

Letter 15

2-25-26

Laundry

At about 7:45 a.m., breakfast is done and you want nothing more than to go back to sleep and finish the dreams that were so rudely interrupted when the lights came to life forty-five minutes ago. You know, though, that if you give in to the sweet siren song of the pillow, you are likely to miss the call for laundry.

Every morning, you are given the opportunity to turn in a particular type of laundry. The type varies depending on the day of the week. We seldom know the date on the calendar, but always know the day of the week.

On Sundays, Thursdays, and Fridays, you turn in your “oranges.” This means your orange uniform top and bottom. You are issued two of each. On laundry day, you drop one set into a bin and let the CO know which size you would like returned. A few hours later, a cart returns with clean, folded uniforms.

The CO accompanying the cart reads off your size, and the inmate working the cart hands you the appropriate size. The laundry inmate, who I can only assume is named Methany, is the recipient of my best smile and charm. This is done in an effort to be handed a top that has a breast pocket. Only half of the uniforms do, and I have come to value that extra square of fabric that holds my glasses for a majority of the day.

It turns out that it's not hard to be the most charming of this charm-less lot. Methany will purposefully find me a pocketed top at every opportunity.

On Monday and Thursday, you turn in your personal items. This includes socks, T-shirts, underwear, etc. You put these into your mesh laundry bag and tie it closed. The bags are collected by cellblock and washed as a pile. The bags remain tied, partially to keep each individual's items together, and partially so nobody has to touch what is likely some of the worst underwear in the county.

The bags are returned to the cellblock as a pile. Each bag has a cloth label where you can identify a bag as yours. This part is weirdly tricky. Jailhouse legend has it that if you write your name on items that are left here, the items will call you back and you will find yourself brought in and reunited with your item.

While I'm not superstitious, I am 'stitious enough to not tempt fate. So I wrote my cell number on my bag. This was useful until I moved cells and acquired a cellmate. My bag was formerly labeled 163. It is now 216, and a scribble that covers the 3.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays, your linens are turned in. This includes sheets, blankets, towels, and wash clothes. I must confess that I now sleep on the consistently cleanest sheets of my life. Never have I bothered with a twice-weekly sheet-washing routine. However, once the work became someone else's, the routine was easy to fall into.

There is huge variety in size and level of wear between blankets. This is again where an investment of smiles deposited to the Bank of Methany pays off. A little bit of politeness and courtesy on your part will lead to the effort of finding a newer blanket on her part.

To make it easier on her, the blankets are color-coded based on age. They range from nearly white through a monochromatic rainbow of coffee-stained teeth.

I noticed that after the first few weeks, I stopped smelling the scent of freshly cleaned laundry. It doesn't smell particularly clean or dirty. Instead, the fresh laundry smells ever so slightly burnt. I'm fairly certain this is due to the extremely high temp they use to wash and dry.

I must assume this is done for the dual purposes of shrinking the clothes as much as possible, while also burning away the sin we infuse into the very fabric of the institution.

Letter 16

2-26-26

Goldilocks

A few years ago, in Japan, I discovered that my back enjoyed sleeping on a traditional Japanese futon placed directly on the floor. So we came home and made the transition to a cheap, hard mattress. It worked wonders.

Then I inherited a \$10,000 adjustable bed contraption that weighs about as much as a dead elephant, but also does wonders for my back. These two widely disparate options solved years of issues. Everything in between ranges from discomfort to outright pain.

Now I have discovered a new, low-end option that also leaves me waking refreshed and pain-free. The secret is a concrete slab and an old beat-up sleeping mat. The slab is your standard five-inch-thick concrete slab found in all the highest-rated sidewalks and five-star basement floors. The mat is the grown-up version of a vinyl and thin foam mat, like my boys had for preschool.

Some folks here attempt to elevate their experience by adding three to five inches of books under the head of their mat. I tried this option, but it was a literal pain in my neck.

I tried scrunching up the head section of the mat into a mess of folds and foam. This option left my feet hanging and still didn't work well, except for reading.

For sleeping, I needed a pillow. We are not issued actual pillows. Perhaps it's a laundry and hygiene issue. Perhaps it's an issue with murdering snoring cellmates. Whatever the reason, I needed to create my own pillow.

The current version, Pillow V.2.0, is a thermal undershirt stuffed with about an entire roll of crumpled toilet paper. This is wrapped in a towel and then put into a laundry bag to hold it all together. This is then inserted into another thermal shirt to cover the laundry bag, and again inserted into a third thermal, turned the other way so that the tails of the last two thermals hang loose from either end and keep everything covered.

The outer thermal provides a comfortable texture for my face, a great improvement from the towel being on the outside in version 1.

The Pillow V.2.0 has become a little compacted, so it's time to add another half roll of TP to fluff it up to V.2.1.