

Childhood dreams. Dreams are nothing more than projected myths. And, being the American citizen that I am, my dreams as a child reflected the American dream. That dream focused on a rugged individualism, a heroism that ventures into the unknown wilderness and succeeds beyond bounds imaginable. I always envisioned that I would be a millionaire. By thirty. Kids born into poverty don't dream of being working-class, or even middle-class. Poor kids want to ball! Born on the margins of society, I felt this desire was no indication of ambition go bad or selfishness. No, no! This desire was borne from a want, a need, to move from the outskirts of humanity and concern and live in the center. If I, a child at times impoverished, at times without the comfort and care of close family members, could attain one million dollars: well, that would prove that I had the goods to make it America...and I could use my wealth to do all those heroic things for my family that the Aunt Hagers of the world prescribe for boys like me. Gone would be the days of ground chuck, chicken wings purchased in bulk and bologna. Bologna, that marginalized food for marginalized people. Have you ever seen bologna made? Meat pulp's what I call it. They take all of the parts of the animal that nobody wants, the scraps, and then cook it down together, with spices and additives that preserve the foodstuff. And then, a hydraulic press type of machine plops the meat pulp out on cold sheets later to be sliced and packaged according to the wishes of the client. I've eaten so much bologna in my life. As I child, I hated it. As a matter of fact, once I turned eighteen and began to work and became the sole provider for myself, I vowed to never eat the stuff again. I mean, what millionaire strives to eat bologna? The result of talent, American social and legal practices and independent decision making on my part led to the realization, by age twenty-seven, that a millionaire's life would not be mine by age thirty. As a matter of fact, a millionaire's life may never be mine. And I really didn't care. I'd met the woman who was the love of my life and would become my wife and I was ready to settle into a middle-class existence. From below the poverty line to middle-class is not bad for one lifetime. And we never ate bologna.

So as I sat in a cold, well-lit cell in a federal building downtown, I dreaded the idea of opening the packaged lunch that the jailer ever-so-politely placed in my cell. At least they gave me a cell to myself. Over a decade ago, I almost started a riot at San Jose County when I decided to dispose of my dinner without touching a bite. Inmates accustomed to the Grade D foodstuffs supplied to most places of incarceration in the U.S. argued over who should have first dibbs on some shit that I was about to throw away. Wouldn't have that problem this time. Nevertheless, there sat my lunch in a little brown cardboard box. One eight ounce carton of two percent milk, one apple and only what I could assume was a sandwich, wrapped in wax paper. Those who have had the luxury of visiting our lovely jails in America know damn well it was a sandwich. And most probably a bologna sandwich! I walked over to the lunchbox, picked up the apple and took a bite. Not a full bite, but I sank my teeth gently into the flesh of the apple just enough to hold the apple suspended in midair as I perused the remaining items of the cardboard food housing. I lifted the milk carton: *Prairie Farms*. I wonder if they have a contract with the government? Does *Prairie Farms* have an interest in the number of men sentenced to jail and prison? Hmmph!

I grabbed the sandwich, yet to unwrap it, and underneath the sandwich was a packet of *Heinz* mustard. Damn! Absolutely no doubt about it now. That sandwich was destined to be a bologna sandwich. Why do jail authorities always and only allow the inmates mustard for the bologna sandwich? Do they believe that the mustard's yellow color will compliment the greens and browns sure to be found in the stuff considered meat found between two pieces of hard, white bread? So, I unwrapped the sandwich, grasped my little mustard packet at one corner and shook violently, then lifted the top slice of bread and with God as my witness came face to slice with the sickest, slimiest piece of green and brown bologna I have ever seen. This slice of bologna was special. It had *a certain* sheen to it. Can we say, the bologna existed in *a certain kind of way*? Have you ever been in a parking lot or a drive way after it rains? Water sometimes sits on the top of oils slicks and areas on the pavement where antifreeze has spilled. If you look at the oil slick or antifreeze puddle at just the right angle, you will notice a sheen, reflecting the colors of the rainbow. Some scientific shit going on I assume. Prisms breaking down the light into its various colors. Well, that shit was on the bologna. I sat there - a graduate of what most people assume is an Ivy League school and proud holder of three Master's degrees and soon-to-be Doctor of Philosophy - and applied the mustard on the bread using the mustard package as a utensil. *I used the damn mustard packet as silverware!* I took a bite of the sandwich. I chewed with specific determination. I chewed. I chewed. Swallowing, in any manner, is something that I am rather adverse to in a jailhouse setting. I chewed. Eventually the food matter found its way to my gut...and it happened almost immediately. I vomited all over my one man cell. Disoriented for a moment, the next thing I remember is a jailer saying, "Ain't this a bitch! Get this twice voting mutherfucker outta here!"