

DAY ONE: Prison Diary January 3, 2013

Solitary Confinement

When I was rudely awakened near midnight on December 4, 2012, to be served **another false "disciplinary report" fabricated by the evil "mail grinch," (initials are LM)**, a so-called civilian clerical employee who has been hounding my correspondence since my arrival here in April, I didn't worry much about it. Even the officer who delivered it to me was astounded at the rambling illiteracy that comprised 23 separate ridiculous allegations going back to 2007, four prisons ago, who said it should have been shredded. This person (LM), who has been the central figure in keeping me separate from my mail, has focused her vitriol on me in retaliation and reprisal for my filing complaints against her for mail theft, theft of postage stamps, "losing," tampering with, hindering, delaying and photocopying incoming and outgoing mail, for months.

Has anyone in the Florida panhandle heard of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution? Considering how higher-level prison officials defer to this person's (LM) total disregard for the law, one would think not. Even prisoners have the First Amendment right to send and receive correspondence from people in "free society," or so the U. S. Supreme Court says, backed up by "Chapter 33" state prison regulations, Florida Statutes, the Florida Constitution, and federal law. Apparently not in this county!

A guard once told me one of my favorite ignorant quotes, "The Constitution ain't in effect in Columbia County." That was twelve years ago. Guess what, M.W.? It ain't in effect in Okaloosa County, either. This is another world, where the rule of law does not apply.

The mail Grinch (LM) began her assaults with a post-it note: "Inmates can not[sic] write short stories," then followed up with, "Inmates can not write poems." Considering the grammatical use "can not," I wondered if it was a value judgment, or a statement of fact, like, "white men can't jump?" "*Inmates are incapable of writing short stories?*" Is that what she meant? Or was it "*Inmates are forbidden...*?" Both statements are false, untrue.

People incarcerated in Florida prisons are allowed to write short stories, poems, essays, books, plays, letters to their mothers, and to their Congressmen. I know. I've been doing it for over thirty years, with the full knowledge and approval of many prison officials. I've also taught approved creative writing courses, including "short stories," as recently as last January at Wakulla Annex, under the "faith and character based initiative." The State issued certificates. Maybe she (LM) just doesn't like poems. I know - no pictures! That made it more difficult to understand.

What prisoners are not allowed to do, according to Chapter 33-602.207, is to sign marketing agreements with literary agents and seek compensation for their work. Section (2) of that rule provides the disclaimer: any inmate seeking to publish his writings must send a statement to the mailroom staff that he is not seeking compensation. I did that here at Okaloosa on May 17, 2012. It didn't matter.

In the days that follow, I will fill in the blanks and explain what happened in the month from when the mail Grinch (LM) concocted those **phony** charges until the Kangaroo court hearing, today, **which resulted in my being sentenced to 30 days lockup in solitary confinement again, for pursuing my First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and redress of grievances.**

Meanwhile, I will recount Day One of 30 for you. I was in the law library at 10:00 AM this morning, Thursday, January 3, 2013, when I was told to report to my dorm. (They euphemistically call it a "dorm," but it is merely a large prison cell packed with 75 narrow steel bunks and 75 prisoners in tight quarters. The word "sardines" comes to mind.) Upon arrival, the guard said, "Pack your shit, you got a d.r. hearing." Great.

So I packed most of my earthly belongings in mesh bags, and a couple of friends carried the mostly legal documents for me. Since I've suffered disk injuries to my back, I refrain from lifting much and further damaging my back, if I can avoid it. Forget about prison back surgery!

While I was waiting for the Kangaroo court hearing (**verdict and punishment discussed and decided upon before I walk in the door**), a prison guard who knew me asked, "What did you get a d.r. for? You did nothing wrong." I told you he knew me. I showed him the charges. (**If you would like to read them, send a response to Libby on the "contact" e-mail tab, and she will send them to you**).

He couldn't believe it. "No way! You won't go to jail for this. I've never read anything like this in my career. This is ridiculous." Famous last words. When I tried to say something in my defense, I was threatened with, "Shut up, back up into that corner, and don't say another word, or I'm going to end this hearing right now and lock your ass up on another d.r. for thirty days."

So much for a "fair and impartial" hearing where I could speak, present evidence, and request witnesses.

