

July 24, 2018

July 24, 2018 was my first day at Federal Correctional Institution (FCI)-Gilmer in Glenville, West Virginia - a medium security federal prison, and still my residence three years later. I arrived, late afternoon, in a bus that had transported me from a Pittsburg airstrip. The morning began at the Federal Transfer Center (FTC) Oklahoma City, Oklahoma where I had been for less than a week.

The Gilmer in-processing ended my almost daily relationship with handcuffs and shackles for the past 13 months (since the verdict on June 26, 2017). Court hearings, relocations, and any other travel outside of a facility required cuffs and chains. Within the confines of Gilmer, I could expect no need to wear such hardware, and that has proved itself to be the case with the exception of a 51 day stay in Gilmer's Special Housing Unit (SHU) in 2019. If liberty is defined by how much steel you wear on your wrists and ankles, FCI-Gilmer has given me freedom beyond my first year in federal custody.

The in-processing resembled the experience, just days before, when I arrived at the FTC. Waiting in line, old clothes off, new clothes on, medical screening, and sitting with other inmates for the scheduled meal (served in a bag). There was a bit more of a conversation with staff; no doubt this was to discern any unexpected problems or gang affiliations. My only significant recollection was the staffs' interest in "What got someone like you here?" and their guidance "Of course, you will be with the whites and figure the rest out from there."

Before moving to my assigned housing unit, there was a brief, and alarming, discussion with the medical staff about my prescription medications.

In that Summer of 2018, my prescription medications were an important piece of how I <sup>worked through</sup> ~~managed~~ each day. The prescribed psychological pills were not extreme, but they played a big role in managing reality for me. In that first medical staff interaction, I learned the Health Services team at FCI-Gilmer had limited concern for an inmate's medications, and a few days with or without meds was not a care for them. My initial reaction was far from positive, and I was sure this indifference would result in a night of distress for me. My psychological meds provided relief from anxiety but instilled greater anxiety when getting them was in doubt. Fortunately, moving to housing and other necessary activities allowed me to push through this concern. I ended all psychological meds a few weeks later as I did not want to give FCI-Gilmer Health Services this kind of power over me.

I was assigned to a housing unit called A-1. To my great fortune, A-1 has an experienced counselor who was, and still is, the best officer in the entire facility. My experience over the last three years would be vastly inferior were it not for this particular federal employee. I was also lucky to be met, in A-1, by an inmate, about my same age (an old man by prison standards), <sup>and</sup> originally from West Texas; the man was a leader amongst the white (I never hear the term Anglo) inmates from Texas at Gilmer (perhaps ten at that time). From that day until his departure to another prison in early 2019, this senior Texan, DEW, would be a source of thoughtful guidance.

DEW and I shared some facets of temperament, knowledge of Texas geography, and an appreciation for progressive country music (1970s Willie Nelson / Waylon Jennings / Jerry Jeff Walker). Still, our only true common ground was his role teaching me survival skills for a new, to me, culture. I was now, officially, in a federal prison, the kind in books and movies, this kind where DEW had spent most of his adult life (the remainder in Texas state prisons). I was soon to learn, most inmates have a mere collection of months as criminals resulting in decades as inmates.



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So what do we call you? That was the question. I had now arrived at A-1, my counselor had given me a room assignment, and I was told to go over to the office, with in the housing unit, to pick-up a mattress in a few minutes. "Jonas" was my response, and that was an answer I had planned, and given, more than once, but here the choice was more permanent. In three previous settings, the question did not have the same significance; I was not going to be at those locations more than a set of months.

On June 26, 2017 when I arrived at the Val Verde Correctional Center in Del Rio, Texas, the inmates had been watching the local television station, saw the jury verdict reported and the motorcade taking me away from the courthouse; they were expecting me and already knew my name. That group of inmates had a limited interest in having someone of media attention to break up their boredom, but what to call me was not important. The same was true for the two other locations where I was incarcerated before reaching Gilmer (a private prison near San Antonio and then the FTC). I did not seek or have conversations in those places; only at the FTC was it important to begin knowing "where the whites sat" for meal, and that query did not require an extended discussion.

The issue of racial segregation was not something I sought out; it is simply a reality in federal prison. Perhaps, prison may be one of the few places where the separate but equal concept really works. However, implementing the concept of separate but equal has never been an operational challenge, or intellectual absurdity, as it relates to livestock.

