

WHEN THE MAN'S AT THE DOOR
AND THE WORLD LOOKS AWAY

It's a big country; the richest and most powerful in the world. Most of its' citezens have too much of everything, materially, but for material goods, their hunger is insatiable. They have similarly insatiable appetites for unhealthy, highly caloric foods and mindless media entertainment - sports chief among them. But there is a national anemia that the gluttons of the hoi polloi care little about, and that is the lack of truthfulness and the honor of democratic principles in their criminal justice system. The structural and cultural corruption of our criminal justice system produces a river of waste that the waddling, cheering, fist pumping and fist bumping masses care little about as they cheer for number 49 or number 25, or whoever has the ball at any given moment, because the masses have developed a sewer system to deal with the waste, and like all sewers, it has portals everywhere, leading down into the greater system that holds what a generally oblivious society wants to rid itself of and think little about. We call these sewers our prison system, and the grates that lead down into it, police stations.

To understand the prison system and the experiences one has there, one must first understand the prisoner's journey through the processing components of the criminal justice system of which the prisons are a part, and which set the inhumane rules by which the prisons take their cue. The components are so intrinsic to each other that they must be considered of a piece, and to not do so, makes any narrative of the prison experience meaningless.

It's a big country, and its' criminal justice system, with its' ranks of well paid attendants - cops, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges - lined up in and beyond the sewer grates of the police stations, are themselves gluttons for the easy and lucrative work of putting people away. The work is made much easier by another big industry that feeds both on it and into it: Television. The same medium that distracts the multitudes from demanding the truth from their political leaders through the distraction of low-brow "entertainment", creates in this same medium, right next to football and zombie shows and super heroes, a toxic delusion called "cop shows". Cop shows condition the masses to think that the cop is your friend, and that they don't lie and are never wrong, that they are very smart and hard working and lay their (sexy) lives on the line everyday as the bulwark between the tv viewer and the curiously always white and very rarely black, nefarious criminals who will eat your soul if not for the gun toting angels wearing badges on television, along with their courageous, brilliant and upstanding cohorts in the prosecutor's office, presided over by benign judges, themselves edifices of honor and umpires of fair play, reaching down from their lofty benches to open the gates of hell through which the almost always white criminals are delivered.

On the occasions when members of the public are pulled away from the hypnotic clutches of their television sets, and their more insidious iterations of internet devices, and brought into a courtroom to serve on a jury, all they can think about is that they are finally getting the chance to do what the actors in a Dick Wolf (the billionaire producer and godfather of the modern cop show) production do every day on tv. Now THEY can be like the sexy and righteous actors on television and put a bad guy away, but THEY get to do it in real life. Dick Wolf and his ilk have made billions of dollars over the last few decades, priming the national jury pool to convict, and as they enter the jury box to decide the fate of another human being, they can think of little else, except perhaps how quickly they can wrap things up and get home to "catch the game". Television is the national mind cancer.

Where television and Hollywood once held up the American justice system as an even handed institution protecting the rights of the innocent, ala Perry Mason, who protected the wrongly accused, and together they emerged as heroes in the end, Wolf and his amoral syndicate hold up the criminal justice system as the only thing protecting the viewer from annihilation. Not only has the national jury pool bought into this sop, the prosecutors and cops themselves upon whom its' benefits rain, rather than look in the mirror, check their moves and measure their demeanor against the occupants of what, the old timers when I was a kid, called "the idiot box". Dick Wolf's unholy product also serves the politicians equally well. The very people with the greatest leverage to bring about prison reform, instead use "tough on crime" issues as the lowest hanging fruit to swat like so many vote filled pinatas to gain or hold office, cop shows ubiquitous presence having similarly jaded the national electorate.

Accused and then sucked into the system, you get the message early: You are presumed guilty and therefore less than human. They put you in an interrogation room - not like the nice ones on tv - with glaring overhead lights designed to make you feel like your eyeballs are being cooked, the message being WE WILL MISS NOTHING. You sit on a hard chair, handcuffed or chained to a steel table or the wall, and they sit and stare at you for awhile, letting the intimidation set in while they size you up. They smirk, they scowl, they get up suddenly and pace, cracking their knuckles. They stare into folders that probably have nothing in them then look up at you suddenly, like, "Really?" There are always two cops and they play off of each other, or it seemed that way at first, but I gave them too much credit. What I took for nuance, I later realized was just stupidity. The average cop couldn't find a Chinamen in Hong Kong.

I had a good idea of what I was there for, and at first expected to answer a few questions and go home, but when people go to the police and accuse you of something, they have a vested interest in making it seem as bad as they possibly can, and the police, in the very similar interest of promoting their brand, are likewise disposed to amplification. Instead of answering a few questions and going home that night, I got my picture in the newspaper the next day and a melange of hideous fiction cooked up by the witness and the detectives who had my case, breathlessly hyped on television

at the same time. Once the self-promoting cops get their case in the news media, the floodgates of overtime for them and their cronies whom they bring in as "investigators", open wide, as do the opportunities for citations and promotions. As I sat helplessly chained to a wall, I watched a feeding frenzy erupt all around me. The news media is free to print whatever fiction the police, who cannot be sued for defamation, feed it, and the crazier the story, the more the news media can hold the public's attention while hyping their happy advertiser's products. The cops get big paychecks and career points, the news media sells more Volvo's and toothpaste, and the gory sensationalism drives more interest in the cop shows, usually on the same network as the news shows, and the gears of these ~~and related industries~~ mesh and print money. It's a big country, and it's full of opportunity, you just need to find your place at the trough. As for me, my life was destroyed.

