

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/06/12/voices-from-solitary-death-row-diary-of-florida-man-scheduled-to-die-tonight/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | June 12, 2013

William Van Poyck, 58 years old and on death row at the Florida State Prison in Starke, is [scheduled to die](#) at the hands of the state tonight at 7 pm. In 1987 he was convicted of murdering prison guard Fred Griffiths in a failed jailbreak attempt. Poyck has spent nearly 26 years on death row in solitary confinement. He has written to his sister about his life in prison, and in recent years she has published his letters to a blog called [Death Row Diary](#). In these letters, Poyck writes about everything from the novels and history books he is reading and shows he has watched on PBS to the state of the world and his own philosophy of life punctuated by news of the deaths of those around him, from illness, suicide, and execution. He also comments on the [bill recently passed](#) by the Florida legislature that will accelerate the schedule of executions in Florida. The excerpts selected here focus on the inhumane treatment he and other individuals on death row endure as they move ever closer to their own finalities. His last entry was written on May 28, when he had 15 days left to live. Abby Taskier

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January 4, 2012

Well, another year is upon us. I feel like I ought to have something profound to say but all I can think of is the too many over 40 years I've spent sitting in a cell or prison dormitory watching another new year slide into my life. New Years is supposed to represent hope and potential but its hard to convince yourself that hope and potential abounds when you're doing hard time! Anyway, 2012 is the supposed end of the world according to the Mayan calendar. I don't put too much stock in apocalyptic predictions; humans have been making them since the dawn of time, after all, without any success, and I'm an optimist by nature. But I confess that as I survey the world around me and what we humans are doing to planet earth it is increasingly difficult to envision a good ending.

The search team came and tore up my cell last week; it was a surgical strike (they came for me alone) and I was later told that someone wrote a snitch kite on me claiming (falsely) I had a weapon in my cell. I'm fairly certain it was someone trying to get a DR (disciplinary report) dismissed by dropping a dime on me on the hope they'd shake me down and find *something*, any kind of contraband, and the rat would then get credit for it. But I had no contraband so the snitch struck out. If the administration had any integrity they'd write the rat a DR for lying to staff. I spent several hours putting my cell back in order; it looked like a hurricane came through, all my property scattered everywhere. This is the kind of bullshit you have to put up with in prison; it's the nature of the beast.

I just learned that Governor Scott has signed another death warrant and someone is on death watch on the bottom floor of Q-wing. Scott didn't waste any time after the holidays; he seems determined to execute a record number of people at the pace he is setting. This is a depressing turn of events, a lousy way to begin the new year, at least from my perspective. The execution, when it occurs, will undoubtedly please some people, so it's all a matter of perspective.

February 9, 2012

Yesterday the prison was locked down all day for the standard mock execution, the practice run which occurs a week prior to the actual premeditated killing. For the mock execution they lock down the joint, bring in an array of big wigs, and go through a dry run to make sure the death machine is in working order, everyone on their toes. The big wigs are just voyeurs, here to vicariously kill someone while allowing themselves the bare moral cover of not actually pushing the knife between the ribs. Their minions do the actual dirty deed while they can go home with technically clean hands. These mock executions are as depressing as the real thing, in the sense that it's dispiriting to watch an entire organization (a prison, with all its constituent parts) so seriously dedicate their time and energies to practicing killing a fellow human being, as if this is a good and natural thing to do. It takes some peculiar mental (not to mention moral) gymnastics to justify this to oneself, but we humans have proven ourselves immensely adept at self-delusion and hypocrisy, especially when we bring religion into the equation. We are really, really good at killing others in the name of God. We are a strange species, aren't we?

February 25, 2012

Robert Waterhouse was scheduled for execution at 6:00pm this evening. In accordance with the established execution protocol he was strapped to the gurney and the needles were inserted into each arm about 45 minutes prior to his appointed time. Just before 6:00,

