

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/12/17/voices-from-solitary-christmas-in-the-hole-1968/>

## Public Facing Advocacy Writing

close

Search

close

close

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#) | December 17, 2011

*Editors Note: In this memoir, the author who prefers to be identified only by his first name and California Youth Authority number recalls a Christmas spent as a 17-year-old inmate in the juvenile jail then known as the Preston School of Industry, since renamed the Preston Youth Correctional Facility. Opened in 1894, Preston was one of the most notorious reform schools in the country, known for its brutality and deprivation. More than a century later, little had changed at least, not for the better. Last year, the Ella Baker Center [reported abuses](#) at California Youth Authority facilities that included young people locked in 20- to 23-hour-a-day solitary confinement for days, weeks and months on end; young people locked in 4x4 cages for temporary detention; guard and staff abuse, neglect, manipulation, and humiliation of the young people in their care; rampant sexual assault; virtually non-existent care for young people with mental health or substance abuse needs; shocking negligence in medical care, especially emergency care; woefully inadequate educational programming; [and] a culture and atmosphere of constant intimidation, isolation, fear and violence. It singled out Preston, along with Stark, as the worst of the facilities. In the fall of 2010, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation [announced](#) that it would close Preston in order to operate more effectively and efficiently as the state adapts to changes in our youth population.*

= = = =

For most of us the holiday season is filled with good memories of cheerfully bright decorations at holiday parties with ample supplies of sinfully good food and drink. It is a time that we all gather together to share our good fortune with those that we care most about. And for the luckiest amongst us, our homes are as full as the cornucopias that sit at the center of our dining room tables.

But as we gather near the Christmas tree to sing Silent Night, I cannot help but recall my solitary confinement experience during the holidays of 1968. The knowledge that there are still other human beings being held in such sterile, foul smelling, and depressingly deteriorating, cold, concrete boxes leaves me both grateful for my good fortune and somber for the others that I left behind. Because, you see, Christmas in solitary is neither silent nor holy, but filled with the howling cries of the ever increasing population of mentally ill prisoners housed there.

When I read about the long term isolation that inmates endure today, my experience as a 17-year-old juvenile seems to pale in comparison. The solitary confinement unit at Preston School of Industry, a California Youth Authority facility which only recently has been closed due to the infamous and unproductive brutality of its wards, is briefly described in Edward Bunker's memoir titled *Education of a Felon*: I was assigned permanently to G Company, a unit with a three-tier Cell block. It was dark and gloomy and a carbon copy of a prison cell block. An indeed it still was when I landed in the hole just before Christmas for fighting.

Back in the 1960s, however, we were at least allowed a nightly shower, and on at least one occasion, Christmas Day, we even ate dinner together in small groups. The dining hall on the first floor was a smaller version of Preston's other dining halls. The dining room consisted of a half dozen four-person, square, stainless steel tables in two rows of three. It was primarily used by the guards except on this very special occasion. The smaller number of inmates eating allowed the guards to keep a closer eye on this potentially troublesome bunch that the system found necessary to confine inside this jail within a jail for disciplinary reasons.

I sat down with three other inmates on one of the four backless metal stools bolted to the concrete floor and painted over with grey epoxy paint. My eyes scanned the face of each inmate, appraising his probable social status in the pecking order of institutional life. The inmate directly across from me was a slightly built dirty blonde around sixteen years old with even younger boyish features. His face, however, seemed tired, as though he had been under extreme stress for way too long. I knew the look well; it is the same expression one sees on fallen prey in a *National Geographic* magazine when the animal realizes there is no way to escape its fate. I didn't know this particular inmate but I knew others like him, so I felt a profound sadness for him. I imagine that this feeling is similar to how a soldier on a battlefield might feel as he passes fallen combatants. The inmate to my left was of a different lot; I imagined him to be still holding his own but only by the narrowest of margins. Now, the guy on my right had the look of a career criminal, a true survivor of the system, who would be willing to use any means necessary to survive even if it meant stepping on top of the first inmate's head to keep his own above water.

Even with this unflattering appraisal of my dining partners, after days of isolation I was eager to swap stories with each of them. The

conversation followed the normal pattern of conversations between inmates Where are you from? What are you in for? What unit are you in? How long do you have to go? Why were you sent to hole? I found the story of the inmate across from me to be incoherent as his eyes darted around the room wildly. He kept saying that he was going to be released and was flying back home. I took this with a grain of salt as the wishful thinking of a desperate boy, for how could he ever hope to be released so soon after being placed in the hole?

I swapped stories with the others as well, and then it was back to our isolation up on the third tier. Later that evening, after I had taken my shower, I heard the blond teenager shout, I can fly, I can fly, and you cant keep me here no more. Then a guard said in a panic, Grab him, hes going to jump. I heard the young man repeat, I can fly, I can fly then a loud sickening thud, like a melon hitting the floor. He had jumped over the railing. I had heard the jailhouse rumors of inmates who had died after being thrown over such rails, so I surmised that the jumper was probably dead or at least seriously injured.

After the commotion downstairs subsided, a short interval of relative quiet followed. As I sat alone pondering the youths words over dinner, a guard opened the slot in my cell door and tossed in a wad of hard candy wrapped in tissue paper. The candy landed unceremoniously onto my now dimly lit cells floor and slid to a stop somewhere in the middle. This candy was probably meant to bring us a little Christmas cheer by who ever had the idea in the first place, but its delivery was carried out with such callous disregard for our feelings that it did little to raise our spirits. I immediately jumped up and asked the guard, What happened to the guy that jumped? I had dinner with him you know. Is he OK? The guard scoffed, Dont speak unless spoken to! So reluctantly I sat back down on my bed and opened the twisted piece of paper holding the candy together, then tried to break a piece free. The pieces had become stuck together and were now just one large piece covered with bits of the wrapping tissue. I turned to look out my window and wondered what the scene had been like on the first floor. The smell of spit and mucus (much like the smell of a persons sneeze in a closed car) emanated from the protective screen which was meant as an additional barrier to the bars on the window, and I asked myself how I could eat candy under such circumstances. I hesitated but tried a piece anyway. The candy had a familiar taste, but one in which under normal circumstances I would not have eaten. I needed some distraction, however, and so I continued breaking off pieces until it was all gone.

Once I had finished eating I lay back and watched the eerie shadow of Preston School of Industrys original building from the 1890s on my rooms walls. I had passed this now vacant building on the way to solitary, and it has always reminded me of a haunted castle from a horror movie. (In fact, it has since been used as a haunting backdrop in movies.)

As we passed the building, the guard had pointed out a wood platform that he said was part of the old gallows from which they hung inmates in its heyday. I wondered how many young men had lost their lives over the years from acts of desperation, murder or execution. (I later learned that Preston has a small cemetery with around 23 graves of wards that were unclaimed by their relatives.) I wondered how the jumper became so disturbed and what had been his fate. How his parents would react to learning of their sons action, and on Christmas Day no less. I wondered if the guard had been truthful about the purpose of the platform. (He was not.) I wondered if the jumper had been trying to tell me of his plans at dinner. Did I miss an opportunity to warn the guards? I tried to put these thoughts out of my head, for there was nothing I could do now. So I tried to sleep to avoid having to think about him, but his face at dinner would greet me whenever I closed my eyes. It was early morning before I fell to sleep.

