

1/23/11

Dear Friends,

It's around 9:30pm Sunday night as I begin this letter. The Jets are losing to the Steelers (aargh!), but my celly is standing in the doorway singing along to his radio, completely off time, thick Cuban accent, broken English. The Bob Marley song is unidentifiable from his rendition, but entertaining nonetheless. We are in cell 220 on the top range of the SHU (Special Housing Unit), aka "the hole", where we are being held in "administrative detention pending bed space" after our recent arrival at McRae Correctional Facility. He told me our one-station receiving radios (dollar store variety) actually has good music on tonight, so we are both listening now—Michael Bolton, etc. Classics. He's loving it, dancing all over the cell, quite entertaining. Enrique Mora (just farted and broke out in laughter), 26 from Cuba—in the States from 15 years of age, sleeps all day, snores up a storm, and comes alive at night. We are looking at about two weeks in the SHU, while space opens up in general population.

This is very much the same as USP—23 hours lockdown five days a week, and all weekend long; but there are some key differences. There is no computer access at this facility, and we only get one phone call a week in here and must wait seven days before the first one. So it seems my birthday present will be a phone call to L.A.—haha! The shower schedule is the same as well, Monday, Wednesday, Friday but thankfully they run showers and rec separately, so at least we get out of the cell twice on those days, albeit in handcuffs while being escorted to the shower or the caged-in two person rec units. No TV! The reason I know the score is that the CO is giving us updates as he goes by on counts/walk through. They have at least provided us with pen, paper, and indigent envelopes to do some letter writing, which I quite appreciate. And despite how unpleasant this situation may sound, I am actually enjoying it here; appreciating the peace and quiet, the warmth of our cell, and the little bit of reading material we have been able to acquire (a few magazines and newspapers). Enrique can be quite moody, but when he is feeling alright, we have a riot of a good time.

Well, I do not have much writing paper, and need to try and make it last for as long as I am in here—as much space as this has already taken, I now see I am going to have to severely limit everything I had planned on writing. So here comes the bare minimum.

The move to McRae happened rather suddenly. I had been awake all of Wednesday night trying to catch up on mail—was in quite good sprits.

Excellent actually. Writing and chatting it up with my new cell at USP, Joseph Smith (doing a two year bid off a buy-bust cop sting in D.C.—much like Skid Row) Eventually I could not hold off exhaustion and crashed a couple hours before breakfast, expecting that if indeed I were to be moved that morning, that it would happen around 10:00ish and that I would be given about an hour's notice. In fact I was half expecting another week at USP—I had relinquished concern/consternation over whether that would indeed be the day, and was feeling very at peace about whatever was to happen. Around 7:30 as I was quietly enjoying my breakfast, a tap on the window and King's voice (head orderly) "Michael pack your stuff, you're leaving." Fifteen minutes later the door opened as the officer on duty came to usher me away. I was reminded of my own words "for blessings came when least expected."

I could spend hours and many, many pages recounting all the remarkable little ways, and big ways, I have seen God's hand at work in all of the events leading up to and surrounding this move—the introduction of a new cell mate just days prior, who is now enjoying the commissary order I left behind, the forced release from seemingly endless amounts of work as I was simply unable to finish organizing mail stacks, the fact that I had given up caring about whether I would actually be moved, and countless other little details. Once again, despite the limitations, I have a sure sense that I am where I am supposed to be and that God is in control.

It's about 11:30 pm right now. I stopped writing to snack on some leftover food, and shortly after that, Gurman (one of the orderlies from whom we have been getting reading material) tried to give us another tray (one of his own when they get extras) when the CO opened the flap to let us have a book—but the CO wouldn't let him.

Now it's 1:30-2:00. Had to stop writing again because I could not concentrate at all with the random noises and drumming Enrique was carrying on. Funny that I wrote about peace and quiet—when he's had some coffee, peaceful and quiet is the last thing it is in here. He can carry on like a 7 year old. Anyhow, the comment on the CO was just to introduce the subject of private/federal facilities. More observations to come later, but it is interesting to spend time observing their behavior—there are those who are laid back, and those who are very picky about the rules, then there are those who seem to relish their ability to make life difficult for inmates. The whole Mcprison industrial complex, with private run federal prisons, must really make for some interesting mixes. Often times here at McRae I have felt as though there are too many of them who take too much pride in the fact that they are helping their country deal with the "immigrant problem."

White ones especially. Most of the Black guards tend to be laid back and amenable. Anyhow, now I am tired and just rambling—a good sign than I just need to be done with this.

I am glad to be here at McRae amongst so many different nationalities. Though I am designated to be in a camp, a low-security prison affords more exposure to real prison (as did USP), and the atmosphere, I expect, will be quite fascinating as there is a completely different prison attitude amongst an assemblage of international inmates. A good combination of a whole bunch of different characteristics—private, low-security, immigration spot, etc.

As far as I can tell thus far, being designated here does not necessarily mean that the INS is attempting to deport you; it just means that the BOP assigned you here because of foreign birth in order to facilitate deportation efficiently if that is indeed to be pursued. Already some guards and counselors have given me strange looks when I have informed them of my U.S. citizenship, one of them outright saying “you’re not supposed to be here.” So we will see what happens. I want to finish my sentence here. I have spent way too large a chunk of a 6 months sentence in the hole simply because of being in transit and really don’t want to endure that rigmarole again—although should it happen again I guess I will have much more warning and be better prepared. It is not the hole part that is bothersome so much as the interruption in communication and separation/loss of items like books, large amounts of mail and other property items. Being strip searched all the time is kind of annoying as well, but quite bearable. I should have known what was to come in being transferred here—it was unsettling at first to find out I would be on lockdown for another couple weeks without much opportunity for communication. But I was well prepared by past experiences, and I am adjusting very well. Even enjoying it. Quite a bit actually. Ok. I am talking in circles now. Time to go to sleep.

Peace, Love, and Exhaustion,  
Michael David