

My Life on Nevada's Death Row

by: Timmy Weber

My name is TJ, I was arrested in April 2002, and convicted and sentenced to death in 2003. In the summer of 2003 I arrived here in Ely, where Nevada's death row is housed. Before I got here I expected the worst conditions being sentenced to death, but since I expected the worst, I was surprised by how humane it was. But after years of being on death row I now know that is not the case, on a comparative level to other inmates in Nevada's prison system.

When I got here the only two people who had contact with me were my Mom and Grandma, they lived together. I have a large family, but none were willing to maintain communication with me. That was in 2003, and they all had already moved past the stamp and envelope way to maintain relationships or friendships. At the time Nevada would not allow inmates to have any type of Email contact.

So the biggest punishment was not allowing me to have a 21st century ability to contact and maintain a relationship with anyone through Email. Looking back, this was huge, it would have allowed me to have a connection with all my family and friends. Which would have allowed me to be a lot more emotionally stable. At the time I was allowed one 15 minute call a week, at \$3.50, for the one call.

Soon the roller coaster of depression becomes a permanent part of your week. One day you wake up and all you think all day is I want to die, I just want this all to be over. Then something small becomes everything for you look forward too. It might be a letter, or that phone call you get to make. It could be commissary night, or one of the prison meals that you like. If you're given the slightest disappointment, you immediately drop down to a deep depression. This is the roller coaster of emotions you go through. Because you are locked in your cell most of the day, your brain has way too much time to think. So you think yourself into all of your life's decisions which lead you here. And obviously since you're on death row, you've made bad choices. You run a million what-if scenarios through your head that would have resulted in you not being in prison at all. Sometimes you blame yourself, the next days you blame others. You never settle on any one scenario, because tomorrow your brain will think you right out of it.

Every inmate on death row who I have spoken with about depression has acknowledged going through the same thing. Probably the number one thing is the realization that you're missing life, family, friends. The other thing most thought about is food; I can't stop dreaming about all the food I can't eat and the next garbage meal the prison is serving. Having grown up in the US, even poor, I feel like I had it pretty good. But it doesn't stop your brain from thinking about food all day. I try to think of all the people around planet earth who are not convicted of any crime, but still don't have access to quality

food at reasonable amounts to offset thinking of food. But I regret to say my selfish stomach wants the foods I came to love on the streets.

So since I'm in my cell so often, those are the two things you think about most, missing life and missing your favorite foods.

I am in a cell by myself. That, as far as I'm concerned, is a good thing. Since I am locked down so often, I would not want to share this small space with another person.

Ely, Nevada is in a remote location of this state, which makes it hard and expensive for family to visit. The people who run the prisons want it that way, they would never admit it, but they don't want inmates getting visits. It doesn't gel with their concept of punishment. Convicts shouldn't get the privilege of seeing people. I got here in 2003, and immediately applied to have my Mom on my visitors list. She was denied multiple times to visit, the prison claimed she was telling lies on her application. After years of stating her case that she wasn't lying, and the prison refusing to tell her what she lied about, she finally got a full FBI printout of her history. Well, it had an arrest attributed to her that wasn't hers. Apparently in a country of over 300 million people another person had her same name and was arrested for a drug crime. After years of paperwork she had it removed and reapplied for visiting and in 2011 finally was granted approval. The prison went out of its way to deny my Mom the ability to see me. She passed away in 2013, so I got to see my Mom a grand total of 4 times in the 10 years I had been here at the time. You quickly learn that the prison officials don't care about inmates' mental well-being.

All death row inmates are put on the highest custody level. Which means no matter how well you behave and don't violate any prison rules, you are still restricted to the max. When the prison isn't on lockdown I get out of my cell from one to two and a half hours a day. I can't get a job, or go to regular schooling; I can't leave the unit without being in handcuffs and shackles. The "yard" is a small concrete area. The food is brought to your cell twice a day, the quality is subpar and portions are small. We are allowed TVs in our cells, and radios. Being in a remote area we only get one radio station, so if you can't afford to buy music you're going to miss a wide variety of tunes.

It's not horrible here, but there is one major problem with the death penalty. There are hundreds of inmates in the state of Nevada who have been convicted of the same crimes, but through a totally arbitrary system were "lucky" enough to not get the death penalty. Which means if they follow the rules of prison and program their time. They get just as much freedom and privileges as an inmate here for a low level drug offense. They can go to school, the yard, have jobs to earn money, recreation activities, etc. But since I was unlucky enough to get the death penalty, I can't have any of those opportunities. I have been here 15 years and have zero write-ups (no disciplinary infractions). But I am still locked down for 21 to 24 hours every day, I can't get a job to earn 20 or 30 dollars a month. I can't go to yard, I can't participate in any yard activities. I can't go to other prisons in the Nevada system. I understand and accept that crimes need to be punished, but taking a small few and

putting us on death row, while randomly letting others with the same crimes the opportunity to better themselves and serve the people makes no sense.

So I sit here day after day, being a complete drain of society, not because I'm lazy or unwilling to be productive, but because the prison won't allow death row inmates the opportunity simply because of our prison custody level "condemned men".