundry bag to put behind my cuffed hands. It had some sheets, a wool blanket, a spork, and a plastic cup without a handle in it. Since I didn't have a belt on me, my pants were falling down to my knees. As the guard had his hand wrapped around my arm, I told him, "My pants are falling down, can you help me to get a finger to hook around a belt hole?" He helped me, but it looked awkward - like hella gay. We were in the dark and cold. We talked a bit on the way to the unit I was going to about how I got screwed into being put on Maximum custody. He gave the senior officer working my I.D. card to check me into the unit. The Senior officer told the guard to take me to my cell. The guard just told me, "You just gotta try to stay out of trouble." I went into the cell. The cell door closed and I put my cuffed hands out the door slot to get unhooked. Once that was done, the guard left.

As I'm in my cell, another guy tells me, "Go talk to your neighbor!" I don't know what he's talking about. I'm trying to talk to the speaker to talk to another neighbor. So finally, I see a soapdish wish some string attached to it come into my door. I'm talking to the guy from under my door. I find out that the 4 rooms that surround my cell are all from my click. But my neighbor wants to know why I'm here and he wants my P.S.I. (Pre-Sentencing Investigation) report. I tell him on a kite what happened at Southern Desert Correctional Center a few months back and tell him how long I've been locked up. I also tell him, "When I get my property, I can give you my paperwork. I understand - but you just gotta wait." My neighbor sends the note for all my homies to look at. As of right then and there, I don't know who I just wrote to and I don't know what all these guys look like. He tells me that my other homies all got red tagged today because they are all validated gang members wanted by the other gang because of my other homie killing their

homie. The other gang wants some type of payback. I get another note saying that the guards are gonna open like 12 cells in the morning and it's a split on the 2 gangs involved in the killing. So I'm just thinking, "Damn, this ain't good. I just got sent here for this?"

The set up was way different than I thought would happen. The guards let 6 cells out at a time. So 12 guys out at a time. Not 12 cells at a time. When my door was open, I saw all my homies by face come out on the tier with me. We all shook hands and hugged. I recognized a few of them and they knew of me or met me before in the past. It was 2 in the afternoon. But only 9 of us were on the tier. I wanted to shower, but I didn't have any shower shoes yet. I asked a homie who I thought ran the unit for us if I could borrow a pair of shower shoes. He told an older guy than me, "Hey! - Let James use your shower shoes!" The dude was cool with it. I hopped in and out the shower and put his shower shoes on one of the unit's table's chairs. I tried to use the unit kiosk to check my account ~~batac~~ balance, but I could not access it yet - for I haven't been in the prison for even 24 hours. ~~yet~~.

So I told a few stories of people on the yard at Southern Desert Correctional Center who ran with us and asked about other homies at the camps or other prisons. Some of them were crossed out or went home. But eventually the hour was gone and we had to lock down. One of my homies asked, "You need soup and coffee?" I was shame, so I said, "I'm good." But my homie knew I wasn't good yet - and I was respected amongst other members of my click, so he just grabbed 3 soups and put it in my cell and put some coffee in a plastic bag and shot it to me in a few minutes under my door.

I slept all the way thru the night and it was soon Friday. We had breakfast and lunch served. The guards let 6 cells out from 8am - 9am and stopped after that. They had to serve people write ups. So nothing went on. I went back to sleep. It was about 1:30 pm. My neighbor was knocking hella

loud by the wall's electrical outlet. He said, "James! - Your property's here! Look out your door!" I went to my door and a C.O. had a wooden cart on wheels with 2 of my cardboard Fire Retardant boxes and 2 big plastic bags of property. He opened the tray slot and asked me my last name and Back #. (Back # meaning I.D. number) Once I gave them those, he handed me my clear plastic 13 inch flat screen T.V. thru the slot and told me that a plastic trash can, 2 nail clippers, and 4 plastic hangers were not authorized property - so I had to sign a paper to destroy them. I asked about my watch and belt and he said they were in there. The C.O. turned around with a big bag of food that wasn't mine. I was surely hoping he was gonna hand that to me too.

After the C.O. left, I could hear a bunch of doors opening upstairs. I could see a few guys using the phone downstairs and guys walking around the tier. Then all I hear is 2 guys cussing each other out with the "N" word and hear blows getting thrown. I figure I just go about my business organizing my property in my cell. But I can still hear 2 guys swearing at each other. I don't know if any of them is getting stabbed though. The front door of the unit can't open and there's like 20 guards in the Sally port. The guys on the tier are on their stomachs because they got told to. The guard in the bubble is shooting rounds out of his gun at the guys, but I don't know if anybody's getting hurt. Now it gets crazy. The guards outside are telling the guys on the tier to cuff up by the door one at a time. A couple of them get out, but then one of the white guys on the tier who's heavy set hits a tall Black guy in his face. They're about to throw down, but the Black guy don't wanna get hit by any bullets. The sliding door finally opens. Guards grabbing all the guys on the tier out the unit. They all get cuffed. The rest of the guards go upstairs with shields and guns. They spray whoever upstairs is fighting with this new MK9 Sabre Red Oxioresin pepper spray. But I don't think anybody died. There's a security camera black ball hanging in the unit so it might have different

footage to what I explained. It's already Monday — I heard this unit's gonna be on lockdown for a long time. So that is my transition from the Medium Custody yard I "was" housed at to the Maximum Custody yard that I am "now" housed at. — Written November 25th, 2019 (Monday)