

Peanut Butter & Jelly Time



by Saint
Scoby

I'm writing today from the Dark Side, the "max" division of Cook County Jail Division 9. Well... My story is about the Food. Please allow me to go back to 2017 around March before I came to this Dungeon. I did transportation in Chicagoland and the surrounding suburbs, picking people up and dropping them off for 8 to 9 hours a day starting at one in the morning...

I ate breakfast about 7 times before the sun came up. Then my live-in girlfriend at the time would make me big plates of food for dinner at home and on my one or two off days she would make me a big breakfast.

Now I'm here, on the Darkside I call it, in the Cook County Jail – still in Chicagoland, so close but yet so far from my loved ones.

My very first breakfast was not a breakfast at all. Me talking to myself, what is this? This must be a snack til the breakfast trays come later in the morning, because it was 4 o'clock then. So I'm thinking the real breakfast or the rest of the breakfast will be served at 8 or 9am. The Hot Breakfast. Nope! That was it, no hot breakfast, just two slices of bread two small packs of jelly a very very small cup of butter and a small flat breakfast cake that's two inch by two inch in size that everyone calls a "breakfast square"...

That was my very first breakfast back in April 9, 2017, about nine years, yes I said about nine years later. I'm still in Division 9 Cook County Jail, and the breakfast is still the same. Sometimes they would replace the cup of butter with a peanut butter pouch (two ounces) or replace the breakfast square...

Guess what!!! I'm still hungry, well well well here comes the lunch trays. I'm thinking it's gotta be better than that malnutrition breakfast tray ... It's Bologna. Slimy, semi brown smelly bologna that we get five times a week. Guess what comes with the bologna tray! Soggy, wet, slimy and smelly bread, 3 slices on Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays...

On Mondays, everyone gets four slices of bread, the same two packs of jelly and the 2 ounce peanut butter pouch we get for breakfast from time to time. Oh, don't let me forget the pack of four sandwich

cookies. Now here comes Thursday – No bologna with soggy bread, no peanut butter & jelly, we get four more slices of bread and two boiled eggs only two & a smaller pack of cookies they call Cinnamon Snap and two slices of cheese. I guess the bread should hold me over til dinnertime, right?

Look at this here, meals on wheels. The building workers just push a big brown insulated box with wheels on it to our tier door around 5:30, 6 o'clock in the evening. The breakfast and lunch trays are pushed to the tiers in milk crates, but this big box has trays that supposed to keep the food warm – not hot, but mostly room temperature.

This meal I really, really need, because I do not have any more food coming til breakfast. The workers bring in the tray – these trays are 12 inch by 5 inch in size, give or take, and gray in color. I can't see what it is but wait – what's that smell, I can't put my finger on it. So I stand in line to get my tray right now, there's 6 people in front of me, now 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and I'm next. The worker passes me my tray – I look down at it, I cannot make out what this is. It's a dark color, I see a couple pieces of corn, couple peas mixed in with the subsistence. We also have more bread (two slices), a square slice of cake and some mushy mixed vegetables.

I go sit at one of the tables, oh there is a spoon on my dinner tray as well. I ask one of the gentlemen that's sitting at the table with me, "what's this called?" He said "slop". "Excuse me," I replied, but the guy said "yeah, that's what these dishes are called". I felt my face frown up because of the name alone, then I look back down at it and grab he spoon to dig in. I ate a spoonful of the "slop" and the taste was so horrible, it tasted worse than it looked and it looked bad...

I'm at a loss for words to describe the taste. I skipped the main dish, I could not take the taste of it, and went on to the vegetables. The veggies had NO flavor at all and they're mushy (except the corn). I like vegetables – I mean I love them, but these do not taste or feel like the veggies I'm used to. So I ate pieces of corn out of the three table spoon size scope of the mushy mix while I'm watching "Wonder Woman" again on TV.

I commercial came on for Wendy's restaurant showing their burgers, fries and frosties. I used to eat Wendy's all the time. The main one I went to is here is on 83rd and Ashland. I had some of everything from there so I know exactly how their food is tasty and as I zoom in on the T.V. I'm still holding the spoon.

As I wipe drool from my mouth and chin with my other hand, I look at this tray, drop my spoon in the slop and grab the bread. I asked myself "Saint Scoby do you know what time it is???" and replied back "It's Peanut Butter & Jelly Time". Yeah, that's my go to meal most nights. We get so much bread – no fresh fruits, no fresh vegetables...

