

Prison Fog



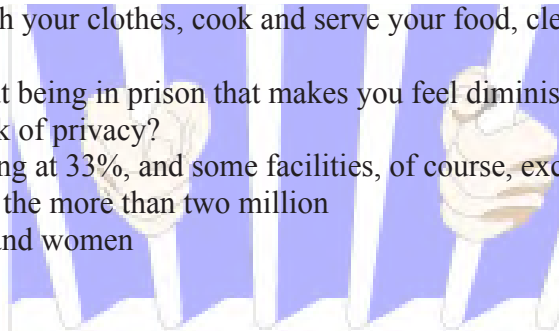
Introduction Joyce Ellwanger of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, wrote this while serving a six-month prison sentence from April-October 2003, at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut. Calling for the *closing* of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation [formerly SOA, the “School of the Americas”], she was sentenced for crossing the line onto Ft. Benning, Georgia, in November 2002. She has been dedicated to working on local and global justice issues all of her adult life.)

What is there about being in prison that makes you feel diminished?
Could it be that you are addressed by your work and not your name-
“Food service, there is a spill by the salad bar, mop it up.”
“Dining room, we need plates”, and sometimes not even that.
“You – bring me a glass of water.” “Pack up, you’re moving.”

In the fog, images become blurred and indistinct, indistinguishable one from another.
So it is with prison fog.

What is there about being in prison that makes you feel diminished?
Could it be that decisions are made for you?...
When you get up and when you eat.
What you eat and what you wear.
When you can be outside and when you can shower.
Other inmates wash your clothes, cook and serve your food, clean your bathroom.

What is there about being in prison that makes you feel diminished?
Could it be the lack of privacy?
Prison overcrowding at 33%, and some facilities, of course, exceed this average by far, for the more than two million incarcerated men and women in the U.S.



Sixteen women double bunked in a too-small room.
Clothes and mesh laundry bags strung from the sides of lockers overlapping.
Sit up in bed with your feet hanging over and they are in your bunkie’s face.
Dress and undress and try to preserve some personal space and dignity.
Noise breaking into your thoughts, your sleep, your attempts at concentration, your reading.
Idle talk about others – how we look, rumors of what we did, anger and resentment toward staff, in English and Spanish, bouncing off walls and echoing outside.
Sometimes it feels as though your thoughts are not your own but are molded by the pull and tug of the noise surrounding them – prison fog rolling in.

What is there about being in prison that makes you feel diminished?
Days without challenge.
Days without interest.
Days without reward.
Days and more days and more days.
And days without passion.
Days without being touched or touching.
Down days
Lazy, hazy days.
Uneventful days in a system that numbs you down,
dumbs you down,
and puts you down.

Prison fog that follows you down the hill and out the gates and only
slowly
lifts.

*Gratitude to CPT for use of their original logo.
(For other CPT-related stories on this site,
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