

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/06/03/voices-from-solitary-the-loneliest-place-in-the-world/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | June 3, 2013



This essay is by Shawn Smith, who is serving time for drug sales and assault in New York. He is one of some 4,500 individuals currently being held in isolated confinement in the states prison system. In a letter to Solitary Watch, he writes I'm so lonely that I dream of human contact with the outside world and I was hoping that you could find it in your heart to embrace me as a friend and help me get my essay up on your website. So that people can become aware of the levels of injustices and sorrow that has been bestowed upon me involving my solitary confinement experience I feel so hopeless that I've spilled out my heart into this essay and I'm sending it to you in hopes that some change can come to me from it. Shawn Smith's mailing address is #07A1605, Marcy Correctional Facility, 9000 Old River Road, P.O. Box 5000, Marcy, New York 13403-5000. James Ridgeway

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Four walls! A ceiling! And a floor eight by ten feet in dimension! In my eyes, this is the worst torture device in the history of the universe! Within this small enclave many men have fallen apart and broken down mentally into a deep stage of sorrow. That has made us (myself included) drop to our knees with lakes of tears under our eyes that cascade down our face. As we ask God Why me? Why must I suffer this unbearable pain and burden?

This place has made me feel so hopeless that I've dosed on pills two times and was rushed to the hospital where they pumped my stomach clean of the many painkillers and anti-depression pills that I digested in hopes of going to a better place! I've hung up with a self-made noose and sliced my wrist, because this place has driven me to the brink of insanity and I felt like I would rather be dead than live like a dog in a cage at the unwanted animal shelter.

In this place, I've lost and found my sanity time and time again. What really shook me up and made me find the inner strength to fight for the willpower to want to live my life and fight to survive in this place was when I saw the COs carry a friend I made in the brother in the cell next-door to me away in a black bag!

I've seen this hellhole made many men convert into almost every religious Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Rastafarian, Buddhism, NOI, and an assortment of other beliefs. As they sought to find an inner place of peace within themselves from this day to day madness that the state of New York calls the SHU (special housing unit). I believe I'm in the most inhumane place that has ever housed people since the Nazi concentration camps of World War II. I called this place for the longest a living purgatory. Where racist COs torture us for fun. I can't believe that I've done over 14 years of my life trapped in a tiny space of the world called a cell. That's more years out of my life that I've wasted away locked in solitary confinement than I have as an adult free out in society!

All I hear around me is arguing! Prisoners arguing with prisoners over the most childish things I've ever heard! Prisoners arguing with COs for not giving them their food! COs just straight deadening dudes on their meals. I've had a CO eat my tray of food right in front of myself like it was the funniest joke in the world, but I start and lost weight. Prisoners arguing with the nurses for not providing them with proper medical care. Prisoners arguing with the law library officers for not providing them with the law books that contains the keys to their freedom. Prisoners arguing with the mental health staff for not providing them with the proper meds that they need and not placing them in the proper environment that's best suited for their mental condition. All I hear around me is arguing!

I feel like Im in a living nightmare! Im surprised I dont have any gray hair. Im surprised I havent lost all of my hair After all of this insanity that Ive been through. Ive been rushed, attacked and assaulted by these draconian COs over twenty times! Ive had nightsticks smashed into my head dozens of times. Boots stomped into my face until it turned black and blue in pure acts of racism. Ive had so much torture inflicted upon me you would scream like the devil was torturing you if you could feel uses of force that was rendered upon me! Ive written grievances and complain about this abuse and all has been brushed under the rug by all the upstairs big dog like it never happened. So I work out every day to be prepared for when they decided to run in up my cell or attack me when Im going to shower. The thoughts never leaves me of all the screaming Ive heard from all the prisoners I witnessed being beaten. Theyve thrown away all of my property three times and act like they never did it. All of my photos of dead loved ones and of my only memories of the streets. They cruelly threw them away, important items to me that have been discarded like it doesnt mean a thing to anybody, things I can never get back.

Tears roll down my face in my solitary confinement box where nobody can see and know of my pain and suffering! They have stripped me of everything and treat me anyway they feel like. Ive written to many officials for help, but I never receive a response and when I do their investigations favorably never find no wrongdoing on their CO Buddies that belongs to their occult of officers.

Sometimes, I stand in front of the mirror and stare at myself trying to find the answers to the questions that be flowing through my brain and I ask myself Why doesnt anybody love me? I know Im not ugly, I always been considered handsome even define more than a few times. Thats my word, this place got me tripping! Im so lonely that my heart yearns and aches for some form of human interaction with the outside world. I feel like Im dead to the world and that Im a part of a forgotten race. That people out there dont have no mercy and compassion for us!

