

Prison Parody

A Different Perception of Incarceration

By

Shon Pernice

Prison can be a place that strips you of all happiness. It is not supposed to be an environment that parallels the free world, however, I believe I have found a way to see the good. It basically reflects on how you view the situation. Therefore, the prison parody begins.

The living accommodations will let you relive your childhood with the junior sized bunk beds. Yes, a 45 year old man can still drape a sheet over his bunk, make a fort, and still be cool. All of the 12' by 15' cells come fully furnished with a small table, footlocker, and a stand-up locker for two adult men. There are no arguments over picking out colors or styles; the state has already saved you that dilemma. It is a rent free, gated community that has the best surveillance system in the state. Video cameras are everywhere, to include the bathrooms. The perimeter security fence is sure to thwart any intruder. The 15' high fencing, complete with layers of shiny concertina wire, also has a vibration sensor should some burglar try to use a ladder for entry. I am safe from the outside.

My gym membership will not expire until I am released. I pay no fees or get cornered by personal trainers seeking new clients. There are lines to wait in, and gang members get first choice, but who can complain? I got my workout in today!

As for what is in style and the current fashion trends, you will never hear that "those gray pants or so last season's". I have no decision to make concerning matching or even if something is wrinkled. Faded clothing just means that I have been here a long time, however, it is still in-style.

While the coronavirus is the headline news every day, I thoroughly believe that we are the only community of 1800 people that reached "herd immunity" in less than a year. Everyone got sick at one time or another and the quarantine wing was full for several months. As we watch on the news that new COVID-19 cases are still happening, we have had no new cases in months! Furthermore, while store shelves were running out of toilet paper, my single roll is passed out every Wednesday and Sunday. Although it is not the same quality as Charmin or Quilted Northern, it has the texture that cowboy legend John Wayne would admire because it doesn't take crap off anyone. What an amazing place!

Have you ever had that neighbor that bragged about his 64" flat screen television? He would let you know how great the sound was and boldly describe the crystal clear picture. And,

he would certainly let you know how much he spent on it. Not in here. Our 13" plastic, see-through, flat screen is really not something to shove down your neighbors ego. This is the type of TV that guys will purchase for about \$137.00 and not even take home to the streets. Television bragging rights is not an issue.

If you were ever a fan of the hit TV series MacGyver, guess what, you get to be on the set and see how things are manipulated first hand! For instance, how about turning a double A battery, and a standard staple, into a lighter. Or, the creation of a functioning tattoo gun by using the motor out of a CD player, some batteries, and a bristle from a steel brush for the needle. The homemade ink is created by using the soot from burnt hair grease, alcohol extracted from deodorant, and a homeostatic mixture that a chemistry professor would admire. The handle of a flyswatter is a universal tool to stir boiling spaghetti in a water pitcher. So practical.

The culinary creations, made in the cell, will make Italian chef Emeril say "Bam!". Making a cake by crushing up a 16 oz bag of vanilla wafers in a medium size bowl, adding one can of 7 UP, and microwaving for 10 minutes will get a birthday cake baked and ready in no time. Ramen Noodle soup recipes can be stretched to infinity by adding all sorts of meats, cheeses, crushed chips, mackerel, or anything else on the canteen. It is also a prized choice for making prison pizza crust by crushing up around 10 soups, mixing in finely crushed crackers (any flavor), and adding hot water. Just kneed together in a large chip bag, roll a soda can on top until flat, and tear off the chip bag. Bon appetite!

Speaking of the canteen (grocery store), I just type in my order and pick up my order on Friday. There is no bagging on my end and the green mesh bag is durable and reusable. Such an eco-friendly society! Granted, I haven't heard of grocery bag hold-ups on the news, but in here, just walk fast and no eye contact. You should be able to make it back to your cell with your items.

Relationship issues, divorce, and break-ups are a common occurrence in this environment. When one guys receives a "Dear John" letter, or a phone call home and an unknown male answers, the pain stings us all since we have been there too. However, I can not think of anywhere other than the military, where such a diverse group of men can come together quickly and support the wounded in these types of incidents. The support system will verbally condemn the heartbreaker as we listen to Taylor Swift break-up songs while the tears of misery trickle down our cheeks. You would surely have to have insurance for this type of support group on the outside.

I have not witnessed a car accident in eleven years or have been held up in traffic. While watching the morning news and observing where road construction is, or the major traffic issues, it does not pertain to me. In addition, not having to deal with those darn car insurance premiums, or even renewing a driver's license, is so much less to worry about. The long lines at the DMV are a thing of the past. Although Amber Alerts and Silver Alerts are sad, should someone go

missing in here: lock down. The situation will remedy itself in several hours and the "lost" person's whereabouts will be known in administrative segregation (the hole). There is always a successful conclusion.

When there is a tornado warning and the siren is blaring of impending doom, have you not been sure where to go? It depends on where you live and what options are available. It could be the basement, the bathtub, a ditch, or to the most low-lying space. There is absolutely no confusion here—I go to my cell. No thinking is involved.

For those that have a complexity about self-expression or nudity, prison life will help you get past that. There is no privacy at all. The showers, with four showerheads, no dividers, glass windows, and to include the video cameras pointed in, it will let you experience voyeurism first hand. As the corrections officers walk through the wing, private parts are no longer private. Strip searches are a common event and mandatory before and after visits. The way in which we are forced to come out of our shell and be viewed by strangers naked, I am surprised that there are no brochures for nudist colonies as part of a home plan option?

Conflict resolution is a skill that is practiced almost daily. With a lot of alpha-type males living in such close proximity, the chances of pissing someone off is great. Whether accidentally bumping into someone, having bad breath, saying something that a guy takes the wrong way, or even a stare taken out of context can get you in trouble fast. Being able to avoid a fistfight, or a stabbing, is a crucial talent that can save your life and help you succeed in the outside world. I believe a course like this would cost money on the outside, but in here, it is just part of survival. I never saw this benefit advertised on Court TV.

A matter that can have great potential during my home away from home is the subject of living with another man in a 12-foot by 15-foot cell. We are confined to each other's moods, body odors, music preferences, and television shows for years on end. After five years, I believe that this would constitute a common law marriage regardless of one's sexual preference. I am not exactly sure if the IRS has included that as a qualifier for a tax credit yet, but I do see great merit in the argument!

Prison life can bring a person down and destroy their sense of normalcy in the world. I have discovered that is all in how I view the situation. If I am looking for the bad, I will find it. But if I look at the potential, or how the situation parallels the outside world, I have realized that I am living in a rent free, gated community, that accepts everyone regardless of their age, race, religion, or sexual preferences. I have never heard of the institution turning anyone away that has received permission from the court system to come and stay for a while. They will leave the light on for you!