

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/03/23/a-visit-to-billy-blake-still-a-consummate-dreamer-after-25-years-in-solitary/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | March 23, 2013

On March 11, we published an essay entitled [A Sentence Worse Than Death](#) by William Blake, who has been held in solitary confinement in New York State prisons for close to 26 years. Since we posted the essay, it has received more than 150,000 hits on Solitary Watch alone and many more, no doubt, on the numerous sites around the world that reprinted or excerpted from it.

Considering the interest in Billy Blake and his writing, we are republishing here an account of a visit to Blake in the Special Housing Unit (SHU) visiting room at Elmira Correctional Facility in south central New York. (A somewhat shorter version of this account appeared in our July 2012 article in *The Nation*, [New Yorks Black Sites](#).)

First, some background: In 1987, while in county court on a drug charge, Blake, then 23, grabbed a gun from a sheriff's deputy and, in a failed escape attempt, murdered one deputy and wounded another. He is now 49 years old, and is serving a sentence of 77 years to life. As a cop-killer and an escape risk, Blake is considered a permanent threat to prison safety. For this reason, he is one of the few New York prisoners in administrative rather than disciplinary segregation meaning he is in solitary more or less indefinitely, despite periodic pro forma reviews of his status.

We visited Blake in December 2011 at the Elmira Correctional Facility, a dreary building on a hill near the edge of town. After being signed in and searched, we stopped at the vending machines to buy what he had requested in a letter: Dr. Pepper and a pizza roll. (The machine was out, so we got a grayish-looking cheese steak instead.) We then waited in a special SHU visiting room, watched over by a guard.

Blake entered wiry, sandy-haired and smiling and talked virtually nonstop for three hours. It was the first time he had had a visit in more than two years. We discussed his childhood (he says his mother's partner was abusive), his poetry (some of which he recites by heart), his love of playing the stock market (he sometimes gives tips to the guards), and his fascination with military history (his dream is to someday walk the battlefields at Omaha Beach and Thermopylae). He described abuse in the SHU, some of it confirmed by a lawsuit he won in 2000. And he told us how bad he feels about having deprived two children of their father when the one thing I never wanted to do was hurt kids.

Blake's subsequent letters, which run twenty-five pages or more, describe his magic ingredient for surviving the Box. 'I'm a consummate dreamer, he writes. I'm a dreamer who refuses to accept that my dreams won't all come true, some however eventually. I'm the kind of guy who you can give 3 life bids to, still in the box for a quarter century, beat me, make me in shit, literally freeze me, spit on me and take my clothes and leave me naked, even steal my money and leave me broke and after all that I'll be thinking OK, things are a bit tough presently, kid. But suck it up. Stay strong because better days will be here soon and you are gonna be shining and telling.'

This illogical hope, Blake writes, is what keeps him from committing suicide: 'I'm not sure I'd even know how to quit. I've had the thoughts at bad times, real bad times, that's true. But I'm too nosy. I want to see how this mad life of mine is going to turn.'

Blake reports that he sleeps all day and stays awake all night to avoid the bulk of the madness that goes on in the SHU. 'Its lonely time though and boring time like only SHU can be boring which is boredom of a kind that nobody out there could ever comprehend unless they had lived in the box before. Sometimes I read till my eyes go blurry, till I've got nothing left in my cell to read and I don't have any more letters to write because I've bothered the few people I write too much already, and then I am out of things to do, he writes, so I just sit and watch the cockroaches on the company go by. Sometimes I will go into a sort of stupid state, a fugue you'd call it, where I'm really not thinking anything at all, just watching the black spots move on the floor. The lights will come on in the morning, and I don't even remember having one thought for the whole night.'

Dreaming is what helps him get through the long, colorless nights in the SHU. 'Sometimes I watch the roaches and I envy them, he writes.

In my mind I have fantasized that I was a cockroach and I maneuver all through the halls of the prison, walk under the locked gates and stay close to the walls to avoid being stepped on by a CO who's walking through the prison. Then I get outside through some crack or under some door, walk through the grass that looks like tall trees to me, my being a roach and small, then I'm up and over the wall and

out. Once I make it, I pop myself back to being human and I walk off into the night, free again and not even caring if I die that same night, just as long as I can see some trees and feel a breeze and know for an hour or two that I was free again, that I lived to see the outside of prison before my time in this world would be over.

