

## "Letter From Loretto"

Greetings from the Federal Correctional Institution at Loretto, Pennsylvania. I arrived here on February 28, 2013 to serve a 30-month sentence for violating the Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982. At least that's what the government wants people to believe. In truth, this is my punishment for blowing the whistle on the CIA's illegal torture program and for telling the public that torture was official U.S. government policy. But that's a different story. The purpose of this letter is to tell you about prison life.

At my formal sentencing hearing in January, the judge, the prosecutors, and my attorneys all agreed that I would serve my sentence in Loretto's Federal Work Camp. When I arrived, however, much to my surprise, the Corrections Officer (CO, or "huck") who processed me said that the <sup>Bureau of Prisons</sup> ~~Justice Department~~ had deemed me a "threat to the public safety," and so I would <sup>serve</sup> ~~do~~ the entire sentence in the actual prison, rather than the camp.

Processing took about an hour and included fingerprinting, a mug shot (my third after FBI and the Marshals), my fourth DNA sample, and a quite comprehensive strip search. I was given a pair of baggy brown pants, two brown shirts, two pairs of underwear, two pairs of socks, and a pair of cheap sandals. My <sup>own</sup> clothes were boxed and mailed to my wife. The CO then led me to a steel bunk in "Central Unit" and walked away. I didn't know what to do, so I took a nap.

My cell is more ~~#~~ like a cubicle made out of concrete block. Built to hold four men, mine holds six. Most others hold eight. My cell-mates include two Dominicans serving 24- and 20-year sentences for drugs, a Mexican serving 15 years for drugs, a Puerto Rican serving <sup>7 1/2 years</sup> ~~7 1/2 years~~ for drug conspiracy, and the former auditor of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, who's doing <sup>a long sentence</sup> ~~7 years~~ for corruption. They're all decent guys and we actually enjoy each other's company.

The prison population is much like you might expect. Loretto has 1,369 prisoners. (I never call myself an "inmate." I'm a prisoner.) About 50% are black, 30% are Hispanic, and 20% are white. Of the white prisoners, most are pedophiles with personal stories that would make you sick to your stomach. The rest of the white <sup>prisoners</sup> are here for drugs, except for a dozen or so who ran Ponzi schemes. Of the 1,369 prisoners, 40 have college degrees and 6 of us have master's degrees. The GED program is robust. (But when I volunteered to teach a class, my "counselor" shouted, "Dammit, Kiriakou! If I wanted you to teach a fucking class, I'd ask you to teach a fucking class!") I'm a janitor in the chapel. I ~~earn~~ make \$5.<sup>25</sup> a month.

The cafeteria, or "chow hall" was the most difficult experience of my first few days. Where should I sit? On my first day, two Asians, completely covered in tattoos, walked up to me and asked, "Are you a pedophile?" Nope, I said. "Are you a fag?" Nope. "Do you have good paper?" I didn't know what this meant. It turned out that I had to get a copy of my formal sentencing documents to prove that I wasn't a child molester. I did that, and was

welcomed by the Aryans, who aren't really Aryans, but more accurately self-important hillbillies.

The cafeteria is very formally divided. There is a table for the whites <sup>with good paper</sup>, a section of a table for the Native Americans, a section of a table for people belonging to a certain Italian-American stereotypical "subculture," two tables for the Muslims, four tables for the pedophiles, and all the remaining tables for the blacks and hispanics. We don't all eat at the same time, but each table is more-or-less reserved as I described.

Violence hasn't been much of a problem since I arrived. There have been maybe a half-dozen fights, almost always over what television show to watch. The choices are pretty much set in stone between ESPN, MTV, VH1, BET, and Univision. I haven't watched TV since I got here. It's just not worth the trouble. Otherwise, violence isn't a problem. Most of the guys in here have worked their way down to a low-security prison from a medium or a maximum, and they don't want to go back.

I've also had some luck in this regard. My reputation preceded me, and a rumor got started that I was a CIA hit man. The Aryans whispered that I was a "Muslim hunter," but the Muslims, on the strength of my Arabic language skills and a well-timed statement of support from Louis Farrakhan have lauded me as a champion of Muslim human rights. Meanwhile, the Italians have taken a liking to me because I'm patriotic,

as they are, and I have a visceral dislike of the FBI, which they do as well. I have good relations with the blacks because I've helped several of them write commutation appeals or letters to judges and I don't charge anything for it. And the Hispanics respect me because my cellmates, who represent a myriad of Latin drug gangs, have told them to. So far, so good.

The only thing close to a problem that I've had has been from the COs. When I first arrived, after about four days, I heard an announcement that I was told to dread: "Kiriakou - report to the lieutenant's office immediately." Very quickly, I gave my wife's phone number to a friend and asked him to call her if, for some reason, I was sent to the <sup>SITU (Special Housing Unit) more commonly known as the</sup> hole, or solitary confinement. I hadn't done anything wrong, but this kind of thing happens all the time.

When I got to the lieutenant's office, I was ushered into the office of SIS, the Special Investigative Service. This is the prison version of every police department's <sup>defective bureau</sup> ~~Investigative~~ ~~Division~~ ~~Office~~. I saw on a desk a copy of my book, *The Reluctant Spy*, as well as DVD copies of all the documentaries I've been in. The CO showed me a picture of an Arab. "Do you know this guy," he asked me. I responded that I had met him a day earlier, but our conversation was limited to "nice to meet you." Well, the CO said, this was the uncle of the Times Square bomber, and after we had met, he called a number in Pakistan, reported the meeting, and was told to kill me. I told the CO

that I could kill the guy with my thumb. He's about 5'4" and 125 pounds compared to my 6'1" and 250 pounds. The CO said they were looking to ship him out, so I should stay away from him. But the more I thought about it, the more this made no sense. Why would the uncle of the Times Square bomber be in a low-security prison? He should be in a maximum. So I asked my Muslim friends to check him out. It turns out that he's an Iraqi Kurd from Buffalo, NY. He was the imam of a mosque there, which also happened to be the mosque where the "Lackawanna 7" worshipped. (The Lackawanna 7 were charged with conspiracy to commit terrorism.) The FBI pressured him to testify against his parishioners. He refused and got five years for obstruction of justice. The ACLU and several religious freedom groups have rallied to his defense. He had nothing to do with terrorism.

In the meantime, SIS told him that I had made a call to Washington after we met, and that I had been instructed to kill him! We both laughed at the hunchandedness by which SIS tried to get us to attack each other. If we had, we would have spent the rest of our sentences in the <sup>SITU</sup> ~~halls~~ - solitary. Instead, we're friendly, we exchange greetings in Arabic and English, and we chat.

The only other problem I've had with the COs was about two weeks after I arrived. I get a great deal of mail here in prison (and I answer every letter I get.) Monday through Friday, prisoners gather in front of the unit CO's office for mail call. One female CO butchers my name every time she says it. So when she does mail call, I

hear "Kirka-kow, Kiriloo, Teriyaki" and a million other variations. One day after mail call I passed her in the hall. She stopped me and said, "Are you the motherfucker whose name I can't pronounce?" I responded, "Ki-ri-AH-koo." She said, "How about if I just call you Fuckface?" I just walked away and a friend I was walking with said, "Classy." I said to him, "White trash is more like it." An hour later, four COs descended on both of our cells, trashing all of our worldly possessions in my first "shake-down." Lesson learned: COs can treat us like subhumans but we have to show them faux respect even when it's not earned.

I'll write about COs more next time. If you'd like to drop me a line, I can be reached at: John Kiriakou 79637-083, P.O. Box 1000, FCI Loretto, Loretto, PA 15940.

Best regards from Loretto,

John