

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/09/02/voices-from-solitary-a-day-in-the-life-part-vi/>

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close

Search

close

close

by [Voices from Solitary](#) | September 2, 2014

*This post is the next in a series of pieces Solitary Watch is publishing as part of a project calling for people held in solitary confinement to write on various proposed themes. Our first suggested theme, *A Day in the Life*, calls for writers to describe a day in his or her life in solitary confinement (read previous entries [here](#)).*

*The following piece, entitled *The Hole Truth*, comes from Nathan Brewer, 29, who has spent six of the last eight years incarcerated in the Indiana prison system, during which time he was sentenced to solitary confinement multiple times for nonviolent offenses. In his piece, Brewer, who has been diagnosed with both anxiety and [dysthymic](#) disorders, describes the way in which he was treated while held in administrative segregation at Hamilton County Jail in Noblesville, Indiana.*

*He writes, *The conditions and treatment to which I was subjected were gravely oppressive and unethical on every front. Released from Westville Correctional Facility in March of this year, Brewer continues to suffer from severe anxiety, which he states was only exacerbated by his time in isolation. He writes from his sober living home, Celebrate Freedom, in Indianapolis. He can be reached by writing: Nathan Brewer, P.O. Box 88033, Indianapolis, IN 46208. Lisa Dawson**

Involuntary Protective Custody in County Jail

I have spent six out of my last eight years incarcerated. Two of these years were served at Hamilton County Jail (HCJ). Throughout this period, I was sentenced to solitary confinement, a.k.a. the hole, a total of three times. Two of these sentences were for nonviolent, petty offenses, which included note passing and allegedly possessing tobacco. One of these stints, however, landed me in protective custody (PC) for 15 days (which coincided with both Christmas and New Years), the cause of which was another detainee using my telephone voice password to prank the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) hotline. Although I was sentenced to the hole for a prank which I had nothing to do with, jail staff refused my request to listen to a recording of the alleged phone call that I made, ultimately preventing me from defending myself.

In this essay, I write to inform readers about what it is like to be in indefinite solitary confinement, which in this particular case was involuntary protective custody (PC, which in my instance could also stand for Punitive Confinement, considering I was punished for being the victim of a prank).

Hour Out?

Each morning, I was rattled from my sleep by a jarring, intrusive squawk over the intercom box in my cell. This untimely disruption, which naturally came at a time when I was in my deepest stage of sleep, was the voice of a corrections officer (CO) announcing my hour out: BREWER! DO YOU WANT YOUR HOUR OUT?! This rude awakening required a prompt yes response, as no response qualifies as no by default, and this opportunity for a short time out of my solitary hovel would be missed until the next rude awakening 24 hours later.

Despite being roused from my sleep, I never once turned down my time out, regardless of how tired I was, withstanding the fact sleep is the only escape in jail and is invaluable. I recall being so psyched to get out of my cell that first day in PC, but soon discovered that I would not be getting a full hour out during my hour out. No, the staff at HCJ had devised a way to shortchange those held in solitary of this basic right. Each day, I was permitted 30 minutes out in the day room, during which I was expected to shower, clean my cell, order commissary, make one phone call and, when possible, interact with anyone else also on their hour out (often times nobody).

After just 30 minutes, guards would order us to return to our cells: LOCKDOWN! LOCKDOWN! This was unless of course you opted to go to the recreation room, which was a small, freezing cold, trapezoidal-shaped room, with nothing in it but a chessboard with no pieces. The room reeked of the distinct smell of a grain bin (to this day, I haven't figured this out) and the floor was grossly covered in toenail clippings.

With that said, it was no small wonder that most chose to decline this optional 30-minute time offered for recreation. On most every occasion, I chose to return to my cell, which only underscores how successful the guards were in their strategically designed plan to

restrict peoples full hour out to just half that time, and we played right into their hands. This is precisely what the staff wanted, and the sham rec time offered is how they managed to give us just 30 minutes out of our cells, as opposed to the required 60 minutes and they were justified in doing so, since they did indeed offer rec time.

Non-Punitive Protective Custody?

While held in PC, I was not permitted to attend any of the programs which I had been frequenting for nearly the past two years, including Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Overcomers, a group which provides Christ-centered substance abuse counseling. I have picked my brain for legitimate reasons why jail staff would not permit me to attend these programs, which serve no other purpose than to rehabilitate me. I was also denied access to the facility's law library, an insurmountable hindrance to someone defending himself pro se, preventing me from effectively corresponding with the courts in accordance with their formal trial rules and procedures, indelibly having a negative impact on my case.

But what fired my indignation most of all was staff's refusal to allow me to attend my weekly worship services, which they knew full well was my custom. And because my time in PC happened to coincide with Christmas and New Years, I missed the holiday worship service, which I had been anticipating all year. In fact, my absence at these worship services did not go unnoticed, as clergymen and volunteers who facilitated these programs visited me multiple times while in solitary. It was clearly not these people who had lobbied against my attending their programs. It was unquestionably jail officials who had denied me these basic privileges and rights.

Cruel Accommodations

With one blanket, a mat, no pillow and an incessant draft, I was always cold in my cell. Meal trays, served three times daily, provided no relief, as the upper tier was always served last, meaning my one hot meal was cold by the time it reached me in a Styrofoam tray, which had the capacity to hold only the scantest of portions. The other two meals were served cold to begin with. Also aggravating was the florescent security light, which was on 24/7. Even closing my eyes allowed no relief, as its electronic hum was a inescapable reminder of the artificial environment and oppressive conditions to which I was subjected during each of my stays in solitary confinement.

