



COVID-19 DEATH ROW CONVICTED

On August 10th, Broad River Correctional Institution was faced with an issue that had been brewing for months: What to do, about COVID-19 within the confines of prison -- where social distancing is physical impossibility.

It started early, as prisoners started to drop. One by one, guys were reporting to -- or being carried to -- the designated "Medical" area, all exhibiting fevers, shakes, headaches, etc. Which is not too uncommon, because the South Carolina sentencing norms of the past few decades have led to an overcrowding of prisoners serving long sentences; with "life without parole" handed out among the men like smites of a vengeance demon wanting an eye for every eye, leaving tax payers to foot the bill for a prison full of old men who have been here so long they don't remember why they are here, or who they were, and most even forgotten by the public. Harmless old men in wheel chairs, or barely able to walk, in prison for 10, 15, 20, 25, or more years, and never even been in trouble while incarcerated. Completely rehabilitated and ready to rejoin society -- but held back by a greedy system.

Condemned to die!

One by one, it was discovered that what the prison had feared, was happening. COVID-19 had been brought in by the guards and spread through the prison population. For months, guards had been going about business as usual: searching cells for contraband, going room to room, touching everything, contaminating the personal belongings of every cell they went to. Touching prisoners even. Guards were told to wear gloves -- however, they never changed them, not once did I ever see an officer change them, instead all I seen was each wear the same gloves as they went from one prisoner to the next, cell to cell, touching. Contaminating. Condemning us all to potential death.

We were told that it had been "approved" for them to wear the same gloves all day, as long as they used sanitizer on them. But, alas, a guard that complied to that was a unicorn among her peers. I never once seen ANY guard put sanitizer on their contaminated gloves.

Prisoner visits have been canceled ALL YEAR, and the prison staff has been on a short-list crew, with only essential personnel. Meaning only guards who ... guard, to say it bluntly. This was done to minimize possible COVID-19 exposure. Leaving the only route of infection to be the guards tasked with security and contraband searches. The only way

for ANYTHING to get into the prison -- disease wise or contraband items, was (as usual) through the guards.

It was known to all that if COVID-19 got into the prison system, it was going to wreak havoc among the sick and malnourished prisoners. In prison, the only way you get to see a nurse or doctor, is if you "fall out" as they say. Meaning you have become unresponsive, or very close to it. The procedure is to sign up for "sick call" by filling out a paper, but that's a joke. I've been trying to get a regular check-up for over ten years, and I've been trying to see the dentist since 2015. One of my family members has -- for legal purposes, kept all my papers saying "you've been added to the list" rubber stamp responses. Over the years of my incarceration, all I have seen is people being ignored, and left to die. And now, it's happening on a large scale.

The negligence of the guards who spread COVID-19 throughout the cells will now cost tax-payers millions of dollars, for many years to come. Prisoners died, that should not have died, and now their family is left to deal with making sure that the guards are held responsible for each death they caused. Just as each guard will answer to their own Karma in life, for the uncaring way they treated their fellow humans kept in cages.

By the evening of the 10th, a lock-down was called. Each prisoner sent to their cell to stay (only to come out for a shower 3 times a week, nothing else), because before the 10th, everything was as normal. Guys were playing cards, dominoes, having Bible study, etc. Guys were told it was mandatory to wear their mask (each of us were given a little cloth mask several months ago); but, a lot of guys did not wear them properly. Like some guards, they merely wore them on their chin, leaving their mouth and nose uncovered, or, over the mouth but not the nose. One dumbass prisoner even walked around all the time with his on his head like a hat (and he was an IRC rep, a person chosen to act as a liaison between prisoners and staff).

Guys were getting sicker and sicker, and with each passing day, as prisoners "fell out" they were carried to the hospital, where they began dying. One never made it to the hospital, he died in his bed, although he had been sick for a while, and already had lung issues. Nurses started to come around and check out temperatures each morning. For some guards, it was still business as usual, as they wore their mask askew, and still entered some cells, giving guys ungloved dabs, patting them down, searching them.

On August 18th, nurses began testing us for COVID-19, with a giant cotton swab that felt like she was trying to scrape the back of my brain. It made me think of that hook Egyptians used to pull the brain out through the nasal passage.

A guy about a hundred pounds heavier than me was before me in line. Yes, we were in a line, about 30 or more of us at a time crowded around a table where the nurse sat giving the test. When the guy turned around, and looked at me with tears in his eyes, and said: "It hurts". I knew I was in trouble, and braced myself for the nasal swab's stab.

It was a clusterfuck, I kept an eye on my swab and made SURE it was not labeled incorrectly, that MY name went on my swab. I would have preferred the nurse to change gloves, or not group us up in a large

cluster of infection-meet-the-uninfected brunch party. But, who am I but a chained bird in a cage hidden away.