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 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.

I was serving few months at a jail in Jamesville NY and Billy Blake was being held there for his case because he was being constantly beaten by the sheriffs in the place he should of been held.

For those of you who have personally experienced what Billy Blake went through, I appreciate you all for having enough humanity to at least sympathize with him for lack of a better word. For those of you who have never committed a crime in your entire life or an evil against another human being for that matter, neither big nor small, I envy you. For you truly make God the father himself a liar. I say that because this would mean that you are absolutely perfect in every way bearing no cross of sin or sackcloth with a speck of dust.

I myself was 17 years young when I was tried as an adult for committing Robbery in the 2nd for armed bank robberies. I grew up in poverty, single parent household a heap of siblings. Second oldest out of six on my mothers side & second youngest on my dads side.

I was a great honor roll student in my youth. When all kids cared about was playing amongst each other and eating candy and jello in school but then I got a little older. I moved into the 5th grade to where all of a sudden kids were more clothing conscious. Girls were starting to develop & we were starting to attract to the opposite now. It was all about being at that stage where everybody wanted to impress everyone. So sometimes we thought were if we can keep the girls laughing they wanted us. But if they laugh too much with someone else than they might want that person. So kids became more cruel & started finding things to make girls laugh AT me about as opposed to laughing with me. Maybe that would mean they didn't want me. This is how my life started going down hill fast behind circumstances that have always been present, but not necessarily a factor at the time.

I got picked on because I was a genuinely funny guy who looked good. Had a way with women naturally from being raised by so many. I got picked on for things out of my control like the clothes I wore. #HandMeDowns. I ended up involuntarily having to defend myself everyday in order to be left alone. Then I found out I was good with my hands. What started off as a defensive mechanism became oppressive. If u said something I didn't like, I handled it. If somebody that you consider a friend or relative felt some type of way about, they could get it too! Then the girls loved it. Then the gangs want you because you're tough. And now the road to destruction unbeknownst to you has already been set. Now you have been socially accepted by your peers & even some elders.

Before you know it you are consumed by the the same evil you hated. You are that person. I say all of this say, we don't know everybodys story. We may all live in the same real time history , but we do not all have the same past. We do not all come from the same struggles as the person next to us. I don't hate a person for not growing up in a ghetto poverty with one female parent in crime riddled area.

But if that isn't even a fraction of your story I, (personally) feel that you have no place to judge. You barely have a right to a silent opinion let alone state one out loud. I was only 19 yrs young when I was sent to the SHU in Elmira and had, what I dare say, the pleasure of meeting Billy the Kid. We spent months down there before I got transferred and he was one of, if not , the realest people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. One of the most positive, articulate well spoken & genuine men this earth may never truly get the chance to know. Most men I know do not possess half his strength or will & they're all twice his size. That is my brother for life & I mean that. For those of you who can't find it in your hearts to find forgiveness for this man, not even to get out of jail but just out of the box, it's not Billy you are mad at. Someone has heart y'all and you need to confront those people have a conversation eventually before either of you leave off this earth & get it off ya chest. Because that's personal.

Billy told me that I was a very intelligent young man and that I could really go home & do something with myself. He encourage me to get & and let my music be heard. Let people hear our stories.

I went into jail with nothing but the clothes on my back. I came home on February.13,2016. 2/ yrs Post release supervision. I have been home ever since. I am now 28. I met my wife February.23,2016. Got engaged on a beach in July. We wed on September 22,2016. Ive been making music with celebrities, have videos & songs on youtube. I started working in the restaurant business and now I am a GM in Spartanburg SC where I moved to over a year ago with my wife. I have my own 3bdrm 2bath home front and back yard. I give jobs. I go to Kingdom New Life church. I own my Jeep. I donate food. I help my family out financially when needed. I host all the holiday get togethers at my home. I give my family shelter when needed without charging them rent. I donate money & food to people I pass on the street and speak words of positivity & encouragement to anybody who will listen

I say all that to say, I became a product of my environment. I am what Ive been through which means I am a reflection of my past Physically. But my past does not mentally define who I know I am trying hard to become. A successful, constructive, positive asset to my family as well as society. See, because I look the same, there are still people who will not allow me to change in their minds. They will always try and convince themselves that I Am who I Was. They will never let you change. But I had to realize it is not my job to try & force toxic people that I am different. They possess not a heaven nor hell to put me in. The only job I have is to be who I declare I am for me. Those that I know believe in me & choose to be a presence in my life, are. Those that know me and wont believe, arent. But to the strangers in between who we dont even know eachother, I could care less. You are not my concern but I do not apologize that for w/e reason I am a concern of yours. Again, that sounds like a #PERSONALPROBLEM!

fantasized that I was a cockroach That would be a step up for him

is he still in solitary? there is a way to write to him? maybe he can join it.

