

MAIL KING

The Dickey Process of Receiving Mail in Prison

Today at mail-call, the chatter sounds like a colony of ADHD chipmunks housed inside an acorn factory. Criminals from all walks of life gather ‘round the octagonal table in anticipatory fashion. Parcels spread across the cold steel surface resemble a buffet, but instead of food and spice; they are crafted from ink and paper. Magazines, a surprisingly diverse assortment of publications, books, photos & love letters make up the bulk. To keep your head right in prison it’s all about small wins and getting mail is one of them.

The most coveted time of day in prison: mail-call.

Only ten, maybe fifteen guys out of a hundred will hear their name called today, but everyone waits in suspense. Regardless of our backgrounds, we all share the desperate yearn for human contact although we decline to speak of it. Even human paper contact counts. Thin glimmers of hope sometimes penetrate these thick walls of hatred. Could today be the day to receive a nostalgic gift of fond memory from the real world? One can hope.

“Wilkins again!?” the C.O. hollers in mock disbelief.

We are swiftly approaching record setting territory as the 8th or 9th piece of mail hails to me. My friend Chris chuckles a half-joke, “Damn Ben, save some mail for the rest of us.” Dull, tortured eyes illuminate with a spark of life when their names are called. At least those chosen few won’t have to exercise “*the walk of shame*” today, that’s what we call it when you walk away from mail-call empty handed, heavy hearted.

Primitive whoops of excitement ring out when a girly magazine shows up for someone. The proud new owner is swarmed with requests to borrow it before he even has time to take a cursory flip-thru for himself. “Hands off my ladies, I don’t want no sticky pages!” he cackles. Embarrassingly, this is an adult prison. Another name called, a brief smile, then, “Aww man, just a child support notice...” The next guy receives two letters, super score! No walk of shame for him.

Some people simply communicate better through correspondence because a partner cannot interrupt their true expression in that form. They bleed onto the pages—past hurts gentle—while new bonds strengthen.

After mail-call we size up the situation. The final tally—sixteen pieces of mail—doubles the previous one-day-mail-record. The booty? Two rejected submissions, four personal letters, six newsletter types, two magazines, one random notice that I should receive Christ as Lord & Savior, and one book. *The book.* It’s the first book I’ve ever been published in, a four-page article titled “Relationship Skills 101,” with a byline. A tableful of us hang back to check it out, we share upbeat words on the women in our lives, our relationships, and how it would be great to find a way to reconnect with our children: the exact intent of the article. Small wins.

Later that night the fellas nicknamed me MK. I wish the MK stood for Michael Kohr so I would be flossin’ like a boss in brand new attire, but it did not. The handle stands for Mail King. Chop that up as another small win.

Ben Wilkins #461478

Spring Creek Correction Center

3600 Bette Cato Ave

Seward, Alaska 99664

Ben Wilkins is a contributing writer for the *National Writers Association* and *Spotlight on Recovery* magazine. His work has been published with *Minutes Before Six*, *Freebird Publishers*, and elsewhere. Though currently imprisoned in Alaska, he believes life is only 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond to it. He hopes to inspire people thru writing. He is hungry for opportunity & feedback, and gladly accepts correspondence @ the address listed.