

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

Pettiness In Prison: Another Example

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Two years ago I felt the Lord calling me to become an artist. That's a pretty strange thing for someone to say and if the Lord had not already turned me into a poet, I would have dismissed His call as a delusion (I have no artistic talent of my own). In 2010, He gave me the gift of poetry and over the next 4 years I wrote over 600 poems and had dozens of them published.

In 2014, I began purchasing drawing supplies - including a drawing board - and started drawing. Over time, I became a pretty good artist. I'm not a professional and I'll never be famous for my artwork, but friends and family like the drawings I send them. I have many drawings posted on my Face Book page.

The only downside is that in the Wisconsin prison system we are faced with ever-increasing restrictions on our conduct and personal property. My theory is that the only way a staff member can get promoted is by identifying a security need and addressing it. Since Wisconsin already has one of the safest prison systems in the country, the only way to earn a promotion is by taking something away from us.

In the fall of 2014, bureaucrats stopped us from buying art supplies from free world vendors of our choosing. We must now purchase a limited range of pre-approved items at a substantially higher price from designated vendors. Why? So the DOC can get a kickback from vendors for the privilege of selling goods to us.

In the fall of 2015, new, more restrictive hobby rules were issued - the most significant change being that all drawing boards which had a clip attached had to be disposed of or the clip removed. Drawing boards with clips have been allowed in Wisconsin prisons for close to 50 years. There has never been an incident or justification for banning clips on drawing boards - which I why I believe in the get-a-promotion theory I developed. Why else would a DOC bureaucrat issue an inane restriction like removing clips from drawing boards? It's ridiculous and petty. It accomplishes nothing and makes it more difficult to do artwork. But we are powerless captives at the mercy of administrators who are so paranoid and delusional that they make the North Korean government look sane and rational.