

"X On My Window" by John Johnson

We have a MAJOR shake down in progress. I watch as guards mark an X on my window for reasons unknown. I occupy a 10x6 cell. A stainless steel toilet is situated in the right corner under a steel mirror and small light fixture. Two vents are welded into the wall. The floor is cement, like the concrete outside. It's blue paint has lost life and faded into what appears to be an ocean and land on a globe. Two male guards do open my cell's door, demanding I remove my clothes, starting with the wooden rosary around my neck, and my white t-shirt. "Now, your shorts... your underwear... your socks. Lift up your testicles! Turn around, and show me the bottom of your feet... Squat! Spread your bottom. Now, cough. Cough, AGAIN!"

After replacing my clothes, the guards handcuff me. In maximum security, there are single-man cells. One block (unit) consists of approximately 140 inmates. They escort me outside onto our recreational area ("yard"), and sit me in a chair situated between a row of twenty other incarcerated residents. An hour passes by as the sun showers me with its beautiful rays. The others, handcuffed in chairs beside me chuckle among each other, giggling and cracking jokes as if this is a fun day in the park. I reckon they laugh because they're nervous, and want to avoid dealing with the reality (as many people do under pressure). Or perhaps their "inside" jokes are so funny, they can't help but laugh? But for me, all I can do is think about the enslaved animal I feel like, with steel cuffs cutting off the circulation around my wrist and my arms behind my back, as hateful men in grey and black uniforms watch me with superior smirks. The beautiful green grass under my feet catch my eye. I overhear as a familiar incarcerated neighbor hurls advice out of the row in my direction, "Keep your head up, big homie." Although I am stuck in a state of silence, energy sometimes speak louder than words. He must've read me. His words of encouragement hit home. They make me feel respected and seen in a place of the unrecognized. Thirty minutes later, I am taken back to my cell that has been completely destroyed. My belongings: personal letters, and my family photos are balled up, EVERYTHING from my books and magazines are scattered and tossed across the floor.

But why? Who knows. A cup of coffee I sipped from prior to the invasion is now drenched all over my clothes. The guards slam the cell's steel door so hard, it startles me. I can feel the collision in my toes. I can feel the impact in my soul!

I use my pillow for cushion to sit on my hard plastic trashcan, and attempt to calm my anxiety while I survey the wreckage. I must regather myself, my thoughts, and cool my fiery emotions before I crack. Glancing over at the unprovoked mess they made, for a split second I begin to crumble. I begin to fumble and fold. But as I bawl my eyes and ball my fist, I stop myself from this. Is it worth it? Are tears going to clean up the harassment left all over your floor? Or will they cease the oppression from occurring in the future? Are they going to free you or help you encounter the peace you seek?

Oppressors come to rob me blind of any percentage of joy they can find. They come to steal my dignity and pride as a Man. They wish to break me as they dismantle and paralyze my spirit -- killing off my faith and belief. Things that will not be confiscated so easily. I spend hours reorganizing, cleaning, and salvaging what I can. I start by gathering all my pictures, and I lie them across my bunk. One specifically, (a photo of my 2-year-old son), I spend more time with it, using my fingers to iron out its deep wrinkles and creases, as best I can. I push all my books and magazines into a pile. One-by-one, I stack them in an orderly fashion, and place them back into my locker. I hand-wash the coffee from my clothes, and hang dry them on a line I made that stretches from one side of the cell to the opposite. I sweep, and I mop. Shit, the clean up job I do is actually pretty damn good. If I didn't say anything about it, you wouldn't even know. Perhaps I can even "turn the other cheek," and just forget about it. If it wasn't for the X on my window.

For feedback and collaboration, add me on Jpay!
www.jpaw.com 631054 Michigan (John Johnson)

John Johnson