

I wrote earlier about some of the drama and trauma that occurred when I was forced to move from a Level 3 to a Level 2 prison, and I imagine some people will assume that my resistance doesn't make sense — after all, isn't the Level 3 more restrictive and dangerous? In general, yes, it can be, but I've rarely worried about overall dangerousness, and sometimes "restrictiveness" can be a positive feature.

To be clear, I categorically reject the concept of "freedom" in prison, period. It's ridiculous, even offensive, to hear people talk about having "more freedom in such-and-such prison." Bullshit. If I can't walk 100 feet in a straight line in any direction without being murdered by a sniper preventing my "escape," then I'm not remotely close to being free. It doesn't matter what "amenities" my captors gild the cage with; no amount of baubles or distracting pastimes will ever amount to freedom. Now, I admit, I'm not too sure what does amount to freedom anymore, but I'm certain about what does not: A ping pong table and easier access to a shower definitely do not make the cut.

If I don't care the little Level 2 "quality of life" improvements (excuse my trying not to choke on the phrase), then what does matter to me? My abhorrence of this new prison is entirely about ~~its~~ basic arrangement. At the Level 3, I was kept in a two-person cell. Small, yes, and with two locked into that tiny bathroom with beds in it, it can be a miserable experience, no question. It can be very hard to find a compatible cellmate, but if you do manage it, life (such as it is) improves exponentially. Better still, one often has no cellmate at all, and in those times, you are... alone! Blissfully alone, and there is peace, and there is even a measure of something surprisingly ~~like~~ <sup>like</sup> freedom. Alone, one has time, which may sound strange, but for me, time is always what I lack most in prison. In prison, during the non-sleeping hours, so, so much time is just... wasted, trashed by endless waiting and squandered by relentless stress. But, if you can step into a room, even just a dismal little cage, and shut the door behind you, suddenly all your thoughts and actions become your own for a few mentally and physically replenishing hours. That is the great promise of being kept in a two-person cell, and I knew very well... I don't even want one cellmate, so what the hell am I supposed to do with FIVE of them?

My issue isn't nearly so simple as a seemingly selfish distaste for proximity to others, though; it's about my fundamental incompatibility with the typical prisonese personality. I have so little capacity left for dealing with the SAME OLD CRAP. It's exhausting, the same stupid conversations and jokes and arguments and myths, all recycled endlessly through hundreds and hundreds of seemingly clone characters, caricatures, really, all with essentially identical perspectives and mindless, monotonous commentary. I'm just terribly tired of it all; especially the endlessly recycled arguments. Simple factual matters that should be easily settled with a quick experiment (e.g. having the fluorescent light on in the summer does not make the cell hot — the sun-baked concrete walls do that, and you only need to touch the light fixture once to feel that it is cool), or more abstract issues of broader social implication and infinitely deeper insanity (e.g. the "Government" does not "register" you at birth so your



"true self" can be traded on some global market like a wall street commodity, making your "real name" worth \$70,000 or \$2,000,000 or whatever other dollar figure they've latched onto, all of which anyone can demand, in cash, from "The Government," so long as they ~~know~~ know the right shibboleth and how to write it to force the hand of the shady traders who purport to own us... ugh. "). These are common and recurrent prisoner myths, popping up perennially like an old herpes infection. The more people you deal with in prison, the more likely you'll be dragged into these and 2 dozen similar ridiculousnesses over and over again. It's f'n exhausting.

