

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | September 9, 2018

Originally published in Issue 3 of the Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement newsletter [End Solitary!](#), the following account was written by Tracey Morgan, who was first sent to jail as a teenager. At age 21, upon her arrival at Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW), Morgan was placed in solitary confinement. The reason, she says, was that she cried too much in front of the guards because she was so scared. She remained in solitary confinement for about a month, but the experience would stay with her for the rest of her life.

Morgan describes the irreparable effects of the time she spent in solitary more than 30 years ago, and shares life experiences that have driven her to work with individuals facing similar struggles in their re-entry back into society. Morgan now works with the organizations [Out for Justice](#) and [Maryland Justice Project](#), both based in Baltimore, Maryland. Valerie Kiebala

My childhood was rough. I was one of six children. Our father was abusive, and he beat us more than the others because at age five I saw him molesting my sister. Our mother had to put up with him, even though he had another woman, because he provided for us and was responsible for us over the weekends. When I was 15, I left home. I got mixed up with other girls and spent time in a juvenile center called Montrose School for Girls. That's where juvenile girls were held for being juvenile delinquents. I was there for not attending school and little small crimes such as stealing. Nothing bad enough to be charged as an adult.

When I was 21, I was feeling abandoned and depended on my childhood friends, who were in prison. It didn't seem to matter if I broke the law. It would give me a chance to find them. Today I know that was a bad choice, and I shouldn't have thought like that. I was young and I had no clue what was waiting ahead for me in the women's prison, called Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW).

I had a nervous breakdown being placed in solitary confinement the first time I ever went to prison, and I was only there for forging checks, not even a violent crime. I was placed in solitary confinement for being afraid of prison and crying constantly when I first arrived there at MCIW. That was the beginning of my experience of solitary confinement. Finally, I was shipped to a mental institution (Springfield State Hospital) for a short stay, until I was deemed stable enough to go back to prison. I was put on large doses of [anti-]psychotic medication called Haldol until I was released from prison altogether. There were no follow-up instructions for what I endured mentally there. I hope this story helps a little to understand why there should no longer be solitary confinement and why solitary confinement is deemed inhumane and cruel and unusual punishment.

My experience was devastating to me, and I vowed to myself that if I ever made it out of those conditions, I would never relive that inhumane situation again.

Solitary confinement does exactly what it's intended to do. It breaks a human down to the lowest level of being a human, if you ask me. I can only speak for myself. If you are not used to being in a space like that, it can cause very harsh mental problems for anyone. Because of the way you're treated and the way you live in solitary confinement, if you're not strong mentally, it's very hard to adapt and remain sane. It's like double jeopardy: you've been sentenced to do your time and then you're placed in a confined area alone with nothing but four walls and a toilet that you don't even have the ability to flush. You're wearing nothing but what the institution provided you and you're fed through a door like an animal. That's not right and it's not humane. You really suffer mentally, mainly. And these thoughts of how you were treated stay with you for your entire life after being released from prison. You learn nothing from being treated like this; you only suffer from the torment and isolation.

If you don't suffer from a mental problem going into confinement, you will suffer from some sort of mental illness when you come out of there, depending on how long you had to endure such harsh treatment. You never ever forget, and you are affected by this for a lifetime (PTSD). For sure, I can only speak for me.

I know that my upbringing caused me to look at life differently, and I made terrible choices due to the trauma I was subjected to. I'm a much better person today because I accepted the fact I must find a way to heal. I reached out to a therapist and after going through so many, I found one who cared and helped me to start my process.

Today I am involved with an organization to help returning citizens. The organization is called Out For Justice (OFJ). We help returning citizens who have just come out of prison. We also help lobby in Annapolis, Maryland, to pass bills that affect people who have criminal backgrounds. We go inside the walls of prison to inform people of the resources available to make their transition back home much easier.

I'm actively involved with an organization called Maryland Justice Project, Inc. (MJP), which helps returning citizens become more aware of their rights and the political aspect of things so they won't return to prison. MJP is mainly a resource center for returning citizens, and we go into the jails to prepare them for re-entering society. I volunteer where needed, when I can.

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

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

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

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

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September 6, 2022

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Thank you for your beautiful, though extremely painful, writing. What a blessing that you have found a way to know your own wholeness, and are now helping others to transform their pain into a full and precious life.

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