

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/11/16/voices-solitary-welcome-shu/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

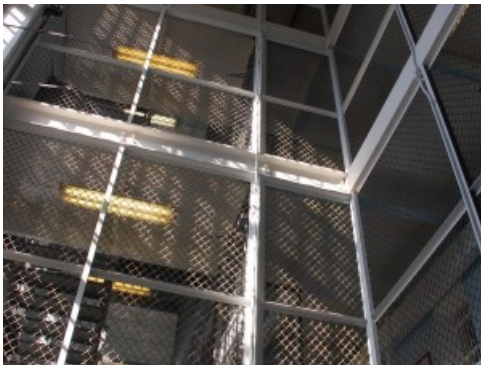
close

Search

close

close

by [Voices from Solitary](#) | November 16, 2013



Karl ChuJoy is currently serving three years in solitary confinement in the Special Housing Unit (SHU) of Elmira Correctional Facility in upstate New York, for possessing a laptop computer. He writes in a letter to Solitary Watch: I've been incarcerated since I was fifteen (15) years old. I am now thirty-six (36) I'm halfway through these three (3) years [in the SHU]. I've been in SHU before, quite a few times. But this is the first time in five (5) years. My introduction to SHU began when I was sixteen (16) years old, in 1993. I've since learned to sidestep the bullshit in prison and stay out of trouble (but can you really pass up a laptop in prison? Come on, think about it). The following are further excerpts from his letter. He welcomes letters at the following address: Karl ChuJoy, #94-A-5418, Woodbourne Correctional Facility, 99 Prison Road, P.O. Box 1000, Woodbourne, New York 12788-1000. James Ridgeway

.....

Being alone is totally different than being lonely. Being alone signifies being physically apart from others. Being lonely is complete a state of mind: feeling alone. The latter holds all of the negative aspects of solitude. In the SHU this feeling is magnified exponentially due to the constricted lack of freedom and relative lack of brain-stimulating activities.

Mail is manna from heaven. When I hear the squeak, squeal and rumble of the mail-cart being pushed down the gallery, I start saying to myself, You're *not* getting any mail, so don't even expect it. Nobody knows you anymore. No one wrote, so stop it! Then, as the cart squeaks and squeals and rumbles a bit louder as it gets closer, I'll jump off the cot and start pacing. Then I'll squat in front of one of my spiders (the SHU Prisoners Loyal Pet) and I'll start talking to it (you talk to your pets, too, don't you?!) I'll say, Come on! Hope with me that we get a piece of mail. Come on! If you hope with me then were guaranteed a letter, and I'll do a little fist pump. I get real animated. I won't do it everyday, though. It becomes a quotidian ritual when I haven't received a letter in a month or more, because I'll start to worry. Only my mother and sister write to me, once a month usually

Literary media is the lifeblood of a sane mind in the SHU. Reading makes one think outside the box. National Geographic Magazine is my Travelocity, my trips to the Museum of Natural History, my Smithsonian, my MOMA and the Louvre, my trips to the Bronx Zoo and Sea World; GQ is my afternoon window-shopping stroll down 5th Avenue; Popular Mechanics and Scientific American are my brain snacks. I was super excited when it was announced that circumstantial evidence was detected of the existence of the Higgs boson particle. Will I be able to open a wormhole in my cell and go on a furlough one day? Quantum mechanics offers infinite possibilities, so I'll keep my antennas up!

Book! Books! Book! A man in SHU lives on books as much as on food (and they taste better). Non-fiction has the potential to feed one's knowledge pool. Fiction has the potential to feed one's empathy. Two different parts of the brain. Both necessary to build a fecund mind. I cannot say enough about books, my friends. I love books. I LOVE books. Books are my teachers, my guides, my companions. They enrich me with new [to me] concepts and ideas to digest. They take me to other worlds, lands, times, realities, life experiences. They introduce me to characters who become close friends. And my companions take me out of the SHU almost completely. Only my physical self is locked in a cell with the chaos around me. My spirit is elsewhere, walking through the woods, living vicariously, a silent partner. When I return, dusk may have turned to dawn and sometimes I'll be surprised/confused when breakfast is being served. That's the magic

of books: they are teleportation machines for the spirit.

For the uninitiated in society who want to know somewhat how the SHU experience feels: go to your bathroom and lock yourself in there (a regular 10 x 6 sized bathroom, not a mansion sized one). Then truly imagine being locked in there for days, weeks, months, years with no way to get out. All your meals are slid under the door. You don't see anyone, but you hear others. Although, you wish you didn't

Because all day, and parts of the night, you are being assaulted by the deafening sounds of others yelling at each other to be overheard, chess players shouting numbers a hundred feet apart from each other, others screaming the foulest profanities and threats at each other for ten hours non-stop to emerge the victor in the argument/mouthfight. The worst are the ones who scream at the top of their lungs at 2 AM, 3 AM, 5 AM, as if they're on fire just cause they're assholes, and others who growl-yell-scream as if they're transforming into werewolves of battling a demonic entity in their cell at 2 or 3 in the morning, while others start barking like large dogs. Yes, actually barking for a minute at a timelike a Rottweiler. You can wake up and really believe you died in your sleep and you're in hell. But nope, you're just in the SHU. Welcome.

