

The Prison Diary of Joseph Dole

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March 14, 2011

I never imagined that I would be writing a diary, especially in prison. A friend had suggested it once and I immediately dismissed the idea. I figured it would just be another item the guards would steal to get a rise out of me, or that it would be lost during a transfer, etc. I only write one now because I have been asked by The Anne Frank Center USA, as part of their Prison Diary Project. I always try to encourage prisoners to write more and get their voices heard out in free society to try and combat some of the tough-on-crime rhetoric and knee-jerk demonization of prisoners. Therefore, passing up this opportunity would have made me a hypocrite.

The letter that accompanied the material from The Anne Frank Center stated that the goal of the project was to educate people “on both sides of the wall”. I assume it means educate those on the outside about what it is like to be in prison. Those of us on this side already know what it is like. The hard part has always been trying to convey what it is like to someone who has never experienced it before. I’ve tried numerous times and always feel incapable of articulating what it is truly like.

How can I communicate what it is like to get arrested when you have one four month old daughter and a second daughter on the way, and then be sentenced to a term of life without the possibility of parole after your first felony conviction, by way of a theory of accountability, for a crime you didn’t commit? How can I depict what it feels like now to have two daughters who are twelve and thirteen years old whom I haven’t held in over nine years because I’m confined in a supermax prison for my sole legitimate disciplinary infraction? A prison which Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Tamms Year Ten all condemn because they consider the conditions here as amounting to torture. The English language lacks adequate terminology for such an endeavor.

The first time I ever really wrote anything was shortly after I arrived at Tamms (the supermax prison where I’m currently confined). I wrote an essay. I had never written an essay before, not even in school as far as I can remember. Yet desperate for money, I tried my hand at it. There was an essay contest being put on by a death row inmate and a good Samaritan. The theme was “Who Am I?” I learned of the contest from another prisoner who yelled out the details from down the gallery. I had to send it in that night in order to make the deadline. I simply wrote down the first thing that came to mind. Surprisingly I won first place and fifty bucks, even more than the ten dollars promised to every entrant. More than anything though, it inspired me to learn how to write better. In prison good writing skills are essential for just about everything – keeping in contact with your family (especially here in Tamms where they still won’t allow us to make phone calls); presenting your appeals in concise, coherent arguments to the courts; advocating for change; filing grievances; etc.

In that first essay I briefly touched upon what it is like in prison. I wrote:

“Most people’s conceptions of being locked up are completely

wrong. It's not the physical things that you're without that make it so hard to be incarcerated for life. It's the fact that you're helpless to take care of your family when they're sick, to raise your children, to help in their times of struggle, and to give back to your community. Instead you're a burden, a charity case, someone to pity. It strips you of your self-esteem and your self-respect. That is what breaks a man, not the absence of good food, alcohol, sex, or any of the other inconsequential thing we may often wish we had to temporarily give us pleasure."

I still find all of that true. Yet, after being confined and isolated for the past 9 years in a supermax prison, I've also come to realize that the little things add up too. There are a million little stressors and injustices that prisoners must endure on a daily basis that can also break a man. These are what I will try to describe with this diary. Each one may seem minor, but the cumulative effect of them all is what drives so many here insane. I'm not sure how accurate the word "insane" is, but it definitely causes a variety of mental illnesses. A recent report by the John Howard Association claims that 95% of inmates in Tamms suffer from a diagnosable psychiatric problem. Up to a point I wonder if this figure is just rhetoric or propaganda put out by the administration to further slander and stigmatize us in the eyes of the public, similar to how they call us the "worst of the worst". I can hear them now, "not only are they the worst of the worst, but they're all crazy sociopaths!" At the same time it disturbingly seems plausible to me that so many here are mentally ill. Numerous studies have shown that as little as three months in solitary confinement can cause deterioration in one's mental health. I wonder what the past nine years here have done to me? What psychiatric problem have they surreptitiously diagnosed me with?

March 15, 2011 4:30 a.m.

Now begins a new day. I just finished eating breakfast which was served at 4:15 a.m. and the trays collected about five minutes later. If you try to keep food off your tray you can be written a disciplinary ticket, and if you refuse to give up your tray they will put you on what is known as "mealloaf" (an entire meal ground up and smashed into a meatloaf-like substance). That's after five guards put on body armor, helmets, and pickup shields and batons, and mace you before entering your cell to forcefully take back the tray. In other words, you learn to eat fast here, or go hungry.

Anyway, I'm altering my schedule. Usually after breakfast I begin my language studies. Every day I study Spanish, Italian, and French. I was working on German too, but it was too difficult and I was unable to procure enough text and workbooks. No offense to the Germans, but that is one ugly language. Words that are thirty or more letters long, verbs that break apart and scatter around the sentence like they're trying to flank the enemy – you don't even know what the sentence is going to say or what tense it is in until the final word a lot of times. I'll stick with the Romance languages for now. There are others I'd like to learn as well like Persian, Arabic, and Kurdish, but my inability to obtain adequate reference materials, and the prison restrictions on the amount of publications we can possess make it impossible.

Learning languages helps me to maintain my mental health. When you read in other languages it opens up whole new worlds and viewpoints. Another good mental exercise are all those popular logic puzzles – Sudoku, Ken Ken, Kakuro, etc. They used to let the mental health staff here pass them out to us, but budget cuts ended that years ago. Exercise is another good way to try and maintain your mental health. It gets the blood flowing to the brain and helps to burn off stress.

Unfortunately I haven't been able to exercise in quite a while. I was diagnosed with a hernia last year and exercise can exacerbate it. I've seen guys die down here from lack of medical treatment and don't want to join that list. It's already painful and gives me discomfort. I get sharp pains periodically throughout the day, and often it feels like a dull ache or all tingly, like when your foot falls asleep.

When I went to see the nurse she informed me that the doctor will not treat hernias until it becomes strangulated and is a life and death situation. I was scheduled to see the doctor, "Dr. Death", nevertheless. We call him Dr. Death because of his complete lack of compassion for prisoners and his priority of saving his employer money over the lives or health of his patients. When I saw Dr. Death he told me "You're alright. It's reducible". I asked him "Shouldn't I get it repaired?" He responded, "Yeah, but we're not going to do it. You can get it repaired when you get out." I told him that I'm never getting out, as I have a life without parole sentence. He responded, "Oh, then you'll die with it." I then asked him, "What about the pain?" He said, "You're tough, you can handle it."

I'm now working on filing a lawsuit to force them to provide me with the surgery to repair it. If it strangulates in the meantime there is little chance that they will be able to get me to a hospital in time to operate before I die. Thus I no longer exercise other than jog in place.

I'm only working on about three hours sleep right now. Two guys on the wing "bugged up" last night, and were screaming and kicking on the door all night. If you've ever heard anyone slam steel against steel, you can imagine how loud and nerve-racking five continuous hours of that deafening noise sixty times per minute in close quarters would be. We say someone has "bugged up" when they lose it and start disturbing the wing. We call the guys who are more mentally disturbed "bugs". I'm not sure why. Maybe it is a reference to pests, or people bugging others or something? Who knows?

The prison vernacular is a hodgepodge of English, Spanish, and Ebonics, filled with innuendos, euphemisms, slang, etc. I've been in prison for over a decade and half the time I still don't know what people are saying. What's worse is that my language skills are deteriorating to the point where sometimes my family can't understand what I'm saying or I no longer pronounce words correctly and don't even notice. Years ago on a visit my mother snapped at me saying "It's police (pa-lēs) not po lice!" (pō lēs). I don't even know when I stopped saying it correctly and never realized I was mispronouncing it. Others have heard me talk on the wing without seeing me and have said they thought I was Latino because I have a Spanish accent. When did that happen? Do I really? I can't tell if I do.

Well I guess I'll stop for now. I need to get to my studies and legal work before guys start calling me for help with their legal problems or want math tutoring or something.

March 16, 2011 5:07 a.m.

I took a nap after breakfast. Once again I am working on little sleep – about three hours. I received some bad news in the mail yesterday on one of my civil cases. It concerns the Illinois Department of Corrections violating a state statute to overcharge inmates on commissary. Even the Illinois Auditor General agrees with every argument I am making yet the courts, being so biased against prisoners, refuse to rule against the IDOC. In the past four years alone, the IDOC has reaped about ten million dollars in ill-gotten gains. Prisoners are the poorest demographic in the country, and yet everyone is always trying to rob us or take advantage of us as captive consumers. More on that later. I'm still too frustrated by the court's illogical decision to go into it all.

Anyway, that decision by the Appellate Court adds more to my plate. I now have to scramble to write both a petition for rehearing and a leave to appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court.

I'm completely overwhelmed with all the legal work (civil and criminal), writing projects, etc. that I'm trying to complete. I always feel as if I'm just spinning my wheels, never accomplishing anything and my life is just slipping away – one wasted second, minute, hour, day, year after another in one great blur. I'm 35 now and may have another 40 to 60 years of this life and little prospect of accomplishing much of anything significant if I remain here.

The mailroom is once again playing games. I'm missing a ton of mail, and yesterday received a letter that was postmarked January 19th. The Pony Express had faster delivery times. Two letters that I did receive and one that is missing particularly affected me. I received a letter from each of my two remaining hopes of finding funding to enable me to continue my college education – both were apologetic denials; and I still haven't received a letter that my youngest daughter sent to me weeks ago.

Last Friday I received a letter from my oldest daughter which made me ecstatic. I can't make phone-calls and have only seen them (my daughters) three times in the past nine years, as they live with my sister thirteen hours away and it costs hundreds of dollars to come visit me. Also when they were younger I worried about the psychological effect it would have on them to have to visit me from behind glass and see their father in a tan jumpsuit, handcuffed, shackled, and chained to the cement stump which is my seat. Our letters are the primary means of staying in contact. Which is not good because it is incredibly difficult to get tweens and teens to sit down and write a letter. Especially when they have a plethora of organized activities (dance, sports, etc.) and a thousand distractions like the internet, texting, etc. and paper, pen, envelopes, and stamps are "like so yesterday, Dad! Nobody writes letters anymore!" Unfortunately, Dad has been abandoned a couple of decades behind of today's technology. No e-mail, twitter, facebook, etc. Complicating matters even more is that I usually only receive half of the mail they send me, which makes my daughters even more reluctant to write me because they feel like "what's the point he never gets it anyway!" So I received one daughter's letter and who knows what happened to my other daughter's letter or what it said. I only hear from them a handful of times per year so each lost letter is that much more disappointing. Regardless, I write them at least once a week.

I was never able to get a college degree when I was out in free society. First, I didn't have the money or scholarship to go to a University; and second, even though I enrolled in a junior college and took out student loans to attend, I could never find the time to finish a semester's worth of school work while working full time, sometimes more than one job, to pay off my loans, and pay the rent, bills, etc. So I got discouraged and being young and irresponsible would instead end up dropping out. Now there are even greater hurdles.

I had to go through a lot to get them to let me take college correspondence courses down here. It was even harder to find assistance with the tuition. An angel from a now-defunct prison ministry assisted me for a while, but now my college days are over; no money – no college. Pell Grants are no longer available to prisoners, and not many organizations see any benefit in helping a lifer get an education. Even the Prison Scholar Fund told me point blank that they won't consider someone who isn't getting out because I'll "never benefit society."

