Thoughts From The Heart
By: Joseph Smith
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1600HRS-23:25HRS

"A Secret Society Prison"

The trip had taken three hours. The course of our drive had been down I-71 South heading towards the Prison Reception Center outside Columbus, Ohio. There was snow and ice on the road. I had no sunglasses, and the glare had given me a headache - my head was pounding, the three hours I'd spent on the Prison Bus along with 25 others had made me sick as we turned off the freeway, across a bridge - You could see the Prison. As we cleared the MAIN GATE, I sat with my head pounding, trying my best not to throw up. It seemed fitting that the physical pain I was experiencing accompanied the mental anguish I felt. I was angry, embarrassed and very frustrated. Yet, part of me didn't care. It was like a cloud had been hanging over me for my entire life and had pointed me to this day. We was cleared off the Bus & the cattle - entered the Building - It was cold

THE DEPUTIES HAD kept THE HEAT OFF IN BACK OF THE BUS. ONCE AGAIN, AS WE WALKED SINGLE FILE - THE physical CONDITIONS OF THE DAY PARALLELED THE CONDITION OF MY HEART. I WAS SHIVERING ON THE OUTSIDE AND STONE cold ON THE INSIDE. I WAS TAKING IT ALL IN, WEIGHING EVERY MOMENT, NEVER TO FORGET THIS FEELING. THE RECEPTION CENTER CONSISTED OF A LARGE ROOM STAFFED WITH A MIX OF ABOUT 50 WORKERS, BOTH PRISONERS AND STAFF. THE ROOM WAS LOW IN ACTIVITY, THE PROCESSING FORMS WERE TYPED IN TRIPLICATE ON TYPEWRITERS. SOUNDS FROM THOSE TYPEWRITERS CUT THROUGH THE MURMUR OF THE VOICES. I SAT with A group of NEW PRISONERS Also AWAITING PROCESSING IT WAS AS IF WE WERE INVISIBLE. NO ONE SPOKE TO US OR EVEN LOOKED AT US. WE FELT LIKE WE WERE NOTHING. FINALLY, A PRISONER with long hair, the hair called MY NAME. HE MOTIONED, AND I FOLLOWED. THE NEXT SEQUENTIAL PRISON NUMBER WAS PLACED ON A PLAQUE. I NEVER TRIED TO Remember THE DAY THAT ALL OF THIS happened; IT'S JUST THAT I'VE NEVER been ABLE TO FORGET. THE Number 211195 WAS WRITTEN ON THE PLAQUE. THE PLAQUE WAS THEN hung AROUND MY NECK DURING THE mug shot. ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER IS AROUND YOUR NECK FOR ONLY A FEW SECONDS, THE EFFECTS LAST A

Lifetime. ONCE you get That Number, you know That you ARE CONDEMNED. Memories FADE as you get older, Details of EVENTS of your PAST FADE, But you NEVER FORGET That Prison Number. It DEFINES who you ARE. After the mug shot, I WAS ESCORTED INTO ANOTHER Room. I STOOD NEXT To a long COUNTER. There were TEN PRISONERS working one walked over AND told me To take my clothes off. I STRIPPED DOWN To my UNDERWEAR - I was Told To Take off The UNDERWEAR. Then I STOOD STANDING There Totally NAKED AND BAREFOOT. All The ACTIVITIES CONTINUED AROUND ME while I STOOD NAKED AND Humiliated. ANOTHER CONVICT motioned for me To follow Him. We went INTO a small SHOWER Room. He HANDED ME A BAR OF SOAP AND A TOWEL AND Then pointed To the SHOWER. As I TURNED The HANDLE, cold WATER CAME OUT. It WAS FREEZING! I FINISHED QUICKLY AND DRIED off As much As I Could. ANOTHER PRISONER walked over To me holding A chemical Sprayer - He Told me To LIFT my ARMS. When I did, he gave me Two large Sprays UNDER Each Arm. Then He POINTED The SPRAYER AT My GENITALS AND GAVE Three long sprays. He smiled, "It's FOR CRABS If you got ANY." STILL NAKED, I WALKED BACK INTO The LARGER AREA - THE PRISONER Asked what SIZE I WORE AND Then HANDED

me some clothes. I've always wondered why they bothered asking my size. The blue pants and shirts and jacket they gave me was twice my size and three inches too long: I was given three pairs of boxer shorts, tee shirts, and socks. A guard led me to a receiving block. There I was assigned a blanket, sheets, pillow pillow case. Within 30 seconds after entering my cell I was surrounded. Some were sharing information about rules and what to expect from the staff. I layed on my bunk until a guard yelled that it was time for dinner. So I grabbed my jacket and followed the crowd. It seemed to be the coldest February in Ohio history. The sub zero wind blew right through me. I had no gloves, no hat and only one thin pair of socks. The mess hall was crowded so we had to stand outside for more than 15 minutes. We stood there like cattle while the guards when inside and laughed at us. I followed the line, grabbed a tray and was issued my first unforgettable serving of Prison Food. It was horrible. Bus stations have bad food the army, convenience stores, most hotels, truck stops and mall restaurants also have bad food. But no food on the planet compares to Prison Food. It is the most unsavory tasteless con-coction known to mankind.

