

Revolutionary Greetings!

I'm sitting here, on Death Row, imagining a landscape without prisons, and it suddenly dawned on me that most people have no idea as to what life is like for a prisoner. I should give you a glimpse into my existence.

The first thing you should know is that every day is different. Prison is unpredictable, anything could happen at any given moment, so based on that I will not attempt to explain what a day in the life is like, but rather, I will describe what today was like, March 9, 2020.

I woke up at about 5:30 AM as I usually do. I washed my face and brushed my teeth. Breakfast was served at 6:00, it was three small, cardboard looking waffles and a dollop of peanut-butter. It didn't appeal to me so I gave the tray back to the officer, and he proceeded to the next cell.

On Death Row, and/or solitary confinement we don't walk to the chow hall.

All meals are eaten inside the cell.

I am located in San Quentin's East Block, it is divided by two sides, a Yard side, and a Bay side. Each side of the unit is five tiers high, and each tier has 55 individual single man cells, and two showers.

When they pass out meals, the trays are stacked onto a cart, and the tier officer will push the cart down the tier, stop at each cell, open the tray slot, slide in the tray or lunch bag, close and lock the tray slot and then proceed to the next cell. Once the officer reaches the end of the tier, they then reverse course and pick up the tray from each cell, locking the tray slots after they have retrieved the empty trays.

Usually after breakfast they start putting handcuffs on the cell doors of the prisoners who elect to go out to the yard, but today that didn't happen because the prisoners in East Block are on quarantine.

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Many prisoners throughout the prison have been coming down with a bad flu, because of the Coronavirus crisis prison officials have been placing various units on quarantine.

Quarantine means no yard. It means you are confined to your cell 24 hours a day. This is how it has been since March 5, 2020, and this is how it will be for the foreseeable future.

There's not much one can do in a four and a half by ten foot prison cell, but because going out to the yard was not an option, I immediately opened my book *The Underground Railroad*, by Colson Whitehead and began reading. I started reading at about 6:30 AM, and read til noon.

By noon time many of the prisoners had risen from their slumber, so as the noise level picked up, I decided it was time to put the book down and to focus on what my first meal of the day was going to be.

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I felt like my body was craving protein. I went to my shelf, correction, it is not "my" shelf. I do not own any of the fixtures inside this cell, and I try to refrain from claiming any state items as "mine."

I went to the shelf that's located in the back of the cell, above the metal sink basin, and I grabbed a pouch of oysters, a pouch of mackerel, and some grits. This would be my lunch.

I have always considered myself to be a cook, foodie, and an aspiring mixologist, and I also pride myself in knowing how to make something from nothing.

As long as I have canteen and quarterly food package items available, I am always cooking, experimenting and formulating recipes. For today's recipe I took two packets of instant grits and poured them into a plastic bowl. I seasoned them with salt, pepper, garlic, and onion flakes. I then poured in hot water, stirred, covered and let simmer.

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After five minutes I added a 3.53 ounce pouch of smoked oysters, and a 6 ounce pouch of mackerel. I mixed the ingredients. I then placed the plastic bowl inside of my small, plastic, 5 cup capacity hot pot. This created an air tight fit, and I allowed the steam from the hot pot to heat up the contents of the bowl.

Within 3 to 5 minutes I unplug the hot pot. I remove the plastic bowl from its steam bed. I reach for my habanero hot sauce. I open the lid of the bowl. I delight in the meal that lies before ^{me,} and I always say grace because I realize that had I not had these items, I would've been forced to eat cardboard waffles and processed bologna.

Prisons have a canteen, which is basically a store. Prisoners who are fortunate enough to have money in their account are able to spend up to \$220.00 per month at canteen. Most of the canteen items are marked up rather high, especially the healthier

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food items, so prisoners often have to defer to the less healthier items because they are less expensive.

Prisons also contract with private vendors such as Walkenhorsts, Access, and Union Supply Direct. Prisoners are permitted to buy and receive packages from these vendors every quarter, or every 90 days.

These vendors sell everything from food and hygiene, to shoes, clothing and appliances. And, to clarify, prisoners in East Block are allowed two packages per quarter. One package can consist of food and hygiene items, and the other package is reserved for non food items such as clothing, undergarments, TV's, radio, fan, CD's, hot pot, etc.

Now that I have advised you of some of the food items and amenities that prisoners are allowed to purchase and possess, let me attest that it does very little in terms of ameliorating one's pain and suffering. It does nothing to change the fact that I am trapped inside

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of a coffin sized cell, and every day I wake is just another day in hell!

I am not pacified by the TV, radio, or man made gadgets, nor am I comforted; freedom is precious, it is a beautiful thing, and I have yet to find anything in prison that rivals or replaces that beauty.

As with most days, I spent this day reading, writing, networking and trying to better myself. And although I didn't leave the cell physically, I was able to leave it psychologically.

I pictured myself at the Solitary Garden on the UC, Santa Cruz campus. I sat on the bench and I overlooked the garden in solitude. I meditated. I walked around the structure, taking in the panoramic splendor of all the flowers and plants. And then, I did what I've been dreaming of for so long. I squatted down and I felt the earth. I picked up the soil and let it sift through my hands. It had been 21 years.