



7-30-22

(Pg 1 of 2)
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Today I overheard an unpleasant conversation: "He put down the phone all of a sudden and said he had to go to the bathroom. I tried telling him to just take the phone in there with him, but he said 'No, then you'll hear me farting and all that.' I explained that I spend all day in a room with five other grown men using the toilet just two feet away from me, so I hear that all the time and I don't care — I'm used to it. But he kept saying he had to go, then he just put the phone down and left!"

This guy sounded almost offended as he complained to his mother about his 13 year old brother. I was bothered by his cavalier certainty that his little brother shouldn't mind performing the toilet orchestra for him because he experienced it every day from "five other grown men"; a confidence in his own depravity that made him fail to understand why his message didn't seem to get through. What upset me most was his obliviousness to the problem not being his message not getting through, but the other way round — the kid's message plainly didn't get through to him. His little brother obviously wanted his privacy! It didn't matter that this desensitized prisoner was unmoved by bowel movements; the kid had clearly just framed it that way ("But you'll hear me farting...") to avoid speaking explicitly about a topic he wasn't comfortable trying to explain to his uncomprehending older brother. It was a discomfort I believe most normal, non-institutionalized people would have.

All of this caught my attention because it's been an issue for me for years that people go to jail and almost immediately seem to forget what it means to have a sense of personal dignity. Perhaps there's some deeper psychological drama at play, some sense within arrestees that they don't deserve privacy or dignity, that dehumanization is part of their "punishment" for being "bad", but that's a rabbit hole to go down another time. Suffice it to say that prisoners quickly become inured to the idea of defecation as a community event, which this poor, degraded prisoner's comments to and about his brother pitifully illustrated. Such comfort with close proximity while casually dropping deuces and carrying on full conversations as if nothing is even slightly out of the ordinary is beyond weird to me. I don't like it, I don't do it or accept it, but it truly seems that sharing a shit is like a ~~rite of~~ passage and badge of honor for those who've internalized the debasement of being caged. Granted, doing one's business semi-publicly may sometimes be unavoidable in the gulag, but more typically, prisoners won't even try to keep it a private function, not even when doing so requires nothing more than a few minutes of patience and self-control.

This overheard phone call really drove home how thoroughly most prisoners abandon real-world standards, such that they soon don't even recognize their own little brothers trying to tell them, "Please leave me alone; I need to use the restroom and you are NOT part of that process!" I felt bad for the kid on the other end of that call, first because he may have felt a pang of guilt for rejecting his persistent brother's unreason-

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onable request, and second because... I mean, what must he now wonder about the older brother he probably idolizes to some extent? Is he thinking, "Gee, my brother really changed. What's happened to him in there?" It's all very sad, I think, viewed in this light.

Anyway, this brings me to my question, which I really hope you'll take a moment to answer in a comment: On a scale of 1 - 10, what's your comfort level with public pooping? Let "1" mean "Hell no! Not in a million years! I can hold it until I get some privacy," and let "10" mean "What's the big deal? I really don't know why there aren't open-air toilets on every corner." Just imagine you find yourself in jail tomorrow — would you try to wait for chances to go privately, or would you just give in at the first tummy rumble and do the deed in front of whatever strangers happened to be next to you? Would you feel disgusted (scale of 1-10) by someone who is not a lover or family member using the toilet right in front of you?

Kind of a ~~shitty~~ subject, I know, but I wonder whether non-prisoners mostly feel like I do on this; moving one's bowels is a private moment. I don't think I ever met anyone who felt differently before I was put in a cage. Thanks for your time!

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