

The Ferrari

by Scott D. Culp

Ask any Chronobiologist, "the study of innate biological rhythms" what the vacuum of solitary confinement does to one's emotional state and they'll try and factor in the time, tides, sun, moon, light, temperature, etc. The only thing I've read that comes close to my reality is from the ancient Roman philosopher Seneca, and his descriptions of silver miners who encountered phenomena from long term mental distress, psychic pressure from claustrophobia, and the full tempest of panic as they imagined the ceilings and walls enclosing them. With no sunsets or sunrises something inherent and primordial devolves into instinct, and like animals in a zoo you become sad and pensive. Eventually something clicks and you succumb to your enclosure and fall into a paralytic shock, "which can be recognized by the endless pacing back and forth". My extended stay in this subterranean cave has nothing to do with me breaking the prison rules. As a convicted bank robber the staff here views me as an escape risk, and leader/organizer. I find it difficult to organize my own thoughts much less lead an uprising against the bologna sandwiches that are served daily. The California Prison system creates darkness where light is so desperately needed. There's an urban legend about the draconian use of Solitary Confinement, it says that over time this place permanently dismantles the last vestiges of hope. Instead of becoming easier over time, the accumulative effects of a prolonged stay results in diminishing returns. In the 1980's an expedition into a cave called Sarawak Chamber, "in the Malay Archipelago" a group of cavers had to be guided out after becoming emotionally despondent. In these places you become adroit at communicating with your fellow condemned. Reading lips, American signing, or just passing lines we reach out to one another. I've learned that my life isn't written in the stars, but in the hearts of those men around me. Recently I spoke, "vis-a-vis the vent" with someone from Stockton. For hours we shared our life experiences. He was in for a parole violation and as we continued to speak, things just weren't adding up. He said that he had worked part-time at Costco in Tracy, and then later remarked that he left for work at 5:00 AM and didn't return until 5:00 pm, "Stockton is about 20 miles from Tracy". Finally he admitted that he was ashamed to tell me that he didn't own a car, and walked the 40 miles to and fro. It floored me! Can you believe he

was ashamed of that? There's always an uncanny mixture of bravado amongst a den of thieves, however any prisoner worth his salt displaces those false veneers, and finds within himself elements of authenticity. Personally I'd rather befriend someone who walks 40 miles back and forth to a part-time job than someone who drives a Ferrari. The context and meaning of my own struggles stood in stark contrast. I had lost sight of the beauty that lies there-in. His story emboldened me to look deeper within myself and focus on that inward voice, and not on the foot-fall echoing off the walls of this concrete cave.

The End