however, he received a 45-minute stay which morphed into an almost 3-hour endurance test as he remained on the gurney as the seconds, minutes and then hours slid by at an excruciatingly slow pace, waiting for someone to tell him if hope was at hand, if he would live or die. Just before 9:00 he received his answer, the plungers were depressed, the syringes emptied and he was summarily killed. Here on the row we can discern the approximate time of death when we see the old white Cadillac hearse trundle in through the back sally port gate to pick up the body, the same familiar 1960s era hearse I've watched for almost 40 years, coming in to retrieve the bodies of murdered prisoners, which used to happen on a regular basis back when I was in open population. I've seen a *lot* of guys, both friends and foes, carted off in that old hearse. Anyway, pause for a moment to imagine being on that gurney for over three hours, the needles in your arms. You've already come to terms with your imminent death, you are reconciled with the reality that this is it, this is how you will die, that there will be no reprieve. Then, at the last moment, a cruel trick, you're given that slim hope, which you instinctively grasp. Some court, somewhere, has given you a temporary stay. You stare at the ceiling while the clock on the wall ticks away. You are totally alone, not a friendly soul in sight, surrounded by grim-faced men who are determined to kill you. Your heart pounds, your body feels electrified and every second seems like an eternity as a Kaleidoscope of wild thoughts crash around frantically in your compressed mind. After 3 hours you are drained, exhausted, terrorized, and then the phone on the wall rings and you're told its time to die

June 10, 2012

Doing my own laundry (most of us do it) has become even more of an imperative over the last year or two. For starters, you cannot exchange your state clothes for clean stuff at the weekly laundry exchange because all the laundry issues now are old, ripped-up rags, stuff right out of a cartoon version of the rags Napoleons army wore as they withdrew from Russia. There is no money available here for any new clothing. The sheets, towels, socks, T-shirts and drawers are almost black with filth; they look like what mechanics use in garages to clean up with. The laundry has taken to cutting all the sheets in half lengthwise and cutting all the towels in half (sewing up the edges) to try to make things stretch. More basic than that, though, is that for at least a year, maybe two, the laundry has simply quit using any soap when it washes the clothes. They stuff they pass out stinks worse than it does when its turned in. If you *do* get something from the laundry, the first thing you and have to do is wash it. Most people do what I do, they bribe someone to get ahold of a couple of new sheets and a new towel, and then they just keep them, washing them by hand every week. Since we cannot obtain any laundry soap (for reasons unknown they stopped selling it to us 10 years ago) we've gotta use canteen-bought shampoo to do our laundry (VO-5 is the cheapest). And of course, we've gotta wash all our stuff in our toilets; this sounds gross to the uninitiated, but we keep our stainless steel toilets scrubbed clean. You then plug it up and flush it until it fills, then add shampoo and laundry and go to work. This is old-school and is universal in prisons around the country (although 95% of prisons have made this obsolete by offering real laundry services. But Florida in general and Florida State Prison in particular are 30 years behind the times and the administration seems to revel in its backwardness). Hell, this prison doesn't even have hot water to the cells

September 13, 2012

In the early morning hours of August 30, my friend Tom, who lived 2 cells down from me groggily awoke to find his face and pillow covered in blood and his tongue bitten about half off. He had no memory of what occurred. That morning his speech was slurred (over and above his extreme difficulty in speaking with a then-swollen, bloody tongue) and I noticed his thinking was confused. I told him he'd most likely had a seizure in his sleep (he has no history of seizures) and that because he was on high cholesterol medication he may have had a small stroke. Over the following days Tom suffered progressively severe headaches almost constantly and began sleeping excessively. His speech became increasingly slurred and his mental faculties were clearly compromised. I, and others, constantly urged Tom to try to get up to the clinic to see a doctor (even though the two doctors here are notorious quacks) and so he began trying to stop any passing nurses (who go down our row to deliver medications to some) to explain his situation, but none of them were interested. Most just said put in a sick call slip. At my urging Tom declared a medical emergency which is supposed to get you right up to the clinic. But instead, a nurse came to the wing, briefly examined Tom's swollen (and now infected) tongue, gave him two Tylenol and told him he was just out of luck since no doctor was on duty on a Saturday night.

Meanwhile, day by day, Tom got worse. He knew something was wrong with him but seemed unable to figure out what to do. I wrote up a sick call slip for him (by this time his handwriting was illegible and he could not put his thoughts together) and the next day a nurse or M.T. (medical technician) came to examine him. He listened as Tom labored to explain what happened, starting with the seizure, then told Tom Well, some people do this [bite their tongues almost in half] to get attention. The M.T. then walked away

