

Elderly Abuse in Prisons

In the early eighties, the Ohio Department of Corrections turned an old T.B. hospital in Nelsonville Ohio into a prison designed to house many of the older inmates in Ohio's prison system. Over the next few decades, as one might expect, various rumors floated around the prison system about issues at that facility named Hocking Correctional Facility, one of the latest being various claims of abuse to the older inmates housed there. For the most part being a very small institution of less than 500 inmates and taking up less than two acres, it seemed like a way to get away from the usual problems associated with all of the previous prisons I'd been in since the beginning of my 18 to life sentence back in 2002. In 2013, I procured a transfer to the medium Hocking facility, mainly due to my age of 55 and due to my going over 11 years with only one conduct report. At the time, it seemed like a relatively stress free place to finish out my sentence but, soon after getting settled in at Hocking, I began to witness firsthand the amount of elder abuse that was not only happening there but was seemingly being condoned by the staff and upper administration there. Due to limitations on length of content, I will only list a few of the many examples of the abuse I witnessed but, the majority of these incidents would be considered felonies in the free world.

There was an incident where an 80+ year old gypsy guy I knew, reminded me of the grumpy old men on the Muppets, was exiting the chow hall where several C.O.s were always posted up and when he past them and started down the hallway, one of the C.O.s yelled at him to stop. This guy wore hearing aids and frequently had dead batteries in them since medical made it a chore to get them replaced and obviously did not hear the officer and continued to walk. Let it be noted that there was a chow hall with 60+ inmates talking nearby. This C.O. reached out and grabbed this old guy and slammed him against the wall and screamed at him

for not stopping and when the old guy, not knowing who had just grabbed ^{him} ~~it~~ twisted around to say something, this officer slammed him to the floor and twisted his arms behind his back and cuffed. He then proceeded to pull out two pieces of bread from under his shirt and toss them on the floor. He and another officer then proceeded to drag this old guy down the hall to the hole. I saw him the next day walking around with a sling on. They had fractured his collar bone. This guy had that sling on for many months after that evening, all for two slices of bread which he was given with his meal ^{to take} back to the dorm to make a sandwich later. This type of over aggressive behavior is very common by C.O.s in prisons everywhere. They learn many self-defense techniques in training and many of them walk around like wound up springs just waiting to apply the techniques they've learned. When they do get that chance, their adrenaline takes over and many times minor incidents turn into major ones with serious injuries to inmates and even sometimes staff. In a laid back institution like Hocking, these types of C.O.s have no business being posted there. Similar incidents of this nature were becoming more and more frequent and I was noticing that it seemed there was a certain few officers that were always involved. Most of the old guys at Hocking had been there for decades and were pretty set in their ways. Things they had been doing for years were now being labeled as rule violations. Violent behavior in prisons has become a problem all across the country but, at Hocking it was nonexistent. There should be special training for staff who work around juvenile inmates, women inmates and elderly inmates. Case in point: Hocking had not had a dirty urine test reported in over 20 years yet one morning about 30 inmates were awakened and instructed to report to the first floor for a urine test. The last six inmates tested, all over 70, somehow tested positive. Although staff "knew" there was a screw up somewhere, all six of these old guys were placed in the hole. All of their property packed up by younger inmates who usually pick through these pack-ups and take what they want because the officers don't supervise

properly. I went to the Deputy Warden because my Bunkie was one of the six and tried to plead their case but he said although he knew there had to be a mistake, he had to follow policy and keep them in the hole until the samples were sent to the state lab for further analysis. This would take a week or more and when the results did come back, they were all negative. The psychological trauma of being placed in isolation and ultimately losing most of their property is immense, especially for an elderly person. The mistake that was made was ultimately blamed on the CO doing the urine tests. He didn't give the final six tests long enough to properly react and therefore they showed up positive. The whole incident should have never been allowed to happen. I witnessed many occasions where several of these "rogue CO's would get bored and just walk around and harass several of the older guys by making them leave their bed area so they could completely trash all of their belongings. When they would leave, the old guy would just sit on his bunk dumbfounded as to what he had done wrong. Many time I would help the guy clean up the mess they had made because I felt so sorry for them. I never once saw one of these youngsters even offer to help. I watched an inmate get thoroughly cussed out for pushing an old guy in a wheelchair down the hallway and out to the rec yard. The officer said he had no business pushing that old man around and that if he couldn't push the chair himself, he had no business being in this prison. At one time, there were inmates whose jobs were to do just that; Help inmates who needed assistance such as pushing wheelchairs or setting up oxygen machines or carrying commissary bags and anything else the lass capable might need help with. Now, all of a sudden you were violating some unwritten policy. I was even beginning to see incidents of younger inmates physically shoving older guys out of the way while walking down the hall or going up steps. These elderly inmates were seemingly in the way in a prison that was originally designed just for them.

