

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/04/10/voices-from-solitary-destroyed-souls/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | April 10, 2011

The following account is from a letter written by an inmate in Missouri's Potosi Correctional Center, which houses maximum security, high risk, and death row prisoners. Among other things, it illustrates how small and seemingly senseless policies like setting a limit on library books can add to the soul-destroying boredom and isolation of solitary confinement.

Unless we have the express permission of the inmate to use his name, we choose not to do so in order to lessen the risk of retribution.

I am a prisoner at Potosi Correctional Center. I am also in ad seg for assault on staff. Ad seg is supposed to be for rehabilitative purposes. The prisoner will soon be released back into mainstream population. Potosi staff and administration have made this into an environment not to help the prisoner but to make the person worse.

Since I've been in this demoralizing place I've seen people go absolutely insane. Staff has created an environment that destroys the soul of a person. In doing so, it has destroyed lives. They have got people that talk to themselves all day. They got people who curse people out all day. They got people that attempt suicide for stupid reasons. They got people that eat or play with their own bodily wastes. Human beings don't do this. Animals do. Uncivilized people do. Staff here created an environment that makes a person uncivilized.

When I say uncivilized, I'm talking about stripping away their humanity. First, they say to the person I don't know if you will ever get out of the hole. They make the person lose hope for anything. Then they don't give the person much to exercise his mind. They only provide us with one reading book a week. I myself can read a 300 page book in two days. I know others can do the same. This gives a person five days to just stare at the wall. While in the hole, we can't order magazines or newspaper ourselves. Most people have the money but can't even get something like a magazine or a newspaper to occupy their time because of no help from the outside. This also has a person staring at the wall. On top of all that, they forbid us from passing along these items so the ones that are fortunate to get magazine or newspaper subscriptions from people helping them on the outside, they can't even let someone else read it. Making matters worse, we stay in our cells 24/7 unless we need to get medical, attend classification hearings, or visits.

These and many other psychological mind games are played on us constantly. I and a very few others are strong-minded so we can overcome these atrocities. We try to reach out and help these destroyed souls. The ones Potosi has turned uncivilized and try to stop the deterioration. It only helps a little.

Then they have the audacity to send someone from Mental Health through here every week. This acknowledges the fact that guys over here are losing or have lost their minds. To add insult to injury, they hinder them from providing the real help they need. They come door to door passing out puzzles (sudoku, wordsearch, etc.). Like these puzzles are going to help a person from going insane.

Many things have been requested about changing some of the conditions down here, from providing rehabilitative classes, initiating an incentive program, to allowing Walkmans. These and many other things are provided in other institutions except Potosi. All in a help to give the person a sense of civility in ad seg. Yet Potosi administration turns a blind eye to every grievance that comes across their desk. It's as if they want people acting like this.

We stay in these cells day after day, month after month, year after year. We want ad seg reform. We need ad seg reform. Help us obtain ad seg reform.

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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

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September 19, 2022

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September 6, 2022

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Its very sad to hear these stories, especially since my brother has been in solitary in the past. Recently he did two years in the shu, it saddens me deeply to know of all crap him and all the other prisoners in solitary are faced with.

Interesting since people who are in ad seg at potosi are there because they have assaulted staff and/or other inmates. you chose how you wanted to make your bed so now you must sleep in it

Heres a novel thought dont assault prison staff and you wont have to worry about being in segregation.

I love how the prisoner who wrote this says, In doing so, it has destroyed lives. Here I thought they had already destroyed their own lives. And why is high risk enclosed in quotation marks in this post, as if they were all docile lambs who wouldnt rip idealistic, clueless liberal retards like Joshlyn to pieces the moment they go the chance?

Truly amusing how some people have no worthwhile cause to worry about.

It is so important that we rehabilitate the prisons so they can rehabilitate the prisoners. This post came just in time for my presentation in college about the lack of rehab available to isolation inmates. Maybe in my lifetime it will get better Maybe..

Such cruel and unusual punishment. How can we get the American public to pay attention and more folks to care? I am going to start forwarding my emails from S. Watch to all my family and friends, as well as sharing on facebook. Thanks.

Jane H

sad that they would do this to you all i was never in pirson but your talking bout staring at the wall all day made me think of my 8th grade oakhill days talking to my self still do lol nuthing rong with that lol ok there is but still should help you all get better sad to see such going on may there be light in the darknes of justice

Hard to believe this is being done in the United States of America. Just really hard to believe.

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

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

Solitary Watch

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