

# A Day in the Life



by Armando Simón

[The following is a letter from a January 6 political prisoner which was published in a shortened version in [American Mind](#) due to space constraints. Here is the full version.

I have recently been corresponding with several with varying degrees of success since a lot of their mail gets returned, particularly envelopes containing newspaper and magazine clippings as well as Xeroxed articles. This, incidentally, is highly illegal in so far as there is solid, extensive legal precedent that inmates in both state and federal prisons may receive mail. Unlike some of the Jan 6 prisoners like Ryan [Samsel](#), it appears that he has not been subjected to brutality by the staff as some others have and he acknowledges that he has it better than many others.

The narration of a day in his life was spontaneous, apparently

sparked by Solzhenitsyn's book, and well written. I did not request it, but I was impressed by how thorough he documented it, and, contrary to his apologizing, the spelling/grammatical errors were minimal. With his subsequent permission, I decided to submit it for publication, partly in order that men like him are not forgotten.

I know that there are some libertarians and conservatives that feel antagonistic towards the actions of January 6, when the participants were angry that the election had been fraudulent and feel that the only proper response should have been headshaking of disapproval. Democrats have a history of voter fraud, well documented, going all the way back to Tammany. Democrats, of course, have hysterically portrayed January 6 as the Apocalypse, with at least one [journalist](#) comparing it, in all seriousness, to the genocide in Rwanda. I, on the other hand, consider it to have [been](#) America's Bastille [Day](#).

One last point that may come as a surprise to the reader regarding prison. All prisons and jails have extensive recreational venues and activities for the inmates. They are necessary. This is not for the inmates' benefit but for the safety and smooth functioning of the institutions. They serve as an outlet to tension and excess energy. If such "amenities" were not available, prisons and jails would be constantly in chaos, on the verge of destruction, and the staff would be routinely in danger.]

Armando,

Thanks for the letter and words of support. They mean so [much] for us here. The media tries to make us all feel like we are all alone, those of us on the conservative side of things, like we are the only ones who feel the way we do. I will be on the lookout for the writings and other materials that you are sending, so thank you in advance. I have thought

of writing about my experience, and I may still yet. I have many people ask and encourage me to do so, but Jan 6<sup>th</sup> is not my favorite thing to dwell on. Maybe some time I will. I am actually interested in writing fiction and have a few books here on the topic that I am studying.

As for commissary, every little bit helps. My registration number 26622-509 and that I am a federal prisoner is all that is needed to know to send money through Western Union, whether in person or through the cellphone app of website—so I'm told. There is also an address to the "Federal Lockbox" or some similar name where postal money orders are sent. The address is in Iowa, but I don't know it. I do know that it is listed on the Bureau of Prison's website. There is no deposit slip that I am aware of for me to send out, unfortunately. Thank you in advance for any support that you are able to muster.

You mentioned that you live in the San Antonio area. I was stationed at Lackland AFB 2001-2004. I really liked the post and city. I was in the Air force's Security forces, Basically their military police/infantry. My wife and I lived off of Culebra at first and once I was promoted moved up to Bandera road between Leon Valley and Helotes. When I got out of the military I worked for USAA in security. My wife and I left San Antonio after I received a great job offer from Neiman Marcus in Dallas. San Antonio still has a special place in my heart, my wife and I were married there, I have so many great memories.

There is a Russian author whose name I have a hard time saying and [his name] would be hopeless in an attempt to spell. He wrote a book called "A Day in the Life" (of prisoner). I was reading that book when I was told to report to this prison and so I did not get to finish it. It is a book written about the day in the life of a USSR prisoner. I really was enjoying the book and I will finish reading it one day when I get the chance. I have a much better plight than the protagonist in

that book, but I will include here in this letter my day as it was lived today as it might amuse or interest you.

This morning the guards unlocked the doors to our cells at about 6:20am—20 minutes later than the usual time. My cellmate was already dressed and anxiously waiting for the usual 6:15 am loudspeaker announcement calling inmates to the medical building for their morning pills and insulin. The unlocking was not our release from our cells, but a doctor and nurse with his strong pain pills. We watched as he crushed his pills with some apparatus made for the purpose. They made him mix it with water and watched him drink it. They do this of course to insure that no one conceals pills in their cheeks to then sell to other inmates.

Normally, we are released from our cells at about 6:00am free to wander around our housing unit, which is similar to a Spartan college dorm. Our cell resembles one of the dorms from this imaginary college. With cinderblock walls, cement floors, two chest high lockers, a sink, toilet, and mirror. All the plumbing fixtures are just like you would find at home, porcelain. The room is about  $6 \frac{1}{2}$  x 10, with a 9 x 1 window looking outside, and a steel door with its own narrow window. These cell doors are only locked at count, 3:45pm-4:30pm and at night 9:45-6:00am, or when there is some kind of irregularity or threat, as there seems to be now. The doctor and nurse locked us back in along with my cellmate's bulging hernia, for which he is getting codeine, with more hunger for it every day. If the hernia he is carrying gets any larger we are going to have to name it and start it a college fund.

