

November 9, 2011

Hello World!

I survived my birthday with only a mild case of depression. I received several very uplifting cards filled with hugs and gentle teasing about my age. I also spoke on the telephone with my father, a dear friend of mind who use to be my sweet 16 heartthrob, and to the daughter and granddaughter of the woman I murdered. Each wished me a Happy Birthday.

Yes, you read correctly, I telephoned the family members of my victim. It is a true miracle, recently revealed, and I will share more later. For now, I must keep my promise to share my early days in San Quentin and my first experiences mingling.

I remained on orientation status for eight days. During this time I was locked in my cell 24 hours a day except for breakfast and dinner, which is eaten in a monstrous cavern that could house the Goodyear blimp. I ate with other orientation inmates. I was also allowed to shower once every three days. You may be asking, "What's orientation?" Well, no one, staff or inmate stops by to explain a thing. One must watch and listen to learn what to do and what not to do.

On the very morning my cell door opened to allow me to walk the yard, I made my first mistake. I ran along the tier. The loud speakers in the housing unit were calling, "Yard! Yard! Last call." I was in a rush to obtain a book to read from another inmate on orientation who I had spoken to at chow. One of the two gunners (Correctional Officers) standing on the catwalk, a walkway 15 feet from and running parallel to the inmate tiers, levelled his shotgun at me and yelled, "Stop!"

I froze, as did all those around me. My God, the muzzle of a shotgun is huge. The gunner growled, "You run on my tier and I'll shoot you." I stammered, "I'm getting a book." He said, "In prison a man only runs from or to something bad, and it ain't happening on my watch. Understand?" "Yes, sir," I said. I've never run in prison since, unless it was on the designated running track.

I walked down the narrow stairs and out of the housing unit. Being December (1987) it was raining. San Quentin's gym was in fact used as a gym with weights, handball courts, basketball hoops, and a raggedy volleyball net. The building echoed with weights crashing against each other and the shouts and grunts of a hundred men. The only silent ones were the gunners perched high - watching - gunners are everywhere. Inmates watch too. You always watch what others are doing; who they are speaking with and where they are looking. If someone is watching you, you better figure out why, and quick.

After entering the gym (guards patted each inmate entering, searching for weapons), I kept moving, trying not to be in someone

else's spot. Every inch of a prison is someone's territory, some group's, some gang's, some race's. On my third lap around the gym, I saw him. He had just sat up from bench pressing 300 lbs. I began walking toward him and had only taken three steps when his dark eyes zeroed in on mine. He had had years of watching, of detecting movement, of spying out someone watching him. His eyes narrowed as I neared, ready to react to the unfamiliar face who approached.

Stopping four feet from him, beyond arm and knife reach, I asked, "Is that you, Mohammed Ali?"

I'll share more next week.

Thanks for checking in on me.

Cordially,



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Novel: [A Thundering Wind \(Amazon.com\)](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000APR000)