

Dark Days in Prison

Kera Abraham, *Eugene Weekly*, October 5, 2006

More than five years in the state pen have chiseled away at the cheery persona of Jeff "Free" Luers, a radical Eugene environmentalist who was sentenced to almost 23 years in 2001 for torching three SUVs at Romania Chevrolet in protest of gas-guzzling culture. In a Sept. 15 dispatch from the maximum-security Oregon State Penitentiary, Luers describes a locked-down world of "violence, drugs and sexual assaults."

Luers writes that on Sept. 9, OSP prisoners brutally beat a guard, the climax of built-up tension between the powerful and the powerless. "[W]hen the guards ordered everyone on the yard to lie prone no one did," Luers writes. "And when the guns were turned on us a chorus of fuck-you was sounded." The beaten guard was taken to the hospital and a 22-hour lockdown was imposed on the prisoners.

The next night, Luers writes, an inmate rumored to be a snitch was stabbed. The day after that, a fight erupted in the chow hall. On Sept. 13, Luers watched a man die right in front of his cell. "He took his last gurgled breath less than 10 feet from me and then his heart stopped beating," Luers writes. "They left him lying in front of my cell for five hours." The man, a convicted child molester, had been strangled, the perpetrator(s) still unknown.

"This is prison," Luers writes. "I shower next to serial killers and sexual predators ... I can watch a man get stabbed in the neck and keep eating. I can pretend to not see a man lying helpless in his own blood ... And I can watch a man die and be completely unmoved.

"Would someone please tell me how this is supposed to make me a better person? Can someone please tell me how locking away more than two million people into places like this is going to stop crime? Is there anyone out there who can convince me we are this planet's most evolved creatures?"

Luers, who won "Best Activist" in *EW's* 2005 reader's poll, spent several weeks in solitary confinement over the summer and recently lost all of his contact visits for a year. His attorney filed an appeal in January 2002 and the Oregon Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in November 2005, but the judge has not yet issued an opinion. — *Kera Abraham*