The two detectives who had my case spent so much time grilling me as I sat chained and handcuffed to the wall of the interrogation room for 16 hours, one of them actually fell asleep while his partner was working on me. I couldn't make this up. They would question me for a half hour or so, then leave for maybe an hour, then give it a go for another half hour. At one point they asked for the keys to my apartment, and asked me to sign a release so they could search it, and I said, "sure", and gave them the keys and signed the form. After they'd been gone a couple of hours, (I lived down the street from the police station.) a "special prosecutor", whatever that is, came in and told me that they had run some tests for crack residue on the walls of my kitchen, where I told the police the witness was smoking crack while in my apartment, something I had asked her not to do. The special prosecutor told me the tests had come up negative, indicating that I was lying, then drew herself up in a huff and said, "Things don't look good for you, Alan", and left. I found out two years later that there are no such tests, or at least there weren't back then. She came back in awhile later, and tried to trip me up with some gibberish I supposedly told the detectives, but even in my state of increasing mental exhaustion, I could see through the ruse and brushed her off, and she again got up and left.

I could sense things were getting ugly but I didn't know why. Sitting in that chair in that small, unbearably bright room by myself for 16 hours, never knowing who was going to pop through the door, and what they would say, I never felt so alone in my life. Eventually the detectives came back and unchained me from the wall, then took me downstairs into the basement where I got mug shots, fingerprinted and walked to a cell. When I asked what I was being charged with, the detectives told me "unlawful restraint". I'll never know if this was true at that point or not, but after all the nonsense I'd been listening to for the previous 16 hours, now that I was being charged, the cops had me where they wanted me, and to my mind had no reason to lie anymore, but as it turned out, they did. So many people had a hand in shaping the case that was eventually brought against me, that when I finally wound up in front of a judge and heard what I was charged with, and later saw the documents, it felt like mine was a recipe for carion, designed by a committee of vultures.

It was a warm, late Summer night when I was brought to the police station, but the cell in the basement lock-up, was a literal refrigerator with long wooden benches running along two of its' three flat steel walls, a toilet was mounted on the third. Shivering uncontrollably in a T-shirt and jeans, I tried to get some sleep. The graffiti on the walls and the ceilings of the cell in the police station, and later in the bullpens of the Cook County Courthouse and the Cook County Jail, was so vile and dehumanizing just to read, it made me feel like I was infected with something after being exposed to it. While I was in the police lock-up, a guy in the cell on one side of me, wouldn't stop yelling that the cops were a bunch of dick sucking faggots and he was going to come back and kill all of them when he made bail. A guy in the cell on the other side of ours was crying and asking someone who would probably never hear his words, in Spanish, to forgive him. One of the guys in my cell was staring at the ceiling, pounding his head against the wall which responded like a drum, to the beat of some rap lyrics he seemed to only half remember. The other guy, a very skinny man of color, sat motionless and quiet, the whole time, his heels on the bench at his buttocks, with his shirt pulled up over his head and upper arms, his gently heaving ribcage the only indication that he was alive. This is what a cockroach cowering in the woodwork feels like, I thought to myself. Looking back, I realize that is EXACTLY what the system wants to establish with you right from the start: You are less than human. Separated from the general population, you are no longer an American citizen. Instead of rights, as a prisoner, you have a maze of procedures you will be forced through to take their place. It will take you years to learn the workings of the maze, as it eventually folds itself into a funnel down which you will slide into the hell of prison.

The constant message is that you are a cockroach. Do cockroaches expect justice? No, at best, they can hope for mercy, and that too, is part of the system's conditioning formula, if you can call it one. Since your guilt is assumed by the press, and therefore the world, from the moment the cops cuff you up, knowing the country has their back thanks to the sensationalizing news media, they and the prison system can do with you what they want, and they constantly remind you of it with every interaction. In this way, they break people down with machine-like efficiency, which is why 95 percent of those charged with criminal offenses plead guilty. Once you pass through the sewer grate and into the sewer, you are practically drowning in the dehumanization of the interrogation room, the police lock-up, and then the county bullpens, aptly named because you are packed into them for hours at a time like cattle, as part of a system that by no coincidence operates like a slaughterhouse. By breaking the accused down with non-stop trauma of first one kind and then another, including the unrestrained physical and verbal abuse of the people you are locked up with, the desperation rapidly mounts as one looks for a means of escape, knowing a long prison sentence awaits them, which will extend for many years the misery they are already engulfed in.

As a result, many who plead guilty, certainly a large minority that might approach half, no one can know, are innocent of what they are charged with. They know, as I was to find out, that the 5 percent that refuse to plead guilty, lose 95 percent of the time at trial, and because they didn't take the plea deal, when they are found guilty, at sentencing they are hit with the "jury tax", which is the universal sentencing practice of judges in this country to give these defendants roughly 3 or 4 times longer sentences for exercising their constitutional right to a trial than those who pled guilty. Digging my heels in and refusing to plead, I would sit in the Cook County Jail for 4 years while my public defender refused to defend me, and I watched literally the entire population of the jail, some 13,000 prisoners, turn over every 6 months as the plea bargain machinery pulled the pleaders through one component of the system and into the next.

My public defender, a hugely fat slob, when I finally got it through his head that I wasn't going to plead, hated me from that moment on. He resented the idea of having to go to trial, something he did everything to avoid, and therefore had little experience with, since he spent all day and every day assembling plea deal packages and selling them to his desperate herd of clients, the process made smooth by the chummy relationship he maintained with the various prosecutors and judges in whose courtrooms he was assigned in the decrepit monolith of the Cook County Courthouse. My case was considered a complex one that would require a lot of investigative work on the part of the public defender's office, and not being accustomed to investigative work and all the pretrial motions he would have to compose and file as the defense took shape, made him apoplectic. At almost every meeting after the point sank in with him, he let me know he thought I was guilty and if I didn't take a deal I was going to get my ass handed to me at sentencing if I lost at trial. His prediction about my sentence was one of the few things he got right in the 4 years we grappled with each other as I tried to pull a cogent defense out of him while I sat in the absolute shithole of the Cook County Jail.