October 2, 2012

I stuck my mirror out, upon hearing the door roll, and saw Tom, a big bandage on his head, tottering slowly and unsteadily down the tier to his cell. That was on the 13th. For the next 5 days he laid on his bunk, often moaning, while receiving no medication at all (despite the surgeons having prescribed many drugs). Finally, after 5 days he began getting some, but not all, of the prescribed meds (no pain meds, of course). Importantly, he did not get the most crucial one, the one to stop his brain from swelling. So he was suffering mightily until just 5 or 6 days ago when he finally saw a free-world oncologist who was shocked that he was not getting the brain swelling medication. After another 3 days he finally began getting that one and he told me the relief was immediate. I knew it was bad when he kept telling me he had fluid coming out of his ears. He's been told he'll get chemo and radiation treatment but that remains to be seen

October 25, 2012

Well, the execution has been cancelled, to the dismay of some around here. Ferguson was scheduled to die on the 16th, but just before then he got a 48-hour stay. Over the next week he got three such temporary stays from three different courts, with the sole issue being his sanity to be executed. Finally, it was supposed to happen for sure 2 days ago, on the 23rd, and we woke up to the standard execution-day procedures, eating all three meals very early, the entire prison being on lockdown, and all guards wearing their dress uniforms. As execution time (6:00 pm) neared the old white hearse pulled up outside the back sally port gate waiting to come in and pick up the body. As 6:00 came and went I assumed the execution had occurred but around 7:30 a guy on the other side of my wing, which looks out on the back gate and the rear of Q-wing (the death house), called me through the vent and said the hearse never came in, but instead had finally driven off. On the 11:00 news it was reported that the US Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, in Atlanta, had given Ferguson a stay of execution and that the US Supreme Court then approved the stay. (The accuracy of that precise chronology is debatable because reporters are notorious for mangling stories involving court decisions). At any rate, he got some kind of stay; how long that stay is

remains unknown to me. I heard on one news report that the Eleventh Circuit granted the stay in order to decide whether it is unconstitutional to execute the insane. Now we go back on lottery watch, waiting to see whose death warrant the governor signs next, which is a great mood elevator for the upcoming holidays.

Last night's mail brought me (and others) a notice that the mailroom had impounded and confiscated the latest issue of *Newsweek* because, the notice stated, it contained an article about pot use in America. Censorship like this, which implies serious First Amendment principles, used to be, and is supposed to be, rare. Only when an article clearly and unequivocally creates a substantial threat to the security of a prison should it be censored. But, over the years, the Florida DOC has gotten progressively petty (and ignorant) on this issue (since the law now practically forbids prisoners from filing law suits anymore) until we've reached our present state where these impoundments have become almost daily and for the most absurd reasons imaginable. With nothing to keep them in check (lawsuit-wise) the prisons do just whatever the hell they want to, knowing they are immune from challenge.

November 8, 2012

Another death row guy has died of cancer. I ran into Michael Bruno (whom I've known for over 20 years) in late July when I took a day trip to RMC (Regional Medical Center) for my upper GI tests. Bruno looked weak and had a persistent cough (the same cough Tom now has) and had just been diagnosed with lung cancer. He seemed to be doing pretty well, but on Friday, October 19th, he suddenly got ill and two days later he was dead. The cause of death, we were told, was septic shock, and I'm guessing the infection found its way into his system via the port they'd inserted into his chest to funnel the chemo directly into his lung. Prisons are filthy so putting a port into a guy's chest while making him live in a cell is pretty much a prescription for disaster. This is especially true here in Florida where the DOC long ago quit issuing and buying (we used to manufacture them) the various cleaning chemicals we used to use to clean our cells and the whole prison, from powdered soap, liquid soap, disinfectants, bleach; all that is gone now and we must buy and use shampoo from the canteen to wash our clothes and clean our cells. This whole decrepit building is filthy and falling apart.

February 27, 2013

My old pal Tom died on Friday, Feb 8th at 4:10 pm, alone in the clinic isolation cell at UCI. I hate that he died alone, locked in a tiny cell with no property (no radio, TV or anything to occupy his mind) and nobody to converse with, just laying on his bunk, staring at the ceiling, waiting for his final escape. His loved ones, who were able to travel from Texas and North Carolina to visit him for three hours just two days before he passed away wrote and told me that he was very weak and gaunt, could not keep down any food or liquids, but was lucid enough for a meaningful visit, though just barely so. Although I know his death was inevitable and imminent, I'm surprised at how much it has affected me. I've seen an awful lot of death during my many years in prison (way too much death, in all its myriad variations), including some friends, but Tom's has knocked the wind out of me.