I know Im not a bad person, dont get me wrong Ive done my dirt, but I did what I did to survive and on top of that I repented for my wrongdoings. God! My sentence by the judge didnt include all of this inhumane abuse. Nobody would give this food to their dog at home, but yet they serve this nasty trash to us with the pride of a slave master giving his slaves slop and pig guts! Its 2013 but nothing has changed over here. I feel like Im trapped in the 1920s. Did you know that they pay a grown man twelve cents a hour to work like a mule, and at the end of a two week pay cycle he doesnt even have enough to buy a bottle of lotion, a bar of soap, a deodorant and a bag of chips at this ever price raising commissary? How can they up the prices of commissary items every week but never not once raise their slavery pay wage, which is the lowest of every state prison in this country! Who is allowing them to do this? Why has nothing changed for the better around me? I recently read a Pro Se magazine that said New York States solitary confinement is the worst inhumane system in the whole world and this is what I have to live through every day!

One thing this hellhole has given me is the insight to never want to come back to it and the means to guarantee that! Because, throughout this tormenting ordeal I read so many books that I gotten tired of reading them and I started writing my own books. Ive written seven novels so far. I find that writing takes me to another place mentally and allows me to escape from this torture chamber. Tonight Im going to try to write in my newest novel Im creating, but theres so much noise and arguing I know thats going to be virtually impossible. The only time in here when its peaceful is when the gate monsters or gates bangers are asleep. We call people who love to yell beef and argue over everything and disrespect people locking around them for nothing, gate monsters or gate bangers!

Damn! There goes the mail cart again just rolling past my cell, its wheels dont even screech at my door as it smoothly rides by. I cant believe how people have just neglected me! This box has got me twisted, I be over here just dreaming of getting some mail from somebody who would send sincere like to be my friend, get to know me and help ease my pain from the suffering loneliness that Im haunted with. Ive never been this lonely in my life, I feel like my heart is shattered into a million pieces. Damn! Here they go arguing again, I cant even hear myself think. I wish I could just open up a letter from someone who is displaying a genuine interest and concern for my pain, sorrow, and loneliness. Damn!!! This is the lonest place in the world!!!!

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.

I have written to Shawn, now just sent my 2nd letter and he said he is still looking for some sincere friends to write to him. I was wondering if someone could help me with finding a picture of him? He asked me to publish something for him on a few pages and its very hard to do this without a picture I think. I have asked him if he has one for me as I dont seem to find anything on the web. I can tell you he is a very nice person and very polite and respectful and its a pleasure talking to him. I just ment to write and tell him that people

do care. And I want to help him in his efforts to find a few sincere friends after all. So if anyone knows where to find a picture of him, otherwise I will wait for his response and see whether he may have one for me to publish. Its so heartbreaking to see people being treated this way and I will support every action possible from my end in order to end all this cruelty that is done to human beings in the so-called country of the free.

We printed this piece out and sent it to Shawn Smith, and he was disturbed by the comment about crimes against children. He wants to be sure readers know he has never been convicted or accused of any crime against children. We would like to add that nearly all prisoners in solitary in New York are put there for disciplinary violations inside prison, most of it nonviolent misbehavior, rather than because of the nature of their original crimes. They are sent to solitary by prison officials, not by a judge or jury.

Ill write too. To read this is heartbreaking. I have a friend in Florida state prison in solitary. He has at least 2 persons who are writing letters and still its so hard for him to live in this conditions. Shawn hasnt anybody. I hope there will be more who will write. And think of all these people nobody hears or read about and they need a friend too. Think about it, reach out! You may meet a future friend. Your letter can make the difference between a god day or the day hes finally give up the will to live.

Omg! Im so infureiated by this boys story. My god animals get better lives. What can we do? Who do we write? There must be something can be done about these men. Im curious of his actal charges and why he was put in solitary. Altho i dont see there could be a good enuf reason, short of crimes against children. I hope at least alot of people will write him.

In addition to writing directly to Shawn Smith, readers can go to Solitary Watchs Action page and find a petition from the New York Civil Liberties Union to Help End Extreme Isolation in New Yorks Prisons. <http://solitarywatch.com/action/>

I read with much sorrow the various writings of prisoners in Solitary (S.H.U). Words alone cannot describe my feelings about the inhumanity.

As a father with a beloved son incarcerated. Our son suffered 9 months in Pre-conviction solitary with no recourse. No help from lawyers, A.G. A.C.L.U. nobody!! This torture must stop!!

We say All lives are sacred in this great country, yet we allow the penal agencies to get away with such acts for their pleasure, or needs. i.e. hindering their defense.

Many are so unaware of this type of torture until exposed to the inner workings of the penal system!

I, also, will write to Shawn. His words touched this 70-year old retiree living in relative comfort on Soc.Sec. with a parrot on her shoulder. I can come and go as I please on my scooter, select my own food at the grocery store, and see my friends occasionally. I live in comfort. Yes, Ill write to Shawn.

I will be writing to Shawn tonight. I hope he gets a ton of mail. I will tellhim that folksout here do care and are working to end these inhumane conditions. But Shawn needs some love just now. I hope you will join me in writing to and reaching out to Shawn really soon.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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