Yes, he is still there. You can write to him at: William Blake #87-A-5771, Great Meadow Correctional Facility, 11739 State Route 22, PO Box 51, Comstock, New York 12821-0051.

I knew Billy Blake For a few years and he never started anything with me or his two ex girlfriends lisa and casey. He had a crimal record a mile long growing up in the hood as did I, but with out a arrest record. I had parents to guide me and he didnt. Being on the street you learn common sense. Instead of letting these prisoners back out on the street with the same knowledge they have when they go in you get the same results such as more crime and back in prisons. Its like this in florida too where I reside now. The crime in florida is alot worse than syracuse,the criminals have no fear of the law and most criminals carry a weapon ,any one can get access to a hand gun here, its like buying a candy bar. Go on lee county arrest record and check it out. Looking back at the Billy Blake record, Who would go in a court room with him and walk next to this violent criminal with a hand gun and knowing he has access to it,its like putting pills in front of a baby and leaving, expect the worst. If he had been handcuffed behind and shackled properly he would not be serving this life sentence. in Gods eyes who is 100% right

Why is he in solitary for so long? He must be doing something to get himself in there. We have inmates where I work who are murderers and are in regular population.

On another note, people always say why is he thinking about himself, he should be talking about his victim. I just dont know how many times in 25 years they are supposed to mention the victim. In every conversation? Every 5 minutes? What is an acceptable number of times or amount of times that they are supposed to acknowledge the victim?

He killed a cop, which is, for some reason, worse than killing a regular person like you and me. That alone is grounds for unfair punishment. Why are cops so special, I wonder? Their whole career is under the assumption of violence; they can get shot at any moment; its a risk THEY take voluntarily.

A regular person is just the opposite; you have no reasonable, or acceptable, assumption of life-changing violence in your everyday life, therefor if you DO get killed, the killer must be harshly punished. Cops know the risk; they can quit at any time. The whole system is skewed, in my opinion.

The SHU SYSTEM, IS THE WORSE OF THE WORSE! I TRULY HOPE THAT BILLY BLAKE, BE RELEASED FROM IT. I WILL PRAY FOR HIM.

I completely agree. The SHU system is the absolute worst thing on this planet earth. Its not even earthly, its hell and it exists In America In the 21st century. I absolutely dont get it. Billy Blake committed a crime, yes, but that doesnt mean he needs to be subjected to eternal misery. Hes still a man that deserves basic rights to witness nature and talk to people. Even if he may be on administrative watch that doesnt mean he needs to be completely isolated. That goes for the entire SHU system. If someone is a threat that doesnt mean they need to be completely isolated. Where is the middle ground between general population and solitary confinement. It seriously is the worst thing about America.

I think, after 26 years in the shoe, even the loved ones of the victims would mostly agree its absurd.

Thank you again.

The Ohio State Reformatory (OSR), also known as the Mansfield Reformatory, Eastern State Penitentiary, and Preston Castle have since become tourist locations.

The public senses the evil that takes place behind these enclosures and I find it a bit sick that they make ghostly tourist attractions. Not funny at all. Thankfully I was a very lucky boy and didnt have a major event take place that would have ruined my life.

My focus and knowledge is on these juvenile institutions of which I learn more each day. For others that might not be aware here are just a few examples of what happens to some of these boys/girls that spend time there.

When he turned 12, Gray was caught breaking into a courthouse and was sent to Kentucky Village, a reform school in Lexington. It was there, Gray said, that he lost respect for authority and learned to hate. He remembers the night guards watched as four kids raped a younger boy. Afterward, the guards ordered the boy to fight bigger kids so he could learn to defend himself.

You learn a lot of these tricks when you go to a place like that, psychologist Levy said. To survive, he had to suppress empathy for anybody else.

