

It usually happens at night on the L02 side of Unit 3. Once the prison lights go out is when it's most likely to begin. My friend, Mr. D, is not a fan of it.

"Do you hear that? What is that?" he asked me with a look of disgust.

For me, I've learned to live with it. In prison, it's not like you can just get up and walk away whenever you want. But Mr. D lives much closer to it than me. So perhaps it's harder for him to bear at night when the lights go out.

Recently, I befriended a new guy named J.C. Since he was now living in the L02 bays with us, I wanted to give him a heads up about what he can expect to happen over here at night. Before I could finish explaining, he stopped me and said, "I think it happened last night. I was laying in my bunk, sleeping with my headphones on," he explained, "and suddenly, my bunk began to shake violently and it knocked my headphones out. I had no idea what was going on." J.C. gave me a serious look and continued his story, "That's when I heard it - a voice. My lower bunkie was laughing so uncontrollably at the voice, that he was causing the whole bunk to shake."

"Yes, that's it," I said, "The voice only comes out at night."

The voice has become a sort of entity here in the L02 bays. Sometimes I'll be walking the prison track with several guys and one will say, "Did you hear the voice last night?"

"Yes, it was in full effect," another would answer.

Some hate it, like Mr. D. Some love it, like J.C.'s laughing bunkie. Others tolerate it, like me. But there's no denying that it's real; that the voice really does exist. Just about all of us have heard it. It sounds like a little kid speaking. Some say a little girl, but I don't specifically get that impression when I hear the voice.

I'm not sure why the voice happens at night. Guys who live in the L01 bays opposite us have heard rumors about the voice and came around asking questions. They never got a straight answer though.

"You'll have to wait until the lights go out and come over here," they were told.

I'm bunked too far away to clearly make everything the voice says most nights. I would catch bits and pieces of its words. But from what I gather, it is a short man with dreads down past his lower back who makes the voice at night. None of us have any idea exactly why he does it and I guess no one has ever thought to ask him either.

I've spent a lot of time contemplating the phenomenon of the voice here in the prison and how men have responded to it. This unexpectedly led me down a different, yet very similar and insightful path. I couldn't stop contemplating another voice I've always heard. The voice in my head. You know, that constantly running commentary in your head. I've been dealing with it for as far back as I can remember.

When I first came to prison, I set the intention to be writing for this blog right away. But the voice in my head told me otherwise.

"You have nothing to offer," or the more common, "People will think it's no good."

And I believed the voice. I believed it for over a year. During that time, the voice convinced me not to write a single word for this blog. I would wake up first thing in the morning in my bunk and the voice would turn on.

"There's no point in trying to write today. Nothing worthwhile will come of it."

Sometimes I would attempt to ignore the voice in my head, but that would only make it more persuasive.

"Listen!" It would say, "This is important. You never went to school, nobody is interested. Really, they couldn't care any less about what you have to say."

I would buy into it every time, reinforcing my self-imposed limitations - my pen and my notebook remained unused, sitting in my locker for a year and a half.

It wasn't just with writing that the voice tried to dissuade me. With everything I wanted to attempt to accomplish, the voice had something to say. The meaning behind what it said over and over again, could be boiled down to four words: I'm-Not-Good-Enough.

I paid attention to and asked others around me if they too were hearing this voice. And it turns out they were and the voice was always saying one of the three things in one form or another: "I'm not good enough, there's something wrong with me," or, "I don't matter."

You might think that you're the only one who is struggling with the voice, but that's wrong. Everyone who is breathing experiences it. I've never met anyone who has gotten rid of the voice completely. But I've learned three things about the voice that have been useful in dealing with it.

First, the voice has no power of its own. Every ounce of strength it has comes from us. We

feed it power every time we buy into the stories it's telling us. Every time we accept its words as fact without any question.

Second, the voice hates uncertainty more than anything else. This is because the more you step into uncertainty and realize you can step out of it and still be okay, the more you change and grow. This makes you stronger, wiser, and less likely to buy into what the voice is saying to you. The voice in your head fears this and will say anything to prevent it from happening. This is why it's always saying you're not good enough or urging you to pull back when uncertainty arrives. It fears you will succeed and not listen to it the next time.

The third and perhaps most valuable lesson I've learned about the voice has truly life-changing potential. **YOU ARE NOT THE VOICE IN YOUR HEAD** - you are simply the one who can hear it.

Something amazing begins to happen when you understand this. You can now say to the voice, "You are full of shit and I'm not going to believe you anymore unless you are willing to help me."

Instead of retreating, you can now more easily step into uncertainty, do the things you've been holding back on, and embrace your full potential. When you no longer identify with the voice in your head, you get closer and closer to who you want to become. You begin to achieve things you wouldn't dare try before. Bad things still happen, but now you have more space to deal with them and course-correct because you're no longer busy identifying with or being consumed by the dialogues going on in your head. This is when you're ready for true growth. This is when you begin to finally break free.

I don't think the voice will ever go away completely. In fact, it showed up when I sat down to write this and tried to stop me. But now, I give it much less energy, I don't believe every word it says. I know the voice is not me and instead of focusing on it, I can finally focus on the more important things in my heart. Like the story I want to write, the art, the project I want to start, the love, and the desire to not hold back in life anymore. I know it sounds a bit crazy, but I assure you, it's a much more enjoyable way to approach life than believing and identifying with the voice in your head. Trust me, it's worth giving it a try.