

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

### **Section 4: Meeting Amanda & Sharing Perspectives**

My first thought seeing Amanda was how stunning her hair was. Long, curly, healthy, dirty blonde hair that fell past her waist. I hugged her and said, “Your hair is gorgeous!” as she said to me, “You’re so pretty!” We laughed as you do when things like that happen, and sat at the first table on the right, closest to the vending machines. We dined on soda, cheese boards, pudding, and sandwiches, all of which were surprisingly fresh and cold. The vending machines take credit cards, something inmates don’t have access to, so it’s typical for the visitor to pay for food. Amanda said that Saturdays are typically the favorite day of the week for inmates because they get to see their families and eat fresh food.

The first thing I asked Amanda was, if I had to summon her, what three items would I need? Her answers: a roller coaster, a beluga whale, and a stuffed monkey. I deduced from this that she is adventurous and has a spiritual connection to the ocean. She loves her family, including her dog Rico, who loves playing with stuffed monkey toys. A spitting image of her father, Amanda radiates humor. During a pre-visit scheduled video chat, Chris jokingly asked if we were allowed to come visit. Amanda replied with a smile, “Yeah! I think I’ll still be here.”

A guard walked by shortly after we sat down and said hello to us. “He’s one of the good ones,” Amanda shared. Once, she broke her thumb playing Volleyball in the yard, and he took her to the medical area in the Annex to get it checked out. When they arrived, Amanda told the nurse the injury was his fault, a running joke that continues every time they see each other.

We got on the topic of guards and officers, who were not all kind or willing to advocate for inmates, unlike the officers Amanda has a good rapport with. “Some of them let power get to their heads,” she noted, recalling two who no longer work at the prison. One would conduct impromptu dormitory searches and throw items everywhere, destroying the state of the room just because he could. One lieutenant would have officers turn off their body cams while handling inmates, a fear tactic that played on “our word versus your word.”

Amanda recalled a story she heard from another inmate who worked the cafeteria assembly line. This inmate was caught smuggling food to another inmate by sticking her hand through the trash window and passing along an onion, an issue considering no food can be taken from the cafeteria to the dorms.

Unbeknownst to her, the person who took it wasn’t the inmate as intended, but a guard. She was taken to a room where officers made a show of turning off their body cameras. Her options were to rat on the inmate she was passing the onion to so they could be taken to solitary confinement, go to solitary confinement herself, or eat the whole raw onion. The inmate ate the onion, the best of the three options when considering her

reputation and avoiding solitary confinement.

Countless other stories involve the poor treatment of inmates, including forging reports and sexual harassment claims at the facility, though Amanda didn't go into detail on specific stories.