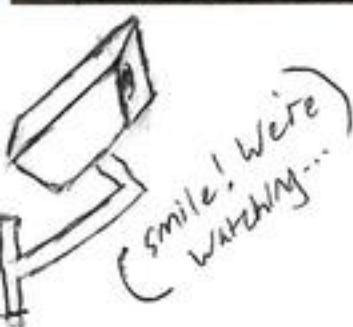




Being transferred to Chino prison has brought a lot of changes, but one of the biggest has been something that nagged at me from the moment I set foot inside, something that felt SO much different from anything I've ex-

perienced in many, many years. I couldn't quite put my finger on that difference at first, whatever it was seemed pervasive, yet also not entirely obvious at a glance... then suddenly it clicked: Surveillance cameras. There aren't any here. Not one!

So, I realized this my first day here (and I was thrilled!), but it wasn't until two days later when I saw a relatively minor scuffle, not a serious fight but still one that would for sure have brought the clown-headed correctional cavalry charging in at the prison I just left from. I immediately look around for the cameras, just out of habit and wondering how our two combatants could be so reckless, and that's when it truly hit me... We are not under surveillance here. I am... Not... Under... Surveillance!! I swear, I haven't felt quite such a lightness of being since I discharged from parole all those years ago; it was like a massive stone was suddenly lifted from my shoulders, no joke. Now, of course I already knew I hated being on camera constantly, an existential intrusion I've watched encroaching further and further into our lives since I was 10 years old and resenting every bit of it, then spending the past few years in a place that was thoroughly infested with those fucking things. But, somehow, I really didn't realize how MUCH I hated it, or rather, how numbingly accustomed I'd become to being recorded literally every single moment of the day. I don't exaggerate when I say that that shit-hole Mule Creek Level II yard had not even one inch of space that wasn't covered by at least one camera, with the lone exception of tiny slivers inside some - not all - cells, sort of like Winston Smith's presumed private corner in the novel 1984. Please really try to imagine that for a second; imagine that the ONLY places where you're not under perpetual, unrelenting surveillance are a few razor-thin corridors inside the few lucky cells where camera angles can't quite reach you. That's it. The moment you step outside your room, that cell, you are watched

100% of the time, and even inside most cells (where you sleep, defecate, etc.) there is no escape at all. Just constant, 24-7 surveillance. It's a profoundly oppressive experience, soul-deadening, and even though I'd "gotten used to it", it was still subconsciously a huge psychological burden that informed and infected virtually every decision I made throughout the day there. It was terrible, and realizing that was gone was truly an existential relief, and I still smile every time I think of it, every time I look up and see nothing but ancient pipes and dust in the corners of every ceiling. No Big Brother there at all. ☺

Now, the bad news. No sooner did I learn of the blissful absence of cameras than I also learned... they're on the way. Yep, the conduit is already mostly installed for a brand new, comprehensive system of surveillance, and this old prison, having escaped that awfulness for so long while all the rest of California's dungeons adopted it, is now leaping past the rinky-dink systems that were used so many other places until just recently, starting off instead with the latest and most grievous of repression technology. So, yay. ☺

They aren't here yet, though, those cameras, and I intend to enjoy the brief sense of humanity while I can. It may still be months away, lord knows the prison system doesn't always move fast, so we'll see. I'm just glad I got here in time to experience this lightness at all. Once it's gone, I suspect I'll never feel it again for the literal rest of my life... and that's no matter where I end up, inside these walls or out.