

## Ignorance Is Not Always Bliss

*By Suzy Hopkins*

When I worked at Folsom Prison I always ate in the lunch room staffed by inmates. I had the same lunch every day – a bowl of soup and a glass of milk. The one inmate named Brown (you always called them by their last name) would wipe off my table, bring the soup and milk. He managed to speak to me, which was not allowed, by speaking quietly as he worked. When he cleaned up my dishes he would tell me how many days until he was going home. Over the months I learned many things from him like his little girl was looking forward to his return and that he was never going to do anything to cause him to be arrested again. I never engaged in the conversation but I could sense how desperate he was to talk to someone who was not trying to kill him.

One day I said to my boyfriend who also worked at the prison, “Brown is my favorite inmate.” He replied, “Read his file and then tell me how you feel.”

Brown’s file was filled with violence towards women, children and animals. He was what they call a career criminal because of his many incarcerations. I was grateful my boyfriend had straightened my thinking. It was a shock and an ‘aha experience’ that served me well in the fifteen years I worked with inmates. Keep your distance emotionally. All inmates are conmen.