

## “Pre-Prison and Pressure or Learning to Float”

They say great artists and performers can deliver the wind of the muses under pressure. I'll let Nietzsche's madness decipher whether or not that's true. I will say there was a random pressure associated with writing this piece. It's the gravity of digging up past pressure. It is me buried in carceral concrete vaults.

At the time of my pre-prison wait in the Kent County jail without bond, I was twenty-two years old. Circumstances in my life long enough to fill whole memoirs made me face taking a plea agreement of 14 to 22 years. Little did I know I would do 17 1/2 years before coming home and over three years in solitary confinement while waiting to be tried before prison.

Maybe every deeply felt life has a glimpse into the entropy of mental illness or insanity. In my twenty-second year while at the county jail, my mind fell into such a state. Instead of giving me care or serious treatment, I was treated to a lone spot in segregation. This happened after I had mere words with an officer.

My condition grew worse and the jail authorities refused to let me out of segregation — a place also known as the hole or box. From here forward as we look back, don't use reason or rational mind. Use the you when you're hungry and deprived of meals, use the obtuse you locked in a bathroom with a rusty slot in the door where you “might” receive meals. Weeks became months after festering in one thousand yard stares at cold walls. I couldn't see my family in person, go outside for even five minutes, and phone calls were a privilege. These so called privileges were stripped away for weeks or months for any slight miscommunication with officers.

Naturally, I rebelled and yelled — if only to stay strong in solitary confinement’s torturous talons. I talked to myself, I sang, meditated, cried, laughed madly, stilled my entire being for every eventual mind/body vertigo break which happens under extreme sensory deprivation.

I tried to work out and when I was lucky enough to keep a cheap plastic radio I listened to music, Coast-to-Coast, and brilliant guests on NPR. BBC news was always a special journey.

If I attempted to save meager meals to eat later when hunger strikes and they found food, I was put on a “food loaf.” This was a grotesque loaf blend baked into disgust with every part of a meal that’s supposed to be separated.

All living supplies were hard won. Any word or action might get you on a DSU (disciplinary segregation unit) diet that consisted of only one hot meal of the same dish daily. Often they took away my mattress and I slept on a concrete slab with no blankets or sheets. Every cruel deprivation was written in marker on glass...“No mattress until...” “Toothbrush used at...”, etc., etc. This imposing glass was around a second door enclosure other than the door that kept me mercilessly. Imagine my door, an enclosure, and a door to that enclosure. It was like a crypt or part aquarium tomb.

Suicides happened multiple times — one right next door to me. Officers dressed in tactical gear (the goon squad) would first gas and then run in on one lone man for whatever his violation like pounding on his door. They were then tied down. I experienced this myself a couple times and regularly choked on second-hand tear gas.

Pressure...let me tell you about pressure. The box within a vault, the Gordian knot of the mind that can only look inward. In this oppressive coerced zen no matter how much I felt fine one moment, the next I was splitting in two. Some days as years went by I lost track of day and night. I often saw multi-colored orbs and heard distant voices.

Officers of all ranks let me rot away with stoic indifference and all but laughed at me when I asked to go outside for one moment. Mental Health workers listened but did nothing to liberate my condition. Sometimes they were told to stay away from my cell. I will not say there were no kind hearted people who came along to speak to me or give me basic human utilities most citizens have as second nature. Yet it's the insidious conformity of dehumanization to pat a jailer on the back for giving the tortured one a shower and "good morning" while denying him outside air and a multitude of other things.

I survived solitary confinement for over three years in the county jail while only doing a few months in population beforehand. Oddly enough, once being sentenced and sent to prison, I was thrust in prison general population as if every arbitrary reason the county used to confine me didn't exist.

I say this and relay my story free and at home. After many years of tenacious change, education, patience, and focus, I am proudly balanced and intentional in achieving goals.

Some say great pressure produces genius and opens existential gates to creativity. I say too much pressure in that ancient ocean causes us to rupture. You have to learn to float. Float while looking past the sky — into the infinite abyss of possibility.