IT HAD BEEN A RIGOROUS DAY FILLED WITH ACTIVITY, MOST of which CONSISTED OF WAITING. I BEGAN TO REALIZE how TIRING IT IS TO WAIT. HOWEVER, WAITING IS A NORMAL part of BEING IN PRISON. DURING WAITING TIMES THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO. AT the DOCTOR'S OFFICE THERE ARE ALWAYS lot of MAGAZINES TO CHOSE FROM. DURING RUSH hour THE RADIO helps TO PASS THE TIME. IN PRISON NO ONE CARES ABOUT YOU. THERE ARE NO RADIOS, NO MAGAZINES, AND NO TELEVISIONS. YOU ARE LEFT ALONE WITH lost your thoughts. EITHER THAT, OR TALK with the others PRISONERS. THE TIME PASSES VERY SLOWLY. IN PRISON, ALL YOU THINK ABOUT IS TIME, how much TIME YOU ARE DOING, How much TIME has passed, AND SO ON. AFTER DINNER I FINALLY was able TO LIE DOWN AND go TO sleep. THE NEXT MORNING AS I was making my BED A PRISONER walked up TO ME, "YOU DON'T KNOW this YET, he SAID But you're going TO the COMMISSARY TODAY. THAT'S Where you BUY STUFF, LIKE A STORE. I GOT A LIST of STUFF you're GONNA BUY ME. GET ME FOUR packs of SMOKES, GET ME SOME STAMPS, GET ME SOME COOKIES, AND FOUR BAGS of JELLY BEANS. BRING all this STUFF BACK TO ME. HERE, TAKE this LIST. YOU GOT IT? I GOT IT, I SAID AS the GUY TURNED AROUND AND STARTED TO WALK AWAY. THIS WAS the MOMENT THAT I HAD BEEN WAITING FOR. IT'S COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT IN PRISON YOU have TO STAND YOUR GROUND WHEN CONFRONTED FOR the FIRST TIME. IF YOU

DON'T Fight, YOU ARE SENTENCED TO A SUBSERVIENT EXISTENCE. THE PRISON SOCIETY IS ONE THAT PREYS ON THE WEAK, IT" NOT A NICE AND SWEET SOCIETY. AS THE GUY TURNED TO WALK AWAY, I WADDED THE paper UP, with ALL EYES ON ME FROM other PRISONERS, I THREW THE paper AT him, HITTING HIM IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD. HE SPUN AROUND FAST with ATTITUDE LIKE he WAS going TO KILL ME. I STOOD FAST IN my place WAITING FOR HIS NEXT'S MOVE. WHEN he STARED AT ME, ALL he SAW WAS SOMEBODY THAT DIDN'T CARE, ALL THE FRUSTRATION AND HATRED INSIDE OF ME, BREWING IN MY HEART DEEP DOWN IN my SOUL, HAS COME OUT, NOTHING MATTERED TO ME, I DIDN'T CARE IF I LIVED OR DIED, AND HE SAW THAT FIRE IN my EYES, I WAS NOT ABOUT TO be held CAPTIVE BY SOME LOSER- AND he SAW IT IN my FACE, AND TURNED AND WALKED AWAY, AND IT WAS A WISE DECISION FOR him. BEING AN EX-ARMY RANGER, I would HAVE HURT him REAL BAD. AS A NON PRISONER, I WAS TRYING TO GET A GRIP ON PRISON LIFE. PRISN LIFE IS A VICIOUS SOCIETY IN which "EVERYBODY" IS trying TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERYONE ELSE. I REALIZED THAT WITHIN HOURS OF ARRIVING, AND I BEGAN TO THINK ABOUT my LIFE- HOW DID I GET here- WHO LED ME TO THESE DEPTHS?? QUESTIONS I STILL DON'T HAVE AN ANSWER TOO.

UNTIL NEXT TIME— THOUGHTS FROM THE HEART—