His rage, fearlessness and absence of inhibitions gave him stature, Gray said.

As for the conditions at Red Wing at the turn of the last century I quote from a undated letter to Henry Lesser from Carl Panzram warts and all, Lustmord: The Writings and Artifacts of Murderers, p. 202, (1997), Brian King, ed. ISBN 096503240X

You know that I spent several years in one of those places [reform school] when I was a boy and the so called Training that I recieved while there is mainly the cause of my being the degenerate beast that I am today. I have thought about that system of Training young boys for all of my life and I know that the whole system is wrong. That system of beating goodness, religion and Jesus into boys in the 99 times out of 100 has the direct opposite effect of taking all of the goodness, kindness and love out of them and then replacing those with hate, envy, deceit, tyranny and every other kind of meanness there is.

Panzram was 11 years old and from a poor northern Minnesota farm family when he was first sent to Red Wing in 1903 for breaking into a neighbors house. His subsequent life of mayhem was so repellantly distinguished that it inspired a 1970 biography, Killer: A Journal of Murder, by Thomas Gaddis and James O. Long, a book that was later adapted into a 1995 film of the same title, starring James Woods.

(You can view this movie directed by Oliver Stone on youtube then go to the 40 minute mark to view what happens after they let Panzram out of Solitary Confinement while he was in prison.) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh03ktloDsk>

According to Panzram the three years he spent at Red Wing contributed mightily to his burgeoning criminal pathology. Upon admission to the institution, he recalls being strip-searched and rigorously queried about his sexual history. The guard, Panzram alleges, examined my penis and rectum, asking me if I had ever committed fornication or sodomy or I had ever had sodomy committed on me or if I had ever masturbated.

Panzram was deemed reformed and granted his release from Red Wing in 1905. I was reformed all right, Panzram later said. I had been taught by Christians how to be a hypocrite and I had learned more about stealing, lying, hating, burning and killing. I had learned that a boys penis could be used for something besides to urinate with and that a rectum could be used for other purposes.

Panzram confessed to it late in his life, by which time, according to his own reckoning, he had murdered 21 people, committed thousands of burglaries, and sodomized more than 1,000 male human beings.

Panzram was eventually hanged for his crimes at the Leavenworth Federal Prison in 1930.

John Handy is the program director at Red Wing these days. At the front desk where Handy meets me there is a sign that reads:

Never Grow a Wishbone Where Your Backbone Ought to Be.

My interpretation: You best grow a pair because youre on your own.

While Red Wing had Carl Panzram, Prestons most infamous inmate was Caryl Whitter Chessman, (Carl and Caryl the similarities are endless), who after two stints in Preston went on to become the Red Light Bandit and King of Death Row at San Quentin. The Red Light Bandit preyed on couples parked in lovers lanes, sexually assaulting the women. In two instances, the bandit dragged women from their cars. At the time, this technically constituted kidnapping under the Little Lindbergh Law (ruled unconstitutional by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1968), the penalty for which was death. On the night of his arrest, Chessman was apprehended driving a car that matched the description of the bandits automobile. A high speed chase ended with Chessman in handcuffs. He confessed to the Red Light crimes but later said the confession was beaten out of him. While Chessman was held in San Quentin he penned several books most famously Cell 2455 Death Row which was an instant success.

the system IS the problem

Alan..

No reason at all for you to be red faced. I truly do find you to be an amazing person. You are worthy of my praise.

I read what you posted about WV Industrial Home for Youth. Very interesting and chilling at the same time. You mentioned Pruntytown Correctional Centerwell, previously Pruntytown Home for Boysvery interesting to me also. I have a second cousin who was incarcerated there as a youth. He has since passed away. This would have been some time in the late 50s..he was incarcerated there for participating in robbing a local store of some kind, along with an uncle of mine, my fathers brother. What is interesting to me now looking back and thinking about this information, is that he was a barber and an alcoholic. One of the sweetest men you ever met and had a really bad alcohol addiction. Alcoholism seems to run in my familyor the tendency to be an addictive personalitytake your picklol. He learned to be a barber while at Pruntytown and did that for work for many years. I just wonder now if he experienced any abuse or time in solitary. May explain some of the ghosts he may have been trying to drown with the alcohol. Like my own father, who struggles with alcohol addiction, this cousin, whose name was Clinton, seemed to me always like he was a troubled soul..battling some internal conflict. He quit drinking many times, always to return to it, contributing to his eventual death. So, I rattle on..sorry, but I just find that interesting because while alcoholism seems to run in my family, none of his brothers and sisters suffered the affliction. My uncle that was involved in committing the robbery was 18 at the time and was, therefore, committed to the WV State Penitentiary, which was at that time Moundsville. Another place with walls that could verbalize horrific tales I am sure

