

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/06/28/voices-from-solitary-on-solitary-confinement-and-finding-humanity/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | June 28, 2011

Susan Crane is part of Plowshares movement, which protests nuclear weapons through nonviolent civil disobedience at military bases and other nuclear facilities. She is a member of the Disarm Now Plowshares Five, who were arrested in November 2009 after they clandestinely entered the Kitsap-Bangor Naval Base outside Seattle, the largest nuclear weapons storage facility in the country, in order to call attention to the illegality and immorality of the existence of the first strike Trident weapons system, [according to a statement](#) from the group. In March 2011, Crane was sentenced to 15 months in federal prison. She was initially incarcerated in FDC SeaTac, a federal detention center in Seattle, and later moved to FCI Berlin, a womens prison east of San Francisco.

The following appeared as a post on the [Disarm Now Plowshares website](#). The text comes from two letters written by Susan Crane on May 10 and 12, 2011, in which Cranewho had herself served stints in isolation after earlier arrestsobserves and reflects upon the lives of women in solitary confinement.

While at the Federal Detention Center (FDC) SeaTac, Sr. Anne [Montgomery] and I were in cell 11 in one of the womens units. Cells 2 10 are filled with women wearing orange, held in solitary (Special Handling Unit as it is officially named). These sisters eat all their meals alone in their cells. They get out of their cell for a 15-minute shower three times a week (M, W & F). They are offered no exercise or outside time. They not allowed to communicate with other prisoners, and we were not allowed to motion or talk to them. There is no yelling between cells. They cant participate in group prayer, or any group activity. No one offers them Eucharist.

The best we could offer was a smile as we walked by the line that is ten feet out from their doors; Sr. Anne and I would walk around the SeaTac womens unit (21 laps = 1 mile).

Some of the women in solitary are pre-trial, some have been sentenced. They are probably here for some sort of write-up for an infraction of a prison rule: some have had a hearing with a BOP [Bureau of Prisons] officer and have been found guilty, and so continue to sit in the solitary cells. The write-ups might be, for example, for fighting, making a three-way call, or the result of mental illness.

One woman who was eating meals with us had just been abruptly taken off anti-anxiety medication. She was understandably having a hard time. The counselor came over during lunch and was excoriating us for keeping items on the shelf and desk in our cells. Our friend quietly walked up to the counselor and is reported to have said, Why dont you let the women eat in peace? (or something to that effect). She is now in orange, in solitary.

According to Bill Quigley, one of our lawyers at the Disarm Now Plowshares trial, and the legal director for the Center for Constitutional Rights, medical testimony presented in the case of SyedFahadHashmi in New York concluded that after 60 days in solitary peoples mental state begins to break down. That means a person will start to experience panic, anxiety, confusion, headaches, heart palpitations, sleep problems, withdrawal, anger, depression, despair and over-sensitivity. Over time this can lead to severe psychiatric trauma and harms like psychosis, distortion of reality, hallucinations, mass anxiety and acute confusion. Essentially, the mind disintegrates (Not Just Guantanamo: US Torturing Muslim Pre-Trial Detainee in NYC, Huffington Post, by Bill Quigley).

Of course the 9 solitary cells holding women at FDC SeaTacare a small part of the entire solitary population at SeaTac, or in the Federal prison system, or in the US. The US has 5 percent of the worlds population and 25 percent of the worlds prisoners! The US now has 25,000 prisoners in supermax prisons, and an additional 50-80 thousand in restrictive segregation units (Hell Hole, by Atul Gawande, in the New Yorker). Although the argument for solitary confinement is that it prevents violence and rule breaking, studies have shown that there is no correlation between the use of solitary confinement and a decrease in prison violence. In June 2006 the Commission on Safety and Abuse in Americas Prisons released its study and called for ending long-term isolation of prisoners. The report concluded that after 10 days, no benefits of solitary confinement were found, and the harms are clear.

Sr. Anne was recently released from FDC SeaTacafter serving her sentence. I am now at the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Dublin. Things here are the way prisons are.

Yesterday there was a group of people who were given a tour of the prison. I was on the rec. field walking on the track. I try to see the facility through their eyes. Women walking, running, talking, laughing; all dressed in khaki; no one rowdy; no one crying. They see

buildings, well cared for, floors clean and waxed, organized, no garbage or litter; sort of looks like a clean college campus.

But there is a lot that they don't see. They don't see the pain of toothaches. They don't see the pain of mothers who can't raise their children, or the pain of the children who want their moms. They don't see the pain that comes when a close relative or friend dies and you can't celebrate their life or mourn with family. They don't see the pain of women who grew up in the US and face deportation to a country in which they have never lived. They don't see the day-by-day humiliations dealt out by some of the guards who are just doing their jobs. They don't hear the stories of an unjust legal system that grinds up so many women and spits them out into FCI Dublin.

I want to walk up and speak to these visitors, but I'm not ready to be rebuffed, yelled at, or see some sort of fear in their eyes if I come near them.

At FCI Dublin, walking on the track on the recreation field (3 laps = 1 mile), I pass the building holding the women in solitary. Here, the windows have a metal shield around them, so we have no contact with them. Is this acceptable punishment in the United States? Does it serve any purpose? Are there better solutions?

