

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2020/05/07/three-ways-to-reach-out-to-people-in-actual-solitary-confinement/>

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During This Time of Self-Quarantine, Consider the Thousands in U.S. Prisons Who Live in Far More Extreme Isolation and Deprivation

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | May 7, 2020

As they shelter in place to impede the spread of COVID-19, millions of Americans across the country have been given just a glimpse of the isolation, idleness, and deprivation faced by tens of thousands of incarcerated men, women, and children held in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers.

Unlike those held in solitary, individuals living under stay-at-home orders or self-quarantines are often confined along with loved ones, and with access to multiple sources of entertainment, outdoor exercise, and electronic communications with the outside world. Yet many of us are experiencing the psychological and physical toll that isolation can take—effects that are far more acute for people in solitary, who spend 22 to 24 hours a day confined in cells that measure about 6 x 9 feet (smaller than the average parking space), barred from work, rehabilitative programming, or meaningful human contact, often including phone calls or visits with loved ones. It is hardly surprising that rates of suicide and self-harm are so much higher in solitary than in the general prison population, or that the United Nations Mandela Rules for the treatment of prisoners identify prolonged solitary confinement as a form of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment that often rises to the level of torture.

During this time, please consider participating in one of the opportunities offered by Solitary Watch to connect with people living in solitary confinement.

1. LIFELINES TO SOLITARY

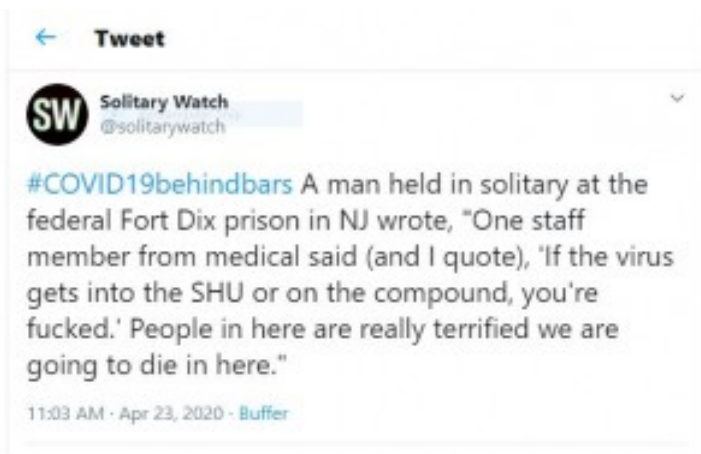
Since its founding more than ten years ago, Solitary Watch has built connections with thousands of people in solitary, exchanging letters and sending them cards, and a special print newsletter, reminding them that they have not been forgotten by the world outside their cells. We call this project Lifelines to Solitary.

In 2015, we expanded Lifelines to Solitary to include the first prison correspondence program specifically designed to reach people in solitary confinement, using our list of more than 6,000 people living in long-term isolation. For anyone joining the program, Solitary Watch provides names and addresses of individuals in solitary, guidelines for maintaining a healthy correspondence, and ongoing advice and support. We also provide a post office box and forward all mail from incarcerated pen pals, to maintain the privacy and safety of all involved.

In an age of electronic communications, letters remain the one and only way to penetrate the dark world of solitary confinement, and to establish contact with a group of people who have been banished and buried not only by society but also by the prison system itself. We believe this communication has the potential to transform the lives not only of the individuals in solitary, but of those on the outside who bear witness to their suffering.

To learn more about Lifelines to Solitary, or sign up to be connected to a pen pal, please **visit our [Lifelines to Solitary page](#)**, or contact marlies@solitarywatch.org.

2. VOICES FROM SOLITARY



Those who do not feel they can make a commitment to a long-term correspondence can still reach out to individuals in solitary confinement. For nearly a decade, Solitary Watch has been publishing [Voices from Solitary](#), a series of firsthand accounts written by people in solitary. Many of the series authors welcome letters from readers, and their addresses are provided with their essays. These essays also provide the most powerful and authentic picture of the reality of solitary confinement. For an even fuller picture, check out our 2016 anthology [Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement](#).

You can also follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#), where we are posting short excerpts from some of the hundreds of letters from people in solitary that we receive each month, many of them describing the terrifying realities of being locked down as the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps through prisons.

