

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | May 14, 2011

The suffering of solitary confinement extends beyond prisoners, to the families who wait for them outside. The anguish can be particularly keen for the families of inmates with mental illness.

Diana Montes-Walkers son, whom we will call A, exhibited signs of mental illness from the time he was a young boy. When he was in his 20s, he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder complicated by drug and alcohol dependencies. In 2005, A was charged with auto theft. He was found not guilty by reason of insanity, and sent to Napa State Hospital for two years. While at Napa, Diana says, he jumped over an inner courtyard fence because he was hearing voices tell him to hit the psych tech that was walking with him, and A did not want to hit him. A returned to the unit peacefully and voluntarily, but the administration called it an attempted escape. He was immediately sent to the maximum-security Atascadero State Hospital.

California's Welfare and Institutions Code Section 7301 states that whenever any person who has been committed to a state hospital pursuant to provisions of the Penal Code is officially deemed to need placement under conditions of custodial security, that person can be transferred from an institution under the jurisdiction of the State Department of Mental Health to an institution under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections. Without a hearing or court order, a resident of a state hospital can be sent to prison instead.

This is what happened to Diana's son. After several years at Atascadero, A, again hearing voices, hit a guard who was making fun of him. No charges were pressed, and A was finally put on a medication that worked for him, and seemed to be making progress. But several months later, A was without warning transferred to Folsom Prison, where he was taken off the medication that worked (because it wasn't allowed at Folsom) and placed in isolation. As Diana describes it:

Their common procedure for any mentally ill inmate sent to Folsom is that they go directly to solitary confinement. It's the Psychiatric Services Unit (PSU); from their very first day there they are in solitary. They have to work a program and earn points in order to move up to a level where they can have a little more freedom.

A had never been in such an environment—no phone calls, only 1 hour of exercise in an outdoor cage each day, 3 showers a week, and he was in handcuffs and shackles any time he was not in his cell. All meals were taken in the cell. He had to go to groups where he and the other men were placed in modules which are actually one-man cages the size of a small phone booth, and the counselor would stand or sit outside the cages to lead their group sessions. All visits were non-contact (behind glass and on the phone, only). No canteen privileges if you could not meet at least 75% of the groups and other requirements they had, but they never told A about that until I complained after I sent him a Christmas package and they refused to give it to him because he had not wanted to go to all of his groups.

He became more and more isolated as he became more depressed. They told me that after one year, he could be eligible to go to the next level and have a little more freedom. I told them that I believed that in a year he would have killed himself already.

Because of Diana's constant advocacy on behalf of A, he was moved to the California Medical Facility in Vacaville. The facility is misleadingly named: it is not a hospital, but a prison for inmates with medical needs. There he is still in solitary; he has a little more freedom, but not much, says Diana. Last week, Diana drove to Vacaville from her home in Yuba City. Here, she describes the trip.

Today I drove the 75+ miles to the California Medical Facility at Vacaville ready to meet with my son's psychiatrist and social worker, and praying, too, that maybe, just maybe, they might feel some compassion and allow me to see him. I had this thought in my head that, somehow, they would let me have a contact visit—meaning a person to person visit, not separated by glass from one another.

I had previously expressed how important I felt it was that A receive the warmth and comfort the human touch can bring and that they would see the sense of this and let me hug my son and hold his hand, touch his face, rub his head like I use to when he was younger. He is nearly 30 now. They have him in solitary all the time now.

I listened to some good old gospel music on the way over there, praising God and asking Him to give me the right words to say to convince the doctor to let me see A. Praying for some miraculous breakthrough by way of our meeting, some way that we could all work together to try to help A. On the phone, the doctor had sounded so compassionate and sounded as though she was crying for A, too, as she

told me how very lonely he was and how he was becoming more delusional. This was why we had set up the meeting. I had been told that it was never done; that a parent never came to meetings with the doctor or the treating team; but I had begged through the tears of a mother desperate to do whatever is necessary to bring help and comfort to my son and they had agreed.

I arrived about 11 a.m. It was already very hot! I don't get out much, not with the osteoporosis in my neck and back. Long drives are always very hard on my body, but it is worth all of it if it doesn't matter, if there's a chance that he can get some sort of relief and help.

I sat in the parking lot and called the prison, dialing the extension of the social worker to let her know I was there. I got her answering machine and figured she'd be back to her office soon, so left her a message. Then I called to the unit counselor, who also didn't pick up her phone, and left her the same message. I left them both my cell phone number so they could reach me in the parking lot. I had arrived early, so I was not too concerned yet. I then decided to call B, a man who answers the phone for the acute psychiatric unit. He is always very nice and tries to get messages to whomever I need to speak to. Since Vacaville actually is a prison, they don't give out direct phone numbers or extensions to the doctors.

