

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/04/03/voices-from-solitary-parts-of-my-mind-did-not-survive/>

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



The following was written by Chris Yingling, reflecting upon the three years he spent in California State Prison, Corcorans Security Housing unit from 1994 to 1996. He was subsequently transferred to Pelican Bay State Prison when the Feds set up shop at Corcoran because of the gladiator fights. The gladiator fights were the subject of federal investigation following widespread reports of prison guards setting up fights between rival prisoners, fights that Yingling reports he was a part of. He reports lingering psychological difficulties resulting from his time in the California prison system. I suffer depression, and harbor some serious resentments toward our corrections system. I have rage. Every once in awhile ill come to tears over the way humans treat each other, he says.

Yingling contacted Solitary Watch after reading an article about the 2011 suicide of Pelican Bay administrative segregation inmate Alex Machado. Yingling and Machado had met each other in the California Youth Authority in the late 1980s. He told Solitary Watch, I read this article just prior to reading my kids a bedtime story and it brought it all back. I know more stuff about Alex that I saw that no human should have to endure much less a 15 year old kid. He did not have an easy life. May god rest his soul. I will remember Alex. I am no longer in chains. Sal Rodriguez

Corcoran

In white jumpsuits chained in groups of four

they pulled our bus onto the yard

made to face a concrete wall

two gunners and many a guard

10 toes, your chin and chest

keep upon that wall

unlock your knees its a 105 degrees

if one goes down you all fall

welcome to the SHU this is hell

you committed a crime in CDC
dont fuck around well put a bullet in you
In a very short time you will see.
What is your name? Why are you in the shu?
I caused Great bodily injury in a riot.
He slammed my face against the wall
The rest of the line still and quiet.
One man was pulled right off the chain
He was surrounded and beaten a long time
Great bodily injury caused by the cops
Apparently isnt a crime
they removed the waist chain choking me with a stick
the cuffs bit into my hand
they pulled my jumpsuit around my knees
now do you think youre a man?
What I experienced for the next 3 years
Made me wish I could die
Although physically I left in one piece
Parts of my mind did not survive.
Men were shot, men were stabbed
Some guys lost their minds
We had to fight while they shot at us
Hit with baton rounds eleven times.
Im not trying to whine not trying to cry
Because my life is so much different today
I was 21 years old when I stood on that wall
It seems like a lifetime away
Not trying to act tough or exaggerate the facts
Just wanna get out whats inside
I was only a kid trying to get through
They made me hate and hurt my pride
Theres a huge system right in societies face
That is just another criminal enterprise
I understand these people did bad things
My own part I now see and realize.
These are our brothers and these are our sons
prejudice and mistreatment is not an answer
our society doesnt just doesnt have a cold

we got mother fuckin cancer!

So I lean toward the left in my political views

Because I saw too damn much of the right

Biases interfere with things of this nature

If you think that Im biased youre right.

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.

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September 30, 2022

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@Chris Yingling

I asked which CYA facility because I served time in Preston in 68 & 69. I wondered how it was later on.

Ive been to Folsom and the CYAs Northern Reception Center and Folsom while in route to court. Folsom was an depressing to view and NRC was a sterile structure.

Good luck in the future.

We met at O.H. Close in Stockton, CA. in 1988. I was also in Folsom in 1992 with Alex.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/04/the-aryan-brotherhood-of-texas-brutal-deadly-and-effective.html>

Brief history and where things are today unfortunately.

So as to give credence to this story and show how wide spread it is I remembered this comment:

Michael W. Jewell says:

March 3, 2013 at 9:22 pm

On weekends the staff, or bosses, organized fights between the various cliques. Each clique was represented by its toughest member, and we went through a sort of process of elimination.

As insane as it may now seem, we were enthusiastically up for that shit. The cliques took great pride in their standing. These fights were called Rolling the Bones, bones referring to knuckles. The combatants wore leather work gloves that scarcely spared the flesh.

The Ft. Worth clique was represented, during my short stay, by a guy named Ronnie Foreman. Ronnie was actually from Bay City, a suburb of Houston. Bay City was too small for a proper clique of its own, so Ronnie rode with Ft. Worth for the same reasons I did, he got along with its members. Ronnie had grown up in a sort of orphanage in Bay City that had a boxing program, and the kid could really roll the bones. Most weekends Ronnie was the last man standing, so to speak, Second at worst.

It gave us a lot of prestige, and, made us a lot of cigarettes, as all fights were heavily bet upon, by inmates and bosses alike. When bosses who bet on us won a nice piece of change from their fellows, it was not uncommon for them to bring us a large bowl of venison chili and platter of jalapeno cornbread.

