

**Free as a jailbird**  
**Gregory Dicum, GristMill blog, May 4, 2006**

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When I [spoke to Jeff Luers](#) by phone from Oregon State Prison, our wide-ranging talk covered more than just his political views. Having never spent time in prison -- and hoping never to do so -- I was curious about what his day-to-day life is like there.

Here's part of that discussion ...

**Q:** So you're working in prison?

**A:** I'm a clerk. I do inventory for the prison food warehouse. But I don't even get paid by the hour. I get paid by what they call a "point scale." I think right now I make like 50 bucks a month.

**Q:** What's your daily schedule like?

**A:** It's very structured. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are all put on at the same time everyday. I work on the yard, so I get out of my cell roughly five hours a day, not including meal times. I guess the best way to describe the yard structure is like a typical high school. There's a track and some handball courts; some basketball courts. The inner structure is an old-school penitentiary. It's a tiered structure. The doors still open on cables -- you flip a switch and your door opens. The cells are five feet by eight feet -- for two people.

**Q:** That's not a lot of room for two people.

**A:** No. Not at all. You get to be real close or really, really not like each other. There's not a lot of in between.

**Q:** What do the other prisoners think of you?

**A:** You know what, I'm actually pretty well respected. I'm sure that I have my share of enemies on the yard, but I can't come out here and walk around without a lot of people saying 'hi' to me or shaking my hand or coming up and talking to me. There's definitely quite a few that respect what I'm in for, and if they don't necessarily respect the reasons behind it, they respect the fact, unlike a lot of the people in here, I came in for my beliefs, for fighting for something I believed in.

**Q:** How has prison surprised you?

**A:** All the stereotypical things that you see in the movies -- that stuff happens here. I've lived through and seen things that certainly no human being wants to see happen to another human being. And what surprised me most is simply my ability to adapt and deal with it. You know, I haven't curled up into a fetal ball and refused to leave my cell. I just accept this environment as

home.

**Q:** Sounds like you've carved out your niche there.

**A:** Yeah, I get along pretty well. I run every couple of days. I hit the weight pile. They've got a punching bag up; I do that every few nights. Play chess. Watch TV to pass the time. Read books. It sucks. I ain't going to lie. Prison sucks. But I do it all right.

**Q:** How's the food?

**A:** You don't want to know about that -- it's horrible. You'll have people in the streets if I tell you about the food!

**Q:** As bad as that?

**A:** I don't think that anything that we get has less than a thousand ingredients. Everything that we eat as a main entree is pre-prepared, mass processed food. Almost everything we get is a year or more outdated -- I know from doing inventory. Last year, we apparently had a contract with Burger King because we got a million pounds of their french fries from 2002.