Being locked in also means no coffee. There is a tank of 180<sup>0</sup> water in the common area we can mix with instant coffee sold in the commissary. I made a futile request to the nurse to let me run over to get some. As the time went on we missed the usual call for breakfast at 7:00am, and the call for work at the factory 7:15am.

I live in the factory dorm. I used to work in the factory making the vinyl decals that go on the sides of federal law enforcement vehicles, mostly Border Patrol. I was getting paid 46 cents per hour. My cell mate is a janitor there. He is here for fraud; he used to run and own a manufactured housing factory in El Paso. They are not using his skills wisely. I and the other J6 prisoners working there were fired because of our cases, they did not want us to have what the prison considers a "privileged" job.

I was "hired" the next day by the education department to teach a class on social skills. It is a nonpaying position, but the best thing about it is that now I only work 1 ½ hours a week instead of 40. I am able to read/write so much more. The factory guards persuaded the Bureau of Prisons to hire the J6 prisoners back because we are such good workers, but I told them that I had already given my word to education.

The 7:15am factory work call is usually greatly anticipated by the 236 men in this dorm. They stand pacing and crowding around the doorway almost desperate to get to work retrofitting new cars with lights, cages, and sirens for federal law enforcement. I'm sure they were all pacing their two men cells like tigers in their crates at the zoo when the 7:15 am work call came and left with no one released.

Out the window my cellmate, who is 56 is practically wringing his hands with frustration for having not been called to work, and I can see guards too to be searching for something. They look in the trees, bushes, and through the grass and landscaping. A guard comes with a tall ladder towards our building. "Drone drop" says my cellmate. The cartels or prison gangs have been flying large drones over the prison's fences at night and dropping large boxes laden with cellphones and tobacco. A cellphone in here can sell for as much as \$1,500 and one cigarette for \$15. The rumor was that they had attempted to drop three such boxes overnight we later found out.

As we watched the guards searching, we realized that we were going to be locked in our cells for a while. I took my heartburn medicine and began reading. I am halfway through the Diary of Ann Frank. The codeine helped my cellmate back to sleep, especially without coffee.

At 10:30am the prison officials felt like they had found all the previous night's drone drops, one on the roof of a neighboring dorm even. I went to the phone in one of the common areas, the one with computers for email by the guard station and I called my wife. She comes to see me with our 9-month-old daughter. She drops our other children off at school by 8:00am, so I was concerned that she might have already arrived for our visit and been turned away. She was still in route. She was delayed, she said, because the cows had gotten out again and she had to get them back in. I can see her out in the pasture with a baby on one hip and a switch in the other hand chasing heifers back where they belong. What a woman.

They called us for breakfast at 10:45 am, it is always grab-and-go, and always consists of a sack of bran flakes, two half pints of milk and an apple. But on Mondays and Fridays a set of pop tarts are included. I've never seen so many middle-aged men so giddy about something so trivial. Actually, I've never seen so many middle-aged men. At 42, I'm younger than half or more of the men in the factory dorm. After getting our "chow" we have to return to our dorms. In this prison we are only allowed to move between buildings or the recreation yard and facilities or factory at set times and are only given five minutes to get there, which is usually enough.

A rumor starts spreading that there will now not be any work today and that lunch has been moved back to 1:00 pm. This doesn't affect me; I have a visit. I'm blessed to have my wife come and see me weekly. Out of the 1,000 prisoners here only about 10% get very regular visits. Visits trump everything here. They will pull you out of a work detail if you have a

visitor show up. Visits are only on weekends. You are frisked by a guard on the way into the visit and about 11:30. I am let into the visitor room to see my wife and baby daughter. My wife and I hug and kiss, which makes my daughter giggle. She never sees anyone kissing her mommy, so it is funny. She starts anew everything her mother and I kiss. The prison allows you to hug and kiss your spouse briefly when they arrive and leave. During the visit you sit in a room in plastic chairs put in rows along with all the other prisoners and their families. As Jan 6 prisoners we are singled out and are only allowed to sit in certain places in the room, directly under one of the cameras. Murderers and child rapists can sit wherever they want even

At 9 months my daughter remembers me week to week and I consider myself blessed to be able to have a bond with her maintained. Even though her mother must sit in a chair opposite me during our full visit, I am allowed to hold my daughter and play with her. My wife told her to "give daddy a kiss." My baby daughter leans back and looks at me for a second, and then puts both of her hands on my cheeks and give me one of those slobbery baby kisses, it's the best part of my week. At 3:00 pm the guard announces that visitation is now over. My wife is always a little teary eyed as we give goodbye hugs and kisses. After they leave all the remaining prisoners stack the chairs and we wait to be searched. One by one we go into a room where a guard has us strip down to our birthday suits and open our mouths and lift out tongues, turn around, squat and cough. We are made to do this after every visit.

