

From: Mcneil, Barton
Date Received: 10/08/2018 01:04 PM CDT
Subjec: PRISON TRANSFER

Hey brother Chris,

As with this set of emails, sent to you on my device using the plugin sync cable at the gym every Monday, my emails seem to be arriving to you OK. But after being here a week I still don't know for sure whether my emails sent to you from the cellhouse wing dayroom kiosk-screen have been arriving to you or not. I'm still trying to figure it out.

I previously told you about my inter-prison transfer at the Menard prison from one cellhouse to another several weeks ago, which was was pretty disconcerting itself. Having been in the same cellhouse for some time, it was sad to be separated from many good friends I'd made over the years, very few I would ever likely run into again. After 3 weeks at my new cellhouse location and starting to get settled in and make new friends, I was suddenly unexpectedly transfered to another prison in Southern Illinois, my mailing address now:

Barton McNeil. #K-75924

5835 State Route 154

Pinckneyville, IL 62259

Once I'd served 20 years in prison with "only" 30 years remaining of my sentence, my security level was reduced from HIGH to MEDIUM, rendering me subject to a transfer to a lesser security prison on the whim of corrections officials. It doesn't matter that I didn't request, or want, a transfer from where all my friends were to a presumably less-restrictive prison. Like it or not, they'll send you wherever they wish with no advance notice.

Along with three other similarly-classed prisons in Illinois, P'ville is not quite a fully medium security prison, but is an interim classification ½ step down from Menard, called a "medium-max" prison, but its also sort of a disciplinary joint for lesser offenders.

Having had to give up some of my property because of last month's Menard cellhouse-to-cellhouse move (since my property boxes are already too full to contain much else, my case-related paperwork taking up most of the space), I soonafter needed to pack my property boxes again for a more more restrictive transfer process to another prison, thus had to give away yet more belongings, in order to ensure that my more-important essentials could fit in my property boxes' remaining space, for a more serious prison-to-prison transfer.

For a number of claimed reasons P'ville was long known to be the joint everyone wanted to avoid the most, many even preferring Menard max prison over the lesser security P'ville prison. Having heard such negative accounts I was particularly apprehensive about this forced transfer. Despite having to give up my all-important reading lamp and other property items, the transfer went off without a hitch.

A little bit closer to Bloomington than Menard is I think, at twenty-five or so years old, P'ville is a much more modern prison than Menard, and is clean and well maintained. Its expansive grounds have 6 "X houses", which are 2-story cellhouses in the shape of an "X" at the center of which is the guards' control center which allows them a clear view down all 4 cellhouse wings simultaneously. Each wing has a long narrow dayroom flanked by 2 floors of cell doors on either side, totalling about 100 cells per wing. Typically only one floor is out of their cells at a time. On my floor there's about 100 inmates. The cellhouse layout is common to all modern prisons, as seen in many prison-related TV documentaries.

In the middle of nowhere, Pinckneyville houses about 2000 inmates. Like at Menard about 75% of them are African American, the remainder being white or Latino. The average age of the prisoner population here is far younger than at Menard, many mere teens, with sentence lengths 10% of my own sentence. Best as I can tell, I have the longest sentence of anyone on my wing with only a few other "long-timers" - most convicts having sentences ranging from a few months to a few years. Yesterday my seeming teenage tablemates at the chow hall were complaining about their sentence lengths, one topping out at only 3 years. I didn't bother mentioning that I've already done more time in a maximum security prison than they've been alive. Most guys here are smalltime repeat offenders, few having serious violent cases. Because I'm old enough to be some of these guys' grandfathers, I don't draw much attention from them.

Pinckneyville is sort of a disciplinary joint for most convicts, sent here because they violated their parole or probation or else got into trouble at their former lesser security prison. In the middle of nowhere, this prison seems to make an effort to provide educational and job training programs in an attempt to change the misdirection of these young guys' troubled lives, none of which I'm illegible for given my release date decades away - unless I want a kitchen job for a slave's wage of 20¢/hour... which I don't. I wouldn't accept a job that required mere sleep for that little pay.

Pinckneyville enforces all manner of petty rules, but that's probably because the inmate population is so young, undisciplined, energetic, and prone to gang influence. In many ways they're even stricter here than at Menard, despite Menard being a maximum security joint.

Like Menard, we're taken to be fed lunch and supper at the chowhall, unless under a lockdown, which is a far rarer occurrence here. The walk to chow is about a full city block.

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Like Menard, we're taken to be fed lunch and supper at the chowhall, unless under a lockdown, which is a far rarer occurrence here. The walk to chow is about a full city block.

Unlike Menard however, we're fed our breakfast meal here also in the chowhall, during the very early morning hours while its still dark. For the first time, in like, forever, I've been walking in the darkness of night to and from the chowhall. On the way there, this morning I saw a low flying bat darting to and fro, and further saw the brightly lit moon and some stars - sights I hadn't seen in 2 decades. At Menard inmates weren't allowed to go anywhere when the sky was dark.

I've only ran into a couple guys at this prison that I previously knew from Menard, but otherwise hardly know anyone here. But I've started making a few new friends already.

The cell sizes here are typical. While the cellhouse I was in at Menard still had porcelain sinks and toilets with good water pressure and genuinely hot water, here the cells have stainless steel combination sink-toilets, weak water pressure that shuts off the water stream after only 15 seconds, and only produces lukewarm water. Also lacking here is the enormous number of cable channels we picked up on our TVs at Menard. But these are only minor shortcomings. Overall this has been a very positive move for me, the warnings about what to expect here unfounded.

