

“First I thank you very much for being forthcoming. I’m just confused! Do you think I’m looking forward [REDACTED]? I’m not! For Pete’s sake, you are a Christian [REDACTED] who is engaged in a war against my religion and my people! Besides, I am [REDACTED] inside this prison.”

[REDACTED] always tried after that to tell me that [REDACTED] didn’t think that [REDACTED] would continue [REDACTED]. But I didn’t make any comment about the issue. All I did was I handcrafted a bracelet and sent it to him as the [REDACTED] who I liked and who had helped me in many issues.

“We are desperate to get information from you,” said [REDACTED] when he first met with me.

It was true: when I arrived in the camp in August 2002, the majority of detainees were refusing to cooperate with their interrogators.

“Look, I told you my story over and over a million times. Now either you send me to court or let me be,” they were saying.

“But we have discrepancies in your story,” the interrogators would say, as a gentle way of saying, “You’re lying.”

Like me, every detainee I know thought when he arrived in Cuba it would be a typical interrogation, and after interrogation he would be charged and sent to court, and the court would decide whether he is guilty or not. If he was found not guilty, or if the U.S. government pressed no charges, he would be sent home. It made sense to everybody: the interrogators told us this is how it would go, and we said, “Let’s do it.” But it turned out either the interrogators deliberately lied to encourage detainees to cooperate with them, or the government lied to the interrogators about the procedure as a tactic to coerce information from the detainees.

Weeks went by, months went by, and the interrogators’ thirst for information didn’t seem close to being satisfied. The more information a detainee provided, the more interrogators complicated the case and asked for more questions. All detainees had, at some point, one thing in common: they were tired of uninterrupted interrogation. As a newcomer, I first was part of a small minority that was still cooperating, but I soon joined the other group. “Just tell me why you arrested me, and I’ll answer every question you have,” I would say.

Most of the interrogators were coming back day after day empty-handed. “No information collected from source,” was what the interrogators reported every week. And exactly as [REDACTED] said, the [REDACTED] was desperate to get the detainees talking. So [REDACTED] built a mini [REDACTED] inside the bigger organization. This Task Force, which included the U.S. Army, the U.S. Marines, the U.S. Navy, and civilians, had the job of coercing information from detainees. The operation was clouded with top secrecy.

[REDACTED] was a very distinguished character in this sub-[REDACTED] group. Although [REDACTED] was a smart person, they gave him the dirtiest job on the Island, and shockingly brainwashed him into believing he was doing the right thing. [REDACTED] was always wrapped in a uniform that covered him from head to toe, because [REDACTED] was aware that he was committing war crimes against helpless

detainees. [REDACTED] was The Night Owl, The Devil Worshipper, Loud Music Man, the Anti-Religion Guy, the interrogator par excellence. Every one of those nicknames had a reason.

[REDACTED] used to keep detainees who were not allowed to sleep “entertained.” He deprived me of sleep for about two months, during which he tried to break my mental resistance, to no avail. To keep me awake, he drove the temperature of the room crazily down, made me write all kinds of things about my life, kept giving me water, and sometimes made me stand the whole night. Once he stripped me naked with the help of a [REDACTED] guard in order to humiliate me. Another night, he put me in a frozen room full of propaganda pictures of the U.S., including a picture of George W. Bush, and made me listen to the National Anthem over and over.

[REDACTED] was serving several detainees at the same time; I could hear many doors slamming, loud music, and detainees coming and leaving, the sound of their heavy metal chains giving them away.

[REDACTED] used to put detainees in a dark room with pictures that were supposed to represent devils. He made detainees listen to the music of hatred and madness, and to the song “Let the Bodies hit the Floor” over and over for the whole night in the dark room. He was very open about his hatred toward Islam, and he categorically forbade any Islamic practices, including prayers and mumbling the Koran.

Even with all that, on around [REDACTED] the special team realized that I was not going to cooperate with them as they wished, and so the next level of torture was approved.

[REDACTED] and another guy with a German shepherd pried open the door of the interrogation room where [REDACTED] and I were sitting. It was in [REDACTED] Building. [REDACTED] and his colleague kept hitting me, mostly on my ribs and my face, and made me drink salt water for about three hours before giving me over to an Arabic team with an Egyptian and a Jordanian interrogator. Those interrogators continued to beat me while covering me in ice cubes, one, to torture me, and two, to make the new, fresh bruises disappear.

Then, after about three hours, Mr. X and his friend took me back and threw me in my present cell.* “I told you not to fuck with me, Motherfucker!” was the last thing I heard from [REDACTED]. Later on, [REDACTED] told me that [REDACTED] wanted to visit me for friendly purposes, but I didn’t show any eagerness, and so the visit was cancelled. I am still in that same cell, although I no longer have to pretend I don’t know where I am.

They finally allowed doctors to see me around March 2004, and I was able to get psychological assistance for the first time that April. Since then I have been taking the anti-depressant Paxil and Klonopin to help me sleep. The doctors also prescribed a multi-vitamin for a condition that was due to a lack of exposure to the sun. I also got some sessions with some psychologists who were assessing me; they really helped me, though I couldn’t tell them the real reason for my sickness because I was afraid of retaliation.

“My job is to help your rehabilitation,” one of my guards told me in the summer of 2004. The government realized that I was deeply injured and needed some real rehab. From the moment he started to work as my guard in July 2004, [REDACTED] related to me right; in fact, he hardly talked to anybody beside me. He used to put his mattress right in front of my cell door, and we started to talk about all kinds of topics like old friends. We talked about history, culture, politics, religion, women, everything but current events. The guards were taught that I was a detainee who would try to outsmart

them and learn current events from them, but the guards are my witnesses, I didn't try to outsmart anybody, nor was I interested in current events at the time because they only made me sick.