That was about 10:40 AM. My property was taken, hands cuffed behind my back, and I was escorted to lockup. First, I went to medical for a pre-confinement physical - 236 pounds. Next, I was locked into a tiny steel cage shower the size of a small phone booth. (Do they still have phone booths out there?) Cuffs removed, then strip-searched, locked in the tiny shower/phoneless booth for almost two hours. They were busy, there wasn't room - confinement is booming - no vacancy. They had to let someone out to find a bunk in a cell for me.

They brought me a lunch tray. Forgettable. A famous prison memoir from the 1970's was titled, "*Where Flies Don't Land*." You could use the same description for the tray. After an hour or so of being cramped and trying to find an angle to get more comfortable, I accidentally bumped the pushbutton that cuts on the shower. That worked! There I was, trapped in a steel cage, with cold water spraying and soaking me! (Important note: avoid pushbuttons!)

Then, the guard came by, noticed my soaked condition and asked a couple of stupid questions. Finally, I was escorted to my new cell - bare bones - a hard, thin plastic-covered mattress, one stained sheet, one ragged, patched blanket. Hours went by. They gave me toothpaste, but no toothbrush. That makes sense. They served supper - "chow." I've already forgotten it, or maybe just blocked it out of my mind.

Later on I strip down to boxer shorts, hands cuffed in back - shower time. First, they shaved my head, part of the dehumanizing/humiliation process, the "P.O.W./mental patient" look. Once a week they re-weigh everyone in lockup, to see if anyone is starving to death or on a hunger strike. If you lose so much weight in thirty days, they have to release you. So I was re-weighed -

210 pounds! A new record. I lost 26 pounds in eight hours! Obviously an error but they wrote it down.

Then back to the infamous steel cage shower, where I was locked in and cuffs removed, ostensibly so I could wash. Five minutes. Back to your cell. I was tired, mentally and physically exhausted, so around 9:00 PM, I curled up on the hard plastic mattress on the steel bunk and tried to drown out the cacophony of lost souls calling out to any human voices who would answer them. So much for DAY ONE in solitary. Good night. See you tomorrow.

Charles Norman - Prisoner #881834

DAY TWO: Prison Diary January 4, 2013

Solitary Confinement

Okaloosa C.I., Crestview, FL

Today is Friday, and I awoke early as my second day of solitary for exercising my First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and expression. An interesting side note: **every state employee (including prison) must swear an oath to obey the Florida Constitution, state and federal laws, and the U. S. Constitution, which includes the Bill of Rights and the First Amendment.**

We don't talk much about the Florida Constitution, but it is in effect, and its Declaration of Human Rights mirrors much of the Bill of Rights. Article I, Section 4 of that document, Freedom of Speech, states that every person shall have the right to speak, write, and publish their thoughts. Look it up! If you don't have a copy of the *Florida Constitution* lying around the house, ask "Mister Google," and he will take you right to it.

You can also view the correctional officer's "Code of Ethics" on the Florida D.O.C. web site, but whoever lets something like sworn oaths to maintain ethics get in the way of **committing reprisals against prisoners who weren't properly subservient and sycophantic toward those who trample on the law?**

Day Two in solitary confinement began with cell lights blasting on around 4:00 AM, then it was the long wait until the food cart came around with breakfast - potatoes, grits, two hard biscuits, a small, dry disk of what they claim is "turkey sausage," but try as I might, I couldn't sniff a single gobble from it. I ate it, along with every other bland tasteless bite on the tray. I am in "survival mode" now, and must preserve my strength. It wasn't much, but it is a long time to lunch, and there is no canteen run in "disciplinary confinement." I am grateful that I am in solitary in America and not Colombia, Haiti, Pakistan, or Russia where they do starve their prisoners. At least the food is reasonably warm.

About 7:00 AM, I was told to pack up my meager belongings again, I was moving to another wing, "DC Confinement," filled with those already found guilty and serving their disciplinary confinement time. (NOTE: **Everyone** is found guilty in this Kangaroo court. Like the song says, "There's no exception to the rule."). I'd spent the first night in "AC," administrative confinement, filled with those locked up for "investigation" or awaiting their fate in Kangaroo court. We desperados serving "DC" time aren't supposed to be around the "AC" guys, but as I said yesterday, there was no room at the DC Inn at the time.

So I was moved to another wing, another identical cell in a far corner, trashed and filthy from the previous occupant. Did I tell you that most of the mentally ill prisoners spend most of the time in lockup? And they do funky things to their cells. Heck, they do funky things to themselves! The guard asked me, "Are you going to clean this mess up?" And I answered, "Of course. I don't live like this."

