

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/12/29/dear-solitary-watchers/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | December 29, 2014

Dear Solitary Watchers:

We reach out directly to our readers with an appeal for support once a year, and only for a very special part of our work.

Throughout the year, while we carry out research and reporting on the human rights crisis hiding in plain sight, Solitary Watch also reaches out directly to over a 1,400 people who live in extreme isolation in prisons and jails across the country.

We get dozens of letters each week, and do our utmost to respond to each and every one. Additionally, four times a year we send out a newsletter with selected stories from the website to more than 1,400 men and women in solitary confinement. And every December we send out a holiday card. This year's card, pictured below, features art once again by Five Mualimm-ak, a survivor of five years of solitary in New York State prisons.

At the same time, our communications with people in solitary confinement serve another purpose, providing us with a rich source of first-hand information that shapes our reporting on solitary confinement, as well as material for the Voices from Solitary we feature on our site.

Earlier last month, while opening the morning's mail, we came across the kind of letter that serves as a touchstone for us and, we believe, anyone sympathetic to the issue we've dedicated ourselves to.

A carefully hand-printed letter told of the writer's life over several years in solitary confinement, the death of his mother, the depth of his loneliness, and an isolation for which no adjective seemed severe enough. Each word, each sentiment clearly carefully considered. And then this:

Thank you guys for looking out for us.

It is difficult to overstate what an impact these Lifelines can have on a person who lives surrounded by gray walls, deprived of all human contact. A colorful card, or a note with a few handwritten words of support, or a newsletter that tells of the growing movement against solitary confinement—all these are acknowledgments of the recipient's humanity, a small sign that they have not been forgotten.

This year, we are expanding our network of people willing to reach out, across the concrete walls, and connect with someone desperately in need of a sign that, despite the conditions they find themselves in, they are not alone. We'll be working with student groups and communities of faith to make sure each letter we receive no matter how large our list grows continues to get an honest, personal response. And of course, as that list grows, so, too, do our printing and mailing costs.

That's why every dollar raised in this annual appeal will go directly to our Lifelines to Solitary project.

Please consider helping us achieve our goals with a donation at any level. To find out more about Lifelines to Solitary and to make a fully tax-deductible online donation, please visit our fundraising page: <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/lifelines2015/>

Thank you for your support, your faith in our work, and your concern for the people who reside in our nation's darkest corners.

With best wishes for the new year,

Jean and Jim



Art by Five Mualimm-ak, survivor of 5 years in solitary confinement.

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 [Jean Casella](#)

December 29, 2021

by [Jean Casella](#)

December 23, 2021

by [Events and Announcements](#)

December 3, 2021

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.

Im unable to financially contribute, but I try to write most of the people who contribute essays about their experiences in solitary confinement. Thank you for starting Solitary Watch. Im glad Ive found this site so I can know who to help in solitary with friendship.

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Solitary Watch News