So far the best thing about being here is that I haven't been assigned a cellmate yet, but I was put in an unoccupied cell by myself, where I've been for a week now, the added benefit being staking the bottom bunk for myself. From the looks of it, could be weeks and even a few months before being given a cellmate. Sooner or later I'll be assigned one, but for the time being I'm enjoying having the cell to myself.

It also appears that P'ville makes a greater effort to match up cellmates according to age, race, size and other factors, leading to more comparable cell-sharing. Here I'm more likely to get an easygoing cellmate - while Menard never bothered with quaint notions of compatibility when assigning two vastly different guys to the same cell.

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Back in 2003 I purchased a typewriter for my legal work. A few years later Menard deemed all typewriters no longer allowed. So we could have them destroyed, sent to someone on the outside, or put in storage until such time they're allowed again. Confiscated 15 years ago, I almost forgot I still had a typewriter in storage, having had no one to mail to, at my own significant expense.

Since Pinckneyville does allow us to have typewriters, I was surprised when my old one was returned to me upon my arrival here. Having sat for so long I'm not even sure it still works. In fact, I may have tossed the owners' manual thinking I'd never get it back. Today typewriter ribbons are prohibitively expensive, so I won't likely be using it much even if it still happens to work. I'll test it out later.

A few days ago our cellhouse wing went to the outdoor recreation yard for my first time. Looks like we have less time at the yard than we had at Menard, but that's mitigated by the loss of less yard access due to fewer lockdowns here - another positive change for the better. Having yard 3 times a week, there are several exercise yards that we visit on a rotational basis, each one larger than all 4 of Menard's yards combined. I almost couldn't believe it when I saw it, that only a hundred inmates were given a yard I'd guess to be several acres, each.

While I normally run a bunch of laps out in the yard, each lap at Menard was $\frac{1}{4}$ the distance it is here at Pinckneyville. I'm not gonna be able to run full laps here - maybe only $\frac{1}{2}$ lap at a time. I paced the length of the yards' perimeter to be about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. The length of each yard is equal to the length 4 football fields!

As mentioned above, each cellhouse wing has a common-area dayroom, which Menard had no equivalent of. Each floor is allowed out in the dayroom for an hour twice a day. At tables in the dayroom some guys play cards or chess or just shoot the breeze, while others just walk about.

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Connected to the dayroom are shower stalls which we can use anytime while out in the dayroom. Accordingly, for the first time this century I have the ability to shower (alone) twice a day if I wanted, rather than twice a week with 30 other naked dudes at Menard - less often than that when we were under frequent lockdown status there.

The laundry servicing is similarly impressive here. At Menard our laundry was gone for a full day each week while it was washed in industrial sized machines at a separate building, later returning to our cells the next day sometimes dirtier than when we sent them out. Here our wing's inmate worker (porter) does everyone's laundry, in ordinary household washers/dryers. We don't have to do a thing. The laundry is returned to us a few hours later, clean and folded. Oh, the luxury!

There's 6 telephones in the dayroom for our use, so I could use the phone twice a day... in theory. In practice, so many of the inmates want to use the phones that it's really hard for me to get to use one myself - some guys bribing others to "reserve " a spot for them at one of the phones. I might have to pay bribes for phone access myself whenever some pressing matter comes up requiring phone contact. Phone access is further restrained because we're only in the dayroom for less than an hour at a time.

Shorttime newly-arrived young cats who still have family and girlfriends supporting them want to hog the phone the whole time. Because such few phones are in such high demand I can only dial a number twice - either the same one or 2 different numbers. If no one answers I can't keep dialing repeatedly, but instead have to step aside and let the next guy use it. I can then try again during the next dayroom session, that is, if I can get to the phone again.

I've only successfully managed to make 2 brief calls since arriving here. Bottom line: phone access looks to be very limited, but I'll still be attempting to call you regularly.

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As previously mentioned, there's a single kiosk screen in the dayroom for sending/receiving emails, which few inmates use. The screen has a timer limiting my use of it to only 10 minutes, barely enough time to write 2 short emails. I now have final confirmation that the screen kiosk does in fact send/receive emails properly, surprisingly

prompt, usually only taking a few hours or a day to arrive. Given my phone limitations its an ideal way to keep in touch, twice a day if needed - far faster an snail mail also.

While the kiosk timer limits me to sending only short OUTGOING emails, I can RECEIVE (multiple) emails from you of any length. For longer outgoing emails like the one you're reading now, I can still type them up on my device in my cell and send them from the gym on Mondays using the device's plugin-sync cable there.

Unfortunately there's no way here for me to buy email credits. So please regularly include batches of email credits when you send emails to me to keep this communication venue open, or else I won't be able to use this service at all. Newly arrived here, I burned through email credits like crazy. Now settled in a bit and familiar with this prison's email system, with my transfer-related emails out of the way, I won't be going through email credits so fast.

In another perk, ice is brought to our wing twice daily year-round used for our store-bought sodas and snack drinks, unlike Menard.

As for the cells here, they all have solid doors on them, with only a small window in the doors, rather an open bars. At Menard and other older maximum security prisons the open bars at the face of the cells let's in the deafening cellhouse noise, dust, smells, and light, and allows any passersby to feely look into your cell and see what you're doing, even if you're using the toilet. ("Yikes!") Here the solid door blocks these annoyances, also making the cell darker at night when the cell's overhead light is off, making for a better sleep.

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