

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/09/05/voices-from-solitary-katfish-on-life-in-the-bucket/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | September 5, 2010

Katfish's blog posts appear on [Tales from the Cells](#), a web site featuring writing by prisoners, maintained by Nikita. Katfish whose given name is Mike Harris is currently serving time in FCI Yazoo City, a federal prison near Jackson, Mississippi. Before he was transferred to the Zoo last fall, he was in FCI Big Spring, in west central Texas. Although both are low- to medium-security facilities, he spent much of his time in lockdown in their Special Housing Units (SHUs), accused of various disciplinary offenses. He believes he is also being punished for writing his blog.

The federal Bureau of Prisons officially states that it [does not have solitary confinement](#) but in the same breath says that on any given day, some 11,000 of its 200,000 prisoners are in SHUs at its various prisons. In fact, the experience Katfish describes here which dates back to last summer when he was still at Big Spring reveal the practice of double-bunking in the SHU, which means 23-hour lockdown with one other person. In the first of the [two posts excerpted here](#), Katfish describes every aspect of his cell; in the second, he deconstructs the rules for inmate disciplinary hearings which are used, among other things, to determine whether prisoners remain in solitary confinement. Although these rules are supposed to guarantee inmates certain rights to protest unjust treatment, Katfish's advice is: Man, do not bother. You never had a chance.

Welcome to the hole, better known as The Bucket. One enters the Bucket thru a two door trap. Big Spring is very security conscious indeed because a hostage cannot be here without two guards sometimes as many as four- who escort the hostage thru the various wings, halls, and stairways. The actual floor plan of the Bucket is irrelevant. Besides that, the way the SIS police act towards me now that they know I'm blogging for TFTC, who can guess what kind of reason they may next contrive to KEEP me in here should I reveal floor plans. Lets not.

So anyway, as I said, two guards to each hostage. A hostage will never be outside his cell, outside his recreation cage, or outside his interview cage (more on Cage World in a moment) without being cuffed behind his back. One guard leads the way while the other holds onto the handcuffs.

The Bucket's clothing issue is all emergency orange in color: Pants, shirts, socks, Chinese karate shoes, even the goddamned boxer-shorts are orange. A very loud color (my nuts haven't had a good night's sleep yet).

The cell they keep me a hostage in is twelve feet by eight feet. The desk I'm sitting at right now is a pie wedge shaped piece of stainless steel bolted into the corner, the front edge three feet across (my measurements are made by my using my pad of paper which is ten and a half inches long). Bolted to the floor in front of this desk is a metal stool. It's shaped like a cable spool. It's about eighteen inches high. Each end is eleven inches across. Five bolts hold it down. Also in my cell is the ubiquitous stainless steel toilet combo sink. This has a drinking fountain thingy on it. You push the button and nothing happens. I have a theory about that, but nothing solid yuh understand.

The cell has a double bunk, an upper and a lower, which kind of eliminates that whole in isolation concept that being in the Bucket means. The bunks are approximately eighty inches long by (and my celly and I have measured this twice now) twenty-seven inches wide. Think about that. Twenty-seven inches wide. I am seventy-five inches tall. I'm not sure how wide I am who is? but I do not fit; my elbows and shoulders hang over the edges. The bunk itself is secured to metal plates in the floor at all four points. It is also secured to the wall at two points. By secured I mean welded. There are two half circle loops of metal about three inches across welded at each end of the bunk. Two. Each end. There's also the same loops welded at each side, but only one per side. I'm told that they're there in case an overly violent convict should need to be restrained: the two at the foot of the bunk would be one for each foot. The ones at the sides would naturally be for the wrists. It's unclear what the restraints would consist of; either leather straps or chains. I'm not inclined to discover for myself. The half circles welded at the head of the bed are a mystery.

The mattress is covered in bright blue vinyl; solid like a waiting room's chairs upholstery. The mattress itself is NOT soft; it is seventy-two inches long by twenty-six inches wide. It's about three inches thick. It has a UNICOR prison industries label attached to it: I tried to peel it off, no dice. Bedding issue is one blanket, one towel, two sheets, zero pillows. All UNICOR products.

The window in the wall is between the desk and the bunk. It has a sheet of opaque plastic secured to it on the outside which allows light in and nothing else. The window is twenty inches across by forty-four inches high. It has three squared bars welded into it vertically.