Before [REDACTED] left he brought me a couple of souvenirs, and with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] dedicated a copy of Steve Martin's *The Pleasure of My Company* to me.

[REDACTED] wrote, "Pill, over the past 10 months I have gotten to know you and we have become friends. I wish you good luck, and I am sure I will think of you often. Take good care of yourself. [REDACTED]"

[REDACTED] wrote, "Pillow, good luck with your situation. Just remember Allah always has a plan. I hope you think of us as more than just guards. I think we all became friends.

[REDACTED] wrote, "19 April 2005. Pillow: For the past 10 months I have done my damndest to maintain a Detainee-Guard relationship. At times I have failed: it is almost impossible not to like a character like yourself. Keep your faith. I'm sure it will guide you in the right direction."

I used to debate faith with one of the new guards. [REDACTED] was raised as a conservative Catholic. He was not really religious, but I could tell he was his family's boy. I kept trying to convince him that the existence of God is a logical necessity.

"I don't believe in anything unless I see it," he told me.

"After you've seen something, you don't need to believe it," I responded. "For instance, if I tell you I have a cold Pepsi in my fridge, either you believe it or you don't. But after seeing it, you know, and you don't need to believe me." Personally, I do have faith. And I picture him, and these other guards, as good friends if we would meet under different circumstances. May God guide them and help them make the right choices in life.

Crisis always brings out the best and worst in people—and in countries, too. Did the Leader of the Free World, the United States, really torture detainees? Or are stories of torture part of a conspiracy to present the U.S. in a horrible way, so the rest of the world will hate it?

I don't even know how to treat this subject. I have only written what I experienced, what I saw, and what I learned first-hand. I have tried not to exaggerate, nor to understate. I have tried to be as fair as possible, to the U.S. government, to my brothers, and to myself. I don't expect people who don't know me to believe me, but I expect them, at least, to give me the benefit of the doubt. And if Americans are willing to stand for what they believe in, I also expect public opinion to compel the U.S. government to open a torture and war crimes investigation. I am more than confident that I can prove every single thing I have written in this book if I am ever given the opportunity to call witnesses in a proper judicial procedure, and if military personnel are not given the advantage of straightening their lies and destroying evidence against them.

Human beings naturally hate to torture other human beings, and Americans are no different. Many of the soldiers were doing the job reluctantly, and were very happy when they were ordered to stop. Of course there are sick people everywhere in the world who enjoy seeing other people suffering, but generally human beings make use of torture when they get chaotic and confused. And Americans certainly got chaotic, vengeful, and confused, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

At the direction of President Bush, the U.S. began a campaign against the Taliban government in Afghanistan. On September 18, 2001, a joint resolution of Congress authorized President Bush to use force against the "nations, organizations, or persons" that "planned, authorized, committed, or aided

the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons.” Then the U.S. government started a secret operation aimed at kidnapping, detaining, torturing, or killing terrorist suspects, an operation that has no legal basis.

I was the victim of such an operation, though I had done no such thing and have never been part of any such crimes. On September 29, 2001, I got a call on my cellphone and was asked to turn myself in, and I immediately did, sure I would be cleared. Instead, Americans interrogated me in my home country, and then the U.S. reached a joint agreement with the Mauritanian government to send me to Jordan to squeeze the last bits of information out of me. I was incarcerated and interrogated under horrible conditions in Jordan for eight months, and then the Americans flew me to Bagram Air Base for two weeks of interrogation, and finally on to the Guantánamo Navy Base [REDACTED], where I still am today.

So has the American democracy passed the test it was subjected to with the 2001 terrorist attacks? I leave this judgment to the reader. As I am writing this, though, the United States and its people are still facing the dilemma of the Cuban detainees.

In the beginning, the U.S. government was happy with its secret operations, since it thought it had managed to gather all the evils of the world in GTMO, and had circumvented U.S. law and international treaties so that it could perform its revenge. But then it realized, after a lot of painful work, that it had gathered a bunch of non-combatants. Now the U.S. government is stuck with the problem, but it is not willing to be forthcoming and disclose the truth about the whole operation.

Everybody makes mistakes. I believe the U.S. government owes it to the American people to tell them the truth about what is happening in Guantánamo. So far, I have personally cost American taxpayers at least one million dollars, and the counter is ticking higher every day. The other detainees are costing more or less the same. Under these circumstances, Americans need and have the right to know what the hell is going on.

Many of my brothers here are losing their minds, especially the younger detainees, because of the conditions of detention. As I write these words, many brothers are hunger-striking and are determined to carry on, no matter what.* I am very worried about these brothers I am helplessly watching, who are practically dying and who are sure to suffer irreparable damage even if they eventually decide to eat. It is not the first time we have had a hunger strike; I personally participated in the hunger strike in September 2002, but the government did not seem to be impressed. And so the brothers keep striking, for the same old, and new, reasons. And there seems to be no solution in the air. The government expects the U.S. forces in GTMO to pull magic solutions out of their sleeves. But the U.S. forces in GTMO understand the situation here more than any bureaucrat in Washington, DC, and they know that the only solution is for the government to be forthcoming and release people.

What do the American people think? I am eager to know. I would like to believe the majority of Americans want to see Justice done, and they are not interested in financing the detention of innocent people. I know there is a small extremist minority that believes that everybody in this Cuban prison is evil, and that we are treated better than we deserve. But this opinion has no basis but ignorance. I am amazed that somebody can build such an incriminating opinion about people he or she doesn't even know.