

# A survival guide to prison

by a guy who was recently released

<http://prisonism.wordpress.com/the-article/>

*Please Note: this guide is one person's experience of being sent to prison, it is not general guidance written by LDMG. Be aware that each prison has slightly different regulations, and in particular women's prisons may differ from the description and advice given here.*

## INTRODUCTION

This isn't a dramatised memoir about my experience in prison, nor is it a rant against the expensive, ineffective, pointless and unconstructive injustice that prison is (it is... but that's another story); it's simply a factual, practical and up to date account designed to help anyone who finds themselves facing incarceration.

Anyway, in calling this a 'survival guide' I guess I've already wrong footed you: peoples vicarious view of prison is that you'll arrive, get robbed, get banged up with a psychopath and then get raped in the shower. In reality it's nothing like this... I ended up on the high-risk wing of one of England's most notorious jails and I had no problems whatsoever.

With a few bits of information, your own bed sheets and a radio it becomes even easier, so please share this with anyone you know who's on bail or inside, repost it, plagiarise it, whatever, if it helps anyone that's all that matters. If I've missed anything or you have any corrections or would like to add your own version of your experiences in prison please send me a letter or contact me through the blog.

Just a note... this isn't all encompassing... I've never sat a parole hearing or had to serve a life sentence. This article will help anyone facing prison but is probably better suited to those serving a 'shit and a shave' (that's a shorter sentence, a couple years or less, by the way).

And also I'd just like to say that subreptives I've included in here are already well known to the authorities: they know how you make hooch, they know that people charge their phones with a playstation and they know you can build secret compartments in cupboards. I haven't included anything that is unknown. There are an ever dwindling number of things they don't know and I have obviously left them out.

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

As soon as you've been remanded or found guilty you'll be bundled down in to the holding cells, so make sure you go with your bags packed if there's a chance you'll be remanded or found guilty. Every court always discharges to the same jail so if you're not sure about where you'll end up you could just phone the court before hand and ask them. Oh yeh and make sure you've cancelled your standing orders or you'll come out with a maxed out overdraft.

Provided you're not given an indeterminate or life sentence you only serve the first half of your sentence inside. The last third of this half though you may be eligible for tag (HDC). The second half of your sentence you'll spend on licence (see the Returning To The Real World section for more on licence). To be honest there are so many exceptions to this I'm not going to write them all down, I just want you to know that if the judge gives you two years, for example, it doesn't actually mean two years behind bars.

Next you'll be carted off in the Serco van, rattling down the road in a tiny cubicle with things like AGRESIVE DAN OV BRUM scratched into the paintwork, on your way to whatever jail, ready to give her majesty pleasure (sounds pretty unappealing doesn't it?). They'll stop you in the security lock gates, some guy shining a torch into your little compartment, counting you only as a number. Welcome to prison!

You'll get herded to a processing area, into a box full of twitching bitties going cold turkey and nutjobs asking you what you're in for; it kind of feels like you're waiting for the next departure to hell. Some baked bean screw will then call you by your surname, you'll be processed, photographed, given a number that you keep for life, told what you can and can't have, stripped naked, given some scratchy clothes and moved on to the 'first night wing'. By this point you will have already been asked for a 'burn' (that's prisonish for cigarette) about 50 times. People will probably be looking you up and down trying to assess you. Don't be worried, don't be pumped up, don't be wet, you'll be ok... it gets easier and easier from this point in.

Over the next week or two you'll do 'induction'. They'll explain to you how to go about 'kit change', library, meal slips and all the rest.

At some point you'll be further assessed and they'll ask you all the usual; are you suicidal, do you have violent antecedents, do you take drugs, etc etc. Whatever you do don't even admit to having smoked weed in the past, they'll treat you as a 'user' and put you on weekly 'mandatory drug testing' for the rest of your sentence. Remember that in the first week you'll be entitled to a 'reception visit' which requires no V.O. (visiting order). Whoever it is can just phone up and book a visit to come and see you; they'll just need your birthdate and full name. You'll also get £2 phone credit to start you off, and a pin number to use the phone: make sure you don't lose this and keep it to yourself.

The system will come as a shock to your own... you'll be astounded at how inefficient prisons are, how much stuff gets thrown over the fence and how preventable it is, how little support is given to illiterate people and drug users when this would quite obviously reduce their likelihood of reoffending, how many people are serving such small sentences for crimes against people and how others are serving huge ones for crimes against capital, how many reformed offenders are rotting away on indeterminate sentences 5 years past their release date, and how bitties smoke teabags wrapped in bible pages when they've run out of cigarettes.

If you're feeling hard done by I'd recommend reading Papillion by Henri Charriere. It's a really fucked up autobiographical story about going to prison in a French penal colony, getting parasites, getting shot, years in solitary confinement in a cell that fills up to your neck with water for 5 hours a day etc etc. Trust me, it'll make you feel like you have nothing to worry about!

