

Letter from Lockdown

By Armando Simón

On August 1 I received another letter from a political prisoner of the [January 6 retribution](#) efforts, written on June 29 and postmarked July 30. Anyone [can correspond with](#) political prisoners and, more importantly, [send them](#) money [they need](#) to buy food and other items in the commissary. I share this letter to make people aware of the conditions faced by the victims of political persecutions. The letter is lightly edited for clarity.



Dear Armando,

Thank you for sending me your book, [A Prison Mosaic](#)! I am looking forward to experiencing this innovative mosaic form of writing. Right now, we are on lockdown here at FCI, confined to our cells 24 hours a day, no recreational exercise, no phones, no email, no church, no programming, no education, no commissary. We have been this way in my housing unit since Monday the 22nd, and the offending housing unit where we have two other J6ers has been this way since the 18th. Some have

died in that housing unit. My cellmate saw six guards carrying the guy out of the unit wrapped in a sheet while eating breakfast. A big hulk of a guy. They put him on a golf cart and drove him, sheet and all, to the medical office. That was the first of several more overdoses—at least four more. On the 22nd when the warden returned to work from the weekend, four units were placed in lockdown. The suspected culprit is a drug called K2.

K2 is a synthetic cannabis that is sprayed in liquid form on paper and then smoked. But fentanyl and Raid roach spray are often added to increase the potency. But the effects are very unusual and unpredictable from person to person, batch to batch, and dose to dose. The roach spray contains a neurotoxin that, when killing bugs, produces the kicking and twitching that dying cockroaches are so famous for. In prisoners who subject themselves to this poison, twitching presents itself involuntary and at times violently. Inmates call this “ticking.”

Inmates who have smoked this K2 will often go into a zombie-like state and shuffle around the halls of the housing units, often with their eyes rolling back into their heads intermittently, bucking and humping the air or walls involuntarily, head twitching to the side like the characters in the dopey comedy *Night at the Roxbury*. If an inmate is found high like this, the whole housing unit will be locked down. The high one will be taken to medical, and then on to the hole.

Guys really don't like being locked down. It isolates them with what prisoners fear the most: their own thoughts. It also causes them to miss a day of work and their 50 cents or whatever they earn, which interferes with their honey bun purchasing power, and nothing upsets an inmate more than being deprived of The Most Sacred Honey Bun. So, to prevent the above, inmates will scoop up those zombie K2 stumbling air humpers and stuff them in the nearest cell, shower stall, or

broom closet until they come down from their high. Sometimes they get so high that their twitching joints will lock up and freeze, and every tunehead (as K2 addicts are called here) has a different and consistent pattern of twitching and bucking unique to them like a signature dance move. When this happens, inmates call it "going stuck." Depending on the joint or series of joints that lock up, they might fall, which is known in the vernacular as "falling out." We have had at least four fallouts since the death last Thursday. So obviously this prison got a bad batch of K2.

You would think these tuneheads would press pause, but no. They do get hooked on it, which is why we suspect that it is laced with fentanyl. These guys that get on it start to lose weight, and when they are not high in Zombieland, they hunch and slouch and cower like beaten dogs all the time. It takes about three weeks once a guy is off of this stuff to return to normal.

Once a tunehead gets a housing unit locked down for falling out, he doesn't have many friends left. Honey buns have been threatened, and woe to the source of the imperilment. I am a teacher by nature, but I live in the factory worker dorm. A week before the overdose, one of the factory workers from my hall decided to get high at work. He locked himself in the Rino liner spray booth and smoked his K2. He got so high that he got stuck in there. After a while the factory was closing and there would be a count of inmates. They could not just leave him in there any longer; if they did, the count would be off and the administration would lock down the whole compound, assuming an escape in progress. What is more, the tunehead would probably get a new charge. The factory workers were forced to get the guards to unlock the spray booth to get the stuck tunehead out, who was already starting to come to, and was able to finally walk back to our dorm.

Now, what came, and usually comes next, I must put delicately.

The prison is highly segregated according to race and gang allegiances as well as other affiliations. Things are relatively peaceful here for what this place is, and maybe I have been numbed to it, but I think that I have preserved most of my objectivity. One of the ways for this seemingly peaceful environment that we enjoy here to be disrupted is for someone from a different group to exact a pound of flesh from another. Chaos would explode, so this is prevented by all pounds or other weights of flesh being collected by one's "own people." This keeps the general peace.

