

The permeable insight into
what its like to be a state prisoner
in Pennsylvania during covid-19

by

Harold Sanford Carter III

The way of life for prisoners doing their time has been completely disrupted. All around me is disorder and uncertainty. This covid-19 creature has really screwed up my routine big time here at SCI Huntingdon Prison.

optimistically, I feel safe because of my own precautions.

The mass of air around me is stale but this is the norm even without a world pandemic. Most of the time I sit on a small trash can by the tray slot of my cell door. I have been on lockdown now for about two weeks. Huntingdon Prison is over a hundred years old. The ventilation system stopped working a long time ago in my cell. Still, sometimes I can feel the fresh aired breeze coming from the massive 15 foot tall window across from my cell.

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In some ways I am lucky.

My cell mate has a television. We always watch the news. I have a radio. I often listen to AM radio late into the night. I pick up stations from sometimes four states away. Most Americans have forgotten about AM radio. To me, it's my comfort at midnight. I write a lot to my church. Sometimes I play my acoustic guitar. I read a lot. My cell mate and I have started to work out a little bit. Lots of push ups.

Things are like a normal lockdown for the most part. The only thing that makes it feel unusual is the amount of time we have been locked down.

Conversely, it does become surreal when on the news I hear that staff at my prison have COVID-19. It becomes surreal when you hear echoing through the prison tier that men are dying in prison already at SCI Phoenix.

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What is a burden to people in society is something I have mastered. Boredom is not my burden.

When the COVID-19 lockdown first started our food portions were very small. Enough complaints reached our captors. The rations we get have thus far been generous. Prison guards coming from any post within the institution and inmate block workers serve me my meals.

The officers are often heard walking around. Their keys jingling in echo down the hallways always in laughter with jokes on their tongues. They make light of the situation we endure. After all, we are on lockdown during this pandemic and our captors go home every night.

The underlying psychology of my peers changes from prisoner to prisoner. Some men are sonorous. Others calm and quiet. Let us observe that our prisoner population has a large population of mental illness. This is thanks to the dismemberment of our nation's mental asylums in the last fifty years.

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For the mentally sound. This is a time of uncertainty. How long will this last? If Covid-19 will come to Huntingdon in the night. I do not know.

I got some legal mail earlier today. It was given to me in a make-shift cell turned Sergeants office. The officer who gave it to me had on a home-made mask. I too had a mask that was issued by the Prison. The mask I was wearing is being made by prisoners here at Huntingdon. The institution is making a pretty penny let me tell you. Still, when called into the office I was unsure to be six feet away from the officer. I had to take a computer pen and sign for my legal mail. I got my legal mail and walked myself back to my cell. How many have touched the Pen I remember thinking.

Im in lockdown. However, I see the work lines going to and from work where they make masks, gowns, and anti-bacterial soap. I guess even a world wide pandemic

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cant stop a prison making its money. I would like to say optimistically for a good cause. These labors are needed in the fight against covid-19.

Huntingdon Prison has tried to keep us in groups of ten. This is, I assume to better control a potential outbreak of the malady. This is seen during phone calls, kiosk time, block out time every three days, and outside yard for one hour every three days. To me, the groups of ten directive is counter-productive. A few days ago ten inmates were moved from Housing unit A to Housing unit E. The groups of ten is to enforce the idea of a quarantine. As you can see this movement was a breach. Further institutional infringement upon the quarantine is how the staff serve meals. A staff member is likely to travel to various housing units delivering food. I also witness a variety of staff members on my housing unit daily. Different officers and staff work on my unit every day.

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It is well to quarantine on the institutional level. It seems Huntingdon Prison is attempting this in part with its inmates. Conversely, the movement of staff and officers make the action of quarantine at Huntingdon Prison senseless, if they too, do not become part of the effort to quarantine. Moreover, IN the preliminary stages of a covid-19 outbreak, it would be a correctional officer or a staff member bringing the disease into the institution. - Not a prisoner.

Since the pandemic and my lockdown lifestyle. The cell I live in only has contact with my room-mate and I. It is only a few times a week the officers conduct what is called, "a security check." This is when a prison guard comes into the cell. They step on our prison rug bought from commissary with their state issued boots and check the lights, toilet, sink, and make sure everything is in good working condition. (i.e. touching everything)
I wonder if these checks are

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bringing the covid-19 right into where I sleep. I can only hope that the geographical area of my captors have a small amount of cases of the virus. I can only depend on the Department of corrections to do their job. I can only keep my fingers crossed that a captor of mine is not, "A-systematic".

