

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/02/24/voices-solitary-day-life-part-ii/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | February 24, 2014

This post is the second in a series of pieces Solitary Watch is publishing as part of a new project calling for people held in solitary confinement to write on various proposed themes. As mentioned in our [introduction](#) to the series, our first suggested theme, A Day in the Life, calls for writers to describe a day in his or her life in solitary confinement.

The following comes from Steven Jay Russell, 56, who is currently serving a 144-year sentence at the all-solitary Allan B. Polunsky Unit in Texas. Notorious for masterminding four successful, non-violent escapes from Texas correctional facilities, his story is recounted in the movie I Love You Phillip Morris. Russell, who has been held in administrative segregation for the last 17 years, is the first person in U.S. history to receive a life sentence for prison escapes. He can be reached by writing: Steven Russell, 00760259, Allan B. Polunsky Unit, 3872 FM 350 South, Livingston, TX 77351. Lisa Dawson

?????

Greetings from the Polunsky Zoo! A day in my life within this concrete box known as solitary will probably bore you. However, I kept track of my activity on December 27th and it will be listed below.

Friday, December 27, 2013

4:45 a.m. My alarm clock starts beeping. I get up from the bunk, brush my teeth, wash my face, then fill up my hot pot (electric hot water pot) with water and four bags of tea. This will yield two 12 oz. glasses of tea when complete.

5:00 a.m. 7:00 a.m. I listen to [Morning Edition](#) on KUHA radio (Houston Public Radio). By 6 a.m., I refill the hot pot with water and teabags and do a repeat which yields my third and fourth glass of tea. I sweeten the tea with Splenda and one atomic fireball piece of candy in each glass. The glass is plastic. ;)

5:30 a.m. First shift begins. The lead guard working on the floor will come to all of the cells on my pod and ask whether or not we want to shower or recreate in one of the cages. As usual, I decline the opportunity to appear in the cage in exchange for an early shower.

7:10 a.m. 7:40 a.m. I'm escorted to the shower. The shower stall is large enough for one man to fit comfortably. A metal door with a small (4x4) plexiglass window and slot (so that I can be cuffed from behind with hand restraints) is closed and locked for the duration of my shower. There are 12 1/8 holes drilled into the plexiglass so that air can get into the stall. I never stop showering until the guards come back to get me out of the shower. Otherwise, I be sweating due to the heat.

8:00 a.m. I prepare my own breakfast using food purchased from the prison store. I'll either prepare oatmeal and powdered milk or frosted mini-wheats with powdered milk. The TDCJ breakfast is served at 1:40-2:30 a.m. every day. I'm trying to sleep at that hour in the morning.

At 6:30 a.m. and 10:50 p.m., we must present our TDCJ photo identification cards to the guards for a roster count. I'm required to appear at my cell door. It's a bit difficult to be awake at 10:50 p.m. and from 1:40-2:30 a.m. for breakfast. The breakfast is served at an inconvenient time to discourage participation. That way, the state can save money due to a lack of involvement.

8:30 a.m. 9:00 a.m. I clean my cell and handwash my boxers, shorts, socks, and towel. Anything coming from the laundry is always filthy. If you want something clean, you do it yourself. I hang everything on the clothesline in my cell to dry. I also wash my own sheets.

9:00 a.m. 10:00 a.m. I listen to the first hour of the [Diane Rehm Show](#) on National Public Radio.

9:30 a.m. Lunch arrives. Since the food is always cold, I placed the ground beef, green beans, macaroni noodles <<separated from the beef and thrown in the toilet, carrots, and chop potato in the insert of my hot pot. In two hours, everything will be nice and hot. I'll improvise later and add some stuff from the prison store to make everything taste better. Stay tuned for the recipe.

10:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m. Daily devotions and prayer. I also spend part of this time working on my Bible Correspondence Course from the Crossroad Bible Institute.

11:00 a.m. 12:30 p.m. I read Section A of the New York Times National Edition newspaper. Its worth the \$71.45 per month paid due to the thoroughness of their articles. I live for details. Brief articles drive me crazy whenever the topics are important.