During the remainder of my time in solitary I did thousands of sit ups and push ups to exhaust myself in order to sleep. Sleep, I found, was the most effective means of escaping the reality of my confinement. But my sleep was often interrupted by the desperate screams of those even less able to endure their isolation. The Catch 22 here is these unruly inmates were then viewed by the staff as not having learned their lesson, so they were forced to endure even longer terms of isolation in a vicious circular cycle.

It is distressing to realize that such tragedies are still being played out 43 years later, and in ever greater numbers as the practice has only expanded and time spent in the hole has only lengthened over these years.

But not everyone has forgotten them.

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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

If you type in the following words without the spaces or quotation marks

preston castle history.blogspot. com/2017/02/my-arrival-at-preston-guest. html

youll see how California had transformed my old lodges cells into a carbon copy of a Supermax Pod.

It was a real eye opener for me (Alan CYA).

@some\_chic says:

I wrote as much.

I wondered if the guard had been truthful about the purpose of the platform. (He was not.)

I guess the guards motive was to creep me out like telling ghost stories while camping.

Alan your a punk fraud.none of

your storyand thats exactly what it is.makes any sense to someone who was there how upsetting to think maybe Jaime put you in her bookyou dont have to lie to kick it.or be cool..why would you lie..you wanna challenge me on this..ill pull your covers!!!!!! Any of that lingo sound familiar..

Unreal what was it 17 when you got to Preston in 1968 as a 17 year oldand what????youll never forget your walk down the hill to sequoia lodge.i dont know what month you were born .but nov68 to june69 makes 7 monthsin your opinionwhat qualifies as a stint.Afortnight B48 hrs..C..all of the above.D..and final choicelong enough to know that cell #13 was not the padded cellby the way it was cells 2 and 3 behind the counselors station..cell 1 was a mop / storagehow do I know these things.i spent 22 months in the bucket.or rack..ive met dudes like you .whatevas.

Please do, pull away then youll find even at 65 Im no bodies punk. Iam way beyond wanting to be cool or kick it or even to use such poor English slang.

I wrote this piece for my dead brother and those currently in the hole for free I seek no publicity. I have no ulterior motives.What is yours to question it? If I use outdated slang or words that are not currently hip its because this was nearly fifty years ago. Id like to hear about your own experience though since you say you were there. Unlike you I have no reason to doubt that.

This is Alan CYA #65085

Mr. Alan..thank you for replying to my postfirst of all I must apologize for my harsh words..whether or not I believe your story does not give me the right to call you names or label you a PC..i respectfully and formally apologize.you said you remember it better than more recent things..Id like to ask you some questions.things I just dont think you would forget if you where in tamarack even for a few days.we forget peoplenames.but not places that burn there memories into your soul..when you walk into tamarackwhat side where you ondid you make a left or right????what kind of light was in the cells????what where you issued apon arrival at tamarack..and what did you have in you cell????since you remember taking a showerif you where on the left side..(of the building) what side where the showers on.and if you were on the right where were the showers???? Where were the rubber cells????how many tiers was tamarack.you said tamarack was previously called g company.you said it was called g company in the castle daysand that it was built in 1928.did they just change the name of the building from g company.or was there another building for solitary confinement use during the castle days???? If so where was it located???? If sequoia lodge was the most violent what were child molesters doing there with murderers and violent criminals????Preston was notorious for not letting that kind of trash walk the what????where was prestons PCs housed????what did they call the area where most of the lodges were.they ran in a straight line???? Do you remember the names of the lodges as they went???? Concrete bunks in tamarack???? Are you sure????what were all the lodges built withconcretered brick.cinder block.or all the above????was the dairy farm still operating when you were there.if yeswhat was it called???? How many cells were on each tierfor instance.1st tier bottom floor left side of whatever way your facing????did sequoia lodge have its own chow hall???or did they eat in the mainlines chowhall.if yes where was it located????thanx Alani did misread the two stories.again I apologize.im looking forward to your response.

I accept your apology and most of your questions can be answered by reading my discription. We never interacted with the rest of Preston. We were isolated in the far left hand corner from the administration building. The Castle was on the right if I was outside the lodge looking up hill to the admin building. We watched movies near the admin building and main dining hall. We had our own dining hall and school rooms adjacent to Sequoia Lodge and I worked in the laundry. My friend Bill worked in upholstery he was a biker and convicted murderer. Shot a man over money. There were two child molesters which were beaten while I was there. I dont know if any PC cases. What I know of the rest of Preston is limited because our world was self contained. I only went to the gym once and pool once. We had weights off the day room. There were about 12 rooms on each side of each wing so 48 or so. I didnt take inventory. The counselors over saw the dayroom in front of their desk and the showers behind the desk. Of course they could see down each wing on their left or right. My cell faced inwards towards the rear fence. The Castle was on the opposite side. When I was walked over to the hole (the name I used I didnt recall Tamerack) you can read my discription on the link given in this article to my other story.

In the pictures the bunk is concret I remembered metal. The light was dim in my cell. No reading material. I didnt ever see the rubber rooms nor knew about the one they show in the photos. Number 13. Kind of a sick joke there.

The Castle was on my right as I was walked up in the direction of the admin building. I thought like Bunker it was a three tiers but I see it was only two. The showers were on the first floor (not a vivid picture of them after nearly 50 years) as was the small dining room I ate in on Christmas Day and only on that day. The dining room Im sure of. According to Preston Castle there were two units for solitary I only saw the one while I was there. I really didnt find solitary too taxing. Only spent two two week stents there. Not only did I spend time in Preston but so did my older brother. I have photos of me there but cant post them. Now tell me your story. What year was you there? What lodge. I saw your comment that you were in F which means you were in the old castle era. My brother was there in 66-67. Went on to Tracy. Now thats a whole other story. You say you were in max sec that sounds like DVI (Tracy). I have typed this on my phone so if I missed something my apologies.

Alanthanx for answering my questions.you misread somethingi never typed anything about F. I was there from 1979 until 1985I was on ironwoodand tamarack.we never called it tamarack thowe called it the ( bucket).or the ( rack)i spent twenty two months down there..that cell 13 in the picture.that is not the rubber roomnor was it ever.the bucket had two sides of the building if you went left that was the

double door side and had always been double doored the dungeon door..with the square opening with 4 square bars..then the steel plate door the bottom half solid plate and the top half was thick metal screen..the solid part held the food port..this side was also called the ci side..the two rubber rooms were on this. 2 and 3. number one was a mop room they were directly behind the counselors station, if you went right that was the single door side the very first cell on your right 16 was my last cell there 13 was three doors down the food latch you see on the door was not there when I was there and I still remember who lived in 13 there was 16 of us that lived in the bucket full time. I remember Sequoia Lodge having a reputation..but it certainly wasn't because they were the most violent..lol..it is what it is Alan..im not here to judge you..im on my phone and its 3:30 in the morning write back..describe the light to me in the bucket what kind it was how you turned it on and off..talk to you later

A few things. First thing much changed in ten years. Ironwood from what Ive read took on the role Sequoia had and Sequoia became a psych ward. From what Ive read the three of them were the only lodges with cells the rest were dorms. As I said we were isolated and at least I was released in about 11 months. Bill was there much longer so he learned a trade. No one was taking meds that Im aware of. No one was seeing a doctor so unless I was stone crazy what the counselor told us was the case at the time. I was shocked because I never considered myself violent just willing to get down if needed and it was needed there. I was sent to the hole for fighting twice. One was a double cop murderer. The other Im not sure. I only hung out with Bill no one else was good people as we called it back in the day. Bill blew the mans brains out in front of his mother. His brother was the president of the Satin Slaves MC which later merged with the Hells Angels. Bill went on to run with the Galloping Gooses.

