

Journal Entries From My First 30 Days Of Prison

Rain, Cats and Trinny

(Entry1)

I woke up to rain streaming down the window today. It was not a good feeling. My outside workout and run would not be happening. I've been here only ten days and I feel upset when my routine gets thrown off. It's not so much about doing things out of my planned routine but rather, about finding a way to fill the time. Having nothing to do doesn't feel good in a place like this. On the "outside" I looked forward to any moment with nothing to do. But when those moments of "nothing to do" arise in here, it's very easy for your mind to acknowledge you're in prison and will be for a few years. It's a rough feeling. Perhaps I will be better able to be with that feeling as my sentence goes on. Thankfully for now, those moments haven't been too often.

I walked through the rain and made my way to the prison library. I wrote down the names of every nonfiction book I wanted to read in there. I had a decent list considering nonfiction is the smallest section in the library.

The rain seemed to make everyone lazy. The men laid in their bunks much later than usual and kept all the lights off in the range. Eventually the sun made its way out and it turned into a beautiful afternoon for me to workout in.

I came to sit on the bench in front of my unit and eat my after workout fruit and noticed Trinidad (aka Trinny) sitting there with an apple in his hand. "Apple time?" I asked. "No" he replied, "I have no teeth to bite it with." He went on to tell me he was 71 years old and about his health issues. He had heart complications. He actually died recently while on the operating table; they had to shock his heart two separate times to revive him. He also has poor eyesight. When he was younger a friend threw an orange and yelled "look out!". As Trinny turned his head to see what was happening, he turned right into the oncoming orange. He got a blood-clot in his eye and never saw right again. He likes to call his wife 3 or 4 times a day. "What are you doing?" he will ask when she answers the phone. "What do you need to know for?" she replies and he simply hangs up at that point. He does this routine 3-4 times a day. When I asked him why, he quickly said "I just want to hear her voice." Then one of the prison cats brought a mouse behind the bench we were sitting on. Trinny and I watched as she ate it piece by piece. First she chewed on the neck until the head fell off and she ate it. Then she gnawed on the body until it split in two and she ate each half (including the tail). I'm not sure why some of the guys dislike the cats so much. On a practical level they keep the mouse population down. They seem to keep them from coming into our units (and I hope the chow hall as well).

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There's a separate unit for RDAP inmates and they have a few more cats over there. One was following me and begging for pets. After a few minutes of petting, I picked her up and walked around a little. I appreciate these moments of warm feminine energy. The cats provide it more than anything else in here so far. It is comforting and a reminder of the tender softness that I hold within my self that is mostly repressed here in this environment.

A Former Panther and Being Present

(Entry 2)

This morning I had a nice talk with Marvin in the library. We talked about everything from spirituality, what to do upon release, how lawyers don't understand the prison system, the lack of caring in the BOP (Bureau of Prisons), our backgrounds, and much more. I think he is one of my favorite people here. This morning he revealed to me that he was a member of the Black Panthers in the past. He joined in the mid sixties at the age of 13 in Philly. I wanted to ask him to help me with outlining my plan for my bid but I don't want to be too assertive. At least not while he's so new and still figuring out this place just like I am.

It's currently 8:40 pm and the skunk is outside my window; closer than it's ever been. It always seems to come about the same time every night. It's nice to sit and watch the wild animals move about in freedom. But it's strange to think about how their freedom is occurring here on the prison grounds day after day. They find meaning in the day to day of life on the prison camp grounds. They are just living in the moment. It seems that's where freedom can be found - in the present moment. But so often we run from the present. We are focused on the past or the future. That's what's behind so much of our fear, anxiety, anger, or depression. We don't accept the moment and simply be. We constantly seek a past or future thought or emotion to latch onto. We search for pain or happiness and completely bypass the peaceful contentedness of the present moment. The skunk arrives every night and seems engrossed in the present moment. The same as the deer I saw last night. She appeared as soon as I was done writing in here. She was about 60 feet away at the edge of the unit. I peered out my window in amazement. I've seen many deer before but I wasn't expecting to see any in prison. I saw several here already, but all far away on the hills beyond the track. This one was close. As she moved I stood watching with fascination. Each step was taken with such intention. The bending and movement of her leg and neck displayed a delicate form that seemed to require no thinking to execute; just simple existence. Her patience was graceful and admirable. Compared to the concrete boxes we were being stored in, she was a display of elegance and presence. The cold structure of the prison buildings were no match for her attention to the freedom to be found in the present

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moment. As she walked away, each purposeful step added a sense of wild life into this place. Only one other inmate seemed to notice her. He took a look and said "Huh" out loud and walked off to watch TV. I quickly headed to the front doors of the unit to try and catch a glimpse of her for one more moment. I was tempted to open the doors and step outside to see her but it was after 10pm and that could be considered an escape attempt.

A Missed Opportunity

(Entry3)

I have been here for one month as of today. I have to admit that it doesn't seem like it. The overall time (30 days) has gone by much quicker than I expected. Time is a weird thing in here..."the days go by like years and the years go by like days" is a saying I've heard in here. I wonder if that will hold true for me. To mark my one month point, the stars have shown themselves to me. I've not seen any at night since I've been here and tonight at least 15 were shining in the sky, a bright reminder that if you look into the darkness long enough you will eventually see the beauty.

I had a miscommunication with my fiance yesterday and thought she would be available this evening for our routine call but she wasn't. I called and there was no answer. It's a hard feeling to deal with in that moment. When you reach out to a person and they don't respond. I know she (or anyone) can be busy with life on the outside and I am completely fine with that. I don't want her to drop everything for me. But I have to admit there is a bit of a sharp sting in my chest followed by a sense of sorrow or loss. The calls to and letters from people on the outside are a reminder of who we are...a person with connections to people, loved ones to hold, children to raise, a person who people think about. When we miss that chance to communicate, it kind of feels like perhaps you aren't those things anymore. Perhaps you are just a prisoner, surrounded by so many people yet so alone. You crave any and all opportunity to connect. A missed phone call feels like a missed opportunity to be reminded that you matter to someone. Hours went by and I felt like I needed to call her. Like Trinidad, I just needed to hear her voice. Thankfully I ended up reaching her and heard her voice for the day. Now I understand why Trinidad would call his wife, say one word and she would respond with a few words and he would hang up. Just being able to hear the voice of a person on the outside that you're connected to, holds so much power in here.