

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2017/10/03/voices-from-solitary-what-decades-of-isolation-do-to-the-mind-and-body/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | October 3, 2017

The following account was written last year by Roger Uvalle, who has been in solitary confinement in Texas for more than two decades. He says he has spent most of his life since the age of nine in some kind of institution, and he has been in adult prisons since he was a teenager. He is currently serving a 40-year sentence for aggravated robbery.

Uvalle writes that he has received no treatment for his mental illness since entering solitary, and his mental, physical, and social health have deteriorated. He says that his social anxiety has worsened to the point where he struggles with almost any face-to-face interaction, and he worries about how he will readjust to society when he is released at the age of 58. Uvalle used to express himself with artwork, but suffers from arthritis after years of sitting on the floor, using his bunk as a table.

The reforms to solitary confinement [recently announced](#) in Texas will not affect Uvalle, or any of the nearly 4,000 other individuals deemed security threats by prison staff and held in Administrative Segregation. Uvalle is currently incarcerated in Gib Lewis Unit in Woodville, Texas. He welcomes letters at Roger Uvalle 625717/ G. Lewis Hs/ 777 FM 3497/ Woodville, TX 75990. Katie Rose Quandt

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Im currently in solitary confinement and have been the past 22 years straight. Im also a mentally ill person that has been denied treatment my entire time being in solitary confinement.

I was under treatment before I was locked up in solitary. Up to this day, I dont know why I was taken off treatment and MHMR restrictions. My illness is not curable and it has gotten worse throughout the years. Several times I have attempted to receive treatment but have been denied or ignored. I have even asked doctors and counselors to check my medical records to see my mental health treatments and records. They would tell me that there is no record of my treatments or diagnosis. Thats very strange because I was under treatment for 4.5 years before I was locked up in solitary confinement. Thats a large chunk of records to lose. I was even in two different state hospitals in the free world that should have records of my diagnosis, and in the county jail.

All this time Ive been coping with my illness on my own. Doctors have described my illness as paranoia, schizophrenia, manic depression, and chemical imbalance. I am 43 years old and wont be set free until 2031. Even if I were to be set free now, I wouldnt be able to function right, socialize, or carry out the responsibilities in a relationship as a husband, father, and a family much less if I get out at the age of 58.

My chances of keeping my illness from getting worse have passed because I havent gotten treatment throughout these years being in solitary confinement. And getting older, my brain starts to deteriorate and makes me vulnerable to other diseases that old people experience more commonly.

Right now Im anti-social, have always been; and when I do socialize its very awkward for both of us. Being around people causes me to have panic attacks, paranoia attacks, like some kind of phobia. Ive always had that problem, but its at its worst now.

When I was put on a chain bus last year with about 60 other people, I looked like a ghost. People were asking me if I was alright because I looked pale like a ghost and I was shaking. I couldnt talk or anything, I was like in a state of shock until I was put in a cell. Only then did I feel relief.

I know I would end up in a state hospital as soon as I leave this place to help me adjust to my new environment and keep giving me treatment.

I really cant predict how long Ill live after I come out considering my physical health, how my body is deteriorating because of being in solitary so long. It has affected my body greatly. For the past five years, weve been allowed to go to recreation three times a month on average, because of lack of officers and many lockdowns.

I experience extreme back pains, waist pains, knee pains, neck and shoulder pains on a regular basis probably calcium buildup where

chronic arthritis is building up. I have never had a heavy labor job or anything like that to have these pains and aches, so it has to be from being locked up in solitary for so long. I did 17.5 years in a prison solitary cell where there wasn't a table and seat, so I had to use the bottom bunk as a table and floor as a seat. After the first two years like that, I started to experience the waist and lower back pains, and knee pains. I was only about 27 at that time.

Throughout the years the pains were more often and worse. That's one of the reasons I quit my artwork, I couldn't bear the pain from sitting on the floor for hours of painting and drawing, so I quit. I'm trying to start doing art again but can't concentrate or find a steady hand because of the coldness in this new unit I am in. It has a seat and a table. I've been trying to use that as motivation to start drawing, but it hasn't worked.

It's been a little over a year since I arrived to this unit, and this is the most I've written since I got here. Usually my letters are very short and brief. I'm not a very good writer. I learned to write in solitary because a few girlfriends that were also locked up were writing to me. But when a law was passed that we couldn't write to other prisoners, I quit writing until I wrote a lot of lawsuits in the federal courts over some guards messing with me and wanting to kill me. I filed about ten different lawsuits. Of course I lost them all and was left with a \$1,000 bill.

That's how I learned to write. It seems that's the only kind of socializing I can do. It's extremely hard to socialize with people in front of me or a crowd, which I think will be a challenge when I get out. I just pray I could adjust to that before I get out to make the transition better.

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](#)

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