

The truth of the matter is that the *gendarmes* (also called *pacos*) often make prisoners' lives miserable by confiscating cell phones, obligating them to do slave labor by hauling trash, cleaning cells, and exterior areas, serving them food, lending them their televisions, feeding them, etc.

Certain aspects of prison life were crucial to one's mental well-being. It did not take long for John to realize just how important communicating with friends and family outside was. For a long time, he had no access to making calls himself, but he solaced himself with the fact that he had seventeen unique visitors, most of whom visited multiple times. Those times were his only contact with his world, namely the Christians, Libertarians, and others with whom he knew and enjoyed conversing.

His new family of criminals simply was not the same, even though he grew fond of some of these "friends" of a sort: Rubén 1 and Ismael 1 for chess-playing, Manuel 1 and Waldo 1 (and likely *Miami* 1) for being innocent victims of bad public policy like himself, Alexander 1 and Ismael 1 for their incipient evangelical faith that they practiced with him on Sundays. Many others asked John questions about the faith, but they were not practicing Christians: Waldo 1, *Che* 1 (the Argentine), Roberto 2 (bald), Manuel 1, *Miami* 1 (Miguel 2), Raúl 2 (younger), and some others *en tránsito*. In some sense, John, who was a Baptist Pastor for three years, was on a mission field, and he also wrote (by hand) a book based on 1 Peter 2:19-20 called *Suffering Unjustly: Imprisonment, Wrecked Families, and Property or Wealth Destruction Affecting Christians in Modern Democratic Societies*, destined for the Evangelical market. But none of that activity could replace the profound loneliness and discomfort that frequently plagued him. Hence, cell phone instant messaging and occasional conversations went a long way towards alleviating these maladies. Yet, what was crooked could not be made completely straight.

Yet his emotional uneasiness was still manifested by his frequent tears during visitation every time his wife would show up for only the last twenty or forty minutes of a two- or three-hour scheduled visit. It hurt him so deeply that the woman he loved would not come on time, nor did it matter to her that she only saw her husband for an hour or less a week. She was late for everything in life. He knew that was so and, therefore, understood that her tardiness was not only directed at him. But it still hurt. He was just glad that she regularly bought him money, clean laundry, and food so he could survive. He was grateful since so many *reos* had no visitors at all.

John's wife (Pamela Sepúlveda Mendoza) never apologized. Instead, she always justified herself, but at least she almost always came. She refused to learn to drive and thus took the bus, which was a one-hour and forty-minute commute each way, a total hassle that she endured. All that effort to see her husband for at most an hour a week. Other inmates began to notice his wife, supposedly a practicing Christian, with such a bad track record. If others coming to visit gave her a ride, they would also arrive late, usually on account of her. Other *reos* felt sorry for John, watching him sit alone for most of the visit while everyone else was in their designated spot in the room.

They were self-designated spots, and once established, they remained that way forever. Visitors always knew precisely where to go and when they arrived. The only significant variations were imposed externally, such as the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The *pacos* limited visitation to one day a week but extended it from two to three hours, also prohibiting the entrance of visitors over the age of sixty-five or under the age of two, as well as those who were pregnant. Such temporary rules left some *reos* without any visitors at all, and John realized that the plight of the poor *machucado*-without-visitors was severe. The pain would set in after only a few weeks of confinement.

John realized early on that prison food produced diarrhea. Maybe it was the excess lard thrown into the food barrels that one could see coating plates and bowls once the cold wash water hit them. John suspected chemicals, germs from unwashed *reos'* hands that prepared it, or maybe even inputs of spit or urine might be responsible. One thing was quite clear: those *machucados* who could avoid or skip *rancho*, the stovetop barrels of hot food that usually arrived 118 at 11:00 a.m. and again at 2:00 p.m., would do so. This grub made up the food supply for both the day and the evening, after their modest (skimpy) breakfast.

There was also a food service called *dieta*, which offered salt-free but slightly higher-quality food, exclusively for people with chronic diseases, delivered by a server (*mozo*) once a day around 1:00 p.m. It was designed for *reo's* with hypertension, diabetes, etc. The only practical way to avoid prison food was to have a wife, mother, or sister bring in food *de la calle* (from the street). Sometimes a friend might also bring a pizza or *empanadas*. John noticed that when he only ate food *de la calle* he had no diarrhea. The main problem was keeping the food brought in refrigerated in one's cell. There was an old box freezer in the four-table dining hall that worked adequately, but it was stuffed full after the visitation, and poorer *reos* sometimes stole from it. When John moved in with Mauricio, one thing changed: he was now allowed to use the refrigerator in the prison's infirmary (paramedic section).