I also started to notice many of them not going to the rec yard anymore for fear of getting run over by the ever increasing number of younger inmates. This was exercise these old guys vitally needed.

When I began to question staff as to how this kind of abuse is allowed to go unchecked, I was met with many forms of resistance such as, "they're just criminals. Just because they're old doesn't earn them special treatment", or "this has been going on for years: and my favorite was the advice from upper administration to mind my own business; that there was nothing I could do about it. I secretly tried to contact outside agencies such as Health & Human Services in the local area, but it seemed nobody wanted to tangle with the ODRC over prison issues, even flagrant elder abuse. To this day, I don't know if my outgoing queries were intercepted or ignored but it wasn't long before I started feeling the sense of being backed into a corner with nobody but myself interested in dealing with this issue. Early on, the smart inmate learns that minding your own business is the healthy way to do time. Sticking to this ideology has been one of my secrets to staying out of trouble for so many years, but this was not something I could, in good conscience, simply turn my back on. Many of the correctional officers that were being placed at the Hocking facility were there due to disciplinary issues at other prisons in the state. The collective bargaining agreement between the union and the state many years ago made the firing of a CO for legal issues very difficult, so when an officer became too much of a problem where he was, they simply gave him (or her) the option to transfer to another institution to avoid legal ramifications from the particular issues at hand. Hocking became a dumping ground for at least a dozen of these "problem staff members" due in part to the fact that there were none of the usual prison problems at Hocking. No gangs. No fights. No drug issues. No stealing from other inmates. I guess they figured if they couldn't get along at Hocking, they should find a different profession. Let it also be noted that for budget reasons, Hocking was combined with Southern Correctional Institution (Lancaster) about

30 miles away; a predominately younger population with all of the "normal prison issues". Because they were now considered the same institutions, inmates could be transferred back and forth with little to no paperwork. They began sending youngsters with gang issues from Lancaster to Hocking rather than going through the immense amount of red tape to get them classed as PC and transferred to another prison. Wasn't long before the problem Cos combined with the growing number of problem youngsters from SCI widened the scope of various types of abuse being dealt out to the elderly inmates there. As if those two factors weren't enough, due to the latest money saving directive from the Governor of Ohio instilled on the ODRC as a priority for all departments, medical was now becoming another issue. When an entity starts putting saving money ahead of adequate health care, especially when you're dealing with the elderly, bad things begin to happen. I began to not only witness medical issues with the older guys seemingly going unchecked, there were more deaths occurring to men who simply didn't appear to be in that bad of shape. It also became common practice for medical to use psychological medicines which were readily available, in place of the usual minor pain medications which was leaving many of the older guys walking around with that thousand-yard stare without a care in the world. Psychological medications do irreparable damage to the brain, which, in my opinion, if used when absolutely not needed, should also be considered abuse to the extent of malpractice. When an institution such as Hocking, for many years known as the ODRC's best kept secret, is allowed to operate practically unchecked with very little oversight from Central Office begins to run astray from their original mission plan which was to provide a secure institution with the amenities to care for the older inmates in the system with various medical issues etc.; An institution that jokingly was believed to be able to operate without CO's even being present, becomes lost as to that mission plan, nobody wanted to admit that they had a mess on their hands. The older men there, who the prison was