When I was unable to distract myself, however, I spent my time in my cell in a constant state of anxiety and depression, with overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and despair. Many times, I would lie prostrate on the frozen floor of my cell, praying fervently, pleading with God, imploring him, to free me from my agony. I demanded vindication! No one deserves the treacherous plight to which I had been assigned. Never had I witnessed such callousness and ignorance (feigned or real, I'll never know) as that which I saw in the guards and jail staff as a whole. My frustration mounted to the point where all I could do is just sob and continue to pray. I was being tested to my limits.

As a diversion from my cold surroundings, I would write letters, draw (with an anti-shank, short flimsy pen, as pencils were contraband), read my Bible (the only book permitted), meditate, or, if I was lucky enough, go back to sleep. Somehow I was able to preserve enough peace in my heart and soundness in my mind to endure the darkest and most daunting chapter of my incarceration.

Punitive Isolation vs. Rehabilitative Incarceration: Night and Day

My time in isolation was nothing more than a roadblock to my rehabilitation that served only to magnify my depression and anxiety disorders, which directly resulted in my Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which I was diagnosed with following my release. These lingering psychological effects are primarily attributable to my stints in the hole, including the time I spent in involuntary PC for something over which I had no control; this turned discouraged my faith in the system, my faith in humanity, and ultimately my faith in God, which is imperative for me someone genuinely trying to come out rehabilitated and able to live a pro-social life.

Following my incarceration at HCJ, I was sentenced to the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC) and transferred to Westville Correctional Facility, where I was placed in the facility's Therapeutic Community (TC), a program which unfortunately accepts only a limited number of people. Here, in a social environment conducive to rehabilitation, as opposed to punitive isolation, I thrived. In TC, I reached the Top of the House, a position in which I served as Dorm Elder, or overseer of all program departments. I also held the position as Orientation Facilitator, the most respected and challenging position in all of TC, which involved instructing new peers entering TC on the fundamentals of the program.

Based on these two very different experiences (HCJ PC and Westville TC), it is clear that the oppressive and overused practice of solitary confinement in all of its forms is not only unethical, but also counterproductive and downright destructive to any person's hope for a successful recovery from a criminal lifestyle, substance use disorder, or any efforts at positive, lasting behavioral change. And nowhere in the equation to rehabilitate offenders and to reduce recidivism do I see a place for the practice of solitary confinement.

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

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

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

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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.

This is unacceptable. Change needs to happen and we must unite and act!

The Indiana state constitution says our penal code is for reformation not vindictive justice. This means it is to rehabilitate, not just punish! However, this is absolutely not the case and is the biggest falsehood ever told.

I was sentenced to a year at Rockville Womens prison in Indiana for adding a refill to a legitimate prescription of painkillers. I was addicted to them, but never did any harm to another human being. I never got any type of addiction treatment, and was taken away from a job that I held for 7 years to do the same job in prison for 20 cents an hour. I slept beside violent criminals and knew every day that I was at the mercy of corrections officers who could do or say anything. The only thing I learned in RCF was how to tolerate verbal abuse and have no respect for our judicial system. Believe it or not, our state constitution says our penal system is set up for rehabilitation, not vindictive justice. However, this is not the case. I used to believe the worst of the worst were who was in prison. Not true. It is mostly filled with people who have the mental disorder of addiction, who are non-violent, and receive no treatment for their disorder. If putting us in cages was a cure, why isn't the Betty Ford clinic doing it?

That's how they roll! IDOC is for profit!!! Not rehabilitation..

This is my Nephew that experienced first hand mistreatment of a lock up facility. This is absurd treatment to any human being alive, especially for petty allegations while in lock up.

My sons last communication with me is I will never make it 18 mos here. He is mentally ill and in SHU at Auburn. His life there is that bad. To be delusional and have cock roaches crawling on you, it adds to his distress. To be depressed and away from family. But the worst is the state is doing what his father did to him many years ago. When my son was having his hair washed in the tub, his father would hold him under water when he moved too much. I did not know that was going on, but when I found out, we left. It affected my son and his illness terribly. Now the state is holding him under, again. Please do not mind if I place this here because we need help to get him out: THE ONLY THING MY SON DID WRONG WAS GOT ANGRY TO GET INTO SOLITARY PLEASE HELP US 67 Days in the The Box, for disobeying a CO and throwing a rag at a table-Can you help us? Is there someone you can ask to sign the Petition at the end of this Note? He is in Extreme Isolation while experiencing Symptoms of His Mental Illness. He has sent me a letter telling me he is feeling effects of not having any social interaction, he actually waits for the time of the month that his counselor comes to check on him, cell side. Once a month! There are reasons we consider Solitary Torture for any Human Being. PLEASE HELP ME FIGHT to get TREATMENT my son, not Torture him. If you have signed, would you please Share Now the Petition link with ANYONE you can!! Just copy, and paste: <https://www.change.org/p/dr-ann-marie-sullivan-release-masai-stewart-from-solitary-confinement-as-required-by-the-shu-exclusion-law-and-human-decency>

It is very brave to testify about so cold and barren circumstances. It must have been tiresome and distressing simply to remember about them. Thank you for taking the pain, and good luck in recovering.

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