When he finally tricked me into going to trial by telling me he had found or developed or was about to acquire the evidence I insisted he gather in order to prove my innocence, he showed up the day of trial without much of it, instead giving me lame excuses and transparent lies about the absence of very critical material I was counting on. A strange thing also happened a few months before trial. My public defender's bosses, also coming to grips with the fact that we were going to trial, and probably realizing what a disaster was in store, gave me a "second chair", a second P.D. to assist with my defense at trial. Once a month I was led from the Cook County Jail through the ancient, smelly, leaky underground maze of tunnels that connect the jail to the courthouse and into the loud and overcrowded bullpens to first meet with my attorney while we faced each other at the bars, shouting over the noise to discuss what was about to transpire in my monthly status hearing before the judge who had my case, when my name was called. Other P.D.s and private lawyers similarly were ranged along the bars doing the same thing, and one of those P.D.s often stood next to mine talking to her own clients, but never once did she ever look over at me and introduce herself and tell me she was my second chair, nor did

my first public defender even tell me I had one. Then one day just a few weeks before trial, while my lawyer and I were in a semi-private room used for critical client/lawyer conferences, going over the details of what I should expect, theories of strategy, and so on, she walked into the room and up to our table and sat down and said, "Hi Alan".

"Hi," I said, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm you're second chair. I got appointed a few months ago." she said, "Didn't you know?"

"How would I know that?" I said, "Neither one of you said anything to me about it."

They both just looked at me like it was no big deal and shrugged it off. Considering how late she came on board, we should have had several such meetings as soon as she got the appointment, but neither of them even had the decency to tell me she was on the team.

She was going to be the second chair in a complex case with a big sentence hanging in the balance, the trial of which would last 4½ days, including voir dire, and they were both fine with her spending just 20 minutes with their client before trial. She had a slightly better reputation with the prisoners than he did, but at trial she did very little and what she did she did poorly, telegraphing to the jury that she was just there for the paycheck and didn't give a damn about her client, a message I'm sure the jury got from both of them. Her appointment, it turned out, was just some kind of window dressing in which a disinterested public defender's office sought to save face among the courthouse tongue waggers. It was a total sham.

My judge, a former lifelong prosecutor, scheduled the trial so that the last day would be on the Friday going into the Memorial Day weekend. I would read later, in a good book written by a former public defender, titled "How Can You Defend These People?" that this is an old trick used by corrupt judges to nudge juries into delivering a guilty verdict, especially if the judge can structure the proceedings so that the last day being Friday, the jury gets the case in the afternoon and has a chance to wrap it up and get started on their long weekend early. In such circumstances, jurors wanting to acquit, are pressured to not "screw up everybody's weekend" especially if the judge drops a hint that they will have to stay late on Friday and possibly come back on Saturday if they can't deliver a verdict in time. The current national mood is such, in no small part thanks to television, that jurors wanting to acquit are on much softer grounds in such situations than those leaning toward conviction, who operate at a much higher emotional temperature, and therefore are more assertive. In such an environment, with a big weekend looming, the arguments for "innocent" melt, and the guilty verdict wins, and everybody gets to go home on time. My judge, who showed me nothing but contempt for the 4 years in which I regularly appeared before him, some 40 times, was a prosecutor still, just prosecuting from the bench as so many of his kind across the country do, and in scheduling my trial, he knew just what he was doing.

Needless to say, the better funded, ruthlessly focused pair of hyperbolic prosecutors who, over 4 years of motions and arguments

to allow or not allow evidence and witnesses from either side, got practically everything they wanted while we got almost nothing, as they mopped the floor with my feeble minded public defender to the amusement and with the help of the judge. Come trial day, they sat at their table not far from me like a pair of hyenas thirsty for blood. Their two chief witnesses lied through their teeth, one of them delivering an Oscar worthy performance, often while one prosecutor would question them and the other would hold up in front of the jury one ridiculous item after another that the judge granted them as evidence and had to be hauled in on two flatbed carts and a handtruck, all of it taken from my apartment, almost all of it completely irrelevant to even the state's absurd case, but by the sheer volume of it, and the way the prosecutors invented the nature of otherwise benign objects, one would think I was the keeper of a haunted house. They also brought in a huge flat screen display board on its' own special cart with its' own computer, with which they repeatedly bullet pointed their daily fiction for the jury, jabbing their hands dramatically at the big tv like thing and then staring at me contemptuously.

"I wish we could afford one of those," my attorney said to me as we sat through another histrionic delivery from the hyenas across the aisle.

At trial, my fat slob public defender dressed like he always did, looking like a homeless bum in a suit he pulled from a dumpster. At the time of my trial in 2010, these people were making the equivalent in today's money of \$150,000 a year. Besides showing up without a lot of crucial evidence I was relying on, he asked the wrong witnesses the wrong questions, and refused to recall them to the witness stand when I pointed out his mistakes after he returned to the defense table. He completely failed to establish major points of our case with the jury, and I realized only then and there, that he had allowed or failed to block all kinds of irrelevant and manipulated evidence into trial by the prosecution without consulting or at least warning me about it, and which the prosecution leaned on heavily to prop up their mendacious case. He delivered his closing arguments while reading them from a three-ring binder with his head down, mumbling through it as if he had never seen the material in it before. His delivery was punctuated with excruciatingly long pauses while he flipped back and forth through the thing, searching for something else to add to his rambling monologue. "Oh yeah," he would periodically restart his closing arguments with, "and then there was..." Not only did I not get a fair trial, I barely got a trial at all, but the charade still lasted 4½ days.

