

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/01/24/voices-from-solitary-coyote-calling/>

## Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | January 24, 2010

One of the aims of Solitary Watch News is to build an online archive of literature, drawings, and reportage by people who are, or have been, in solitary confinement. These will be compiled in the [Voices from Solitary](#) section of the site, and sometimes featured in blog posts. Readers are encouraged to send in their suggestions.

A reader from Nevada Prison Watch recently told us about the writings of Coyote Sheff, which are now being published by his friends on the outside on a blog, [Coyote Calling](#). Coyote has been in Nevada's Ely State Prison for about a decade, much of it in Disciplinary Segregation. In fact, of the eight units at Ely, seven are in some form of permanent lockdown, where prisoners are held in their cells 23 hours a day, either alone or with a cellmate.

Ely State Prison, located in a remote town in Eastern Nevada, is currently being sued by the American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project for grossly inadequate medical care to its 1,000 prisoners. The [ACLU filed suit](#) after state officials failed to act on the findings of an expert, Dr. William Noel, who was sent in to investigate medical conditions at Ely. According to the ACLU:

In his report, Noel wrote that medical care at ESP shows the most shocking and callous disregard for human life and human suffering that I have ever encountered in the medical profession in my 35 years of practice. According to the report there is a horrific but all too common pattern of neglect, misguided health care policies, and little accountability for frequently under-qualified staff. Noel also noted numerous instances where important medical records were missing from prisoners' medical files. Finally, Noel and the ACLU have raised serious concerns about prisoners who died and were cremated before autopsies were completed and their families notified.

This piece by Coyote Sheff is called [Solitary Enslavement](#).

We sit in these cells like dead bodies sit in cemeteries. Death fills our lungs, fills our minds, fills our hearts and fills our souls as it lurks and lingers and seeps through the concrete. Our minds go numb and our spirits fade into inactivity. We sit here waiting to waste away, erode, dissolve, and disappear into the cracks of the cement.

Solitary confinement. What an evil concept, what a wicked notion, what a clever way to destroy a man without even laying a finger on him. Solitary confinement the murderer of minds, hearts, and souls. The person who designed such an evil conception must have had murder on his mind and hate in his heart.

We die alone in these cold cells, as our hands stretch out to clutch concrete, but fail miserably to hold anything in their grasp other than the death-stench of air. We die alone a lonely, miserable, suffering death. We die alone.

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

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.

i am one of the fortunate few who actually paroled out of Ely state prison rather than exit the way 95% of inmates do, in a bodybag. i was an inmate in solitary at ESP from 2001 to 2005. i was only 20 years old when i arrived in that cold desert town january of 2001. that day will be ingrained in my memory for the rest of my life. i remember stepping off the bus to a c/o yelling at the top of his lungs demanding we all get naked and keep your nose and toes to the wall mother fuckers! we stood in the hallway in reception for what must have been 4 long cold hours. they had the big roll up doors open at the end of the unit and being middle of winter, snow flurries were blowing in, it took everything i had not to collapse. a few people to the right and left of me stumbled backwards and i watched as a 220lb c/o shoulder blocked them from behind slamming their face into the wall exploding their nose cheekbones and mouth. the c/o proceeded to yell again nose and toes to the fucking wall! they told us this is our prison motherfuckers! there is no less than lethal weapons! there will be no warning shot! its all 223 sleeping pills from here on out cocksuckers! i think it must have been 3:00am by the time i got a cell in unit 5 the gang validation unit which would be my home for the next couple years. i was trying to absorb all that had happen when CERT certified emergency rescue team was at my cell door with full riot gear and electric shields demanding that i cuff up, so i complied they moved me to the shower and locked me in and they started searching the property they had just given me 2 hours prior after a quick cell toss one of the c/os came to the shower and demanded i tell him where i hid the shank that i cut out of the plastic property locker they had just given me. i tried to plead my case but eventually caught on that this was their way of letting me know that at ESP the only rules the administration abide by are the ones they make up as they go. i was charged 170\$ for the plastic locker that was previously damaged prior to my receiving it. i'd like to know how much money ESP has made off that one locker? the torture was endless and relentless you'd think solitary alone would be enough to make a man question his sanity but the staff had many tricks to twist and turn the screws. one roll of toilet paper a week, they played that game for awhile. the 3 minute shower clean or not rinsed or not, i made the mistake of yelling to get the water back on because i had soap in my hair. Mr Evans! do you need a longer shower? was that not enough time to rinse your hair? NO SIR! i yelled 4 hours later they removed me from the shower cold shivered coughing because not only did they turn the cold water on but they opened the door to the unit and let 10 degree air blow through while i was locked in the shower unable to avoid the water from hitting me. when the c/o was kind enough to come get me he was holding a picture of my girlfriend he had taken from my cell and he and the other c/os were telling me as they escorted me back to my cell how they would rape my girl orally and gang rape her while one c/o is telling me what he would do with my girl he's licking her picture as we reached my cell the c/o tore my picture in half giving me the top half saying he was going to keep the bottom half so he could later masturbate while looking at my girlfriend's photo. i could write for weeks and not tell the same story twice. after 6 months solitary they send a psychologist to your cell to give you a psych evaluation and every 6 months thereafter and then upon release you get another one. i thought i was a lot better off mentally than i thought i'd be after 5 years of solitary and i was, but it wasn't until i was released that i started suffering from numerous different mental issues. today it's been 9 years 8 months? since i was locked up and i'm still suffering from a number of issues and some are new problems just now coming to surface. each day is a struggle to hold it together even after all these years it feels as if i'm still suffering from the torture from the evil dungeon. i watched so many crumble and violently remove themselves from ESP the only way they had the power too, by hanging or even seen one man light everything flammable in his cell, boxes and boxes of legal mail and court transcripts bed sheets, he lit everything and sat in the middle of the inferno screaming in an attempt to take his life and send a message, how bad do things have to be to want to burn yourself to death? i hope those few stories will help get us one step closer to ensuring that no animal should have to endure that kind of hell

I am adding this blog link to mine, People do not know what goes on in prison. Keep the word strong and loud hopefully it will make a difference.

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