

## **CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER: VISITING AMANDA**

### **Section 3: Navigating Prison Security: A Visitor's Perspective**

Chris and I stood outside the prison where Lowell Work Camp was sprawled over the Florida corrections logo in cursive lettering, which I thought was far too delicate for the looks of the place. Chris spoke with two correctional officers separated by glass and speakers in what's called the control room. It looked like a ticket booth at a local fair, but bigger and more intimidating, with buttons, levers, and various equipment everywhere. We traded our State IDs for visitor passes, Chris #7 and me #8, before heading inside. Chris told me to always keep the pass with me because it's a security issue if I misplace it. It's how they differentiate between you and the inmates, so losing it means trouble. Chris was familiar with the guards, making pleasant conversation and asking how their shifts were going. We learned that the AC in the control room had been broken for weeks, resulting in a lack of airflow during a miserable 96-100 degree heatwave. "It's miserable even at night," one officer said.

We entered a room attached to the control room that functioned like the TSA security area on a smaller scale. I was advised by Chrissy the night before our visit to go without any of my necklaces or rings, because you have to take them all off, and it's easy to lose them. I was admittedly nervous going in, not because I had anything on me, but because of how strict the dress code is. I reviewed a document the night before detailing the requirements and asked Chris and Chrissy to verify the appropriateness of my outfit before we set off. Wearing the following clothes will prohibit your visitation: halter tops, fishnets, skintight clothing, see-through fabric with nothing on underneath, dresses or skirts more than three inches above the knee, camouflage, metal of any kind, etc.

Chris once watched a five-year-old boy be denied visitation because he wore camouflage shorts to the prison. They take the dress code rule seriously, and traveling from Maine, the last thing I wanted was to be turned away at the gates. I brought nothing inside that had to be checked because Chris advised me to leave everything but my ID in the car. There is a small bin and an X-ray machine, like the one you pass luggage through at the airport. I walked through a metal body scanner, like the ones you see outside concerts or amusement parks and received a pat down before being cleared and ushered through a door that led to a small room the size of a coat closet.

The door we came through shut and locked behind us. We waited thirty seconds before the control room unlocked the door adjacent to the one we entered through, and we came outside into a completely fenced-in area, roof included. The door behind

us locked, we waited thirty seconds, and the fence door unlocked. We entered the prison lawn from there, walking past gray buildings, surrounded by thick fences with razor-sharp spools of barbed wire lining the tops. Women mowed lawns and walked past us in slate blue jumpsuits, chatting with each other and our fellow visitors at picnic tables. We followed a path to a building that reminded me strongly of a summer camp cafeteria and entered to find air conditioning, tables, colorful murals of dogs and wildlife, vending machines, and Amanda Boals.