

Preface

The purpose of this book is to show the good, law abiding (e.g., haven't been caught yet), taxpaying citizens what life is really like inside prison walls. It is the hope of the authors that you will open your mind and your heart to the notion that although most (not all) inmates have done bad *things*, they are not all bad *people*.

After all, your boss may be a total jerk, blaming and humiliating you in a staff meeting for a mistake *he* made, yet every Saturday you might find him feeding the homeless. Then again, he could be a prick all the time; hard to tell for sure.

We all have good days and bad days. We all make good decisions, and we all also make life-altering choices for which we wish we had an un-do button. We have all felt love in our hearts at one time or another; we have also felt anger, and even hatred. Most of us have helped out a stranger without a second thought, and most of us have also hurt people we know and love, without realizing how long the scar took to heal; if it did at all.

We have all given—we have all taken. We've learned good and bad behavior, and whether we meant to or not, we've also *taught* good and bad behavior, often without realizing it.

No one is perfect. Nor is any one person *all* good or *all* bad. We are all composed of both flaws and of beauty. We are all human.



"Much of our difficulty in discerning the workings of good and evil is due to our unwillingness to acknowledge the potential of both supreme good and evil within our own lives. We don't want to see ourselves as either very good or very bad, hiding instead behind a collective moral mediocrity that requires neither the responsibility of goodness nor the guilt of evil."

- Shin Yatomi

"To understand another person and be understood by her or him is to experience the joy and the strength of our common humanity."

- The Buddha's Three Rules for Improving Dialog

Author's Note

(by Teresa X. Roberts)

This book has taken many turns—all for the better I believe. Well, maybe with the exception of the last little detour (see the Backward).

The original title was “How to be a Con-Artist.” I wanted to work with one inmate who could both draw and write and I found Mr. Lytle. My original goal was to help readers understand how a convict learns to become an artist while in prison.

I also wanted to show the world that inmates do in fact have hearts just like any other human. My plan was to use art as a vehicle to illustrate that point. It was going well until Mr. Lytle found himself in the hole which forced me to come up with another plan. We had 13 stories written when I found Mr. Farrell.

I sent him one of Mr. Lytle's stories and asked if he could pick up his style and finish the book. He replied in true competitive nature, “I can, but honestly, I can do better.” He sent me an example of how *he* would have written about a particular topic instead. I loved both versions!

On a rare phone call with Mr. Farrell, I asked him what he thought about writing a counter story to every one of Mr. Lytle's, in his own words, from his own point of view. He responded, “You just made this project way better! Yes, I can do that.”

I then wanted to add more narrative content about life inside, but alas, that idea was “arrested” by the prison officials.

While this book might be a quick read for you, the thoughts and feelings reflected herein have taken the authors some hard time compiling to share with you. I truly hope you enjoy it.

- Teresa X. Roberts



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Glossary

ASU	Additional (or Administrative) Segregation Unit is separate housing for inmates waiting for their rule violation hearing or waiting to go to the SHU.
Bird Bath	Using a sink to clean your body by splashing water or using a rag.
Books	The tracking of money on an inmate's account that they can use for commissary or sending money outside for approved purchases.
Boot Camp	A place much like Juvie for delinquents and incorrigibles.
Bracelets	Handcuffs.
Caught a Case	Got busted and charged.
Cell	The cold concrete and steel box that is "home" for inmates; generally 6x8 with a bed, desk, storage locker, toilet, and a sink. Some have windows but are not see through. Most are double occupied. Also called "house".
Cell-in	Hanging out in the cell.
Celly	The other person in the cell who shares the same fate. If you don't want a celly, you would pretty much have to kill one; the prison is unlikely to put you in a cage with another one after that.
Chow	Food.
CO	Correctional Officer.
Count	An activity conducted several times a day to ensure all inmates are still there.

Day Room	A common area that inmates can <i>hang out</i> during specific times. They often play cards or watch a shared TV.
DOC	Department of Corrections. In California, it's called CDC for the California Department of Corrections; but you can trust that the name is as inappropriate as the tax dollars that are wasted on the place.
Fishing	Term applied to the method of sending and retrieving items cell to cell using paper and string.
Flexy-pen	The flexible ink vessel removed from the harder outer casing of a pen. Usually given to someone in the hole.
Free Staff	Prison staff members that are not Correction Officers.
GP	General Population of prison inmates as opposed to Ad-Seg or Sensitive needs inmates.
Grip	Slang for A LOT.
Hole	Separate housing for problem inmates meant to isolate them from the rest of the population. Also called Ad-Seg (Administrative or Additional Segregation or Disciplinary Segregation).
Homie	A friend, and often from the same home town.

