

Merlin the Phoenix



A Prison Journal by Alan Pearsall

Sample Chapter

Chapter Two: Wasted Days



The Farm was the county's minimum security facility and it was most short timer's goal to get transferred there. It sounded like Shang Gra La in comparison to county jail: no violent offenders, no cells, long in person visits, nature and street clothes. My lawyer assured me I would be there within a couple weeks. When I first worked in Upper Programs I thought the guards and administration would work with me if I followed the rules and acted respectfully. I imagined it would be an 'in' with the Farm Board and my transfer. Most everyone treated me well, but they mostly liked the fact that I was non-threatening and didn't steal everything not nailed down.

A couple months after my arrival, I sat before the Farm Board. The group of five cruelly drilled me about the accident. Each question designed to tear apart my version of the story and provoke an angry response. I held my own at first, I talked to guys who had been before the board and had some idea about what to expect. The provocative questions are supposed to weed out the violent guys. When they asked me about my wife, I lost it. I sobbed as I described the destruction of our simple, happy life. My shame was overwhelming. I left the meeting like a punch drunk boxer. I found out later that day the grim faced board approved my transfer.

I was sent to the Farm at last, I felt some relief. It was a dormitory style layout in a former boarding school built in the 1920's, housing 200 or so inmates. It was mass Victorian buildings of brick. It felt great to put pants on and I felt somewhat safer. On my second day, still acclimating to my new environment, I was on the phone with Bebe, when I heard my name on the intercom demanding my presents at the LT's office. My heart sank. When I arrived at the guard station they grabbed me, put me in a van headed back for Eastern County with no explanation of why.

Two days after my transfer the media-conscious sheriff revoked my transfer. I was later told that because it was an election year, the sheriff didn't want to look soft. So that was it. I was sent back to the big house.

I arrived back the at County jail at around 9pm. I sat in intake for hours while they searched for a cell for

me in the crowded prison, reliving that first dreadful night. In the moonlight I walked across the prison grounds past the growling guard dogs and to a foreign, noisy block with my itchy bedroll. Everyone eyeballs you when you arrive to a block. I had no allies in this shit hole. I felt broken and alone. I spent one night on 60-block with the violent offenders. Again.

The next day, with no explanation, my caseworker assigned me back on the worker's block with nothing but my sox, boxers, my ill fitting tan jumpsuit and my 'bobos'. The meager belongings I collected to that point sat at the Farm in a locked foot locker. Thank God for my boys. Indigo, Nunya and Hector. They set me up with a hot pot, a cup, coffee, food, tee shirts, boxers and sox. They fed me for a few days and made me feel welcome. I actually was glad see my boys again. That was some good looking out. They saved my faith in humanity after such a heart wrenching experience. I felt out of control and depressed. I knew this meant I may never get to the Farm and would do my time in County, a despairing thought.



I made my first soap carving of the 'Love Birds' for Brooke on our Anniversary in July. She loved it and then requested I carve twentyfour more, to give out for Xmas gifts for my family and friends. I spent the next few months carving away to fill her order. The shitty state soap was perfect for carving.

THE ROUGUES GALLERY - A FEW OF THE GUYS AT 240-BRAVO!



JUST A LITTLE VIEW OF MY BLOCK MATES! - LOVE AL
PLEASE SCAN AND SHARE MY LOVE ♥

I was stuck on the top tier with a new celly, a dopey kid who was in for throwing hot fried dough at an elderly lady and resisted arrest. He had an enormous head and smoked at night in the cell while I stood guard. He left after a week or so and his replacement was a young junky who paced the cell all night and babbled incoherently. I had to get a reliable celly. I was in a panic. When the junky was due to leave in a couple days I felt panicked and you never knew what mental case they might pair you up with. I chose this guy Lex who was an oxy addict in for DUI, but a decent guy. He was one of the few intelligent guys I met there and he shared his New York Times with me, even let me do the crossword puzzle.

Lex's current celly smelled disgusting and was a slob. The guards OK'd the move, so Lex moved in after the Junkie left. His pessimistic and dark view of the world was not a good influence, but he was clean, educated and I enjoyed our deep intellectual conversations on many topics. We grew tight and I helped him with his case. Lex loved taking risks and spent a few weekends in the hole for stealing from the kitchen. He relished the thrill of smuggling past the guards. We all did it, if you wanted to enjoy the spoils you had to. Indigo and Lex both worked in the kitchen and used me as a mule now and then. It was risky, but pretty easy to fool the guards and it gave us something exciting to do.

Despite what the movies may portray, fights are never solved by a 'dance off' in jail. On my second day when I went for my prison hair cut and I witnessed my first fight on the stairwell to the barber shop. No guards came, we were in one of the few unmonitored zones. I kept moving and didn't look back. Most fights happened on the block. A planned fight took place in the furthest corner cell from the guard's bubble on the bottom tier. Guys would roll into the cell between watches and quickly beat the snot out of each other. The constant din of the block created the perfect cover for most altercations. The block was huge, an acre in size. The problem was the block often went strangely quiet when a big fight was afoot. Big bloody fights on the block floor happened every few weeks like clock work. New guys were always fighting to prove themselves.