It was starting to get too hot in the truck, so I packed up my things, got my I.D. out, and walked over to the lobby to check in and let them know I was there. There was so much activity going on, so many officers walking in and out, others I looked around and found a female officer standing at a booth where we usually go to check in whenever we visit on the weekends. She was chatting it up with another female officer about switching shifts in the coming week. When she saw me, she asked what I needed; she was very polite. I pulled out my I.D. and let her know that I was there to see As social worker and psychiatrist. She looked in a large binder to see if my name was written in the schedule for a meeting. She looked at me and asked if I had an appointment and I said yes, we had spoken and I was to meet them around this time, call from the parking lot, then go in for them to come out to meet me at the lobby. She did not find my name anywhere, returned my identification to me and said sorry, there wasn't anything she could do.

It was already almost noon by then and getting hotter by the minute. I walked over to another counter where there were 3 officers sitting around, checking in the arriving employees. One of them asked if I needed assistance and I again told my story; he directed me to a phone on the wall and told me to call the social worker on that phone, which I did. No answer. I tried B's phone but he must have walked away and he didn't answer either, but I left another message anyway.

I looked around at all the activity; people in uniforms and plain clothes walking in and out of the building, talking, joking, some of them looking very serious. None of them seemed to pay any more attention to me. I wasn't sure what to do, so I dialed the social worker's extension again and, again, got no answer. I sat down on a very old-looking sofa that was against a wall and just waited and watched for about an hour.

Finally, my cell phone rang. It was B. He told me that he had looked for the social worker and discovered that she had called in sick. Then he said he had spoken to Dr. G and she had told him to tell me that she could not meet with me unless the social worker could be there with her and that she was very busy! B seemed very apologetic and courteous at the same time. I told him that I had driven from Yuba City, and his voice seemed to make the sound of shrugging shoulders as he told me there was nothing more he could do. He suggested I call back later and reschedule. I felt very helpless and just said ok and hung up. I gathered my things and slowly walked out the front door.

As I walked toward the parking lot where I had parked my car, which was quite a distance, I looked at all the huge, stone buildings. All identical, painted white. Some with a letter of the alphabet painted on the front of it. My son is housed in building P, but I could not see that building. It must be way in the back, I thought. What might he be doing at that very moment? Was he better? Was he acting out? Would we be able to see him this weekend? Did he have a window? Was it hot in there? Had he had his lunch? Had he received our letters and was he able to read them? So many thoughts ran through my mind as I walked slowly back to my vehicle.

I didn't want to leave. Just knowing that I was so close to him; that he was somewhere nearby. I prayed he would feel my presence there and felt so sad and very tired. I had brought with me an envelope with some papers from As past and a photo of him from 9th grade so the doctor could see how cute he had been. In the photo, he is wearing a hat, slightly slanted to one side like my father used to wear it. He had on only a tank top and jeans, but he looked so happy. His face lit up with that great smile of his. I thought about how it had been so very long since I had seen that smile.

I reached the car, got in and started it to get the a/c going. I made some notations in my journal; it was so hard for me to go. I just wanted to stay on the same property where I knew my son was; to somehow connect to him in some way. To breathe the same air he was breathing; to see the same sky he might be looking at. Finally, after about 30 minutes, I decided I'd better go before someone kicked me off the property.

I drove home on the highway; I drove too slow because I kept thinking about A and forgetting to step on the gas. I didn't play my music or the radio. Just quiet while I thought and thought. I didn't know whether I believed what B had told me, but there really was nothing else I could do. The place was a fortress and there was no shoving my way in. I thought, that's OK, God. You know what you're doing. Maybe it just wasn't supposed to be yet. I will call and reschedule and discuss whether they really will allow me in. I better make sure this time, before I leave. My whole body is aching from the drive. It's OK, though, there will be another day. Tomorrow I will fax them a letter and call. I pray we will be able to see my son this weekend. I can't give up.

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James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received

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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

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September 19, 2022

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September 6, 2022

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I cried as I read this woman's story. I'm a mother of a son who is incarcerated in prison for twelve years because he defended me against my husband's abuse. The real criminal is my now ex-husband and he should be in jail for all the damage he's done to me. My ex lied about my son and me all because he was having an affair with a co-worker and he wanted to keep all the money and assets, his greed destroyed four lives. My son's life, his two sons and my life. It's terrible to think that he planned for two years how to discredit me and get everyone on his side, he made himself look like a saint. Well anyway I feel bad for any mother that's dealing with DOC. There's just horrible things they are abusive and they cover up for each other. The guards get away with abusing the inmates but the inmates are there because of a mistake, a lack of good judgement, a bad choice. They shouldn't have to be subject to the abuse of authority. Myself, I'm sick and tired of people in high held offices getting away with whatever they do. There's not above the law and people need to keep speaking out about this. Solitary confinement is cruel and unusual treatment according to our amendment and rights.