designed for, were now in the way due to the many changes in the ODRC's new mission plan. One of the well-used threats the staff liked to use when one of the old guys would complain of an issue was, "If you don't like it here, you're only a bed move away from going to Lancaster." The thought of being sent to a prison with predominantly youngsters being housed there, scared these old guys to death. Most of these guys had been at Hocking for dozens of years for a multitude of crimes and the thought of being sent to a gang infested prison where anyone older is presumed to be a child molester and have everything they own being taken from them scared them into silence. With the threat of my desire to expose what was going on there increasing, various ploys were tried to quietly get me removed from the prison, but someone of my age with a virtually spotless disciplinary record was not an easy inmate to set up with an issue serious enough to get me transferred without raising suspicion. There was enough of a paper trail at least to show my concerns for what was going on there. They did enlist an inmate soon to be released to assault me to the point that a fight ticket would be enough to at least give them a reason to move me to Lancaster. This inmate resorted into breaking a pool stick over my head in the rec room, producing a gash in my head and breaking my jaw. After multiple video angles showed he did this completely unprovoked by me, he was placed in isolation and I was not. I was later told by a staff member (CO) that this assault was preplanned as a way to get me out of there. He also said he would not testify to this fact, but thought I should be on my guard. Although Hocking was a small prison, I now felt compelled to do something drastic to get the word out on what was going on there. What I decided to do may not have been the smartest decision I've ever made but when you're backed into a corner, rational thinking is not always a luxury available to you. On March 27th, 2016, I escaped from the prison and hid out in Nelsonville for about 30 hours until I knew for sure that the whole public knew I had escaped. I then walked out of hiding and gave myself up. Although over

the next year I turned down four plea deals in order to go to trial; Facing a sure 8 years for a probably guilty verdict, against my attorney's advice, I went to trial with over three hours of testimony prepared. I simply wanted the people of Hocking County to know what was going on there. After the state concluded their case, questioning multiple officers of the incident, my attorney went to the judge and filed a Rule 29, Failure to show jurisdiction. Not one witness could say what county Hocking prison was in. Even though they all worked there, we were in the Hocking County Courthouse and the judge even gave the state a chance to rectify their error yet not one witness would state what county Hocking prison was in. Kind of like asking, "What color is General Custer's white horse?". The judge had no choice but to issue an acquittal and since the escape was my only charge, I was returned to the Ohio State Penitentiary super max prison. The state got its wish in the end. I never got the chance to testify due to their error. Done on purpose? You decide. Most of the inmates were transferred out of Hocking within weeks of my escape and shortly after that, the rest of the inmates were removed and the prison was closed for good. It became well known at O.S.P that I was the inmate that got Hocking prison shut down. The many letters that I got from Hocking inmates verified that fact. Because of my good behavior, I've worked my way back down to a level 4 prison from level 5 O.S.P. Although I was acquitted of the only reason I was raised from a level 1 , I'm now being kept at a level 4 indefinitely because of that escape. I go to the parole board in less than a year for a murder that happened in Cleveland Ohio in which I was involved in a home invasion at my own home. Due to the fact that a undercover Cleveland police officer was involved in that invasion, my whole murder conviction is questionable but when you're provided court appointed counsel, you get what you get. The fact that with a murder conviction I still made it to minimum security in 13 years; secondly, I was free from custody for over 30 hours yet committed no additional crimes should be evidence that I'm

not a violent person that needs to be kept in a maximum security prison. With virtually no oversight though, the prison system in Ohio and throughout this country do pretty much what they want when faced with the threat of a whistle blower willing to endure their retaliatory measures aimed at keeping them quiet. I sleep easy at night knowing those old men are no longer being kept in a place like Hocking prison. Nothing I can do about it huh? I'm sure when I see the parole board in about a year they will gladly give me the 8 years the state failed to give me at the escape trial. As an added note; Quite a few years ago when I first got to Hocking and during an election year, I was watching a segment on a Columbus Ohio news station about the growing number of elderly inmates in the prison system. They were questioning a political candidate and a parole board member on the issue of releasing some of the older inmates to save money on medical costs etc. and one of the issues was where to put inmates with no place to go. One suggestion was to place them in care facilities and the politician said he himself would not want an ex-con in a facility with his loved one. The parole board member said they had been curtailing that very issue by denying paroles to many of the older inmates simply because they "didn't" have any place to go and medical care was considerably less costly in prison than on the outside where the state would still be required to provide care. I could not believe what I'd just heard. He just admitted to denying paroles to qualified inmates for financial reasons? I will agree with him on one thing. With adequate medical care in prison being a thing of the past, I'm sure it is considerably cheaper. Just another form of abuse? Instead of reducing the populations in the prisons, Ohio's answer to saving money is to take away many of the essentials inmates need to survive and stay healthy. They now count on loved ones to provide many things the law requires the state to provide. Again, no oversight.

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