College courses are prohibitively expensive for prisoners. How do they expect us to pay \$1,200 for every 2 courses? (That's the discount/package rate at Ohio University where I took my 4 courses). We aren't allowed to work and if we write a book or start making good money off our art work the state confiscates our money to pay for "costs of incarceration." There is no aid or grants for prisoners. I currently have a 4.0 GPA, but am still ineligible for any type of scholarships. College programs are also disappearing from even the medium and minimum security prisons in Illinois at an alarming rate. Then everyone wonders why the recidivism rate is so high. Gee, do you think it may be because nearly 60% of the prison population is either illiterate or functionally illiterate and the IDOC refuses to adequately educate or rehabilitate anyone anymore, and guys (and women) are released to the streets with no marketable skills where people with MBA's can hardly find work? How are felons supposed to find work? One of the guys on my wing is forty years old and will be released next year after serving 17 years in prison and still can't read or write, and since he's in segregation they deny him the opportunity to take basic education classes which they consider "a privilege" even though the United Nation's defines education as a human right.

Well I guess I'll close for now. I have a lot to do today and have already spent more time on this than I had planned to. Until tomorrow.

March 17, 2011 5:39 a.m.

I got a whopping six hours of sleep last night. Unfortunately though, I probably won't be going to sleep again until 6:30 a.m. tomorrow morning because I need to get some legal work in the mail before then in order to make my court deadline. So with the aid of quite a few cups of coffee I will be handwriting legal documents for the next 24 hours.

Picking up where I left off on education yesterday – since the courses are so expensive and the available classes that someone can take without a proctor are so limited, I've been working to get them (the administration here) to provide us a proctor. That way we would be able to enroll in a wider range of courses (though the list gets shorter each year since we have no internet access), and would allow us to take course credit by examination which would save us a lot of money.

I feel like I am in a Kafka novel. We fought for over a decade just to get GED testing here. It finally happened last year. They hired an educator that actually educates and a

number of people have been able to get their GED, which is great. In February of 2010 I talked to the new educator and asked him if we could use the same proctor who does the GED testing. In March he responded stating that we can't as

“at this time I will be unable to proctor any test. However I would like you to ask me again in a year from now. This time next year I may be able to talk to my bosses and see if I will be able to help you. I am not telling you this to give you the run around, just at this time with all the changes going on in education here at Tamms I just don't have the time.”

So I waited patiently trying not to sweat him. In October though he happened to be on the wing so I asked him if he thought it would happen soon. He then informed me that there already was a way to take proctored college correspondence courses now, and that if I wrote him he would give me the details. I then wrote him without receiving any response and started writing weekly requests to him, all of which he ignored. When one of the guys who I tutor went to take his GED test I asked him to ask the educator about my request and I finally received a response from the educator on January 7, 2011 but he failed to provide any details and instead told me to write the Assistant Warden of Programs. So I did, three times so far, and have received no response. I wrote the educator again as well – no response. I wrote my counselor who refused to find out the details for me and instead directed me to 2 mental health staff members, neither of whom have anything to do with the education department and neither of whom responded to my requests. This is how things “work” around here. When you see someone face-to-face they always say “send me a request”, but when you do they never respond.

So six months later I still can't obtain the details on how to get an exam proctored. It doesn't much matter since I can't obtain financial assistance to enroll any longer anyway, but if I could figure out how to take proctored courses it would mean I would only have to find about \$400 instead of \$800-\$1,200, because I could take course credit by examination.

All the studies done on recidivism and inmate behavior show that the more educated someone is the more well-behaved and law-abiding they are. Yet the prison administration actively impedes our efforts to obtain an education. Society is no better. Our Pell Grants were taken away because voters were in an uproar that prisoners were receiving a “free” college education (as if we didn't pay taxes prior to incarceration). Prisoners don't deserve education they said. Well then don't whine when those same prisoners get out and have no education and no marketable skills, and therefore return to a life of crime.

In prison the administration sees educating prisoners as a threat, even though an educated prisoner will be more well-behaved. It's because violence is an equal opportunity employer. Both stupid people and smart people can choose to employ violence. But the more worrisome threat to the administration is the threat of the lawsuit and the threat of prisoners being intelligent enough to realize when the administration is breaking the law and violating prisoner's rights.

That was the impetus behind the PLRA (Prison Litigation Reform Act) and the nearly incomprehensible maze of legal procedures for prisoners trying to sue. Cases hardly ever get a ruling on the actual merits anymore, instead they get dismissed for procedural errors because

the inmate can no longer navigate the maze. Also he or she is left to be their own lawyer because the PLRA also denies lawyers who take on prison cases fair compensation even if they win. Most of the time juries and judges don't want to award any money to prisoners (the majority of society seems to feel that prisoners don't deserve compensation no matter what was done to them) and often only award nominal damages like \$1. Under the PLRA then the lawyer can only get \$1.50 in attorney's fees. So when an inmate educates himself or herself well enough to navigate the maze they become a huge threat - they effectively become the sole check on the administration's illegal acts and abuses of authority.

Another day and no letter from my youngest daughter. My anxiety level rises as it is more and more likely that the letter is lost. Anxiety is another symptom of the effects of isolation. I never knew what anxiety felt like until I came to Tamms. I never realized that it was possible to become so anxious, agitated, worried, etc. that your heart beats abnormally.

Well I'd better stop now and get started on all the legal writing, which I'm dreading. Oh to have a typewriter and copier!

March 18, 2011 6:00 a.m.

Still no letter from my youngest daughter. I guess that's one more I will never receive.

I'm getting ready for bed finally. I got my legal mail out. I'll only be able to sleep about 2 hours, then I take a shower and hopefully will be called to the satellite law library so that I can access my legal boxes to obtain some other legal papers I need to work on a different petition to try and meet yet another filing deadline.

That's another way they hinder our access to the courts. The mailroom doesn't consider mail from court clerks as "legal" mail so they open it up before sending it to you and can read what it is. So if it's something that is telling you that you have like 7, 14, 21 or 35 days to respond, appeal, etc. they will just hold it until you either miss the filing date or nearly do, making you scramble to respond. Since it takes like a week to get your legal boxes and you have extreme limitations on the amount of property you are allowed to keep in your cell, you often don't have the papers you need in your cell and can't get them in time to file your response or appeal. Also since it's not "legal" mail you have no proof that you didn't receive it in time. (If it is legal mail they have an officer witness delivery, sort of like when someone in free society receives a certified package out there and you sign for it.)

I'm surprised I'm still able to write legibly right now. The tip of my index finger is throbbing, my third finger is raw, my forearm, elbow, neck, back, and butt all hurt from sitting at this desk writing for the past 24 hours. There's no way I'm going to be able to shave my head to day. I won't be able to hold the raiser in my hand over my head that long.

My daughters always bug me to grow out my hair. I currently have it shaved bald, and use a disposable razor to shave my head in the shower. If I were to grow it out I would have to pay what we call the "hair tax". It's a \$4 charge anytime you change your appearance because they have to give you a new ID card. That's the new thing nowadays. Budget crisis? Just make prisoners and their families pay for everything; soap, ID's, visits, etc. Anyway I'm not giving them fifty bucks just so I can grow my hair out for the next year.

More importantly though, I would then be dependent on the barber to cut my hair and that entails way too much risk for my taste. I used to go out to the barber, but the last time I went I came back with two deep cuts that were dripping blood. As if that wasn't bad enough, the inmate in the next cell yelled over to me and confessed to being positive for Hepatitis C and that the barber had just cut his hair and drawn blood as well. I asked the correctional officer if he had seen the barber clean the clippers after my neighbor's haircut and he said no. I also noticed shavings of foreign hair much thicker and blacker than mine on my head and shoulders.

So I asked for a Hepatitis test and was denied one. Then I filed a grievance and Dr. Death called me out to see him and tried to convince me that it is not possible to contract Hepatitis that way. Which is laughable because when we come into prison they tell us not to share electric razors, nail clippers, etc. because that's how Hepatitis is commonly transmitted. I continued to argue with him until finally he agreed to test me for Hepatitis C only. I said fine (it was better than nothing and Hepatitis C is what my neighbor had). Luckily it came back negative. A year earlier I had finally gotten an HIV test after asking for nearly a decade. That too came back negative. I'm trying to keep it that way. Therefore, just to be on the safe side, I no longer go to the barber. In general population one must also worry about contracting both diseases through fighting. Fights in prison get extremely bloody.

Those aren't the only ways diseases get passed around in here either. They are supposed to screen kitchen workers and not allow inmates (from the nearby minimum security prison) who have either disease to work in the kitchen, but they still do. A number of years ago we were supposed to have chili for dinner but the trays were empty. We started asking what was going on, and the guards were really mad and told us that one of the kitchen workers had Hepatitis and bled in the chili. They never would have told us, but since the guards often eat the same meals as we do they were mad that this infected guy had been preparing all of our food for months without us knowing. Who knows how many people he may have infected. We all asked for Hepatitis tests then too, but were all denied.

I've seen studies that conclude that somewhere between 30% - 40% of prisoners in the U.S. have Hepatitis. The prisons and private health care companies are always fighting against testing inmates for it and never want to treat the people that they know have it. Most of these people will be getting out someday, and will pose an enormous public safety risk if they are unaware that they have Hepatitis. Prisons act as giant incubators for Hepatitis, MRSA, etc., and even HIV rates are much higher in prison than free society.

Okay it's going on 6:30 a.m. so I'd better stop here and take my 2 hour nap.

March 19, 2011 5:40 a.m.

I'm not sure how much I'll have to say today. I really didn't want to get out of bed this morning, and I'm still half asleep waiting for the "mocha" to kick in. I'm not sure if "mocha" is the correct word, it's not in the dictionary and I never drank any coffee before coming to Tamms. What I do is mix one spoon of Maxwell House coffee with 2 spoons of hot cocoa mix and 2 sugar substitutes. So whatever it is; "mocha", "cappuccino", etc., I'm not sure – it's what helps me stay awake when I can afford all the ingredients.

Yesterday I got my legal boxes by the skin of my teeth, and was just able to make my filing deadline. First, in the morning the guard told me I had a pass to the satellite law library (a small room the size of a walk-in closet with about a hundred outdated, half-destroyed legal books; it's also the only place we are allowed to access our excess legal property boxes) and that pass said I was supposed to have my #1 and #2 boxes, but that no-one had brought them from the Personal Property department because there was no one working in that department. Luckily a halfway decent guard was working and he did me a favor and called the watch commander who pulled someone from the mailroom to get the boxes and bring them down here, at about ten or eleven o'clock. (If I hadn't gotten my boxes I would not have been able to make the filing deadline).

Then when I was supposed to be put in the law library at about eleven-thirty, someone acted out and all the guards had to suit up and go in an inmate's cell for some reason. So they stopped all movement and there was no one to transfer me to the law library. Then when things settled down I was told I'd be escorted out to the law library at 1:30, then at 2:30, then when they were getting ready to move me one of the guards got called to an emergency on another pod and there weren't enough guards to transfer me. Then I had to wait until after shift change. They finally transferred me to the law library at like 3:40.

When I was trying to get back to my cell the guards were again called to another pod twice right as they were about to transfer me back. Then when I finally got back to my cell I had to scramble to write the petition, handwrite three extra copies, and mail them out.

Today I have to write yet another petition and 3 copies, and tomorrow I have to write a reply to a Motion to Dismiss, plus a bunch of letters, an essay, an article, this diary, etc. It's never-ending.

