

It's prison, it's not all rainbows and kittens...or is it?

When I first started this blog, my fiancé told me an old friend of mine reached out to her and said the stuff I write is sad. My first thought was: "Hmm...when I sit down to write for this blog, it is my intention to be completely honest without glorifying prison, and to also offer a sense of hope and even some humor." No mention of sadness there!

My next thought was: "Since he knows me personally, the thought of me locked in a prison is probably more saddening to him than it is for someone who never met me." I'm sure there's truth to this, but I suspect there is more to why he thought my writing was sad. I'm in prison after all, and it's not a particularly happy place.

There's no question that a sadness pervades the physical, mental and emotional landscape of incarceration. With my intention of remaining honest for all of you and for myself, I simply cannot ignore this fact like most of the men here do. They've learned to cry in total silence. They talk in code instead of speaking honestly. For example, when they say, "This place sucks," it is code for "This prison is eating away at part of my soul and it hurts." When they say, "I can't wait to get out of this place," it is code for "I want to be back in an environment where people actually care about me and show me love." And when they say, "I can't wait to be working again," it is code for "I want to contribute to something larger than myself so my life can have a sense of meaning, because in here it feels like it has none."

Being aware of all this, it's not surprising that sadness finds its way into the words I share with you. But, like any place, prison is not just one thing. Prison is full of dichotomy, and the people that live here are full of duality. This is something I tried to express in my story [The Toughest Man in Prison](#).

When I first sat down to write this post, it was my intention to justify any sadness in my writing by describing all of the sad things I must endure daily, and titling it: "It's not all rainbows and kittens-it's prison!" But as soon as I said the title in my head, I had to laugh, because yes, this is prison, but this one actually is full of beautiful rainbows and playful kittens. Seriously!

I've seen more rainbows here in one summer than I did in my whole life previously. I recall waking up one morning to a giant rainbow stretching over the entire compound. About 30 of us inmates stood together, staring at it through a window with smiles on all of our faces. We all stood there in silence, as if the emotion of the rainbow had drifted down from the sky, through the window, into our unit and cast a spell over all of us.

I believe it did cast a spell over us. Everyone in the prison seemed much happier that day.

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Additionally, every morning when I leave the unit and head outside to walk over to the chow hall, kittens run over to greet me. And ducks waddle over too! It seems that twice a year, the stray cats give birth to a litter of kittens just outside our unit. We took a wheel barrow, turned it upside down and put our blankets under it so the kittens can have a warm, comfortable place to live.

I've had conversations where an inmate would say, "Back when I was on the streets..." and go on to describe some tough, gangsta stuff he did, and an hour later I'd see that same inmate outside with a kitten in his lap. In a calming voice he'd be repeating the name he gave it and telling it how he plans to bring it home and care for it when he is out.

Other inmates go around the chow hall taking collections of uneaten bread because it makes them happy to feed the 100+ ducks that (likely) escaped from local farms and now live here with us.

Ground hogs scratch just below my bunk window to let me know that they are hungry for some fruit. I offer them an apple, which they take directly from my hand. As they stand there eating the fruit, they let me pet them gently. It is a highlight of my day when it happens.

These are a few of the many things that bring happiness into our lives while in here. We laugh, we tell jokes, and we play games. We have found many moments of happiness and joy to embrace while on this journey. Yes, it is prison, but it is also rainbows and kittens that have found a way to warm our troubled hearts.