At 3:00 pm all work on the compound stops and all the inmates are to return to their housing units to prepare for count. I missed lunch like I do every Monday since I'm in a visit, but I console myself with a mug of coffee. Guys are sitting around in the common areas and watching one of the many TVs streaming different cable channels. You have to have an FM radio with headphones to hear the TV, as they are muted, and their sound

is broadcasted over unused radio frequencies.

3:45 we are locked in our rooms for our daily count of heads prison inside. Guards, always a pair, reach our door's window by 4:08. We must be standing with our light on, they want to make sure we are not high on drugs, or at least not so high that we can't stand up.

We are released from our cells at 4:45. I go to the computers and check my email and commissary account balance. The computers can only do that, nothing else. There is one computer station that has what passes for a digital "law library." The only one for 236 men. I have an email from my mother and my wife. The emails are from four days ago. Jan 6 inmates must wait usually 3-4 days before getting their emails drug traffickers, child pornographers, they all get their emails delivered in four hours or less. These inmates are seen as less of a threat than Jan 6 inmates—a less threat to what is the question, I guess. I talk to some other prisoners I know, one a lobbyist [?] is going to translate my social skills class into Spanish for me as I teach, and we talk about plants.

5:30PM dinner. Tonight, it is chili. We are doing it to-go again, which is fine by me. I hate eating in the chow hall. We are given foam to-go containers, and as I'm one of the 30 of 1,000 served [at] this time they give me 4 times the usual serving. Now, what they call chili is mostly beans and rice, but today there is a good amount of beef and canned tomatoes in there, but very little seasoning, if any. It is way more than I can eat or want to, so when I get back to my unit I go to a few different cells of guys who I know always want more food and spoon my excess into their plates. I add some hot sauce from the commissary that I keep in my locker of mine.

At just before 6:00pm the move permitting prisoners to go to the recreation yard is called and I go. Here you can see guys from other housing units, and I say hi to several friends I



have made including a young J6 prisoner. As I was leaving my housing unit I walked by the guards station as I went out the door. A guard had called me into the office—mail. I received your letter and Saturday and Monday's copies of the *Wall Street Journal*. I did not wish to walk all the way back to my cell so I just took them with me to the rec yard. Now I did not wish to carry them, so I went into the gym to the art studio located inside where I now have a locker. They gym has a full-size basketball court, treadmills and stationary bikes, a pool hall. I have to walk through the crowded pool hall to reach the art studio.

Half the space is taken up by leather craftsmen and the other half by painters. I'm a painter as is another Jan 6 prisoner that I find working on almost finished painting of a longhorn. He has done amazing work. He and I talk about his painting and then decide to go outside and walk the  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile track. We talk about our families, rumors going around about the First Step Act, stuff going on in the prison. After a mile they announce a move is open for people to go back to their housing units or to come to the rec yard.

It's 7:00. My friend goes inside to his cell, and I go back to the art studio.

At 7:05 they announce the track and pickle ball courts are closed. It's too dark now for the guards to see the drones. I work on my painting of a polar bear that I am doing for my 13-year-old son. We can mail our artworks home—at our expense. Any art supplies come out of our commissary money and guards place our orders for us with outside companies. The government gives itself a 30% commission on anything we buy.

At 7:45 we must come back to our housing unit and recreation is closed for the day. I go straight to the phones and call my wife. There is a short line. 7 phones for 236 guys. Phone calls are 15 minutes, and you get 500 minutes a month. Calls are free for now. I talk to my wife, my baby, and my six-year-

old son. They are about to sit down to eat.

After the phone call I go see a young friend of mine, 26, who is really very smart. Since his arrest, he has turned his life around and really seeked the Lord. He and I debate Calvinism vs Arminianism, talk about prison news, tell some stories from our lives, back to Calvinism, the deaths of different Apostles, and out come the Concordance to look up a verse that we ended up finding in the Sermon of the Mount in Matthew. He has a minor seminary's worth of books in his cell. He lends them out to guys all throughout our housing unit, and he keeps a little ledger of who has what.

At 9:38 a guard is coming, and I can hear his keys jingling, it means that we are being locked in our cells for the night. My young friend's cellmate, a very large white guy that is a lieutenant or something in a Latin gang serving a RICO case, cuts short his speech he was giving on prison etiquette, and I run back to my room, so I won't get locked out. My cellmate was sitting in his chair quietly reading and I began this letter, only interrupted once by guards in their pair counting heads and checking for sobriety. My cellmate is now asleep, and I am finishing this letter by booklight, and it is tomorrow.

Well, that is a day in the life of a J6 prisoner, I will do it all again tomorrow, well all but the best parts. I hope you were at least a little amused, ha-ha.

Thanks for your support and for remembering us.

Christopher

PS Sorry for the spelling errors. I miss spellcheck more than beer at this point.