Dick Wolf, as formulaic as a cult leader, has reconfigured Hollywood's old playbook with the likes of Spencer Tracy and Henry Fonda at its' center, railing for the little guy (the defendant), and has turned all that on its' head, using his ubiquitous cop dramas and countless imitators to always portray the defendant as the bad guy - and for every Gregory Peck performance in *To Kill a Mockingbird* the public saw then, they see scores, perhaps hundreds of Dick Wolf style productions today. This has produced

a deeply poisoned national jury pool primed to serve the prosecutor's interests and hungry for vengeance against everything they find wrong in their communities as portrayed by prosecutors across the land in their own fictionalized productions directed at the occupant of the chair at the defense table reserved for that one small person. In absolutely no other human endeavor, not in baseball or any sport, not in the invention of devices, the search for a cure for diseases, not in applying for jobs or the search to find the perfect applicant to fill them, not in launching rockets or making successful movies or finding that one true love in romantic relationships, not in scoring "100" on almost every test one takes in school, NOWHERE in these or countless other human endeavors, does anyone anywhere come even remotely close to scoring a win 95 percent of the time, except in our criminal justice system where prosecutors get a guilty verdict 95 percent of the time. This is absolutely insane, and any reasonable, objective person must recognize this as irrefutable proof that the American criminal justice system is among the most corrupt governmental operations on the face of the Earth.

The "contest" of evidence in a trial, and the old, now ephemeral doctrine of "presumed innocent until proven guilty" are functionally archaic props behind which the criminal justice system shields itself while it vacuums up thousands of innocent people year after year to support the myth of its' own importance while supplying the morally bankrupt politicians who rule our lives, and the television, movie and internet industries, now inextricably intertwined, with fodder for their own enrichment. All of these and other industries feed ON and simultaneously feed INTO each other. Nature, in all her glory and beauty, if she could feel the emotion, might feel a certain envy of such a perfect ecosystem, but where hers' is about the creation and balanced support of infinite life forms, the American criminal justice system runs on depravity and greed and little else.

Menard Penetentiary is located in the extreme southern tip of Illinois, some 15 or 20 miles from the Kentucky border. It sits in an old limestone rock quarry, a horseshoe shaped bowl of land facing the Mississippi River just a stone's throw away. Going to Menard as a prisoner, you go "behind the wall", which is to say you are sent to one of Illinois' 3 maximum security facilities, each of which is surrounded by a high masonry wall. In Menard's case, the wall spans the open end of the horseshoe, while the quarry walls, ranging up to about 50 feet, provide the rest of the compound's containment. The Illinois Department of Corrections' other 27 facilities, by contrast, are surrounded usually, by a double or single course of very high chain link fences topped with concertina wire, they being medium and minimum security prisons, the politically fashionable term these days being "correctional center" even though almost no correcting goes on in them. Menard is one of the oldest prisons in the Illinois state system, some of the erection blocks in its' original brown, fortresslike sandstone buildings dating to 1888. Legend has it that the site was once used as a prisoner of war camp during the Civil War, before permanent structures were erected there.

Menard has some modern brick buildings, like the healthcare unit and an administrative building, all of them shodily constructed, the material and workmanship making them look exceptionally pathetic in contrast to the original Gothic massing of the old prison. Not only is Menard a study in the history of penological architecture, as a max joint at the opposite end of the state from most of the state's population concentrated in and around Chicago, and some 150 miles from the state capital of Springfield, it sits in sociological isolation, which fosters a brutish, often sadistic prison administration to continue to behave toward the inmates in much the same way others before it did in the century when the place was first built. To call conditions there medieval, would not be too much of a stretch. The IDOC in general, even for a government agency, is backward and extremely dysfunctional, but Menard, even in such a system, is an outlier still. Its' reputation is such, that when Hollywood decided to cast Harrison Ford as a Chicago surgeon convicted of his wife's murder in "The Fugitive", the screenwriters and director chose Menard as the destination to which Dr. Richard Kimball was headed to do his time, until fate intervened.

I stumbled off of the bus in a line of other inmates, many of us from Chicago, in leg irons, handcuffs and a waistchain anchored to both with a black steel box locked between my wrists to further restrict movement and add to the misery of the long ride down the length of the state. Behind the wall, you can see nothing of the outside world, no matter how close it might be. Those tall masonry walls serve as more than just security; isolation is a major factor in psychological degradation and reinforces the message that you have lost control of your life and are no longer a part of society. You can hardly even see much sky at Menard because of how close together the buildings are constructed. The imposing limestone walls of the old quarry are part of the reason the place is often referred to as "the pit", but contributing to that moniker are the living conditions in general. As each of us clambored off the bus, we came face to face with a line of guards wearing riot helmets and clear plastic face shields, each of them holding nightstick-type clubs, but longer and laquered in a clear finish.

The line of guards facing us stood at parade rest, while three others, outfitted in the same gear, brusquely marshaled us, some 15 men in jumpsuits, into a tight line running along side the bus, yelling, "Heads down! Eyes on the ground! No talking, no looking around!" We stood that way for some time while the marshallers walked up and down the line repeatedly, looking for violaters to jab with their sticks, or whose heads weren't at the proper attitude and would get shoved down hard, forcing the man's chin to his chest. More time passed as two white shirted lieutenants with clipboards processed a small group of inmates in jumpsuits and chains like our own, who were getting on the bus to go to other joints. That done, the white shirts walked over to the head of our line, and walking slowly down it, scrutinized each man's face to compare it to the blow-up of his mug shot on their clipboards which also had all kinds of vital information like the guy's date of birth, crime or crimes he was serving time for, prison registration number,

calculated aggression level, length of time he was serving, and so on. As they stopped next to each man, one of them would bark his last name, and then say, "First name! Middle initial! Date of birth!" Satisfied with the response, they would move to the next prisoner, until the line was completed, and they turned us over to the guards again and walked away.

