

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/09/27/voices-from-solitary-a-little-taste-of-freedom/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | September 27, 2010

It's a measure of the torment of solitary confinement that by comparison, life in the general population of a maximum security prison could seem like paradise. Joseph Aragon was validated as a gang member and placed in solitary confinement at Corcoran Security Housing Unit, even though he renounced his membership 13 years ago and is now 52 years old. In an August [Voices from Solitary post](#), Aragon recounted what were then his most recent experiences:

I spent the better part of 2008 and part of 2009 in a cell without any glass in a 2 foot by 4 foot window frame. I had to use the blanket I was issued as a window covering. I slept with all my clothes on a bare mattress so I could have two sheets to cover myself with. I also lived with huge cockroaches and mice and had to secure my food items by hanging them in a t-shirt from the ceiling vent to keep bugs and rodents out. I've had to drink water with toxic levels of arsenic and selenium well above federal standards. If this is not torture, I don't know what is.

Last week, Lois Ahrens, who publishes the excellent web site [The Real Cost of Prisons](#), received unexpected news in a letter from Aragon:

I am writing today from an actual mainline! How about that? I was transferred to Delano-Kern Valley State Prison Transitional Housing Unit last Monday. As soon as I got here the handcuffs came off and I was able to have movement without restraints. It felt a little weird and yet very exhilarating. It's still a bit restrictive as it's a level 4 mainline (maximum security). We are fed in our cells, but have unrestricted yard time and dayroom time. It's not much, but even just a little is a whole lot more than I have had over the past 16 years. Showers are done unrestricted and much longer than the 3 minutes I've been accustomed to and I got a razor issued to me for about 3 hours in my cell and can take my time and shave correctly. We had chicken last night and I actually got a full quarter of a chicken with the bone. I was in absolute ecstasy as I have eaten only chicken patties (processed) and to beat all, the CO gave me a second tray! I am still confined to quarters until I go to classification which will be either this Wednesday or next. I can have phone calls, quarterly packages and contact visits. Is that cool or what?

(Aragon welcomes correspondence, and his new address is Joseph Aragon GO8220 Kern Valley State Prison T4UP.O. Box 5101 D7-211U Delano, CA 93216.)

This is not an example of how justice prevails. It is an example of the difference between treating a person as a caged animal for years, and then treating him like something closer to a human being. Think of what it would be like if the tens of thousands of prisoners in who live in solitary confinement some for a few months, others for five, ten, twenty years or more were able to write such a letter. In fact, that's what needs to happen before the United States can say that it is committed to ending torture.

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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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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god bless you homie i hope you get your freedom in or out of jail

grads to you first off grate to hear your out of that hellhole seen a lot on that prison it is nuts in that shu i mean wow i know a person named after that prison or at least her name is miss corcoran lol would be odd if wardens had prison name lol but really your right bout the usa was not in a prison but was anuff to do the same thing to me i know solitary is sick i hope you do get to live freely one day and if not to be free in mind and soul may there be light in the darknes of justice

I certainly am happy for Mr. Aragon, though somewhat bittersweet is my dismay at how the control systems in place that the industry has over human beings and their emotions, and the place of resistance and stamina they have to be in to survive this torture; to now be dangled the luxury of seconds on real chicken but at the same time not let them have the luxury for one moment to forget the fickleness of their captors to take that all away on a whim or sheer cruelty.

The whole thing is a mess, but I am glad for his glimpse of SOME token freedoms, it doesn't get much worse in solitary than what he went through.

This is the most telling reason for the abolition of prisons!!

Twitch Entropy,
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