Wow it is such a shame to hear stories like this. There is a lot that we could do to change so that things like this don't become an issue. We could still maintain safety and implement rules. Exploiting people with mental illness is cruel and inhumane. To allow things like this to go on is insane to say the least. God help these people and the families who are hurt by them. It is not uncommon for a man who's not really a criminal nor has committed any real offenses to become victims of this abuse.

I am the mother who wrote this story about my son. Adam is still in a prison and still in solitary confinement at Salinas Valley Prison, which they tell me is really not a prison as it is run by the Dept. of Mental Health, however, he's treated just like a prisoner/inmate, shackled, cuffed, isolated, showers 3 times a week, yard 2 or 3 times a week. They finally have allowed him to call us once per week since we filed a Habeas Corpus case in Court. I have faxed them often with complaints and questions so they had the California DMH attorney in Sacramento write me and ask me to stop sending them faxes and calling about my son and offered to have once-a-month conference calls with me and my son's team so I wouldn't bother them so often. We've had one such conference call and they allowed me 20 minutes to ask them questions and my son was not present. They seemed surprised when I asked if my son could be there for the next meeting, as if he doesn't count! I want to make sure that whatever they tell me is the truth. We are still trying to get them to return him to a proper mental hospital so he can receive proper psychiatric treatment and socialization in the hope that he might be able to come home one day. This entire process is extremely slow and our son has now become very used to being isolated and we are having a hard time convincing him to go to groups. He's so afraid of making any kind of mistake that might make them write him up on some violation that he doesn't even want to try to be around others. He hears voices that warn him. He wants to get out of the prison but says he is trapped. It's been 3+ years now since they put him in prison; no convictions, but he's still in a prison. Laws have to be changed. Men must not be treated like this; as though he is nothing. I complained about a month ago that my son had complained that he was hungry all the time; that they don't give them enough food in there. They began giving him double portions of food for his dinners, which I was very grateful for. Then last week, our son told us the order for double portions was expired, but he is still skinny and will go back to being hungry! I imagine they don't feed any of the prisoners/patients enough. He does have the basics: a toothbrush, underwear, socks, a blanket, and just received a pillow for the first time in 3 years! He is thrilled whenever he gets clean underclothes, as it is not very often. After I have complained so much and they see that my son is not violent or trying to hurt himself, they have finally told us that we may send him a package!! The first one in over 3 years! But, I can't send the package until they call me back to tell me WHAT I can send and the weight of the box I can send him; they said they would let me know last week, but no one has called me!! I faxed them again today asking them to let me know as our son is so excited that he can receive something!! No call yet, though, and it's almost 4 pm, so they will be leaving their offices soon. The court process, also, is taking a very long time as the state never answers papers quickly. God give us all strength!!

Is your son home yet?

As a 17 year old serving time in 1969 for disturbing the peace, I visited every major prison in CA between Folsom and L.A. on a C.D.C.R. bus. Somewhere between Soledad and California Mens Colony we arrived at a downtown jail in farm country. A chain was run through a loop in our cuffs so that we were all now daisy chained together and then we were unloaded under armed guard.

Once we were all off the bus we were made to walk a short distance to the jail's entrance where more guards waited. It was an embarrassing few moments as pedestrians and the inhabitants of cars stared at all of us with expressions of disdain and concern on their faces.

Once inside I was placed in a cell by myself and all the others were in a larger cell. Later, when the guards returned with a new prisoner, we were all loaded back on the bus.

The new arrival had a wild look on his face as he asked the others who I was since I was sitting alone. They explained that I was a C.Y.A. inmate. Satisfied he began to tell the others of how he had escaped from Atascadero State Hospital for the criminally insane. I listened as he described his escape. He had overpowered a guard then took him and another guard hostage. One guard was forced to drive off in a marked car while he held a gun in the mouth of the other guard. The inmate was delighted that the guard had wet his pants as he was forced to repeat that he was the inmates bitch. To prove that he was indeed his bitch the inmate forced the guard to perform fellatio on him. This all took place with the gun held to the guards forehead as they traveled down the road.

I imagined the scene and wondered what the pay back would be when the inmate was returned to the facility. Most inmates think that a real man would never submit to such an act. If someone has been forcibly raped it requires the quick gruesome murder of the offender by the victim in order to prevent any further exploitation. This is the minimum that will regain even a small measure of respect of those around you. This need to be respected is the root cause of prison violence and the slightest sign of disrespect can get you killed.

From an article in the San Luis Obispo County, Telegram-Tribune newspaper report on May 27, 1968 and the 1970 case file of (People v Quinlan), one of the three inmates that escaped, I have pieced together a more complete picture of the events. (I just discovered this article this past week.)

