



## What you would see in prison

By Daniel McDonald, 36 years old, 11 years in prison in Texas

What you would see in prison? You'd see gym-like activities: men working out and sweating. They walk. Or strut. Puff themselves up. But you'd also see older, more broken men. One with a cane. Another using a crutch due to a leg wound that will never heal.

There are the mentally... out there. Those who seem to exist elsewhere. Those who never exit their cell. And others who live for drama - who go out of their way to cause problems.

Line running is common. So you'd see various lines and envelopes, and all manner of material sliding across the floor. They go over rails, down stairs, and under doors.

Officers will cuff and pull men out. Escort them. To the dayrooms and back. To the showers and back. Steel doors everywhere. Black and white walls. Synthetic lighting.... and bad air.

You'd literally SEE the smoke when fires are started by those who can't help themselves. With horrid return air (none in the cells), the smoke lingers. Pumps into the cells. So, you would see men with wet rags around their faces, or socks.

There are bald men, some with hair on top. Or hair around a bald top. Then, all manner of facial hair varieties: normal scruff, goatees, full beards. One guy looks like a bearded dwarf, like from a movie.

Guards are fat and skinny, tall and short. Not so smart, or more than competent. Or simply uncaring. The variance lends inconsistency to daily operations, so you'd see the officers doing their job properly one day, then lazily the next. The latter causes problems: jacked bean-slots, fires, flooding, foul language.

When it gets started, it becomes visceral. By that I mean, you can literally close your eyes and FEEL the tension. The aggression and frustration driving such actions. You would feel that, then watch how indifferent the officers are. Then watch them question "Why are you mad at me?"

What you would see and hear would likely whip up a vortex of emotions. You'd have to fight them. As others rise in anger, you'd feel drawn in the same direction. As if caught in a whirl pool. Or a powerful riptide. Swim with it. Walk along the rim of the visceral weight bearing upon you... or get drawn under.

At the end of the day, no more chains. No more doors opening then slamming closed, except when officers use the crossover doors to make their rounds. Conversations spring up. Chess games. All random. Then silence. When sports are on, cheering is common. Random men are taken to sick calls.

Lights will be on. Some brighter than others. The sun will set, and lights outside will add their ambience to what exists within. Not to comfort. More like glowing eyes. Ever watching. Because they are. Cameras everywhere: at the end of each run; in the dayrooms; lining the walk spaces.

When you get ready to leave, you will have seen all the grey uniforms. Reminiscent of confederate soldiers, as if they are civil war ancestors. Gives an archaic feel. Add the riot vests, utility belts, pepper spray... well, it is what it is.

Hopefully you'd never witness a "team". A select group in riot gear: pads, football helmets, huge shields. Lots of gas and a license to beat someone.

Outside this crazy reality are floating skies. Bodies of various kinds: birds and cows, horses and other people moving about. I can see the parking lot. The fences. Razor wire.

The wind is there to hear but seldom felt. The glow of the sun a tease most often. All is shaded a certain grey, tailored to affect the overall mood. Even the whites we wear are soiled. The white isn't a mark of purity, but rather marks to identify beasts. "Offenders". It may look clean and bright, but the intention is one of institutional deception. Why else would the guards wear greys and blacks and blues in opposition? Aren't they more noble?

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