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.

Why are you spelling prey as pray?

The comment above is so appallingly full of misinformation and judgment that I just had to respond. I DO know better. I have never had a family member incarcerated. I come from a strictly conservative, law enforcement family and would never classify myself as a bleeding heart liberal. But as luck and God would have it, we met a young juvenile lifer four years ago through his beautiful wildlife art, which eventually led to correspondence and ultimately visits.

Our relationship with this wonderful young man through the ups and downs of prison life, have radically transformed our thinking. Not once did this young man ever ask us for anything other than a friendship. In fact, we have OFFERED assistance at times and been turned down!

Scamming us?! This young man has BLESSED US with his friendship and love. We feel honored to have met him and learn through his example behind bars, where he finds purpose in helping others. Moreover he has brought a few other young men into our little fold whom we also write to now. Every single one of these men have been unfailingly polite and considerate and have never, never asked us for anything more than a friend to write to now and then.

Protecting you, I realize there ARE inmates like you warn us about. And no one would suggest we deny the fact that most of the people behind bars committed crimes for which they are paying their debt. But there are also many who I suspect may be better human beings than you now are. Open your heart before your anger completely defines who you are.

What inmate chujoi doesn't tell you is he is NOT locked in a small room day and night. Inmate chujoi has the opportunity for recreation regularly and this is outside his cell. Inmate chujoi is the porter for shu and is out of his cell working for long periods of time. Inmate chujoi gets visits and spends a large part of a day in the visit area talking to his visitor. All inmates in shu are afforded time outside their cell for things like recreation, showers, visits, and haircuts. So don't let these murderers, child molesters, rapists, etc fool you they aren't locked in a hole with no one to see or talk to. Most of these violent inmates are in shu because they can't handle general population and intentionally act out to stay in shu, or they owe debts to other inmates and can pay so they use shu to get away. These inmates pray on the liberal hearts of people or anyone who will listen, and try to get whatever you will give them but just remember they are the ones who killed your family member, robbed your mother, assaulted your brother, raped your daughter, or molested your child. They are far from innocent and will pray on you for whatever they think they can scam from you.

Karl mentioned his Facebook page and his poetry on it but can't seem to find it can anyone help me locate his Facebook page. He mentioned his poems
Social outcast and Alternate Realities

I've got two letters from Karl so far. He writes a nice long letter. Best way to get to know one is simply share with them. I know he would enjoy getting more mail.

Is it okay to ask what he is in prison for or if his story is anywhere? Thanks for writing this, Karl. You're not alone, you are strong, alive

and well with this movement.

I tried locating Karl on the New York State Corrections website and his name did not come up. How can I contact him?

Juanita: We have added his address at the end of the introduction to his essay. I believe he spells his name two different ways (Chujoi and ChuJoy), which might be why you couldnt find him. The important thing is to include his correct number. He will definitely appreciate hearing from you!

Powerful,Karl.Have you considered corresponding with neurophysiologists on sensory deprivation studies?

Have you attempted to write poetry?Your prose is clear and insightful.

Ill share a story Tommy Silverstein told me that at one point many years ago they took all his art supplies away he was granted 5 pieces of writing paper a week and a 3 inch pencil so he decided to read every book the prison had on painting and become the best and if you ask me he is given the primitive supplies hes allowed is the absolute best. So Alan C.Y.A. IS RIGHT read!!!!

He writes:

Book! Books! Book! A man in SHU lives on books as much as on food

Then we have this quote:

http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2003/review_brook_janfeb2003.msp

Those least likely to become mentally ill in solitary confinement are prisoners who can read, because reading prevents the boredom that can lead to insanity.

(The human psyche appears not to have changed since the days of Eastern State, when an inmate told Alexis de Tocqueville that reading the Bible was his greatest consolation.)

Because roughly 40 percent of U.S. prisoners are functionally illiterate, however, reading can provide solace and sanity to only a fraction of those behind bars.

So obviously education is part of the solution in this crisis.

I am humbled by Mr. Chujoys story, particularly his words; In the SHU this feeling is magnified exponentially due to the constricted lack of freedom and relative lack of brain-stimulating activities. Much gratitude to you for allowing us into your life, your existence.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions.](#)



Solitary Watch News