The old prison routine I'm used to might be gone forever. I get block out for one hour every three days. I get outside yard one hour every three days. I get a shower every other day. one hour a week in the law library.

- Law library. That's a topic. The state of New Hampshire just took my parental rights to my eleven year old daughter. I got four days to appeal to the Supreme court. I got my legal mail late because of the pandemic. The pandemic hopefully is good enough reason to ask for a continuance. To boot, I got a detainer out of Louisiana. I'm up for parole in October. I'm trying to work the detainer out with New Orleans. But didn't New Orleans get hit hard with covid-19? Will they even

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extradite me in a Post time of crisis? The PCRA I filed in Northumberland still hasn't answered. Lastly is my legal battle with the Pennsylvania Department of corrections with their inability to accommodate my faith as a Pagan/Wiccan.

In the past month I've had an hour to spend in a law library. I was told I would start getting an hour every week for now on.

The Huntingdon prisoners who make soap, masks, and gowns all go to work. My job in the institution was to wash pots and pans in the kitchen. I don't get to work anymore. From what I understand I will still get paid my wages for the month. At 19¢ an hour I take home to my cell about a twenty dollar bill. This is important considering I have no financial support from the free world. I do miss my job. A man feels like he is a man when he works. Even in prison. In some ways what's going on in the free world is going on here in prison.

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The only difference is when a prisoner is told to stay home we are obligated to walk into a cell under lock and key. our social distancing is in some ways dictated by our immediate authority. - correctional officers.

I am able to wash my hands with anti-bacterial soap. Because prisoners make it here. I can get plenty of it. When this pandemic first started in the prison it was difficult to get the orange soap that is anti-bacterial. We used to only be able to get the green soap. This color soap is regular soap. This has all changed because Huntington is mass producing the anti-bacterial. This mass production is needed in society and is turning a pretty penny. I am sure.

My cell is very clean. I am offered everything I will ever need to disinfect my cell. IN addition to this. It must be said, on the record, that stepping into a convicts cell is the cleanest place you will find in a prison, this century. Have you ever had to take off your shoes because a friend or relative just

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washed their already brand new living room rug in their spot-less home? This is what it's like to walk into a convicts cell.

Also the disinfecting of communal areas going on here at Huntingdon. At first could a captain be seen spraying the outside recreation yard between yards. As the days become weeks more and more inmates can be seen with these large pump up sprayers of something. I can't tell you with a hundred percent accuracy of what is being sprayed. What I can say is sometimes when they spray it smells very good. I live in a place of sensory deprivation. I know a good smell. — If it's disinfectant I cannot say.

The conclusion of my permeable insight as a prisoner in Pennsylvania during covid-19 rests with my concerns.

No inmate has tested positive thus far at Huntingdon. Why are we lockdown and on quarantine? The disease can only be manifested by a corrections of staff worker. Not by a prisoner!

And with this in mind. Why are prisoners

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Not making and delivering the food?

What about the A-systematic carriers of covid-19? What becomes of a food tray touched by them? At Huntington Prison officers and staff prepare the food.

Moreover, there is movement everywhere concerning the free world people who work at Huntington for eight hour intervals. The focus of the pandemic institutionally, at least at this prison, has been the lockdown and restricted movement of prisoners. Inmates are already quarantined. We were quarantined when the judges gavel fell.

The correctional officers and staff in the future need a better course of action in terms of better ways to join the stagnate movement in this situation. Regarding invasion of potential lethal diseases. Guards and staff are everywhere, doing everything in the prison! To alleviate the potential spreading of covid-19, they should have minimal movement within their posts.

A prisoners movement should NOT be the only factor.

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The covid-19 Pandemic hit the world off-guard. I looked into the DC-ADM index to see if there was a policy to govern such an issue. (i.e. D.O.C, rules & regs)

I found no such policy, actions, or guidelines to follow. Truth is. The entire world didn't see this coming. The entire world is winging it!

I hope this has taught the Pennsylvania Department of corrections to better prepare for such a calamity.

This world wide catastrophe surely has instructed the globe to better ready.

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