

John grew increasingly sicker. His fever at night soared, but someone had stolen his thermometer so that he couldn't know the exact reading. Judging from his relative chill at night, even when wearing three pairs of pants or sweats and a shirt, sweater, and hooded Winter jacket (which he, for the most part, stayed in for three weeks), he figured he was well above 39.0°C (102.2°F).

Doctor Venegas, a kind and courteous lady, examined John for the first time on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and then every five or six days afterward. She listened to the level of phlegm in his lungs and cough and diagnosed him with pneumonia, for which she gave him seven days of strong antibiotics, later boosted to thirteen days. She also surmised that his intestinal pain in the kidney and testicle areas was probably a kidney stone. He was given pain medication and two pills designed to reduce fever.

All of it also reduced his appetite. Even the thought of food was revolting, and after three weeks of eating fewer than five hundred calories per day, he had dropped two belt notches and perhaps ten to fifteen kilograms. (Once back in 118, he found that his muscle mass had been eroding. He could only do half the bench press repetitions that he could do just before entering 109.)

Three nights during the end of June (between doctor visits), John thought he was close to death. He could not breathe well and sometimes not at all, waking him up as his brain struggled to get oxygen to his lungs. It was horrifying lying all alone in the cold, dark cell with death knocking at the door. He took the Covid-19 test but did not know he was positive for six days, but coronavirus took its toll in the meantime. Hence, the three new ailments, in addition to his hypertension, insulin resistance, diverticulitis, hypothyroidism, hormone deficiencies, and slight macular degeneration (all being controlled or treated by medication), made John by far the sickest of the sixty or so inmates quarantined in 109.

Only twice during his nearly month-long stay in 109 did he eat a prepared prison meal. And other *reos* were as repelled as he was by food. No one wanted to bunk with John. They literally avoided him like the plague, especially Mauricio 1, Ricardo 1, and Helmut 1. *Gendarme* Lebuy would sometimes enter and comment or exclaim just how bad off John looked.

It was serious, and John knew that when he had to consciously tell his brain to make his lungs breathe (since it wasn't happening automatically, sometimes for over an hour), he was in bad shape. He had a hard cough, scratchy throat, diarrhea, occasional vomiting, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches, and almost no energy to do anything. Getting up to turn on the light was a chore (imagine how much more so walking down four flights of stairs and back up when the doctor came!). His wife had sneaked a new thermometer into the cardboard base of the food bag that arrived five days after John reached 109. Thus, he now had to get up to turn on the light that Helmut 1 rigged up to read the thermometer. Killing bugs was also a burden. Life was hard.

Given the filthy, inhumane environment he had been thrust into, it was almost a miracle he survived. Indeed, John took it as a sign that God was with him and still had a purpose to fulfill in life. After two or three weeks, he began to gain the upper hand over his illnesses. John had Mauricio 1's cell phone for most of the first couple of weeks. The signal was so bad that most of the time, he could not make a phone call, and WhatsApp messages would take anywhere from ten minutes to five hours to send. But he was grateful to be able to communicate with his wife, children, friends, and other Christians. They were all understandably quite worried about him and the dangerous environment he was in. However, Mauricio 1 wanted his phone back, so he did not have to keep borrowing Helmut 1's (who was his 109 cellmate, too, along with Ricardo 1). John complied.