## **CODES OF CONDUCT**

Prison is jam-packed with stupid, aggressive and pugnacious people. And then there are the inmates; most of them are harmless. Still, I'd recommend you to keep yourself to yourself until you've assessed who you can be yourself with. Don't dress flash, don't bullshit, keep it low key, don't approach people, don't be too safe to them. It's not nice but it's a survival technique: there's a lot of people in prison who will happily take the piss out of you at first opportunity but if you stay off the radar then you'll always be alright. Then again there's a lot of people in for crimes like fraud and drugs who aren't nut jobs - the thing is, like you, they'll be keeping themselves to themselves so you may never talk to them even though they live just down the landing from you. One of the easiest ways to track down sound people is by finding the newspaper guy on the wing and asking who orders a semi-decent paper, from this you can get their surname and cell number. Go and say hello, ask for their second hand newspapers... this is a good technique to meet someone and have a decent conversation. After all, this is what you'll miss the most; real interaction, so finding someone you can have a half decent conversation with is paramount.

Generally speaking though, play your cards close to your chest. The less people know, the better; there are a lot of weirdoes. Don't share your details and don't trust anyone until you've known them for a while. A lot of people bullshit in jail; I remember this one guy asking me for a cigarette out at exercise one day, I was thinking to myself hang on, yesterday you were telling me how you were the biggest coke baron in Kent and you've got a gullwing Lamborghini!

That leads me nicely on to cigarettes; as there is no money behind bars, prison is basically run on an economy of tobacco, and sometimes tins of tuna. A haircut will set you back 2 tins of tuna, getting a kitchen guy to get you some black pepper or having your cell repainted by the wing painter or a spliff of hash will set you back a half ounce of burn, one of those horrible match stick jewellery box things might set you back two ounces, and so on. Even if you don't smoke it's worth having some tobacco stashed away so you can buy something if you need it. A good piece of advice would be to give up smoking cigarettes before you go in. If you do smoke though, keep it to yourself. As soon as you donate one cigarette the whole wing will be swarm your door begging and asking why they can't have one too.

I never had one thing stolen but I was slightly cautious until I knew people on the wing. Put your stuff away at 'sosh' (that's what everyone calls association time), even if people don't try to steal it they'll do your head in asking if they can have some 24/7. Once you know your next door neighbours they'll look out for your cell, but don't get too complacent. The main time for cell-dipping is when a fight kicks off – everyone will run to one end

of the wing to watch, and you'll see a few wiley junkies taking their opportunity dipping in and out of peoples cells.

## **VIOLENCE**

Considering the media hype and most peoples vicarious view of prison, violence is relatively rare. I mean, I did see some crazy fights, including one in a London B-cat between literally 30 people, people getting stamped out whilst their unconscious, and you do see some nasty shit like cells or a hallway with 'claret' splattered on every wall. But in general, adhere to the following simple rules and prison is probably safer than your average provincial high street on a Friday night. Don't be wet, but at the same time don't walk around like you've got a nuclear warhead up you rectum. Never ever grass anyone up. Don't steal from people. Don't start taking smack and don't start ticking anything.

## **SHARING A CELL**

To state the obvious, who you share a cell with, especially when you're banged up 23 hours a day, will have a massive impact on your existence. I shared with psychopathic Russians who didn't speak a word of English, a grumpy old bank robber who just farted and smoked fags on the bunk below all day, and for one night only a crackhead going cold turkey, shitting and puking all night in the toilet situated just at the end of the bed.

A couple months in though I got made high risk, meaning that I was deemed too risky to share a cell with anyone. This was total bullshit, a screw told a big fat lie about me, but in the end I was actually very grateful. It's quite easy to stage a fight if you have nothing to lose and want to be made high risk and therefore have a single cell (another way of getting a single cell is to say you're a bed-wetter when you're first assessed!), but if not it's a good idea to share with someone you get along with. Don't do it by application, it'll just get lost in the Bermuda triangle of prison paperwork, just get your stuff all bagged up, get the other guy to move (a cigarette will probably persuade him) and just go... then go and tell the screws you already done it.

This is quite often how it works in prison, if you go through the correct channels i.e. endless applications and detailed explanations it doesn't get you anywhere. Just do it, be confident, use initiative.

## **GETTING STUFF DONE (COMPLAINTS & APPLICATIONS)**

If you want to get something done in prison you need to go through the correct channels. I'm not going to list off every scenario and what you should do, it will become apparent, but there are a few things you should know.

Wing 'reps' go off to wherever they represent every day. So if you want to apply for education or go to mosque or whatever it may be you're probably better off asking them than going through forms for reasons I'll get on to. As far as forms you'll have general apps, wing requests, comp1 forms and a whole bunch of others like job applications and property hand out applications. It's a good idea to keep a few of each in your cell for quick access.

In my experience a lot of apps are totally useless if its something important - half the staff just throw them away. This is what we call the Bermuda Triangle of prison paper work - anything vaguely important tends to get 'lost'. If you need a response then use a 'comp1' form as they HAVE to log this and give you a response.

Take this for example; two months before my release my Granddad died... rather than process the paperwork required to let me out on an escorted visit to attend the funeral, they 'lost' my paperwork. On that note if someone you're close to dies while you're inside contact Cruse bereavement (find their address in the Useful Contacts section) if you need help and support. So I'd recommend you photocopy everything that's important, keep the original and send them the photocopy. This way they know that you've photocopied it and you've got the original to refer to if you need it.