Once the white shirts were gone, the line stepped up to us, one guard to each inmate, and grabbed our waistchains with the freehand not holding the nightstick and started yelling "Heads down! Eyes on the ground! Nuts to butts!" over and over, shoving us into each other so that each inmate was practically standing with the tip of his toes on the man's heels in front of him, thusly the command, "nuts to butts", properly executed. Again, we stood there like that, until one of them yelled "Let's go!" and they marched us off to the "chapel" as the big bus roared away, engulfing us in a cloud of black, sooty diesel smoke. The "chapel" is actually an old theater building with an exceptionally high stage (probably for security reasons) that looks to have been built around 1900, with gun "towers" protruding from its walls and up in the balcony, straddling a projection booth that probably hasn't shown a film in decades. There are some 25 such "towers" located around Menard, some of which are actual towers, while many are just concrete boxes protruding from walls, and each of them bearing a number from one to twenty-five. The building called the chapel had long fallen into disuse as a performing arts center as part of the IDOC's general abandonment of any type of uplifting rehabilitative practices, a general retreat that continues as all types of industry in the joints are similarly shutting down along with real college courses and vocational training. There is no correcting in Corrections. Now, the old theater was being used mostly just to process new arrivals like ourselves, where once a week, when the bus arrived, temporary cubicle-like processing stations would be erected and one by one we were threaded from one to the other, each staff member (civilian) would deal with medical history, another, information packets for which we would sign for, regarding rules and regulations, then another something else, until we were all processed in and then marched off to receiving - a group of cells in one of the cellhouses where we would wait for some weeks until the placement office figured out where to locate each of us long term. As for the chapel, it got its name because occasionally preachers of different faiths would show up to promulgate their brand while standing in front of the orchestra pit with small groups of inmates sat clustered in front of them, thusly the name, "chapel", the old place now awash with ghosts, not of the Holy Spirit variety, but more along the lines of James Cagney.

They don't have cameras in the showers in Menard, so that is where the guards would take handcuffed prisoners to beat them. They very deliberately destroyed most of the food they served us, just for spite. The rice, which was served several times a week, was always cooked to a mush you could spread like grits, and the chicken patties, which were served with the same regularity were always cooked to the point where they had the consistency of beer coasters, which they were the same size and shape as. You can't talk in line outside when you are on your way to the "chow hall", the library,

commissary, and so on, and you can't leave your cellhouse without being escorted by a guard, or if you are in a line, with MANY guards. They would put the place on lockdown, (I served 8 years at Menard, and am now at a medium joint) for any reason or no good reason at all, trapping us in our cells for days or weeks at a time while they put their feet up. They put the place on lockdown for deer season, so that they could all go kill deer, and they put us on lockdown for prolonged periods every Spring when the Mississippi flooded its' banks, closing the road out front, and usually flooding the compound, the water surging right through the westernmost cellhouses and wreaking havoc with the infrastructure. This had been going on for over a hundred years, but somehow it never occurred to the brains trust in Springfield to build a dyke system - an ancient and highly effective remedy - somewhere between the river and the penitentiary. When we went on lockdown, which was constantly, you could only leave your cell every three days in handcuffs to get a shower. Depending on where your cell was in relation to the showers, you might have to walk down 3 or 4 flights of stairs with your hands cuffed behind your back, clutching a bar of soap, a washcloth and a towel before getting the handcuffs removed at the shower door and having them replaced when your 12 minutes was up and it was time to reascend the stairs in the same fashion. The pettiness of the rules and the fact that they might significantly change with every shift, depending on which spiteful bastard was on duty, along with the suffocating culture from the administration of NO!, made one feel like their soul was being crushed out of them.

If a single inmate assaulted a single guard, and the guard got so much as a blackeye, all three thousand of us would be put on lockdown for a month, not coming off until a special, ad hoc tactical force, called "Orange Crush" was assembled and bused in from other joints to augment the guards at Menard who also joined the operation. They wore bright orange jumpsuits and steel toed combat boots, riot helmets with plastic face shields like the greeting committee wore, and like them carried the extra-long night sticks, and over the jumpsuits, wore a large, specially designed web gear array. Getting off of the buses, a hundred strong, they would arrange themselves in columns and march up and down "Front Street", the private street that bisected the compound, chanting some macho bullshit or other, just so everybody could see them and know what was coming. When they marched into the cellhouses, they dragged the night sticks on the bars of each cell as they passed it, making a deafening, horrific noise, before pairing up, two of them facing each two man cell, and ordered us to strip, one at a time, while they observed. Then before each man could dress, he would have to hand each article of clothing, one at a time to them, for them to inspect before they passed it back, but only after they first made you bend over and spread your cheeks, then turn around and face them, and separately lift first your penis, and then your testicles. They went through our cells with a fine toothed comb, after cuffing us up and marching us over to the chapel, one tier at a time, "nuts to butts", shouting at us to keep our heads down, eyes on the ground, nuts to butts. We would then stand in the chapel, heads down, eyes on the ground, nut to butts, for the better of an hour or more, while they went back to our tier and tore the cells apart. If you had candy

or something else they liked, they ate it and left the wrappers or packaging on the floor just to rub it in. They got a kick out of mixing your personal papers, pictures of loved ones, and dirty laundry with your cellmates. Each one of them had a different idea of what was contraband, and even though it wasn't, it disappeared from your meager belongings.

If we were on lockdown and you had a healthcare appointment, one of the very few reasons you might be let out of your cell, albeit in handcuffs, hands cuffed behind you, they would walk you over to the healthcare unit where you would be required to sign a \$5 co-pay voucher WITH YOUR HANDS CUFFED BEHIND YOUR BACK. Like I said, petty. State law forbids the IDOC from marking up commissary items they sell by more than 25%, but the IDOC ignores this and countless other edicts and court orders and charges us \$425 for typewriters we could buy directly from the manufacturer if we were allowed, for \$225. Similarly, they sell us cheap 13" flat-screen televisions that commonly sell out in the world for less than \$75, for \$220. Five months after I scraped the money together to buy a typewriter from the IDOC, they confiscated it as contraband because it came with a steel rod in it that the printer rides back and forth on. They wouldn't give it back to me for 5 years until I transferred to a medium joint that allowed them, and of course, never offered an alternative in the mean time.