On May 26, 1968, Robert G. Quinlan, Gerald Joseph Gallant, Jr., and Robert Higuera were inmate patients in Unit 23 at Atascadero State Hospital when two officers arrived to do a shakedown of the high security unit. Armed with a gun, that someone had smuggled in, Higuera greeted them at the door, and ordered, the officers, to turn over their uniforms, keys and wallets, then they were locked in a room along with all but two of the staff assigned to the unit. Hearing the phone ring Gallant held a knife to the lone male hostages throat and ordered him to answer the phone. After the hostage complied, with their demand, and hung up the phone, Gallant and Quinlan put on the officers uniforms. Meanwhile Higuera held a knife to a female hostages throat and forced her to accompany them to the first security gates office where Gallant poked the gun through its opening while Higuera shouted, Open the gate up or Ill kill her! Fearing for the womans life, the officer stationed inside complied, but once let through Quinlan stabbed him in the stomach. They then repeated this tactic at the next security station and were again successful but this time they did not stab the officer. Then the three patients, the original two hostages and the two security officers, got into the male staff members car and drove off with Quinlan behind the wheel.

When the group reached the freeway they headed south where one of the escapees in uniform motioned for the car driving alongside them to pull over. After compiling to what they assumed to be an officers order, the armed men forced the occupants out of their car and transferred the hostages to the travelers car and drove off.

The group stopped at a random, unoccupied, Avila Beach house where Quinlan, armed with the gun, watched over the hostages as the other two escapees ransacked the house. Finding more guns, liqueur, and suitable street clothes they changed out of the stolen uniforms, tied the two wounded officers to a bed, stabbed the uninjured officer in the back, and stole a Buick that was parked at the premises.

Then they drove the stolen Buick north on Highway 101, stopping at yet another random house in Los Osos, but this time the residents happened to arrive while they were still in the house. So Quinlan held the surprised elderly residents at gun point, as Higuera made a mysterious phone call in the other room then he and the female hostage headed south in one of two cars belonging to the couple. So Quinlan and Gallant took the couples other car and along with their male hostage headed north towards San Francisco. Once they arrived in San Francisco the escapees tied up their hostage and left him in an isolated location.

Higuera had called another woman staff member at A.S.H. who agreed to swap places with his female hostage. The new female staff member then drove to a Pismo Beach motel where the swap took place.

Once freed the original hostage then drove non-stop to San Luis Obispo where she telephoned the authorities. When asked why she waited so long to call she answered I just wanted distance between us right then. She later told the newspaper that, I didnt know any of the three. So the woman that had received the call from Hidurea, and then swapped herself for the hostage, fell under immediate suspicion.

After the authorities learned the location from the freed female hostage the new hostage was spotted walking outside the Pismo Beach motel barefooted. When questioned by the police she told them that Hidurea had taken a stroll on the pier. Shortly thereafter the two officers spotted Hidurea clinging to a piece of driftwood and ordered him to come out of the surf which he did.

The newspaper also reported that, 28 year old Gerald J. Gallant, 28, was the apparent ring-leader and that he had originally been convicted of robbery and rape in Los Angeles and was considered to be a disordered sex offender.

It was noted in the court report that Gallant and Quinlan were apprehended in Ohio.

Given that Quinlan was the driver of the getaway car, and considering Gallants description as a disordered sex offender, lead me to believe the escapee was Gallant and that he may have even forced the officer to perform fellatio on him. Gallant was most likely tried where we picked him up for his role in the trios crime spree.

We next stopped at a state building of some kind, most likely yet another courthouse. First one of the guards then the other went inside. We were alone for the first time since I had been placed on the bus. The story teller from Atascadero, as if to confirm his bravado, quickly jumped to his feet and began going up and down the aisle looking for a weak spot on the bus. Finding an open window the man laid face up on the seat and began kicking at the bars outside the window. He had to do this with both feet since we all wore ankle cuffs as well as handcuffs. Bang bam nothing, bang bam nothing, pausing he asks to be notified if the guards reappear. Bang bam nothing, I begin to ask myself if he succeeds and gets out and the others follow what would happen if the guards return and see a massive prison escape. The thought of the guards firing on us now worried me.

And then it all hit me Im here with a bunch of hardcore desperate men. Yes I wanted to be free but I also knew that I didnt have years to do and although doing time was rough I felt I could make it.

The inmate soon tired and just as he took brief rest the guards exited the building carrying bag lunches. Once the guards boarded they began to distribute the bag lunches unaware of the drama that had preceded their return. We all were required to eat while handcuffed and bouncing up and down as the bus maneuvered down the road. It was difficult to eat while holding on to our drinks so either we raised our drinks along with our sandwich to our mouth or the drinks had to be squeezed between our legs. The rest of our meal rested freely on our lap all of this took awhile for the inexperienced like me to figure out so you would hear men cuss as they spelt their drinks or dropped their food.

Our next stop was Atascadero State Hospital in order to return the escapee. During our previous stop at CMF I overheard a couple of the other men mentioning that they knew inmates housed here and then one commented that he had a friend that was sent here for murder. He said that although his friend was a little bit crazy that he was alright as long as you didnt piss him off. Yeah sure I thought as if you can be just a little bit crazy.

