

①

"Quarantining in Prison" @A&E #60DaysIn by Bryce Huber

I am so grateful to A&E and the 60 Days In producers for spotlighting some of the conditions that incarcerated Americans have dealt with during the last two years of COVID-19.

During the pandemic, I spoke with many of my family and friends about quarantining and COVID conditions in their area. I would hear their complaints and respond with "at least you aren't quarantined in a bathroom!" which is essentially what we had to do as inmates and prisoners.

My first real taste of the pandemic came when I was sent to a different unit to quarantine because my cellmate, who worked in the gym, was considered a close contact of someone else who also worked in the gym that tested positive. An officer came to my cell on a Sunday, while I was watching football, and gave my cellmate and I each a box. He told us that we were being sent to a different unit for quarantine. We could take only what we could fit in the box. I was in that quarantine unit for 16 days and I felt like I was being punished. I got only one shower a week and that was the only time that I ever came out of that cell! No fresh air, no telephone access. Needless to say, it was a long 16 days! ~~It~~ When I was returned to my regular unit, that whole unit was now on quarantine. We came out of our cells for only 20 minutes every three days. So when it was my turn to come out, I would take a quick shower, then make a few five minute phone

(2)

calls, then back to my cell for another 72 hours. Luckily, my cellmate and I got along pretty well, but others were not so lucky. Some people would get tired of being stuck in the same room for days on end with another person that they may, or may not get along with. Cellmates fighting was not unusual. In fact getting into a fight will get you sent to the hole, or solitary confinement, where your conditions may be better than being quarantined. When one is in solitary confinement they will get an hour out of their cell five days a week, plus three showers. While that doesn't seem like much, it was more time out of the cell than being quarantined on mainline. I knew two guys personally who tried to commit suicide because they couldn't take being quarantined any longer. Thankfully, neither attempt succeeded.

Now this is going to sound really crazy, but covid actually helped us prisoners when it comes to certain health and hygiene issues. For instance, pre-pandemic, we were not allowed to keep any kind of cleaning supplies (such as germicidal cleaner or disinfectant spray) in our cell. We are now allowed one spray bottle per cell. Also, in the dayroom, there is a communal sink. Naturally, there should be soap next to the sink so people can wash their hands, right? Wrong! Staff took away the soap dispenser because inmates were filling up tiny, little shampoo and lotion bottles to use in their own cells. I guess this was considered "stealing state property," or something. Well, during the pandemic, we got our soap back!

3

During the worst of the pandemic, the prison system routinely flagged and blocked any outgoing correspondence where prisoners and inmates were exposing our deplorable conditions to the outside world. They wanted to keep everything hidden, like the dirty little secret it was.

I have written all of this, not to complain about our conditions, but to shed light on what Covid was like for me, and other incarcerated individuals. I was watching an episode of 60 Days In, realizing that I was watching the ^{past} two years of my life. My jaw was hanging open and I knew that everything I was watching should of been on the news while it was happening, not on TV now. But as they say, "better late than never." So now you know.