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A day is as long as a year

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I was in detention pending trial for eight months in Austria. The cell was like a grave, like being dead. Where we eat and sit is also where we shit. The big cells are for four people, but I was always in a cell for two people. That was hard, you can't talk to the same person for 24 hours, can't see the same face all the time.

We were allowed to go outside for one hour a day, walking in circles in the courtyard. It wasn't big, but it was good. When you're in a cell for 23 hours, it's nice to get some fresh air.

When we were all outside, we were allowed to talk to each other. But if we talked at the window, the guards would come and tell us that it's prohibited. One time I talked to someone in the cell underneath mine. There was a camera there and it recorded us and the guards came and said that it's prohibited. I don't understand why it's prohibited, especially if someone is alone in a cell and not doing well and wants to talk to somebody else. If you get caught talking at the window three times, you get a penalty.

The food was hardly ever good, but it was almost always really bad. The bread was like wood – if you were to hit someone on the head with it, they could die. One time, an old man was in the cell with

me who didn't have any teeth, he put the bread into water so that he could eat it.

Shopping is really bad there. Outside, I can go shopping for little money, in prison there are the same things as outside, but they cost double as much. Because they want to make money. And because they know that we have to buy it, no matter how expensive it is. There's no control over that, it's the police themselves who do it.

Everyone in prison has feelings like that

I wasn't very lucky with my cellmates, I often had sick people living with me. One guy was with me, he was from Albania, he killed someone. He had already spent ten years in jail before, he wasn't normal. I lived with him for two and a half or three months.

Then I changed cells and lived with a Turkish guy, he was sicker than the other one. He was addicted to drugs and an alcoholic. That's what I heard from the others, I never asked him what he does. But my patience ran out at some point and then we had a fight. But we didn't hit each other. Then I called the guards and was put in another cell.

One time I was in a cell with a guy who spoke only Arabic, I can't speak Arabic. We communicated with body language. We had a hard time, because we couldn't talk to each other. He was with me for two weeks, then I told the guards that we can't understand each other, that we were having a hard time. Then someone who spoke German came into the cell.

I was all alone in my cell for one month. Being alone isn't bad, but it also isn't good. You're always scared and thinking about what

might happen. If someone else is around and you're having trouble in jail, then you can talk – and the worries leave your head.

The psychologist came every week and I told her that I was thinking too much and that I wanted to kill myself. Then the psychologist didn't let me be alone in a cell anymore. If you're alone in a cell, you can do everything, even dying.

Everyone is prison has feelings like that, not just me. I saw an Algerian guy who cut himself, his chest, arm, and even his head. And a few days later, the guards beat him.

They don't do that to the Austrians

I saw how bad the police are for the first time. The police are bad in my country, too, but they don't hit you in the face, maybe from the back, yes, but not in the face and they don't kick or punch. Here, the police are very racist, have no heart.

They don't do that to the Austrians. The Austrians didn't live with us. The Austrians had a special cell, with a good TV, everything good. Where I lived, there were only foreigners, no Austrians.

Those eight months in prison weren't life. That was a punishment, it was really bad. I was in detention pending trial. Usually, people in detention have lots of possibilities, sports and so on. There were lots of possibilities there, too, you can play football, work out. We always asked, but in seven months, I only exercised once.

The Austrians lived on the other side, the men on one floor, the women on one floor, and the sick ones on one floor. They are always taking walks and exercising. But for those of us in detention pending trial, there was nothing.

The police were racist, they always insulted us, as if we were their enemies. They laughed about us. Not all of them, but most – two or three police officers were good.

I talked to one of them sometimes, he had been working there for a long time, but most of the others were new. Those were the racist ones. The old policeman said that people have a problem, they come in and at some point, they go out again. Our job is only delivering food and locking and unlocking the door. It's not our job to be insulting.

My family thought that I had died

I didn't speak with my family for eight months. I didn't hear my mother's or my father's voice for eight months, nobody. That was hard for me, but it was really hard for my family, their son in prison for eight months and mother and father can't hear his voice. When I got sent to prison and couldn't call anyone for one and a half months, my family thought that I had maybe died. Then a friend of mine visited me and I gave her my family's number. Then she talked to my family. Then my family was calmer, because they heard that I'm okay. They wanted to help, but what can they do – they're there and I'm here.

After they let me out, I talked to my mother and father and they cried and said, come back. But I can't go back, I have problems there.

Maybe he would have survived

A man died there, I think it happened on a Sunday. He was maybe 30 or 31 years old. He was a foreigner, too. When I heard that he had died, I asked who was in his cell. And that person told me that the man was in pain all night long and he kept calling the guards,

but they didn't come. They said "we're coming," but they never came. He called all night long and they never came.

Maybe he would have survived if the guards had come. If someone has to die, they have to die. But maybe he would have survived if he had gotten help.

Something happened to me, too. I was in the corridor, we wanted to go out to walk. You're allowed to go out for one hour a day.