I can only tell you what I know no bullshit. Spending a total of four weeks in the hole 50 years ago wasn't enough to have total recall. The kid did take a dive and I never learned if he died. Anyway it is what it is. If the counselor lied to me and I was in a nut ward I must have been really nuts because after hearing enough of the others crimes and being threatened by some (it was the 60s and race was a big issue) I did what I had too and beat the ring leader down. A lot of weapons were discovered in his room meant to off every white they could get beginning with me. He went to DVI I was suddenly released to let the blacks rule without opposition. Believe what you will I have a clear conscious. Sorry about your long term solitary assignment my brothers also did long term. I never did thank god. I just did it without making a scene like so many others. I understand Ironwood took on Sequoias role because if the cells. Id love to read about it why not contact the editors on here. I did because of my brother. Good luck in life I did well so its possible.

How are you my friend..just wondering

Im good how about yourself? Did you ever go to

<http://prestoncastlehistory.blogspot.com/2017/02/>

Take the spaces out and see some of the photos of your old lodge.

Come to find out the photos in this article were of the lodges on the other side of Preston. I was in the lodge on the poolside at the rear of Preston. Someone placed the Sequoia Lodge plaque at the entrance to the unit on the opposite side of Preston also at the rear.

You wrote before that:

in 1979 when I arrived at Preston PC was housed in Lyndon lodge which was connected to juniper these two lodges had cells.

Well these two lodges in the photos are connected together which had me question the man that sent me the photos.

He saw the plaque reading Sequoia and assumed it was the same lodge I was in. I dont know if they changed the name or someone was messing around and put it on this lodge.

If you were at the right rear of Preston on the opposite side of Sequoia Lodge which is on the left side (pool side) at the rear then this is where you were.

The two lodges are connected so I think it is where you were.

You should check it out. I determined it was not the Sequoia Lodge I was in by google earth which clearly shows Sequoia by itself and these two on the other side of the field.

Lots of changes took place.

Take care and let me know what you think of the renovations. LOL

You can leave a comment there too but it might notify me.

enjoy!

I dont recall having control of the lights anywhere Ive ever been. I just remember it being dim but that was better than blaring lights to try and sleep to pass the time faster. The Windows I describe much as it appears in the photos. You know the smell of mucus like a sneeze in a closed car. We used the term hole not bucket in my day. Terms change from one generation to another. You entered a full decade after I left and because of our actions the shit became more serious wards spent more time a ged became necessary I read so sorry for my contribution to that but Im alive to write about it with all my mental facilities. Many if the abused never were right in the head after their experience. Just because your experience and memory of it differed from mine doesnt mean Im bragging or being dramatic. Its just what it is. Give me a email Ill send you a copy of my experience there in full. If youd prefer ask the editors to be the middle men Ill let them send it to you. BTW I have the dates because I have the copy of my arrival and release. Photos etc. they seen it all. Take care I hope you write about it so I can read it. Most adult prisoners were once in such facilities. They shaped who they became. Take Thomas Silverstein. He was in the CYA in Chino So many others. It was the center for radicals in my day. All the major gangs began in Cali.

Ok just one more comment to support my earlier comments.

In July Of 2005 California Department of Corrections issued a report on staff assaults. I quote:

DISCUSSION: Thirty-seven of the fifty-four incidents involved wards with serious mental health issues. Twenty-nine of the incidents occurred in Sequoia Lodge. Only 7 incidents involved wards on general program status.

Five incidents of staff assault occurred in the Ironwood Lodge during the year of 2004. An equal number occurred in the hospital ward, 8 occurred in the Redwood lodge and 27 occurred in the Sequoia lodge. These statistics support the immediate issuance of vests to officers assigned to Sequoia lodge and suggest that strong consideration be given to issuance of vests to all officers. Vests should be available to visitors in Sequoia and Redwood Lodges.

Tamarack is listed as closed.

Although the mental health status had changed in Sequoia Lodge it remained the most violent and still isolated as I reported.

This is confirmed in 1977 a CYA which reported:

.The Sequoia Counseling Program is an intensive counseling milieu and educational program that is designed to deal with 48 wards. This program is primarily segregated from the other programs at Preston.

The Special Unit Academic Program provides education within the Tamarack Intractable Unit, the Sequoia Counseling Program, and the Ironwood Protective Custody Program this allows the Special treatment programs, to maintain their isolation where necessary.

Tamarack Intractable lodge is a 40-bed living unit which provides a secure setting for older more sophisticated wards of the Preston population who are considered intractable. Tamarack does not contain program elements designed to deal with weak, psychotic, or suicidal wards.

Also included on Tamarack Lodge is a 21-bed Crisis Intervention Unit for use as a temporary program for other Preston lodges.

These 21 beds were in essence solitary confinement. That kid that jumped sure wasn't getting mental health care.

So I found the answer to where PC populations were housed in 1977. They were in Ironwood.

You wrote the following above:

I was there from 1979 until 1985 I was on ironwood and tamarack.

All of this is off the web. Cut and paste a portion to google to get the reports.

If I send a link it gets refused as spam, I tried.

Interesting!!!!!!..in 1979 when I arrived at Preston PC was housed in Lyndon lodge which was connected to juniper these two lodges had cells. what we called the hill or the line from front to back went like this buckeye. evergreen fir. greenbrier. hawthorne..ie (horrible Hawthorne)..Ironwood..ie (mighty D) juniper..ie (jumping J). and Lyndon was connected to juniper..the mainline basically consisted of Hawthorne ironwood and juniper..those were the 3 bad ones. i think we got gassed on the avg of twice a week. tamarack..ie .the bucket or the rack was the end of the line. manzanita was a hard core drug program lodge. oak was similar to sequoia and then redwood. redwood and sequoia were like med lodges like hot meds. thiorazine. halidol. prolixin. those kind of heavy duty mind altering drugs. yes I remember a lot of staff assaults down there most of those dudes were mentally ill..yes Preston was a very violent place more violent than some prisons..i ended up going to Tracy..ie dvi 3 times..ive been to san Quentin..old Folsom. mule creek state prison. susanville. Lassen yard level 3 yard of course back then we all went to Vacaville green side. ive been to Solano james town soledad. I spent two years in the hole at Quentin..c sections south block. none of it compared to the time I spent in the bucket. this is pretty cool shootin the shit wit ya ..thanx man really!!!! I've got some funny stories that came outa that place with me. have a good day brother

This is exactly what I was saying. Preston changed who was assigned to which dorm over time. What either Lodge was at any one point is not necessarily what it was a decade later. For instance I was never given meds in Sequoia or anywhere else, I have never saw a Psychiatrist except maybe to be evaluated nor did anyone that I can remember on Sequoia Lodge. Were they all sane? I am no one to judge. Funny side note I rode the prison bus to most of the prisons on your list while I was at Preston. It was enough to make me aware that I didn't want to stay in any of them. I had been summoned as a witness in my brother Mike's trial. My other brother Victor, whose death I wrote about, was in some of the others on your list. Sorry to hear you sent up stream. I did a short stint in Baton Rouge after my release from Preston. It was still segregated back then.

