

## Evanescence

Isolation. Desolation. Abandonment. Ostracism. Left, to die on the vine. These are just some of the feelings prison evokes. It's a dark and depressing place, with plenty of reasons to retreat to the solitude of our cells and to walk around like zombies with our heads hung low in silent resignation. But it doesn't have to be like this. And sometimes beauty pierces the shadowy veil. You just need to know where to look for it.

I spent two years at a unit located in the Permian Basin, an area of Texas that millions of years ago sat at the bottom of a shallow ocean. The water that once was is now a sea of sand – a desert punctuated by tumble weeds, the occasional cactus, and a handful of grand mesas. Our recreation yard was located at the end of the unit and provided us with a 180 degree view of this barren spectacle. Obstructed only by the chain link fence and razor wire that encapsulated us.

One day I was standing next to the volleyball court, assembling my team and awaiting our turn to play the winner of the current game. Behind me the sun was just starting to breach the horizon on its inevitable plunge into darkness. To my front, the warm unrelenting West Texas wind was filling my nose with the smell of sage brush and rain, as it pushed a thunderstorm across the near distant mesas on a beeline straight for us. My vision was saturated with dark ferocious clouds and lightning dancing like Russian ballerinas across their desert stage.

As the storm approached and the luminous dance intensified, rain began to fall – lightly, like angel kisses upon our cheeks – while desert lions roared with thunderous applause. And just when I thought my senses had reached saturation, a rainbow appeared to the Northeast. Full and vibrant and brilliant, its ends framed the pathway straight back to my home. To family, friends, and all things good and right in the world. As if to say, "Here we are, waiting patiently for your return."

In the movie Shawshank Redemption, a prisoner named Andy is called to the Warden's office to receive a shipment of donated books for the prison library he started. He discovers a record of an Italian opera. In a moment of mischief, he locks himself in the office and plays it over the PA system for all to enjoy. Everything came to a stop. Work, Rec, Chow – it all fell silent as the inmates enjoyed a brief moment of freedom. That rainbow was *our* Shawshank moment. The volleyball and basketball games, the guys working out and the yard-walkers, all of them froze in their tracks, and stood in silent worship of the glory and grandeur of God's work. And for a brief moment, we too were free.

"Hey man, serve the damn ball! We only have 20 minutes left." And just like that, our succinct yet splendorous moment passed. The games and walkers resumed, our heavenly vision vanished as quickly as it appeared, and life returned to its wonted pace.

I've had dreams about that rainbow. It is forever etched upon my soul.  
Along with these words:

Tarry not upon the dirt and mud of your past. For in  
it lay the seeds of regret, planted by a life of bad choices, and  
watered with the tears of self-deprecation. Lift your gaze to  
the heavens, as *there* is where your hope and future dwells.

- spin

2022