The block was a dangerous place. It felt like walking in a strange wilderness with dangerous animals. I ventured out to sit at the tables to do crossword puzzles, sketch, watch TV and get the hell out of my cell. Only the mentally ill and the real pussies stayed in their cells all day anyway. We called them Bugs. I always wanted to fit in and not be noticed. It worked for the most part. I had my share of run ins, but was able talk my way out of fights. It took a while to get used to jail life, but I got along. I was a fish out of water and everyone knew it.



Study from unknown artist's painting I found in the church prayer guide.

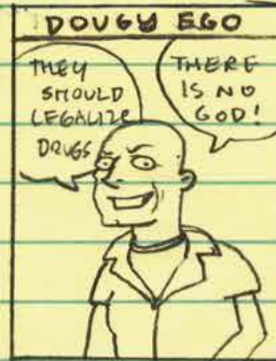
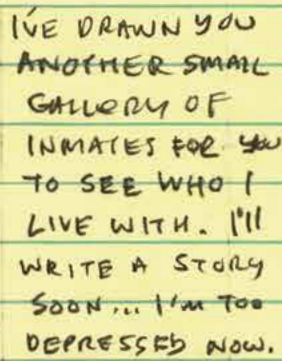
One thing about jail: you can't pretend to be tough and get away with it. My acquaintance with Indigo kept the big fish away and the everyday hustler's bullshit pretty transparent, lets face it, we weren't dealing with MENSA members here.

After Lex left I moved to a new cell with Sparta the Albanian Elvis. He was ok, but I wouldn't say I liked him. He was an evil man, a murderer actually. I allied myself to only a couple guys, and I got along with the veterans and older inmates. He was a vet and we were friendly around the block. I did a couple portraits of him for his wife, a greeting card for his son and I got him books and magazines from the library while he worked. When his cellmate moved on they stuck him with a big, smelly guy while he was at work. On his return Sparta went ballistic over the filthy inmate. The guards switched me to take his place that night and moved Stinky to a more deserving inmate's cell. It was a good fit. I never really trusted Sparta, but he was easy to live with. Sparta was well connected in the jail. He worked at intake and in the Infirmary. He left at 6am and returned at 3pm. So I had some privacy during the day at least. On his 20th month, he knew his way around the prison.

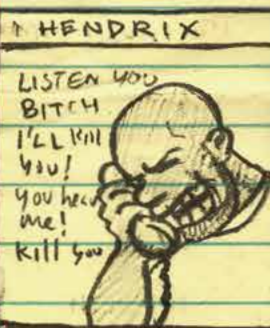
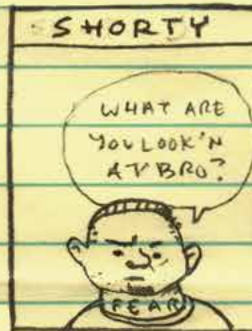
He was a Albanian native with an Elvis hair cut, choppers and all. He got me new sheets, blankets, uniforms and a good pillow. He also was sweet on this fat nurse who brought him food from the outside world which he shared once and awhile. He was neat and we kept the cell immaculate. He was in for his 5th offense of DUI. He told me he was wanted for murder in the old country and after he finishes his jail time he'll be deported to Albania by INS to face the music. You could say he had a dark side.

My association with Sparta had an immediate effect. He had the guards in the palm of his hand and got away with a lot of stuff. He was smart about his smuggling and no one was the wiser. Like Sparta, I was allowed to take a shower after work while everyone sat in lock down. My cell was rarely searched. Guards used me as a message runner often as they did with Sparta. I always liked roaming around the grounds unattended and checking out the different blocks. And Sparta could get anything if you gave him enough time. Sparta had even got the guard to open up our cell 5 minutes

SEPT 19 (4TH MONTH IN STIR)



MY CELLY DOUG!

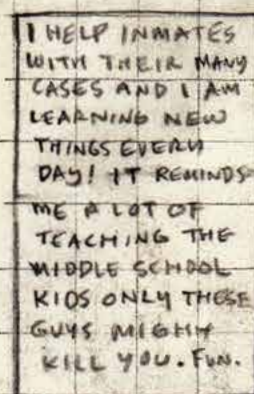
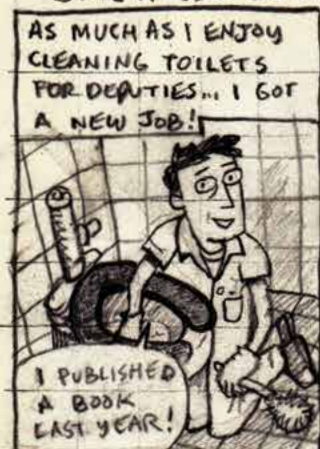


before the rest of the block so he could get a good seat for TV and of course I followed him out there. Why he got these privileges I'll never know. Something about the thick Albanian accent disarmed them.

