

The following is a excerpt from Claudio Lavazza's autobiography, *My Pestiferous Life*<sup>1</sup> (Compass Editions, 2020):

Many years before I had decided to prepare myself psychologically for the possibility of ending up in jail, which, after all, was quite a likely prospect. I wanted to test my capacity to endure tough situations and, most importantly, face the paranoia that a long detention could have caused me. I rented an off-the-grid cabin in the mountains, completely isolated from the city. It had bars on the windows just like a cell, and the walls were solid, in stone, as they once used to be built. There was only one escape route, a dormer window that gave onto the roof. Although I promised myself I wouldn't use it, this would be my way out in case I couldn't endure the self-seclusion I had been preparing. I had enough food for a month, a transistor radio to listen to the news, sufficient water and lots of books, but no telephone, mail or visits. I handed the key of the massive door to a friend who was about to go on holiday and didn't even know when he'd be back. He locked the door saying, "You're crazy," and went away. During the first few days in this artificial prison I didn't notice anything strange. I spent most of the time reading or exercising, daily push-ups and stretches. During the experiment, every morning and every night, I took notes of all the sensations I was feeling in a diary. Only a week later did I start to experience something strange - a state of agitation and stress that kept me awake at night. Then anxiety came and finally dangerous paranoia. I started to get excessively worried that something could have happened to my friend, and wondered how long he'd be away, before coming back and opening that damned door. All this was the fruit of my imagination, as the conditions of isolation were taking their toll. In reality, there was nothing to worry about, because I could have left whenever I wanted, contrary to what happens when you really are in prison, where others - the authorities - decide for you.

I found out that if you don't have any contact with what you love most (nature's scents, the sun warming you after hours of diving in the sea...), your brain produces these sensations on its own, a quite dangerous phenomenon. Experts say that ten years in isolation leaves irreversible scars on a prisoner's personality. I asked myself, "Is what they say true?" I wrote everything down in my diary and I can assure you, years later, when I read my notes, the results of this experience were truly astonishing... believe me. Try this experiment and you'll see for yourself.

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<sup>1</sup><https://compasseditions.noblogs.org/post/2020/09/05/my-pestiferous-life-claudio-lavazza>

A month and a half later my friend returned, and I immediately came back to life. Suddenly, all the anguish, the sadness, the bad thoughts, stress and fear disappeared. Instead, I felt a new man, stronger because I had survived a very hard test.