

FREEDOM FOR A DAY

by: Al Cunningham, California

In the past, I have expressed my sadness at not being able to see any forms of green plant life growing and nature as a whole, as well as other such conditions and experiences which each and every person sees and endures within the activities and travels of their everyday lives on the outside. Often people don't even take the time to open up their eyes and appreciate the beauty which surrounds them, but for me, today, was a day filled with wonder, excitement, mystery and different experiences from that of my usual cold concrete, asphalt and steel bars encasement. Today, even if only for a few hours, I was free to experience the outside world.

With plans to lay-in and sleep until noon, I was certainly not expecting to be awoken at 10 a.m. and told to get ready for a trip to UCSF Medical Center in San Francisco. But within the next few minutes while attending to my hygiene, the excitement began to build-up within me. I was shackled and chained and placed in the back-seat of the transportation car where the windows would become my eyes to the world outside.

As we departed the prison and became one of the thousands of cars upon the busy highway of travelers who in their haste resembled ants in the ways they crisscrossed lanes, I looked at all the different cars and the people inside as they passed us, or we them, and suddenly I began to wonder if in their curious looking back and seeing the two guards in their green uniforms and me sitting in back with bright orange jumpsuit (commonly worn by prisoners), if they knew or even could possibly see how chained and shackled I was. I became a little self-conscious of their eyes and the possible thoughts emerging from behind them. So, I guess to avoid any such stares, I mentally shut them out and directed my attention to what things I have missed so much in my life over the many years of my incarceration.

I noticed so many different and beautiful trees, some showing their colorful little budding flowers, especially those commonly called Cherry Blossoms with their pretty pink buds. So many of them in a row, the lovely features became even more enhanced. I observed all the plant life, the sea, lakes, and waterways with the various sizes of boats sailing and docked. I observed the buildings, houses, even how unusual the clouds looked. The green grass covered the hills and rolling mountains. Some grass so tall, you could stand inside and become invisible (to the eye). I became so intense in the wonder, that I found myself forgetting, or maybe simply ignoring all the scientific knowledge and wondered what determined when the limbs/arms of a tree should sprout, and why they take the shapes they do (in growth). A world of questions with no one to ask, and to which answers yet remain in the distant yesterdays of experiences.

As we entered the city streets, I noticed how filled they were with numerous of people chattering away on their cellphones, mothers with their babies in carriages, dogs being walked on leashes, even a junkie looking for his fix.

As we entered the medical center with no more trees and flowers to admire, my attention became centered on the multi-ethnic beauty and existing wonders of women as they strolled by and in front of me. I thought myself, „No time for being self-conscious now with all their legs and butts of beautiful women in all different shapes, sizes and colors“. They all became my new source of excitement, wonder and entertainment. Not so much lustfully (not for lack of desire), but just the joy of the break from my usual norm.

The visit turned out to be only for an examination and evaluation. Before I could absorb the dentist's comments and conclusion, I was back in the car and retracing the roads to the prison.

During the return ride, while all sights were noticed, even the cold island of Alcatraz, so near as we traveled across the Golden Gate Bridge, they all seem to lack the wonder, excitement and mysteries of the journey up. I sat there engulfed in the silence of my thoughts, treasuring the collected memories of the morning's

astonishments and abhorring the thought of the reality which awaited me around the next few turns in the road.

As I returned back into the reality of the prison, a place I have lived in for more years than I both anticipated or want to acknowledge, the sights and wonders of the day slowly settled into that dimension of time and place known as memories where only daydreams will allow me to visualize, retrace and enjoy the world beyond these walls – your world – where dreams are created in my world.