Luckily, I became friends with some guys with peanut allergies so I would give one guy my lunch tray for two peanut butter pouches and a couple packs of jelly and the other guy would get my dinner tray, minus the cake & bread, for the same deal as the first gentleman.

Not every dinner is disgusting like I describe here. However, five times out the week are. When you can watch a cat or dog food commercial and their food looks more appetizing than the food they feed human beings, that should tell you a lot...

My Dear Friends over at Jail Solidarity Network wrote an article called "Going Hungry in Jail", the Cook County Jail. This awesome article explains and breaks down how we suffer from lack of fresh produce and insufficient portions.

They also showed that on the Jail's vendor contract the daily calorie counts of their provided meals fall between 2,300 and 2,500 recommended calorie intake. Depends on the person, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Dietary Guidelines for Americans notes that nineteen-to-thirty year old men, who make up a majority of the jail population, needs 2,400 – 3,000 calories per day.

Remember how I described the breakfast & lunch trays, the vegetable amount being three tablespoons, that was NOT an exaggeration.

Not every dinner is how I described; only 90% of them are. The breakfast & lunch are the same, but wait – the plot thickens. They have Special Diet trays you can get on: no soy, vegan, halal, and

kosher. The vegan tray you get the same peanut butter pouch and jelly for breakfast with an apple, same for lunch (but no apple). Dinner is beans & rice, apple sauce, & a powder milk packet.

Halal is the second best tray because you get sliced turkey bologna for lunch, and the breakfast and dinner are the same, pretty much. Now the kosher tray!!! The Kosher Tray is the best Cook County Jail tray there is. I was on the vegan tray, the halal tray, and the kosher at one point, remember I been here 9 long years. Everybody wants to try to get on the Kosher tray. For starters you get an apple with every meal – a fresh apple. You get cereal & a powder milk pack, peanut butter pouch, jelly and bread for breakfast, and for lunch, peanut butter, jelly & an apple. But the dinner is ten times better than any other dinner tray. It is double wrapped for freshness; you can tell what it is when you see it and it tastes so much better than the general population dinner.

The Kosher & Halal tray is sooo hard to get on and soooo easy to get kicked off of; for example, 30 people in Division 9 (where I'm housed) was kicked off the Kosher and Halal tray for ordering gummy bears.

Here's the thing, these gummy bears are made with beef gelatin, and if a person is on the Halal or Kosher tray, beef is not prohibited, and once you're off that tray, they will not put you back on it. Nothing you say or do will work, not even grievances, believe me I've tried. Are you wondering why? The Kosher tray costs more money. If everyone got "slop" that money could go in someone's pockets.

Think about it – let's say that you made up in your mind that you are NOT eating the slimy bologna or the slop with mushy mixed veggies, you can't get on the Kosher tray or you might have peanut allergies, what are you going to eat? If you're lucky you have some loved ones in your corner to put some money on your books for commissary so you can buy soap, towels, noodles, and maybe cheese.

Everything here costs – I mean costs more than it would at Walmart, Jewel-Osco, or even a gas station. We have no choice but to shop here. Ms. Jane Gubser, the executive director of Programs here at the jail, she called commissary "a privilege". I've been here 9 years, the stuff they used to give us for free is now a commissary item, like toothpaste, towels, even shower shoes, all cost now.

The Crook County Jail is the largest single site jail in the country. “96 acres”, eight city blocks, holding anywhere between 5,000 to 6,000 inmates on any given day.

The commissary made 9.1 million dollars in 11 months back in 2023 and since then prices went up 3 times, the most recent price gouging was in February 2026.

WOW...

If you have any questions or want to reach out I could be found on facebook.com. Thank you sincerely:

High Supreme Saint Scoby



Find Saint Scoby on Facebook

More about Cook County Jail and Food:

"Going Hungry in Jail" (CCJ) by Harley Pomper

<https://southsideweekly.com/going-hungry-in-jail/>

"Food and Power in Cook County Jail"

<https://www.southchicagoabc.org/zine/cabc-food-and-power-at-cook-county-jail.pdf/>

"Eating Behind Bars: Ending the Hidden Punishment of Food in Prison"

<https://impactjustice.org/innovation/food-in-prison/#report>

"Private Food, Public Harm: Privatized Food Service in Prisons and Jails"

<https://www.cspi.org/PrivateFoodPublicHarm>

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