Today is Saturday, which means tonight I usually only sleep from like 4:30 a.m. Sunday to 7:00 a.m. Sunday. The reason being is that I stay up to watch Saturday Night Live, Stargate Universe, and Stargate Atlantis. Then after sleeping for 2 ½ hours after breakfast I get up for the news and political shows like This Week, Face The Nation, etc.

There's so much going on in the world right now. I used to have a subscription to the Economist magazine but it ran out. The group Tamms Year Ten has a good program to help us get a subscription. People can donate airline frequent flyer miles which are used to buy each Tamms inmate one subscription. I got a subscription to the Wall Street Journal newspaper which helps me stay up on the news and what is going on around the world. I won't go into all the stuff happening in Japan, North Africa, the Middle East, etc. as that's not the purpose of this diary, but, man, so much is happening right now! It really makes one feel useless just sitting here unable to help anyone in Japan, or give support to people fighting for democracy.

Usually it's quiet at this time of the morning. That's why I choose to write this diary around this same time each day. Today though Yip and Yap (two "bugs" on the wing) are screaming at each other. This on top of the background noise of all the door kicking and howls from the mentally ill on some other wing. I imagine it will be another busy day for the guards. All the noise is usually a harbinger of inmates flooding or trashing the galleries, if not inmates tearing toilets off the walls or throwing feces at each other, and/or staff. Did you know that guys are being sentenced to an extra five years sometimes for throwing feces at guards? That

means if they serve those extra five years in Tamms the taxpayers are paying \$450,000.00 to punish a guy for slinging urine or excrement at a guard. Talk about a waste of money! Where is the Tea Party and all those fiscal conservatives?

It's never completely quiet on the wing unless a power outage occurs. There's a constant and loud white noise here at Tamms. It's the giant fan that struggles to circulate air in an otherwise hermetically sealed environment. You get used to it but only after some months. After a year or so there would be times that it would just really drive me crazy though. Then after about two years it ceased to ever bother me. It adds to the difficulty in communicating with others on the wing though.

Actually it also has its positive aspects as well. On the rare occasion that the power goes off it gets so quiet in here that you can hear every inmate urinating, farting, snoring, etc. Not pleasant! It's also a warning that someone is going to be maced. Whenever the guards are about to mace someone they kick it on high which is extremely loud, to the point where you can't even hear the guy in the next cell yelling to you.

Whenever they mace someone on the pod it spreads to every wing. So even if it's on the other side of the pod you're going to be coughing too. If you're on the same wing as someone who gets maced you too feel the full effects, because you're in a sealed cement box of ten cells sharing the same air. The administrative directive concerning the use of chemical agents states that staff is supposed to move everyone not being maced off the wing before macing someone, but they never comply with that directive. (Too much of a hassle, and after all, why bother when macing 8 or 10 prisoners is more fun than macing just one).

Okay I guess I'll quit for now so I can get back to my legal work. So, til tomorrow.

March 20, 2011 11:30 a.m.

Well I got about an hour and a half of sleep after breakfast this morning before these idiots started screaming at each other at about a quarter past six. They are still at it, uninterrupted, except for the six minutes it took them to scarf down their lunch. What kind of sick cosmic joke determined that it's usually the most ignorant people who are capable of yelling the loudest? I could barely make out anything that was being said on the television this morning because Yip and Yap's squall was overpowering the sound emitting from my earphones. I finally gave up and now have the radio blaring in my head to try to drown them out.

If I yell for five minutes I lose my voice. How can someone yell for 5, 10, or even 12 hours at full volume without losing their voice? It boggles my mind. Worse it gives me a headache just listening to it, grates on my nerves, and I can do nothing to make it stop or escape from the onslaught to my hearing.

Anyway it's good to be writing in cursive again. My hand, forearm, etc. are killing me. I've been printing, by hand, legal documents all morning while listening to the TV and radio. That's why I got started on this diary later in the day. I had to make sure I had time to finish my legal work to make my filing deadline. Since receiving my legal boxes I've handwritten (in small print) over 45 pages of legal documents. Not fun!

I'm behind on so many things it's ridiculous. I'll be at it until at least next weekend before I can even think about relaxing and reading a book, and that's only if I don't get another motion, or court decision in the mail that I need to respond to. I always laugh when the courts accuse prisoners of filing lawsuits as a sport. Like we really want to spend hours per day struggling to understand such a contradictory subject. It's not fun. It's simply necessary to protect the limited rights the courts say we retain but which are constantly and arbitrarily denied to us.

Yesterday a couple of guys were having a conversation on the wing about going to Mars or something and they were talking about muscle deterioration from lack of use in space. Then hours later there was a conversation about guys not being able to hold their bladders and bowels on the yard. (The "yard" here is really just a cement box with solid concrete walls about 20 feet high. It's about the size of a one car garage with no washroom, and half of the roof covered with chain link fence and the other half with corrugated steel where birds nest in the grooves. The birds shower the yard with nesting material and feces.) Anyway, it got me thinking, and I started to wonder if, statistically speaking, more people in supermaxes or long-term solitary confinement develop problems holding their bladders and bowels than those in the free world. Thankfully I don't have problems, but it seems very common.

A lot of guys are scared to go to the yard because they can never get back in to use the bathroom fast enough. I've seen a number of guys down here that have defecated or urinated on the yard because they could no longer hold it. So that had me wondering if the muscles responsible for controlling our bladders and bowels are atrophying due to lack of use. I've been no further than four feet away from a toilet for over 9 years other than the handful of times per year I go to the yard or on a visit, or when I'm in the shower (there's a bathroom in the law library).

Is it a case of use'em or lose'em like when astronaut's muscles atrophy while in space? Who knows? It wouldn't surprise me though. Pretty soon we'll all be old men in diapers. Someone should do a study on it. I suggested to my lawyer before that they should also do a study on the effects of solitary confinement on guys hearing, eyesight, etc. It seems everyone down here needs glasses after a year or two.

I was going through the little pamphlet on how to write a diary supplied by The Anne Frank Center and had to laugh. It says something like "take a lemon and describe it, etc." I was like, yeah. I haven't seen, smelled, or tasted a lemon in over a decade. The only fresh fruit I've tasted in the past ten years are oranges (up until 3 years ago), apples, and bananas. As far as canned fruit – nothing but apples, pears, plums, and peaches. I'd give a couple fingers for a steady supply of berries.

Well I guess I'll cut today's entry short as I still have a lot to do today before they pick up the mail.

March 21, 2011 5:00 p.m.

I tried to send a card to my stepmother but it was just given back to me because I have insufficient funds to pay for the postage.

Last Friday I received a letter from my mother telling me that while one of my stepmother's brothers was in the hospital getting open-heart surgery, her other brother died of a heart-attack. I guess she had to call my sister to pick up my father. My father is mentally disabled and someone has to be with him at all times. He had a stroke/heart attack over a decade ago and now can't remember anything past a couple of minutes ago. So he couldn't handle being in the hospital all that time and was driving my stepmother nuts.

I'm completely useless in any type of situation like this. All I can do is send a card offering my condolences. Even then, only if or when I have the funds to do so. I can't call her, go help out with my father, help her with anything concerning the funeral, etc. I'm completely impotent to be of any assistance to anyone. That is what breaks you. It's not just that American society views anyone who is in prison (or who is even simply charged with a crime) as evil, stupid, and worthless. It's that, with a life without parole sentence you're daily reminded of just how impotent you are and always will be if you don't get out. You're forced to view every family tragedy as a spectator, but with all the emotions of being personally effected which are compounded because you also know you can't do anything for your family. You can't take care of them when they're sick, help them when they need a hand, or even attend a funeral. Being in a supermax with no phone calls also means you learn of the deaths of family and friends weeks after the fact in a letter. Letters you reread over and over hoping that you somehow misread it the first half dozen times.

It also means that your family has to watch you suffer as you are denied medical care so the state can save money or some company can increase their profit margin. It means that when you die your family will have to fight to get your body and if there was foul play involved in your death they will have to deal with a cover up to try and learn the truth about what happened inside a closed environment that the public has almost no access to. Not to mention that the local and state police and prison guards are often related to one another, and taking anyone who may be responsible for your loved one's death to court means going to court in a town where the majority of the jury pool has relatives or friends working in the prison.

Well as you can see I'm in a pretty morose mood right now. (More than usual even). I need to try and finish my reply to this motion to dismiss I received on one of my cases. I'll explain about that tomorrow.

March 22, 2011 5:00 a.m.

I still have not finished my reply to the motion to dismiss, so that will most-likely take up the entire day after I finish this entry and my language studies. The reply to the motion to dismiss is this – last year, actually December 1st of 2009, I was written a disciplinary ticket for violating a rule that does not exist. It was actually the second bogus ticket I had been written in 2 months. Both were in retaliation for my having filed grievances against mailroom staff for failing to follow proper mail handling procedures, such as confiscating allowable mail, failing to notify the sender of the confiscations, etc. Anyway in retaliation I was first written a bogus ticket for an allegedly unauthorized business venture, which was eventually expunged after I beat it out on appeal. They used this first ticket though as justification to then confiscate around 20 parcels sent to me over the next few months by my family and friends. This is a violation of state law as no disciplinary restrictions are supposed to be placed on the mail. Nevertheless they did it, and even though I beat the ticket out (which was their justification for

the confiscations) they still to this day refuse to give me the mail that they unlawfully confiscated. So this will engender a federal lawsuit in the next couple of months.

I was then written a second bogus ticket less than a month and a half after the first, and after having filed over a dozen grievances about the bogus confiscations. See a pattern here? This time they claimed that I was soliciting from someone who isn't a family member, and claimed this was against the rules. First it's not against the rules. What I actually did was respond to a friend who asked me what I wanted for Christmas that year as she always gets me a small gift. In response I sent her an order form filled out for her to order me subscriptions to magazines from a discount dealer. My letter and the order form were returned to me and I was told I couldn't send them out (a clear violation of my First Amendment Right to free speech under the U.S. Constitution). Then I was written a disciplinary ticket, found guilty, and the conviction was rubber-stamped all the way through Springfield.

Not only should I have not been written a ticket, nor found guilty of it, but Tamms staff had no justification for withholding my letter and order form from being sent out as it did not constitute any type of threat to security or safety. I was merely sending a list of magazines to be ordered for me. The IDOC's outgoing mail regulation (20 ILL. Adm. Code §525.130(h)) permits employees to "spot check and read outgoing non privileged mail." "Outgoing non privileged mail may be withheld from delivery if it presents a threat to security or safety." If it doesn't present a threat it cannot be withheld. Nor can it be the basis of a disciplinary ticket.

Also my right to notice as to what constitutes prohibited conduct is also being violated, because there is no rule or regulation anywhere that stipulates that an offender is prohibited from asking friends or other non-family from ordering him books, magazines, etc. On the contrary, the above section of the Code only permits staff to read or copy such letters and withhold them (something they are normally prohibited from doing) only when they present a threat to security. Informing someone that staff can read or withhold mail that presents such a threat does not in any way notify anyone that mailing out mail that doesn't present a threat is a disciplinary offense.

Furthermore the offender orientation manual clearly states "A member of the individual's family or a friend may also order, solicit, or bring approved publication to the facility". Also such a misinterpretation of 525.130(h)(6) would make the act of requesting books from Books to Prisoners organizations not only unallowed, but also a disciplinary infraction and something nearly every inmate at Tamms would be guilty of. Not to mention make the Mental Health Department complicit in those infractions since they provided the addresses of those organizations in their newsletter.

