

"The Prison Environment" by ChangeSomeLaws

There's no reason to describe the daily experience of being incarcerated ~~when~~ in general terms when what's around me this very moment will serve perfectly well to convey the flavor of the place and its culture.

I live in a twelve-man room, which currently has seven occupants due to a (very) few lucky souls getting "compassionate release" due to the Covid-19 pandemic and their medical problems. Right now, at 2:10 PM, one man who has been "down" for thirteen years is taking one of his frequent naps. He's an eighth-grade dropout who and a know-it-all who complains all day about ~~everything~~ everything a person could complain about. Another man, who I think may be schizophrenic (versus a low-functioning autistic spectrum person) just got up.

The room is dark because ^{my} most aggressive roommates believe the fluorescent bulbs that light the room make it warmer. It's June, and those lights give off negligible heat.

In the winter, those same A-types leave the windows open 24/7, with

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an industrial fan blowing and two large ceiling fans spinning around.

I'm writing by the light of a handheld "personal reading light." I need the → low number of batteries I can ^{buy} each month for my radio and the light. The men in my room (at least most of them) sleep until around 11AM — but some of them will nap at any hour — 2PM, 7PM, you name it. And the unspoken rule is that the lights are off at those times, when someone sleeps.

So many of the men around me (around 230 in the unit) have such obvious psychological problems that it's hard not to start believing I "belong" in the group. Every so often, I have to remind myself that I made my living legally up ~~to~~ until I was caught breaking a law — at more than sixty years of age.

I worked hard (in medicine) and gave patients the quality of care I would want for myself. I did not walk around with a hair-trigger temper, ready to take offense at the slightest thing. Most men here are loaded up

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so completely with tattoos (including on the neck and sometimes on the face or scalp) that I have to believe they live for attention; they deliberately have chosen to alienate and/or scare the average person; and they want to signal to other career criminals that they belong — that they are members of the subculture.

One of the craziest "rules" among inmates is that you don't rat someone out. Look, if someone in my building wants to smoke cigarettes, or use a cell, that's their business. I'm not about to tattle on them. But inmates take this rule to an absurd length. If someone chooses to physically attack me (I'm much older than most guys here and not a bodybuilder), I'd have to be crazy to let that go on and not tell the guards.

We have to walk about half a mile to pick up our ready-to-go meals — and if it's raining hard or snowing... guess what?

Did someone say "health care"? Prison is not a place to get sick. I'll spare you the details. These are not "doctors" you would want to go to. Some of them clearly see their inmate-patients

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as the enemy, as worthless people who deserve nothing, medically.

Damn the torpedos, damn the law, you ain't getting the medication, CT scan, crutches, specialty consult that you think you need.

The less said about prison medicine, the better.

If all of the above sounds good to you, then I guess you've got about a year to get here o