

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2016/03/18/voices-from-solitary-restless-nights/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | March 18, 2016

The following account is by Nicole Natschke, who was incarcerated for years in Illinois Logan Correctional Facility, about three hours south of Chicago. During that time, she was constantly in and out of segregation, including one stay that lasted for an entire year. Logan Correctional, which was repurposed from a mens prison to imprison women from the shuttered Dwight and Lincoln Correctional Centers, has a rated capacity of 1,106. In 2014, it held [1,950 women](#). A December 2014 report by the [John Howard Association](#) described the dismal conditions at the overcrowded [and] underresourced prison. Last year, Solitary Watch published Natschkes essay [I Am Somebody's Daughter](#).

Natschke was released in late 2015, nearly a year after her original scheduled release date of December 2014. (Her segregation sentence extended her time in prison.) In this piece, titled Restless Nights, she describes how the mental effects of solitary confinement continue to haunt her months after her release. Victoria Law

Long-term isolation can severely damage any human being, whether youre considered fairly normal or if youve suffered from mental disorders your entire life. It doesnt matter, either way you will have issues when coming out of segregation. I was incarcerated for four years all together. I was constantly in and out of segregation at Logan Correctional Facility. The stay in isolation that had the greatest toll on my mental stability was the one year straight I did in that little cell. Not only did I spend a year in segregation, I also went home a year later than my original outdate.

There is supposed to be a rule enforced in all prison facilities that if an IDOC offender is listed as SMI (seriously mentally ill), that person is allowed more time out of their cell, and is also offered an opportunity to get out of segregation sooner than expected based on their behavior and whether or not segregation is helping them or further damaging them. When an SMI offender is hearing a ticket they received, a mental health professional is supposed to hear that ticket as well. Theyre supposed to investigate whether or not that offender was in their right state of mind. Needless to say, these rules were not enforced. I was listed as an SMI offender, was on four different psychotropic medications, and was not in my right state of mind.

I had a seizure in August 2014 and a code red was called. After the nurse checked my blood pressure and heart rate, a corrections officer came into my cell and proceeded to lift me off of the ground. He then grabbed the back of my head and slammed my face into the concrete wall. My reaction was instantaneous and impulsive, I spit in his face and attempted to protect myself. No one believed my side of the story, so I received a year in segregation and an extra year in prison. By then I felt like giving up. I wasnt allowed to talk to my family, no visitation rights, and commissary was limited to only necessities. The only time I was allowed out of my cell was once every four days for a shower.

Finally, I made it home in September 2015. When I first arrived home I had these recurring nightmares where I would wake up in a panic with tears streaming down my face. I scheduled an appointment with my psychiatrist and told him what was going on. The nightmares depicted me sitting alone in isolation. Those same feelings of hopelessness and depression came rushing back into my life. I woke up with the most realistic feeling of being back in segregation. Ive learned how to cope better with these nightmares now that its been four months out of that despicable place, but I continue to wake up every morning with a full blown panic attack.

The nightmares arent the only problem I deal with on a daily basis. I used to be outgoing and extremely sociable. Now I find myself preferring an isolated environment. I hate being around other people and when I do get around a big crowd I feel a shortness of breath and a high level of anxiety. My psychiatrist previously diagnosed me with anxiety, depression, PTSD, and ADD. Due to spending 365 days in isolation I have developed sleep insomnia, social anxiety, and my PTSD has worsened. Im terrified of the changes Ive seen in myself lately compared to who I was before that incident.

I am also extremely scared for those men and women who are currently sitting in isolation for a lengthy period of time. Especially those who are considered mentally ill. I hope they find a healthy way to pass the time, instead of the self-destructive behavior that is expected in these situations. Many mentally ill inmates who have been thrown in segregation, resort to cutting themselves, suicide attempts, spreading feces on the walls, and other harmful behaviors.

I witnessed my friend Victoria Woodrich kill herself after receiving two years in segregation. You would think the officers would, at the very least, report that an inmate is suicidal. That's not the case. I told several correctional officers, repeatedly, that Victoria revealed suicidal thoughts to me. All those officers did was ask Victoria if she was OK, and of course she replied she was perfectly fine.

After her death, the correctional officers had to stand outside her cell until her body was removed. Considering I was housed in the cell next to hers, I got the opportunity to hear all the despicable jokes the officers made about Victoria. When two officers were discussing Victoria's suicide, they exclaimed that inmates are dropping like flies around here, and good, now there's more bed space.

You think being isolated in a tiny cell, alone, with nothing to entertain yourself with is the worst? I honestly think the mental abuse distributed by the correctional officers is harder to handle, especially in those circumstances. The c/os really know how to make you feel worthless. Luckily, they no longer dictate how I feel about myself. The nightmares and restless nights are considered a reminder of where I've been, what I've survived, as well as my motivation to never go back. I'll keep all those who are currently suffering in isolation in my thoughts and prayers.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to read what I had to say. I hope that all of you were deeply impacted by my story and I sincerely hope I was able to open your eyes to the disturbing reality of the prison systems way of discipline.

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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I too grew up with Vicki she used to come to my bar every morning and we would play 2 handed spades. I tried keeping in touch she would never write back I also signed her up for pen pal programs. It's my understanding she lost her mom and this was the outcome.

RIP Vicki

Your friend always,
Jodi

Dear Nicole,
Thank you for sharing your experience in see with us. I can't even begin to imagine what it would be like to spend a year in segregation. You truly are a survivor!

On another note, I grew up with Vicci. We were best friends all through childhood. I kept in touch with her as best I could from the time she was arrested until the time I had my first child in 2015 when I learned of her death. I was shocked and deeply saddened. I am now angry as well, at the way the officers made light of and made fun of her death. I wish I had kept in closer contact with her during the year prior to her passing. I wish I knew what a dark place she was in. So that, MAYBE, MAYBE, I could have done something. I just pray she is in a happier, more peaceful place..

And as for you Nicole, I will keep you in my prayers! Again, thanks for sharing your story.

Thank you for sharing this very personal experience with your readers. Having a family member recently get out of jail I have been reading a lot on the subject and looking online (and at books) that can help me to empathize and relate more with what he went through. I recently read a really enthralling memoir about prison life by author Don Alfredano called Real Men Wear Beige (<http://realmenwearbeige.com/>). This book gives you a fascinating real life look at the criminal justice system as well as what life is like in state prison. The author manages to inject humor, insight, and deep emotions throughout his memoir. I couldn't put it down. I think it would be a great book to add to this website and for prisoners and ex prisoners to read. It's inspiring and heartfelt and it reminded me of this post. Hope you will check it out

Nikki I agree with you as many inmates who are SMI can become dangerous after spending time in solitary confinement. What you may want to do if you get time is to check DuPage Co. for resources as they have a mental health court as they're located in Wheaton I believe. I can get the address for you as I'm originally from Elmhurst. I also know a current congressman as we've been friends since we were kids as he actually is not too far from one of our friends. I didn't realize that until I read this as I would bring this to Springfield ASAP especially with the comments the correctional officers made.

Nicole, Thank you for sharing your incredibly terrible experience in segregation. I can not imagine what you went through every day and night. By sharing, you let others know just how awful it is to endure solitary confinement. I am glad you are out and I wish you the very best and hope that time will heal some of the trauma you have endured.

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