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# Imprisoned at McNeil's Island

[March 6, 1918]

by Floyd C. Ramp

Untitled manuscript, handwritten on a length of toilet tissue.  
Floyd Ramp papers, University of Oregon, Collection 189, box 6, folder 3.

Never to see the sun come up or go down for 2 long years. In a cage, behind great gray stone walls — shut in from the beauties of a sunset, denied the inspiration of a glorious sunrise — could anything be more wrong? When the days are nice we are out on the bank with our picks and shovels, our bars and sledges, our cars and — I must not forget — our guard, too. But at evening when everything is so soft, so soothing, and at the same time so glorious, we are behind the iron bars.



The island is beautiful I know — I often look off across the little fields to the rolling hills behind, partially covered with timber, and think how I would like to wander out there and explore the rest of the island. I know that when the warm sun comes and the flowers are blooming there, my desire to go *will* be so much stronger. We are always kept behind the bars and the iron gate — the great high fence with its barbed wire.

Yes, we are always watched — sharp eyes and hard looks are always greeting us and that in itself makes us feel guilty. Never a smile — not one expression of sympathy — no manifestation of friendliness is ever our greeting. Always the cold, hard expressions and of course we grow to avoid even looking at our keepers. I sometimes wonder if they are really like they look or whether they are just carrying out their orders. Let us hope it is the latter.

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I watch the gulls on the sound — they have freedom. The mud-hens float on the smooth surface, finding their meals, quietly and in peace. Sometimes the porpoises play in the sun out there a mile away — all seem so happy, so free from care; but we, who are in our “pen.” Penned up, away from the world, either being punished or striving to reform ourselves.

As I have said, this great nation, the greatest in the world, who is fighting for democracy with all their might, has failed to solve this simple problem of prisons. I am sometimes forced to wonder whether they are really in earnest about democracy.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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