

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/06/24/voices-from-solitary-i-lost-the-will-to-live/>

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close

Search

close

close

by [Voices from Solitary](#) | June 24, 2012

The following is an excerpt from testimony submitted to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Human Rights, and Civil Rights, which held a [hearing](#) on solitary confinement on June 19th. Brian Nelson, in written testimony, testifies to his 12 years in Tamms Correctional Center, a supermax prison in Illinois. Nelson, transferred from a minimum security prison in New Mexico, describes a harrowing experience of prison isolation and the significantly detrimental effects on his health and well-being. Tamms has recently been in the news for a contentious [debate over its closure](#); this week, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn [announced](#) its closure by August 31st. For the full testimony, click [here](#). Sal Rodriguez

As the time went by I remained in the gray box I degenerated even worse. I lost the will to live. I lost hope, even though I was scheduled to be released in a couple years. Depression overwhelmed me. Then a lawsuit was filed over the treatment of inmates with serious mental illness not being properly treated at Tamms. I was named in that suit. In reply, Tamms mental health employees began to harass me and started placing me on suicide watches for no reason. I was given the Minnesota Multi Personality Test. When the results came back, the head psychologist called me to the infirmary had me locked in a bathroom and screamed at me that I was making her look bad. She then ordered officers to strip me naked which they did leaving me locked on the bathroom for approximately 10 hours. The psychologist then ordered that my medication be immediately stopped. As part of the case, our lawyer arranged for two doctors to come into Tamms to evaluate me. Dr. Kathryn Burns and Dr. Terry Kupers. Both doctors confirmed that I was severely depressed and the conditions at Tamms exacerbated the depression. Both found that I was actively suicidal. Even though Drs. Burns and Kupers are experts on the conditions of supermax prisons, the Tamms psychologist refused to initiate any of the therapy they proposed. I got worse. Another serious suicide attempt followed and I lost so much weight that the Deputy Director, after seeing me in the holding cell, ordered that some sort of treatment be started, and immediately had me weighed. I weighed 119 lbs. All the bone in my body protruded. I shuffled instead of walked. I had no appetite and wanted to die.

Everyday I went to sleep I got down on my knees and prayed that I would die in my sleep, yet God's will was not mine. When I woke up in the night I prayed harder for death. I couldn't sleep, and during that period got no more than 16 hours of sleep a week. I went days pacing back and forth like a zombie (a condition now recognized as a sign of severe mental illness when exhibited by animals in zoos but apparently it's okay when people suffer this way). I looked like I was already dead and I had no will to live. Day after day all I saw was gray walls and over time my world became the gray box. I fought hard with my own mind, and I prayed. I copied the Catholic Bible word for word which took me 1 year 9 months and 2 days. I copied the Rule of St. Benedict 3 times and studied with Cistercian Monks and Priests. I watched a friend give up and kill himself at Tamms. Sadly, several minutes before he died, he told the nurse and mental health worker that he was going to commit suicide. They just didn't care and walked away. Marcus Chapman was finally released from the gray box in a black body bag on August 24, 2005.

He concludes his testimony with the following:

I spent 12 years in solitary confinement and I was never told why I was placed in solitary. I am a human being and every day I still struggle with the trauma being held in that gray box. I wake screaming at night. I can get it out of my head some days. Solitary confinement in my opinion is worse than being beaten. That I spent twelve years in such conditions in America is appalling.

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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For the uninformed, uneducated, & the folks that have NEVER EXPERIENCED iso; YOU HAVE ZERO RIGHT TO MAKE NEGATIVE COMMENTS HERE !!! It shouldn't matter if you're a Gang leader, a drug lord, a killer, etc., the government has NO RIGHT TO USE CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT ON ANYONE! THAT'S STR8 FROM THE GENEVA CONVENTION! EVEN TERRORISTS ARE HUMANS AND HAVE CIVIL RIGHTS IN AMERICA. It's what makes our Country so much better than other countries! I wish one of you fuktards on here that make those ridiculous comments were to ENJOY the opportunity to be in isolation for a mere 30 days (imagine 12 years). I promise you would have a totally new outlook on this matter. I am doing my best to be considerate, even though my mind tells me otherwise. We are ALL human which defines the word humane (for those who are uneducated and like to make ignorant comments !!! As an uneducated, PLEASE, I BEEN IN ISOLATION FIRST HAND. SO UNTIL U HAVE FIRST HAND KNOWLEDGE OF, KEEP UR DIK SUCKER SHUT because aint no book gonna give u the pain of iso! Im done!

No it's not you MAKE the bed you lie in. I hate uneducated people as much as criminals most of the time. You guys who think this is inhumane need to take a couple of history classes. You guys = The suck!

This article doesn't mention that Brian Nelson or Mouse as he was known on the streets was the alleged leader of the Simon City Royals gang, which has thousands of members nationwide and is involved in drug dealing, murder, robbery, assault etc. they're big in Chicago, Milwaukee, Florida, Tennessee, Mississippi etc. This guy is/was not just some unlucky kid, he was a major gangster, look it up for yourself.

Not saying that the treatment described isn't inhumane, but if the people who wrote this are willing to omit such important info to get you on their side, they're probably not to be trusted about anything else they say

Smh Wake up America !!! This is a Gigantic Moral Concern!!

No.. Bueno These Beasts are Killing prisoners Harshly. WAKE UP AMERICA!! THIS IS A GIGANTIC MORAL CONCERN!!

There are people who are in prisons who should be. The men that have suffered the harm of being in long term isolation are not afforded any opportunities and have no given chance at a life. They work hard, they fight hard to have whatever life they have. To say that it is not torture is not only a lie but an a total lie to me a taxpayer and advisor to those who are incarcerated. WHY do these places still operate? Money. What is more important money v. human life

@Belinda yep Money is the most important thing each of these human beings represent a pay check to someone Isolation costs more, and certainly people that break the law should be in prison but again I say torture was never supposed to be part of imprisonment. These places are not only still operating but still growing Obama okayed at least 2 more super maxes last year. I have recently felt defeated and intended to step back from the issue; The futility of watching and being part of the lives of those suffering made me want to quit then I read the BOP director Samuel's sent of all things a memo to those in seg saying in part don't lose hope Um I wrote him too. My letters are always respectful but never acknowledged. Thank you for the post I still feel there's no hope. Talking and doing just need to be more doing. Right?

Does it really matter Carree?

Exactly Tim people should go to prison for a crime but we as Americans have a right to not be tortured.

Why were they in prison in the first place?

Hebrews 13:3

(NIV)

Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

I have heard so many stories this one I cried I only have questions but no one to ask. and these fiends drawing a paycheck for doing these things blows my mind.

I dream of it all ending and these employees being hunted down like Nazi war criminals the psychologist in this story should be before a firing squad stripped naked.

Reblogged this on <http://www.HumansinShadow.wordpress.com/>.

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