

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | September 30, 2020

Eric King describes himself as a 33-year-old vegan anarchist political prisoner and poet who was arrested and charged with an attempted firebombing of a Congresspersons office in Kansas City, Missouri, in September 2014. King was charged with throwing a hammer through a window of the building, followed by two lit Molotov cocktails. The criminal complaint states that both incendiary devices failed to ignite. King was identified as a suspect by local police because he had previously come under suspicion for anti-government and anti-police graffiti. After accepting a non-cooperating plea agreement, King was sentenced to ten years in June 2016. His release date is October 2023. He has served his time in various facilities of the federal Bureau of Prisons, or BOP.

King is currently facing one count of assaulting a government official for an incident that occurred in August 2018 at the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Florence. According to Kings account, he was taken into a mop closet, out of sight of prison cameras, and beaten up by a corrections officer. The officer then said that King had assaulted him. King has been housed in a segregation cell at FCI Englewood since August 2019, fighting this charge. Overall, King has spent about three years in solitary confinement. He now faces a maximum of 20 additional years in prison. Read more about Eric King here: supporterick.org.

My toilet is right next to my cellmates face, not hyperbolically, it is literally three inches from where he lays his head. I am in the FCI Englewood Secure Housing Unit (SHU) the oddest SHU in the Bureau surely. In this segregation unit, you will get inmates from the Low [security prison], pre-trial people and folks like myself and my cellie who are on writ [having a court case] from other penitentiaries. This oddball combo makes no sense and causes a localized class system, all a part of the psych-ops of this odd rust bucket of a prison.

On August 17, 2017, I was taken into a mop closet by *Super Patriot* Lieutenant. I have been in solitary ever since, 19 months and counting. I learned how bad it can get, discovering new ways they can torture you; mentally and physically. Whether being choked while being held in four-point restraints for seven hours, being held in a cell for four days without a functional toilet filled with someone elses feces, I have seen their brutality and am stronger for it. I hope.

The last SHU I was in before the indictment hit was the penitentiary in Virginia: USP Lee. There is no oversight at these joints. At USP Lee, you have nothing coming. NOTHING. You cannot receive or buy magazines, newspapers, books, radios, coffee, hygiene or pens. You can buy a rubber pencil which shows up horribly on all papers. You are completely isolated, which in my case included a phone ban from a previous SHU and visiting restrictions that were never explained to me. This is a SHU that holds 200 and only had 150 mattresses, many of which have no covering and are just urine-reeking slabs of foam. If you dont stand for count, they take your mattress as punishment. Skip standing a second time and they will take you out and replace your clothes with paper clothes: see-through orange shirt and see-through bikini bottoms. You will be marched up and down the tier while the guard calls you faggot and spineless inmates join in with cat calls and whistles. You will stand next time. If you refuse the new wardrobe, you will get beaten and charged with assaulting staff. This is the BOPs SHU. Resistance is not tolerated and no one will hear you scream. No one is listening.

I was told I would be returning to Colorado on August 10, after a short and glorious four-day holdover at Grady County Jail. The US Marshals returned me to the FCI Englewood SHU where I would learn I was now facing 20 more years for the Lieutenant mop closet incident from over a year ago. They are charging me for my own attack: classic BOP.

I have been in this SHU ever since, seven months as of March 2020. Facing and fighting BOP charges while being held at a BOP facility, in segregation, to ensure any defense will be interrupted and complicated. Let me tell you about my physical existence. It is not pretty. The cells here are the smallest I have ever experienced. I am not certain they could literally get any smaller. 6 x 8 feet double bunked. These cells were built for troubled children in the 1930s. This is not supposed to be a long term segregation unit, and it only becomes such for people like myself. Then it gets really overwhelming and mentally exhausting. Thats the Bureaus game plan; shatter spirit, disrupt, dissent, blame you for the horrors of this SHU, then expect lapdog loyalty when they give out small comforts.

At 6 am sharp, the four-foot-long fluorescent light comes on and will stay on until evening. This light is about two feet from my face and could make even the most level headed person homicidal. Breakfast is brought around 6:15 am, hot oatmeal and a weird cramp-inducing cake, seven days a week. It is at breakfast where you can sign up for your government approved one hour of outside recreation or rec. Rec is basically the same everywhere: one hour of standing in a dog kennel. At Englewood, there is a chain-linked yard so you can at least see the sky and pretend you are hearing birds singing. Going out to rec can be a curse also; we only get showers on Monday,

Wednesday and Friday on my range. If you slip up and work up a sweat, you will be annoying your cellie and birding bathing [cleaning yourself at your sink].

