



## “Room versus cell” - Death row cells in Florida, Texas and California compared to the cell of Robert in the book “Im Gefängnis”

Comments to the drawing by inmates on death row in Florida, Texas and California

Put together by Ines Aubert, Switzerland, February 2020



Drawing: „Im Gefängnis – Ein Kinderbuch über das Leben hinter Gittern“  
von Thomas Engelhardt und Monika Osberghaus mit Illustrationen von Susann Hesselbarth  
ISBN: 978-3-95470-186-5, Klett Kinderbuch Verlag, 2018

## Death row cells in Florida



Video: [How inmates on death row in Florida live as they await execution](#) Duration: 1:50 minutes  
Source: Tampa Bay Times, 2018

As for the differences in my cage and the one from Robert's is like yin&yang. There is no window in this cage, nor is there a rug on the cement floor! This cage has three cement block walls, and the front is all bars with the door facing the hallway, and the window across the hallway.

There are no shelves at all, to put books on or anything else. There are two screws in the wall for us to hang our towel and wash cloth, which has to be taken down during those cage inspections. The TV rack/shelf is in front of the bars about five feet off the floor. The table was added, like ten years ago, at the end of the bed in front of the bars, across the cage from the light, not very bright or smart.

There is no chair, no cement stool, we have to slide a footlocker over and sit on it, which doesn't work for many of us, height wise, not high enough.

Also, there is no standing locker to hang our clothes. We have to fold everything up and put them into our footlockers, along with our canteen items and other personal items.

The back wall is the headboard to our beds, to where the guards can fully see you.

Upon everything else, this picture has a whole lot more privacy than we have here in this cage. Even when we use the toilet, anyone in the hall can see us using it, no privacy at all or a curtain or any sorts.

Musquaw, 42 years on death row in Florida

As for the differences I see between my cell and the picture you sent is two things: first the window in the cell. The closest window to me has nine feet and two sets of bars between me and it. The second, and more important thing is that the cell in the picture has a homey feel to it. Our cells are all concrete, steel and drab colors.

When it comes to what my cell looks like it is not very big, so it will be easy to tell you about. It is seven feet wide and ten feet deep (213 centimeters wide and 305 centimeters deep). On the front of my cell is a set of steel bars covered with a metal grate with half-inch (1.25 centimeters) holes, so you can't reach through the bars. There is a little flap in the door called the "bean flap", which they unlock and slid your food through or put handcuffs on you when you leave the cell. As you walk into my room, to the right, there is a small table where my fan sits and above it is a stand for my TV. Between the table and back wall, there is a bunk just six feet long and made of steel. We are supplied with a think matt and pillow to sleep on. On the back wall opposite the head of my bed (left side of room) is a toilet and sink made together. They are made of stainless steel and have a polished steel mirror hanging on the wall behind them. That is my whole cell ... not much but I call it home.

Jay, 7 years on death row in Florida

Natural light and a view from the window in the cell. That is the one thing that would be the most valuable and comforting addition with having that type of prison cell, which is illustrated in the reading book. Our cells have no window. The nearest window is 10 feet in front of my cell, and the glass is bronze tinted. So, I have no natural light coming through. We here on Florida's death row spend 163 hours, out of 168 hours in a week, in our cells. We are let outdoors for up to five hours per week ( it is supposed to be six hours per week but that never happens).

I was incarcerated in the year 2000, and I was 47 years old at that time. My eyesight was better than 20/20 back then. Both of my parents had 20/20 vision well into their 60's, so I have the genetics for an above average eyesight into my later years. All of my siblings, (two sisters and a brother) who are also in their 60's, still have exceptionally good eyesight. I am the only one who has to wear eyeglasses in order to read a book, or see clearly at a distance.

I have been living under fluorescent light for near 20 years now. Natural light is essential for healthy eyes, and also for supplying certain vitamins which our body needs. It is because of the lack of natural light that my eyesight has become so poor.

Even something as simple as a chair in my cell would be a blessing. We live in a very stark environment. We have no privacy, such as the divider at the head of the bed. We are not allowed to hang pictures or anything at all on our walls. We must have EVERYTHING stored in our lockers (two small floor lockers) at all times., except when we are using any particular item(s) such as reading a book or writing materials when writing a letter.

Having a cell such as the one illustrated, would be like moving out of a cave and into a nice flat with window. Please know that I am in no way exaggerating the conditions in which we must live here on Florida's death row. There is one more inhumane condition, which I must mention.