Wanting to be called Jonas was a choice that reflected my perspective on this current experience. From the moment, the FBI violently attacked my home with military weapons, to issue a warrant for me, along with pieces of paper and computers, I have anticipated there will be a comeback. These years will not be a dark cloud; they will be a massive source of distinction and leverage. There is going to be a future moment when cynics are going to suggest this entire era, of charges, convictions, incarceration, disgrace, and drama, was orchestrated, by me, with the goal of self-promotion. As absurd as that sounds to anyone reading this (in the Summer of 2021 or while I am still locked-up), I am preparing for such an eventuality every day. My choice of branding myself with my last name was with this in mind. Everyday is part of a comeback saga.

As best as I can tell, the federal incarcerated population has very few, if any other, currently incarcerated inmates sharing my last name. While I do not seek to draw any level of attention to myself, in the instances where I am known, I want the branding to be taking place, and every action I take is with, at least my efforts, to keep, this in mind. The comeback narrative is being designed each day.

Beyond what to call me, DEW continued to manage the few moments before the doors to each room were locked for the evening as I had picked-up the foam rectangle defined as a mattress. "was I hungry?" was the next question, and before responding, a meatloaf sandwich and a chilled Coke were produced. I gladly accepted knowing that the gesture was far more important than my efforts, at the time, to eat Kosher. The Apostle Paul has since set me straight on that issue.

After making sure I was eating, the next query was "Did I need anything?" Different from inmates transferring from another Bureau of Prisons (BOP) facility, I had no property to transfer. Nothing I had in the previous facilities was allowed once I was in a place like FCI-Gilmer, so DEW took change of securing for me coffee, books, papers, toiletries, and various personal items.



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Within those moments before the nightly lock-down, DEW paraded a cast of characters through my newly assigned room in A-1 - a tall obese inmate, that could pass for a bearded lady, answered to a name consisting of two consonants and claimed to be from San Antonio, Texas (definitely not from my side of town), the apparent representative from the white supremacist, and various others DEW thought important to see me. The goal was not for me to make social connects; the objective was to establish that I was OK.

Me being OK was important to DEW, as it is important to anyone who has spent a majority of their lives incarcerated. To be OK, one has to be in prison not as a result of a sex crime involving minors (the primary concern) and lacking documentation of cooperating with the authorities against other criminals (being a rat or snitch).

With my legal and public policy background, the ability for these inmates to assess OK is horribly flawed - flawed in a way they will never acknowledge. To explain these flaws, South African history is an excellent example.

In the mid-20th century, the Afrikaners of South Africa gained political power <sup>and</sup> ~~an~~ implemented policies call apartheid. In that system, there was a group, the whites, anxiously trying to make sure all of their group members were OK. In the case of the Afrikaner, OK meant a lineage of absolute whiteness. Their goal was clear; their standard, in their Calvinist tradition, was exclusive and absolute. To be OK meant to be white, absolutely white, no mixed blood in your lineage, and no means absolutely none. The Afrikaner goal soon confronted reality; absolutely no mixed blood, given the available historical records, would permanently classify some of their greatest white families as colored (a much dreaded fate). So the Afrikaner standard was adjusted and ignored the reality that very few people are truly OK. The standard of OK in <sup>sc</sup>Prison faces a similar challenge.

In prison, you cannot be OK if you have been convicted of certain crimes, and the intellectually myopic standard applied is whatever is referenced in documents relating to your conviction and incarceration. However, the truth about those particular undesired crimes are that they are absolutely intertwined with almost every other criminal activity with direct ties to any activity involving the sex trade, human trafficking, drug use and abuse, and every type of pornography; all of the aforementioned sustain and enable the undesired crime. In fact, the undesired/non-OK crime probably could not exist were it not for the other criminal activities. To draw the line at the point where certain magic words do or do not show up in a criminal record may keep a couple of undesirables off of a prison recreation yard or housing unit, but it is silly to believe that the remaining occupants are not part of the same disgusting problem. The attempted distinction reminds me of the Monty Python sketch where the man orders a "rat tart without so much rat in it."

This brings me to the second thing an inmate is to avoid so that they can be OK. If you are an enabler of the authorities, you are not OK. At this point, the absurdity of the <sup>sc</sup>Inmate standard of OK is fully exposed.



