

Ask a Lifer

No snitching allowed

We hear about the “convict code” in TV shows and movies. What is it and how does it work?

When I arrived at Oregon State Penitentiary on Feb. 10, 1992, the code of “No Snitching” was Rule One. See no evil, speak no evil... Convicts swore by that code, did



Kevin Young

serious segregation behind that code, got beaten by staff and others for that code. Point blank, that code was a determining factor of one's prison integrity. It used to be a badge of honor and it worked by inmates keeping their mouths shut and not sharing info with staff.

Here, there was, is and always will be, snitches. The ones who run and tell everything they see or hear. The cold thing about it is, they don't receive anything for giving the info.

The code took a hit here when they took tobacco away. When that happened, people started acting like fiends ... some people became cell thieves, others started selling their personal stuff (from black market

or themselves. Also, it became a tool used by staff to find out what people were doing.

Over time, many of the cool cats got exposed for not honoring the code. Yet, to this day, there are a few of us who live by that code and creed.

Last November, I did 60 days in the hole for the code. Do I feel stupid? No, because I can walk this institution with my head held high and not have rumors following me. Nor do I have to worry about staff approaching me about some dumb-dumb stuff.

In here, my word is my bond and my bond is my strength.

What is the hierarchy of a prison?

Here at OSP, one truly doesn't know the hierarchy. The population is so divided, yet intermingled. There are pro-Whites, pro-Blacks, pro-Asians, pro-Latinos and others. Then there is your culture of independents (no gang affiliation).

The hierarchy only works for those who allow another person to pull their strings, who honor someone really not willing to put that work in himself.

So, when there is a conflict, everyone has to separate then align with

the group they represent. However, the next conflict that pops off, you will have yet another alliance.

People here tend to flock to the strongest hand at the time.

Are sex offenders given the lowest status and, if so, how are they treated?

Each state, each prison, has its own unique way of dealing with sex offenders. Also, the sex offenders as individuals have a say in how they are treated.

On this issue, there is much hypocrisy here. One minute, you have someone talking bad about a sex offender, only to find out he is celled up with one or, worse, he is one.

Many lay claim and draw a red line, but if a sex offender has something that's desired, then he is everyone's best friend.

Then you have the tough guys, the ones who need to get their bones or make a name for themselves. So, they will sock an old man (70-80) with a walker

because they heard he was a sex offender. However, that same tough guy is not willing to sock that 25-year-old who has been convicted of molesting kids at a daycare.

My motto is, clean your own backyard before you

tell me about my front.

There are so many sex offenders, different degrees of sex offenders. For example, an 18-year-old college student is convicted for having sex with a 16-year-old high school student. Regardless of the fact that they have been together since middle school. Now that kid is labeled a sex offender.

In here, if he fights and gains his respect, then he will fit in. However, if that kid comes in here and lays down, then he becomes a toy. So, a sex offender status in here depends on how hard he fights for his rights.

Me, I came in here alone. Everyone I met over the years, I met over a can of soup. I don't judge people by their crimes nor their race. I pay attention to a man's integrity, the honor of his words.

Can you share your thoughts about being a black man in prison? Do you believe there are inequities in the criminal justice system?

I don't get caught up in the being black saga. I know who I am, my truth and what I stand for.

All my life, I have been denied things and opportunities, and me being black had nothing to do with it

'cos I was being denied by blacks.

Sure, I have witnessed racism — my brothers, sisters and I were bused to an all-white school during the 1970s, while desegregation was happening in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I was not allowed to compete in some arenas as an athlete because of my race, no matter how good I was. But, I never allowed my lack of participation to hold me back nor stop me from learning.

Those few instances did not warp my train of thought to hate others.

Yes, I have seen the inequities in our justice

system: Black man commits murder, one victim, receives life in prison; white man commits murder, three victims, receives 20 years. Black teen has sex with another teen, gets 25 years; white teen molests 5-year-old, gets 10 years.

So, yes, I have witnessed inequities in our justice system.

— Kevin Young has served nearly 30 years for an aggravated murder conviction. He has agreed to answer questions that readers may have about how the prison culture operates. Questions for Kevin's monthly column can be submitted to Raelynn Ricarte at editor@statesmanexaminer.com.

Thanks For 1 Year!

We are so grateful for all the constant support we have been shown this last year! October 1st is our one year anniversary and we are thankful for all of you who have been with us through it all. You all stood beside us through the COVID closure, your support mean a lot to us and we would like to show some appreciation back!!

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Moldex use at facility explained

Raelynn Ricarte
Statesman-Examiner

Don Dashiell, a former Stevens County commissioner, said use of Moldex as a disinfectant when the COVID-19 crisis hit became controversial after an employee complained about a reaction, but the product is approved by the Environmental Protection Agency for that purpose.

Dashiell was serving when Moldex was applied to door knobs, counters and other often-touched public surfaces, beginning last spring. He said the county investigated its options and chose Moldex based on the EPA listing and availability. "The name is a little misleading because it makes you think it's just for mold, but that's not the case," he said.

