

Prison and Diesel Therapy

Questions about my prior prison internment arise from time to time. Some are curious as to what it was like, others how I managed to keep emotional balance through the experience, others are interested to know how I dealt with the shocking injustice of it all.

America locks up its citizens at roughly **5 to 10 times the rate** of all other "first-world" nations. In 2006 when I surrendered myself into Sheraton Prison, America had more people in prison than all the other first world countries combined. In fact, it held **25% of the entire world's prison population** while accounting for less than 5% of the global population. According to the jailers at our prison, 80% of prisoners violate their parole, intentionally, or unintentionally, and are returned to prison. They call this revolving door of prisoner release, re-offense, re-capture, re-intern, "recidivism." Prison guards are vocal about recidivism being the guarantee of their career path.

As to the injustice both civilly and criminally, the false accusations, the prosecution, the forced plea agreement, the eventual internment, and the legal torture of diesel therapy, to which I was personally subjected, I have spent a fair amount of time in contemplation. On balance, I have come to the conclusion that ultimately, from an eternal perspective, it was for my own good. However, when going through these difficult experiences, I was stunned, overwhelmed, and generally not of the thinking that these were simply experiences designed for my personal evolution.

All of us suffer unfair experiences from time to time. Most of us are spared the drama of incarceration, but the ultimate question is how we respond to injustice. The normal reactions seem to be first shock, then indignation, anger, the desire for vengeance, shame, depression, etc. All of these emotions immanent from fear. And yes, I experienced all of these pretty much in that order. However, after months in prison, one comes to something akin to a new normal. You accept it. It is simply what it is. And you come to realize there is very little you can do about it, except make yourself miserable by focusing upon the injustice of it all. So, you try not to focus on injustice. In my case, the legal torture of a sort, known within the system as Diesel therapy reignited the misery, but once that was over, I was so relieved to be back to the prison camp that I was actually smiling.

Diesel Therapy is rarely discussed outside federal prison. Released prisoners are afraid to go public and discuss it for fear of being re-interned. It is a violation

of U.S. Bureau of Prison regulations, but it is surreptitiously used to intimidate and punish those who are considered non-compliant.

IRS special agents came to the prison camp where I was interned and had me sequestered in a room with just them and no witnesses. My lawyer was not advised, which in itself is not legal. The agents “requested” that I testify against a long list of people whom I did not know and had no experience or former dealings with. At least to the best of my knowledge and recollection. I explained I did not know these people. They then offered me a “potential” sentence reduction if I would work with them and testify against them. I repeated I had nothing to say about these people. They were quick to explain not to worry, they would tell me what to say. I refused again. They finally said, these individuals may have read one or more of my books. My response was that the books in question had legal opinions claiming they were factual and did not violate U.S. law. The agents threatened me if I was not helpful. I continued to refuse. They left. I called my lawyer, a former district attorney, he confirmed the meeting was illegal without his prior knowledge.

Some weeks later another special agent in company with a federal prosecutor from another state came to the prison and repeated the process. This time I knew two of the names in the list of citizens they were apparently investigating. In both cases I felt these were honorable people. I refused to assist federal agents in pursuing them. I was offered a “potential” reduction in my sentence if I was cooperative, and serious consequences if I refused. My refusal to be cooperative and help federal agents seize the assets of other U.S. citizens, and possibly incarcerate them, ended in my being subjected to Diesel Therapy.

Diesel Therapy sounds simple, it’s basically being put on the road in a prison bus or on Con Air or both, going from federal prison to federal prison, and sometimes stuck into state prisons. It is impossible for a non-prisoner to grasp how this impacts the individual, their physical and emotional health. In the middle of the night jailers came, hauled me out of bed, chained me in front of everyone in my barrack as an example of what happens when you’re not cooperative with the government, and took me off to God knows where. I was stripped naked, placed in a freezing room, no shoes, no socks, and made to stand on a cold concrete floor. The shivering was uncontrollable and lasted for hours. No toilet options. Not a pleasant situation for a man in his sixties with a bladder issue. Just before daybreak, I was tossed a jumpsuit and thin flip flop rubber sandals. I was rechained around my waist and ankles and boarded a waiting prison bus. No toilet options. I was chained to the seat. It took five hours to get to another

federal prison in Seattle. Once there, I was locked in a maximum security holding area with about 30 other prisoners, still with no toilet options. These other prisoners were vocal, belligerent, and gave the appearance of dangerous men. A couple of hours later just when I was sure fights were about to take place; I was taken out for processing. There were other prisoners in a line awaiting induction. The pressure was so severe to pee by this point, I passed out. I was taken to another room, actually a locking closet, and left there. The female guard forgot that she had locked in the closet, and when her shift ended, went home. Hours went by. Prison guards decided I had escaped somehow. I tried knocking on the door, but it was impossible to get anyone's attention. Eventually the door was unlocked, and I was severely reprimanded for attempted escape. Excuse me? Seriously? They were serious. I was stripped naked and thoroughly examined, then sent to the hole. A cold, despicable, dark and filthy cell in solitary confinement with limited food and water. I was given a thread bare jumpsuit and was held there for days. I lost track of time. Perhaps a week or so later I was cuffed and taken out, stripped nude once more, carefully examined, meaning primarily under my testicles and inside my rectum by two female guards. Then another jumpsuit and I was chained around the stomach to ankles and then boarded another bus that took me to a remote ramp at Boeing Field in Seattle. On the open tarmac in morning daylight, I was made to underdress while chained, in several inches of snow while yet another female guard examined me. Everything was designed to humiliate. I was told to dress, an almost impossible chore in chains, and out of balance, standing barefoot in snow. Only partially able to get clothes on, I was shouted at to climb stairs into an aircraft widely known as Con Air.