So I now have that disciplinary ticket in my master file which is used not only as a factor in whether or not to grant me a transfer to another prison (and out of this hell), but also used as a factor when the Governor hears my clemency petition. It will be used to argue that I'm getting into trouble in Tamms so I'll also cause trouble in another prison if transferred and will likewise cause trouble if let out into society, so I should be denied a transfer and clemency.

Therefore I had no choice but to file a Petition for Writ of Mandamus to try and get a court to force the IDOC to expunge that ticket. Since I can't afford an attorney, I also had no choice but to represent myself, again. Thus when the Defendants (IDOC) filed a Motion to Dismiss my Petition I now have to scramble to reply and correct all their lies and argue my case. This is going to cost taxpayers thousands of dollars, all because the administration first wanted

to retaliate against me for trying to get them to follow their own rules, and then for again not following their own rules all throughout the disciplinary process. It's ridiculous.

Oh, on another subject, the counselor came around yesterday. I asked her why she never got back with me about the proctored college exams. Instead of answering me she asked "Oh you still haven't found out?" Um, no, last week you told me you would find out for me, before that you gave me two names of other people to write to, neither of whom ever responded. So she again claims she is going to find out for me, but I can guarantee you we'll be having this same conversation when she make her rounds next week.

I think the only way I'm going to be told how to take proctored exams is to declare a hunger strike and demand to be told. A hunger strike down here is a serious affair. First they don't want anyone to find out you're on a hunger strike so they trash your mail or delay it etc. Also right when you declare a hunger strike they come shakedown your cell and take all your food and even your toothpaste to make sure you're not eating anything. Then if you stay on it too long they come forcibly extract you from your cell, strap you down and force feed you by cramming a plastic tube up your nose and down your throat. Not pleasant! In prison you have no right to peaceably protest the multitude of injustices perpetrated on you.

Well I guess I'll stop for now. I feel like this whole dirary has been a giant complaint log, but it's the only way I can think of to explain how much stress, anxiety, frustration, etc. stalk us in these cells.

March 23, 2011 5:48 a.m.

It's slow motion today. I feel good. A little of the stress has lifted since I finished my reply to the motion to dismiss yesterday and sent it to the law library to be copied. At least now I can check that off the list. Today, since I can't get into my legal boxes until either tomorrow or Friday, I can do a little work on my other projects, maybe even read a couple chapters of a book, and finish another section of my neighbor's clemency petition. Maybe spend some extra time on my language studies.

I'm picking up French pretty easily. I only started learning it because my oldest daughter claimed to want to learn it so I told her I'd learn it with her and got us some workbooks, dictionaries, etc., but she hasn't followed through at all. She's thirteen right now, and very busy with all her dance classes, sports, etc. Also, like all kids at that age it is hard to get them to stay focused on one thing for too long. I wish I could afford to send my daughters to language camp.

Anyway, as I was saying, I am picking up the vocabulary pretty quickly. Knowing a decent amount of Spanish and Italian speeds up the process. I need a pronunciation guide though or some French language tapes. We are only allowed to buy tapes from 2 different vendors though, each of whom takes advantage of prisoners. One used to sell 8 French tapes for \$24.99, then they inexplicably jacked the price up to \$50. Any new music tapes that come out are usually about twenty bucks plus you have to pay like four bucks shipping and handling and another three bucks to have the company remove the screws. ("Security risk"). Since only

like two percent of albums even come out in cassettes anymore they're discussing switching to CD's or MP3's. Logic would say that since CD's are just as close to going the way of 8 tracks as cassettes that they would go straight to iPods or something. The IDOC rarely does anything that is logical though.

I am sending a couple of articles that I wrote to try and sell to Prison Legal News. Hopefully they'll accept them for publication. Writing opportunities for prisoners (paying ones) are getting even more scarce as more and more publications fold. There are very few avenues for prisoners to earn a wage sufficient to support themselves. Then people wonder why prisoners are always trying to make money in prison through illegal means. Maybe if there was a legal alternative they wouldn't have to.

Even the two prison mainstays of art and writing are going the way of the dodo. With two million prisoners and a decreasing number of available prison jobs, more prisoners are trying to sell their art and writings. Yet with few places paying for prisoner writings and a saturated market for prisoner art, there is greater supply than demand and are few opportunities for an artist or writer to make a living.

Also some prisons will try to confiscate any money made by a prisoner to pay for "costs of incarceration" which acts as a disincentive to prisoners to make money legally. This also discourages rehabilitation. Society seems unconcerned though as rehabilitation is no longer a goal of "corrections". It has been a myth for decades now. It should really be called "IDOP" (Illinois Department of Punishment), not IDOC.

Knowing I can't really "make a living" off of my writing nor art (since they have banned art supplies, and wrote me a ticket for an "unauthorized business venture" when a friend handed out my homemade origami Christmas ornament in exchange for donations. She was trying to make sure my daughters received Christmas presents from me since Angel Tree was so unreliable). I spend the majority of my writing energy on writing proposals, research papers, or policy papers. I just wrote one on the costs incurred by the State of Illinois due to enacting its Truth-In-Sentencing law. The law has been on the books for well over a decade and no one has even looked at how much it is actually costing the state, or what the benefits of enactment were. Yet, astonishingly they are debating whether or not to expand it to cover even more crimes.

I found that the state incurs well over a quarter billion dollars in added costs each year due to enactment. Then people wonder how the state has a \$15 billion dollar budget deficit. Gee maybe because you're passing laws without considering their costs? There's a great bill in the Kentucky Legislature that has a provision that says "Any state legislator who filed a bill to establish a new crime or strengthen the penalty for an existing crime would have to list the cost in terms of housing or monitoring criminals and identify a source of funding". That's my next project – to push to get something similar passed here in Illinois.

Okay I'll stop for today. I need to get ready for my shower and do my language studies.

March 24, 2011

Once again I did not want to get out of bed, even though I got six hours of sleep last night. I forced myself to get up though and drank a "mocha" and am now wide awake and

ready to write. I just read all of the John Howard Association reports recently concerning their monitoring tours of the maximum and supermaximum security prisons in Illinois over the past year. More than 20% of inmates are on psychotropic medication. I am not. I self medicate with "mochas". You know how they say chocolate releases endorphins or something in the brain similar to when you're having sex or in love or something like that? (I forget exactly what the studies have shown but I remember it was something like that.) Anyway, I believe it because any time I'm really depressed or anxious a Hershey's bar or "mocha" seems to help. When I go through a rough week or two I notice I go through a lot of "mochas." Chocolate is my Prozac.

They weren't kidding either when they came up with the name "comfort food." Especially in here where food is just about the only pleasure left. They have us dependent like drug addicts. They can charge us anything for a candy bar (95 cents) for bag of chips (80 cents for 1.5 oz.) and sooner or later if you can afford it you'll pay. We are captive consumers, victims to monopolistic practices, and desperate for any pleasure. We pay the equivalent of \$3.60 for a \$1.29 box of Little Debbie cakes.

I'm getting close to the end of this writing pad already and have just checked and realized I can only fit two of these in the envelope The Anne Frank Center sent. I wonder if filling two of these pads is equivalent to one of their journals? I also wonder what, if any response there will be to what I've written. It doesn't feel like I've done much with this diary thus far. How does one describe the monotonous other than to say it is monotonous. How does one convey the monotony of years of the same stresses and the toll they take? I don't know. Hopefully my writings here can be used for something. It's always nice to feel useful rather than useless, (which society constantly tells prisoners they are every day).

That's probably the biggest lesson that I've learned since being in prison. America throws away people like no other nation on the planet. Our prisons are warehouses brimming full of wasted human potential. Millions of people are discarded into our prison system with only the most superficial attempts to rehabilitate them. They are given almost nothing productive to do with their time and often when they are productive they are punished for it. Prisoners want to contribute to society, want to accomplish things with their lives, and want to make their families proud. Yet in an environment where the powers that be make so many rules that doing any of those things is nearly impossible, where society constantly demonizes prisoners and tells them they are worthless, and where many have been told throughout their childhood and adult life that they are stupid, worthless, and were born evil; overcoming those obstacles and stigmas on one's own is rarely a realistic possibility.

My neighbor just received his GED. He was an alcoholic at age 12, sentenced to 48 years in prison for a crime committed at 18. He had a seventh grade education until last week. When he received his GED he was stunned. He told the wing that he never thought he was intelligent enough to be able to accomplish something like that. Now he's looking to figure out a way to take a paralegal course to help guys with their legal cases, and he's thinking of going to college in the future.

The prison administration has been in his way the entire time. They refused to provide GED testing for years. They only began to do so because we fought for it for so long and so hard that our supporters demanded it as one of the reforms to Tamms. The administration still does

not encourage education, but instead discourages it by prohibiting anyone in disciplinary segregation or Level 1 from enrolling. They offer nothing after a GED. Us prisoners are the ones who encouraged my neighbor to enroll and I tutored him. The teachers wouldn't spend the time. He taught himself mostly. The first A he received on an essay amazed him. He had never known how good it feels to accomplish something and receive praise.

I've never heard of bigger myths than the three following American aphorisms:

1) "Everybody deserves a second chance" (Really? Then how is it that thousands of people are being sentenced to either death or life without parole or its numerical equivalent for first time offenses, many of which were committed as children?):

2) "The land of the free". (Really? Then why are we the nation with the highest incarceration rates, with only five percent of the world's population but twenty-five percent of the world's prisoners?); and

3) The term "Criminal Justice System". (if it is so concerned with justice why are there so many innocent people sitting on death row or in prison? Why does the court system routinely deny prisoners justice by refusing to hear a case or an issue because an uneducated prisoner or incompetent lawyer failed to navigate the most complicated procedural mazes you can imagine? Why are prosecutors vociferously seeking convictions to advance their careers when they have evidence that the defendant is innocent? Why do courts and legislators around the country still prevent defendants from obtaining DNA testing of the evidence to try and clear their name, and refuse to disclose all the evidence or pass open-discovery laws? How is this a just system when it denies the wrongly accused the only evidence that can free them?).

It's heart-rending to see so many lives thrown away – guilty and innocent. For every one like my neighbor there are ten who never get to have that feeling of accomplishment, and will continue to feel useless, worthless, and incompetent until they die.

March 25, 2011 5:00 a.m.

Ahh, a new day, a new tablet. This will be my second and last tablet as it is all I have and all I can fit in the envelope.

Let's see, what's on the agenda for today. First, this diary entry which usually takes between fifteen and fort-five minutes. Then my language studies, as usual. Then get my third shower of the week which is nice. In another month I will be getting five showers per week if I don't get any disciplinary tickets before then. Ironically if I get transferred out of Tamms to a lower security prison due to good behavior I will only get two or three showers per week depending on which prison I go to. For the first eight years and seven months that I was in Tamms I was only allowed one shower per week. I really perfected the bird bath during that time. Although, a bird bath can never make you feel as clean as an actual shower, no matter how many cups of hot water you dump over your head.

The problem with getting so many showers per week (as if this were a lot; in the free world I used to take two to three showers per day – morning, gym, night) is that I have so much work to do that it puts me behind schedule because often they forget to let me out of the shower and I'm stuck in there for two hours or more. The shower is definitely worth it though.

Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah. Then when I come back from the shower I have to do all of the following today. Read and take notes on 20 different court cases that I borrowed from the library; go through a stack of documents that I just received from the federal court which prove that the state's attorney not only withheld exculpatory evidence from me at trial, but also lied to my jury in order to obtain my conviction; go through this new habeas corpus book I received and start preparing to write a habeas corpus petition in case the Illinois Supreme Court denies my petition for leave to appeal; write (or begin to write and then finish this weekend) a separate petition for leave to appeal on a civil case I filed, in case the appellate court rubber-stamp denies my petition for rehearing; and (quickly) outline the rest of the arguments for my neighbors clemency petition. Then I collapse into bed and try to get at least six hours sleep. Oh and I have to do laundry as well, which entails washing each piece of clothing individually by hand in a tiny sink and hanging it to dry on my T.V. or desk.

By looking at all the legal work I do, one would probably assume that I enjoy it. Actually I despise it. It is the bane of my existence. I do it only out of dire necessity to 1) try and regain my freedom; 2) protect my rights as well as prisoners' rights in general; and 3) try to help out others who need my assistance. When I started, it was completely overwhelming. I had no clue where to begin learning the law and couldn't comprehend ninety percent of the legalese, Latin, etc. No one would help me out and I was thrown into it unexpectedly.

I had thought I had a lawyer. My family had paid a disgusting amount of money to my appellate lawyers who simply filed an ineffectual brief that failed to even comply with the court rules, not to mention misstated the facts at trial and in evidence, and failed to raise the numerous meritorious arguments that existed and instead raised frivolous or illogical issues, or raised issues that the court then refused to hear because my lawyer failed to properly cite supporting case law or include any argument on the issue. Then after telling me that they had filed both a reply brief and petition for rehearing they abandoned my case without any notice.

After months of trying to contact them to no avail I wrote the appellate court clerk who informed me that neither of the above were ever filed. Since they hadn't been filed I also found out that all of my time limits to file anything else had run out as well. Luckily I saved the lawyers' letters and could argue that I only missed the filing deadlines due to the lies told to me by my counsel. It still meant though that I had to scramble to learn in six months what it takes most lawyers a decade of college, law school, practice, etc. to learn.

We (Tamms inmates) got some encouraging news. Well sort of. They finally gave us our pin numbers and phone lists, and claim that we will be able to make phone calls beginning next month. Of course they've been promising us these phone calls for two years now. (Before that they always told us we would never get phone calls because Tamms was for punishment not privileges. They used to use the excuse that it would be a security threat to provide us with phone calls, yet convicted terrorists in the federal prison ADX in Colorado get phone calls, as do inmates in other supermaxes around the nation; so it's obviously no security threat.) In December they said we'd get them in January, in January and February they said March, now it's April. We'll see. It would be nice to hear my daughters' voices every month. We only get two 10-15 minutes phone calls each month though.

Well I'd better stop for now, and start tackling my to-do list.

March 26, 2011 6:05 a.m.

Good thing I still have some coffee left or else I would have slept until noon, and I have way too much to finish this weekend to have that luxury.

I received more bad news yesterday so I am somewhat out of sorts today. Also I failed to finish half the stuff I wanted to get done yesterday, so there's the added anxiety over the growing list of things I need to get done. Moreover, I have yet to receive my youngest daughter's letter. Yesterday I received a stack of mail that was all at least a week old (post-marked at least 2 weeks ago) and one piece had originally been sent to the wrong cell on another wing. Luckily either the officer passing out the mail realized that the other inmate wasn't me or the inmate turned it back in when he realized it wasn't his. A constant fear is that another inmate will get my daughters' letter and try to write her. I also received a package from my mother with no letter or list of what was enclosed, both of which she always includes. So I don't know what happened there. She always puts in the list because items are so often missing from my packages by the time I get them.

Today I'll be writing until well past midnight, then tomorrow I'll have to write for probably 6-10 hours as well. I still have not been able to get back to any of my other projects, which I was hoping to finish one or two of this month. That's not going to happen now, so everything is pushed back.

I have a stack of mail about seven inches high ready to be mailed out but I haven't been able to afford the postage for weeks so it just sits there aging.

As you can see, I'm struggling to find something to write about today. All I can think about is how I need to get to work on everything. So I will stop for now and either pick up a little later or maybe tomorrow or Monday.

2:35 p.m.

I finished writing six letters, four copies of a motion, read two magazines, three reports, and a half-dozen articles printed off the internet. Oh and I cleaned my floor and walls and did some laundry. Now I'm getting ready to eat a snack and get back to all the legal work.

Once again guys on the wing (Yip and Yap) are kicking the steel doors and screaming at the top of their lungs. It's driving me nuts as usual. All I want to do is yell "shut the &!\$* up!". Yet I don't because if I do I'll just become one more screaming, jabbering idiot and sooner or later pass the point of no return to a state of complete psychological meltdown like so many others down here. It's impossible to read case-law or concentrate on anything with all this racket. So I'll work on things that don't take a lot of deep thought or concentration and listen to the radio loud enough to try and drown out the cacophony (which never works). Hopefully they will wear themselves out in a few hours and I can get back to the rest of my to-do list. We'll see.

9:00 p.m.

I finally gave up trying to digest case-law as they wouldn't quiet down, and instead I just watched a movie. I think it was called The Stepford Wives, or something like that. I couldn't hear half of it over the din of the steel thunder. Now they've finally stopped. Hopefully it is for

the night (well I really hope it is forever, but I know that's too much to hope for). So while I get a respite I'll close this and try and read the rest of the case-law I haven't gotten to yet, and try and write some more of my petition for leave to appeal.

10:45 p.m.

Well they started up again. Here's hoping that they don't have more than an hour and 45 more minutes worth of screaming left in them. Stargate Universe comes on at 12:30 a.m. At least they aren't kicking the doors. I'm constantly amazed how a sentence with 20 words can consist of only three words that aren't obscenities and can still convey a thought (or at least an outlandish accusation). It's an art-form I'm glad I haven't perfected. Of course listening to it for years on end is a disease to one's own vocabulary. Till tomorrow.

March 27, 2011 9:10 a.m.

It's Sunday morning. Once again Yip and Yap are screaming at each other. I have my earphones in with the radio blaring, destroying my hearing. I'm trying to drown out the noise. Unfortunately people have their cell lights on so it makes the radio real staticky (I have no idea how to spell that word. "Staticky" is probably wrong but "staticy" seems wrong as well. Is that even a proper word? I can't recall ever seeing it in print).

I got through most of the case-law I had to read between like 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. when it was actually quiet. I still have a few more to get through today so that I can return them to the law library tonight (through the institutional mail). Any I don't return I'll be charged for – five cents per page. Then I can request another 20 cases to read. Also I still have lots of legal work to finish.

My writer's block is gone. The music and yelling are making it difficult to compose my thoughts, but I'd like to expound on why I have such a hard time coping with being incarcerated with a life-without-parole sentence and confined in a supermax prison with the plethora of restrictions solitary confinement entails, for years and years on end.

What makes prison so hard is having ambition, dreams, goals, and wanting to do right and accomplish positive things. Prison is conducive to none of these. It's so much easier to not care about life, not learn, not grow intellectually, not mature. It's easier to just hate-hate life, hate people, hate yourself. Striving to do something with your life, especially under these conditions make every day that much harder. It's always easiest to destroy or ignore. Hardest to care and build up yourself, other people, society, etc. It's easier for people to give up - on themselves, their children, others. It's why society finds it so easy to automatically demonize and write off anyone convicted or even charged with a crime without even knowing for certain whether he or she is guilty, or the circumstances surrounding the incident. All they need to know is that he or she is a "suspect" or a prisoner, or arrested for X crime, etc. It's much harder to look into the situation before making a judgment; harder to have compassion; harder to deal with the societal ills or root causes of crime. It's so much easier to be smug and sanctimonious. Easier to be deliberately indifferent to what is happening in your community until it adversely effects you and then just scream for revenge, rather than to try to understand how things came about. I know, that's how I used to be in my youth. Selfish, indifferent, not a care in the world.

That's also the easiest way to do a prison bit. It's safest to only look out for yourself. It's easiest to not care about your family and their struggles. It's easiest to sit around and read urban novels and watch the idiot box all day, not doing the hard work to try to accomplish

anything with your life. Not fighting for your rights or the rights of others, not sticking up for or lending a hand to anyone.

I can't live like that. I want to make a difference and accomplish as much as I possibly can with the remaining grains of sand which plummet all too quickly in my inner hour glass.

I want to be a good father to my two beautiful daughters. I can't do that from in here – no matter how much I try. A prerequisite to being a good father is being there for your child. I can't be there for them, so I fight with every ounce in me to change that. Oh how easy it would be to not write them every week when they don't write me for months. How much heartache and stress it would save me not to constantly worry about how their health, grades, and lives are, and how my being here is affecting them or how it will impact their lives in the long run. How easy it would be to give up on all my avenues of appeal and collateral attacks on my conviction and sentence and just quit on life, becoming a bunk potato for the next five decades.

It would be so easy to harden my heart and not worry about how my family is doing, not care about the thousands of problems facing our communities and country. It would be so easy to not study all these issues, not write proposals, articles, reports, etc. Not stress about how I am so impotent to make a difference from in here. It would be so easy to cease trying to understand other's point of view, to show compassion, or to forgive those who have done me wrong. It would be so easy to repay every wrong done to me with an equal or greater wrong. It would be so easy (and save me so many headaches and hours of my days) to be deliberately indifferent to anyone else's struggles, and refuse to help them in any way.

It would have been so easy to remain that selfish, crass, ass that I was in my youth.

Instead I choose the struggle. I fight. No longer with my fists or over pride. Instead I fight to rescue my life from being a complete waste. I care nothing about the "next life". I do nothing out of fear of any God. I couldn't tell you if any God exists. I've never seen an ounce of proof that one does exist, let alone that he intercedes in our lives. I believe in neither heaven nor hell. I worry about this life and making the most of what time I have here.

Why don't I worry about the "next life" or if there's a God? Because I believe one thing that most religions seem to reject. That if there is a God, and I'm living my life trying to help others – be a good parent, friend, neighbor, and citizen solely because I choose to care about others, then He or She will be much more satisfied that I am living right for the sake of living right than if I did it out of fear of God or was trying to rack up points, treasures, virgins, etc. in heaven. If God requires me to care only that I believe some story which requires me to suspend logic or common sense to believe it, or that I must bow to Him or Her out of fear or self-interest, then I'm not interested in the next life or stroking God's ego.

I don't know how I went off on a religious tangent. Oh well. As I was saying though – when you have any ambition, dreams, goals, worry about your family, etc. it all makes living in prison all the more difficult because accomplishing anything or being there for anyone is a thousand times more difficult. You're isolated in a cocoon of cement, steel, and insanity, where your resources are negligible and the whole of society is against you.

All I want is to make the most of my life and not waste another single grain of my sand. It's hard though when I'm constantly being persuaded that all society wants is for me to die so that the state can save some money and open up a bed for another they've deemed worthless. I see it in the denial of my rights, the denial of adequate medical care, in the illogical, unjust,

and factually erroneous decisions handed down by court after court. I see it where every portrayal of a prisoner on television is of a sadistic, homosexual rapist or baby killer. I see it where education for prisoners is seen as a waste of resources even when every study ever conducted shows it saves more money than it costs, so eliminating educational programs is counter-productive not only to balancing the budget but also to the safety of society.