He said after the employee who claimed to have been adversely affected called the Bureau of Labor & Industries, the county ended up with a \$3,000 fine — not for using Moldex, but for not having an eye-washing station at the site it was being handled as a concentrate while being diluted with water.

He said handheld eye-wash available to workers were not deemed to be enough protection by L&I.

According to Dashiell, spray bottles containing the diluted Moldex mixture

were provided to all departments to use as necessary.

After the employee complained about the reaction, Dashiell said the county paid to have air quality

checked in the courthouse to make sure there was nothing wrong. He said the testing showed no problems. An eyewash station is now in place as mandated.

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Ask a Lifer

Surviving a 'life without' sentence

Can you share with us how you have psychologically dealt with a sentence of life without parole?

Once the cuffs snapped shut in April of 1991, reality set in. My mind began to play tricks on me. Sure, I had been arrested before for DUI and for minor infractions that were never acted upon, but I always knew that I would be released within 24 hours. This felt different, this was different. After booking, I was escorted to my unit — single cell — and enclosed with nothing but thoughts of coulda, shoulda, woulda. I could only form one clear thought—what's going to happen to my family, my sons?

For the next nine months, I was visited by family and friends, each telling me to be strong, hold on, things will be alright, you'll be home soon. To be honest, I ate it up. There was never

any doubt, I would be set free.

After the gavel sounded, I was the only one stunned by the verdict and "life without mercy" sentence.

Right then and there, my mind was clear, a new understanding was born within me. I knew that I was alone and, to get back to where I belonged, I had to fight. Not physically, but mentally.

I had to go back and visit that kid who felt comfort being alone. The kid who refused to hang with the crowd, yet never missed out on things. To be that kid without trust issues, but

only a few to trust.

I didn't shut down or shut people out. Only their words didn't carry weight anymore. I would listen, take notes and ask questions that I knew the answers to.

When I got to Oregon State Penitentiary, I was reborn, my life had a purpose — freedom. In order for me to achieve that, I knew that my mind had to be clear, I had to remain focused. I couldn't allow distractions to throw me off course.

Many thought, some still do think, that I lost it. That I gave up because I didn't react to any situation the way they thought I should.

However, for 20 years, I never forgot a birthday or holiday.

From day one, I vowed to live my life one day at a

time. To love and care for others one day at a time. To accept others' love for me one day at a time.

If, one day, someone said, "I can't do this anymore," I would understand and be thankful for the love and support that was bestowed upon me in those days gone.

I never go to bed mad or upset; whatever is bothering me, I work it out, find a solution or handle it.

I don't place undo stress on myself; if there is something out of my control, why bother thinking about it? There is nothing I can do.

I don't place myself in another's shoes or business; let his issues stay his because baggage tends to take root and I don't need any of that.

I don't outsource my is-

issues. I had a real friend, someone who was willing to listen without passing judgment, one who gave sound advice and helped others. As my friend got older, I would help him clean his cell, go to chow and exercise. A real friend is rare in a place like this.

Over the years, many lessons had to be learned and mistakes were made. I own it all. I am responsible for

my actions and that is my reality.

— Kevin Duane Young, 56, is one of 53,000 prisoners across the United States serving life without parole sentences, an all-time high of people being offered no possibility of release or redemption. Young has agreed to answer questions people may have about the American prison system and different aspects of life behind the wall in a monthly column. Questions can be submitted to Raelynn Ricarte at editor@statesmanexaminer.com.



Kevin Young

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on Page A 9



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Ask a Lifer

Prison yard is what you make it

We hear how dangerous the yard is in TV shows and movies, is that true, and why?

THE YARD! The only danger on the yard is what an individual makes it to be. There are many who walk the yard without a care in the world because they do their own number and stay out of another's business or way.

Then you have those who can't keep their mouths shut, the ones who want to be in the know about everything and in everyone's face. Those who need to be involved in every aspect of someone else's life.

They are the ones who make the yard dangerous, because they tend to make things up just to get some BS started. Those individuals will be the first ones to fade into the background when things pop off...

Each day, there is

something going on, to be honest. I don't even try to keep up with what others are doing because their business is none of mine. If an issue arises, then it shall be dealt with as soon as possible and not allowed to fester.

All in all, the yard is what one makes it, if you hang with a crowd and something happens, then you are associated with that incident and whatever happens, happens...

How many prisoners have no support from the outside, and how do they live?

This question touches on the humanity of others. Over the years, society has created the "Have and Have-nots." We have em-



Kevin Young

braced the theory of, "Out of sight, out of mind."

Yes, lots of people in here have some kind of support system; however, many more don't. Sure, there may be blame for that, but that's not for me to speak on.

I can share my story. I have many friends who support me and show me love in my quest to better myself, to remain humble and caring. To embrace change.

It's nice to receive mail from an old friend or from someone who allowed a skinny kid to sleep over when it was raining too hard to get home.

Me, I never burn a bridge. I may not hear from someone for years, then a letter shows up. Or I may send out a birthday card or anniversary card, letting others know that I haven't forgotten them.

