

JOURNEY THRU THE ROW NEVADA, ELY STATE PRISON

Death row here in Ely State Prison is pretty much the same as the other units in the institution. The whole prison is lockdown prison. Inmates only come out of their cells for a couple of hours each day. Only a handful of prisoners are allowed to work and it's only these inmates!! Who can stand on their own two feet and support themselves. For the rest of us we are supported by family or friends who are generous enough to want to help us. However, if you have neither then your time becomes a little harder because that means that you have to demean ... yourself by selling what little possessions you have just for basic necessities. I've seen guys sell pairs of shoes off their feet for deodorant and shampoo. Other guys sell their meals, and to them it's a matter of priority : they'll suffer the hunger in exchange for something they'll desperately need. Some guys became creative and learn to draw or make things to sell. There's some unfortunate souls who fit neither category. They have no family and they can't draw because even to do that cost money. Skipping too many meals is paramount to suicides. If you're fortunate to have someone on the outside helping you the prison takes 10 % of your money and puts it in a trust fund. They say it's for burial cost in the chance that you get executed or killed.

At one time many years ago cigarettes were the equivalent of red money in prison. Since then many prisons have banned smoking and now stamps have become the new currency. It's like the euro replacing the lira. With stamps you can get anything you need. You can exchange them with someone who is somewhat financially stable enough to buy you what you need. You order on Saturday and receive your commissary on Tuesday. The prison store sells everything you need from clothes to CDs. The prison policy is simple: if you guys need anything you buy it from us, at our prices. And that's why a simple small TV. will cost you over 200 U.S. Dollars, just a little while ago it was over 300 USD. Once you order a TV. or any kind of appliance you'll have to wait a minimum of 3 weeks before you receive it. Everything is clear. TV's, CD players, lamps and even watches are made out of clear plastic. This is to prevent guys from hiding stuff inside their appliances. If you alter any of your property in any way it will be taken from you and you can, and probably will, be written up for it. For instance, a guy was fortunate enough to save up enough money to buy himself a TV. and one day it blew out. What happened was that a fuse blew out. He knew that getting another TV. was out of the question so he went inside his TV. and replaced the blown out fuse with some tinfoil and his TV. worked. But the guards found out and his TV. was taken from him. When I say taken I don't mean that it was taken for only a little while and given back to him. It was taken for good.

This also happens if you have torn clothes. One time a pair of pants was taken from me because I had a hole in them and I bowed the hole up. They considered the pants altered from its original form so they were taken from me.

Once a month 2 guards „shake down“ your cell. They come in and go through everything you own. Every piece of clothing and every piece of paper. They are looking for any contraband or an over abundance of stuff. We're not allowed to have more than 12 books, CDs and magazines. We can only have 2 pairs of shoes. If you have excess it will be taken from you. There are many guys who try to better themselves and they collect books that will help them mentally and spiritually but they often have to get rid of their useful books in order to stay at the limit. This prison offers no programs to inmates. We are where housed. If you want to better yourself you have to do it on your own and there's even a limit to that.

Because there are no programs it becomes a matter of how you want to do your time. Some guys are content to mindlessly watch TV. all day. Some sleep all the time and others work on their case. The one thing you can't do is let yourself deteriorate. I've seen this

happen to many guys. The public is told very little about the many suicide attempts there are in prison or how many inmates literally start losing their mind. For some kind of attention even negative attention I've seen guys set their cells on fire, while they're inside. Some will stand at their door all night talking to no one in particular. These kinds of prisoners are steadily increasing in Nevada and many are housed here in Ely State Prison. Last year a lot of inmates in general population were shipped to another prison to make room for inmates with mental problems.

A saving grace for inmates is visits, that is if you're lucky enough to have someone who is able to visit you. The prison is 4 hours from Las Vegas and is located in the mountains. This does make it difficult for anyone to visit. Visiting days are Monday and Tuesday and visitors must telephone the prison Sunday morning to let them know they will be visiting their loved one on the next day. Visits are 5 hours long and the visits are contact. If the inmate pays before the visit he can take pictures with his visitor(s).

We are locked up 22 hours a day. One day we're allowed to go outside for 2 hours and the next day we come out on the tier where we can take a shower, associate with other inmates or use the telephone. We come out 12 people at a time. This way it's easier for the guards to monitor everybody in case something happens. That's why fights only last a few seconds. The guards always have a shotgun ready. I've seen a guy get shut just for arguing with a guard. But that is prison. You're at the mercy of people who care very little about you as a person or as a human being. It's an existence I wouldn't wish on anyone. The conditions of prisons not only in the U.S. but all over the world have been documented over and over. I'm not here to complain about where I am but to show you someone, especially a young person, that this isn't a place where you want to be. When we were born it wasn't God's plan or even our parents plan to spend a life being told what to do and having freedom out at the whim of someone else. Living a life of despair and loneliness. Somewhere along the line me and the guys I live around got off of our intended path and here we are. I thank all the wonderful people who pray and fight for people like me for without them I wouldn't know how to feel cared for but more importantly. I wouldn't know how it is to feel human.