

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

May 1, 2017

Strawberries In Prison

Last week, we were served fresh strawberries at one of our meals. They gave each prisoner 4 strawberries. This is the first time since I've been in prison that I have been given fresh strawberries. I would speculate that they got a good price on them because they were on the verge of spoiling. The prison system often buys food which is near its expiration date because it sells at a discount. The prison saves money and we get higher quality food. It's a win-win.

In the good old days of doing prison time, strawberries weren't such a big deal. Medium security back in the 1990s was much different than it is now. For instance, we could purchase fresh fruit twice a month from the local grocer. We could order a \$4 or \$7 bag of fruit and list which fruit we wanted. It was a win for everybody.

We also were able to order pizzas, sub sandwiches and fried chicken regularly. The profits from those purchases went to fund inmate groups within the prison. We had numerous other privileges which are no longer allowed in Wisconsin prisons. It's all part of the maximization of the prison system - the steady march toward ever-increasing restrictions on prisoners at each security level. There is no need for these increased restrictions. It is merely the mindset of the people in charge of the prisons these days. In some circles, it is fashionable to be seen as tough on crime and the best way to present that appearance is by treating those in prison more harshly.

There are only about 20,000 people in prison in Wisconsin at any time. With a state population of almost 6 million people, the prison population is relatively small. There simply aren't enough people affected by the prison system at any one time to make a difference in Wis. politics. People (and politicians) for the most part are more interested in doing what's expedient rather than what's just or humane.

But we still had fresh strawberries last week and for that I am grateful.