So you were in Tracy here is a excerpt from my memoir about it. I have photos in my memoir but they don't show up here.

Riot at DVI Tracy, California

They stabbed every white on the tier, all of whom wore white jumpsuits, for they had just gotten off bus and had no idea they would be attacked for being white. One died, and one vaulted the railing to avoid the stabbing blades broke both his ankles on the concrete below.

Within hours all the assailants were in the hole, but none was indicated in outside court. George Jackson was transferred to Tracy, where he ignited another racial conflict. He got himself locked up and transferred to Soledad.

Edward Bunker Education of a Felon

The following is a letter to me dated June 25, 1993 and in it Mike writes;

Dear Al

There may be worse things than being caught in the middle of a prison race riot, but frankly I cant think of one.

Time: March 28, 1967

Place: D.V.I. Tracy, Ca

Event: Riot

#### Act 1:

Five thirty in the morning and the racking of the cell doors, shrilling sirens and glaring lights wake be from my dreams. Its another day at the Deuel Vocational Institution at Tracy, California, but the sun doesnt know it yet.

In my 6 X 8 accommodations, cellmate Lewis and I begin our daily routine. I dress first because of the bunk bed and combination toilet and sink in the cell we share, there is hardly enough room for both of us to stand at the same time, let alone dress. And because our world is governed by adrenaline diplomacy, the threat of violence is constant. Known and unknown grudges can be settled swiftly, perhaps fatally, if you let your guard down for even a moment. So Lewis stands watch outside the cell door.

I hurriedly wash my face in the chill, blackish water that dribbles from the spout. Since it is so cold, I take the precaution of shaking all my cloths out. Cockroaches make my shoes, pants, even my hair their home away from the cold. When Im finished, I relieve Lewis from his position outside our door and allow him privacy to complete his dressing.

For the last three days all the inmates of Deuel have been in a high state of alert, anxiety, tension is higher than usual since Hightower, the hip coke-dealer from Compton was murdered. His throat was cut and he was left hanging upside down naked, in a shower stall. The killing was blamed on the Aryan Brotherhood over a bad drug deal. But thats bullshit. The drug deal rumor is bogus, intended to cover up the real reason Hightower was murdered; and every convict on the compound knew it. Hightower always had a thing for pretty white-boy punks, and it wasnt that this punk hadnt been putting out; it was that he hadnt been putting out to Hightower. Jealousy, envy, who knows what was in Hightowers mind when he tried to rape the pretty white boys ass, but one things for certain, Hightower wasnt thinking too straight when he did it. The white population of the prison didnt stand for it and Hightower paid for his actions with his life. But, as these things happen, Hightowers brutal death has escalated into a Black Thing. To hear it on the compound, One of the brothers has been done wrong, disrespectedWe cant let this shit go, man! Battle lines have been drawn, sides taken, and the guards are taking bets.

Rumor has it that it is going to come down sometime this weekend, probably Sunday, but it could happen any day, any hour, and if it does, it can easily escalate into a full-blown riot of the worst kind racial. Most riots are focused on the bulls guards, staff but when its racial the ugliness turns inward onto the inmates themselves: rapes, beatings, mutilations and often deaths. The guards wont get involved except to finally clean up the mess because this vile, this violent, they know theyre helpless and apt to be swallowed up in the insane whirlpool.

So it comes down to every man for himself or every fraction for itself: The Black Muslims, the Mexican Mafia, the Crips, the Bloods, the Aryan Brotherhood, the American Indians from Comanche to Sioux, to your basic misfits, fruits, nuts, and vegetables, all fighting, all competing for a stake in power and control in an environment of only four square acres held loosely in check by guards who are really no healthier or better psychologically or emotionally, than the animals they watch over. It simply comes down to animals guarding animals a cesspool in a pressure cooker!

#### Act 2

Lewis finishes dressing and we take a quick look outside our cell door, just to make sure everything is copasetic. I take first shift on the lookout for the bull. It is now time to armor down and to get our shit together.

Our armor is crude, but effective against the wide variety of custom designed weapons each prisoner has fashioned for himself. National Geographic magazines are soaked in the toilet, two or three at a time, until they are soft. Then, with a pencil, each page is painstakingly pierced until there is an even hole running from the front cover all the way through to the back cover, at both the top and the bottom, strips are ripped from bed sheets and made into crude ropes. These strips are then threaded through each hole in the magazine, binding them side by side, ending up looking something like a womans corset. The result is, quite literally, armor plates all the way around your mid-section from under your armpits to the small of your back. Providing a knife blade doesnt land between the magazines, these National Geographics make a pretty formable body protection. Shanks homemade knives- enable us to walk to breakfast with a further sense of safety. Hidden in each of our mattresses, our shanks are made of Plexiglas, trimmed and sharpened on both sides. The Plexiglas was taken from Prison Industries and because it is plastic, it wont set off the metal detector. The knife handles are made from wooden handles of a gardeners spade, forced onto the end of the Plexiglas, then wrapped with sticky masking tape, which enables you to get a tight grip, and best of all; no fingerprints. To be caught with a shank on you is an automatic sentence of five years, but to be caught without it could easily be a death sentence!

Ready now for breakfast, Lewis and I walk down the three flights of stairs of Cell Block A.

We reach the bottom door and zip up the old Navy P coats given to us for winter, and step outside onto the compound. The walkway is covered with slimy pigeon shit, frozen over in the winter-morning dew.

But were less worried about slipping and sliding on the frozen slime than we are with what may lay waiting in the shadows and corners that we have to pass to get to the Mainline cafeteria.

There exist two and only two types of riots in prison: One is literally spontaneous erupting over the smallest of incidents and spreading like wildfire. The second, more serious and deadly is slow and calculated and includes well-planned physical and sexual assaults. The impending riot promises to be one of the latter.

As best we can, we keep our heads down against the cold Northern California winter wind, at the same time staying alert to danger, yet never making eye contact with anyone we dont know or are not on speaking terms with. The wrong gesture, no matter how unintentional, or stare held too long, if not provoking, immediate reprisal, will most assuredly be accounted for if and when it finally comes down. The cafeteria is already half full and it isnt because of the great cuisine and atmosphere: Its dangerous to lie in your bunk after the doors are racked open.

More and more convicts pile in, each morning to the self imposed area designated by his group. Lewis and I dont belong to any particular group, we try to watch out for each other, but your race tends to automatically involve you in any altercation.

We find a good spot near the door. If it kicks down maybe well be able to get out before the bulls lock everyone in from the outside.

(This way, they hope to isolate the problem and let whoever are locked inside finish each other off, making it easier on them to deal with and, eventually, clean up.) A skinny, weasel like, streetwise kid named Three Fingers Sammy walks up to our table and nervously scans

the cafeteria before looking for permission from us to sit down. He earned his name from losing the last two fingers of his right hand from cheating in a poker game.

So whats up, man? he asks.

You tell me. Lewis says. Why arent you sitting with your S.F.V. brothers? Lewis asks without waiting for Three Fingers Sammy to respond.

Were cool. Hell, man, after losing these, Sammy holds up his right hand in a gesture of bravado, Im their number one ace dude. I can get them shit no one else in this rat hole can get.