I stood guard when Sparta smoked every night and he even hid a lighter in our cell. He got small piece of Velcro and stuck it to the back of the toilet. Our cell was flipped once a week, but most guards don't want to stick their heads next to the toilet, so it was never found! He rolled chewing tobacco with the thin paper ripped from a little Spanish bible. Smoking or having lighter were lugging offenses, but I put up with it. If he was caught we both would go to the hole. He blew baby powder in the air to hide the smell of smoke and it actually worked pretty well. He would dry the tobacco in my hot pot during open block. We never got close to getting caught, the guards were very predictable and generally dim witted. The jail always hired the lowest common denominator in most cases, thankfully a handful of decent people made it on the motley crew.

There was a certain number of guys that were stuck there and wanted to make it as comfortable to live as possible. Those were my boys. Many so called tough guys got all wrapped up in prison drama and all it did was bring them heat. That was most of the prison. The guys I liked worked on improving the standard of living without drawing attention from the screws. These guy didn't fight unless necessary, treated me with respect and generally stayed out of any covert trouble. They had it right: good food, a nice blanket or a decent radio went a long way. The trick was not letting the close quarters get to you too much. You had to do normal things like having your coffee at the same time everyday and read the paper, I shaved every morning just to feel normal.

Everybody lost it on one day or another, myself included. I got in a confrontation over a phone and told a guy who tried to take it to "Fuck off", which I immediately regretted. I can fight, I used to box in my twenties, but I didn't want to fight over a stupid phone call. He starred at me with murder in his eyes for days. He kept telling me how he was going to kill me when he had the chance. He got released a few days later, the young thug never got to waste me. The



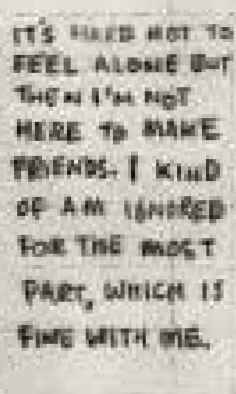


maddening existence made you lose your old self. I miss that guy.

I worked as a janitor for a couple months, until I landed a job in the jail library thanks to Nunya, as a parting gesture he got me his sought after position. (I had to interview for it!) I happily left the Upper Programs job. I couldn't take anymore bullshit promises from the administration, so it came at the right time. They kept telling me week after week my transfer to the Farm was eminent, only to take it away at the last minute and add month or two. They threw months of your life around like it was nothing.

I missed Nunya's company. I only hung around with a few guys and Nunya was my favorite. A smart guy, well connected and good for a few laughs. When a good guy left it was bitter sweet. You were happy for him to move on to better things, but losing a trusted friend made an impact. Nunya had kept me up on prison gossip and I enjoyed our talks as we strolled the perimeter of the block. We shared food and coffee and played a lot of cards. The trust worthy, decent guys were few and far between, and the loss of Nunya did not go unnoticed. His pride and joy, the underground block store fell apart without his respected leadership, and the guys who took over his card table cheated and reduced the intense poker games to a crooked black jack trap for new fish. Never under estimate good leadership.

I loved the new job. Working as a janitor sucked and seeing the lazy administration of the jail everyday only made me resent them and their constant bull shit promises. The new library gig got me off the block for 8 hours a day and it had perks: copy machine access for my comics and first dibs on donated reading material. I distributed books sent to inmates from family and friends, which had been ignored for months and also helped inmates work on their court cases. I was in charge of the law library. Helping guys with their cases was the main thrust of my job. This went a long way with many of the guys. I served a different block of the jail each hour, even the gang blocks. Those were some bad men. I helped anyone who needed it to write motions to the court. Many inmates had little education and could barely write.



The men I worked with were grateful and I gained a reputation of a guy that knew things and could untangle the confusing world of case law and court motions. Digging into their cases taught me a lot about the law and even more about human behavior. I dealt with violent felons, thieves, bank robbers, gang members, child molesters and murderers. Most faced the future of a lot of hard time. Most claimed their innocents. I got them to explain their cases and I filed their request and motions. Nothing I did ever cracked a case, most of the motions were ignored for months. A lot of it was just spinning wheels and wishful thinking. The inmates just wanted to feel like they were doing something to help themselves. I used to try to put a positive spin on even the most depraved and hopeless clients to at least give them hope.

I dreaded the weekend. Stuck on the block and the mind numbing hours of lockdown, I made the most of my time. I organized the horrible selection of books and magazines. The mean guard at the library acted pretty cool to us workers and gave me his Boston Herald every day which I circulated throughout the block. I went through the donated books that sat in boxes for months and added them to the meager collection excluding the overly violent books and true crime by the order of the jail. This allowed me choice of "new" books. I read voraciously, so anything remotely interesting I snatched up and devoured.