The prisons complaints system is designed to be impenetrable. They know they can take the piss in the knowledge that the large majority of inmates are either dyslexic, illiterate or not going to bother to complain. Therefore, as a literate person with all the time in the world, it's imperative that you let them know they can't walk all over you and anyone else who might find themselves in a similar situation in the future.

Write a comp1 form. When they give you a useless response (that's just a formality) write a comp1a appeal form. When they give you another unsatisfactory response write to the IMB (Independent Monitoring Board).

When that still bares no fruit write to the PPO (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman... I've included the address in the useful contacts section). Get a solicitor involved. Write to your MP. Write to the Home Office. Do whatever you can.

It will probably take three months or longer to actually get a result but it's absolutely necessary, and when the governor is getting formally disciplined it makes it all worthwhile!

## **EDUCATION**

Once you're on the wing make sure you get involved with education courses. The education department is a solace full of (relatively more) sensible people. Fill out the usual 'activities application forms', but its probably more effective to find the education rep on your wing... as I've already mentioned going through prison application forms can take forever. The education department, via the Prison Reform Trust, will provide you with funding to do whatever course you want providing as though you've got six months left to serve. If you know you are going to prison it would be a good idea to research the Open University website for what courses you want to do before you go in.

## **MANDATORY DRUG TESTING**

MDTs are a fucking joke. Not only did their introduction in the early 90s encourage the use of heroin (heroin clears out of your system in 24 hours, ganja takes up to 30 days) but they are also easily scivable; when everyone finds out the MDT unit are on the wing it's comedy the way everyone skidaddles back to their cell in a very obvious fashion to drink 2 litres of water, then passes with flying colours despite the fact you seen them smoking brown on the landing only last night. MDTs catch you smoking skunk, and that's about it. If you test positive on an MDT you'll have an adjudication; I'll get to those later on. By the way you should avoid taking any drugs that you haven't been prescribed; a friend of mine took cocodamol for his toothache, had an MDT a couple days later, tested positive for opiates and ended up getting put on Basic and various compulsory drug treatment courses.

## **HAVING A PARTNER**

Having a relationship is by far and away the hardest part about being in prison and to be honest if it isn't rock solid it won't survive the emotional tumbledryer. Give it some deep consideration whether you want to put your partner and yourself through this. I was lucky enough to have the support of my partner throughout my sentence. The following is written by her...

"This is written from a girlfriend's perspective and is aimed more at the people visiting inmates on a regular basis, which is invariably women.

Visiting someone you care about and love in prison is hard, in many ways you serve a sentence as well. The parameters of your relationship are completely transformed and the ways in which you can communicate and support one another are hugely constrained. Supporting a friend or family member inside is massively important for them, the reality of the prison system is pretty fucked up and prisoners definitely need to have a line to the outside world to help them through and use their time in more constructive ways than dying of boredom or getting hooked on skag.

This doesn't just involve physically visiting someone; I'd say the most valuable form of communication is actually letters. You can write them and read them in your own time, without someone watching over you, cutting you off, or asking you to sit further apart; and it's just way easier to say stuff. Loads of people say 'oh I don't know what to write', but you can write about anything, it's all good. What you did that day, what plans you have, about what you're reading or what you're friends are doing, just everyday stuff. You'll inevitably miss a load of conversations you normally just have with each other so try and put them into a letter, moan about whatever stuff at work to them, speculate about whoever's relationship, or run any ideas past them. Phone calls and visiting times offer much less space for this sort of conversation, they are often much more formulaic or forced. You can also photocopy articles from magazines (they often don't let you send the actual magazines) and send these in, send photos, or when you're somewhere where a load of their mates are, pass round a bit of paper and get everyone to write a quick message on it, it's just nice for them to know no ones forgotten about them.

Mostly it seemed like in the visiting room everyone just pretended their hardest like everything is O.K., which wears thin after a while, especially when a lot of the women visiting are clearly trying to support families on the

outside. I'm not going to lie, visiting is pretty grim. Each prison has a different system, you can read a bit online, but it's more about just leaving plenty of time and asking the other visitors when you get there. Some prisons you need about twenty different bits of ID, and they just anally refuse you entry even if you're about 90 and have your passport but forgot your water bill. You'll get herded through different gates, it smells dingy, sometimes there are dogs, and at scrubs there was an ominous load of posters saying '134 VISITORS ARRESTED THIS YEAR' and each time the number got scrubbed out and had gone up by a couple digits. The screws are all turdy caricatures of themselves, and fully enjoy telling you that every single item you brought to try and hand in is not allowed. You actually just have to make a joke of it to survive it – so it's always going to be easier if you go with a friend. In a lot of visits you actually get quite a long time, like two hours sometimes, and I quite liked the thing of choosing to leave before the screws start yelling and prodding at you to move. The whole thing is about power and control, right down to how you are allowed to sit together or put your jacket on the chair, so wherever you can take it back makes it feel a little bit more normal.