Later last night they moved Paul off death watch on Q-wing and put him in the lone empty cell on my floor [after he received a stay of execution]. That's gotta be a Hell of a transition; you are hours away from execution, you've had your final visits (imagine how emotional that is), made your peace with the inevitable, perhaps eaten your last meal, then, in a finger snap, you're told you won't be dying after all (at least not that night) and you are back on a regular death row cell talking with the Fellas. I've seen a number of guys go through this over the years, one of whom was just twenty minutes from execution in the electric chair when he got his unexpected stay. They moved him next to me and I was startled to see that his hair had turned almost entirely white during the six weeks he was on death watch. He died quietly in his sleep from a heart attack about six years later, right here on this floor.

It's surprising to me that more prisoners here don't kill themselves given the long term extreme isolation and punitive conditions, the hopelessness that comes from being confined for years in a tiny cage with virtually no property and certainly no programs or anything to engage the mind or offer any shred of hope. I'm referring specifically to the 1,000 men in close management status here (close management being euphemism for long-term solitary confinement lasting years and years). Death row conditions are marginally better; at least we get visits and we can buy a little TV or radio (or now an MP3 player), but the flip side is that we spend decades in these cells and unless you possess a stout mind (and body) this inevitably erodes your constitution, often without you even knowing it. I've seen too many men go insane, a sad and scary thing to behold, or just throw in the towel and kill themselves, or get the state to do it for them by giving up their appeals and demanding to be executed.

April 10, 2013

On April 10, Larry Mann was executed downstairs. Seven days later Governor Scott signed another death warrant, for a guy out of Orlando named Elmer Carroll, who happened to be my next door neighbor. We were out on the rec yard when a lieutenant holding a bunch of chains showed up and took Elmer away, and while they didn't tell him why they were taking him in I knew something was up. When I came back in, his cell was stripped and he was down on the bottom floor of Q-Wing on death watch.

The governor is wasting no time executing people, he's killing a guy every 60 days, as regular as a metronome. Still, that is insufficiently bloodthirsty for a majority of our state representatives. This morning I watched, on the local Public Television Channel, the floor debate in the House on a bill designed to speed up the death penalty. Various politicians stood up to argue pro and con, and several invoked the Bible (notably the Old Testament) to justify killing us all as quickly as possible, while one guy repeatedly referred to all of us as animals. I have not read the bill so all I know about its particulars is what I could glean from the comments made by those who spoke up for or against it. One representative stated that if the bill becomes law (and it surely will) Florida will execute between 13 and 90 prisoners in the next six months. I don't know if that's accurate but he must have had some basis to come up with those particular numbers. Those who argued against the bill, urging caution and reminding the crowd that Florida leads the nation (by far) in death row prisoners exonerated, often 10, 15, 20 years after conviction, were steamrolled down by the Republican supermajority and the bill passed by a wide margin.

May 3, 2013

Today Governor Scott signed my death warrant and my execution date has been scheduled for June 12th, at 6pm. I wasn't really surprised when they showed up at my cell door with the chains and shackles; for the last month or so I've had a strong premonition that my warrant was about to be signed, but that wasn't something I wanted to share with you.

Sis, you know Im a straight shooter, Im not into sugar coating things, so I dont want you to have any illusions about this. I do not expect any delays or stays. This is it. In 40 days these folks will take me into the room next door and kill me

When your warrant gets signed so many things suddenly become trivial. Ive already thrown or given away 95% of my personal property, the stuff that for years seemed so important. All those great books Ill never get to read; reams and reams of legal work Ive been dragging around, and studying, for 2 decades and which has suddenly lost its relevance. My magazines and newspapers stack up unread; I have little appetite to waste valuable, irreplaceable hours reading up on current events. Does it really matter to me now whats happening in the Middle East, or on Wall Street, or how my Miami Dolphins are looking for the upcoming new season? Whats the point? Ditto the TV; Im uninterested in wasting time watching programs that now mean nothing in the grand scheme of things. The other day I caught myself reaching for my daily vitamin. Really?, I wondered, as the absurdity hit me. Likewise, after 40 years of working out religiously, thats out the window now. Again, whats the point?

May 12, 2013

On Tuesday they came and measured me for my execution/burial suit. Sometime soon Ill be given the details on how the body will be disposed of following the legally required autopsy (will my cause of death really be a mystery?). I understand the State will pay for a cremation should I choose this form of disposal (I do) and my ashes will be available at a Gainesville Funeral home; but dont quote me on that yet. Discussing the practical aspects of my upcoming death was a little disconcerting, but I took it in stride.