On the 26th, a guard came around with a list of names, and was telling certain prisoners: "Pack up. Get your stuff together, you are moving."

That was it. No explanation.

In this building there are about 247 prisoners, and only 48 of us were told to pack up. After we began, we were told we were going to the gymnasium. There was confusion, we could see, in the guards. At first, we were told to take our things with us, then told to put our things in the dayroom (where the dorm's classes had been taking place up until about April), and then it became urgent, and we were told to go, don't worry about our things.

In my case, I have my typewriter, TV, radio, Android Tablet, things like my photo album, my groceries, clothing, etc. I was at my cell door, watching, and apparently was one of the last on the list. When he came to my door, I thought for sure he'd say my cellie's name, because he had been sick — coughs, fever, the works — but, no, he said my name. And, my immediate thought was: Fuck, really? Seriously.

All the cells on my row had been searched by contraband officers a few weeks prior, and all the guys had gotten coughs and fevers less than three days after. I could hear all of them coughing and wheezing at night. A lot of the guys documented the officers' names who had contaminated them, and have started preparing for the lawsuits to come. Using the same gloves all day, prisoner to prisoner, cell to cell, was a big mistake. Now guys are dead.

At the call of my name, I thought, "Dammit. I am the only mother-fucker on the row that wore his mask, washed it properly every day, and stayed the hell away from everyone — and I am sick? Really!"

Everyone else was yelling, "Get them outta here."

We were the infected, being taken for quarantine.

48 out of 247 sounded about right, statistically, and it was obvious that the test results of our brain-scrappings had come back. The guys in the cells still, were relieved. They had dodged a bullet. Or so they thought.

In fact, we discovered, two dorms about 500 prisoners had been tested, and 348 tested POSITIVE for COVID-19, with our little group being among the few, that tested NEGATIVE.

From my area of the building, only about 12 were negative, EVERYONE else was COVID-19 positive. We sat in the gymnasium for most of the day, and then, finally sent back to get our things and move to different cells — separated from the infected on what is now being called:

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Where the guys are stuck, waiting, to see if they will live or die. Some finish their prison sentence next month. One I know that, I think is now dead, was in prison for stealing two 12 packs of Pepsi from a woman's carport (he was given Life No Parole, because it counted as burglary, and was his second offense). He was old, and nonviolent. Too many people are oversentenced. A lot of these guys could be let out of prison. S.C. parole eligibility needs to be discussed.

I was relieved to find out I was negative, but the idea of the others, nearly 200 in my building alone, being positive, was a crazy unfathomable. When I went back to my cell to finish getting my things, guys in the building were finding out that it was they, who were COVID-19 positive. Many expressed anger at the unconsciounable way SCDC staff, especially the lower ranking guards, had handled the whole COVID-19 threat.

My Cellie was an elderly man, who has been in prison for almost 30 years, and has a clean disciplinary. Never been in trouble. Never stolen anything, or got in a fight, or even spoken down to a guard. The state won't make him parole eligible, and now, he sits there on COVID-19 DEATH ROW, waiting.

I have been writing for many years about the need of prison reform, but now it needs to be discussed more than ever as all of the prison is in true danger of death. I am still worried about getting sick, and wash my mask, and wear it when people are near my cell. Guards still come by, but now they seem to take it a little more serious after having to carry out dead bodies. They realize they expose us, and potentially murder us, when they don't wear masks.

We don't even have access to bleach.

We have our tablets, and can call home. I've been able to stay in contact with my family via:

connectnetwork.com

where people can send messages straight to my tablet. Right now, family is important. I have five kids, some now with their own kids, and I want to live to meet my grandchildren. I have a great woman that loves me, and she still prays for me to one day be released so we can be together. I am not some abandoned hermit. I never lived as a criminal. I was not sentenced for the death penalty. Yet, here it is, in the air. It's on the hands of guards who keep me locked away.

The warden here is actually a good guy, and I know he was unaware of how some of his employees were acting. Guards should have taken it more seriously, and when they encountered a prisoner not properly wearing their mask on their face, or worse, on their head idiotically with a shit-eating-grin, they should have delt with them. But, the prison has too many people. A building designed for about 125 has 247, because single-prisoner cells were converted to two-man cells. Many years ago, a top bunk was welded to the top of every bed, a triple bunk in some cells, making them three-man-cells.

I hope lawmakers see this problem.

Even now, guys who tested positive are out serving food and cleaning the building. "Run arounds" they call them. Guys who take out the trash and do menial tasks. It worries those who are negative.

I will be curious to see what law firm picks up this case, to begin the lawsuit. But for me, I just want parole eligibility. A chance to earn it. Something. Because this is not humane. We need help. People are dying unwarranted deaths. Grandfathers, fathers, brothers, sons, lost. And for what? An eye for an eye? Revenge? The nurses didn't even come back to tell us our official test results until September 5th.