Yeah, right I say. Then why havent you got your weasel ass plunked down with your homeboys?

Youre in-hock, arent you Fingers? Lewis asks.

No big thing, man, just a little strapped.

Bullshit, Sammy! Your ass is in a sling, even with all this heavy shit about ready to kick off, they arent even signifying you and now you need some white boys to hang with, otherwise youd have some big-dick daddy nigger making you his kid. Lewis tells him.

Yeah Sammy, and we all know how they love a white boys butt!

Fuck you, man, Sammy spits at me. There'll be blood on my shank before theres any of my shit on some toads dick.

Yeah, okay. Right, Lewis taunts him. Sit down before someone thinks youre taking our order.

Sammy does one more, quick glance around and then, as if hes lost all strength in his legs, falls into the chair next to Lewis. When do you think, man? he asks.

Soon, I reply.

With nothing more to be said, the rest of us sit and watch as the cafeteria fills up with faces that never before braved the cold for hard biscuits and lumpy oatmeal.

You know, Lewis says, When it kicks down, the snitches are really going to be in a hard way because they

Good! Fuck them, Sammy says. They deserve it and more. Besides, why are you defending any snitch?

Fuck you, Lewis spits into his face. Im just saying never fucking mind!

Get out of my face, you niggers punk. Go find someone else to be your daddy. Lewis shoves him hard in the shoulder. Sammy looks surprised, then glances over to where his friends are sitting, watching. No one makes a move in his defense.

He gets up, pride hurt, screams; Fuck you! at Lewis and storms off to another side of the cafeteria to a table where a psychopath named Oakie is eating his oatmeal with his fingers.

Why in the fuck did you do that? I ask

I dont know, man. He pissed me off. Hell be okay. Look, see! Oakie has let him sit at his table.

Yeah, but thats only because Oakie is a serious booty bandit.

So what? Lewis says. Hell have protection. Besides, he keeps getting himself in debt hell need a daddy to keep him.

Lewis, you are one insensitive fuck!

Yeah, well, in here

The scream comes from the back of the cafeteria and echoes all the way down the aisles. A white man named Tank comes running out of the bathroom, his face streaming blood from two holes where his eyes had once been.

Lewis and I are up on our feet, but were immediately knocked to the floor by a rush of men trying to make it out of the cafeteria. The doors are slammed shut by the guards outside before we can get out. One mans hand is caught between the door and the wall. His fingers are crushed off and there are only bloody stubs remaining. He falls to the floor in excruciating pain and shock.

A gurgling scream comes from the left side of the cafeteria. Oakie is clutching at a carving knife imbedded in the base of his throat. With his left foot seemingly glued to the floor, he is pivoting in small movements, all the while staring upward with bulging eyes, frantically pulling at the knife handle. Sammy is nowhere to be seen.

While half the cafeteria has rushed to get out, the other half has prepared to go into combat. Looking around, Lewis and I see bands of three to five blacks advancing on less numerous whites, I turn a table over on its side, and Lewis and I drag it to a strategic corner. We pull out our knives and wait.

There is fighting everywhere. It looks like something out of a gladiator movie, but with less sophisticated weaponry.

Blind and bleeding, Tank has somehow made it near us and has huddled down in a fetal position, whimpering like a puppy dog, obviously going into deep shock. Lewis tries to venture out and get him, and for his efforts is struck across the head with a lead pipe. Dazed, his scalp peeled back and bleeding, Lewis falls back onto me behind the turned over table. He throws up all over me, and begins to mumble something about having to go out and feed his dog.

A black guy comes screaming out from behind the serving line with hot grease on his face, his skin streaming down like a pink river.

Oakie now is lying face up in a sightless stare at the ceiling, the knife still deeply embedded in his throat. Sammy comes running, dodging the small groups of fighting men, seemingly untouched, but screaming out for Lewis and me. He looks bewildered and cant find us; I see the knife lodged just under his shoulder blade. I stand up to call out to him, and theres a whizzing sound over my head, then a painless pressure strikes the top of my skull and the floor rushes up to me. There is a sound of braking glass and I can smell something, at first sweet and thick, then gagging. And I begin to dream. I am back home with my brother Al and family in North Hollywood, we are all sitting around the floor of our home and I am happy, so very happy.

Act 3

The voice is calling my name over and over again.

Hey, wake up. If I have to lay here awake staring up at the peeling ceiling, so do you. As if rising from the depths of a deep dark well, the voice pulls me away from my family. I move and feel something wet and slimy as I slide my skin across it. My left wrist aches something awful. Turning, I finally waken enough to realize I am in bed in the prison hospital. The slimy feeling is the old, unchanged bed sheets Im lying in. Opening my eyes, I look up and see my left wrist has been handcuffed to the bed post. The side of my head is bandaged and the gauze hasnt been changed in quite a long time.

Man, I thought you were a goner for awhile, Lewis says with a half-hearted smile. You took a good one across the head. At least, thats what they tell me.

Well, sidekick, you werent moving too swiftly either. In fact, I thought theyd taken you off the count too.

They did take Sammy off, Lewis says, turning his head and looking away.

As soon as the riot began, Oakie was the first to be killed. Because he was so strong and crazy, the blacks figured he was one of the most dangerous whites, so he was to be killed as soon as possible.

As for Sammy, his instincts for survival helped him only for awhile. Trapped in the locked cafeteria, he could only move and hide so long. Sammy was a lot of things, but a fighter he was not. All this time his strategy for survival had been his wits and crafty weaselness, none of which did him any good in this situation.

They caught him. Then repeatedly, with tag-team effort, they beat him. Then they dragged him by his heels back into the kitchen and systematically raped him, ripping his asshole wide open. And still they werent through with him! While still conscious, his dick was severed and stuffed up his bleeding ass like some perverted version of your old dear grandmothers stuffed turkey. Finally, kicking and screaming Sammy Three Fingers was shoved into the large oven and broiled alive. With only a mild concussion, Im promised to be back to life as usual, lucky me.

Our second stop was Vacavilles, California Medical Facility (CMF), a state prison/mental health facility which first opened its gates in 1955.

Beginning in the early 1950s, there had been a major push for the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill after the abuse carried out in mental asylums had been exposed. Some of the mental patients ended up in privately run nursing homes using the new 1965 social welfare program, Medicaid, but undoubtedly many others landed in prisons over time, creating a need that was filled by such institutions as CMF.

No old granite walls here, instead the more modern and less expensive dual chain-link fences topped with razor-wire just like Prestons greeted us.

We pulled into the 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. I knew that Sirhan Sirhan had been transferred here after killing Bobby Kennedy on June 5, 1968 in a ballroom of The Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, CA, which meant the government felt it a secure enough institution to house a presidential candidates assassin.

Once through the dual 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 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 lunch tray, with all its contents, up in the air in the Southern Reception Center while walking over to his table. As the debris began raining down over a wide area the inmate started howling like an injured animal, which brought five or six heavily muscled counselors rushing 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. (It had been derived from the authors own observations.)

I was soon brought back to reality as another prisoner joined us. Once our new passenger was seated we drove back to the front gate where the process of entering was reversed. I was again glad to leave this place and wondered where we would go next.

Within a year of our departure the SLA (Symbionese Liberation Army), a violent revolutionary foco group, would arise out of Vacavilles Black Culture Associations newly formed militant wing, the Unisight Committee (UC). The UC had been established by Donald DeFreeze, alias Clinque Mtume.

