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## A Survivor's Guide to Prison Slang

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# A Survivor's Guide to Prison Slang

Canteen babies suitcase it carbon monoxide high  
chow primo time stretchers diesel therapy  
hall get it like Tyson royal flush looking like Lassie  
honeycomb hideout gun camp woof ticket fly check off  
Mother's Day a check out  
woofin' light bulb kite  
bug  
greened up Barnyard Queen the hole bug juice doctor  
baby life s.o.s moon VI fly when they buy  
browned down beat feet rock bobos hustle  
sewer trout maytag white shirts Carried to the door

Gary K. Farlow

"If you loan me your car, I'll put some gas in it."

This statement sounds like that of a teenager attempting to borrow their father's car for a Saturday night date. In prison, this statement means "If you'll loan me your radio, I'll put some new batteries in it."

With over two million Americans incarcerated, prison "slang" has become a new dialect of the vast and growing subculture in our nation's prisons.

Hollywood has provided the unfamiliar with such terms as "turnkey," "screw," and "C.O.," all meaning correctional officer. But have you heard of "moon rock," or "bobos"? What about "baby life" or "bug doctor"?

Prison inmates are inventive and creative

in applying terms to the everyday. A "moon rock" is a meatball, typically made with ground turkey. "Bobos" are prison-issued sneakers. These shoes are avoided by most inmates, as they not only provide no arch support but are an identifier that the wearer is a "state baby," or broke. Not to be confused with "baby life," which is a ten-year prison sentence.

Food is a predominant preoccupation among most prisoners. Coffee, Little Debbie, ramen noodles, and Cactus Annie comprise the four basic food groups. Care for some "sewer trout"? That's fried fish, typically pollock, served in the "chow hall." How about a piece of "barnyard queen"? Chicken. There is the veritable "S.O.S.," or beef gravy on toast or a biscuit, and "bug juice" is a fruit drink.

Serving time can find you “greened up,” or promoted to minimum custody, as well as “browed down,” or demoted to maximum custody.

If you’re fortunate, you may get a “slip,” meaning you have money “on your books” or in your inmate trust account.

If you are inclined to complain or whine, someone may tell you to “leave something for the baby to do.” Of course, you may have a reason to gripe if you’re serving a “light bulb,” or a minimum of twenty years. Still, no one likes a complainer, so don’t be surprised to be told “Let your clutch out,” “Kick rocks,” “Let me see the back of your head get small,” “Burn the road up,” “Suitcase it,” or “Beat feet,” all meaning you best move along before someone decides to “get it like Tyson” or want to fight.

Of course you can make good friends in prison, but a lot depends on your “game face,” or the impression you make. Finding another to “have your back,” or support you, is optimal.

You can always develop a “hustle,” or side job, to get by. You can “Maytag,” or wash clothes, or “fly when they buy,” go to the canteen to make another inmate’s purchases with his money for a tip.

Every day is nearly the same, so “you know what time it is,” “what’s kickin’,” and “what’s up, hangin’, shakin’ or happening.”

You could get a “VI,” or visit, and it could be “Mother’s Day,” or your wife or girlfriend.

Try to avoid “time stretchers,” or those who usually have a short sentence and often have an attitude problem, provoking others serving longer terms.

Making friends has a downside, as inmates are a transient population with trans-

fers, or “diesel therapy” and a “carbon monoxide high” that can leave you “looking like Lassie” or missing your friend.

A person learns how to quickly “carry it,” or develop a demeanor. Some sadly become “canteen babies,” constantly relying on others to buy them candy or sodas from the canteen, and others “check off” or “check out,” leave the “yard,” or regular prison population, and go to “the honeycomb hideout” or “the hole,” which is segregation.

Respect is “primo” or highly important, among inmates. Personal hygiene is expected, as some are told “The water is free,” or to go get a shower. There is often a communal restroom, so courtesy demands that one “play poker and give it a royal flush,” or flush after use.

Prison will “try” you or test you; you’ll learn not to “snitch” or tell on another, to “handle business,” or stay out of others’ affairs, how to “fly a kite,” or send messages to other inmates, and be “straight up,” or honest.

If you start “slippin’ and slidin’,” or being elusive and beating around the bush, the “white shirts,” or the prison’s administration, may let you “smell some gas” and send you to another location.

Avoid “sharks,” loan sharks, “shooting boosters,” or “woofin’,” bragging on your ability to do anything, as somebody will eventually “buy your woof ticket” and make you prove it.

The day will arrive when you’ve been “carried to the door,” and you’ll be released from “the big house,” “gun camp,” and freedom will be yours. Just remember, if you do get in trouble, “they’ll leave the light on for you,” as prisons always have beds for inmates.