

My kitchen is my bedroom, my writing room, and my workout room. My cellie also lives in my kitchen too. In prison, everything is confined to a small space. So where you set up your kitchen is where you get dressed, where you dream at night, and where you write. My locker is many things. It holds my clothes, my books, and my letters. But it also doubles as my pantry. Next to my books, is a row of olives and a row of mackerel in foil pouches. Jars of mixed peppers are stacked next to my address book. Next to piles of letters is peanut butter and cheap coffee. Right beside my toothbrush is my garlic powder and olive oil that I use on a daily basis. The top of my locker is a countertop and my cellie also uses it as a step stool to reach the upper bunk where he sleeps every night. In prison it seems like everything is multi-purpose

My window also doubles as a refrigerator. The window doesn't open, but it is the coldest place in our small space. Right now as I write this, there are two cartons of milk resting on the windowsill. Hopefully, they won't be too warm when I drink them several hours from now.

I have a desk. It's a typical school desk, exactly like the one I had in fifth grade. When it is time to eat, my cellie and I pull it out from against the wall. We turn it the long way and place a chair on either side. There we sit, in our small space, over our small desk, eating our small meals. We are close. Very close. So close I can hear him chew almost every bite. Sometimes I wonder if I chew loud. But usually I don't worry because my cellie is hard of hearing and wouldn't notice anyway. After we are done eating lunch we transform the desk from a kitchen table into a chess table. My cellie brings out the pieces.

"Okay, I'll play a game," I say. "You know the rule," my cellie responds, "best out of three."

There is one other space that is also utilized for kitchen activities - it's the prison bathroom. I go there to drain the oil out of my packaged foods. Next to me, while I'm draining oil, a man might be brushing his teeth, while 2 feet behind me, a man is pissing in the urinal. Sometimes, you go in there and someone is taking a shit. It stinks, but you're hungry, so you prepare your food. You peel and rinse your hard-boiled egg as the toilet flushes. It's a normal part of prison life.

After preparing food in the bathroom sink, I always clean it. Other guys aren't as courteous. You go wash up later and find bits of chicken, rice, eggshells, and tuna resting in there. The range I'm, on has only 3 functional sinks for about 40 guys, so the bits of food can collect rather quickly.

I miss having a kitchen that was more inviting. A place where I often played Rocksteady

music while preparing meals for my fiancé. It was a more welcoming space to cook food. When I opened the pantry, I would just see spices and herbs, not like my prison locker where I see my underwear and calculator next to my Mrs. Dash and bananas.

My sink at home was a place to rinse vegetables without someone shaving right beside me. My kitchen at home was where my friends and family would gather for shared meals as we talked and laughed. The kitchen at home was the place I held my fiancé as apples baked in the oven with cinnamon on top of them. Love would mingle in our hearts and through the scent of sweet desserts simultaneously. I want that feeling back. I want to feel surrounded by the love in the kitchen I left behind. I also want a kitchen sink that is not two feet away from a man peeing in the toilet.