

My Time in Prison

My expectations entering prison were largely formed by T.V., movies, and the off-hand remarks of an ex-con. Because I was 39 I believed I knew much about the world, and thus, life behind bars. My impressions weren't all wrong; some were spot on. Like how inmates are little different from correctional officers^(CO.) and staff. Inmates committed crime and are punished. C.O.s commit crimes, too, but escape punishment. That's the distinction between us.

While at the diagnostic center, a roomful of men and I stood nude undergoing an invasive strip search. A female staff member, non-CO, saunters by - taking in the view of naked male body parts including bare buttocks and exposed ~~male~~ genitalia. Some inmates grumbled with embarrassment. The CO retorted, "Sue us." Another blatant indignity but not necessarily criminal act occurred one frigid morning while awaiting a medical evaluation. We inmates were ordered to remove our coats, hats, gloves while medical staff and guards retained all their cold weather gear. Criminal? No, just good old mean-spiritedness. A clear distinction separates us legally but not behaviorally.

At my first camp, a senior staff member menacingly announced, "I don't care what they did (there), you're at Potosi now!" She was right. ~~Some~~ ^{Established} rules and policies did not apply. Inmate rights would soon be flaunted. In fact, her veiled threat turned out to be prophetic. Soon, I was assaulted by guards and placed in administrative segregation. Their criminal behavior continued and I was charged (~~over~~ ^{over})

with assaulting a guard - a felony. I languished in Ad-seg for more than a year. Fortunately, the local prosecutor actually viewed the video of the alleged assault and declined to prosecute. Yet I remained in the hole due to the bogus assault charge. Moreover, the false charge ~~is~~ ^{still} remains on my prison record.

During transfer to another camp, I was strip searched. As the male CO conducted the search a female CO entered the ~~room~~ ^{wing} and comments, "I didn't want to see that!" Angered and chagrined I attempted to cover myself. Rather than lash out I decided to file a complaint. I ^{gathered} a couple inmate witness statements (the incident occurred in a wing of approx. 30 inmates) along with ~~the~~ required inmate grievance form and submitted it. As is typical, my grievance disappeared. No record of it exists. I filed another amended complaint but it was denied for timeliness; - 14 days had passed since the alleged misconduct and thus my claims were barred. COs commit crimes but ~~dodge~~ accountability and punishment.

Three different prisons - all with serious misconduct and ^{alleged} crimes - yet the "blue wall" covers up, denies, collaborates, and is complicit. From entry-level COs to the warden and all staff in between, there is a systemic effort to willfully abuse inmates, deprive inmates of ~~their~~ ^{our} rights, property, and oftentimes our lives. My experience is not unusual. We inmates are victims of public indifference and neglect. Prison officials violate with impunity.

The camp where I now reside is distinguished from the others by the preponderance of female personnel. It's as if ^{current} mantra dictated that a female-led prison would be "better." It is not. A person with typically longer hair, makeup, and painted nails can lie, obfuscate, and abuse as well as any male. The generally (Next)

softer voice means nothing when your rights are being trampled. The generally shorter stature and perfume mean zilch when you're the victim of excessive force or outright assault. The feminine mystique fails when you realize she's just a person with the same flaws, attributes, and limitations as anyone else. A ~~law enforcement~~ ^{corrections employed} female, period.

Mandatory pesticide spraying is imposed at this camp. They spray outside and in our cells. Due to the fact that we inmates eat, sleep, and carry out bodily functions in our cells, we should be informed on any chemicals that could cause harm. I asked the technician what chemical(s) are used. He didn't know (or say) and referred me to his boss. I sent a kite. It went unanswered for days, then weeks. I asked a caseworker who claimed no knowledge of the chemical(s). Finally, I saw the boss so I asked him personally. He basically said it was none of my business. I filed a ~~grievance~~ ^{complaint} in hopes of finding out what chemicals are sprayed around my bunk, locker (food) and sink (water). Complaint denied. Grievance denied. Finally, the warden responded and she denied my claim, too.