While I was at Menard, I tore a rotator cuff muscle in my right shoulder playing handball. The pain was severe and increased as I waited nearly a month to be seen by a doctor. I asked for an MRI, but she would only authorize an x-ray, which is logical as a first step procedure in such circumstances. But when the x-ray came back showing an impingement of the clavicle and the acromium, an impingement being two bones touching that are not supposed to, the doctor refused to then order an MRI, which an impingement implies is necessary to see what soft tissue damage is causing the bones to touch. "Impingements are nothing to worry about" she told me, "Just avoid strenuous use of your right shoulder for awhile and it will heal." Instead the pain grew worse and the shoulder's range of motion steadily declined while I battled with Wexford Health Sources, the doctor's employer and the megalithic healthcare company that provides what they call healthcare to the IDOC and other Corrections departments across the country, to get an MRI for 5 years afterward at Menard. Once I was transferred to Hill Correctional Center where I am now, it took almost another two years before Wexford's agents finally granted me an MRI. The private, outside orthopedist that reviewed the MRI, told me that 3 of the 4 rotator cuff muscles in the right shoulder were completely severed, and so badly atrophied and scarred, they could never be reattached. The injury, he told me, and my own experience with what I felt and the progression of pain and loss of movement in my arm confirmed it, started with what was probably a minor injury that if it had been diagnosed in a timely manner, could have been repaired with outpatient surgery, but instead, the tear progressed to a complete severance of the first muscle and then the other two tore and then separated in sequence as they attempted to compensate for the severance of the first muscle. Now I need a new shoulder but Wexford Health Sources, now 9 years

after a relatively minor injury they refused to treat, likewise refuses to give me a shoulder replacement the necessity of which is entirely due to their cruel parsimony, where this huge corporation puts profit maximization over humanity. My story is by no means unique, in that thousands of prisoners across the country, similarly trapped in Wexford's corporate web of greed, suffer terribly and languish in misery while at its' corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh, it continuously rolls up record profits. It should come as no surprise that state prisoners in Illinois are two to three times as likely to die of cancer as all other Illinois residents with the same diagnosis, and it is much the same with inmates in other states under Wexford's or other corporate providers care. In some states the statistics are even more gruesome.

I could write pages more of this, both personal experiences and what I have witnessed happen to others, but to what purpose? Someone once said of war, something to the effect that "War is ninety percent boredom and ten percent abject terror." Prison is much the same, and after over 17 years of incarceration, and blocking as much of the experience out of mind as I can every single day, in order to protect my mind and my spirit from the poison that swirls around me, I find myself indisposed to go on with these complaints. I don't "live" here because I won't let the system do that to me, but I don't pretend to live "out in the world" as we call it, beyond prison, but rather, in a third place. The greatest benefit of my incarceration is that it has removed me from the distractions of holding on to menial jobs and struggling to pay the rent; of wrestling with romantic relationships and dealing with all the attendant disappointment and heartbreak that attaches to them, and so on. The third place is not without pain, indeed, I have spent the last 17 years looking back and reliving over and over again, the consequences of my mistakes and the indignities of many people I loved and looked up to who found me wanting. But that pain and my own infinite curiosity has been the fuel of enlightenment, and therein I have salvaged a reward of sorts in the Pyrrhic victory of the wisdom I have struggled to accumulate.

As for the Department of Corrections, surely the reader gets the picture; Whether it be Illinois or anywhere else, there is little interest in rehabilitation, to the public's detriment. There is no correcting being done in Corrections, only a deeper entrenchment of dysfunction among its' captives. To call this corrections is like calling arsenic a vitamin, but in the twisted world of prosecutor double-speak, the title, "Corrections" makes taxpayers feel like the fortunes squandered here are somehow protecting them. Governors in both parties look at the big investments it would take to completely reshape Corrections in their states as an extraneous expense putting undue weight on their budgets and making them easy targets as "soft on crime, soft on criminals" by their political opponents. And so the deep rot of the state prison systems begins with the governors and state legislators writing court and policing rules that they get voted into law in order to more efficiently prosecute the innocent, while there are no counterbalancing "experts", as the prosecutors bill themselves in these legislative bodies to write and pass the legislation that would bring about the direly needed

changes to a system gone off the rails. Not knowing or caring about what is needed, governors hand off the responsibility of running the departments of corrections to politically compliant imbeciles who haul down salaries in the neighborhood of \$200,000 a year, and give them big, similarly overpaid staffs to simply "keep the lid on the mess." None of them have a clue about what they are doing, nor do they need to, from any governor's perspective, as long as they don't let shit fly between "now and the next election", they've done their job. These golden morons circulate regularly from one state to the next, traveling with the prevailing political winds as well as following the motivation of making more money somewhere else. Our most recent corrections director who stopped by this facility a few years ago after his appointment, was the former corrections director for the state of Ohio. I didn't know who he was when he first started speaking, and thought he was a stand-up comic, his awkward delivery and erratic, cartoonish behavior signaling as much, until someone told me he was our new director and he was being serious. He has since moved on to another state, reportedly for more money.

Of course, 95 percent of the senior administrators and all of the midlevel management that work under these itinerant bufoons never leave, assuring that whoever you have running things from the state capital as they work next to a totally disinterested governor, will never change things. The people working under them, spreading out to all the penitentiaries statewide, are of the same type: Breathtakingly lazy and stupid, their behavior is almost indistinguishable from that of the inmates, while they sit on their asses all day, every day, making salaries and benefits far above the average of much harder working people in the private sector. Shielded by the corrupt criminal justice system and the indifferent bueracrats in the state capital, they do with us as they please.

Culturally the greatest impediment to changing the system and in the process creating real rehabilitation in the joints is the state government's myopic view of investment. The federal government, by contrast, and by its' sheer mass, generally resists the revolving door of presidential administrations and shifting party control of the Congress. If NASA is working on going to Mars or the National Institute of Health (NIH) is working on cancer vaccines, their decades-long building and testing programs go on largely unabated.

