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Doing Time at Jackson County – The Men I Share This Space With and Spend My Time

Five weeks down and I'm somewhat familiar with the inmate population here at Jackson County Jail. A designated holding facility, most inmates here are being held over on their way to some place else. For me and my fellow Federal inmates, this place is like a bus stop on our way to a designated Federal Bureau of Prison's facility. For inmates from Johnson County, they're here waiting to return to Johnson County to go to court, see their attorneys, or just get cut loose. It makes for an interesting mix of people. In C Mod where I find myself with 22 other men, the proportions of Feds, Johnson County and Jackson County inmates is roughly one-third each.

My closest friend in the Mod is Leo. He is a 28 year old African-American who was in the same unit I was at the Pottawattamie County Jail. We were both Federal prisoners awaiting placement in the system and came down here from Council Bluffs together. Leo's doing his second prison term, a five year sentence for drugs. He got married to the woman he has three children with just before he got locked up. Last week she gave birth to their fourth child, their first girl. Leo's that rare drug dealer who is also a good family man. He cares for his kids and wife and used all his drug money for his family. He knows he is out of the drug business for good. His wife is going to wait for him. He misses his kids terribly. Leo's a real smooth talker. He can sweet talk himself extra stuff from guards and inmates alike. He is the Mod hair cutter both for black and white guys. We are now the senior Federal inmates in the unit and we watch each other's backs.

Our sidekick, Steve, who came down with us from Omaha is also a Fed sentenced to ten years for drugs. Steve is a 30 year old white guy from Carter Lake, IA, the only part of Iowa that is located on the west side of the Missouri River surrounded by Omaha, NE. Steve is a two-time loser and also has kids. He is not nearly the family man that Leo is. He is a real product of the streets, a large man who makes his presence known. He is generous with his friends and tough on others. He makes a mean jail house hot sauce for soups. Steve was my cellmate who was not happy about our light bulb being replaced and tried to break the light fixture with his shoe. Steve got moved to another Mod after threatening another inmate in the Mod.

My two current cellmates are both locals who could be characterized as losers, poster guys for the Scott Peck chaos level of faith development. Samuel and Joshua are two twenty-four year old white guys. The police went to Samuel's apartment when a neighbor complained of loud arguing taking place in his apartment. He, his wife, and mother-in-law were fighting. They have three small children. Sam worked at a Burger King. It seems Sam's wife believed he was seeing another woman. The police brought Sam to jail for an outstanding warrant for refusing to pay a \$500 county hospital bill. The following day he got a notice that he is \$5,000 behind on child support. Human services does not know he is living with his wife and children so they continue to collect welfare. Yesterday he was told his mother-in-law was pressing assault charges against him for breaking her arm while they were arguing. Sam swears he did not touch her. Sam is well known to the jail guards.

Joshua might be called the "Job of Jackson County Jail." He was sent here after serving a four month sentence at another county jail and sent to Jackson County for an outstanding warrant. Three years ago Joshua plea bargained a drug charge to a \$900 fine and probation. He never paid the fine and was given three opportunities. Now he finds himself

back in the Jackson County Jail and a judge told him that he either pays the \$900 fine or stays in jail a year. Josh has no means to pay the fine and nobody on the outside who can help him. His plan was to become a trustee in the jail and work off what he owes in fines, something they allow here. While in the Trustee Mod, his cellmate took to breaking the cell window. They both were caught and threatened with escape charges. His cellmate was set free having completed his sentence. And before Josh was transferred out of the Trustee Mod another inmate sucker punched him in the eye. That's when he showed up in my cell with a swollen shut eye.

But all this is not enough to get Josh the "Job of Jackson County" title. His girlfriend of eight years from Topeka managed to get up here to visit him. As she was walking into the jail, she ran into a couple of women inmates who were trustees. They asked her who she was going to visit. She told them and the two women trustees told her that he must be the same Joshua who flirted with all the women through the ventilation system from the Trustee Mod. They said he was a smooth talker and kept asking for favors and good night kisses. When Josh's girlfriend got to their visit, she spent the first 15 minutes angry at him for his flirting. Then the police stopped their visit and arrested his girl friend for an outstanding Jackson County warrant. It was only after this happened and Josh returned to the cell and told us what happened that he carried the "Job of Jackson County Jail" title.

Josh is really a good-hearted person. He quit doing drugs a few months before his current legal problems in a sincere effort to change his life around. Before he got locked up he was living with his girl friend in Topeka. A day after their visit, we got word that his girl friend got bonded out of jail by her mother. She is back in Topeka holding down a fast food restaurant minimum wage job, paying the bills and keeping their apartment. And the good news is that she is giving him another chance with the relationship. Josh is also petitioning to get reinstated in the Trustee Mod and is asking that his alleged escape charges be dropped. Josh and I are also doing a daily bible study. We are currently reading a chapter a day from Mark's Gospel.

Some days I feel like I'm on the outer edge of the world out here in Kansas, the backwaters of the world's largest prison system. Still opportunities continue to come my way to be present to men in need. Last week, Martin, an American Indian, sat down to talk to me after breakfast. The hours after breakfast are my best writing hours. Most people go back to bed after breakfast and I can set up on a table in the common room and write. Martin is the guy I rent my tennis shoes from for \$2 a week of commissary goods and he is one of the nicest guys in the Mod. He had a court hearing and was taking a shower and getting ready when I asked him what was up. He sat down next to me and told me he as pleading innocent to first degree murder charges. He killed another American Indian with a knife in a drunken fight. His remorse and sorrow are real. Being in jail was just a back drop for his troubled spirit. He is fighting the first degree murder charge hoping to get a reduction of prison time but there is no way he can lessen his grief from having killed a man, bringing a life long experience of sorrow and grief to his victim's family and his own. We talked for awhile. Afterwards he said he hoped his crime will not affect my relationship with him. I assured him it would not and that I would be praying for him as he went to court.