

Anna M. Vanderford
537261 MBCC C1-A- 215
29501 Kickapoo Rd.
Mc Loud, OK 75851

A Word to the Fish

I don't know why they call new arrivals "fish", perhaps because you feel like a fish out of water, when you arrive in prison.

My mom was an old Jewish lady, old by even the standard of other parents. She was really old enough to be my grandmother when she and her retired husband adopted me. She used to say, "You can't put an old head on young shoulders." I'm not sure that I ever knew what that meant nor cared. However, I know now.

30 years of prison, day in day out, like a goldfish, stuck in an aquarium, able to see everything. I finally got the good sense not to jump out of the tank myself, but I can't keep the youngsters away from the barracudas, or from becoming barracudas themselves.

A few weeks back, a woman slashed her girlfriend's throat. This week, her woman retaliated by stabbing her with a crochet hook (Note: the horrible; part is that I don't think either of them could crochet and now the old ladies that like it so much could lose their privileges.) That particular fight was a domestic. There was another, shanking, one participant had to have metal staples, it wasn't over a cheating lover or dope: I can't imagine anything more important than getting home to your kids and family, if you have one.

I say youth is wasted on the young. I was young once, but I can't remember it vividly enough to really talk to young people, still what good am I if I don't try?

If you are 18 – 25 years old and you have just been sentenced to a lengthy prison stay:

- 1) Eat healthy, exercise, take care of yourself, no one else will. There's only one you.
- 2) Stay busy, your time will pass more quickly and you're less apt to become depressed.
- 3) Develop hobbies, particularly reading and writing. The reading will enable you to educate yourself and the writing will help you stay in contact with people in the free world. Look for areas that you like and that will help you to shine. This way your time will pass quickly and *enjoyably*.
- 4) Do not tell your business, your crime, time, and life are your business. Sometimes kindness is considered weakness in prison. I have seen groups of thugs pull scams on unsuspecting fish (new offenders). For instance, the bunkmate gets the offender's family address and gives it to a group that writes the family saying the woman owes them for breaking their TV. They've watched how often she calls home, etc. They know they will receive money before the offender can call home. There have been scams where the fire alarms are set off so that an offender can be robbed. The less people know about you, until you can get your bearings, the better. You can always blather on about yourself later, if you choose to.
- 5) Treat the staff with respect, perhaps they are jerks, perhaps they are having a bad day. Whatever the case, in all likelihood, you will need their help at some point. No sense in heaping unnecessary misery on yourself.
- 6) Never give up hope, there are angels along the way and no matter what negative emotions you may be dealing with, it too shall pass. -End