

I don't know what the professionals would say of my opinions on the subject, but I can imagine them saying I am not qualified to know the short and long-term repercussions of this experience nor to assess its impact. However, I'm going to opine on the impact and me, anyway. As if I were the most qualified expert in the world, on me! On me now! As in, In the present moment. And on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on me mentally, physically, and spiritually for the last two months.

First of all, I AM WELL. My common response to "How are you?" Is, "I am well, staying strong, staying out of the way, and letting it do what it do." Everyone seems to get it without me breaking it down. Because it's complicated. Let me break it down to you. Before COVID-19 hit "us" Americans, I had been imprisoned 44 years. I can tell without any exaggeration I had already been through some serious drama/traumas, deadly, death-defying dramatic events. These lived experiences are the source of my strength, and the reason why I AM WELL, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. Now! This moment! The past is in the past, and the future is but a tick of the clock. But, "now" I am well. With you, Dear Readers, in my mind's eye, as I sit in the cell, in a seat at the desk/kitchen table/dining room/entertainment center and write and wonder how to put what I am doing, seeing, feeling, and thinking into words which could give you a glimpse into this moment in time. The sky is clearing; I can see sky blue gaps in the disappearing cotton-candy patches of clouds sailing southwestward across the Delaware River and Commodore Perry Bridge that I can see only in my mind's eye. When I lived in the same cell four stories above this one, I could see it all, clear into Delaware. It's 10:37 AM Saturday, December 4, 2020 here in Chester, Pennsylvania, at SCI-Chester, and it has been raining heavy, light, and constant for the last thirty six hours. If only the COVID-19 could be washed away.

If we don't treat the planet better one day, it's gonna wash us all away.

My cell is a small space about 12' X 8'; it was made for one person with a 5'H X 2'W X 2'D locker mounted to the wall, a 30" W X 6'L bed, a sink, toilet, 36" X 24" table with a stool mounted the wall on each side of the table. The cell for one was converted to a cell for two ten years ago simply by mounting a second bed to the wall 4' above the first bed, adding a ladder, and sitting a second locker on top of the first locker. This is a crowded cell for one person, and to say it's "overcrowded" housing for two people is an understatement. One full step through the

door on a 24" path, on the left and you're at the stainless steel 1 gallon face bowl sink, a baby step forward is an 18"H white ceramic toilet, another half step the first stainless stool, the one I'm perched on now, with my knees 36" from the middle of my bed; my left elbow is touching stainless steel desk/everything table, still about 3" from the tables top, then stool #2, the 5'H X 1'W window with a 1" W steel bar in the center of its vertical axis. It's nice to have a window, even if it doesn't open, with a view inside the facility. I can see the sky and planes landing and taking off from Philadelphia International Airport sometimes. I used to be able to also see marine traffic on the Delaware River and commuter rail traffic when I lived higher up. A window is nice to have; I spent too much time in cells that didn't have a window in the corner of the back wall with this beautiful view, right next to the lockers stacked in a 10' pile. I have about 7 letter-size file boxes lining the wall under the locker around to beneath the bed, beneath the desk/everything I have a footlocker open, filled with a small library of things I have read, am going to read, have worked on, am working on, or just want easy access to. I have a 19" RCA flat screen on the desk sitting atop my AM/FM radio which stays tuned to WHYY 90.9 (PBS), my only radio station. [end of second message]

WHYY feeds my need for mental stimulation as much as the window fills my need for visual stimulation. For the inquiring minds which would like to know, "Which one would I keep if I had to choose between keeping the window or keeping WHYY radio?" I would keep WHYY,;folks who have had Driveway moments while listening will understand. I've had those driveway moments so many times, and you know I don't have a car. News, books and authors, nature, science, local, state, national, international, a one-stop shop for enrichment. A real window on the world. I've got my word-processing typewriter sitting on the opposite stool, the electric piano in the corner, clean clothing piled high, with a 8" oscillating fan on top. And, I have my 9" tablet in hand, although it's limited to a half-dozen apps and USB cable operations through a Department of Corrections portal and kiosk. It is more than I imagined possible five years ago. Meals are being brought to my cell, as are the US Mail, and commissary orders I place for food items, toiletries, sneakers, books, papers and magazines. I have been receiving funds and gift food packages from folks who love me, and I've been able to phone them with mutual love, admiration, and gratitude.

It has been hard. No yard, no visiting, contact or virtual. I have been through worse. I am grateful to be alive, my friend and mentor Al Joyner who lived one floor down and five cells away contracted COVID-19 and died three weeks ago. Al was 72 years old and had served over fifty (50) years. A lot of my friends and associates serving life sentences have died, but not like this: on a ventilator, not being able to see any of those he loved and were loving him through this unusually cruel circumstance.

Seeing my friends die of COVID-19 touched me. I have long known death is stalking me; that's the price the living must pay. COVID-19 all around has me thinking more often about having to pay the price soon! Yet surviving amidst the crisis now!