Anyway..Pruntytown is now a Correctional Center for medium and maximum security inmates and Moundsville is closedis a tourist site for tours and ghost hunts. Penitentiary is now in Montgomery, WV at Mt. Olive Correctional Complex. I copied and pasted the following about Pruntytown for you

The Pruntytown Correctional Center is located at Pruntytown near the city of Grafton in Taylor County. Pruntytown Correctional Center was originally established as the West Virginia Industrial School for Boys in 1891 and served as a juvenile facility until being closed in January of 1983. At that time, the juveniles were transferred to the West Virginia Industrial Home for Youth near Salem.

The Pruntytown Correctional Center was reopened in 1985, housing minimum custody adult male inmates whose primary work function was to renovate the facility. In November 1988, the Division of Corrections moved thirty-two state adult female prisoners, who were housed under contract at the Federal Correctional Institution for Women at Alderson, West Virginia, to the Pruntytown Correctional Center, making it the states first adult co-ed correctional facility. Additional housing was added in 1999 for another 128 male inmates.

In January 2007, all female inmates housed at Pruntytown Correctional Center were transferred to the Lakin Correctional Center in Mason County, which serves as the states female prison. Pruntytown currently houses 369 minimum and medium custody male inmates. I do enjoy conversing with youjust really started looking into the history of prisons and suchhave an avid interest in seeing the death

penalty abolished. You can message me at my personal email its easier for me to read the lengthy stuff that way..I can print it off that way. My email: crjnursewarrior@gmail.com
Thanks again for all the great info.
Lori

Abusive life? His father raised him. His mother is a saint and would have never let anyone harm her children. When I seen that I cringed. His mother has stuck beside him for a longtime and for him to badmouth her makes me sick to my stomach. He was old enough to know right from wrong when he committed the crime and to pass it off on his mother to apeas himself is crap.

One last one also in New York state.

Lincoln Hall, was founded as a home for Civil War orphans in 1863. It later became known as Tryon Reformatory.

When Mike Tyson was 12, he was sent to Tryon Reformatory, where he knocked out a score of boys and several guards. His fighting ability caught the eye of one guard, former boxer Bobby Stewart, who brought him to Cus D'Amato.

The New York State Vocational Institution, opened in March 1935. The first inmates received at this institution, generally known as Cocksackie, were older inmates from the New York House of Refuge which was being closed after serving as a juvenile reformatory since 1825.

Cocksackie Correctional Facility is located in West Cocksackie, Greene County. It is classified as a maximum security general confinement facility and detention center for males between the ages of 16 and 21. Cocksackie presently confines approximately 1,000 inmates.

Here is a bit of its history.

Researchers in the mid-1940s studied the transmission of a deadly stomach bug by having young men swallow unfiltered stool suspension. The study was conducted at the New York State Vocational Institution, a reformatory prison in West Cocksackie.

Cocksackie continued this reformatory function, providing inmates with a program of academic and vocational education. Industrial training is presently provided in mechanics, machine shop, printing, and other trades, as well as training in agriculture. For the first ten years of its operation, Cocksackie received inmates by direct commitment from the courts. Since 1945, with the opening of the Elmira Reception Center, Cocksackie has received nearly all its inmates from this Center.

Elmira was the site of a prison camp for Confederate prisoners of war from 1864 to 1865. Built in 1876, the Elmira institution was designed to hold first-time felons, between the ages of sixteen and thirty, who were serving an indeterminate term of imprisonment, set by their sentencing judge.

The prison, which officially received its first prisoners from Auburn Prison in July of 1876, began a new era in the science of penology as the first reformatory.

Discipline was largely patterned after military academies. Inmates would be dressed in military style uniforms often marching to the tune of a military band. Read more here:

<http://solitarywatch.com/2013/03/11/voices-from-solitary-a-sentence-worse-than-death/#comment-11469>

Im red faced but thank you.