There are avenues for

us to reach out to others; to try and meet a friend. There are inmate pen pal sites just for that. Over the years, I have joined a few.

I must say, not everyone is looking for love. Many join simply seeking a friend — someone they can talk to and share a laugh.

Some join for legal help, because one never knows who they might meet. The majority of prisoners come from impoverished backgrounds so they could not hire that good lawyer to help them prove their innocence or negotiate a lighter sentence.

I encourage others to reach beyond these walls to seek someone to communicate with. Support comes in many fashions and has multiple faces. It's more than money. Trust me, a kind word lasts longer than a few dollars. A simple smile is worth 20 hugs.

But most importantly, many will one day be set free without knowing how to hold a meaningful conversation; not being able to look another in the eyes while talking. They will simply walk out of here speaking this prison lingo — and you will look at them like they are crazy.

They may emerge bitter and angry because no one cared about them, which is going to make it more difficult for them to change their ways.

As far as how indigent prisoners live — they are supplied with soap, shower shoes and baking soda to be used as toothpaste and/or deodorant. Once a month they can request five envelopes.

There are people genuinely concerned about another's well being in here. Imagine eating a meal and a person sits down at

your table with body odor or foul breath. Many of us are more than willing to help someone in need, but that is frowned upon by the higher ups. They don't want someone opening themselves up for trouble, or worse. I get it, but if the goal is to prepare prisoners to re-enter society as better people, then why not start with compassion for others? If a person is hungry or thirsty, why not share?

Everyone inside and out needs some kind of support.

— Kevin Young has served nearly 30 years for an aggravated murder conviction. He is one of 53,000 prisoners in the U.S. who are serving life without the possibility of parole sentences. He has agreed to answer questions that readers may have about how the prison culture operates. Questions for Kevin's monthly column can be submitted to Raelynn Ricarte at editor@statesmanexaminer.com.

Local deputies, residents help Spokane during riot

RaeLynn Ricarte
Statesman-Examiner

John Valle and other Stevens County members of the American Patriot the III% were asked Sunday night to protect several Spokane businesses from rioters and looters.

The protest over the death of George Floyd, 46, a black man who died at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis last week, was peaceful during the day, but things changed at night, said Valle.

He said when rioting began, the Spokane Police Department, assisted by the Stevens County Sheriff's Office and other area law enforcement agencies, kept the situation largely under control.

"They just did an awesome job, and they thanked us for coming out to help," he said.

Valle is president of the group that he says is an advocate for conservative values, but which has been labeled a militia promoting racism by media outlets.

That happened again in news reports from Sunday's scene, he said. Reporters referred to people guarding businesses as white supremacists or neo-Nazis.

"I am Hispanic and most of our members are Native American so that was pretty hilarious," he said. "We are pro-law enforcement and pro-constitution, which seems like something people should support."

There were three teams from the local chapter of AP III% who helped out at riots last weekend, said Valle.

His team went to

Spokane from 7 p.m. until midnight and the other two traveled to Tacoma at the request of business owners.

"We met up with other groups that were doing the exact same thing — protecting their city," he said. "America is about 'We the People' coming together for each other in moments like this."

When violence broke out in Spokane, Valle said his guys helped carry a wounded young black woman to a cab, took an elderly white man to the hospital and rendered aid to a couple of young women.

"We formed a wall around some bystanders to protect them from the rubber bullets the police were shooting at the rioters," said Valle.

Unlike Minneapolis — St Paul and more than 100 other cities, police kept rioters in Spokane from setting fire to buildings, he said.

The Nike store was broken into and people ran out with stolen items, but that was an isolated incident, he said.

"Everybody we talked to [protesters] were from other places — California, Oregon and Idaho. We heard that people were bused in but I don't know if that's true," he said. "It should be pretty easy for police to check, though, as they were probably staying at motels in the area."

Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward and Police Chief Craig Meidl held a news conference shortly after 9 p.m. on May 31 to announce a downtown curfew until 5 a.m. on Monday.

They praised the peaceful

protesters who had gathered earlier in the afternoon to express outrage at the death of Floyd. He was handcuffed on May 25 and forced to lay face down on pavement after being accused of using a counterfeit \$20 bill at a market.

Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, was videotaped with his knee on the right side of Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds; two minutes and 53 seconds of that time, Floyd was unresponsive, according to the criminal complaint against Chauvin.

He has been charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter.

Officers Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas K. Lane were at the death scene and could also face criminal charges.

The officers claimed that Floyd physically resisted arrest, although their claim was not backed up security camera footage from a nearby business.

At Sunday's press conference, Woodward credited local NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) president Kurtis Robinson for helping deescalate the situation, and law enforcement for their restraint.

At one point, police knelt in solidarity with protesters.

However, that night a group of about 500 began rioting and breaking windows downtown, which led to the curfew.

Valle said Spokane officials did a good job of handling the situation so that people could be heard, but not destructive.



Photo courtesy of John Valle

The American Patriot the III% of Stevens County are shown in Spokane on Sunday night, where they helped protect businesses and aided law enforcement in stopping rioting and looting.



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