When their sentence is nearly over it can get pretty daunting, especially if you are in a relationship with them, suddenly it can feel like you have to deal with all the expectations. What if it isn't the honey dipped reunion we're all waiting for?! You've all just been through a pretty inhumane and damaging experience and it's difficult to know how it's going to work out. The prison system doesn't offer any real support for any of the people concerned so it is really important you get it yourself. Talk to your friends and family about it, and try and make plans for their release that doesn't put too much pressure on you. A relationship is maybe even worth breaking off and starting again at this point, in order to return to normality. However this is not a straightforward choice because you are an important part of their (true) rehabilitation process, bringing them back and helping them through. Some people may think this is some sort of exaggeration, but it's not worth underestimating how damaging a system the prison system is, especially when the effects of it so often remain hidden behind the constant front of machismo."

## **KEEPING IN CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD**

Letters are a serious life-line. They allow you time to think so it's the nearest you'll get to genuine interaction (as I've already said, this is what you'll probably miss the most). Don't forget all the mail is monitored, especially if you're on 'monitored mail' (your wing staff will be able to tell you if you are). The prison is not allowed to monitor legal letters though. You can seal these and write RULE39 on them and they won't be opened. Just a word of warning though prisons have often been found to abuse this rule. Oh yeh and don't think you can just write to your mate and stick RULE39 on the front and they won't notice, they compare the name and address to a list of solicitors to see if it's genuine.

The payphones on the wing (known as blueboxes) are fucking extortionate, the pennies drop faster than minutes when you call a mobile. I'm sure they are actually more expensive than payphones on the out. You are only allowed 10 minutes at a time and everything is listened in to, so don't do something silly like ask them to call you back on your mobile if you've got one. That brings me on to mobiles. First things first, having a mobile phone is highly illegal. If you get caught and get found guilty at adjudication you may be given extra days or denied HDC or a parole hearing if that is applicable to you. Prisons take it very seriously. In saying that though they are unbelievably common. I seen people using them like it was fully allowed, casually standing on the landings using them, sitting in their cells smoking a spliff watching videos on Youtube... it's a joke really. The prison tries to pretend to be hot on it but if you're clever there's a plethora of security avoidance techniques (the best of which I'm obviously not going to list here but for example you can look out for phone scanners by keeping your TV on - if it flickers they are on the landing). Watch the shadows outside your cell, never ever use it during lunchtime bang up and if you're being transferred to another jail be aware of the BOSS chair (the ominous sounding Body Orifice Security Scanner).

Visits are like this airlock between prison and the real world. They vary from amazing to heart wrenching. It's pretty weird, it's definitely not an ordinary form of interaction: you're sat there with a hi-vis vest on, being watched over by shitty screws, not allowed to touch each other too much, lairy little kids screaming around, with a set amount of time before you get booted out. Whereas in real life you rarely talk to each other solidly for 2 hours, in a visit there's such expectation, you're sat opposite each other and feel awkward if you can't verbally machine gun each other for the entire time. If you cut the visit short though they always seem to strip search you on the way out in the suspicion that you're not really friends and you've already done the deal.

When people come to visit you make sure you remind them and remind them again to bring the required ID. The

prison takes joy in turning you away for the most minor thing i.e. if your address on the passport doesn't match the one on the VO. According to my girlfriend a handful of people got turned away at every single visit she came to. You'll get between one and four visits a month depending on which jail and status you're on. Just a note... lip readers are used in visits so if you're on remand for something serious don't talk about your case, or at least cover your mouth.

## **PRISON LAW AND 'ADJUDICATIONS'**

Prison has a whole legal governance of its own. If you get nicked for anything, whether it's having a phone, brewing hooch, having a fight or whatever it may be, you'll end up in front of a governor. This is called an adjudication. You can be given anything from a week suspension of canteen to six months down the block or extra months on your sentence if it's particularly serious. They can also put you on closed visits where you're separated from your family by a big plate of glass. Prison law is exactly like normal law, you have a right to legal representation and if you don't have it the governor will fuck you over. Do not pass up the chance of legal representation, however minor your charge. The library holds all procedural information and, in my experience, were very helpful. This might entail reading through a whole page of mind numbing legal drear but once you've found that the screws didn't provide you with all the information or warnings they should have, and your case gets thrown out, trust me you'll be happy!

## **OMU & CATEGORISATION**

The OMU (offender management unit) department will decide what 'category' of prisoner you become and subsequently what kind of prison you will end up in. If you're in for a non-violent crime, you and your solicitor should both write to the governor and the OMU as soon as possible asking for you to be made a 'D-cat' prisoner. Here's a little more about categorisations...

**Double A-cat and A-cat prisons...** well, firstly, I've never been in one. All I know is that they are hard to break out of.

**B-cat** prisons in my experience are like a sorting office; most people don't stay there for too long before they get moved on to a different prison. In a B-cat you'll meet everyone from triple murderers waiting for extradition to bitties doing a month for stealing a packet of sausages. They are full of skag, riffraff and local nitties so at least there's some on-wing entertainment.

