

Entry Five

Right, so I was about to tell you about the 1995 crack riots in the federal prison system,

At that time, people caught with crack cocaine were receiving much higher sentences than people who were caught with the same amount weight wise of powder cocaine. There were changes being made to the sentencing guidelines and everyone thought they were going to reduce the sentencing range for crack cocaine down to where it was for powder cocaine, which would have released a lot of people from federal prison due to sentence reductions. Well, that's not what happened, ... In late 1995 they raised the sentencing guidelines for powder cocaine and it triggered a nationwide riot throughout the entire federal prison system. The riots happened while I was sitting in the hole. (I'm sure if you Google "1995 crack cocaine riots in federal prisons" you will find many articles about what happened at different places).

So, there I was about to eat my lunch when I saw the ninja turtles going over the side of the chow hall. I had never seen anything like this in my life, I was in awe as I sat there watching them begin shooting gas canisters into the chow hall in an attempt to gain control of what was happening in there. The riot started out in the chow hall and quickly spread to most of the living units. At that point they still had pool tables in a few of the living units and I later heard from several people that when the officers ran in to one of the units, someone threw a pool ball and hit a CO square in the forehead and dropped him instantly. Most everyone who saw it, that I later spoke with thought he was dead, but he got pulled out of the unit and survived. I honestly can't remember how long the riot lasted but it was full blown chaos!!! In the hole people were lighting fires on the tiers and passing out the pruno (homemade wine) they had made. Like I said, it was freaking chaos!!!

In situations like that when there are multiple people involved in a serious violent act in prison, they will bring buses and do emergency transfers in order to break the groups up. Once they were done shipping people they did "kick outs" from the hole to make room for the people going in and I was released back to my unit.

Prison is a crazy place!!! Everything can be going along smooth and in the blink of an eye all hell breaks loose. Most of the time you have an idea of when something is about to go down though as you can feel the tension in the air. People are on edge and grouping up more than usual. When this happens you simply stay out of the way and let whoever is having issues handle their business. Oh, and one thing I quickly learned was to keep "lockdown rations" set aside in my cell. I always kept an extra case of top ramen soups, smokes and matches, bottled water, some meats sticks and other stuff set aside. USP Lompoc went on lockdown A LOT!!!!!! The lockdowns may only last a night or a few days, but you want to be prepared for when you're stuck in your cell. Next I'll tell you about something the majority of people in prison do to help pass their time, but it is something that helped me tremendously with keeping my sanity in such an insane place...