These thoughts ran through my mind as I looked at the institutions buildings to get a sense of the conditions on the inside. I wondered how it differed from Preston. Visions of mad men foaming at the mouth filled my imagination. Deranged people worried me the most because they were unpredictable. You never really knew what they were thinking or when they would go off.

I recalled a rather small inmate that threw his tray with all its contents up in the air while walking over to his table for lunch. As the debris began raining down over a wide area the inmate started howling like an injured animal as five or six heavily muscled counselors rushed over to restrain him. No one ever knew why he had thrown his tray. Apparently he just went off for no visible reason, at least not visible to anyone else. I now thought to myself, if it took so many people to control this one small guy what would happen if a larger one attacked me?

I pondered the thought of confinement with so many unstable men whose control is only maintained by the use of medications, restraints, and shock therapy. I wondered how many of the inmates that are administered these drugs and treatments were victims of a vengeful staff member. Years later in the classic movie One Flew Over the Coo Coos Nest this type of abuse was portrayed as being perpetrated on Jack Nichols character. (Based on the authors own experiences.)

After clearing the gate we stopped by a large underground tunnel/hallway. The guards took us all out and locked us up in two separate holding cells while the escapee was put through the institutions admission process.

From my separate holding cell I could see the inmates walking up and down the large hallway. I wondered if the nearby window that many inmates were stopping by was where they received their medication. After my recent experience on the bus I had developed a new found respect for medication to control these men. Although the escapee was not a large man he was defiantly a dangerous person. I came to realize that not all threats were obvious and one needs to measure the treat more carefully.

I cant stop sobbing as I read these letters. My son has been an inmate at Atascadero state hospital for almost 7 years almost all his adult life. He has high functioning autism and bipolar disorder. He was persuaded to plead Not guilty by reason of insanity when he stabbed a jogger with a paring knife after his father talked him into stopping his psych meds. He started having hallucinations and thank God only mildly injured the person. not even breaking the skin. My son may never be released. This commitment is an indefinite one and often a life sentence. I am so furious at a society that punishes the victims of genetic neurobiological disease by I carcerating them and failing to adequately fund research for safer and more efficacious treatment. My son was a few months from receiving an astrophysics baccalaureate at the time of his arrest. He is an intelligent talented and kind hearted hounng man. It is a trajedy that has devastated our family.

Donna: I am Diana and the story you have read is about my son. You say your son has been waiting for a bed since Dec. 2012?? What hospital is he supposed to go to? When my son was in jail awaiting his transfer to Napa State Hospital, I called Napa myself every day and told them that my son was very ill and could not remain in the jail or he would surely hurt himself. They could not ignore me because I didnt stop calling. I got him in there within 3 weeks! Dont think you dont have any power because you do!! YOU are all he has.make his public defender aware of the fact that your son is not receiving the medication he needs! Have the P.D. call the hospital, too. Dont take no for an answer. The commanding officer at the jail should know that it is illegal, if your son has been found Not Guilty Due to Insanity or Incompetent to Stand Trial, to now have the jail psychiatrist go see him and prescribe medication! You have to stand up to these people and fight for your sons rights. Please dont give up and dont back down. They are not attending to him because no one is pushing them too. Get in there and get him the help he needs! Call every one you can think. Start with the hospital where he is supposed to go. Find the correct department and speak to someone in charge. Get names and phone numbers, extension numbers, all the info you can. Also, find out the name of the jail psychiatristthey usually work for the local mental health clinic. Ask the jail personnel for the name. Get his/her number and start calling. Was your son on medication before he got into jail?? If yes, take them the actual prescription bottles and show them to the Commanding Officer and tell him you KNOW that the jail is not observing your sons legal, constitutional rights to proper medical/psychiatric care. If the public defender tries to avoid you, plant yourself at his/her desk until you get the P.D. to make a call to the hospital! Keep in contact with the hospital daily! Once your son gets transferred to a hospital, you need to immediately get the name of the Hospital Administrators, the social worker who will be in charge of your sons case, the name of the psychiatrists who will be working with your son, and get all their phone numbers, fax numbers, and emails, if they have them. Let them know that your son has an advocate! You cant stop.Donna. As long as he is locked up anywhere, you have to make sure that it is known that you are watching the hospital staff; keep a journal of all that happens, dates, lists of medications & dosages, changes in meds, blood tests.any time your son gets into trouble, find out the scoop, not just from the staff, but start making friends with the other patients

in his unit so you can know whats going on. Most of the patients are pretty lucid most of the time and can help you out.

I doubt Peter Ladetto was falsely convicted of murdering that police officer in cold blood because correction officers wrote false D-Reports. Please pray for that officers family and his countless other victims.