12:30 p.m. 1:15 p.m. I prepare my lunch. In a large white bowl, I pour the contents from the insert (hot pot). I add a Nissin Top Ramen chili noodle soup, some dehydrated onion flakes, a speck of garlic powder, slices of jalapeno pepper, and some crunched up saltine crackers to my plain TDCJ food items that have been getting hot with about 1 1/2 cups of the hot water. Now, I have a real meal! For dessert, I fix a piece of Pecan Pie that was sold to me by the prison store on December 20th. All of the ingredients are sold on the prison commissary. Enclosed is a price list with all of the items available.

1:15 p.m. 2:30 p.m. I finish reading the newspaper and work the crossword puzzle.

2:30 p.m. 5:00 p.m. I read The Nation magazine and The New Republic. I also read three letters that were received on Thursday night. Outbound mail is picked up by the guards Monday-Friday at 5 a.m. Inbound mail is passed out by the guards from 7 p.m. to midnight or whenever they get the inspiration to do their job.

5:00 p.m. Supper is served. I do a repeat and place only the vegetables in the hot pot. I also dump a pouch of chunky white chicken meat with broth into the insert. When everything gets hot, I'll make chicken tacos.

5:30 p.m. 2nd shift begins. The guards work 4 days on (12 hours each day) with 4 days off. Due to staff shortages, most of the guards are now working six, 12-hour days with two days off.

5:00 p.m. 6:30 p.m. I read a few chapters from the book, How the Mind Works by Steven Pinker.

6:30 p.m. 7:00 p.m. I listen to Marketplace on National Public Radio. The program gives a recap of daily business news and market results.

7:00 p.m. 7:30 p.m. I listen to Turning Point with Dr. David Jeremiah on American Family Radio Network.

7:30 p.m. 8:00 p.m. I listen to Dr. Ed Young, Pastor, Second Baptist Church of Houston. While listening to Dr. Young, I prepare my chicken tacos and eat supper.

8:00 p.m. 9:30 p.m. I listen to classical music on KUHA radio. At some point during that time, I fell asleep. Had to get a start because the guards will wake me to pass out the mail later and do their identification roster check.

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.

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 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.

THank you. I write him every day. I told him I know he feels like he is drowning, but there is now someone on shore who sees him and will not take their eyes off of him till we pull him out.

I will do everything you suggest. I joined the prison society in hopes i will now be able to visit. I wrote the warden and will follow up next week, I let her know I am a Registered Nurse with some mental health experience and my husband is a law enforcement officer. The letter was very courteous but the tone expected results. I have called Americans for Disabilities and will check back with the warden soon. If I get no response there I will go to the DOC secretary in PA, and have even thought of contacting Rick Raemisch for suggestions. He testified recently at the hearings in DC. He is the DOC Chair in Colorado, supporting reform.

If anyone has any other suggestions, please let me know. The SMU program that Mario is on mandates he complete another 6 MONTHs!!! of perfect behavior (no emotional meltdowns/anger) to pass to Phase 4 where he will be allowed a newspaper!

Anyone with any knowledge at all of human behavior would never prescribe such a harsh punishment with such a microscopic carrot at the end of it.

Thanks for your support and suggestions!

As sad as this is, I am writing to a mentally ill patient in solitary in a PA prison. He is NOT allowed newspapers or a radio OR food from the commissary. He is allowed only one library book a week. Despite his illness he writes extremely lucid letters begging me to help him learn how to manage his emotions and despair. He has been in solitary for four years. I am trying my best to help. I would like to visit him but he is not allowed visits except from immediate family. He has no immediate family! He suffered horrific abuse from his parents (documented) and they dont visit now.

I wrote a letter to the warden and am trying to get him some help. I will check back here from time to time to ask for suggestions.

Your friend is being tortured and that is the only way that I can see it. I think you should gather your evidence and send it to every agency that you can think of that deals with torture, prison reform and also mental health issues in the hope that someone will pick up on this very serious issue and this particular case. Also, you are one of lifes unsung heroes for doing the work you are undertaking on behalf of someone who is at the very lowest that they can be. Dare I say, God bless you and your friend!

Wow, and wow again. I am really humbled by what I have just read. Incredible how a human being can create a quite disciplined life inside of such a restricted environment. Washing, cleaning, studying, keeping up with the news and listening to good music. Keep the faith brother.

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