The aircraft was full of prisoners. No toilets available. We flew to an Air Force base right outside of Sacramento and deplaned in lines of chained prisoners. Prison buses arrived and over the next few hours as we stood outside in a blowing winter wind, every prisoner except me was loaded on to the various buses and taken in different directions to other prisons. At no time did I ever have a clue as to what was going on, other than I was headed somewhere.

Two federal marshals showed up in a non-descript van. They chained me behind the front seats on the metal floor and took off. They drove up into the mountains where it was snowing once again. The highway we were on was closed for snow. The marshals had a debate with the police at the barricades who had stopped all traffic due to bad roads and deep snow ahead. They showed their badges and were permitted to continue. We slid around on a snowy highway for hours. No toilet. We eventually arrived in a town which I was to discover was Reno, and

after sliding off the road a couple of times we stopped at a non-descript building and I went through another induction process and found myself in a very violent place. The induction process and treatment at this prison was much worse than the federal prison camp. I watched two guards beat and inmate, later I would see guards taser prisoners and laugh at their jerking about. This place was worse than the first six weeks I had spent in a maximum security prison before being placed in a federal prison camp. The term "camp", is the lowest security designation in the Bureau of Prisons designation.

It would be about 8 weeks before I would be shuffled off again to other prisons for several more weeks before returning to the Oregon prison camp. The Reno state prison was by far the worst place I would experience. The induction process and the initial harassment to each facility is ugly, but after a while one becomes a waking zombie enduring it all. You stay in one prison an undisclosed amount of time, then are yanked out of bed, chained and you're moved again. During diesel therapy, the movement between prisons, you have no toilet facilities and the guards in the bus tell you to pee or crap your pants. And, it gets much worse, but there is no value in focusing upon it. When in a prison bus for more than 8 hours they pass out paper sacks from a storage closet that contain a sandwich and bottle of water. The sandwich was always dried out and frequently moldy, green, bologna between two slices of white bread. You are afraid to drink anything because there is no toilet facilities available to a chained prisoner. The good news of the Diesel Therapy experience was I lost over 25 pounds.

The mobile guards in the prison buses were always mad, and NEVER polite or decent in their interaction. They would threaten you for no reason while holding a shotgun. You never know where you are, or where you are headed, or how long the trip. You can't even scratch an itch, because you are chained and handcuffed. Family and friends have no idea where you have gone. You cannot receive or send a letter, you cannot buy a stamp from a commissary as your prison account is with another prison, you cannot make a phone call as you have no credit with the prison to which you have arrived. Prison phone calls are recorded and VERY expensive. To use one, during the 30 minutes a day when they are available, you must have money on the books of the prison where you are located. When subjected to Diesel Therapy you have no way to do anything. You have simply disappeared from all contact while experiencing continued harassment, threats, and being treated with disgust.

The prison camp where I spent most of my incarceration had little violence. A couple of the places I was sent on Diesel Therapy were pretty ugly. In the cell

next to me in maximum security, one cellie having been taken off his psych drugs, killed his cellmate. It was horrible to listen to. The guards waited until it was over, then entered a blood spattered cell and beat the living inmate into submission. They drug him out, and no one ever heard from or about him again. Blood was everywhere and it took a couple of the prisoners designated to clean the mess up several days to complete the process. Blood was embedded in the concrete blocks of the cell walls. They would go in and vomit in the process and then have to clear up their mess.

Sheraton prison, where I was sent for the majority of time, is actually three different prisons separated by a few hundred meters each. There is the maximum security prison. The medium-high prison, which is internally run by the 13th street gang inmates. They are part of the infamous Sureños, a very violent gang of Mexican Americans. And there is the lowest security area referred to as the Camp. After spending the first six weeks in maximum security, I moved into the barracks of the camp. This was still prison but considerably more tolerable. Except for the few months of Diesel Therapy, I made a life for myself in the camp and eventually felt like I was making a valuable contribution to inmates. For the most part, I managed to keep myself in a better state of mind by focusing on helping others. My full-time job in the minimum security prison was education. I taught mandated classes to inmates that had not graduated from High School. This led into avenues of experience I could hardly have imaged were I living outside of prison. Aside from humbling me, which the experience certainly did, I found ways to be of service that gave me a sense of value whilst living within a situation most would think untenable.

In retrospect, I was given a gift of time. Time to consider once more, who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? What is my highest and best use in this mortal existence? What should I be focused upon, and other questions of this nature. I joined a Buddhist group that met twice weekly, and a twice weekly church group, and I became hyper involved in teaching night classes on subjects of personal self-development, astronomy, and physics. These were in addition to my daytime responsibilities in teaching high school studies. Having several pursuits kept me focused on more uplifting activities rather than obsessing with the obvious injustice of a broken system.

Prisons are not quiet places. But because I did not go to the cafeteria for any of my meals and instead prepared my own food at the tiny desk in my bunk cubicle, I had periods of time each day in quiet to myself. (How that was possible is another discussion entirely.) For 45 minutes every day at noon, 31 of the 32

inmates in my prison-wing lined up at the cafeteria for lunch. I stayed in the barracks and sat in a plastic chair backed up against a wall learning to mediate. Prison was not easy, it was not designed to be, but ultimately I was benefitted. It took years of processing the ever present fear of prison life after my early release for the experience to age into something more beautiful whereby I can admit it provided value.