I am so worn out and heartbroken for all of our children. My son violated an order of protection via telephone. Hes 28, and has never been in trouble with the law. He has bipolar disorder with psychosis, and jail was the only way to keep him safe from hurting himself or others in his psychotic state. Hes been in jail since Dec. 3, 2012. He has been court mandated to a psychiatric facility but there are no beds open and the court liason said it would be at least another 4 5 months before he is transferred. In segregation. Without medication. I, too, do not know what to do and miss his smile and sweetness with every moment of my beings. Im so sad for each of you and those you love who are suffering. Its incredibly inhumane. They would not put a cancer patient in segregation and deny them medication. Ive been crying all daysomething I do almost every day. Is there a God? Why do our children have to suffer such indignities My mind cannot comprehend and my heart will never comprehend.

that place is sick and if you love him your only chance is the USDOJ. Gain federal jusisdiction!

Inside Earleys book is this helpful website:

<http://www.ncchc.org/>

Our Mission

The mission of the National Commission on Correctional Health Care is to improve the quality of health care in jails, prisons and juvenile confinement facilities. With support from the major national organizations representing the fields of health, law and corrections, NCCHCs leadership in setting standards for health services is widely recognized. Building on that foundation, our not-for-profit organization offers a broad array of resources to help correctional health care systems provide efficient, high quality care.

Diana here is a link to a book by Pete Earley that deals with your situation. I hope it helps you find a solution.

Good luck and god bless you and your family. I am sorry if my personal experience discourages you. I dont have the answers but maybe there are some in this book at least you will find how others approached this.

<http://www.petearley.com/books/crazy/>

Diana prisoners call their mothers The Rock because people lost at sea will cling to a rock to survive.

I hesitated in writing this but I think you should know the truth about life in a state hospital. I understand your concern because my mother fought long and hard for my younger brother Victor who died in a Salinas Valley SHU after 12 plus years of isolation. He was scheduled to be released within months of his death. But then I have also visited these hospitals you believe will be different. Here are two accounts of them. The first is from someone who did time in the worst CA prisons.

Eddie Bunker wrote in his memoir Education of a Felon on page 20: Pacific Colony was primarily for the mentally retarded, but they took some ninety-day observation cases from the youth authorities. Its one locked ward was the most brutal place Ive ever beenThey could get away with anything. Id seen brutalities that would never happen in reform school, or even a prison for that matter.This was a hospital. We were patients being cared for.

He then goes on to explain in great detail the physical attack on him by staff members that nearly killed him. After I was certified as sane they returned me to reform school.

I have visited several of these institutions as a teenager and found them scarier than the prisons which I also visited on the prison bus.

In 1969 the prison bus I was on pulled into Vacavilles first gate and it closed behind us. Armed guards above us peered down at us as they lowered a basket from the watchtower. The guards on the bus placed their manifest into the basket and then it was raised back up to the guards in the watchtower. After they reviewed the paper work Vacavilles guards lowered the basket once more, this time a key had been placed into it along with the manifest. One guard used the key to open the gate and then we drove through. The guard then locked the gate behind us and got back on the bus.

This process impressed me since we were in the middle of nowhere with open ground all around us. It seemed suicidal to me to attempt an escape under such conditions but then suicide was not uncommon in these institutions. Sirhan Sirhan had just been sentenced here after killing Bobby Kennedy which meant the government felt it a secure enough institution to house a presidential candidates assassin. Once through the duel gates we drove on to the main buildings which were well set back from the fence. I heard a couple of the other men mentioning that they knew inmates housed here and then one commented that he had a friend that was sent here for murder. He said that although his friend was a little bit crazy that he was alright as long as you didnt piss him off. Yeah sure I thought as if you can be just a little bit crazy. These thoughts ran through my mind as I looked at the institutions buildings to get a sense of the conditions on the inside. I wondered how it differed from Preston. Visions of mad men filled my imagination. Deranged people worried me the most because they were unpredictable. You never really knew what they were thinking or when they would go off.

I recalled a rather small inmate that threw his tray with all its contents up in the air while walking over to his table for lunch. As the debris began raining down over a wide area the inmate started howling like an injured animal as five or six heavily muscled counselors rushed over to restrain him. No one ever knew why he had thrown his tray apparently he just went off for no visible reason. At least the cause was not visible to anyone else. I now thought if it took so many people to control this one small guy what would happen if a larger one attacked me?

I pondered the thought of confinement with so many unstable men whose control is only maintained by the use of medications, restraints, and shock therapy. I wondered how many of the inmates that are administered these drugs and treatments were victims of a vengeful staff member. Years later in the classic movie One Flew Over the Coo Coos Nest this type of abuse was portrayed as being perpetrated on Jack Nichols character.

Afterward an inmate began to tell how he had escaped from Atascadero State Hospital for the criminally insane. I listened as he described his escape. He had overpowered a guard then took him and another guard hostage. One guard was forced to drive off in a marked car while he held a gun in the mouth of the other guard. The inmate was delighted that the guard had wet his pants as he was forced to repeat that he was the inmates bitch. To prove that he was indeed his bitch the inmate forced the guard to perform fellatio on him. This all took place with the gun held to the guards forehead as they traveled down the road.

