

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

September 26, 2011

You've Got To Be Kidding!

I had my cell searched the other day. No big deal. I've had hundreds of cell searches over the last 27 years. But for the first time I had a guard tell me that he had to take my paper clips because they're contraband. I kid you not! All I could think was that Wisconsin is spending \$2.5 billion on corrections over the next two years so this guy can keep Wisconsin's citizens safe by confiscating paper clips.

Is he delusional or what? In a previous blog I talked about having a large chest of leather-working tools in my cell until 2000 while in a medium security prison. Eleven years later and now paper clips are a threat to security? Sounds like something you'd see in a Saturday Night Live skit or read about in The Onion.

I should point out that I have a scissors, pens, pencils, nail clippers, toothbrush, crochet hook and all sorts of other items. If I was the officer who did the search I would feel like a fool trying to tell someone he could not have paper clips.

Perhaps he doesn't view prisoners as people, deserving of the same consideration he would give to a neighbor or co-worker. Perhaps he is one of the people Albert Bandera did his study on (blog posting, Aug. 15, 2011). His guard training at the DOC Academy may have created in his mind the rationale for his actions. I don't know. I can only speculate and shake my head in disbelief in what I see.

Another unbelievable experience occurred a couple of months ago.

I recently made arrangements to place a direct phone call to a friend in Italy using the prison phone system. This was a rare treat and I willingly agreed to pay the cost of the phone call, knowing that nowadays phone calls to anywhere in the world can be made for pennies per minute. A flyer I obtained from freedomline.net, for instance, states that they can provide direct dialing phone service to anywhere in the world for 31¢ per minute or less. I figured I could talk for 30 minutes and pay about \$10 for the call.

What I didn't factor in was how much a client like the DOC would pay a phone company under its contract. I made a 19 minute call and was charged \$93.30 - about \$5.00 per minute. If I had internet access, I could have called on Skype for free. Instead, I had to pay the rate AT&T charges the DOC.

Harlan Richards/September 26, 2011

In the September 2011 issue of Cruising World, an article quoted the cost of using a satellite phone at \$.85-\$1.25 per minute while in a sailboat anywhere in the world. For that globe trotting sailor he could make a call to anywhere in the world from anywhere in the world for about one-quarter what I was charged to make a direct call via landline. I am paid wages of 26-28¢ per hour for 40 hours per week. That comes out to \$21.76 every two weeks. That \$93.30 phone bill cost me over 9 weeks of gross wages.

How many millions of dollars is the DOC overpaying AT&T for its phone service?

Dawning

With each day's dawning
My anticipation grows
The way a hungry patron
Nibbles breadsticks waiting
As the feast is prepared.
A lifetime of poor choices
Begetting bad luck are bound
To end soon, releasing me into
A sea of humanity as a
Salmon fry finds its way from
Fresh water to sea.
With each day's ending
I look back sorrowfully
The way an unlucky gambler
Peers into empty wallet,
Wishing things had gone differently.
Yet at the next day's dawning
My anticipation swells anew.

Harlan Richards