They weather the cutbacks and rule changes of hostile political actors from time to time, but the work goes on. At the state level, there is much less inducement to invest long term, especially in socially sensitive projects like prison reform because governors obsessed with their own political identities, and desperate to differentiate themselves from their predecessors whom they may have had to beat in the last election, will tear out by the roots much of what the last occupant of the governor's mansion stood on, much as male tigers, gorillas and hippo's will kill the young of a female they take as their own if her offspring were sired by another male. Not only have we not evolved as far from other animals as we'd like to believe, by inventing things like politics and television, we have actually regressed to a point where animals are often much smarter than we are. Likewise, ever since it won

World War II, this country has developed a self-defeating case of hubris and narcissism, pounding its' chest as "The greatest country in the world", while all the other equally great countries of the world have quietly gone about the pursuit of perfection in many different fields, and left this one in the dust, where it continues to pound its' chest. Car design, from the 1950s through the 1970s is the most iconic of our modern failures, where our once world dominant auto industry ignored a galaxy of superior designs and manufacuting techniques that increasingly captivated the American car buying public's attention, until the manufacturers of those automobiles stormed our shores with their products and ate Henry Ford's lunch. The situation is much the same now with Corrections, but tragically we can't count on the Danes and Swedes and others with outstanding Corrections systems far superior to ours, to storm ashore and eat our prosecuters and television executives, in an environment where the progeny of Dick Wolf continues to poison a country stuck on stupid. There is precious little hope for prison reform until the meteor that Hollywood keeps promising will smash into us, shows up, but talking about prison reform in the meantime makes us feel better; some of us, anyway.

Real prison reform, the deep stuff, the real deal, would require enormous upfront investment and longterm comprehensive tracking and analysis to prove the obvious to a skeptical electorate. The current do-nothing system expects inmates to watch 12 hours of television a day, the majority of it either sports or other forms of violence glamorizing guns and criminals (television for this country is a lose/lose proposition), play cards, gang bang, lift weights (sometimes), look at a bible or koran (maybe), and maybe seek mental health counseling, which here in Illinois generally allows an inmate to talk to a college psychology student twice a week for 15 minutes on Zoom, while the heavy lifting is left to pharmacueticals. For this "keep the lid on" approach, the taxpayer in Illinois pays about \$175,000 per year, per inmate. This is the fertile soil from which the 70 percent recidivism rate springs out like a homicidal jack-in-the-box at hapless innocent victims across the country every day.

Bringing in aggressive outsiders and their support staffs, building the physical infrastructure from which they would work and giving them unprecedented autonomy to create a penological environment unlike anything that has ever existed in this country, a central component of which would be a large, permanent staff of psychology and psychiatry professionals from various disciplines within those respective fields (since most inmates are mentally ill, and a large minority of the mentally ill, are extremely mentally ill), would require not only an enormous upfront outlay, but just as importantly require a guaranteed longterm budget that could not be disturbed by shifting political environments and also be inflation protected. Instead of costing the taxpayer \$175,000 a year, inmate care could easily reach say, \$400,000 a year. I'm spitballing, but I'm probably not far from the bullseye. Bringing back industry to the joints where everybody goes to a real job everyday (Many grown men here have never had a real job in their lives.) and actually MAKES things, and all the discipline required to make that happen consistantly,

efficiently and profitably is extremely important too. We also need real schooling, something else that has gone by the wayside, now done by hacks standing at the head of a class that is often coopted by a belligerent inmate or three, where the placeholder at the head of the class is reduced to being a referee. Currently the tests are often open book, which is a sham, and everybody who just shows up for classes gets a certificate of completion which many are only there for to use the certificates to get a time reduction in their sentences. There is no rigor here, only a lot of mindlessly abusive rules and punishments which makes bad people worse, and good people withdraw. When it comes to rehabilitation, rigor is king, but it must be uniform, well reasoned and transparent. All of this must come with more, much more, humane housing and healthcare, and a total professionalization of the guards and the administrators in the prison system. In Illinois, as in most states, all you need to become a guard (and many go on to become administrators) is a high school diploma, and to complete a two month course in being a guard. They learn the rest on the job, and what they learn from the other, seasoned guards, is to avoid conversation with the inmates, make sure you know nothing about any of the programs available to them, please your lieutenant who doesn't give a shit about inmates, and often hates them, and spend as much time in the shack or the bubble (control center) talking about killing animals, getting tatoos, hot SUVs, and what's on sale at Walmart, as possible.

Another extremely important aspect of rehabilitation is the arts: Music, painting and sculpture, writing and performance. Deep immersion under the guidance of inspired teachers anywhere, whether out in the world, or in the darkest max joint, for those so inclined, is redemption of the richest, purest form. There is absolutely none of that here, ZERO, and the art supplies they sell us on commissary are such garbage, a 7 year old would reject them. The stuff is an insult, but typical of how the hacks that run these places look at us.

The upside to such a big investment is that recidivism would, must, be driven down into single digits and stay there. Ironically, for all the expensive analytics some may be tempted to apply to such an extensive make over of the system, recidivism and cost-benefit measurements are easy to calculate and basic. On the cost-benefit side, if the new system works properly, prisoners doing 30 years at \$175,000 per year that would eventually cost the taxpayers \$5.25 million, inflation adjusted, at \$400,000 per year and released after 7 years, would cost the taxpayers \$2.8 million, and in the neighborhood where they lived, you could let your kids walk to school. Then add to this equation a radical drop in victims of crimes committed by recidivists, and the costs of rearresting, processing and incarcerating them again, and you have powerful arguments for investment and change.