On the day of the factory fallout I was sitting in my cell and heard the sound of a lifesize pinball game in which the ball was being bounced off the cinder block walls, steel doors, cement floor. When the sound concluded, I stuck my head out my door to see what was going on. The pinball was lying on the floor: the tunehead from the factory screwup. His face was messed up and his kneecap was in the wrong place. Steel-toed boots, of which every inmate has a pair, can be a powerful weapon. Someone pulled him into our laundry room. I grabbed my pancho and a bottle of Motrin. I filled my pancho with ice and gave him the Motrin. He had made it to a chair, and we iced down what was left of his knee.

Chow was called, and while eating I saw from a window the beaten guy "checking in" to the lieutenant. "Look, it's not safe for me here anymore. Please put me in solitary confinement." Usually you need to have some kind of proof. In this guy's case all he had to do was show them his face. When I returned from chow hall I was greeted by two bruisers of my same skin pigmentation. This was bad. They carried a message from a certain Latino street affiliation: next time, I was to mind my own business. Even if I found a body lying on the ground, I would be best served to step over it. Noted.

They said that they understand about Christian faith in light of what I did for the injured guy, but to next time keep that faith to myself. Luckily, no debt of flesh was owed on my part

for my *faux pas* against prison etiquette—this time. We were not locked down due to the human pinball's falling out, I think in part to the swift retribution meted out by his compatriots. I think the administration here likes it when we "police our own." That is why, against bureau policy, they dole out collective punishment to ensure that we weed the offending parties out of our ranks.

So, an investigation was made into the case of the beaten tunehead, consisting of a unit wide "body check." This is where the guards line up prisoners with their shirts off and check their upper bodies and knuckles for injury that would show they were in a fight. Finding nothing, they were satisfied. They were looking in the wrong place: they should have been checking boot toes.

But since these five or more K2 overdoses the warden has been pissed off, and maybe with some justification. Since the full compound lockdown I don't know if there have been any more overdoses. On Monday the 22nd, my dorm's first day [of lockdown], my cellmate and I woke up to find the door locked and water turned off, leaving no way to get anything to drink or flush the toilet. The water for drinking was not restored until later that afternoon when we had cleared a full dorm shakedown search. For that we were one by one led out of our cells, strip searched in a shower stall, and, after putting our shorts and shower sandals back on, handcuffed behind our backs and stuffed in a small T.V. room where they had a *Sex in the City* marathon on the whole time—talk about cruel and unusual punishment. Then they led us back to our trashed cells. I assume that the guards were looking for K2. I wish them success in their search, but doubt their results. K2 is notoriously hard to detect or find. It looks just like a piece of random scrap paper, or even a page of a book. A dose is about 1cm x 1cm, so a piece the size of a playing card can hold as much as a dozen doses.

They came by on Wednesday, our third day of lockdown, to let

us out one by one for showers and to collect dirty laundry. So that was good, even though they did have a female guard supervising the showers along with a rank guard at first. Showers are single man stalls with a curtain that covers from the chest down—unless you are short, then you have complete privacy. They started taking some guys to work in the factory yesterday and today, but on the whole I don't know how long this lockdown will last, and neither do the guards. Some think that it might only last a week, others for two months. It is definitely making them work harder. They are basically acting as glorified stewardesses, bringing us all our meals and coming around after to collect our trash.

A guard just came by and told us that we are going to recreation to watch a training video, are going to the chow hall to pick up our lunches, and are coming back to our units, but will not be locked in our cells, just our dorm. If this is true, it is a great improvement: I can call my wife. The phone lines are going to be crazy.

It's also just in time, as our toilet is clogged and we need to get a plunger—so important after the high fiber breakfast of bran flakes they fed us. My cellmate doubts our phones will be turned on. I doubt whether a plunger will help our toilet. Several weeks ago, there was a plumbing backup in the cells by the phone. That whole hall flooded with sewer water for a day; we had to stand in it (only about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep this time) to make phone calls home. Some guys had to sleep in their cells with it flooded like that, but some were relocated, maybe most. Later it got several inches deep before they fixed it. Seems that an inmate had flushed a plastic bag and clogged a collective line. Inmates were using their trash cans to cook in, so the warden ordered all trash cans removed. So inmates have taken to flushing their trash and now we have plumbing problems.

How's all that news lately, huh? So much coming at us, Democrat revolt, Biden stepping down, the coronation of

Kamala, and let's not forget the Republican convention and the proper reorientation of the party. Wow, so much.

Till next time and thanks for your support,

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