From the day of my incarceration in the year 2000, my feet, have never since then, touched mother earth. I forget what it feels like to have grass or soil under my feet. I will also add this fact... The animal rights group here in America placed a law suit in the Federal Court system against all animal shelters that did not let their animals out of their cage for at least three hours a day., and out onto a "'\*pastured area.'" (\*with grass). They won the lawsuit. This means that animals have better rights than we do! :-/ I don't remember who made this next statement, but

it is fair and accurate... "One can clearly see just how civilized any nation is, by the way it treats its prisoners." I suppose, I need not say more.

Florida Death row prisoner Will (19 years)

## Death row cells in Texas



Model of a Texan death row cell

Video [Life on death row in Texas](#) Duration: 2:30 minutes

Source: Robert Riggs reports Texas new death row, 2011

The first thing that struck me when I looked at the picture of Robert's cell was that, if I ignored the bars outside the window, the room did not really look like a cell at all, but rather a small efficiency apartment – or maybe even a compartment on a train (I mean, there is a bag with a zipper sitting on the floor!). Too much was normal: a real toilet, with a separate sink, not a stainless-steel all-in-one contraption. Things like actual towel racks and toilet paper holders simply do not exist in the world I know.

Here cells have hooks, of a sort, but mostly I am required to either drape clothing, or a towel/rag over my toilet, sink, or make a line to hang it all up when I want things to dry. From the floor to the ceiling, the cell seems less harsh. I can't tell if the cell is carpeted, but the drawing seems to indicate tile in the small bathroom area. Our floors are solid slabs of plain concrete with no variance, and the entire cell is an open space, with no dividing wall to separate the bathroom space from the sleeping area like in Robert's cell. In fact, such a wall would never exist in the cells here, because prison officials would consider it a safety hazard. Guards want to be able to see every part of the cell clearly, and a wall like in Robert's cell provides a sort of privacy, maybe even to be considered a sort of decency, that we are denied.

Next are the amenities and fixtures. A real chair? In our cells, the best that will ever exist are stainless-steel stools (just a round, flat surface) mounted on a metal frame/pole that is bolted to

the floor. Everything just seems so ergonomic in Robert's cell. A full sized window to take in outside views, but also allowing in much more natural lighting (as opposed to the slitted windows we are used to). A curtain that can be drawn? Wow. Real utensils to eat with, instead of a just a plastic spoon, or a spork; and actual plate ware, not just the plastic bowls and cups we are limited to having. \*Sigh.\* A standing locker? Geez.

Even his bed looks comfortable! Quite a bit different than the metal frame bolted to the concrete floor that our, often, lumpy mattresses lay on. And he has a real pillow?! \*Blinks.\* I struggle to remember the last time I slept on one of those. Granted, we make pillows: we take the stuffing out of the mattresses and sew up sheets into various pillow-like shapes. But a feather pillow, or something even better, exists in a reality I can't access.

I imagine that if the door was shown I would be able to comment on it. It just seems that Robert's entire cell was organized/designed with the idea to provide some modicum of comfort, whereas our cells are structured to exist as a harsh, Spartan reality. Overall, I would like to think Robert's living quarters serve to aid in his rehabilitation, because he is not forced to reside in such a small space, required to share it all with another person, then made to, at times, suffer the whims of another individual. Robert seems to be given, through his more normal looking living space, a true sanctuary that can likely mitigate some of the anxiety and depression that can crop up due to being separated from the world and loved ones.

Terry, 14 years in prison with a life sentence, in segregation in a cell like on death row

As soon as I looked at the German prison cell, the first thing that caught my eye was the big window. Not being able to see the outside world is really depressing. That was a big factor of what almost got me out of my mind. Thank God, I got off death row after 24 years and have now a life sentence. What I would love to change in my cell would be the big window or to have a big picture window install in my cell.

Mariano, 80 years old, 34 years on death row and in population, suicide attempt ten years ago

A window with a curtain, a desk with a chair, a bookcase, a cabinet and a decent bathroom. Looks like a hotel room compared to mine. My cell is probably three times smaller, with a bunk bed, lockers overhead, and a small toilet-sink combo. Room versus cell.

Seth, 25 years old, 9 years in prison with a life sentence

## Death row cells in California



California death row cell, Bohemian.com, 2015

Video [Virtual Tour Inside San Quentin's Death Row](#) Duration: 3:50 minutes

Source: Los Angeles Times, 2016

The most striking difference between Robert's cell and the cell I live in is the window. Robert's cell looks more like a room than a prison cell. His window seems to give him direct access to looking outside. He has curtains. I do not. He has a writing desk and a chair. I do not. There also is a large mirror attached to the wall. In San Quentin we have to purchase our mirror from the canteen if we want one. I don't know what significant difference it would make if I was in Robert's cell, because I would still be in prison and subjective to everything that prison entails.

Jump, 39 years on death row in California