

TRULINCS 23038076 - LUMMUS, ALLAN CRAIG - Unit: BAS-H-A

FROM: 23038076
TO: [REDACTED]
SUBJECT: mindful prisoner #7
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Mindful Prisoner #7
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"The numbness I felt reflected my disconnection from my body."

One of the more common experiences in prison, is overhearing (or participating in) a conversation about the injustice of their particular case. Everyone can cite chapter and verse about why they are/were wronged. Either we were treated more harshly than other similar cases, or our case is not like the others that our case is associated.

The later happens be my version of this rant. As a middle aged white professional male, it is not surprising why I am here: sex offender. But the sex offender term refers to wide range of acts. For example as a first time possessor of child porn I have the same post prison restrictions as a serial child rapist. The actual risk to community varies by crime, but the restrictions are uniform.

So I was going through these rants at the "injustice" of the justice system with some friends and I noticed something about how I was reacting that was new. My whole body was hot, sweat was poring from my pores, and my pulse was racing. That sounds very normal reaction to a passionate display of emotion, you say. Well it is for me. My normal experience of any personal emotion is numbness regardless of what my head told me I was feeling: anger, sadness, happiness, etc. Intense feelings were reserved for academic or activist debate about someone else's injustices, not my own.

A regular argument between C and me was why didn't I show my anger at x for hurting me. C overtime became my surrogate emotion demonstrator. She was happy or sad or anger for me. I experienced them through her.

While some of the progress can be attributed to depression meds, a big part of the shift is the daily practice of mindfulness. Experiencing how my body holds my emotions. Prior to prison I would live all day in my head. I had to consciously focus on my breath and body before I could feel the emotions fully. The numbness reflected my disconnection from my body.

A good poem by Derek Wilcott expresses this feeling of knowing your own heart.

Love after Love

The time will come
When, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome

And say, sit here; Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was yourself.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all you life, whom you have ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.