**C-cats** are basically a B-cat in the middle of nowhere with less security and less staff... so if you're a brownhead or you use your phone all day I guess it's an improvement but for me it was just mind numbingly boring. This is what really kills you in prison; nothing, and I mean nothing, happens. And in C-cats in particular NOTHING happens. Most people in C-cats are on a progression moves system (see the IEP section for more details) so they are just trying to get their D-cat or their home leave and therefore don't want to put a foot wrong.

**D-cats** on the other hand are a fucking holiday camp; you get home visits after a month, you have a key to your own cell, you can get it on with the art teacher and get your friends to throw bottles of whisky over the fence.

What I'm trying to make clear is that you should do everything you can to get in to a D-cat. Write to the prison and ask if they will accept you. Write to the OMU stating how you're a non-violent criminal, never had a drugs problem (whatever applies to you) etc etc. Staple it to a general app, address it to the OMU and it should help your case.

## **JOBS**

Prison jobs include being a wing cleaner, library orderly, womble (that's a litter picker), religion rep, 'biohazard' (that's where you clean up blood, puke and suicide attempts), wing painter, gardener, visit room cleaner and about 10 others I can't remember. Wages range from £2.50 a week to a tenner... so basically you aren't in it for the money, it's only useful if you want to be unlocked. I personally didn't mind 'riding bang-up' (not being unlocked) so I was indifferent, but having a job does mean you can travel between wings and go to places you can't otherwise go.

You can also train to be a 'toe by toe mentor' or a 'listener'. The former is a paid job whereby you teach less literate inmates to read and write, and the latter is an unpaid job listening to people on behalf of Samaritans.

## **INCENTIVE EARNED PRIVILEGES SCHEME**

The IEP system is a divisive but effective system used to control prisoners. If you get caught doing something

you get an 'IEP warning', this could be for anything from smoking cigarettes on the landing to not attending an appointment. An IEP warning puts a black mark on your record and results in losing certain privileges, and being put on 'basic regime'... they'll confiscate your tobacco, they'll take your television, limit your wages, no a association, no courses, no work and no opportunity to make phone calls.

To be honest I was perfectly OK with this, you're still allowed books and I didn't socialise all that much anyway. Keep your poxy incentive earned privileges thanks very much!

But if you're on an IPP (indeterminate public protection sentence: 1 in 10 prisoners are), waiting for a parole hearing or a HDC hearing, or your release is subject to 'progressional moves' (to move from B-cat to C-cat to D-cat and then home leaves etc) a single IEP warning can prevent you from being released. This meant that totally reformed prisoners in for a violent crime who hadn't had a fight in their whole sentence were being denied release because they had IEP warnings for brewing hooch or smoking cigarettes on the landing! SO STUPID!

## **SECURITY**

Security comes in all shapes and sizes... from a standard cell spin by wing screws, to a dedicated search team locking off the whole wing and searching every cell with dogs. I had both, sometimes 3 in a single month. Just a word of warning; if security screws want to find something they will find it... secret compartments in cupboards and matchbox-jewellery-box-things do not work, stuffing it in your sink pipes wont work. They're pretty wiley, you need to be artful if you want to out do them. Also remember that it's not as simple as just being spun, i.e. don't go buying 10 batteries each week to charge your phone because they will look at your canteen habits. Don't even reference credit or 'I'll speak to you later' on the bluebox. Don't think that the censors don't understand slang. Unfortunately nowadays they are not stupid!

It's also worth a mention that if you are on remand or have open cases they quite often use speech readers in the visit rooms. They also like to have a good look through your legal documents when they spin your cell even though this is against the law, so if you have any sensitive paperwork I'd recommend you keep it in someone elses cell.

## **STAFF MEMBERS**

There's three main screws you need to know about: your personal officer who will know slightly more about your case, general wing officers, and lastly, senior officers But really there's only two types of screws... 1 - those who are total arseholes from the start. 2 - those who are quite reasonable with you but then turn out to be total arseholes. The former is preferable because atleast you know what you're getting.

So yeh, never ever trust a screw. Despite me telling you this, you probably still will lapse into this false sense of friendship at some point; you'll have decent conversations with them, you'll see them almost every day, you'll spend more time with them than your friends and family... but then the most minor thing and they'll happily nick you, stitch you up, send you to the block, or write some fucked up report about you that prevents you from getting a parole or HDC hearing.

But at the same time don't go out of your way to piss them off, especially if you're up to something, you know, keep your enemies closer as they say. Be jocular if you can stomach - just never ever think they are your friend.

## **FOOD**

Prisons have a budget of £1.85 per day per prisoner so you can imagine how it's going to taste. You'll have a mix of gritty burgers, over boiled beans, rice that tastes like disinfectant and chicken that tastes like wood. The secret is to get friendly with someone who works in the kitchen; they'll bring you fresh onions, chicken, herbs, pepper and spices. The last two are disallowed in most jails though because people used to blow it in screws eyes; you'll laugh to yourself when your stashing your black pepper like it's some kind of class-a drug; these are the kind of stupid situations prison puts you in!

