

Center For Constitutional Rights

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2016/12/23/discussion-should-be-towards-freedom>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The CCR blog

To mark the 23rd of the month, invoking the 23 hours per day that prisoners spend in their cells in the SHU, activists throughout California are [taking action](#) to bring attention to prison conditions. Below Randall Ellis, a class member in CCR's lawsuit challenging longterm solitary confinement, [Ashker v. Governor of California](#), shares his experience of being released into the general prison population after years in solitary confinement, following a settlement in the case, which effectively ended longterm solitary confinement in CA prisons.

I was delighted to be asked about my transition from long-term solitary confinement (SHU) into the general population, and I[am] happy to write a blog sharing some of my experiences thus far.

I was held hostage for 33 years in solitary confinement. I should mention that Ive been incarcerated since the age of 16. However my confinement to the SHU was as a result of the states practice of engaging in status based punishment (that is punishing individuals based on who and what they say you are) as opposed to what one does.

This practice has served as the bases for my and similarly situated prisoners continued incarceration for decades. We must start completely over once were released into the general population. That is to say, I have done 33 dead years. I must now prove that I am suitable for parole starting from scratch, as if I havent just done those last 33 years.

Whats more, I was threatened with having to debrief in order to be released from the SHU, now Im hearing that the parole board is directly making similar demands in order to consider one for parole, giving absolutely no consideration to one[']s victimization and being held hostage to illegal and unlawful practices for more than three decades.

I was honored to stand with the men who finally decided to put an end to this barbaric practice, and having been in the general population for almost a year. It has been an adjustment being able to move around some what freely and talk to different people, and just vibe off the youngsters and their way of life. I try not to be judgmental, recalling that I was their age once and I too was wild out of control and probably hard headed as well.

I have gotten a contact visit, and fortunately my daughter and granddaughters visit regularly and weve been getting to know each other, our first contact visit in their lives!!! My daughter wrote about it on her facebook page. She described it as the best thing thats happened to her in her 34 years on this planet, and it certainly was quite an experience for me as well. Just to see the kind of woman shes grown up to be makes me so proud of her. And my granddaughter is, so beautiful, and full of love. They never made me feel like a stranger to them, it was like we have a special connection and Im papa to them. We enjoy spending time together eating and playing games. Our first visit was amazing, so was the second, and the third, and all the rest. Im so proud of them and my baby girl because she came back for me, and I wanna continue to fight as hard as I can for them.

Im enjoying the sun and am finally starting to get my color back. The twenty-plus years at Pelican Bay had turned my skin into two different tones, so much so that the doctors there had tried to tell me it was vitiligo. They did this with ease and with no regard for the psychological implications of their misdiagnosis. The 10 months of constant sun exposure here has rejuvenated the pigment of my skin and my color is about 98% of normal thus far. I find myself just sitting out in the sun, even at 110 or 115 degrees, just enjoying what weve all taken for granted (sunlight).

Im very appreciative for the legal team bringing their expertise together to help bring about this much needed change. However, we shouldnt be satisfied with just ending longterm solitary confinement, we should and must demand just as forcefully a fair and just parole consideration process as well. Weve done our time, theres no justification for men having been held in these places for 35 or 45 years for things theyve done when they were kids. The discussion should be towards freedom!!

I only ask that folks on the outside just continue to engage. Your support is valuable in forcing men to put aside petty differences and work for the common good.

Dont allow the state slowly to try to return us to the status quo of petty hatred and racial rivalries. Weve shown that we can be and are better than that. Thank you so much for your comm[itment and interest.

Sincerely,

Randall Ellis

[View the discussion thread.](#)

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