I was smoking. One of the guards came and said, you're not allowed to smoke here. But he was smoking. So I said: Why, what's going on? You're a person and I'm a person. If you can smoke here, I can smoke here. He said: Wait here! Then everyone went out to walk and I wanted to go outside, too. But the guards brought me to a call and they beat me there. There were three guards, one of them hit me on the head with his fit, then I was on the floor, then he kicked me in the ribs. I cried, but they guards didn't give a shit, they kept on beating me. And then they threw me in my cell, like a dog. I was there for ten or fifteen minutes by myself and I cried and cried. I was totally helpless, I couldn't do anything.

Then my cellmate came, he was older than me. I had a big bump on my head. He gave me a towel with hot water and kept putting water on it. But I had a lot of pain in my ribs. I yelled for the doctor in the night, but the doctor didn't come. The doctor only comes on Monday, for normal controls. And the dentist comes on Wednesday. If somebody has a problem on Tuesday or Thursday or Friday, no doctor comes. I was doing really badly for four or five days.

One time I lived with a guy for fourteen days, he died last week. He was younger than me, he was nineteen. He told me his story.

Fifteen years ago, his mother left him, he was four or five years old. Then he lived with his father. His father was Turkish. Then his father married a woman from Poland. He always had problems with his stepmother, because she didn't love him. And because of the stepmother, his father sent him away. That was eight years ago, he was eleven. Then he lived in a foster home. He lived there for five years. He always wanted to go back to his father, but when he went, the father always said, go away.

Then the organization that managed the home sent him to Namibia. He was there for three years, to see how people live there, how everything works. And after three years, he came back to Austria and always had problems. He was in jail for the fifth time. One time it was six months, one time two months ...

And he always told me that every time he went to jail, he wanted to kill himself. I said: you're very young, how can you do that? He said: if you get two or three years, you will kill yourself, too. I said: yes, maybe, if my sentence was that long, then maybe. But if I only get five or six months then I wouldn't do that shit. But then he said that he will kill himself if he gets five months. He always said that if they don't let him out, he would kill himself.

My hearing was earlier and I got out. Nobody came to visit him, no friends. He had a girlfriend and a kid with that girl. He gave me the girl's number and said, please, when you get out, call her and tell her to visit me.

But I forgot that I had the number. I got out four days later and then he was alone in his cell. Before, we were together, but then he was all alone. And a man told me, a guy died there. He told me the name, but I didn't recognize the name. But then I saw the paper again, where he wrote down his name and his girlfriend's

name. I saw the guy's name and then I was so devastated, it was a shock for me. He was so young and we talked so much and laughed so much. He was a very funny guy and had a good heart. He also gave me his number and his Facebook name. I didn't know that I would never see him again.

That was my school

When I arrived in jail, I couldn't speak German at all, only English. But I watched TV for eight months in jail and that's how I learned German. I also asked the officials if I could go to the German courses; there were German courses twice a week. I often wrote them, please, can I go to the German course. I asked the doctor too. But I wasn't allowed to go. Then I learned alone, nobody helped me. I learned by listening. When I got out, everybody asked me where I learned German. I said, that was my schooling, eight months in prison.

In the first month, I couldn't speak German. Whenever I had a problem, I rang the bell and spoke in English with the guards. But they always said, we're not in England or Australia, this is Austria, you have to speak German here. When I said something, the officers said, we don't understand you. But normally, everybody here understands English. But the officers were racist and didn't want to speak English, didn't want to do any work, just have their peace and quiet. They don't care about anything, even if someone dies.

Maybe I would have never learned German if the officers hadn't told me that I needed to speak German, because this is a German country. But what if someone is new here and doesn't speak German? Then he has to speak English. If someone has lived in Austria for a long time, then it doesn't matter, he can speak

German. But if someone is new like me – I had only been in Austria for six or seven months.

I had visitors two times a month. I don't have any family here and I didn't know many people. But these people were very warm with us, they came, asked what we needed and brought it.

One time, a friend of mine came and an officer had to listen to us. There was no officer there that spoke English. I don't believe that, but it's what they said. And she came from Vienna to Wiener Neustadt and the officers told her that she's not allowed to visit me. Then she went back to Vienna and wrote me a letter to say that she was there, but wasn't allowed to see me.

At first, I spoke in English with some people in prison, but then I only spoke German. I said, I don't understand English, I only understand German. But I didn't understand any German, I only said that so that I could understand better. And then I wrote down words so that I wouldn't forget them. But I couldn't write down what I heard on TV because they speak so fast. And I can't write German well.

There is no justice for us

Outside, a day goes by really fast. But when you're in prison, a day is as long as a year, because you're always thinking. A day is really long. I was there for eight months and I sometimes thought that I have only been alive for these eight months. I couldn't remember anything from before. If you spend so much time thinking, time goes slow. I always thought that the clock had stopped. Outside, the clock-hands move, but in prison, they stand still.

The word “justice” is written everywhere there, but there is no justice for us, only for the police or the judges. Maybe for Austrians, too, but not for foreigners, it means nothing.