

## The Things That Should Not Be

It is very late, and I've turned the light out. It's way past midnight and my cell is very dark. It is now November 1st, also known as All Saints Day, a day we in the Catholic faith celebrate as we honor the Saints who bring to light in creative fashion quite new human potentialities. For me, it is also the anniversary of my Father, William, passing away in 1990. So you could say that it's a solemn occasion for me.

For the next few hours, I will be completely alone in the universe. Rather than lay on my bunk, I've chosen to sit on the floor with my back against the concrete wall. For some strange reason, this gives me a different perspective on where I am in the world. The sensations are real: dark, confined, alone. There is nothing to see, and I find myself running my hand over the smooth concrete wall. I picture myself in a casket, buried alive. Surprisingly, I don't feel trapped or in a state of panic. My train of thought seems much sharper and my mind is comfortable enough to wander wherever it desires. I've let go of every worry and my thoughts take me on a journey. Events in my life flash by in thousands of still photos, and in each brief millisecond I play each one out. I recognize my faults and attributes. Not by others' standards, but by my own. As we grow older and perhaps even wiser, we see life through reflective eyes. What actions seemed so prudent so many years ago are not as clear today, at least not to me.

Youth can destroy the future. So can ignorance, when it becomes a sickness, as it appears to be with certain staff here in this place, known as Shirley Medium.

Earlier in the morning, some friends and I went into the Chapel during the adoration hour to pray, as a community for my Father. My friends and members of our Church community showed up with me, for me, to show both me and the memory of my Father honor and respect. I was humbled to my very core.

And before we began to pray enmasse, someone made a little coffee for us to enjoy, as we sat in fellowship inside our Chapel quietly reflecting upon the spirituality of the moment.

And then the Captain looked through the window and saw what we were doing. Sitting in community and fellowship, supporting a friend on a solemn occasion.

Here's what we were not doing: getting high, making weapons, stealing, gambling, fighting, plotting gang activities or harrassing staff. Yet this Captain flipped out and made a scene out in the hallway. And all because we were sitting inside the Chapel, unsupervised, praying and seeking some much needed spiritual guidance amongst one another as well as from those we pray to and for.

I can't remember when the caliber of the inmate and the staff changed. I guess it was a slow process over the years. Because on both sides, the "new breed" is pathetic! Don't get me wrong, not all of the new breed are lacking honor, integrity, discipline and some sense of commitment to what's right, but the majority are only interested in themselves. The inmates about getting high and getting over on one another, and the staff about making money and implementing petty and foolish rules and policies which do absolutely nothing to address the brokenness of this system: drug addiction, gangs, and ennui.

Rather than address those issues, they implement rules about i.d. cards and proper placement of such. Proper placement of movement passes, cell decorum, clothes lines and hooks on the wall.

Henry David Thoreau once said; "Any fool can make a rule, and every fool will follow it."

That is what is going on inside these places.

So when a Captain, the shift commander of the entire institution wigs out about a dozen men sitting inside the chapel praying and drinking coffee, I'd say that there is something seriously wrong with him and the entire mind set of the powers that be, So what should I do? I believe you must look upon such people as having a sickness. It's a sickness that corrupts the human spirit by trying to reduce us to their low levels and violating our impulse toward goodness and caring for one another, our families and our communities.

True strength lives where fear cannot gain a foothold because it lives at the center of belief. Remember, strength is not a force. It is an attribute of the heart. Its opposite is not weakness and fear, but confusion, lack of clarity and lack of sound intention.

Horrible and all-powerful as evil sometimes seems to be in a world like ours, in the larger picture love is always overwhelmingly dominant, and will ultimately be triumphant. Evil is necessary

because without it, free will was impossible and without free will there could be no growth- no forward movement, and no chance for us to become what God longed for us to be.

So the Captain did his thing and eventually left. And then Joe Labriola went and found a passage in the bible. Psalm 56, which reads in part:

"O'God, have mercy on me,  
for people are hounding me.  
My foes attack me all day long.  
I am constantly hounded by those who slander me,  
and many are boldly attacking me.

Psalm 56:1,2

"They are always twisting what I say;  
they spend their days plotting to harm me.  
They come together to spy on me-  
watching my every step, eager to kill me."

Psalm 56: 5,6

As Lao Tzu says, "The best fighters display no anger: The best conquer seeks no revenge."

Remember the words of the **Tao te Ching**: "The only true strength is a strength that people do not fear."

Strength based in force is a strength people fear.

Strength based in love is a strength people crave.

And so, here I sit. Entombed by choice in this small area and entombed by actions in the greater. My physical space in life has been determined. My mental space has yet to be realized.

I'll continue to push forward, despite these obstacles and have faith in my path. We live in a pluralistic world, and only the most hard-headed refuse-to accept the fact that truth-whether spiritual, cultural, political, or otherwise-is given to different people in different ways.

Only a fool refuses to walk in the sunlight because he cannot see the shape of the sun.