But least I paint too humane a portrait of the bosses, they were some vicious, brutal sonsofbitches.

At the slightest provocation they were quick to use fists and feet in retribution. I could write for hours about good old Gatesville.

Robert Perkinson, author of Texas Tough: wrote that Gatesville gained a reputation for ruthlessness as decades passed. Gatesville, which served as the main juvenile detention facility for Texas since its opening, had a focus on labor instead of rehabilitation.

Excerpt:

Michael Jewell a former Gatesville state school student who attended the school in 1961, said that long periods in solitary confinement, stoop labor, fights between gangs, beatings perpetrated by staff members, and sexual assault occurred at the facility.

As for my own experience I was 12 when I was first sent to the CYA where one evening bouts between wards were deemed exercise by two counselors. The time frame of the bout was suspiciously short after my run in with the two of them. Coincidentally I was matched against arguably the strongest kid in the lodge.

I didnt like the idea of being used for entertainment purposes by these two counselors that I now despised so much. So I only reluctantly and casually entered the makeshift ring set up in the center of the dayroom wearing the supplied boxing gloves. When the bout began I protected myself in a rope a dope manner under a heavy barrage of strong blows falling solely on my gloves which knocked me from side to side but did no real damage. During the entire first 30 seconds or so of the bout I did nothing but cover up allowing my much stronger opponent to tire. Then as I felt his strength diminish and his punches slowing down I threw just two effective blows which landed flush on his face. Seeing that I had only been biding my time the counselors yelled out for us to stop the match. I now realized that the match was not expected to be competitive. No I now believed that the two counselors had fully expected that I would be knocked out or at least beaten badly.

Other fun activities organized by these two included:

- 1) A 1:00 AM fast paced march up and down a local hill until they tired hours later.
- 2) Making all of us stand naked at attention for hours until a few passed out.
- 3) A cross country run in high temperature resulting in several wards passing out from heat exhaustion.
- 4) Having me run behind the garbage truck dumping the trash cans in their neighborhood. The cans weighed more than me and the flatbed truck bed was above my chest.
- 5) Mowing the park size sloping hills with a push mower in extreme heat.

Good preparation for the adult system huh.

Russ

Your story reminded me of Bunkers from the same era writing about his black friend.

Edward Bunker wrote in his memoir Education of a Felon:

Page 134: Whites were still about 70 percent of the prison population.

Page 136: He was really my friend, (I must insert parenthetically, especially to convicts who read this, that such a friendship would never had started in San Quentin after the early part of the 1960s, when the race wars began.)

Page 145: What I did for a black friend in the mid-fifties is something I would never have even considered a decade later when the race wars were in full swing, it would have been like a Tutsi having a Hutu friend, or vice versa. By the time Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, racial estrangement was absolute in San Quentin. And it remains almost the same three decades later.

(Make that five decades now.)

I also noted from that book review on the Walpole Union movement that:

In 1971 at Walpole Prison, the vast majority of the population was still white and organized into explicitly racist gangs. The developing leadership within the prison had to find ways to forge interracial solidarity.

Former inmate Robert Dellelo remembers:

We got everyone in the auditorium. The racial tension in the prison was thick I said, There is only one color and that is blue, the guards wore khaki You are either blue or brown. There is no in-between ground. We are all in this together. The guards could not work us like before. If we refused to fight each other, they lost a lot of their power. There was a peace across the prison that never was there before. We ended the body count.

Isnt it time to repeat Walpole?

I agree only together can we make a change in the system.

This is the horror of our system.. Same with Ralph Hamm now on his 45th year in the Mass. system; came in at 17 had to fight Now 64, College grade, they wont let him out. why? A great Black prisoner leader, who developed black education programs.. Author of the book Manumission. Love Ralph Top Con Oh, I forgot; no dead bodies on his conviction, 45 dam years it is criminal and inhuman.. Has two partners on the crime, been out long ago, and they both were older when he was a kid.. The dirty bag head of parole, last time he went before parole, told Ralph to die in prison; I have him on tape (Dirt-Bag and a black man, piece of garbage) Well, look at he Governor, he is coward who want intervene

Yingling and Machado had met each other in the California Youth Authority in the late 1980s.

Which CYA facility?

In most cases these are the training grounds where one learns that you must fight to survive. Then when you fight your labeled antisocial etc. This Catch 22 is a bitch.

Too damn much of the right! That's it, isn't it? Ironically, the right is now calling for prison reform. Want to trust them now? Prison reform to the right means privatization, me thinks, whereupon abuse will slip beneath the radar.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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