The SLA, Venceremos Brigade, Black Guerrilla Family and the Weathermen were all part of the Bay Areas New Left militant movement advocating for the overthrow of the government and the freeing of all political prisoners. Their message was simple, because the underclass was forced to commit crimes to live; imprisonment itself was a political crime and the criminal a political prisoner. The message was well received in prison, primarily by blacks, where these new revolutionary convicts developed their ideology in secret political study groups, and by 1970 they were committing secret, retaliatory gang-style slayings aimed at changing the way power was distributed in the prison. All these groups saw themselves as the vanguard troops of the revolution and they went on an offensive on the outside with targeted assassinations, bank robberies and the bombing of the Department of Corrections offices, along with other symbols of the enemy. By May 21, 1970 the Weathermen had went as far as to issue a Declaration of War, against the U.S. government. DeFreeze had just arrived in 1969 on an armed robbery and assault charge. By 1973 the group was said to be responsible for two murders of officials inside and outside of prison. The SLA would go on to kidnap Patty Hearst, the daughter of the newspaper titan William Randolph Hearst, from her Berkeley apartment.

Later in May 17, 1974 MTume died in a fiery blast at a Los Angeles house after tear gas and 5,371 rounds of ammunition had been fired into it by police. Hearst who had apparently since joined the group was filmed robbing a bank with other members. Patty Hearst was later arrested in September of 1975 in San Francisco, and convicted of the bank robbery on March 20, 1976. After serving 22 months in prison she was released February 1, 1979. General Field Marshal Cinque was the only African-American member of the SLA which had more than a few white-female, members.

## San Quentin

We arrived at the first gate of San Quentin outside of San Francisco around 8am. I noticed an art gallery to my right where inmates sold their art work. This made it possible for the inmates to buy the little extra things that make life on the inside a little more bearable. Many of these inmates are forgotten men whose families have long ago given up on them. The selling of their artwork is a means of being self sufficient. I was impressed with what I could see through the window and wondered if they could have been able to make a living as an artist under different circumstances.

For instance, I have since learned that between, 1953 and 1955, inmate Alfredo Santos, had painted 5 large murals for the main dining room depicting Californias history while he was still in his mid-twenties. These murals are in the style of Diego Riveras 1940 Pan American Unity mural located on nearby Treasure Island and in a testament to Santos skill his murals are still there as I write this. We pulled up to the main gate, then through it, and were unloaded in front of two large doors under the watchful eyes of the guards on



the cat walk above us. I noticed as we climbed the steps how everything around us was weather beaten and damp from the ocean. The paint on the two large iron doors was peeling and they appeared to be the original doors from the 1850s.

Trustees swept the street around us peering over to see if they knew any of us and most likely to size us up. We entered the doors and were lead though some locked iron gates. Once inside we were made to line up against the wall. Then a few names were called out, these were the inmates arriving here to do their time. The selected inmates then entered a separate area where they were made to run their fingers through their hair. Then they had to stick out their tongues, lift it up, and move it side to side. The inmates were then patted down to search for weapons, and then made to strip down completely. Once naked the inmates were asked to raise their genitals to insure nothing was hidden behind them. After this humiliating inspection they were ordered to turn around, bend over and spread the cheeks of their buttocks. A guard with a rubber glove spread their cheeks even further one by one asking them to each cough in order to force any contraband to exit their rectum. Then as customary when an inmate arrives to a new institution, even if they are coming from another, the inmates were ordered to shower using a special shampoo to kill body lice.

I always found these searches particularly humiliating even if I understood the security reasons behind them. The rest of us were processed the same way minus the shower. Afterwards we were taken down a hallway which connected two buildings necessitating the opening of gate after gate. I overheard that someone knew an inmate that was killed down one of the intersecting hallways coming back from visiting his family. Three guys using a mop ringer had beaten the inmate to death for a reason which the story teller didnt give but race was an issue. One could still sense the effects of the January 12-16, 1967 Race Riot in such stories which were still reverberating strongly in these halls as we entered the chow hall.

The chow hall was very old and bore the scares of decades of abuse. The main difference between this dining hall and the ones I had eaten in before was that in this serving line you couldnt see who was serving you the food. Only the arms of the server were visible due to a partition separating us at eye level. We stuck our tray under the partition to get our food while saying nothing. I sat down to eat taking in the sight of the others coming in and getting their meals. We had limited time to eat, and soon they came to collect our silverware, which was then counted, in order to assure that no one could use it to fashion a weapon later. After we left the dining hall, I was separated from the rest, and locked into a holding cell out of view of the others. The place seemed to tell a sad story of human misery, and the dampness seemed to radiate off the cold concrete walls. I felt a chill, and not having a jacket with me, like the trustees outside, I struggled to warm myself. I rubbed my bear arms to warm them, as I searched the room for rays of sunlight. However, since my windowless cell was under an overhang, all sunlight was refracted from across the hallway. I wondered where I was inside of the prison, and the purposes of the buildings that I could see outside the windows across from my cell.

I knew that this was where the death penalty was carried out and I couldnt help but wonder if any of the buildings in sight now contained condemned men. It felt ominous to think of all the lifes lost here both to legal and illegal executions and I wondered if the poor victims souls were still held captive here.

At that very moment, I could understand why Johnny Cash had written San Quentin and sang it here shortly before my arrival. It contained these words, San Quentin I hate every inch of you, you bend my heart and mind and you warp my soul. What good do you think you do?

I was glad not to have time to find out if these words accurately portrayed the inmates true sentiments. I was eager to join the others on the bus for our next stop The Correctional Training Facility at Soledad or just Soledad to us.

### The Correctional Training Facility at Soledad

When the prison doors are opened, the real dragons will fly out.  
Ho Chi Minh

Unknown to me at the time, the legendary George Lester Jackson, prison number A-63837, commonly referred to today as the Dragon, (from the Ho Chi Minhs quote) had arrived from San Quentin in January of 1968. He would later be charged with killing a guard in retaliation for the shooting deaths of three black inmates. The inmates had been shot by a lone white guard during a brawl three days prior in what is now known as The Soledad Incident of January 13, 1970. Jackson along with two Soledad Brothers Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette, as they were called by the press at the time, would dominate the newspapers of the era.

Jackson had cofounded the very violent Black Guerilla Family prison gang in 1966 and following the Soledad Incident his Marxist-Leninist, revolutionary, ideology and guerilla foco tactics, took hold on both sides of the prison walls and resulted in the deaths of nine more prison guards and 24 inmates over the next year earning him the rank of Field Marshal in the Black Panther Party.

On August 21, 1971, Jackson himself died a violent death in San Quentins Adjustment Center, reportedly during an escape attempt. Three guards and two white building tenders also died in what is now called the Bloodiest Day in San Quentins history, after being repeatedly stabbed and having their throats cut. Three other, similarly wounded, guards would recover. Jacksons coconspirators Hugo Pinell, Johnny Spain, Willie Tate, Luis Talamantez, David Johnson, and Soledad Brother Fleeta Drumgo were known as The San Quentin Six and would go on to dominate the news cycle during their trials. The legend is that when Jackson released his fellow AC revolutionary convicts, he shouted, The Dragon has come!