Ill add this one to my growing collection of juvenile detention centers.

I had to find out if my hunch was correct that this home was, like Preston, also built during the Long Depression and lo and behold it was.

The Industrial Home for Youth opened in 1899 as the West Virginia Industrial Home for Girls. Young females were sentenced by the juvenile courts or justices of the peace for incorrigibility and immorality, and by the criminal courts for felonies. Males were sentenced to the Industrial Home for Boys in Pruntytown, which had opened in 1891.

The story is very similar for Preston School of Industry which opened on July 1, 1894 in Ione, CA and for its near identical twin the Minnesota State Training School in Red Wing, MN which opened in 1891.

It seems the country went on a building spree in the 1890s. Most of the better know inmates are a product of this type of juvenile school. And all were modeled on existing facilities in the NE.

The New York House of Refuge was the first youth detention center in the United States. The building was located in Manhattan, New York City, at Randalls Island.

The reformatory opened January 1, 1825, with six boys and three girls. Within a decade 1,678 inmates were admitted.

Two features distinguished the New York institution from its British antecedents.

First, children were committed for vagrancy in addition to petty crimes.

Second, children were sentenced or committed indefinitely; the House of Refuge exercised authority over inmates throughout their minority years.

During the nineteenth century most inmates were committed for vagrancy or petty theft.

A large part of an inmates daily schedule was devoted to supervised labor, which was regarded as beneficial to education and discipline. Inmate labor also supported operating expenses for the reformatory.

The Lyman School for Boys was established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts about 1886 and was closed in 1971.

In November of 1943 at age 12 Albert DeSalvo was arrested for assault, battery and robbery. In December he was sent to the Lyman Reform School for boys.

The self confessed Boston Strangler trapped dogs and cats in orange crates and watched the animals kill each other. He also shot arrows through the boxes.

Dellelos prison life began at age 13, at the Lyman School for Boys in Westborough, the first reform school in the nation. While there, he and other boys were subjected to violence and molestation at the hands of those who were charged with their care. They also acquired new skills like car theft and lock-picking, along with an intense anger and hatred for authority.

Reform schools were places that taught violence, said Dellelo. In Massachusetts, your killers, your mobsters came through these institutions.

Robert Dellelo believes Massachusetts prisons are creating more problems than they are solving. It is a claim he does not make lightly. Having spent 46 of his 63 years in those prisons, he is somewhat of an expert.

The Ohio State Reformatory (OSR), also known as the Mansfield Reformatory was built in 1896 and was the site of the movie Shawshank Redemption.

On July 21, 1948, former inmates Robert Daniels and John West were dubbed the Mad Dog Killers for a murder spree which included the superintendent of the OSR farm along with his family, a tavern owner, a farmer and a truck driver. West was killed in a shoot out with police and Daniels eventually died in the electric chair.

So much for rehabilitation although admittedly they might have had issues before this.

This is why I believe in order to resolve the log jam down stream we need to stop them from entering up stream.

Read about Preston and its twins history here:

<http://solitarywatch.com/2012/12/30/voices-from-solitary-haunted-by-memorys-ghosts/#comment-11011>

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.

So I looked Gatesvilles history up.

Gatesville opened in January 1889 with 68 boys who had previously been located in correctional facilities with adult felons in the Huntsville Unit.

He also spent time in Greendale which has a similar history as well.

It was also thought up in the 1890s. I read on the web that:

The Kentucky Legislature of 1898 made an appropriation of \$100,000 for the establishment of two schools of reform, one for girls and one for boys to be located in Greendale, KY.

Greendale was first known as the Kentucky House of Reform.

And as expected it has done a lot of damage to those that entered its gates.

