

* CROSSING THE LINE *

(After my six week stay at what many prisoners have considered to be their "Identification Deterioration Habitation," it was time for me to enter the third and final level of my lifelong separation from civilization. Just like with the second level, when I had to go to the reception center, I was required to go through the process of being transferred. However, this time my destination wasn't a friendly sounding place like a "Reception Center." Instead, it has been known for centuries as -- PRISON.

Actually, some time ago the higher voices of authority in the Department of Corrections went through the process of changing the term from "Prison" to "Correctional Institution." Granted, this new term does give the impression as being a bit more beneficial. However, I think I'll just continue to use the more familiar term "Prison." For one thing it's easier for me to spell, and . . . Well, I don't know about you, but every time I think of the term "Correctional Institution" I get this scene of some museum filled with pictures of kids getting spankings.

While most of the other guys on the bus were using the time to enjoy some idle talk and senseless argumentation, I was using it to enjoy the few and far between opportunities to observe the free outside world. A transfer is just about the only opportunity a prisoner has to see the free world without being under the control of what somebody else wants to focus on. (ex.: pictures and television)

According to a small poll I took while writing this book, the AVERAGE time a prisoner serves in a prison between transfers is four years and six months. However, due to certain health issues the average time I serve at a prison between transfers is one year and eight months. Hence, I've been able to enjoy the panoramic view -- through the windows of a bus -- of real life in the outside world a bit more often than many other prisoner like myself who has been down \1/ for over twenty years.

This transfer, unlike my previous one to the reception center and the ones I would experience in the future, was the dividing line between two major hardships in my life. The first having been the training and reconstruction I had to endure so as to conform to my new neighbors, and adapt to a radically new way of life. The second being the start of that life style with the realization that it would continue to be that way for the remainder of my life.

As the bus continued toward its destination, I began to ponder over some of the ESSENTIAL ground rules I had been taught throughout the previous 58 weeks. Some of the most important being:

- 1.) The easiest way to stay OUT of trouble is to stay AWAY from trouble.
- 2.) You don't have to pay the water bill, so never wait for the demand to "FLUSH IT!"
- 3.) Streaking through the day room is highly prohibited for your own safety and well-being.
- 4.) Your worst friends are the fellow inmates who are the most friendliest. And of course . . .
- 5.) Always keep your toilet paper locked in your locker.

However, let us not forget the SIMPLE things I learned that I must admit are of some value as well. A few that come to mind are:

- 1.) Never underestimate the ingenuity of a criminal.
- 2.) When approaching an intersection of sidewalks, a captain coming from the opposite direction ALWAYS has the right of way. Even if he's making a left hand turn. (Who'da thought?)
- 3.) After waiting outside in front of a dorm for a substantial amount of time, don't allow yourself to think you're doing the guard in the control room a favor by knocking on the door. If you knock it will never be interpreted as a friendly gesture of: "Excuse me, sir. I wasn't sure if you noticed me out here. Would you please push the button on your control panel to unlock this door so I can come in? Thank you." No. It will always be assumed to mean: "Hey, you moron! Unlock this door so I can come in!" Basically, it's like this: That guard will unlock the door when he is good and ready. (Or, whenever he finally wakes up.)
- 4.) If an officer tells you to do something and you're unable to hear him, the best thing to do is simply ask, "What?" Dear God don't ever use the term, "I beg your pardon?" No matter what tone of voice you use, it will always be misunderstood. And of course . . .
- 5.) No matter how enticing a performance by a group of strippers may sound, at a reception center it is not an enjoyable experience.

* FOOTNOTES *

- 1.) Down: Serving time in prison.

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As the bus continued toward its destination, my concerns began crossing the line from my previous events to the future activities I would begin experiencing -- just minutes away.

My year in the county jail had -- somewhat -- trained me in the area of what kind of individuals I was going to be living with. Whereas the six weeks I spent at the reception center -- somewhat -- trained me in the area of what my daily lifestyle and environment would be like. The reason for my use of the word "SOMEWHAT" is due to the fact that the ability to fully comprehend what my new neighbors and new lifestyle were ACTUALLY going to be like was going to require nothing less than hands-on training. The reason for this analysis was due to the fact that my previous training had included interesting information regarding the character of my soon to be neighbors. I had been warned of how the element of time can have a serious influence on the lives of guys who have been locked up a good number of years. You see, while I was in the county jail I was living among a crowd of individuals who were in and out of jail on a regular basis, along with some who had spent -- at most -- five years in prison sometime earlier in their lives. So as we see, our "Jail Birds" get to enjoy the experience of free flight out of their cages periodically, which helps to maintain a sane lifestyle and reason to want to live. But for a large percentage of our "Prisoners" it can be quite a bit different. This is because you have many who entered the prison system back when they were just teenagers, been down for over 30 or 40 years, and still don't see an upcoming release date in the near future. That can cause some serious behavioral and psychological differences between the two groups.

In the environmental sector the element of time can also play an important role -- especially in the behavioral aspect. Due to the fact that a reception center is just a temporary place of residence there's no significant amount of time for guys to get themselves settled down. Hence, the ability to become active in any wrongdoing is limited. But in a prison a guy has more time than he knows what to do with. Therefore, it's only natural for a criminally minded individual to become involved in his corruptive interests. So after weighing in these factors I realized I was still quite unaware of the gravity of the situations I would soon be facing.

I noticed the time for my opportunity to enjoy the outside world was drawing to a close when the bus made a turn that brought into view hundreds of feet of chain link fencing with razor wire^{1/} on top. It was this location and others like it that I would now be referring to as my home. I had finally crossed the line and was trying to accept the fact that I was about to face a very much longer hardship in my life -- one that I would have to endure for the remainder of my life. But then it suddenly dawned on me. There's always a good side to everything, right? I'll be getting three meals a day, a place to sleep, clothes on my back, and all my medical needs taken care of -- all my necessities in life absolutely free. So as the bus came to a stop things were starting to look pretty good after all.^{2/})

* FOOTNOTES *

- 1.) Razor Wire: The type of wire that prevents you from even wanting to try and climb over a fence.
- 2.) That my dear friends is the power of positive thinking. Or, just a sore excuse for not wanting to face reality.

UNFORTUNATELY, OUR TABLETS
WERE CONFISCATED SO AS TO SUPPLY
US WITH NEW/UP-TO-DATE ONES, AND
THEY STILL HAVE YET TO ACCOMPLISH
THE SECOND HALF OF THE MISSION.
SORRY FOR THE INCONVENIENCE.

THANK YOU