My biggest fear, though, by FAR, of going to a six-person cage, is noise. Few prison people have the slightest awareness of how not to be obtrusive, selfish scumbags, and the primary demonstration of this incompetence is the extraordinary amount of noise they make during all waking hours, no matter what anyone else around them is trying to do. They may sing loudly, whistle constantly, bang out beats on any and all metal surfaces within reach, but worst of all, many of these assholes have torture devices... they call them "boom boxes"; I call them assault weapons. IF they have them, they play them, LOUDLY. Constantly. Disrespectfully. It's bad enough in the two-person cell, where each is connected to the neighbor by an open grate so you can hear their music from your wall as if you had a built-in speaker with no volume control or off switch. There can be — there are — fights over this (I've had one, sadly), but most inmates without radios just put up with the dicks who do. It is literally torturous, and I've been tortured by it for years. It's clearly caused PTSD in me, and I'll never forget the beautiful summer day I was walking to my friend Coby's house, passing a Mexican restaurant — which smelled delicious — and suddenly, inexplicably feeling the hair on my neck rise, full of anxiety, high alert... what the hell was happening? Everything had seemed perfect, yet all of a sudden I was a total wreck, vaguely angry, feeling ready to fight... it was absurd. Then it hit me: Mariachi music. Accordions. The happy, upbeat sound I used to associate with family and good food, that's what was affecting me so badly. See, that sound was the primary torture inflicted on me in prison, and it had broken me, to some degree. The worst moment still haunts me, a 120-degree day outside with no air-conditioning inside, and I was sweating and stripped to my underwear when the aural onslaught began. It was relentless as I tried to write, and soon I had the air vents fully covered with toilet paper to block the main source of the noise, then every crack in the door; the cell became a stifling sauna of hot, still air. And noise. I could feel the music, and I ended up huddled in a corner with my sheets and blankets wrapped around my baking cranium, ears stuffed with soggy T.P., and still I could feel the vibrations. That was truly torture, and it plainly affected me, along with a hundred similar incidents over the years.

In a two-person cell, where I was, it's possible to avoid some of the worst things about prison, simply by limiting your exposure to others. In this six-person cell, you can never, ever be alone, nor can you control who you are around. It's basically the design a true sadist would come up with if he were feeling especially nasty. Even in a larger, open dorm of 50 to 100 people, there's something resembling solitude, since in that environment there generally isn't anyone trying to "run things" for everybody, and it's fairly easy to be left alone since people largely ignore those they don't regularly interact with. In a six-person dorm, everyone is deeply into everyone else's business,



endlessly passing judgements as well as copious clouds of gas. It works well for the gossipy types; not so well for anyone just wanting to be left alone to read, write, or think, and ~~you~~ invariably find yourself surrounded by people you'd do everything in your power to avoid in the real world: racists, bullies, misogynists, paranoiacs, ceaseless chatterers, egomaniacs, creepy stalkers, liars of every sort... you name it, it's common in prison. And each of them, in these six-person hells, feels some kind of personal investment in you. How can one get stuck with five randos in this environment and not end up clashing with one or two? That would be like winning the lottery. Then, for me, with my stupid, pathological hypersensitivity to blatantly discourteous radio or T.V. noise, to end up caged with one of those types, much less in a cluster of them... that scenario simply doesn't end well, for me. I'd ask for their consideration, they'd reject the overture, possibly we'd fight... more likely, in a largely non-violent Level 2, they'd respond with a wave of passive aggression and continue the torture. Perhaps I'd end up disposing of their offensive noisemaker, but then what? No good comes of this. My future gets compromised. That's why I resisted this move so strongly.

As things have turned out (so far - it's only been about a week), I did get really lucky. I won that lottery, so to speak. But such a lucky situation can change at any moment, and looking around me, I see so much of exactly what I'd feared most. Right next door, right below me... if I'd landed there rather than here, I certainly wouldn't have lasted. And that's the norm. I really shouldn't be here, and while I hope things continue to go well, I know they may not. Not sure what that will ultimately look like for me, but very likely, it means a severe crash in my ability to accomplish the few things I actually want to do with this ruined husk of a life I have left. I certainly don't intend to spend it being tortured, if that can be avoided.

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Since there's a little space left... a good quote or two. ☺

"Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities."

— Voltaire

"One has a moral obligation to disobey unjust laws." — MLK Jr.

(I'm sure I've used this one already, but...  
it bears repeating, doesn't it?)

I've been moved! If you'd like to write me directly, please send snail mail to:

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