Wow..I am just starting into reading your articles. I have read what you published with Solitary Watch. I am honored to speak with you through these posts. Rarely does someone get to meet someone like you..someone who has personally experienced The injustices wrought by the system and still managed to effectively overcome..who seems to me to have walked thru the hell and lived to tell the tale. The details you write of this journey, and your continued concern for those still suffering, are truly, to me, inspirational. You, sir, are a testament to the triumph of the human spirit.

particularly interesting to me, are your stories of incarceration as a youth. My time working in the juvenile justice system was spent at the West Virginia Industrial home for youth. This place is set in a small town called Salem. Your Preston sounds like a similar place. The time I spent working there bothered me greatly. The look of impending doom to the building as I drove up the hill was eerie to me and I knew I would be allowed to leave. I can only try to imagine the feelings felt by young children driving up the hill unsure of their fate. I thought maybe I was just making too big a deal of it, but reading your posts about your experience tells me I was not. The mental anguish I suffered from working there is nothing in comparison to what you and these youths have experience. But reading your post tells me my mind was right. Something about the place just didnt sit well with me. It just gave me the creeps, so to speak, apparently was my conscious telling me something. I now know what it was telling me. Just as I suspected, these prisons for children are nothing more than chambers of mental and physical torture. We can build buildings that look stately and we can give these places euphemistic names like industrial home for youth but they are still, in fact, prisons. The lack of progress noted since you were there many years ago is appalling and unacceptable. Only those ignorant of what goes on would not be offended by it. I am thankful for Solitary Watch and people like you with the courage to tell their stories. Once again, Alan, I say thank you.

<http://solitarywatch.com/solitary-voices/in-solitary-at-las-juvenile-hall/>

Your welcome.

These stories have a bit of overlap in them about Preston so you should skip over that once you read it once. Im glad I dont have more of such stories to tell. Most of my other trips trips to the hole were uneventful and therefor only a blur now.

I hope by me laying it all out that it does some good for others in the future.

This link begins with one of my earliest experiences in the hole when I was only 10.

Sorry..hit publish on accident

I spent some of my 4 yrs working at the juvenile prison..I didnt like it. I was bothered by the lack of rehabilitative services, as well as the fact that i felt bad for most of the kids and wanted to take them home and raise them as mine. Working in the adult system was different although many of the inmates i dealt with were still just 18 or a little over. Thanks so much for your input Alan.

Thanks so much for the background info, Alan. I will definitely read your stuff on the link you gave. I spen

<http://solitarywatch.com/?s=Alan+CYA>

You can find a few pieces that I wrote about my experience by clicking the above link.

I never did adult time but two of my brothers did so I am familiar with it. I visited all the major prisons on a corrections bus going down to L.A. and back up to Ione, CA dropping off and picking up adult prisoners. It was an educational experience believe me for a 17 year old. I rode with the prisoners because I was one as well just a juvenile.

What you say, Kim, about the criminal justice system failing has validity. No one here denies that the penal system needs an overhaul. Lets start with cases like this. Just because his plan to escape was premeditated doesnt mean the murder wasMr. Blake made the choice and made the wrong decisions. That doesnt mean we should lock him up and throw away the keylets try locking people up and giving them incentive to change early on..like say in the juvenile justice system.

Lets spend taxpayers money rehabilitating before its too latenot just spending it to build bigger and more secure prisons. Maximum security does not equal maximum safety or rehabilitation.

Kim and Alan..I would be interested to know your backgrounds in the penal system. I spent 4 years as a nurse in the WV Regional Jail System.

@Kim

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/collegeprose/2013/03/25/college-behind-bars-how-educating-prisoners-pays-off/>

How Educating Prisoners Pays Off

I wish I could help him.

After the primary necessity of food and raiment, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature.
J.S. Mill 1869

Take away ones freedom and no amount of TV or correspondence classes will fill the void.

If you have indeed walked the tier then I assume you walked as a free person and not as a inmate.because no ex-con would agree with you.

I have been a tax payer for 40 plus years and I never have begrudged an inmate for trying to get an education. Even though I had to use the GI Bill to get my own education. But I realize that it is better to have an ex-con educated so he can succeed upon his release then have him/her lurking in the alley to make a living.

yet the system doesnt require a convict to better himself on the inside, therefor the SYSTEM is part of the problem. Theres no rehabilitation taking place. Often times, convicts come out worse than when they went in

I hate to disappoint you but yes I have. On the flip side has this personally caused you anything but an opinion?

Wow you really know not what you speak. Obviously you have never even walked down a tier and experienced the tension and despair.

Blake talked in detail about the night of Feb. 10, 1987, when he shot and killed David Clark and seriously injured Deputy Bernard Meleski while trying to escape from town of DeWitt court.He talked about his intent to escape from the moment he was arrested a couple of days earlier, DeJoseph said. It was pretty compelling, the judge said of Blakes detailed description of what happened and his thought processes at the time given that that was almost a quarter of a century ago.