I imagined the scene and wondered what the pay back would be when the inmate was returned to the facility. We next stopped at a state building of some kind. First one of the guards then the other went inside. We were alone for the first time since I had been placed on the bus. The story teller from Atascadero, as if to confirm his bravado, quickly jumped to his feet and began going up and down the aisle looking for a weak spot on the bus. Finding an open window the man laid face up on the seat and began kicking at the bars outside the window. He had to do this with both feet since we all wore angle cuffs as well as handcuffs. Bang bam nothing, bang bam nothing, pausing he asks to be notified if the guards reappear. Bang bam nothing, I begin to ask myself if he succeeds and gets out and the others follow what would happen if the guards return and see a massive prison escape. The thought of the guards firing on us now worried me. The inmate soon tired and just as he took a brief rest the guards exited the building.

Our next stop was to be Atascadero to return the escapee. After clearing the gate we stopped by a large underground tunnel/hallway. The guards took us all out and locked us up in two separate holding cells while the escapee was put through the institutions admission process.

From my separate holding cell I could see the inmates walking up and down the large hallway. I wondered if the nearby window that many inmates were stopping by was where they received their medication. After my recent experience on the bus I had developed a new found respect for medication to control these men.

Although the escapee was not a large man he was defiantly a dangerous person. I came to realize that not all treats were obvious and one needs to measure the treat more carefully.

Previously my older brother had spent time there. After faking suicide in Duel Vocational Institute in order to avoid being murdered by another inmate Mike woke up in solitary confinement. Then within days he was transferred to Atascadero State Hospital. Once he was in the hospital Mike claimed that he had first played the part of being totally insane (but I suspect that he may have indeed had a nervous breakdown) then slowly he reacted as if the therapy (shock treatment) that he received at the hospital was working.

Mike began acting more and more normal over the next few months until he was transferred to Camarillo State Hospital which is a minimum security mental institution in nearby Ventura County. It was there, soon after Mikes arrival that my mother and I finally made our first trip to visit him.

Camarillo State Hospital turned out to be, a sprawling collection of one story buildings positioned on grass covered rolling hills. I had never been to such an institution and I was shocked at what I saw there. When my mother and I finally located Mikes dormitory the two of us entered cautiously. As we walked inside the door we both gagged on the pungent smell of human waste as we marveled at the wide variety of patients that we found in the dimly lit room. Some patients were in apparent catatonic trances barely moving at all, while others were in constant motion rocking their torsos back and forth, and still others were pacing rapidly back and forth with their arms flailing wildly carrying on heated conversations with unseen people. We informed a male orderly that we were there to visit Mike and then the orderly directed us to a large grassy mall where he knew Mike liked to hang out. Mike was later transferred to MSH.

Mom and I found that the Metropolitan State Hospital for the mentally ill was located in the nearby city of Norwalk. As we arrived at the hospital it appeared from the outside to be just another hospital except that all the doors were locked. After we were let in we found our way to Mikes room on our own. It was no big surprise that we found Mike reading because he has always been a fervent reader devouring a wide range of material especially when incarcerated. Mike had even become a jail house lawyer for his buddies while he was in DVI in Tracy. Mike hadnt noticed us enter his room until we sat down next to him on his bed. He dropped his book and gave me a huge hug saying Bro you came down to see me this is a great surprise. Thanks! You too mom, thanks for coming and bringing my little brother here.

As we sat there chatting back and forth I noticed a large bald man with his head down running by at full speed. Then we heard shouting and a loud bang. I rushed over to the door and peered down the hall. I was shocked to see a spatter of blood on the door where the man had hit his head on the locked door. The man was sprawled out on the floor with his head in a growing puddle of blood as the medics rushed over. I turned to Mike and said Damn dude that guy just busted his head on the door! Yeah I know this isnt the first time he has done that. Hell he does it every week or so and you would think the guy would get hip by now. Hey lets go to the dayroom while they clean that shit up. Mike leads us to the dayroom where we are immediately approached by a woman with a clip board and she identifies herself as Doctor Bernstein. She starts asking us a series of questions for no readily apparent reason. Mike stood next to us with a knowing smirk on his face and after she leaves I asked him What the hell was that all about? Why is the doctor asking us those questions? Mike busts out laughing and answers, Dude she is a patient. You should have seen your face while she asked you those questions. We visited for an hour or so then we left.

Mike spent a few more months in the hospital before he received a notice that he would soon be released back into society. Mike had survived his incarceration physically unscathed but his mental heath was obviously another story? For who could experience such things and walk away totally unaffected by them? Once Mike was released he would find that being labeled a psychotic was a life sentence of a different kind.