Yet it is done over and over. Why? Because it's so much easier to hate prisoners and be deliberately indifferent to both the facts and the toll on humanity, than it is to care about another human being and try to understand him or her. Understand that an 18-year-old kid with a third grade education whose only family was a gang – which he or she would do anything they could to please because it was the only love they ever received – and who had already been an alcoholic and drug addict for a third of his or her life, may not make great decisions as a kid. That kid doesn't need a 50 year prison sentence. That kid needs our help; needs it long before they commit a crime; needs it even when they are incarcerated; needs treatment, education, hope for a better future. What he or she doesn't need is to be constantly told that they are evil, worthless, despised, and not worth anyone's care, consideration, or assistance.

I've met so many guys in here that have only ever felt pride in doing things that are self-destructive, or detrimental to others. I've met too many teenagers with natural life sentences or fifty or five-hundred year sentences. That is what disgusts me. Everyone makes mistakes. What is scary is when society collectively and deliberately throws away so many of its young people, and then justifies its actions with knowingly false rhetoric, playing on people's fears or desires for revenge, or desire to feel superior to someone else. Or even worse, as part of an industry – passing harsher and harsher laws to feed the private prison industry or to satisfy unions worried about job security.

March 28, 2011 6:14 a.m.

I'm really getting started late today. I just got out of bed about fifteen minutes ago and only got about five hours of sleep. Five interrupted hours of sleep though as Yip and Yap were sporadically going at it all night. These guys drive me nuts but I get along with both of them and try to understand that not only are they clearly mentally ill, but also that a lot of what they do are clear symptoms of what is commonly referred to as "SHU Syndrome" (Secure Housing Unit Syndrome) and what we call Tamms Syndrome.

What cracks me up is that they are completely oblivious as to how much they disturb the rest of the wing. They were screaming at each other in the middle of the night and in the wee hours of the morning and thirty seconds after they stop one of them calmly calls me as if nothing has been going on, and asks me to spell a word for him – at five in the morning, when I know at least two other guys are trying to sleep.

Most days I feel like "information", you know, when you call "411"? Or nowadays I guess it's more like "Ask Jeeves". Instead I'm like "Cell Seven how may I help you?". All day every day guys are calling up here asking me to help them with stuff, or to ask me questions, or to look something up, etc. Some days I just have to tell everyone to stay off my door. Otherwise I'll never be able to finish what I need to finish.

One guy – Yip, one of the screamers – I have to intentionally be rude to for him to leave me alone. If I don't he will try and start a thousand conversations just so he can have

something to do. He can't read past like a first grade level. The only genre that holds his attention long enough to even make him try to read are books about street life or erotic novels. He has so little knowledge about nearly every subject imaginable that the majority of his questions are completely illogical and even when they are coherent enough for you to understand them you need to explain a hundred other things first. The whole time though he's not really interested in the conversation. He just wants to hear someone talk. Whenever the conversation starts winding down he'll ask another question which usually has no connection to what you were talking about, or just as often evidences that he didn't listen to anything you just said.

Why does he do it? Because he's in his cell with no TV, no radio, uneducated, and can't read or write to pass the time. So his choice is usually to try and get someone to talk to him or scream at Yap his nemesis. He is so desperate to talk to anyone that he drives the guards crazy hitting the emergency intercom button, stops the guards every time they come on the wing every half hour to make rounds (to make sure no one escaped or that no one else has killed themselves) and every time he sees anyone come on the pod he screams at the top of his lungs, all to try to get them to come talk to him. Why they put him in cell #1 (the only cell that can see everything that happens out in the main area of the pod) is beyond me. They hate him screaming for people yet put him in the only cell that gives him a view to even know that someone has entered the pod. He knows every employee in the institution and nearly every mundane detail of their personal lives. The car they drive, which of their family members work for the IDOC, who they're dating, married to, etc.

I went off on a tangent again. Back to feeling like "Ask Jeeves". For the next few hours I'm going to log every time someone calls up here and asks me for help or information. There are only eight guys on this wing altogether. One, Yap, is completely antisocial. The only time he has talked to anyone in the past month was when screaming or cussing out another guy. (Yip). Anyway I'll start by recording what has already happened:

4:30 a.m.

Cell #1 – Asks me if I know what the temperature will be today.

5:00 a.m.

Cell #1 – Asks me how to spell the word "gave".

6:47 a.m.

Cell #1 – Tries to start a conversation. I tell him it's too early for that.

8:15 a.m.

Cell #6 – Asks me what time it is.

8:16 a.m.

Cell #1 – Asks me what's going on in Liberia (He pronounces it Libreria, but actually means Libya).

8:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. (while taking a shower)

Cell #6 – Asks me how to calculate compound interest.

Cell #1 – Asks me, if "technically" is spelled t,e,m,e,r,i,t,y. He's looking at "temerity" in the dictionary. It takes me five minutes to try and figure out what he's actually looking at though because what he actually asks is "Is 'technically' spelled e,t,t,e,r,t,e,m,r,t,y?" I say "no". He's obviously dyslexic. Instead of trying to teach him to read to even minimally prepare him for release next year, the administration would rather deny him any education and send him out as an illiterate 41-year-old parolee.

10:00 a.m.

Cell #2 – Asks me if I know of any legal cases that show that if your defense attorney argues to the jury that you should be found guilty – that that constitutes ineffective assistance of counsel.

11:00 a.m.

Cell # 8 – Asks me about a new case that says Miranda rights can be curtailed for terrorism suspects.

11:05 a.m.

Cell #1 – Asks me about electronic filing in federal court.

11:06 a.m.

Cell #1 – Asks me about jurisdiction.

11:10 a.m.

Cell #3 – Asks me about constitutional issues for a Post-Conviction Petition.

11:25 am.

Cell #2 – Asks me to look up cases for him.

12:15 a.m.

Cell #2 – asks me to look up a statute for him and explain part of it.

etc. etc, etc. Some days this is normal, some days it is much worse. Once in a while an anomaly occurs and no one calls me all day. I love those days!

March 29, 2011 6:43 a.m.

I should have continued the log yesterday. Cell #1 must have called me another fifteen times at least.

I overslept today. I woke up about twenty minutes ago with a pounding headache. I'm not sure if it's due to oversleeping or if that's why I overslept. Who knows? Last night the argument between Yip and Yap was just two long simultaneous rants filled with a litany of homosexual euphemisms and other derogatory names. That may be the cause of my headache.

I really detest prison culture. It's just a huge dichotomy with not a single positive aspect to it. Life in prison is plagued by the tough guy mentality. One must never look weak, soft, sensitive, compassionate, etc. Which is ironic because this same rule has created a culture where everyone swears they are tough but in reality they are comically hyper-sensitive to anything that may even theoretically imply that one is sensitive or insecure. If you tell someone to stop being so sensitive, most will take it as disrespect and want to physically hurt you. No one will realize that they are being overly sensitive about being called sensitive.

Some guys are so obsessed with not being seen as weak, soft, etc. that they see slights or innuendo in every word. So many guys in prison are extremely insecure, but at every chance they will profess otherwise even while constantly proving their insecurities. I've heard guys take issue with the word "buddy" (I'm assuming they were illiterate and don't understand that that word has no connection to the word "butt"), the term "your guy", "my boy", or "my man", all of which just a decade ago were synonyms for "homie" or "good friend", but now are frequently thought of as innuendo, insinuating that they refer to a male lover.

Guys are scared to admit they enjoy any TV show or movie that is in any way considered soft. I always laugh when I catch guys reading romance novels, watching soap operas, chick flicks, etc. and then they swear up and down that they weren't. If you like it, you like it. Stop being worried about what others would think tough guy. It shows how contradictory prison culture is. Everyone is desperate to prove how tough, confident, etc. they are, but in reality those same efforts to do so always belie their insecurities or fears about their own image.

When I first came to prison I was like that too, probably to a lot lesser extent, but still, I was in survival mode. Now, I couldn't care less what anyone else thinks. I'm done wasting energy on conformity with prison culture. All it does is perpetuate the problems that have plagued prisons for decades. It also contributes to so many guys being released illiterate, unreformed, and unprepared for reentry into society. It's disturbing to see so many kids coming in who not only haven't experienced much of anything in life, but are now terrified of being themselves, or of being seen studying, or enjoying any book, movie, etc. that they even suspect could be viewed as "soft", "square", "girlie", or "nerdy". So many guys are not only too ashamed to admit they're illiterate but scared to admit it because it makes them vulnerable, giving other inmates an additional barb in an argument.

I take a lot of ribbing for my likes. I like Star War books, and never hear the end of it since I both read them constantly and I never hide nor deny it. Me and another guy used to watch the show The Gilmore girls. The show hasn't been on in years. I still hear about it. Whenever a Hallmark movie comes on TV, someone will inevitably yell "Joe one of your soft ass movies is coming on". I have very eclectic tastes. The books and shows that I enjoy cover a wide range – espionage, fantasy, comedies, dramas, sci-fi, etc. (I don't like any of the crime shows, CSI's, Law & Order, etc. They all just perpetuate the "tough-on-crime" rhetoric, revenge mentality, and the myth that our justice system is concerned with justice). No matter, how varied my interests are though, it all comes down to "Joe be watchin that soft shit". I find it both amusing and sad. It's sad that millions of us have to live in a culture where personal opinions, taste, etc. are so repressed and where so many succumb to their fears or insecurities and end up not experiencing or enjoying the multitude of things life has to offer. It is also sad that this culture, along with the discouragement of the administration and society, is a major hindrance to any chance at rehabilitation.

Yip and Yap just started yelling again. They yell at each other simultaneously. You would think they would realize that just as they can't hear the other, nor are they being heard. Obviously they don't.

Oh I forgot to mention the counselor came by again yesterday. She asked if I needed anything. I said "Yeah, I'm still waiting for you to find out how I can get college courses proctored." I'll bet she comes by next week and not only doesn't provide the information I seek, but is again completely clueless. They must really search high and low to find employees this incompetent and indifferent. Not only do they constantly lie without conscience to the prisoners, but so many have this attitude like whatever they say is law, and that since you're a prisoner it's your job to just be ignorant, compliant, and not dare to challenge them. It's very tiring constantly trying to teach staff what the Illinois Administrative Code actually says, not to mention that we do retain some of our constitutional rights.

March 30, 2011 6:03 a.m.

Another day, another morning I wish I could just sleep in. The coffee is running low. In a few days it's going to be even harder to drag myself out of bed. I'm half-way through my last pad of paper so I'm trying to think of other examples that I can give to show what life is like in here. I'm sure that as soon as I mail this out I'll think of dozens of others that I forgot and new things will pop up.

Yesterday I was talking to someone through the window on another pod. Since we are so isolated and compartmentalized from one another we communicate through the two strips of four-inch wide, dirty window that sit in the wall about eight feet above the floor of our cells. In order to see out of them you have to stack either your property boxes, if you have any, or all of your bedding – folded up mattress, blankets, and pillow – and stand on it. The shorter you are the more difficult it is. Since the windows do not open, the only way to communicate is through sign language. The administration some years back prohibited sign language instruction books to try and hinder communication. That was a futile undertaking. The first guys down here weren't about to wait until everyone could order the same books so they began developing their own sign language system. Or actually systems. Since there's so little movement and each wing can only see a couple other wings a number of sign languages were developed autonomously. Therefore each inmate knows a few different systems, and can easily adapt to a new one in the beginning when speaking to someone new.