Ive been on death watch for 10 days now and I have 31 days left to live. (It seems surreal when I write that out, and just as surreal that all those around me accept this as a normal and natural thing). My cell (one of three) is next to the execution chamber so I wont have far to walk. Theres another guy down here with me, his execution is set for 2 weeks before mine so assuming he doesnt get a stay Ill have a front row seat to how the final days and hours play out. Arent I lucky?

May 19, 2013

Ive got 25 days left to live. It isnt normal to be able to write something like that, and that sense of surrealism permeates every hour down here. Making a man spend his last six weeks ticking off every minute, hour and day of his life left on earth constitutes cruel and unusual punishment by any definition. And it certainly constitutes, as a matter of law, two of Floridas statutory aggravating circumstances (used by the state to justify the imposition of death sentences), to wit: 1) the killing is cold, calculated and premeditated; and, 2) the killing is heinous, atrocious and cruel. Although Ive fully accepted my circumstances, I know its going to happen and Ive come to terms with it, that does not obviate the fact that it just isnt right to do this to people, and for society to accept this as normal or natural, well, it speaks more about our society than it does about those being so efficiently dispatched down here in the bowels of this penitentiary

There are now three of us down here on death watch; all our executions are spaced 2 weeks apart. The guy with senior status (Elmer) is set to die on May 29th, 2 weeks before me. Last week the Florida Supreme Court denied his last-ditch appeal and hes got no place left to go. He does not know much about the law or court procedures but he told me he knows there is now nothing between him and his date with death. Hes resigned to his fate and I hear him pacing the floor a lot, a pacing that is gradually morphing into a listless shuffling, as if all hope has deflated from his body, like air leaking from a punctured tire. Its a sad, melancholy sound when you know its context. I choose to remain active, vital and alive, my spirit, intellect and even my humor undiminished, and Ill remain so until they shoot that poison into my veins and snuff out the candle of this physical vehicle

May 22, 2013

I have 21 days left to live. The fickleness, the arbitrariness, the fleeting nature of life itself is on display daily throughout our world but as good an example as any occurred here on Monday morning when, as I was being dressed out here on Q-Wing for a visit, a sudden radio call brought the wing officers rushing upstairs where they found a prisoner (non-death row) hanging in his cell. After 20+ years in prison this guy (Earl) had finally given in to the utter hopelessness that can seize the heart and spirit of any man mired forever in an American maximum security prison. The irony wasnt lost on me that while 3 of us on death watch are fighting to live, this poor soul, living just 10 feet above us, stripped of all hope, had voluntarily surrendered his life rather than continue his dismal existence. When nothing but a lifetime of suffering lays ahead with no hope, no promise, no opportunity to change your fate the idea of utter annihilation can come to look appealing in contrast. When everything has been taken from you, the one thing you have left, that nobody can take away, is the decision to live or die. In that context choosing death can look like freedom

Today my neighbor, Elmer, went on Phase II of death watch, which begins 7 days prior to execution. They remove all your property from your cell while an officer sits in front of your cell 24/7 recording everything you do. Staff also performs a dry run or mock execution, basically duplicating the procedures that will occur 7 days later. This is when you know youre making the final turn off the back stretch, you know your death is imminent, easily within reach, you can count it by hours instead of by days. Right now Im on deck; when Elmer goes Ill be up to bat (thats enough sports metaphors for now)

May 28, 2013

Tomorrow Elmer will be executed and Ill be next up to bat, with 15 days to live. A situation like this tends to make you reflect on the elusive nature of time itself, which some folks physicists and metaphysicists alike claim is an illusion anyway. Real or not it sure seems to be going someplace quickly!

This may be my last letter to reach you before you begin your journey down south to be by my side for my final days. These many visits Ive recently received from those who love me have been a blessing for me. Im acutely aware that some guys on death watch have absolutely nobody to help them bear their burden during their last days and hours on earth, not a soul willing to share some love. Its a terrible thing to die all alone

I read in a recent newspaper article that the brother and sister of Fred Griffis, the victim in my case, are angry that Im still alive and eager for my execution. These are understandable human feelings. I have a brother and sister myself and I cannot honestly say how I would deal with it if something happened to you or Jeff at the hands of another. I have thought of Fred many times over the years and grieved

over his senseless death. I feel bad for Freds siblings though if seeing another human being die will truly give them pleasure. I suspect when Im gone, if they search their hearts, they will grasp the emptiness of the closure promised by the revenge of capital punishment. Theres a lot of wisdom in the old saying An eye for an eye soon makes the whole world blind

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Update: William Van Poyck was executed by lethal injection, and pronounced dead at 7:24 pm on June 12, 2013.