Each bar is two inches to a side. The entire window has a grill of expanded metal welded over it.

The door to the cell is a heavy duty Nazi-bunker affair, thirty-six inches by eighty-four inches. It has a slot window in it maybe sixteen inches high by five inches across. I can see the cell across from me. There are Mexicans in there. We do not speak the same language. There is also a tray slot. It is locked from the outside. Food trays are passed in so one can sit next to the toilet and eat soggy food. The tray slot is also for handcuffing. If a convict must come out of the cell, then he must back up and extend his arms/wrists thru the slot. The guard cuffs us. If you have a bunk (I've been in this cell before with 4 convicts at a timetwo man cellfour convicts), then he also must cuff up before the door is opened.

Also on the door is a round hole. It is at face level. It has perforated steel welded to it, inside and out. In between the perforated steel is a piece of metal which blocks about 75% of the hole. The hole was designed so a hostage could speak with staff. The metal blocking the hold is an add-on idea meant to block an angry and frustrated hostage from spitting or throwing nasty liquids thru it and into staffs face. The metal blocking the hole also is good at blocking sound rendering the hole useless, thus staff and hostage scream into the doors edges in an effort to communicate. By the way, the expanded metal welded to the windows make it impossible to clean. The window to the outside is recessed, approximately six inches from expanded metal to glass. It is unbelievably filthy in there; at least half an inch of dust, dirt, lint (orange colored of course), plastic forks and spoons, desiccated and largely unrecognizable bits of food and fruit peels, Jolly Rancher wrappers, etc tetra Yeck.

The floor is concrete and gray. The walls, stool and bunks are painted a dull yellow, the color of a heavy smokers walls. The door and windows are painted a dark brown. The ventilation is very good. Theres a shelf made of expanded metal welded beneath the lower bunk. Were to keep our few allowable affects there.

There is a long fluorescent light-box in the ceiling. It has two light bars in it. Between 10:30pm and 11:00pm the fluorescent lights are extinguished. They stay off until between 6:00am and 6:30am. Doesnt matter because there is also a regular light bulb up there. Its as strong as the one in your living-room. Its stays lit 24/7. I can write and read by it. In fact Im doing so now. Its 4:37am.

This is my world. This is day 18 in the Bucket, punished without reason, charged with nothing, heldunder the ever ambiguous investigation clause

Now meet Cage world: The recreation cage is one large cage divided into 3 smaller cages. When I was a hostage here from July 29th, 05 thru December 5th, 05 for rioting (see my upcoming blog Riot of 05), two out of the three cages had both basketball hoops and pull up bars. The third had a dip bar/pull up bar contraption in it. The north and west walls are concrete, the rest is chain-link, roof inclusive. I went out there the other day. The pull up bars, dip bar contraption and basketball hoops have all been removed. Now its simply 3 empty cages. Thats Big Springs segregation rec. Empty cages. Three of them.

There are other cages. In 05 it was only one. It was in a private room. It was utilized for strip searches, giving urine tests, or conducting interviews. Since 2005 three other cages have been installed in the middle of the thru-way that leads to the rec cages. Big Spring SHU does enormous business due to their SIS officers inappropriate use of the 90 day investigation clause. Nothing like creating their own job security. Fuckers.

The rules also state a shower is to be made available 3 times a week. I detest this rule because I shower and shave every day. My floors shower schedule is Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. The shower is also a caged affair at the front of every hallway. There are but 4 showers in the whole Bucket. The police must move hostages back and forth all day. Props to them.

There are plenty of police who work at FCI Big Spring whom realize that a convicts life is already plenty miserable enough, and those Poe show kindness when they can. Yet there are definitely those other Poe who clearly cannot wait to get to work so they can power trip on us for 8 to 10 hours. I dont mess with police. I dont try to make their jobs harder. I dont mess with anybody truth be known. And if I do hear of some outrageous behavior by BOP Big Spring staff, I look into it, write it down, and I share it. Youre learning thru my eyes, my ears, my words.

Day 22

Yesterday, the shu-police moved me, and my Forrest Gump Bob celly to different cellstandard BOP procedure really. Every three weeks or so, they play musical cells.

My new cell is exactly like the old one, except for two major differences: I have a bigger desk with two stools, and there is no expanded metal welded to either window, thus this cell is fairly clean.