Anyway, the guy I was speaking to out of the window was telling me how they refuse to provide him surgery for his hemorrhoids and how embarrassing and degrading going to see Dr. Death was. (Yes I was surprised he was telling me this as it was only the second time I have talked to him. Of course a week or two ago I just told you all about my hernia, so go figure.) First, they come and shake/strip him down then handcuff and shackle him in boxers and a t-shirt and take him out to a little medical station. It's located on the pod and is completely open to viewing by anyone entering the pod. The door, a huge sliding glass door similar to a patio door, is left open and he is asked all types of embarrassing questions by the nurse and Dr. Death, like how much it itches, burns, how his stool is, etc. All while he is held on either side by two guards who were not only cracking homosexual jokes at his expense, but who will also inevitably tell their coworkers and other inmates about his medical condition.

As if that weren't bad enough, there was also a female Lieutenant present in the room watching as well. So he had quite an audience when he had to bend over the gurney, with 2 guards holding him down while Dr. Death pulled down his boxers and used two fingers to examine his rectum. While that was happening more jokes were being cracked and two other people passed by looking into the medical station. All so he could get some ointment to stop the itching. In other prisons they just sell it on commissary. Here the only way to get it is to constantly be degraded every time you need another seven day supply.

I can completely understand how he felt. When I first came down here I had been assaulted by a number of staff while in handcuffs in another prison. At the other prison I was placed in the health care unit for 24 hours of close observation, due to multiple head wounds, then transferred down here. Upon arrival I was placed on suicide watch for no legitimate

reason, but rather to keep me even more isolated, to embarrass me and further punish me. Even the mental health staff said I was not suicidal and should not be on suicide watch. They were given a direct order to keep me on suicide watch nevertheless.

They also recommended I be given property so that I could write my family. Instead I was denied all property, any shower, etc. for four days. I was given a greasy inch-thick, green foam mattress, and a paper see-through jumpsuit with the entire front torn off of it. I was placed in a square furniture-less room with a cement floor the texture of sandpaper. There was a toilet but nothing else – no bunk, no desk, nothing. The two florescent lights were left on twenty-four hours per day. Dozens of times per day (every 10 minutes) guards, mental health staff, and administration officials would come and stare at me through a 5 x 3 foot window. If I was required to speak with them, I would have to approach the window covering my privates with my hands. I was denied underwear, socks, soap, deodorant, shower, pen, paper, reading material, etc. for four days in a bare room with a toilet.

You would think that people can't just arbitrarily treat you like this, but in prison it's all too common. The administration's justification for treating me like this? They said I needed to be on suicide watch because I have a life-without-parole sentence and was written a disciplinary ticket. Now, let's forget for a second that this would also justify treating thousands of other inmates as suicidal and that by that same reasoning I could be subjected to the same treatment every time I am written a disciplinary ticket. This "diagnosis" was made by an administration official who had no training to qualify him as capable of making that decision and was completely contradictory to the judgments of those who were actually qualified to make that decision.

When I went to court over this degrading treatment, that part of the case was dismissed beforehand because, ever since the passage of the PLRA (Prison Litigation Reform Act), prisoners can't sue if they can't prove a serious physical injury. While I could sue for the assault while handcuffed, I couldn't sue for the four days of humiliation. So, for instance, all the terrible photos everyone saw in the media about how prisoners in Abu Ghraib were humiliated, they could do that to prisoners in the U.S. and we would have no recourse whatsoever, because humiliation, debasement, mental and emotional suffering is not actionable. Why? Because everyone hates prisoners, so laws like the PLRA can sail through with little opposition. We (prisoners) can't even garner the same public sympathy from Americans that our enemies garner. The week after the uproar over the Abu Ghraib photos were released a video was released showing American prisoners in a facility here (in America) being made to slither naked on the floor with attack dogs snipping and barking at them, all while officers screamed at them and videotaped them wriggle from the day room to their cells. There was little outrage evident as it quickly disappeared from the news.

I always find it really ironic and hypocritical that society always expects prisoners not only to rehabilitate themselves and follow the rules and laws, both when they are in prison and after they are released, yet guards and administration officials, constantly break the rules and laws with little to no accountability. What's that maxim? Something about a society is judged by how it treats it's least powerful citizens?

March 31, 2011 6:06 .m.

Last night I received a grievance back that I had written. Once again the counselor and grievance officer agree with me and once again the warden overrules them to deny me relief.

It's so frustrating! This warden has done this to me dozens of times. She is completely incapable of comprehending the plain language of the Illinois Administrative Code, the department's own administrative and institutional directives, and the state's statutes. How she ever became a warden is beyond me. Her and people like her are a large factor in why the courts are overburdened with so many prisoner law suits.

This time I had written a grievance about a new policy of hers. She has ordered the commissary to prohibit us from purchasing more than 20 plain white envelopes at a time and she claims that an institutional directive prohibits us from possessing more than 20 at a time. First of all, the institutional directive that she is speaking of does not put any limit on the amount of plain white envelopes we can possess. (I've actually purchased 100 at a time on numerous occasions prior to her new policy). Every lieutenant, major, counselor, and grievance officer that I've talked to agrees with me on that. There is a reason there is no limit, more than one actually. One, to do so would be an unconstitutional infringement on our right to free speech under both the U.S. Constitution (First Amendment) and the Illinois Constitution (Article 1, Section 4: "All persons may speak, write and publish freely..." and Section 5: "The people have the right... to make known their opinions to the representatives and to apply for redress of grievances".) Two, it violates state law – 730 ILCS 5/3-7-2(e) states "All institutions and facilities of the Department shall permit every committed person to send and receive an unlimited number of uncensored letters." Three, the institutional directive that she claims justifies her actions (I.D. 05.505.006) unequivocally does not place any limit on plain white envelopes. She is citing the limit of "40[20]" on embossed (pre-stamped) envelopes and claiming this also pertains to plain white envelopes, which it does not.

The second problem with her interpretation is that the "40[20]" limit on pre-stamped envelopes doesn't limit the amount I can purchase or possess to 20. It does limit the amount of pre-stamped envelopes that I can possess at one time to 40, but the "[20]" denotes how many inmates in elevated security status can possess. I am not in elevated security status. Neither are most other inmates in Tamms. The institutional directive clearly says: "Those items noted [], are items and quantities approved for elevated security status offenders." So the warden is either functionally illiterate or is deliberately violating the rules in order to limit our right to free speech.

So now I have to appeal this to Springfield. The only good thing about this grievance and all the other ones where she has overruled the grievance officer to deny me relief, is that they are all further evidence of the warden's continuing retaliation against me for filing grievances to get staff to follow the rules and laws, giving an interview to the Chicago Tribune, and all my advocacy work; all of which seems to infuriate her. Just another stress of being a prisoner. We are told to follow the rules and obey the laws, yet the staff never has to and whenever we point out that they are failing to, we then have to endure the retaliation that will inevitably follow – our cells trashed, personal items stolen or destroyed, bogus disciplinary tickets written against us and all the accompanying headaches and loss of privileges they entail.

Anyway switching subjects. Last night I received one of the packages I was missing. It was from my mother with a bunch of stuff that I had asked her to type up for me. Without her I wouldn't be able to do most of my advocacy work, or at least I wouldn't be nearly as effective. Not only does she type up my finished work, but she does a lot of the work on the internet searching for a lot of the articles and studies I need.

Well, seeing as how I have a thousand and one things to try and knock out today, I'd better stop here and get to work. À la prochaine!

April 1, 2011 5:15 a.m.

Last night I received word from the Governor that my clemency petition has been granted and I'll be going home next week!

Ah, maybe you didn't notice the date – April fool's. No, unfortunately still no word from the Governor, nor the Illinois Supreme Court. I still try to “keep hope alive” though.

I've decided to start going to yard again now that it is getting warmer out. I have not had any “fresh” air since last year some time. Going out to yard takes up a lot of time that I need for other things but I need to stretch my legs. Running in place just isn't the same as jogging. Of course jogging on the “yard” is a far cry from jobbing or running anywhere else. You can only build up a little speed before you have to turn a corner. At most you get about four or five steps. Also the only shoes I have are these canvas ones with the cardboard insoles. They do nothing to save your knees and ankles from the excessive wear and tear that accompanies running on concrete making sharp turns.

Last night I was reading an article in the Nation magazine (April 11, 2011). It was titled “How Wall Street Crooks Get Out Of Jail Free” and written by William Greider. It had the following quote:

“At the end of the day, “Senator Kaufman warned, “this is a test of whether we have one justice system in this country or two. If we do not treat a Wall Street firm that defrauded investors of millions of dollars the same way we treat someone who stole \$500 from a cash register, then how can we expect our citizens to have any faith in the rule of law?”

Too true. Too true. We can't. Ask any poor person in America if they believe the same laws apply to the rich. Think of it this way. Wall Street bankers not only were doing things they knew were illegal and unethical and cost people not only their homes, retirement savings, etc. and destroyed people's lives, but they faced absolutely no repercussions for their actions. Instead they were awarded with millions of dollars in bonuses and continue to be to this day. (Also they were often stealing and are being awarded with money they don't really need to survive compared to many a petty thief who may be stealing to feed him or herself due to being unable to find work).

Now if it were your home, or car, or retirement that was lost and you punched that banker in the nose you would be immediately taken to jail, quite possibly serve time in prison (up to 5 years in Illinois if the sentence wasn't enhanced), and you'd be reduced to a second class citizen for the rest of your life as a felon. That is our “justice” system. Destroy hundreds of thousands of families' saving, etc – get rewarded with millions. Hit someone and you're thrown in the clink and a leper for life. Anyway it's a good article.

As I was saying yesterday, a lot of the advocacy work I do wouldn't be possible without my mother. Even with her though there is a lot I'm unable to accomplish due to insufficient resources. It gets more difficult each month, year, etc. that goes by because my resources shrink and the longer I'm in here the more of my friends and family who stop writing, etc.

Here's another example of shrinking resources. Since I have no access to an actual library or the internet (other than my mother who will search for things, but usually can only find them when I tell her the exact website, title etc. and it is free to download) the only other source of information I have are magazines and newspapers. I used to get dozens of magazine subscriptions, but can no longer afford them. Not only am I not able to work, but the prices keep going up and so many magazines are going bankrupt and are ceasing publication, other than online, that there are less out there. This means that I read less, learn less, and have less material to quote from or cite to when writing articles, essays, or reports.

If we were allowed adequate resources and the administration encouraged education, we (us prisoners, especially lifers) could be such an asset. So much is not studied in the world due to a lack of manpower. We could be generating reports, studies, etc. on a thousand issues or subjects that are neglected due to people in the free world lacking the time or manpower to accomplish them.

Here's just one example: forest ecologist Nalini Nadkarni got prisoners from the Cedar Creek Corrections Center in Washington to do experiments on ways to cultivate moss.

Nadkarni lacked the time to watch the moss grow and record the data to determine the best cultivation method. She came up with the experiments and provided data books and basic training in measurement protocols and the prisoners conducted them. As reported in Discover magazine Nadkarni said "It's really about bringing scientists who have questions together with an audience who can help them out." Such programs or collaborations are extremely rare. This one was such a novelty that I saw articles about it in at least a half dozen magazines.

Instead we simply warehouse prisoners, especially long-term prisoners, and waste invaluable human resources. How many experiments could a million prisoners conduct? How much knowledge would we accumulate as a society by their efforts? How many marketable skills would prisoners learn as a byproduct? And how much money would that save by reducing recidivism? We'll probably never know, because instead that million prisoners are all watching most of the educational and vocational programs dwindle, and prison restrictions become more onerous. They spend more and more time in their cell. (I've spent more than 99% of my last 9 years in this same exact cell that I'm writing this diary. Twenty-two to twenty four hours per day, every day). They're discouraged from learning at every corner, and the administration has the audacity to say they support education and their main goal is rehabilitation.