Indigent	An inmate who is poor (a rich inmate is as common as a winning lottery ticket and is about as useful as if it were expired). If an inmate doesn't have anyone on the outside to put money on their books or can't get a job inside, they may get extra free stuff such as a very limited number of envelopes and stamps from the prison.
Juvie	Juvenile Hall. A place to warehouse juvenile offenders and often makes them worse, not better.
Keys	In California it is slang for the person in charge of their group, also called a "Shot Caller." In Oregon it is the Correction Officers.
Kite	A form that is used like an internal memo between inmates.
Lifer	A person who probably will never leave prison unless it's in a box.
'Lope	Envelope.
Mainline	General population inmates who are not in <i>additional</i> trouble.
Minute	Slang for a long time.
Mud	Coffee.
PIA	Prison Industries of America. It's a work-place environment where inmates can learn skills and earn money; usually 10 cents to 50 cents an hour. The DOC often takes deductions out of that money for any retribution, child support, and sometimes room and board.

Punked Out	Many meanings which include but are not limited to: 1. The act of an inmate being humiliated and they did nothing about it. 2. The act of something being taken from an inmate. 3. You don't want to know.
Shredded	Defined muscles.
SHU	Segregated (or Security) Housing Unit for inmates who will be housed separately from GP for a long time.
Write-Up	A written notice of a rule violation that is held in an inmate's file and can count against their time.
Yard	Exercise area for inmates.
Yoked Out	Heavily muscled.



The Big House

Pison is kind of like a big house with a garden and a picket fence. Except instead of a garden of flowers, we have a “guard-en” of towers. Instead of a picket fence, we have an electric one, complete with razor wire. So if you want to get technical, I guess the only part of my metaphor that is accurate is that prison is sometimes called “the big house.”

In a typical “big house,” you may find a butler or some servants. In *this* big house, most of the work is done by the inmates who also reside here. Inmates take care of the servant duties, such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning.

The workers in the kitchen are responsible for making sure everyone on special diets gets the right food. This can be anything from a beans and rice tray for vegetarians to a kosher meal for religion folks. The “soft trays” are prepared for those who have no

teeth. They don't *give* you fillings in prison; they *take* your teeth, so a lot of folks need soft food. I'm sure it would be cruel and unusual punishment, even in this place, to make someone gnaw at an apple with their gums.

The guards are busy with their own tasks, like counting us. At certain times throughout the day, we have to be in our cells, on our bunk, with our lights on, waiting patiently for someone to make sure we're all still here. "Count" is several times a day, every day.

Some of the guards who aren't busy counting us have to sit up in towers all day. I assume they are waiting for someone to run, trying to avoid being counted. These observations have taught me three things:

- 1) Prisons are not the same as mansions.
- 2) There are lots of great job opportunities.
- 3) Being able to count is apparently a major job requirement for prison guards.

- Charles Lytle

Day in and day out, it's all the same; it's hard not to crack. It would be simple to snap and lash out just to change things up. Keeping a sense of humor (one thing they can't take away from us) is often helpful in ensuring one's heart doesn't turn to stone.

There are many ways to view incarceration. For the optimist, we live in a hundred-room house—each room with its own toilet. There is 24/7 security and our rent and utilities are paid for. Hot meals are hand delivered two times a day. We can send our dirty clothes out once a week to be washed. There is a yard with basketball courts and a soccer field surrounded by a quarter-mile dirt track for jogging with a large asphalt track for walking.

It's just a short three-minute commute to work with zero traffic or road rage. We can go grocery shopping once a month. If it weren't for the gun towers, stabbings, riots, and complete lack of privacy and freedom, this would be a downright paradise for some.

In a few states, you can even arrange special visits if you're married, and if you're not, you can live off of letters and supervised visiting, not unlike the courting of yesteryear.

The one hundred rooms are really the size of a tract home's walk-in closet, and the toilet (inside that closet) is just a cold steel oversized urinal protruding from the cement block wall. The security is meant to confine the residents, rather than protect them from

intruders. Not even the craziest people would want to break *into* this place. Even the guards bitch about coming in here, despite getting paid insanely well and having the freedom to leave after their shift.

The meals *are* hot, but they *are* garbage. On most days, access to the yard is denied or severely limited due to the unauthorized activities of some of the residents ruining it for those who *do* follow rules. Some of our restrictions occasionally occur simply because one of the guards is having a shitty day and feels like exercising his power. At least it's comforting to know that the yard is still there, right?

However, what is the point of dwelling on the negative when it is never going to change? When you make light of pain, you take away its power to hurt. When you can remove the pain, change is possible.

- Seanmichael Farrell