Once settled in, I discovered a stack of papers on the lower bunks shelf. In those papers were copies of the new commissary sheet, a copy of a convicts disciplinary report, for refusing to give a urine sample, and a BP-5293.052, which is an inmates rights at discipline hearing form. Im including this for posting.

Never yet having been given a shot in the feds, Id not seen one before.

People, as I read the seven inmates rights, I quickly became stunned with the blatant misinformation therein.

So read the form, then read my opinion of one through seven. I believe its kind of important that people know that the kangaroo courts in every federal prison uses this same inmates rights form.

First Right

Imagine youre a convict, and youve been in the bucket for, I dunno, say 90 days, a suit shows up, hands you your disciplinary sheet, and a copy of the inmates rights through the tray slot in the door.

Now say its 8 a.m.; Your hearing is at 8 a.m., in 24 hours.

Great now you have 24 hours to prepare.

The 90 day investigation clause gave the SIS police all the time in the world to prepare a defense, but you've got to get at it, tiger!

Second Right

A convict has the right to have a staff member represent them at the hearing.

If a convict would even deem to be represented by a B.O.P. employee, said employee must be reasonably available, meaning if he/she isn't here at 8 a.m. tomorrow, you're screwed.

Also, keep in mind you've been in the bucket for 90 days, you have not been on the compound, you no longer know if anyone remembers you, or even why you are in the bucket.

How in the world are you going to locate a staff member who may know, or even be willing to go on record, that you're either innocent, or that there were mitigating factors, because they won't let you out of the bucket, to go round up evidence on your behalf, in the first place?

Third Right

The right to call witnesses, present documentary evidence, blah, blah, fucking blah. Same thing. How's a hostage in the bucket suppose to do this?

And this: provide institutional safety not to be jeopardized.

Are they kidding me?

They invoke an ambiguous term like that without having to justify the reason, and you can bet you're never getting out of the bucket-never!

Fourth Right

The right to talk or remain silent.

Only in this case, the most basic Miranda Rights/5th Amendment rights are completely excluded, because this clearly states that remaining silent may be used to draw an adverse inference, while at the same time stating your silence alone may not be used to support a finding of guilt. Catch 22; Doublespeak, baby, doublefuckingspeak. Silent or not, you will be found guilty.

Fifth Right

You can either be present, or not, for the charade, because one way or another they are absolutely sitting in judgment of you.

They have added that all the staff reps, and/or witnesses, that they never let you contact, can be present.

As if.

Sixth Right

Check this out: they're willing to come tell you that they've found you guilty.

Why wouldn't they? It's highly likely that the POE/SIS that put you in here to begin with was probably having lunch with the hearing officer the day before, at the officer's mess, at the chow hall.

And, hey, not only are they willing to tell you you're guilty, as if 90 days in the bucket wasn't enough proof of guilt until proven innocent, but they'll even give you written proof, same as they gave you a copy of your inmate rights.

Seventh Right

You have the right to appeal, and have 20 days to do so.

Man, do not bother. In the eyes of the bureaucrats, the moment one of their guards put you in the bucket, you were 100% guilty, and the whole disciplinary hearing was nothing more than lip service, red tape, and a dosie doe. You never had a chance.

And, neither do I.



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.

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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

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September 6, 2022

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Do you have a right to have your attorney present during the hearing?
Thanks

ok FBOP first off you say you dont have solitary may i first say ADX every USP bullshit please tell you what bop if it that's big a deal to you that you have to be head on it hears what you do file a bp9 lol as in bullpoo you got the solitary bug big time lol need a say tommson marlin oh and you one boned your self on AZ you know the one on the big island in CA state known for solitary oh and mite i say SILVERSTEEN ADX you cant hide your shit we know you are in love with solitary like osma is with blowing the usa to hell you know what you all doing to silversteen is sick and rong free the man or shoot is ass and call it a to save someones life from him doing sothing or escape or theart to a life that you had to do it but do not leave the poor man like you have everyone ses death is the gratest sentinces one can give no it not what you done to this man is the gratest sentinces one can ever be forced to bare death is fast solitary is everlasting theres a coutry song for those of you who thow those in solitary that do not belong anymore look it up called pray for you and boy do i ever every day i pray a flower pot falls from a widow still and knocs you in the head like a like to boy i sher would at times but i care more then you do i want fix what you call working i warn you adx cant shut me up lol pray silversteen have mercy on you at the day of judgment lern from esp you wont more monny less supermax would help that

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