Canteen is a list of things that you buy once a week out of your prison earnings and any money that you've had sent in. Make sure you check how much money you've got every week (prisons regularly steal from inmates), check your bags before you open them (the companies who supply canteen steal from inmates too) and circle the entries on your canteen sheet when you hand it in so the people who process it don't miss things. So you can either live off canteen food, or alternately, you can make some simple recipes to make the prison grub slightly more edible. Here are a few suggestions...

## **SALAD DRESSING**

- \* take an empty ketchup bottle
- \* take one part oil (from a can of tuna if you can't buy olive oil)
- \* take 2 parts vinegar (given out in sachets but if the canteen sells Sarsons that's much better)
- \* mix in lots of mixed herbs, pepper, salt, Ancona chilli sauce, mustard or brown sauce
- \* shake well and that's it

### **TOAST**

- \* Wrap bread in a piece of paper and stick it on the hot pipes for 5 minutes.

### **KOLEE NOODLES WITH TUNA**

A prison staple... the best meal you'll get in jail. Order both off the canteen.

### **DUMPLINGS AND CURRIES**

Yardies, Africans and all the Asian guys cook malodorous curries, mackerel stews and dumplings in their kettles. I never did. You'll have to ask them how they do it if you want to know.

### **ALCOHOL**

Okay... hooch can range from tasting like mouldy orange juice if you do it badly, to vodka and orange if you do it well. I generally avoided it. Being pissed on the wing never really appealed to me plus it has the potential of making you go blind. But if you really want to try it, here's how...

So you need a couple large bottles, squash bottles will do. You get the yeast from brown bread... you can crumble it up and just stick it in the bottle, but if you're a pro you dry it out on the pipes, grind it up stick it in a sock and immerse this in warm water; this way you wont have bits floating around in your finished product. So now you take your yeasty water, add a shit load of sugar and top it up with fruit juice. This is pretty much it. Now you just need to leave it to ferment. Don't forget to periodically loosen the lid to let the carbon dioxide out... if you don't it will explode and coat all of your possessions in stinking hooch. This process takes up to a week, but if you're a real pro and you have a 'kick' (the sludgy sediment once you've made one batch) you can do it over a weekend. The purpose of this is that weekends are a 'non patrol state' i.e. the screws wont raid you out of the blue like they may do on a normal weekday.

You can go one step better and make vodka: I only seen one guy doing this the whole time I was inside and he sold it on for £20 for half a litre (quite a lot in prison terms). The thing is it actually tastes pretty good considering as though it's only one step away from mouldy orange juice. So you take your hooch; a couple litres or so to make it worthwhile; and stick it in a bucket or a cleaned out bin. You then take a sheathed kettle lead and stick it in aforementioned mixture. Now here's the tricky bit... you need to suspend a bowl in the middle of the bucket; the easiest way to do this is to drill three holes a centimetre beneath the rim, evenly spaced, in your bucket. Do the same to your bowl and tie pieces of rope so your bowl hangs nicely in the middle. Now you need to attach a sheet of plastic (a section of bin bag will do) over the top so its got a little bit of slack but is airtight; use elastic bands or rope to seal it up. Now you need to put ice or the coldest thing you can find on the top of this plastic.... stand back.... and switch on the power! After a few hours you will find your bowl is full of distilled alcohol, you now need to periodically empty this into a container and walah you have vodka.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

Ok so here's a few miscellaneous bits and bobs and how-tos. I could write a whole book about this stuff but I'm going to try and keep it brief...

#### **KETTLES**

Some prisons have an urn from which you have to collect your hot water in a flask before bang up. As everyone always collects their water at the same time and the urn is tiny, only about 10 people on the whole wing get hot water. One way to get round this is to make your own kettle... you strip down a kettle lead, connect it to one of the tin containers that lunch often comes in... and switch it on. This might seem fucking dangerous, it is, but this is how you boil water if the prison doesn't give you a kettle.

#### **PIPES**

If you want to smoke ganja in a pipe you wrap up a section of the tin containers that you get lunch in, then just fold it slightly at the smoking end so the smouldering ganja doesn't just fling down your trachea.



## **MAKING ROPE**

The easiest way to make rope in prison is to take horizontal sections of prison issue bed sheets; if you need it to be longer (for example if you're swinging for a package or passing stuff along the hallway after bang up) you need to just tie these sections together with a reef knot.

## **HOW TO TRANSFER STUFF CELL TO CELL**

So once you've been banged up if you need a lighter or some rizlas you're pretty screwed. One way to transfer stuff is to attach a rope to a mirror (in prison you have small plastic square mirrors with holes in the corner) and spin it out on to the landing; if you get the right angle it will bounce off the opposite skirting- ledge-thingy and skim under your next door neighbours door. They then tie a lighter to the string or put the tobacco on the mirror, reel it back in, and there you have it.

## **STICKING STUFF UP**

You're not allowed blutack in jail for some reason unbeknown to me. Instead you can either use toothpaste (lasts about 2 days and fucks up your pictures), whitener mixed with a dab of water (like super glue, also fucks up your pictures) or jam sachets (somewhere imbetween, also fucks up your pictures).