How many more studies, reports, articles, etc. could I have written without all the nonsensical restrictions, with more of an education, and with more resources? We'll never know. Everyone who reads my work is always amazed at what I've been able to accomplish from this cell. (Unfortunately that's due in large part to the stigma attached to being a prisoner. It's kind of like seeing something that you've been told your whole life could never happen – a prisoner being productive. After all prisoners are only evil and destructive right?). I on the other hand am always disappointed because I'm constantly prevented from accomplishing more than the meager product I had to struggle so long and hard to complete.

April 2, 2011 6:15 a.m.

Yesterday I went to "yard" for the first time in a long time. I jogged for about 15 minutes and walked for about an hour. Around and around in a tight little oval, staring at

concrete the entire time and jumping a puddle each lap so that my canvas shoes didn't get wet. My ankles, knees, calf muscles, thighs, lower back, and even shins are sore.

Last night I got a letter in the mail from a pen pal who clips out articles on prison issues from the Chicago Tribune and sends them to me. Enclosed was an article that gives another example of society's animosity towards prisoners to the point of working against its own interests.

An inmate name Kensley Hawkins has been locked up since November of 1982. During that time he has worked in one of the few remaining industries making furniture. Over the past three decades making about \$75 per month, he has managed to save \$11,000. This amazing feat of self denial and diligent saving was not applauded by the IDOC. Instead the IDOC and the state of Illinois have decided to try and take this money from him. The state is now suing him to try and recover a miniscule portion of the costs of incarceration. The case is currently before the Illinois Supreme Court after the Appellate Court, not surprisingly sided with the state. If Mr. Hawkins had frittered away his earnings on pornography, drugs, or junk food the state would have let him keep his money, but since he saved it, most likely to assist him when released as an old man, he is being punished.

Ironically or tragically rather, the work program that he was in was designed to prepare him for life after prison. He had originally taken the job to send money to his daughter who was eight years old at the time. What a bastard! Right? I mean, this scumbag prisoner first tries to help support his daughter and now saves for release, the actual objective of the program. The nerve of that guy! Sorry, the nerve of that evil, inhuman, bastard! Here's what the Chicago Tribune editorial staff had to say, "We won't be heartbroken if Hawkins has to hand over his savings. He's a bad guy..." Though they went on to note how counterproductive doing so would be, their attitude towards Mr. Hawkins sums up society's attitude towards all prisoners; in America at least.

I just realized that I'm nearly out of paper. Let's see, what's one other example of what it feels like to be incarcerated that I haven't touched upon ... I guess I'll briefly explain about women. For homosexual male prisoners I guess it's fortuitous that they have no desire for women. For heterosexual male prisoners, the absence of women increasingly gnaws at our essence more and more each day as the years pile up.

It's not the absence of sex that weighs so heavily, although that certainly weighs on us as well. Of course most heterosexual men have a primal urge to have sex and procreate that is as old as humanity itself. It is something that is encoded in our being. No, there is something even more devastating. After having experienced a woman's companionship and the anxiety of a new relationship with a woman and the joy it brings, you don't want to believe you will never experience them again. It's difficult to come to terms with the fact that I may never get to fall in love again. Never meet, love, and live a lifetime with a "better half" or "soul mate". Not having touched, smelled, or had the companionship of a woman for well over a decade are all so soul-decaying that I can't adequately describe the toll they take on me.

I dream not about having sex, but rather the sweet mundane moments shared with the mother of my children that I hadn't realized had been recorded in my brain. The most vivid recurring dream I have is of her getting out of the shower with a plush maroon towel wrapped around her petite frame from the swell of her breast to the thick of her thigh. Residual heat

from the shower pulses out of her every pour. Her hair is wet, curly, and long. As she steps out of the bathroom I kiss her warm, moist lips and then smell the hollow of her clavicle while I enfold her into me. Her smell can only be described as immaculate euphoria. She is unblemished by any tattoo, makeup, or hair product residue. That's the entire dream, just holding her. Yet, other than when I've held my daughters as babies I know of no other moment that gave me such a feeling of peace, joy, and pure love, as I felt at that moment, and I get to relive that feeling every time I have that dream. It is the only time I have ever had such a feeling in prison, and every time I have that dream I always worry that I'll never again have a similar experience and am terrified that I'll cease having that dream.

I don't know how well I've been able to convey what it is like living out a life-without-parole sentence in a supermax prison. Reading over what I've written doesn't seem to be worthy of anyone's time. It actually seems like a pretty boring read. I suppose part of it is because I am the one who wrote it and lives this monotonous existence.

In sum, I guess prison life is an amalgamation of various feelings of impotency. I'm impotent to assist my family. I'm impotent to raise my daughters. I'm impotent to contribute to society in any significant way. I'm impotent to accomplish any of my life's goals, or anything meaningful. I'm impotent. Not incompetent, just impotent.

In an essay that I wrote last year entitled "The Meaning of 'Life'", I wrote the following:

"Rarely am I asked what it's like to serve a life-without parole sentence. Arguing for a death sentence for my first felony conviction, the State's Attorney implored the judge not to allow me to spend the rest of my life on a virtual "vacation" in prison. I can unequivocally state that it is no vacation.

A life-without-parole sentence means a million things, because, as its name suggests, it encompasses a person's entire remaining life.

It means being reduced to a second-class citizen in the eyes of most people. It means decades of discrimination from the courts and public. "Prisoner", "inmate", or "convict" each have a strictly pejorative use in the media or pop culture. Those terms become the sole defining characteristic of a man's entire character.

It means that courts will turn a blind eye to any act of injustice against you unless it causes "atypical and significant hardships." A free man may find protection in the courts from emotional and mental harm, but a prisoner can only find protection from "atypical and significant" physical harm, and that's dependent on finding an objective and unbiased judge and enough citizens who can set aside their personal biases against prisoners to fill a jury box and render a fair verdict – a nearly impossible feat. So when you're stripped naked and left in a concrete box with nothing but a toilet for four days without cause, as a prisoner you have no recourse in the courts. When you're beaten to a bloody mess while handcuffed, as a prisoner you're more likely to encounter a jury that will conclude you deserved what you got, regardless of the circumstances.

It means that after being "spared" the death penalty and receiving a life-without-parole sentence, you lack all the procedural safeguards against a wrongful conviction that a death sentence would have entailed, solely because you were found undeserving of immediate death. How ironic it is that the worse you are deemed to be, the better your chance of proving your innocence and regaining your freedom.

It means a lifetime of censorship, where you're told what books and magazines you can read, what movies you can watch, even what hairstyles you can sport, and where every letter coming in and going out is subject to inspection.

It means a complete lack of privacy forever, and a complete indifference to your physical and mental health, until someone fears being sued.

It means a constant, heightened risk of catching a deadly disease. You're captive in an environment where staph infections run rampant, where people still die from tuberculosis, where the population has twice the rate of HIV infection compared to non-prisoners, and where up to forty percent are infected with hepatitis. An environment where there's nowhere to run from many of these diseases because you're forced to use communal toilets and showers.

It means three meals a day of the poorest quality food that the least amount of money can buy without killing the inmate population.

It's a daily existence where trust is non-existent and compassion is not allowed. Not only is compassion viewed as a sign of weakness in the prison milieu, but it is, ironically, actively discouraged by the prison administration. If your neighbor is destitute and you want to assist him by giving him soap, paper, or even a snack to supplement the meager meals, you can only do so at risk of being written a disciplinary ticket for "trading and trafficking".

It's a never-ending pressure cooker where the stress and anxiety compound daily as you constantly have to watch your back. Soldiers returning from Iraq understand this. It's a major factor in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The constant fear for your safety and the need for 24-7 situational awareness frays at your nerves. Now imagine not a 12-month tour but a life-time deployment.

It means constantly being told that you aren't worth rehabilitation and thus are ineligible for nearly every educational or vocational program. Your life sentence disqualifies you from any state or federal grants to pursue an education and even the Inmate Scholarship Fund (founded by a prisoner) has no qualms about telling you that you're ineligible for a scholarship because you're never going to get out and contribute to society.

It means convincing yourself daily that your life has value even when the rest of the world tells you you're worthless. It's a lifetime spent wondering what your true potential really is, and yearning for the chance to find out.

It means decades of living with double standards, where any guard can call you every profanity ever invented without fear of punishment, but where if you utter a single one in response, or anything that even resembles insolence, you'll be written a

disciplinary ticket, lose privileges, such as phone calls and commissary, and be subjected to a month of disciplinary segregation.

It means the state constitution is irrelevant where lifers are concerned. Article 1, Section 11 of the Illinois Constitution state: "All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship", but the courts have decided that politics, revenge, and hatred of "criminals" trump the constitution, and have thus rendered the above section essentially meaningless by their refusal to rule life-without-parole sentences

unconstitutional, even if it is the defendant's first felony conviction on a theory of accountability, as in my case. This puts the lie to the American maxim that everyone deserves a second chance.

It means that you're especially vulnerable to incomprehensible punishments, such as a lifetime of disciplinary segregation. I was given indeterminate disciplinary segregation after being found guilty of my sole disciplinary infraction. That was 8 years ago, yet here I remain. I've been told (on more than one occasion) that I will never be allowed out of indeterminate disciplinary segregation. So I will continue to endure conditions for the rest of my life which are known to cause mental illness after just 3 months. It means I will never taste another Hostess cake. Nor play softball or any group activity ever again. More importantly, it means that I will never have physical contact with another human being for the rest of my life, including my 11 and 12 year-old daughters.

It means being incapable of taking care of your grandparents and parents as they reach their final years.

It means missing out on every important event in your children's lives; unable to raise them; impotent to protect them or assist them in any meaningful way. It means they'll grow up resenting you for the thousands of times they needed you and you weren't there.

A life-without-parole sentence means constant contemplation of a wasted life. A continual despair as to your inability to accomplish anything significant with your remaining years. A life spent watching as each of your family members and friends slowly drift away from you leaving you in a vacuum, devoid of any enduring relationships.

It's a persistent dashing of hopes as appeal after appeal is arbitrarily denied. It is a permanent experiment in self-delusion as you strive to convince yourself that there is still hope.

It's a compounding of second upon second, minute upon minute, hour upon hour, of wasted existence, and decade upon decade of mental and emotional torture culminating in a final sentence of death by incarceration.

These though, are simply futile attempts to describe the indescribable. It's like trying to describe a broken heart or communicate what it feels like to mourn the death of your soul mate. The words to convey the pain do not exist. When you're serving a life-without-parole sentence it's as if you're experiencing the broken heart of knowing you'll never love or be loved again in any normal sense of the word, while simultaneously mourning the death of the man you could have and should have been.

The only difference is that you never recover, and can move on from neither the heart break nor the death because the pain is renewed each morning you wake up to realize that you're still here, sentenced to life-without-parole. It's a fresh day of utter despair, lived over and over for an entire lifetime."

The above essay and this diary, are as close as I can come to convey what it is like to live in a supermax prison with a natural life sentence. I'm in a sea of madness during an eternal perfect storm of despair and heartache for the duration of my breaths; constantly conscious of

the fact that nearly the entire country despises me without knowing anything about me other than I am a prisoner. I've survived thirteen years so far. Just forty or fifty more to go.