

#51

## Maybe I'm Crazy?

© by Nate A. Lindell, P.O. Box 9900 Boscobel, WI 53805

created 19 Feb. 2012

Here, on W.S.P.F.'s Alpha unit, the grumble of "Breakfast!" coming from my cell's intercom stirs me from my dreams each morning. Usually, about ten minutes later, a short, slight, senselessly smiling female C.O. with an acne-scarred face is the one who slides the tray or bag containing token amounts of food into my cage. She giggles every time she stops in front of my cell, as she does when she stops in front of other cells. I've wondered if she's giggling at the fact that I'm becoming skeletonized, that she's been puppetized, or due to a delusion of romance inspired by my recitation of "The Raven" when she and another female C.O. escorted me to Alpha.

Other staff who deliver rations or pick up our garbage all have dourer expressions, as if they really don't want to be doing what they are doing. I'm sure that, as reportedly occurred amongst the guards at Auschwitz, staff here suffer psychologically from exposure to the miserable conditions they help create. Imagine how you'd react to earning a basic living by taking care of caged people, many of whom threaten you or disrespect you or fling body fluids at you or masturbate in front of you or attack you or <sup>do</sup> a combination of these or other things in an effort to share their misery with you.

Staff in this prison tend to look so doleful that their depression exacerbates my own. Sometimes I'll crack a joke with them just to relieve the pressure of their sadness on my fragile mood. They are easier to extract a laugh from than most prisoners are, and it is a power greater than all of us — a dumb, democratic beast — that has thrust these terrible roles on both staff and prisoners.

"Oh, you'd be surprised at how many staff are on S.S.R.I.s.<sup>1</sup> If only there was a light bulb above their head that turned on," the psychiatrist here said to me at our last visit, with too much verve. That comment

---

f.n.1. S.S.R.I.s are selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors, such as Prozac.

and its personality led me to believe that both the fittering C.O. and the psychiatrist were such staff. I too am on an S.S.R.I. and find myself sometimes experiencing wholly unjustifiable good humor, such as savoring the hope suicide always offers.

As insane as I suspect that I am, after 11 years in W.S.P.F.'s segregation units, when I consider many of the captives around me, I'm impressed at how competent I actually am. Sure, I look like "a smoked-out Woody Harrelson," "a skeleton with glasses," as prisoners have said. Sure, I sleep 14 hours a day and daydream for another four. Yes, I loudly recite poems while furiously pacing the four steps back and forth in my cage. Most nights my dreams are... intense, often causing me to wake up by the sound of my own yells or frantic movements. I'm startled easily, particularly by images in my vision's periphery. But, look - I can write rational essays, study complex subjects, draw intriguing art, and even successfully argue difficult legal challenges to oppressive prison practices.<sup>2</sup> The psychologist for my unit, Cavegirl, finds me so sane that she's always rushing from my presence! Despite my anguish, I've retained my indomitable core.

Much of the pain I feel is caused by realizing how other captives are being degraded, further broken by this mad experiment known as prison. This is so even though they, along with staff, try to amplify my hardships.

One prisoner, a black guy convicted of rape and infected with H.I.V., he loudly proclaims that staff are pumping poison gas in his cell. When I suggested that he might be paranoid, then, after him telling me he was convicted of rape, to which I replied "bye," he accused me of being racist, not knowing I'm convicted of killing a white man whom I believed was a sex criminal. Despite my dislike for rapists, I can understand why he's paranoid and feel the horror of his situation. Given my life sentence, I too may die in this dungeon.

Another prisoner, one like a dozen I've encountered (see my posts

---

f.n.2 The defendants recently agreed to settle Wesley v. Hamblin, W.D. Wis. Case No. 3:10-cv-00459-slc, a case I litigated, which is described in a post dated May 2011 and titled "An Invitation to Former Wisconsin Prison Staff..."

about Mad Max), seems friendly one minute, then, a few minutes later, after I fail to satisfy his convoluted ideals, calls me every foul thing and makes every vile threat he can think of. It's no relief that I know he's miserable, that his arms are covered with the fresh scars from where he bit himself, that I understand his malformed personality. Although I have sympathy for him, I can only spare so much and must abandon him to his slow suicide.

A third type of prisoner, one more rare in Wisconsin's prison system, is exemplified by Justin Patrick Welch, (a.k.a. Slayer), who gave me permission to name him. Again and again circumstances put him in a corner and he fought his way out, along the way losing the decency that only restricted his fighting. After living on the run in Mexico, he's doing life in prison, convicted of being a hit man straight out of a Hollywood thriller. He wanted to go out in a blaze of glory, escaping from custody (at the cost of two lives) while he transported back to Wisconsin in an effort to make that happen. America's Most Wanted thwarted that plan; and, after being locked in total isolation in the Waukesha County Jail for more than a year, Mr. Welch tried to take a less dramatic exit from life that took 18 stitches to prevent. Despite that suicide attempt having occurred less than 7 months ago, the W.D.O.C. now has him in segregation at W.S.P.F. After our many chats, I believe he's too serious to botch his imminent suicide attempt.

My circumstances and those of my neighbors are stressful and seem crazy. Forces I can't control and struggle to comprehend cause my world to act in ways that seem senselessly destructive. There is, I concede, another possibility. Maybe I'm crazy — not everyone and everything around me. Maybe all the seemingly senseless miserable and destructive activity I see makes sense, but my craziness blinds me from seeing that sense? Like how society was blind to the sense that motivated my own destructive reaction to oppressive circumstances.

This is why I pester Caregirl, why I ask readers for criticism. If I am crazy, how would I be able to tell myself that?