Doesnt seem too spur of the moment to me. I think our criminal justice system fails in many cases that come before it. Everyone makes mistakes but there has to be a line drawn somewhere. TV is a privilege that some hard working families can not even afford to pay for in their own homes but those who commit hate crimes, malicious and violent get this reward once locked up? So many people cant afford to go to college but hey work on a degree while behind bars? I dont agree to the country club jails have turned into. These places are often welcoming to some of society instead of deterring.

In many countries in the world, life means 25 years as above that is regarded as too much, whatever he did. It is time to at least take him out of solitary. He has before in the essay if you care to read it stated his remorse and took full responsibility for his actions. That should be enough in many civilised systems to grant him parole fter 25 years.

Twenty three year old Billy Blake had been out of prison for only 50 days when he shot and killed Clark and wounded that other officer

in the courthouse.

Twenty eight year old Evan Ebel had just been released in January before dying in a shootout with police this March 19th in Texas. Evan had spent most of his last five years of his life in solitary confinement.

Were these men just bad seeds? Does the department of corrections bear some responsibility for unleashing these men on the public without any transitional programs?

In 2006 The Homeland Security Policy Institute and Critical Incident Analysis Prisoner Radicalization Task Force published Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of the Prisoner.

In harmony with previous scholarship, the study found that maximum security prisons such as Colorado State Penitentiary in Canon City and Elmira Correctional Facility, have fewer rehabilitation programs; higher levels of overcrowding; more serious gang problems; and more politically charged living spaces than lesser security prisons therefore they are more likely to produce radicalized prisoners than lesser custody institutions.

As a products of such environments the effectiveness of such institutions must be held in question. This is not to say either man should be excused for their actions.

Kim while I certainly agree that people are responsible for their own actions and for facing the consequences of those actions, several things bother me about your comment. You spoke of this man's main focus being himself and not the victims first let's realize he is writing an article for Solitary Watch, a site whose primary focus IS these inmates. He's not writing a random look back at his life. He is not writing a letter of apology to the victim's family. He does express remorse for leaving his children without their father. What should he do from his single, isolated cell in the SHU to show genuine remorse..or to repay his debt to society. Isn't imprisoning him for 77 years to life adequate punishment? I don't think Mr. Blake is asking for outright freedom, complete with the key that unlocks the front door of the prison. He is simply asking for fair and humane treatment. Every person in prison for taking the life of another human being is not housed in segregation. They are allowed contact with other humans. They are allowed to see the blue sky and feel sun on their skin. Making mistakes should not deny one those basic human rights. Even God makes the sun to shine on evil doers patiently waiting for their repentance. Do we deserve, and are we qualified to mete out a harsher judgment and sentence? I think not. This man, after 25 yrs of paying penance for an irrational and awful spur of the moment decision, should at least have the opportunity to live in general population..if for no other reason than to demonstrate how well or how not so well our penal system is faring in the department of correcting and rehabilitating individuals. The justice system is broke..fixing it requires more than turning a blind eye and narrow-mindedly promoting an eye-for-an-eye mentality.

Again another story of wallowing in the pitiful situation he chose. A quarter of a century with all this empty time and his main focus is on himself. It's not just about the one officer he killed and those two children and widow what about the officer he maimed and his four children and wife? If he was any kind of human being with a conscience after all this time where is the genuine remorse? He's only sorry that he is in the SHU and sorry he isn't free. He is sorry for himself. An abusive life event isn't an excuse for cold blooded murder. Many children are abused and they don't all become criminals and murderers. Billy Blake should take his own words suck it up he earned himself exactly what he got and he shouldn't expect anything more.

It has been said of me that I am cold-hearted: May have some truth in that I know there are at least 80,000 other said stories; I even have my own and my older children may have theirs do to my going to prison when they were young My friends are doing time some will never see the light of day, they choose to do what they did like I did; one of my friends is on his 45th. year in the Mass., prison system, no body involved If prayers do any good I'll pray for Billy after I have prayed for his and my victims Hopefully he will one day see the light of day Or changes may come to make his life more Constitutionally in line? Bless all in your opinions

Oh so this is the evidence of his aspiration to escape that I read about.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News