3. PHOTO REQUESTS FROM SOLITARY

Photo Requests from Solitary (PRFS) is an ongoing project that invites men and women held in long-term solitary confinement in U.S. prisons to request a photograph of anything at all, real or imagined, and then asks volunteers on the outside to make the image. The astonishing range of requests received to date provides an archive of the hopes, memories, and interests of people who live in extreme isolation, surrounded by gray walls. In addition to being sent to those who request them, serving as a form of direct support to people in isolation, the photos are also featured in exhibitions to help to bring the growing debate over the use of solitary confinement to a broad audience.



AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY TREE
Keisha Scarville for Keith

Keith requested an image that would represent a family tree, with multiple generations celebrating various life events. He wanted the photo "to show/express the unity and growth of family when times are good and bad. I miss my family, being there for them."

Initiated in 2009 by Tamms Year Ten, a grassroots coalition of artists, advocates, family members and men formerly incarcerated in Tamms Correctional Center in southern Illinois (which was shuttered in 2013 after years of opposition), the project is now a collaboration between founding artist and activist Laurie Jo Reynolds, artist and educator Jeanine Oleson, and Jean Casella of Solitary Watch (which also hosts the project). It has expanded to include California, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, and is actively seeking volunteers to fulfill requests.

You can view all of the hundreds of requests and photos received to date on our website, photorequestsfromsolitary.org. If you are

interested in filling a request, please use the Open filter to view all unfulfilled requests, choose a request, and upload your photos. You can also follow us [on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter](#) at @Photos2Solitary to stay updated.

PLEASE ALSO CONSIDER SUPPORTING THE WORK OF SOLITARY WATCH

Today is the last day of a rare mid-year fundraising appeal, as we join other producers of independent, public-service, mission-driven journalism for #GivingNewsDay. This kind of journalism, already under attack from the highest levels of power, also faces new economic hardships brought on by the coronavirus just at the time it is needed most.

Solitary Watch is no exception. Working remotely from our homes (as we always have, to avoid overhead!) we have managed to bring you the [first account](#) of how widespread prison lockdowns and quarantines are forcing hundreds of thousands of incarcerated people in solitary confinement, as well as the [first article](#) on how those who protest their conditions or try to communicate their plight to the public are silenced and punished with solitary. In addition, our [commentary in The Guardian](#) warned, early on, of how COVID-19 would decimate local jails, which were already deadly places before the virus hit. Like so much of what happens behind prison walls, much of the suffering and death wrought by COVID-19 are being hidden from public view, so the work of Solitary Watch is more crucial than ever.

As always, this work depends in large part upon the generosity of our donors. For those fortunate enough to be surviving the pandemic without financial hardship, we hope you will consider making a tax-deductible donation today.

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.

Gods Plan of the Ages!
They will all grow younger !

But truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Numbers 14:21

God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces.

Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17

All wars shall cease.

Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3

All evil shall be suppressed.

Psalm 37:10; Revelation 20:2,3

Gods judgments shall teach righteousness to all.

Isaiah 26:9; 28:17

Nothing shall ever hurt nor destroy.

Isaiah 11:9

Truth shall triumph in the earth.

Psalms 85:11

God shall write His Law in the hearts of men.

Jeremiah 31:33

All shall know Him from the least to the greatest.

Jeremiah 31:34

Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God.

Habakkuk 2:14

God shall pour out His spirit upon all flesh.

Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17

All iniquity shall be remembered no more.

Isaiah 55:7

All shall rejoice as sorrow and sighing flee away.

Isaiah 35:10

There shall be no more death, sorrow or pain.

Revelation 21:4,5

There shall be no more sickness.

Isaiah 33:24

The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Isaiah 35:5

The earth shall yield her increase.

Psalms 67:6

The desert shall blossom as the rose.

Isaiah 35:1

The ransomed of the Lord shall return from death.

Isaiah 35:10

One shall not build and another inhabit, nor plant and another take, nor shall any labor in vain.

Isaiah 65:22,23

Every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree.

Micah 4:4

God shall multiply the fruitage of the earth.

Psalms 67:6; 85:12

There shall be showers of blessing.

Ezekiel 34:26

The earth shall become like a Garden of Eden.

Isaiah 51:3

Message: Good News!

Our nonprofit organization is tiny and struggling we strive to assist the incarcerated within Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC). Our priority is to the Lifers and those living in Solitary Confinement. We feel they are most neglected of this population.

We are need of any type of assistance possible. We desire to collaborate with other nonprofits and service providers.

Please contact us via email gwlifeline@hotmail.com, call or text 269 252 5433.

We are striving to provide a line of hope,
Gwendolyn Williams
Administrator and Founder
Our Lifeline Incorporated
<http://www.ourlifelineinc.org>

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Solitary Watch

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Solitary Watch News