

January 10, 2012

Hello World!

Back to the 'Q'. Prison is monotony. Everyday is the same. Breakfast at 5:30 AM. Work at 7:00 AM. End of work at 3:00 PM. Dinner at 5:30 PM. Locked in your cell at 6:00 PM until breakfast the next day. I quickly learned I had two jobs in San Quentin. The first as the 103-B card clerk and the second was to break the monotony.

One stereotype of the convict that quickly shattered in my mind was that no matter how uneducated prisoners may be, they were neither stupid nor lacking in creativity. Unfortunately, too many use their gifts to manufacture pruno (wine), fashion weapons for offensive or defensive purposes, and to smuggle contraband (drugs). There were and are a minority group that turn their God-given gifts toward productivity. Some gravitate to music, others to arts and crafts, ie. the prison hobby program. I am still amazed by the artisans around me. Their work in wood, paint, leather, and jewelry is astounding.

Again, it was Mo who offered me a way to be productive in my non-working hours and to earn money. I would have cash to purchase canteen items and send money home to help pay for the collect calls I made. With the prison's proximity to San Francisco and its iconic cable cars, one of the best selling items in the prison's hobby store were wooden cable cars. They were manufactured with working lights, music, and some rotated. The deal, Mo purchased the materials and cut the wood to size. I assembled them. He lacquered them and I would decal the sides and add felt to the bases.

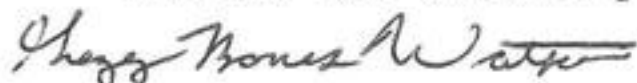
For my efforts I received 25% of the sales. A great deal for all. I spent hours each night being productive and earned about \$250.00 a month. The prison gained a programming inmate and the hobby program cost the taxpayers nothing. A charge of 32 cents from every dollar earned by the inmate went to the state to pay the hobby manager's salary. In addition, many inmates saved their earnings to have a nest egg for their release because the \$200.00 gate money provided by the state to a parolee barely paid the cost to travel home.

Eventually I branched out into making hobby horses, one of which is in the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. I also carved duck lapel pins and screen printed tee shirts. I was productive, earning money, and paying my way. A win-win for all -- except victims' organizations.

Victims have the right to obtain justice even though many times it is not satisfactory. What they shouldn't have is the political clout to cut off their noses to spite the faces. In their vigor for satisfaction, to get a pound of flesh, victims' groups have successfully lobbied to shut down many prison programs. Music and hobby, except for in-cell drawing, have been eliminated. So too the free staff positions paid for by the inmates.

For me, I turned to writing. For many others, well, idle hands are the devil's workshop.

Thanks for checking in on me.



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Novel: A Thundering Wind (Amazon.com)