Convicted of the 1965 brutal rape of a 22 year old white woman in San Francisco Hugo Pinell was already serving two life sentences, one for this rape, and one for the stabbing death of yet another Soledad C.O. in March of 1971. Following his convictions and subsequent additional life sentences for the gruesome San Quentin murders and assaults, Pinell was placed in various solitary confinement units at Folsom, California State Prison-Corcoran, and Pelican Bay State Prison. Finally Pinell was transferred from Pelican Bay Solitary Confinement Unit to California State Prison-Sacramento on January 8, 2014 where on July 29, 2015 he was placed into the General Population after over four decades of isolation. Gang related grudges have long lives in prison so it was not much of a surprise when two weeks later the 71 year old Pinell was promptly stabbed to death on the prison yard at approximately 12:55 p.m. on August 12, 2015. A riot involving 70 inmates from multiple prison gangs erupted immediately after the attack.

Unlike San Quentin which was overlooking San Francisco Bay, Soledad was in a dry flat area outside of Salinas. We didnt leave the bus this time and all the new arrivals came to us. I scanned the yard and saw that all the inmates separated themselves into groups by race. They were a lot younger here than either Folsom or San Quentin and therefore more likely to act violently. I sat waiting to see who would be coming with us. I had to rub my eyes when I saw the group arrive at the bus. They were already shackled and each one of them appeared to have spent a lot of time weight training. One by one they climbed the steps of the bus which would sway a little with their weight. The last one to enter was a black man so large that the bus seemed to bow to him as he climbed the steps. The mans massive arms were protruding from his sleeveless shirt; the sleeves had been removed to accommodate his massive arms. To this day he is still the largest well conditioned man that Ive ever seen. This was a person I didnt want to be on the wrong side of. I sank a little in my seat and felt threatened by his presence. As we drove to our next destination I watched with interest from my seat at the rear of the bus all the interactions between the new arrivals and the other inmates that had already been on the bus.

I noticed an inmate sitting next to another speaking rather softly but intensely. The other inmate looked intimidated and it appeared a classic example of coercion.

Later on in the day we arrived at a small-town jail somewhere between Soledad and Atascadero in what appeared to be a farming town. A chain was run through the loop in our handcuffs 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 jails entrance where more armed 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 within ear shot of mine. Later during the wait for the guards return I heard an attack taking place on an inmate and I assumed it was the two men that I had witnessed talking earlier. Later when the guards returned and we were all loaded back on the bus along with one new prisoner the body language of the two inmates confirmed my suspicions. Submission had been established and my heart sank a little for the man that had been made to submit.

I convinced myself that it was better for me to pretend I didnt know so I looked away as the victim raised his eyes to mine. Now the trip was beginning to be a concern for me.

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 other hostages. The guard was forced to hand over his keys to his car, and while one of his accomplices drove the car, he first held a gun in the mouth of a 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.

This comment continues from the one under this.

From a 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.

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 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 and 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 reported that the apparent ring-leader was 28 year old Gerald J. Gallant, a disordered sex offender originally convicted of robbery and rape in Los Angeles. It was also 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, leads me to believe the escapee on our bus 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 a 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. As one can imagine, it was difficult to eat while holding onto our drinks in handcuffs, so either we raised our drinks along with our sandwich or the drinks had to be squeezed between our legs while 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, and/or dropped their food.

Our next stop was Atascadero State Hospital (ASH), which first opened its gates in 1954 one year prior to Vacavilles CMF, in order to return the escapee.

#### Atascadero State Hospital (ASH)

After clearing the gate we stopped near the entrance of a large 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 serious threats were obvious and Id have to measure each individuals treat level more carefully in the future. California Mens Colony

Again I was glad to leave Atascadero for our next destination, California Mens Colony which turned out to be another newer style facility located in San Luis Opismo County. At the time of our arrival, Huey Newton, the cofounder of the Black Panthers, was just beginning his 2-15 year sentence there for voluntary manslaughter of an Oakland police officer that had pulled him over. Newtons conviction was overturned on appeal in May 27, 1970 and he was released on \$50,000 bail on August 8, 1970, to await a new trial. Ironically Newtons release was only one month before Timothy Leary escaped from the institutions low security section. The Ex-Harvard Professor had been serving two 10 year sentence in C.M.C. both for marijuana possession. Leary had first taken responsibility in 1965 for three roaches, and a matchbox of weed found in his car on the Texas, Mexico border near Laredo after being denied entry into Mexico. Leary was traveling with his two children and girlfriend at the time. Let out on bond Leary was rearrested in December 1968 after two joints were found in his possession. He claimed they had been planted by the officer. (Regardless, Im still amazed at the difference between the two crimes and their penalties.)

Leary had escaped with the help of members of the radical Weathermen organization who had prearranged to have him smuggled out of the U.S. to Algeria where he joined Eldridge Cleaver, and the Black Panther Partys government in exile. Not too long after his arrival Leary had to flee to Switzerland when Cleaver attempted to extort him. From Switzerland he traveled to Beirut, Lebanon and finally to Kabul Afghanistan where he was captured and brought back to the US.

Once in the states Leary was returned to C.M.C. where he spent four months in solitary confinement. Then Leary, the original LSD guru, was transferred to Folsom Prisons Solitary Confinement Unit and ironically housed in the cell next to Charles Manson, who told him, Ive been waiting to talk to you for years. Manson was the cult leader of a small band of followers that called themselves The Family, Under Mansons direction the cult were all heavily using LSD, as well as other mind altering drugs, when they carried out several notorious murders in the late 1960s. These murders inspired a movie and book both titled Helter Skelter.

Manson continued: Now we have plenty of time. We were all your students, you know. You had everyone looking up to you. You could have led people anywhere you wanted And you didnt tell them what to do. Thats what I could never figure out Why didnt you? Ive wanted to ask you that for years.

L: That was the point. I didnt want to impose my realities. The idea is that everybody takes responsibility for his nervous system, creates his own reality. Anything else is brainwashing.

M: That was your mistake. No one wants responsibility. Everyone wants to be told what to do, what to believe, whats really true and really real. At least that seemed to be the Familys reality.

After another four months in the hole Leary was released into Folsoms general population. Then he was transferred to Vacaville where he spent another five months in the hole. Leary was eventually released by CA Gov. Jerry Brown in May 1976 after cooperating with the Feds investigation of the Weathermen.

Learys early release was primarily a repudiation of the governments conduct, alluded to in the quote above taken from his autobiography Flashbacks, i.e. the Watergate break-in, and other such illegal activities directed towards civil rights groups.

By now these institutions were all beginning to look the same, and I was becoming accustomed to the sight of men warehoused inside barred wire fences, wasting their life away while struggling to survive in a demeaning environment, surrounded by other men capable of taking their life at a moments notice. The alliances that serve them today may very well compromise their safety tomorrow. I knew this was my likely fate if my life continued as it had in the past and the thought was profoundly disturbing.

I received some photos today that revealed all the modifications they made to Sequoia since I left. Basically it was turned into a Supermax. Concrete bunks narrow slat windows and food/cuff up slots on cell doors remotely locked. Guess things took a turn for the worse after I left.

Interestinghow are you my friend

Im good. BTW you can view the photos if you go to [http:// presto castle history.blogspot .com/2017/02/my-arrival-at-preston-guest.html?m=1](http://presto.castlehistory.blogspot.com/2017/02/my-arrival-at-preston-guest.html?m=1)

leave out the spaces.