Talking to some of the women at FDC SeaTac, I heard that they thought short times (3-10 days) in the SHU gave them time to refocus, to think, to re-evaluate what they were doing. My own experiences in isolation, first for 3 days and later for 30 days, were the beginning of a spiritual quest that I've been on for many years now.

I saw that many of the guards made a point of talking through the doors to the women in the SHU, using their unique humor, being human, showing compassion. And I was thankful to see that!

But what about the structure, the actual rules that put women in solitary confinement? Our willingness to allow this sort of punishment lets us imagine that it's OK to hold prisoners and torture them at Bagram or Guantanamo.

Jesus once said, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me (Matthew 25:40). Is that not the measure of our humanity? Is any other human being less than us? How is it possible that the US has 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the world's prisoners?

Does our disregard for the humanity of our brothers and sisters held in solitary make it easier to imagine killing millions in nuclear war? Are not the warehoused, marginalized, throw-away people in prisons a symptom of devalued life, and a symptom of the kind of thinking that allows us to invade other countries, and spend trillions of dollars on nuclear weapons and consider their use?

Where in all this do we find our humanity?

Susan Crane, 877-83-011, FCI Dublin, 5701 8th St. Camp Parks, Dublin, CA 94568

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 a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

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.

How about this one:

When dogs run free, any and all breeds, the murder rate among themselves approximates that of humans. (A statistic; a demographic. Do the lab.)

When they lock up humans, the message is very clear each and every of these should not come anywhere near any human in society, out

there. Safety, the issue proclaimed, is thusby accorded to all of the out-there society that these certain ones are contained, having shown preemptively a propensity to cause harm or even ultimately kill. The message is also that the probability is greater these are among those who might harm, or kill another. human. With these probabilities, enforced by the message, what happens when

Michael Vicks (or anyone doing what he did) puts 2 dogs in a tight place together? How did Michael Vicks or anyone effect the dogfighting? Answer: by the sole act of putting them in a small room together.

How do the states and feds house their prisoners? By the sole act of putting them in small rooms together, or wherever this specific act, and it IS the mainstream act in there.

Is dogfighting a felony? When it was Vicks the feds said so. And Im not even equating pit bulls to certain humans the lockdown message suggests have propensities. I said ANY and ALL breeds. Do the lab, the study. You dont need special dogs for the dog murder rate to be the same. And it all starts with a contact; forced when you put them in a small room together. (Also see trunking, a recent phenomenon.)

By the repeated housing of literally all prisoners, states and federal, in 2 man cells, they have created somewhere a guaranteed murder. Created murder, not accessory to murder. If you could show me where it has been mandated that prisoners are not humans, thus are never entitled to the right to avoid being randomly murdered, please show me.

The answer has always been there: no human, incarcerated or otherwise, should be forced to live either with a stranger hes never met, or anyone he doesnt want to. At the booking into any incarceration facility one prime question is Would you like to live with another inmate. If no, they live alone. It would take a bit of discomfort to work the prisons up to this, but clearly possible. Quite a few would choose to live together; its statistically the case; you could still keep large portions of the facility as double occupancies, and depending on the choices, the rebuilding, add-on building may not be as difficult as you might think.

But add on to all present prisons and jails the rows of the loner-housings for those who, perhaps prudently, would like to eschew the possibility of being murdered. THIS should be an inalienable right, and should always have been in place on the statistics. Picture Chelsea Clinton has just been arrested and booked for spitting on a cop and slapping him in her disgust over a ticket. They force her in withoh, I see Charlie Mansons not got a celly. Pardon me, Charlene Manson, his female counterpart. Might that be OK then with Hillary, since this is the way it works presently? oh yea, must be. Often the intercom in the cell doesnt work if theres one at allor they wont even answer it. And when the terrors got you, not vica versa, do you think youll even be able to make 1 step to that button? Michael Vicks losing-dogs didnt know quite what to do with it either. The answer is simple. Uninvite the possibility.

Point to somebody in authority in history who ever thought to arrest himself.

Now consider the likelihood of the system charging itself with The Felony involved.

All the jailers in this country, fed and state, by these proofs, continue to operate the infamous rings involved.

I tried to put this to the record for yo, bro, (sis now too), with a come-around civil address, but they didnt consider it too likely either the system would even consider to undertake its correction minimally. Apparently, regardless of the crimes, murder or dogfighting.

Posted at:

<http://sfbayview.com/2014/mission-statement-of-the-pelican-bay-human-rights-movement-first-amendment-campaign/>

When I was in the SHU at the Federal in Dublin, CA, they allowed me 1 ph. call a week. If the guy didnt answer, wasnt there, for 1 try allowed to ring him, you waited till next week to ring him again. They sometimes forgot to allow a call. The BUSINESS of putting together ones defense (impossible without MUCH, much phoning w/lawyer to focusno detail to be overlooked in a very complex case) is given the preferred-instead tools of letting you rot. This comprises then ones right to defend under the amendments, as well as the tools to do it. The federal judge ACTUALLY USED the phrase Silence is Golden when instructing me to stop speaking, while I was on the stand, when I was using my best to answer questions. Its on the trial record. Re: ones right to testify. Right here; in the high self-touting USA. (Could she have meant Silence Like a Cancer Grows?). S.F. Dist Court 2009-10. I KNOW what you guys must bear for a system so corrupt its unbelievable, where it hasnt left you perfectly speechless already as to its extents.

Case3:09-cr-00989-MHP

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News