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.

In the paragraph of Robert Waterhouse that is torture and cruel and usual punishment to have a man regardless of crime strapped to gurney for 3 hours giving him hope and then to tell him he will die and go through with it is absolutely sickening.. I doubt any murderer has ever tortured their victims like this and its just complete cruelty. The executioners, all the staff deserve to suffer the way they made him suffer and maybe they will learn how cruel and inhuman they are before they die!

Agree with everything except your doubt that a murderer has not done that to his victims. Read the story of Denise Amber Lee. I hope Florida does this to her killer. It would make me laugh. POS.

In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche 1844-1900

No one can draw more out of things, books included, than he already knows. A man has no ears for that to which experience has given him no access.

It is my ambition to say in ten sentences what others say in a whole book.

Or dont say in the whole book.

I feel I have just enough experience to draw a general outline on the subject of solitary.

So I will continue to seek out those ten sentences.

Knowing as I do that:

No one will be heard in the future that does not speak in short bursts of truth.

Quote by Saul Bellow 1915-

:)

Just an opinion is well enough, however factual evidence or reference to scientific studies are usually better received by people unfamiliar with the subject than an anonymous emotional laced opinion. (Please dont take that the wrong way.)

This is possibly why the site has posted the views of so many experts on the subject.

Now that is just my opinion. :)

I enjoy the linking of these independent concepts and thoughts into a constructive argument against the status quo of abuse in the system.

But as an amateur I also often cringe when I reread my past comments.

Keep your voice out there.

A case in point:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/10/19/hermann-goring-s-shrink-and-the-perils-of-the-nazi-mind.html>

When the (Nuremberg) trial began in November 1945, US Army psychiatrist Douglas M. Kelley had already started to reach conclusions about the Nazi personality. None existed, he believed. The Nazis were psychologically normal. Nazi evil was not only banal, as Hannah Arendt later asserted, but its potential was widespread, especially in American politics and business. I am quite certain that there are people even in America who would willingly climb over the corpses of half of the American public if they could gain control of the other half, he said.

These conclusions unnerved Kelley and eventually led him to change the focus of his career from psychiatry to criminology. His personal connection with Gring rattled him even more deeply, and as Kelley fell into alcoholism, workaholicism, and depression, he faced his own capacity for evil.

Kelley's study of evil had turned into something personal. In Kelley's mind, Gring had possessed a combustible mix of admirable and atrocious qualities, many of which the psychiatrist shared. On New Year's Day 1958, standing in front of his family, Kelley took his life by gulping cyanide, just as Gring had done a dozen years earlier. What the psychiatrist had learned from the Nazis about human behavior was appalling. What he discovered about himself hurt more.

@masteradrian

Unfortunately I believe it is just human nature. This is why we need checks and balances from opposing camps so we don't have such Moral Mazes as the sociologist Robert Jackall describes in his book by the same name. Read the rules that govern such bureaucracies here:

<http://solitarywatch.com/2013/10/18/fire-federal-bureau-prisons-audits-use-solitary-confinement-buys-new-supermax-prison/#comment-13938>

Harvard psychologist Stanley Milgram found that some people when first entering the system may protest the work required of them, but almost all eventually comply.

People working in such oppressive systems usually don't think of the consequences of their actions but deceive themselves into believing they are acting correctly, it's a self-deception with consequences for those they oversee.

Keep voicing your opinion on here I read all your comments.

Well, firstly thanks for reading all my (in my own opinion) often ludicrous comments (after re-reading them!) but be assured that what I write as a comment is from the heart and soul more than from the brain then yes. I detest injustices, I detest wrongs, social wrongs, judicial wrongs and things that are in my opinion utterly wrong, inhuman, inhumane and or animalistic!

And yes, I know I may sometimes utter opinions that seem to be irrational, but when I read that a human being is kept for a period of 26 years (or almost 26 years) on death row, and also knowing that that means no contact with other than the guards so that it means in reality being in solitary confinement for 26 years (almost 26 years), my stomach turns, and I more than seriously question the mental state of those who subject that human being to such a treatment!

I also know that I make no references to highly educated professors from whatever university.