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While the documentation in certain inmate files or others sources might confirm a level of specific help an inmate gave to authorities, every inmate that enters into any plea agreement or participates in any conduct that causes a prosecutor to make any favorable comment, to include sentence reduction for accepting responsibility for ones actions, has enabled the authorities just like the "rats" that inmates claim are not OK. The idea that there are inmates smugly calling others not-OK when they entered into a plea agreement confirm, once again, that whether an inmate is OK is a silly distinct, has no grounding in a true standard, and is absurd as two lowly Army Second Lieutenants arguing over who is the more senior officer.

I guess at the end of the day, the standard of an inmate being OK is, as one of my old First Sergeants used to say, a dumb as arguing rank among whores.

DEW was not particularly relieved that I was found to be OK. It seemed to be a result he expected. In some ways, I think he was less than certain such standards had any real meaning. As I would learn in the months to follow, DEW was more concerned about honesty in dealing and taking care of others from Texas. From that first day until his departure, he was pestering other Texas inmates to share their unneeded or extra possessions with me. A few months into my time at Gilmer, I commented that I was putting together things to share with the next new person that showed up, and DEW gently let me know that those with much more, than I had, would be taking care of such matters. At that time, I did not fully appreciate the inmate economy and the various resources certain inmates had at their disposal.

As the door to my room was being locked and DEW was leaving, I would have a few minutes to get to know the person sharing my quarters. He had been at Gilmer for a few months/weeks, was from Tennessee, and assigned to the lower bunk.

Upper or lower bunk mattered little to me, but the previous months had confirmed that bottom bunk status was desired by most inmates and was usually a reflection of seniority and a documented medical condition; it is no surprise that the more senior inmates are also skilled at documenting their bottom bunk mandating medical conditions. The bottom bunk downside, in my opinion, is that your place of sleeping becomes a place of sitting by any random inmate entering the room that lacks manners or assumes familiarity. I still recall my Egyptian cellmate in Del Rio that was an absolute lunatic and would sit on my, lower bunk, as he told me how I reminded him of his dad. Avoiding the "prestige" of the bottom bunk has its advantages.

So ended my day on July 24, 2018. I was at FCI-Gilmer. Dozing off, I noticed my cellmate using a AA battery to ignite a piece of tissue which he then used to light a substance that he smoke through a combination lock. I had never seen such an activity before, but the fact that it took less than thirty seconds, and I was tired, made me uncurious. The next morning, the man did not move until mid-day, and I was to observe this pattern every time he smoked that stuff using the combination lock as his pipe.

I had started the day in Oklahoma. An early morning voice outside my cell door informed me to prepare to move out. I had no possessions, so that meant merely getting dressed and gathering the bedding, towel, and additional clothing issued days before. In a holding room, I was given my medications for the day, and it appeared that those medications would follow me on my trip.



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Breakfast in the FTC holding area was followed by being put in handcuffs and shackles. Back then, being in handcuffs and shackles was a normal morning ritual as that was part of my uniform for multiple visits to the federal courthouse that year. Once our chains were installed, we waited a bit until we waddled on to the tarmac and on to a plane that would take us to Pittsburg. When we landed, buses with lunch were waiting. I was directed to the bus whose destination was FCI-Gilmer, Glenville, West Virginia, the largest town in Gilmer County.

This was only my second trip to West Virginia. In the 1980s, I spent time at the state's only resort which is now owned by their billionaire governor. In retrospect, ~~that~~ <sup>this</sup> day was one big field trip (except for the handcuffs and chains).

The three hour trip from Pittsburg to Gilmer County provided rural vistas with the Appalachian beauty I recalled from my years in the Blue Ridge Parkway as a undergraduate student at Washington and Lee University where I graduated, magna cum laude with honors in 1983.

Once parked outside of the offices that lead us into FCI-Gilmer, I noticed a plaque outside the facility with an engraved photo of John Ashcroft who was the United States Attorney General in the first years of the President George W. Bush administration.

I had gotten to know Ashcroft when he was a United States Senator from Missouri, had a daughter that was a student at Rice University (Houston, Texas), and was part of a barbershop quartet, The Singing Senators, led by my political ally of many years, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. The singing was not amazing, but their performance was superior to hearing a speech. With Ashcroft having a daughter in a Texas school and Lott's friendship, The Singing Senators were often a feature of Texas fundraisers I hosted ~~back then~~ <sup>in those days</sup>.

What a long strange trip it has been.

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