## **LEAVING YOUR DOOR 'ON LATCH'**

If you need to go to the shower or to get food a good technique is to leave your door on latch: twist the handle fully inwards, pull your door to and let the bolt sit just on the edge before it clunks into the hole. This way your door looks as though it's shut, and if someone tries to open it the spring will release and the bolt will lock. It's kind of difficult to explain but it will become apparent once you're there.

## **CELL WORKOUTS**

Okay, even if you're not usually the type to spend hours in the gym, it's good to get in to a regime whilst you're in prison to avoid becoming a complete vegetable. Do press ups, sit ups, turn a chair upside down and do 'dips', bench press the bed, headstand press ups against the wall.

## **RETURNING TO THE REAL WORLD**

To be honest, when I got out of prison it was pretty underwhelming, mainly because I'd built it up so much in my head. They just call your name and deposit you outside the gate with forty quid. This is when your 'licence' starts, that's where I'm at now. Licence is a load of bullshit, it basically means attending probation who do fuck all for you but if you miss an appointment they'll send you straight back to jail. You've just got to make sure you attend and grin and bare it. Pretend you're very sorry. Pretend that the system works. Pretend that you regret it. All the usual when actually all you want to do is tell them how fucked the system is. Anyway licence is better than jail so like I said, you've just got to "yes miss no miss" it.

If you break your licence or commit another crime you get recalled. It doesn't matter how minor it is; you can be recalled if you get caught pissing on a wheely bin. For example one guy who I met served his half of a seven year sentence for drug importation, he'd got released, gone straight and narrow and was in full time employment, always attending probation, he'd had a baby daughter... anyway a month after his baby daughter was born he was recalled for smoking a spliff, so back he went to jail for the remainder of his licence (roughly three years). Doesn't make any sense does it really.

So before you leave distribute your belongings among your friends. Don't forget your people inside, it's easy to do but you've got to make a conscious effort to keep in touch. Write down their prison numbers when you leave. Send them CD's (they're only a fiver on Amazon you haven't got an excuse!). If you've got outstanding complaints follow them up. Write to me, tell me about your experience and anything you have to add to this project. Write to Howard League or the Prisons Reform Trust.

And if you're going to commit a crime utilise your newfound criminal mastery that you learnt in jail and don't get caught. But more than anything enjoy and value your freedom!

## **STUFF TO TAKE WITH YOU**

As I've already said, it's a very good idea to take a packed bag with you if you think you may be getting remanded or found guilty. This is a complete list, you don't want to go too overloaded so pick and choose. You'll only be allowed a certain amount of items at any one time, the rest will be kept in your stores property.

Keep a very close eye on exactly what you have in your 'prop'; I had various pieces of property stolen by screws, from CDs to my best shirts and brand new trainers that were sent in but I wasn't allowed to have. They steal your stuff, edit the property record, then deny all knowledge of it ever existing.

- \* nice tracksuit bottoms are a must
- \* a couple Don Ed Hardy shirts
- \* 1 pair of shorts
- \* smelly trainers for the gym
- \* comfy trainers for the wing
- \* smart shoes for visits are optional
- \* jumper (hoodies aren't allowed)
- \* flip flops for the shower (so you don't contract a danky veruca)
- \* colouring pens
- \* pencils
- \* sharpener
- \* rubber
- \* decent writing pens (it hits home that you're in prison when you can't even find a decent biro)
- \* notepad or diary
- \* white card
- \* stereo (not too big - most B-cats don't allow detachable speakers, a model like Panasonic RX-ES27 is perfect)
- \* over ear headphones
- \* CDs and tapes (they might not allow copied CDs or tapes that aren't see-through)
- \* toenail clippers
- \* hair cutting shears are a major investment; you can set yourself up as a wing barber, or just keep them for yourself
- \* toothbrush
- \* shower gel (they might not allow this though, I'm not sure)
- \* towel (trust me prison towels are GRIM... people have been know to get body lice and crabs off them)
- \* bed sheets and pillow covers (as above)
- \* list of phone numbers, addresses and dates of birth
- \* pictures of your friends and family for the cell wall
- \* PS2 (also to charge your phone via USB if you've got one)
- \* pictures for the wall
- \* stamps and envelopes
- \* cash (so you've already got it in your account ready for first canteen and don't have to wait for a postal order or cheque)
- \* books (prison libraries are generally quite decent though)
- \* alarm clock
- \* watch (so necessary!)

### **THE PRISON LEXICON (UPDATED)**

Adj1 - form for appealing against an adjudication

Adjudication - where you appear before a governor for some wrongdoing

Bang-up - when your doors locked

Barry - cocaine

Basic-rider - someone who loves being on basic regime

Bitty - an addict or generally rattling person

Bluebox - payphone

Bobby - heroin

Burn - ubiquitous jail term for tobacco

CRD - conditional release date

Comp1 - complaint form

Comp1a - complaint appeal form

Comp2 - confidential complaint form

Cro - weed

Dipping - stealing

Dogends - cigarette ends

DTU - drug testing unit

HDC - home detention curfew  
IDTS - integrated drug treatment system  
IMB – independent monitoring board  
IPP - indeterminate public protection sentence  
Tek - mobile phone  
JR - judges remand  
MDT - mandatory drug testing  
NACRO - national association for the care and resettlement of offenders  
NOMS - national offender management system  
OASys - offender assessment system  
OMU - offender management unit  
Pelly, pad or peter - your cell  
Peterteef - cell thief  
Plug - hiding things in your chatham pouch  
PSR - pre sentence report  
ROTL - release on temporary licence  
Scooby - a screw boy  
Seg - segregation unit  
Shit 'n' a shave - a brief sentence  
Shitted up - when a screw has a bucket of shit thrown over them  
SO - senior officer  
Spin - a cell search  
Tick - to borrow drugs or tobacco  
VDT - voluntary drug testing  
VO - visiting order  
VPU - vulnerable prisoners unit  
Wire - something for charging your phone  
Ting - any of the above

