

Give Him The Bird

By Shon Pernice

After spending the last three weeks in administrative segregation (also called The Hole), I became immune to the constant yelling, complaining, and cell door banging. Guys would yell out for things like toilet paper, improper treatment, to be let out, and most common: profanities. I can normally block it out, however, what I heard this morning got me off my bunk and to the small rectangular window in my cell door that is secured with a Plexiglas flap. "C.O., get the bird out of my room, cell 581!" echoed throughout the wing.

I have seen the small brownish sparrow in the wing. He will fly throughout this massive area that holds 156 inmates. The front door to the housing unit is normally left open to allow airflow into the stagnant environment. It is the end of May with the Midwestern humidity starting to show its oppression. The birds will accidentally fly in and get stuck in the main rotunda area where the corrections officers (CO's) maintain their authority. At the top of the wall section is a gap to where the trapped birds can find some semi-freedom in one of the four wings of the housing unit. I felt blessed with this little guy because he is fun to watch through my small window and brings something natural into an unnatural environment.

The bird swoops around the wing and lands to find scraps of food on the floor. Some of the men will throw out pieces of bread to help out our winged mascot. At the base of each gray steel cell door is a five-inch gap to allow trash removal, sheet exchange, and to shove the meal tray out when finished. Otherwise, you are locked in the nine by twelve foot cell, 24 hours a day, until released back into the prison general population. This little guy must have landed, hopped under the cell door, and became an unwelcome surprise.



It took the corrections officers about ten minutes to respond to the cries for help. The threat must have been confirmed because the two men in cell 581 were handcuffed and escorted to a holding cell. Their cell door was left open to allow the jailbird to escape. After about 30 minutes, the threat was over and the two tough guys were escorted back to their cell as the entire wing erupted in laughter and verbal pokes of fun.

In my time confined to this behavioral modification area of the prison, this was the first enjoyment that I experienced. The little feathered friend that is a natural part of our Missouri ecosystem, made his way into the cell of a couple of bad boys, and forced them out. For me, it brought a great laugh and a story to tell.