It could have been worse.

Some years back, I had a Cuban "Marielito" cell mate who was one of the thousands Castro released from prisons and mental hospitals, freeing them to join thousands of other Cubans who came to Florida on the "boat lift" from Mariel, Cuba. No one ever said Castro was stupid. In a matter of weeks, he dumped the worst criminals and psychopaths onto Florida shores where many came quickly to prison.

My cellmate wasn't one of the worst, just a petty criminal who couldn't make it "on the street," but he had many horror stories about Cuban prisons that made me count my blessings to be where I was, despite the injustice and inhumanity. Since I spoke Spanish, it was a revelation to hear the stories of an illiterate man who spoke no English.

There is a large, thriving criminal element in Cuba, despite the totalitarian police state, and the criminals organize themselves in gangs of mostly geographic breakdowns. When the authorities transferred a group of Western Cuba prisoners to a prison filled with mostly Eastern Cuba prisoners, bloody battles broke out until they separated them. The guards maintain their own geographic loyalties, too.

A "big man," a powerful Havana gangster and his bodyguard were sent to a distant prison where the guards had animosity toward him before he even arrived, disdaining his "elite" status as a well-off, powerful Havana criminal.

Guards took them to a cell where two prisoners lay dead, butchered by a psychopath, the cell covered in blood. The guards pointed to a mop and bucket, told them that was their cell, to drag the corpses outside and scrub down all the blood. The gangster was a bigshot, told the guards they weren't doing it, and to give them another cell. The guards told him they had a choice - to clean the cell, or they were going to lock them in the cell with the dead bodies and the crazy guy who'd killed them. They scrubbed the cell.

This cell wasn't anywhere near that bad, but it was filthy with brown steaks and boogers stuck to the wall. No cleaning supplies, but I used much of a bottle of my shampoo (what do I need it for? They shaved my head) and a piece of rag, along with the dribble of water out of the steel sink, to thoroughly wash the walls and floor. The cell seems bigger when you're cleaning it! It smelled a lot better, too. Now I'm not afraid to touch anything.

In "AC" they take showers Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. In "DC" it is Monday, Wednesday, Friday. For once I got lucky - took a shower in AC on Thursday night, and doubled back for another one in DC tonight, Friday. I'm not complaining. Otherwise I'd be taking a "bird bath" in the dribbling sink.

Since the mail Grinch (**LM**) disapproves of my poetry and literary efforts so vehemently, I figured my best revenge would be to use this 30 day period to write a poem every day, along with this prison diary, to show you what it is like, and to keep my brain functioning at a high level. Hettie Jones says that writing is the best activity a person in prison can do, to keep themselves sane and make sense of the world. I agree. I am already behind, but am catching up. My friend and mentor, Stephanie Riggio, challenged me to write a sestina a year or so ago, and sent me the rules and some examples. Sestinas are particularly challenging poems that must be meticulously constructed using six non-rhyming end words that are repeated in a varying order in

six stanzas of six verses that use all six words. What a challenge! A well-crafted sestina that tells a story is quite an accomplishment, and my skills weren't up to it until recently, when I wrote my first one, fittingly titled, "A Sestina for Stephanie."

I found the second one several degrees more difficult and struggled to complete it. But complete it I did, today. I will share it with you here tomorrow, if you care to read it. Meanwhile, I will attempt to sleep on this rock-hard narrow bunk - see you tomorrow. Good night.

Charlie

EDITOR'S NOTE: I never fail to be amazed at how Charlie maintains a positive attitude and his unique creativity under the most adverse conditions, as evidenced by this latest edition of his ongoing prison diary. But he needs the moral support of friends during this trying time. Charlie has battled hard against corrupt politicians who've abused their power and generated lie after lie to keep him imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit. It is shameful.

If you have any comments about this prison diary you can make them to me by e-mail, and I will forward them to Charlie, or you can make your comments and send words of encouragement directly to him at Charles P. Norman, #881834, Okaloosa Correctional Institution, 3189 Colonel Greg Malloy Road, Crestview, FL 32539.

Be sure to use "Charles." According to the mail Grinch, "Charlie" is NOT "Charles," so any mail addressed to "Charlie" will be unceremoniously returned to sender. Please feel free to pass on Charlie's story to any friends you think would be interested. Thanks.

Libby