### **A comment about this guide from someone else who has been inside recently**

*"Really good. This person obviously became quite comfortable with the system (both the official and unofficial one) and how to play it, although it sounds to me like it was probably only in one prison. Unfortunately one thing I picked up is that all prisons are really quite different (even wings have their own atmospheres), so we need to put that caveat in there.. Also, I wouldn't want people going straight in thinking they can do all this stuff - it takes a long time to get your bearings and work out what goes on so I think to be really useful this needs a bit more about the first few days / weeks as this is what people will be focussing on."*

### **And another comment**

*Generally I like this piece, it has good spirit, and like some similar guides I've read, it isn't a 'groveller's charter'. It contains some good advice – not trusting screws, not grassing, stopping smoking, etc. Where it falls down I think, like other similar guides, is in the specifics – most of them are specific to particular jails at particular times and they are limited by the experience of the writer - and some of the specifics are wrong. It's always a bad idea to use phrases like "most jails" when you only have experience of a few.*

*I'd guess this guide was written by a recently released prisoner who served a relatively short sentence, starting off in The Scrubs, and then going to a privatised Cat C jail in the south of England, probably run by Premier. I've been in over 20 different jails, but the same thing applies – my experiences are limited to those jails, and only at a particular time. Of course, I also correspond with a lot of prisoners, but again, the same applies. While there is some good advice in this piece, because it is so specific to the author's very limited experience, I don't think it is very helpful and would only add to the confusion inevitably experienced by any newcomer to jail. Probably the best part of it is that written by the author's partner.*

### **Links**

**London ABC group - <https://network23.org/londonabc/>**

Email: [london\\_abc@riseup.net](mailto:london_abc@riseup.net)

**ABC Brighton, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK.**

Email: [brightonabc@riseup.net](mailto:brightonabc@riseup.net)

**ABC Leeds**, 145 - 149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ, UK.

website: <http://leedsabc.org/> Email: [leedsabc@riseup.net](mailto:leedsabc@riseup.net)

**325 Magazine** online Anti-capitalist, anti-repression magazine '325', with articles, interviews, wrtings by political prisoners, and a distro. For a world without borders or prisons!

website: [www.325collective.com](http://www.325collective.com)

**Anarchist Solidarity**, c/o PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK.

website: [www.anarchistsolidarity.wordpress.com](http://www.anarchistsolidarity.wordpress.com)

**Campaign Against Prison Slavery**, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK.

website: [www.againstprisonslavery.org](http://www.againstprisonslavery.org)

email: [againstprisonslavery@riseup.net](mailto:againstprisonslavery@riseup.net)

**Earth Liberation Prisoners**, BM Box 2407, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

e-mail: [ELP4321@Hotmail.com](mailto:ELP4321@Hotmail.com)

**Green and Black Cross**: Provide legal support for demonstrations, so far based in London

website: [www.greenandblackcross.org](http://www.greenandblackcross.org)

**Haven Free Books to Prisoners scheme**: BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX. UK.

website: [www.havendistribution.org.uk](http://www.havendistribution.org.uk)

**Legal Defence & Monitoring Group (LDMG)**: Volunteers for the Defence of Civil Protest & the Right of Public Assembly. LDMG co-ordinate court monitors attend court during court cases, can find accommodation for those in court in London and other support offered. The new edition of "No Comment - The Defendants Guide to Arrest" is now available as a PDF on the website.

Tel: 020 8245 2930 (24hr answerphone)

Website: [www.ldmg.org.uk](http://www.ldmg.org.uk)

Email: [ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk)

**Miscarriages of Justice UK (MOJUK)**

website: [www.mojuk.org.uk](http://www.mojuk.org.uk)

email: [mojuk@mojuk.org.uk](mailto:mojuk@mojuk.org.uk)

**No More Prison**

Promoting radical alternatives to prison that focus on social and community welfare rather than punishment. c/o Paul Mason, School of Journalism, Media and Culture Studies, Bute Building, Cardiff University, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3NB, UK.

website: [www.alternatives2prison.uk.com](http://www.alternatives2prison.uk.com)

**Prisoners Advice Service**

website: [www.prisonersadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonersadvice.org.uk)

tel: 020 7253 3323 or 0845 430 8923

**Vegan Prisoners Support Group**, PO Box 194, Enfield, Middx EN1 3HD, UK. <http://www.vpsg.org/>