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Our Sentences

Andrew Miller

[Lightly edited and arranged after asking 50 men in my Creative Writing Class to write one sentence about life in a Florida State Prison]

How long are ten years, really? Please remember that I am a person, NOT a number. The present moment is the only moment. Going to prison feels like lava at the end of a rainbow. This place would have enormous potential if all the staff came on board. Upon arriving, I noticed the trees and gently rolling hills. Living here, you can feel a peace not found at many other camps. This prison is changing lives. I must move again, lugging everything I own in a bag like a hobo. Lights out. Today took a tragic turn; I'm going to confinement for contraband. Should I sell my tray, my chicken tray, for two ramen noodles? Please hurry up and clear the count; I must use the toilet and don't know how long I can hold it before I make a mess. Prison taught me to stand in line, show respect, and follow a schedule—but not much toward my self-confidence. Freedom is a mindset. He leaned against my bunk and moaned, "I disappointed God again." For a moment, I wondered how he had dyed his shirt red. I used to like the colors: white and blue. The noise is perpetual—a crushing weight—and I am Atlas. Just a hundred dollars a week, and you can become anyone. He was lying peacefully when the stretcher finally arrived. The level of incompetence displayed was truly astounding. Some officers are like some inmates; they can't stop creating hostile environments with aggressive attitudes. Prison can be a great opportunity for self-improvement if you make good use of your time with mental exercise. Just like the street, don't believe everything you learn on inmate dot com*. The indignities poured on us are like swill for hogs. There is protection from the storm by calling on the power within. If a man is his dreams, then prison is the place where dreams come to die. When dreams become preferable to reality, hope begins to fade. Prison can be your coffin or your cocoon; it's all in your perspective. Benji, wearing an all-blue jumpsuit, never thought he'd be wasting his life for the next 12 years. Standby to stand up. You're in prison—get over it. Be who you want to be. You are an illusion of your mind. This place has taken my worth as a human and perverted it into a cog in a broken machine. I feel like I'm good for nothing, physically and mentally abused by fences, walls, chains, boots, fists, and words. Held for ransom as your kidnappers steal wealth and food from your family meant to keep you alive...hoping someday you'll return home. Is this all that's left? I was born, I lived, I died, the end.

*Not an actual website—an "inside" joke.