They also moved Ironwood to Sequioa so they are joined together. Seems they could move from one cell block to the other down a hallway. Lots of changes. Ironwood had the same type of cells by the time Preston closed. I didnt use the photos of Ironwoods wing however.

I thought that would interest you. The only way to send the link is with spaces or it gets rejected as spam.

I had saw this guys comment of which you had also commented to.

Benjamin Sarasua doug 2 years ago

Yes, I remember the farm that was F company, I was in J Company Laundry and there was an A Company which that was the people who work in the Mess Hall, kitchen.

Benjamin Sarasua CYA 67656

vincent cottelli Benjamin Sarasua 3 months ago

Hey Benjamin.read this cats stories.he arrived at Preston Nov of 68..were he says he will never forget going down to sequoia lodgehe says he was 17then he says when he got there he was assigned to g co permanently is tamarack.then he says when he arrived there he went straight to tamarack.and he had barely turned 14.read it this guys a good writer ill give em thatbut what????he thought his covers wouldnt get pulled one day.what a joke.

Thanks for the good writer portion anyway glad we cleared up the confusion of your reading.

See the link to photos of Sequoia Lodge above. It was transformed into a carbon copy of a Supermax Pod.

You can search this article I also wrote for SW.

In Solitary at LAs Juvenile Hall, circa 1962

Cut and paste it in my he search window. Youll see I what I wrote before I found the photos and Bunkers book.

From the research I have done, there has never been any official executions at Preston ever. So the guards were full of BS. There were no Gallows eitherI believe inmates were tortured and many killed and their murders covered up but no executions as far as convicted sentences being carried out.

@Chuck have you forgotten? Yours is a much more compelling story.

You must have a story or two to tell. This article about you is very interesting.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/the-men-who-escaped-their-fate-on-death-row-475966.html>

Chuck Culhane

I meet Chuck Culhane on a college campus in upstate New York to see him teach a course on criminal justice. It is 1997 and Culhane is 53. Dressed like a college professor, in blue-gray tweed jacket and black beret, he looks more like a middle-weight boxer. The Bronx native paces the hall. His audience, made up of conservative and vocal Generation Xers, is tough. They know that their professor was on Death Row for three years and in prison for 26; thats the first thing he told them. Hes stiff as he begins, maybe nervous. He hesitates and then looks away, clears his throat, stammers. He seems to have lost his footing. Where is the man who verbally and physically sparred with Death Row guards?

Culhane is the middle child of seven; always the familys black sheep, with a juvenile criminal record. He escaped from an abusive home and found solace in the streets, particularly the bars. In 1966, Culhane returned to prison for robbing a gas station attendant at gunpoint and for wounding two police officers in the process. His accomplice was Gary McGivern, who had never been to prison. He took a plea bargain and would be out in a couple of years. Culhane was given 10 to 20 years.

Soon, however, both men were on Death Row. In September 1968, Culhane, McGivern and William Bowerman, who had been convicted of a separate armed robbery, were being transported from prison to a court hearing by two deputy sheriffs in the deputys private car. Bowerman attempted to escape and wrestled a gun from the driver. Both he and Bowerman were killed. Culhane and McGivern said they had nothing to do with the escape and blamed it on Bowerman, who they said killed the deputy. At trial, the surviving officer said McGivern killed his partner. Both Culhane and McGivern had been shot in the ensuing gun battle McGivern in the arm, Culhane in the chest. There was medical evidence that Culhane had been crouched in the back of the car during the shooting and, therefore, could not have been involved. The deputy disputed the theory. The trial ended in a hung jury. In 1972, after a second trial, they were convicted of capital murder.

The classroom is quiet as Chuck tells the teenagers of his life on New Yorks Death Row. He describes the day he became an abolitionist. In his cell in Greenhaven Prison, barely a month after his life had been spared by the Furman decision, he picked up Life magazine. Flipping through, he stopped at some photographs taken in a field in Nigeria, of men only minutes from execution, tied to wooden posts held in place by oil barrels. In 1972 more than 200 armed robbers men who had never taken a life were executed by the Nigerian government. Culhane was hypnotised by the eyes of one man. That picture changed his life.

Culhanes lips begin to quiver, his eyes brimming with tears. I saw myself in those eyes. He was me. We were both convicted robbers. But for me this was a time when the door was opening. The Supreme Court said, Were not gonna kill ya. Youre going to live. But it certainly wasnt a time of hope for these people. I just started crying and crying.

Its time for questions. In a sweatshirt and baseball cap bearing the name of his fraternity, a student in the audience picks apart the statistics and studies. Look. You do the crime, you do the time. Thats it. Pure and simple.

Do you know what its like to do one year in prison? asks Culhane.

No, I dont. But you know what else, Im not gonna do anything thats gonna land me in prison for a year, he replies. Im not going to go out and hold up a store. Culhane looks at the clock. The class is over, although hes not ready for it to be. Not on this note.

The ex-con struggles, trying to understand that the teens of the Sixties are very different from those today. The only way to eliminate the

death penalty is to put a face on it, he says. Then they will see who they are killing. Guys like me. People who can be rehabilitated. Who can make something of their lives. And have.

While incarcerated, Culhane took university classes. He became a nationally recognised prize-winning poet, winning first place in 1989 from PEN, the international writers group, for one poem. In 1988 Chuck won the International PEN second prize and dedicated the poem to then-California Supreme Court Chief Justice Rose Bird, an anti-death penalty advocate. His poetry has been published. Hes won two PEN awards for his one-act plays. He collaborated on a play, The Capeman, with Paul Simon, and it opened on Broadway.

In 1985, when he first became eligible for parole, his case became a cause clbre in the abolitionist movement, supported by media heavyweights such as Allen Ginsberg and folk singer Pete Seeger. Culhane is still prohibited from drinking alcohol and cant make public statements about the death penalty, but its hard to be an abolitionist and keep quiet.

After his release from prison in 1992, Culhane returned to college for his Masters, taking courses in psychology. He completed the coursework but he doesnt have the \$2,200 for tuition. Like almost every former Death Row inmate Ive interviewed, he is struggling financially. Few employers want to hire a convicted killer. He does odd jobs for friends and church members, and hes paid \$100 a week to teach the college class. He stays at a peace centre for free, in exchange for being its handyman. He counsels addicts, for free, at a youth centre.

In January 1994, Culhane was stopped by police after running a red light he had been at his brothers house where hed had dinner and two glasses of wine. He was given a 30-day sentence but the New York Parole Board sent him back to prison for 11 months. After we met, he returned to prison, in May 2002, after eight years on parole, for a substance-abuse parole violation. He left prison on 26 June 2003. Two years later, he joined a drug rehab programme where he was arrested, after testing positive for cocaine, and sentenced to 14 months; a parole officer increased the term to 24.

Moving and harrowing recollection. It is good that the brother remembers his own past, and greatly significant that he remembers the people living the nightmare today.

Im repulsed by our Criminal Justice System! Who are the real criminals? I write novels and short stories about the lack of justice and the politics behind it.

Very sad story. Makes me feel sick to my stomach, literally.

This is wonderful and most necessary piece. Please keep up you untiring efforts to keep in the Light, a part of society most choose to forget. Change must comethank you again for sharing this. L.

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



**Solitary Watch News**