One reason is because I feel that what I comment on needs no reference, or support by a highly educated professor, it is my opinion in the comment, and what the professor thinks or feels is their opinion..

Second reason is that mostly one part of a professor's writing is fitting to my opinion, were another part of the same writ I often totally disagree with, and to refer to him or her is (in my opinion) wrong..

Secondly, Human nature is all that we have, and human nature is not anything else than a section of animal nature were animals, supposedly evolved animals but when losing our doctrines, our values, our norms, or when they are taken from us for whatever reason by whomever, in other words are falling back onto ourselves, we fall back to our animal instincts, and we become animals again.. and will act as animals, and feel no remorse, regret or even astonishment for what we did when we are confronted with what we did

just my opinion

Here is a moving letter from the grieving parents of a murdered guard to the DA.

They blame the lack of mental health care of inmates in prison for their son's death and believe that the prosecutor only wants to further his career by using their son.

<http://www.coloradoindependent.com/144496/parents-of-slain-prison-guard-plead-da-brauchler-to-drop-pursuit-of-death-penalty>

Parents of slain prison guard plead DA Brauchler to drop pursuit of death penalty.

@Alan CVA # 65085: Doesn't this letter show clearly how sick, rotten and inhumane the judicial and penitential system is, has become? That parents of a murdered man even accuse the system for the death of their son, and at the same time recognize the desire of the prosecutor to improve his position over the back of the one who has killed their son!

As long as the present rotten judicial and penitentiary system remains people will remain subjected to power hunger of men and women, who want to improve their own personal position over the backs of those who they should in fact be helping to try to get back into society a better person, after paying their dues to society!

Our society is rotten, and those who should do their best to repair it are even more rotten than the society!

Nearly 26 years on death row.. Legal torture, inhumane and in fact an act against humanity! Sorry, but the ones who kept him on death row for nearly 26 years are as criminal as the killer himself!

<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/TwoPercentReport.pdf>

In 2009, only six counties accounted for 96.6% of death sentences. Even more startling, just three counties Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside accounted for 83% of death sentences in 2009.

Only 41% of California's population lives in these counties. Together, these three counties sentenced more people to die in 2009 than the entire state did each year from 2002 to 2008. It is the increase in death sentencing in just these three counties that accounts for the high number of death sentences statewide in California in 2009.²⁹

At the start of 2013, the counties that had sent the most inmates to death row across the nation were

Los Angeles, 228 (the most populous county at 9,962,789); (2012 census)

San Diego, 40 (5th at 3,177,063);

Orange, 61 (6th at 3,090,132);

Riverside, 76 (11th at 2,268,783);

San Bernardino, 37 (12th at 2,081,313);

Alameda, 42 (22nd at 1,554,720);

and Sacramento, 35 (25th at 1,450,121). (All counties above are located in CA)

Harris (Houston), Texas, 101 (3rd at 4,253,700);

Philadelphia, 88 (22nd at 1,547,607);

Maricopa, Ariz., 81 (4th at 3,942,169);

Clark, Nev., 61 (13th at 2,000,759);

Duval, Fla., 60 (59th at 879,602);

Nine of the top counties for executions were in Texas or Oklahoma.

Harris was first with 115, followed by Dallas County, Texas, with 50 (9th at 2,416,014).

Houston had 8% more murders than Dallas, but 324% more death row inmates; 15% more murders than San Antonio, but 430% more death row inmates.

The outlier is Cook County, IL which has only 5 on death row yet is the 2nd most populous county at 5,231,351.

So scratch population as a prime factor in these results.

Here is an article by The Atlantic quoting these same statistics.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/04/the-death-penalty-becomes-unusual/390867/>

Excerpts:

A 2012 study by DePaul University law professor Robert J. Smith found significant geographic disparities in the death penalty's application.

A 2013 report by the Death Penalty Information Center found that 59 counties fewer than 2 percent of the total of 3,144 counties in America handed down all U.S. death sentences in 2012.

The New York Times reported in 2003 that prosecutors in Louisiana often threw parties after winning death sentences. They gave one another informal awards for murder convictions, including plaques with hypodermic needles bearing the names of the convicted. In Jefferson Parish, just outside of New Orleans, some wore neckties decorated with images of nooses or the Grim Reaper.

Orleans Parish Assistant District Attorney James Williams, told the Los Angeles Times in 2007, There was no thrill for me unless there was a chance for the death penalty.