Thank you, Solitary Watch, for publishing my letter. There is so much work to be done. We need our legislature feel the pressure; for the families of persons in my sons situation to rise up and bother them! Letters, telephone calls, faxes, meetingswhatever is needed. There are thousands of young men and women who are locked up in solitary confinement with no good reason except that they are mentally ill and doctors dont know what to do for them. One must remember that those that work in the custody business only know that they are supposed to keep the person locked up; they may have no idea of the persons history. They keep telling me about custody; that they are only in charge of his custody and can do nothing about his psychiatric situation. The psychiatrists tell me they are trying to help him, but that because he was sent to a prison, they must be careful to not interfere with his custody situation! its ridiculous. This country has more people locked up than any other country; no one wants to be bothered! This is my son! Hes still young, still has hopes and dreams of having some kind of life. Being in solitary is making him sicker and sicker, no matter what medications they give him. I need to get him back in a regular state hospital! No one will listen; everyone seems afraid to take a stand; everyone is afraid of saying the wrong thing and losing their job! They tell me one thing, but then do something else. I have not heard from my son now in 3 weeks. I dont know what they are doing to him, if he is better, worse, how they are treating him, if they will keep him at Vacaville or send him back to Folsom Prison. The not knowing is torture for all of us too! Something has to give.

Hi! I am Dianas husband. First I would like to thank all who have read and responded for all your thoughts and prayers. I dont know, if knowing others have much the same pains and heartaches eases ours any, but it is good to hear others speak up about their situations. My son is so fortunate to have a motherwho loves him so and has knowlege of how the system works. She never gives up, even though sometimes I feel it is beating her down. Just think of all those who get no support from the outside. It is pretty obvious many have been written off by how small the visiting rooms are at the different facilities and the small number of people who visit. My son has a great big heart and would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it and all we would like for him is to be treated fairly and get the help he needs. It hurts so much to see and know what heand others like him must endure because he is ill. I would gladly take his place so he could enjoy some peace and joy in his life. Please God help him!!!!!!

I am so sorry. I am writing my U.S. Senators now. This boy needs to be released.

Diane,

My heart goes out to you. I pray for you and Zeke. Our criminal justice system needs to be revised. There was a time when only people who had committed real crimes went to prison. Now, it seems that everything is a felony and that people are getting caught in the webs of our justice system. Once they get you, there is no letting go. The laws keep changing and being applied retroactively. What is sad is that some people buy into the hype that these cruel and unjust laws are needed to protect the public. Unfortunately, this is not the case. These laws are just propaganda to keep people employed (guards, psychiatrists, mental health workers, technicians, etc. etc. etc.) These laws also provide tax payer money to the companies or vendors who will be supplying equipment and services to prison systems; and, the lawmakers who sponsor the bills that change the laws keep getting kickbacks and money for their campaigns. In the meantime, many, many, many people, like Zeke suffer and do not receive the help they need. Diane, I admire your tenacity and I will continue to keep you, Zeke and your family in our prayers. Unfortunately, we need more than prayers to change the current criminal justice system. Irma

Please see that this mother and her son receive this comment. I have added A to our Church prayer list and forwarded it to others who will pray world wide. This is persecution. This is suffering.

This is a sad story , my heart aches for this Mom. This why we need prison abolotion. We need a worldw/out prisons.

The tax payers need to take a stand and speak up your tax money is being wasted daily by the second. The criminal justice system is very messed up. Three strikes destroys your state. Taken children of the futures education and healthcare. How does a bank robber with no guns or hurt anyone get more time then a man or women who rapes, child molesters, or murders. Its sad. It needs to be looked at. Why cant the sentences run together why separete. Why cant CA have more drug programs? Why cant these criminals be a part of the childrens lives on the street more after a successful program? It needs to be looked at. Its sad. Its a cycle and its time for tax payers to look at what your spending money on.

My heart goes out to this mother to and its such a true story. My husband is in solitary confinement. Its hard and I pray to God he gets out before he goes home to be with God. No phone calls, no sun light, no nothing. Its sad and hurts the families too. No pictures together.

As the wife for 27 years of an inmate who has been locked up in isolation more than any other inmate in the state of Massachusetts, I have had the exact same feelings. As a Christian, I too have sat in the parking lot praying and feeling the same way and had to leave before they kicked me out. My husband does not have a mental illness but I am surprised that he doesnt due to the horrible amount of false d-reports and isolation that he has had in the last 27 years of his life. I am also a registered nurse. This is extremely cruel for mentally ill patients. We wonder how human beings can treat other human beings this way and then we remmber Hitler and what he did.

my heart goes out to this mother..I hope soon there is help for her and her son.God speed!

CDCR at its finest; there is no where to turn for help in cases like this.no where! What is family to do? Why must we be treated like criminals? Who holds these people accountable? After all, we, the taxpayers pay their bloated salaries..who is responsible and accountable? why do they not answer their phones? Who helps us????

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