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## Addendum: Literacy on the Inside: Recipes and the Art of Making Do

Shannon Carter  
*Texas A&M Commerce*, shannon.carter@tamuc.edu

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## Addendum

### Literacy on the Inside: Recipes and the Art of Making Do

According to Michael Moore and John Warnock, “community’ literacy’ is . . . the domain for literacy work that exists outside of mainstream educational and work institutions. It can be found in institutional programs devoted to adult education or lifelong learning or work with marginalized populations, but it can also be found in more informal, *ad hoc* projects” (7). Through Texas HOPE Literacy, I have been involved in one “institutional program” that supports literacy work via individualized instruction, writing groups lead by volunteers like me, and even various plays led by a volunteer from community theater.

But literacy on the inside is made up of numerous “*ad hoc* projects” as well, the most obvious of which being the letters serving as primary communication points between life on the outside and incarcerated friends and family members. From the beginning, letters have been a staple of incarcerated life. Literacy sustains connections between inmates and the “free world,” but it also sustains connections among the inmates themselves and, perhaps just as importantly, reproduces aspects of the “everyday.” One manifestation of that is the circulation of recipes and written accounts of “household tips.”

In prison, supplies are limited but ingenuity is not. A narrow inventory of foodstuffs and personal items are available for purchase at the commissary, but there is, of course, no cookware, no stove, no cutlery. Laundry can be taken care of by the State, but everything is white cotton and items often come back yellowed, stained, or not at all. Jessica Foster and Debbie Furrh (inmates at Dawson State Jail in Dallas, Texas) include some recipes quite common in their dorms, as well as some of her specialties. Also included here are some of the innovative ways they’ve found to cut pickles when no knives are available, press clothes when no irons are available, and dry sheets.

#### **Part I: Life inside the Box (Debbie Furrh)**

Living here “in the box” is rough sometimes. I call it a box because we live in a ten story building in Downtown Dallas, Texas that we don’t leave—even once—for the entire length of our sentence. We drive up to this building the day we get here and that will be the last time you see or be outside until you walk out that door. What I would do to sit in the grass. Oh, you would not imagine.

Life in the Box. Twenty-seven metal bunk beds with a gym mat for a mattress. Fifty four seats at fourteen tables. A glassed-in ground post that sits by the restroom. Seven toilets and four shower heads. Each day the same four walls.

We live out of a box that is mounted under the bottom bunk, a container that is about a twin side bed in width and about two sheets of paper in length. We keep everything inside these boxes, from our clothes to our books, and everything in between. Our lives are in those boxes. Letters from home. Soaps and shampoo. Toilet paper to food. Oh, food.

The food stored in our box is purchased at the commissary with money sent in from loved ones. Choices are limited, but they are our own choices. As opposed to the food provided by the TDC. Generations of inmates have gotten pretty creative with their recipes, given the lack of variety in ingredients, availability of kitchenware. It also requires creative options for heat sources, given that no “kitchen” exists. Lots of things are heated with hot water from the tap. Some of the things we live off of in here may sound a little crazy, but are not that bad. Try these simple recipes and you will be in for a surprise.

These are just two of the things we make here. Our “cooking” is done with just a hot pot water spigot. I will have to say it has been a learning experience.

### Spread

4 servings  
 2 packs of roman noodles  
 ½ bag of cheese puffs  
 1 cup dill pickles (cut in small pieces)  
 An empty chip bag

Break up the noodles into small pieces. Make the cheese puffs into dust. Put all of this in a chip bag with enough hot, hot water to cover about half o the food. Mix this all by “working” the outside of the bag. Put somewhere warm for 15 minutes. Enjoy.

### Cookie Cake

1 pack of sandwich cookies  
 ½ cup peanut butter  
 ½ cup hot chocolate mix

Take icing out of cookies. Put into a cup. In a large bowl, use the peanut butter jar to smash the cookies into a dust. Add a little water to make a hard dough. Set aside. Take the cup, add peanut butter and hot chocolate mix. Add enough water to make a thick icing. Add to dough. Let set for 10-15 mins. You can add candy or graham cracker crumbs to top. Enjoy.

## Part II: Recipes and Household Products (Jessica Foster)

### Spicy Bacon Sandwich

1 bag hot pork skins  
Salad dressing  
Save bread slices from lunch tray

Spread salad dressing on bread slices. Cover bread with pork skins. Put bread together like sandwich and squash. Enjoy! Yum!

### Spam Spread

Any Roman noodle, cooked with seasoning  
Spam—cut in cubes  
Cheese puffs—crushed  
Salad dressing—spoonful  
Cheese—2 spoons full  
Pickles—cubed, 2 spoons full

Mix all ingredients together well. Put in large chip bag. Squash to make 1" layer. Fold end under. Cover with newspaper to keep warm. Done in 5 min.

### Chili Cheese Fries

1 bag Hot Fries  
1 bag chili—warmed  
Cheese—3 spoons full

Mix all together. Enjoy. Add hot sauce if you like.

### Spicy French Fries with Ketchup

1 bag Zapps Jalapeño Potato Chips  
Ketchup

Put Zapps in bowl. Squirt on ketchup. Enjoy.

## PB/Chocolate Cake

1 bag chocolate cream cookies  
 1 spoon of peanut butter  
 1 pack of regular oatmeal  
 1 nutty bar  
 1 oatmeal cream pie

Take each cookie and scrape icing off of cookie and into separate container. Crush cookies. Add oatmeal, oatmeal cream pie (crushed), nutty bar (crushed), and enough water to make dough-like substance. Mix well.

With icing in separate container, spread out cookie dough like a pie and add icing to top. Add crushed Chick-O-Stick if desired.

### Cutting, Washing, Pressing

*To cut pickles for adding to meals:*

We use the blade in razors. Put the pickle into empty peanut butter jar. Add diced jalapeno or chili seasoning from Roman noodles, maybe even carrots from tray.

*Washing Clothes:*

Add toothpaste to stains until able to wash. Alternative: Laundry soap can be made with small pieces of soap supplied by the State. Put into jar. Add water or even cleaning chemicals (for cleaning dorm). Use a palm brush to scrub with (a brush without a handle for very short hair).

*Pressing clothes:*

Put flat or folded for crease under mat.

*Drying clothes:*

Lay out on tables between 10 p.m. – 6 a.m.

*Drying sheets:*

Tie one end to bed and wave back and forth until dry.

*Tampons:*

State supplies pads. Tear open one side of pad. Tear down seam of sticky part. Pull out padding. Tear off 2" of padding. Layout outer later with sticky side up. Tear off inch on left side. Put padding at opposite end. Roll out to sticky side. Fold over excess. Pull off tab of sticky and roll up. Twist bottom. Put 1 inch sticky over to keep padding in.

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Shannon Carter is Associate Professor of English and Co-Director of the new Converging Literacies Center (CLiC) at Texas A&M-Commerce. Her research interests include prison literacy and potential applications of New Literacy Studies and activity theory to writing center work and the basic writing classroom. Other, related interests include conservative rhetoric (published in *College English*) and academic labor issues (forthcoming in CCC). Her book, *The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and Basic Writing Instruction* is forthcoming with State University of New York Press (March 2008), an article-version of which appeared in a recent issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing*.