Now that's a type of thrill kill that does not usually come to mind when using this term and those noose neckties are condemning of the wearers' mindset.

There is no man so fortunate that there shall not be by him when he is dying some who are pleased with what is going to happen.

Marcus Aurelius, c. 175

The rituals of a last meal and of allowing last words have persisted in this otherwise emotionally denuded process precisely because they

restore enough of the condemneds humanity to satisfy the publics desire for the punishment to fit the crime, thereby helping to ensure continued support for the death penalty.

As LaChance puts it,

The state, through the media, reinforces a retributive understanding of the individual as an agent who has acted freely in the world, unfettered by circumstance or social condition. And yet, through myriad other procedures designed to objectify, pacify, and manipulate the offender, the state signals its ability to maintain order and satisfy our retributive urges safely and humanely.

Read much more fascinating history of the last meal ritual here:

<http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/essays/last-meals.php?page=all&src=longreads>

400 years prior to this execution there lived another executioner.

<http://us2.campaign-archive1.com/?u=1854296747731744c923a33ef&id=eda3719f38>

The Faithful Executioner, a book by Joel F. Harrington, Professor of History at Vanderbilt University, published this year by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Harrington explains:

My book is based on the personal journal that German executioner Frantz Schmidt (aka Meister Frantz) kept during his forty-five years in the profession, from 1573-1618. During this time, he executed 394 individuals by various methods, and also flogged, disfigured, or tortured many hundreds more. This was clearly an amazingly prolific executioner, but what has been even more intriguing to me since my first encounter of this manuscript is the unexpected portrait of Meister Frantz that emerges: a man forced into an unsavory occupation, who appears to never lose his commitment to fairness, forgiveness, and other humane values. The following passage provides the social and legal background for the era of European history Ive called the golden age of the executioner. The chapters that follow then trace the experiences and thoughts of Frantz Schmidt from his own perspective, largely in his own words, particularly his lifelong quest to restore his familys honor and free his own children from his cursed profession.

William Van Poyck, 58, died at 7:24 p.m. local time by lethal injection at the Florida State Prison in Raiford.

Valdes died in his isolation cell in 1999 from massive injuries (22 broken ribs, fractured sternum, nose and jaw, plus bookmarks). No one but guards had access, No one was ever held accountable.

Under Floridas felony murder statute, a felon whose crime gets someone killed is culpable in the homicide so who pulled the trigger is not important. And Van Poyck wrote in his memoir that he fired at the police in pursuit so he could of killed someone else.

Van Poyck and OBrien had done time together, and Van Poyck, a sharp jailhouse lawyer, had made OBriens case his mission. But the law wouldnt budge. So OBrien tipped off Van Poyck from prison about the doctors appointment.

James OBrien went back to prison.

All these deaths for nothing. Tragic.

http://www.cbs12.com/news/top-stories/stories/vid_7980.shtml

Ill be closing up shop and headed home at 6:00 PM with this mans fate on my mind.

Here is some info I researched on the case. It follows a familiar story.

Possessed with an incorrigible, rebellious spirit, at age 11 William Van Poyck was locked up in Youth Hall. At 12 he was confined in Kendall Childrens Home and at age 14 he was shipped off to the notorious Okeechobee Boys School.

At the Florida School for Boys in Okeechobee he was beaten (30 licks) with straps and paddles the punishment repeated if he cried out and hog-tied, drenched with water and left overnight in what was called the wet room.

In January 1972, at age 17, William was sentenced to life imprisonment for a Miami robbery, even though no one was hurt in the crime.

He had a breakdown two years after being sent to adult prison and was put on industrial strength antipsychotic medication.

He spent the next 15 years touring and escaping from Floridas ever-expanding prison system, becoming a certified legal aide and renowned jailhouse lawyer in the process.

Frank Valdes shot Griffiths after he threw the vans keys into nearby bushes to hinder the escape. Police arrested Van Poyck and Valdes after a high-speed car chase.

Williams accomplice, Frank Valdes died in 1999 after a raft of Florida State Prison guards murdered him in his cell. In the subsequent investigative furor, the governor ordered William transferred to Virginias death row. There, he penned and published several books. In 2008, William was transferred back to Florida State Prison.

Frank Valdes shot Griffiths after he threw the vans keys into nearby bushes to hinder the escape. Police arrested Van Poyck and Valdes after a high-speed car chase.

In order to clear a log jam down stream frist stop them entering up stream.

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