In order to swallow the big financial pill of investment, we would start in a state like Illinois, with three facilities, one at each level of security; maximum, medium, and minimum, with 3 distinct models tailored specifically to people held at each security level, and continuing to add three facilities, maybe every three years,

but it is extremely important to understand that this CANNOT be done by private corporations or with any significant involvement of them, like that of the monolithic Wexford Health Sources whose track record in penological healthcare, like other corporations in the same market and those separately running the prisons themselves, both for some federal facilities and in some states, has been a thoroughly documented unmitigated disaster for the last 20 years or more. Profit based Corrections seemed like a good idea at the time, the reasoning being that performance as a profit incentive was a stronger driver of positive outcomes than the vagueries of government altruism. Instead, 20 years down the road, we have seen as we have seen thousands of times before, that where corporations can subvert the common good to make a profit, they will. With Illinois inmates dying of cancer at two to three times the rate of all other Illinois residents, and people like myself languishing in agony with a ruined shoulder because Wexford, in order to save money and thereby protect its' profit margins, refused to give me a simple shoulder surgery over nine years ago, it is high time to get the corporations out of the joints, once and for all. Another potential upside to keeping the private sector at bay from total prison reform, if the movement ever starts moving, is what we all should hope would be a contagious spreading into other agencies of real human concern among governmental employees upon whom everyone in this country relies upon to keep the roof up and the lights on. If a program like total prison reform actually takes off and starts cranking out miracles, would other agencies be inspired to follow suit? Currently we are still headed in the other, terribly wrong direction. The criminal justice system, top to bottom, is more corrupt than ever, and escapes further scrutiny by the band-aids politicians put on the system, like doing away with the death penalty in this and other states because so many innocent people have been executed over the last 40 years. Rather than go after the prosecutor's nation which has thoroughly infested the Congress and the state legislatures in twisting the rules by which the courts are run, and thereby destroying the rule of law, the politicians, many of them former prosecutors, like the legion of judges across the country, know that a public more interested in cop shows and football, are satisfied with the innocent rotting in prison instead of being executed. We are, after all, the greatest country in the world. As for the problem of recidivism, the answer, as supplied by the prosecutor's nation, has been to take parole off the table, thereby causing those who should have been rehabilitated, to die, very expensively for the taxpayers, in prison, serving out the full length of often draconian sentences while Wexford, et. al. dole out handsome bonuses to their senior executives, and fat dividends to their shareholders. With so many getting fat at the troughs, who needs reform? The roots of the problem, and they MUST be torn out if all the other reforms have any hope of working, are in the trial process. Take for example, the trial mechanism that allows the prosecution TWO closing statements, in legalese called "two bites of the apple", before the

jury is given the case to deliebrate over in the jury room, but only allows one closing statement from the defense, that statement BRACKETED by those of the state. This is one of a substantial number of extremely corrupt elements inserted into the trial process by the invasion of prosecutors into the Congress and state legislatures where such rules are written and ratified, the former prosecuters holding themselves up as "experts" on the subject to their legislative colleagues who reliably always defer to them, and by doing so, continue to fill the prisons with innocent victims of the criminal justice system. The justification for this heinously unfair advantage given to the state is pure prosecutorial double-speak: "Because we have to carry the burden of proof" they say with a straight face. When you ask one of these sociopaths why they shouldn't carry that burden FAIRLY, and only get as much of the apple as the defense does, they stare at you as if you are mad. The idea of fairness is so alien to the prosecutor's nation, that they take personal offense at any mention of it. It comes from the same place their rubber headed justification of "Soveriegn Immunity" does. The soveriegn immunity doctrine protects the legions of corrupt prosecutors and judges, almost all of the judges former prosecutors like my own at my criminal trial and those in the Illinois Appellate Court that rubber stamped my wrongful conviction on appeal, from themselves being held criminally liable for deliberately manufacturing, manipulating, hiding or destroying evidence, frequently in concert with the police, that allows them to put thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of innocent people away year after year. The reason they argue for the preservation of this ridiculous and anti-democratic shield, is that because "if judges and prosecutors don't have this protection, nobody would take these jobs." Nobody that is, except honest people, an idea, again, unfathomable to the nation of corrupt individuals holding these jobs and another protection granted them by their bretheren in the legislatures whose laws drive the nation's 95 percent conviction rate.

The "comity doctrine" is one you won't find written as law in the legislative record because it operates just fine as a ghostlike cultural artifact of the judges' good ole' boys and girls club. Where you will find the written evidence of its' existance is in countless appellate court decisions in thousands of cases, where appellate court judges will refuse to closely examine or overturn the egrigious decsions of their bretheren in the lower courts, or even rebuke or censure them, in order to "maintain the comity between our courts so necessary for them to function smoothly and properly". Another artifice these abettors like to invoke in rubber stamping the criminal behavoir of the lower courts is "We will not second guess the reasoning of the [lower] court on this matter...", when no one is asking them to guess. What we rightfully expect of the appellate courts, is to EXAMINE, not guess, but these are just different ways of the appellate courts telling us mere mortals that it is far more important that they all get along, and their comfort not be disturbed by these troublesome demands for justice that we the wrongly accused and convicted seem to think is our right.

Bill Clinton, a former prosecutor, may he burn in Hell along with the prosecutor controlled Congress that put the legislation on his desk, for signing the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, commonly known as AEDPA, into law, a law like the Defense of Marriage Act (attacking gays while he himself was desecrating his own marriage), that he has since said, he regrets signing. The massive wall of AEDPA that a legion of enraged legal scholars, court watchers and practitioners vehemently opposed and continue to stand against, is one Clinton now conveniently admits denies most wrongfully convicted individuals from obtaining relief in the federal courts. And what was one of the core drivers of AEDPA? To "unburden" the courts of the huge number of appellate cases created by the corrupt system of the prosecutor's nation, prosecutors like Clinton, who rig the rules and subvert justice to incarcerate tens of thousands of innocent victims across the country year after year. With AEDPA, we see once again, like the comity doctrine, that truth and justice always take a distant second place to the comfort of judges, their courts now "unburdened". "Would you like fries with that, your honor?"

Once they get sucked through the sewer grate of their local police station, most citezens accused of serious and lesser crimes, never escape, but they represent only 1 percent of the American population. It's a big country, they won't miss you once you're gone.

Alan Wyman
A wrongfully convicted prisoner.
Galesburg, Illinois
January, 2024