For some ungodly reason, we are not allowed to buy decent soap, toothpaste, body wash, shampoo or deodorant. We used to have that right and after they announced the cancellation of hygiene, coffee and radios from canteen, my current cellie organized a SHU-wide cell barricade, to force them to come and take our stuff. We were not handing away our only comforts. The fear of the administration and high level of boot-licking is incredibly real. People will stab their neighbor over a stamp but won't lift a pinky for their own dignity against the suits and ties. The barricades resulted in a lot of pepper spray balls and weeks in paper clothing. We stood up though, and they remember that, often acting more respectful.

My SHU existence until recently has been overwhelmingly lonely. Starting in November 2018, the gang and terrorism people at USP Leavenworth permanently banned me from the phone after an anarchist website posted updates on my earlier beating. That ban and a visiting ban followed me here to FCI Englewood and stuck. Other SHU prisoners do not have it much better with only one phone call, 15 minute tops, a month. If your loved one accidentally disconnects, tough. After the barricade, I organized a three-person hunger strike to get visit privileges back. Eighteen missed meals later and a lot of pressure from my legal team, non-contact one hour per week visits were restored. On December 14, I got to see my wife for the first time in 16 months. Plexiglass or not, it was one of the best days of my life.

This is a very violent SHU but not in the typical ways. In most SHUs, the violence stems from staff placing known enemies together, then loving the show when hell breaks loose. I experienced that first hand at FCI Florence. They sure love a good battle. Here though, it is ALL psychological and a lot of people myself included for a time had a very hard time handling that. On every Tuesday, the admin (Warden, Assistant Warden, Captain, etc.) will do their walk throughs along with S.I.S. (investigation goons) and your unit team (counselor and such, staff that handle your legal visits and calls, normal visits, transfers). This is your ONLY chance to try and either learn about your situation, try to get out or get grievance forms. In the Bureau of Prisons, our only legal protection against overzealous admins, is the grievance process. You must file these forms to resolve an issue before you initiate litigation. The only person who can give or receive them from you is your counselor.

They have mastered this routine to ensure prisoners in the SHU stay confused, angry, on edge or just broken and give up. You will hear people begging S.I.S. or the Warden to get out, and they being experts, will spin you so delicately that you really believe they will help you. Next week, same thing. Next week, still more of the same. At this point, you are shouting and losing it and they will tell you: *You cant act this way if you want me to help you*, flipping the script. Maybe you realize the games, so you ask your counselor for a BP-8 grievance form. Well, don't you know he is all out but hell be back in a day or two. You will not see him for weeks! Finally, you see him and get a BP-8 but then the next week, he loses the reply. Start over. It is maddening beyond words until you check their game. When you trash the tier or scream, they love it because they are in control. They have got you in this sick web where you start seeking their approval, when all along you never got your issues close to being resolved. But you feel good because they *will look into it*

Another way that plays out is with the mail. In the SHU, you are at their mercy for mail call. There is nothing you can do when you know you have letters. They shamelessly gaslight you with *Sorry, nothing for you. Sure they sent it?* I have been lucky to always get pretty solid mail days when they decide to deliver it. Last month, after weeks of complaining to the SHU Lieutenant about missing mail, trying to convince her S.I.S. is doing too much, the Lt. and Captain went and grabbed a big crate filled with letters and months old magazines from S.I.S. (who claimed they overlooked it).

If you are any sort of activist, S.I.S. will read and inspect every letter. In theory, they still have to follow guidelines and get it to you within 48 hours. This has never happened during my entire sentence. Even with the Captain forcing S.I.S. to hand deliver my mail, my most current letter was eight days old. Mail from my wife and friends will take 10-15 days at least. Isolation as a tactic, cutting you off from the world, making you feel forgotten and unloved and then showing up with a stack of letters saying *See, we arent holding it* result in some people thanking them and groveling. I mark the days and let my lawyers do the fighting for me but they will never get a *thanks, boss* from me!

I have been imprisoned 69 months. 38 of those months have been in solitary (nearly three years of my life), with no let up in sight until after trial in August. I have seen all the horrors you pray never to see: suicides, homicides, brutal beatings, hunger and water strikes, flash grenades and bear mace foam. I have seen floods, fires and prisoners get dropped on their skulls without care or concern. I have seen happy relationships torn to shreds by the forced isolation; seen drugs turn people out of their heads. Yet there are also victories sprinkled in little pockets of life where convicts show true heart and self determination. People standing up even when their fellow prisoners back down. Once you have faced their worst and survived, you have won, they have to work with you now because they cannot step on you. We hold tier poetry readings, keep our family alive with stories, have firm conversations about our worth and power, reinstalling what the system tries to take.

New cats come and go weekly, my cellie and I try to prepare them, get their minds ready for the lies and the dull days and boring nights. I always share magazines and stamps to help people get on their feet and remove the desperation and panic. To let them know they are not alone and give space to express themselves, either with moaning, bravado, singing, whatever. The prison staff wants us bickering and fighting with each other. Classic divide and conquer. We are not having it. I won't allow it.

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

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My son has been in MAX custody for over a year and was in CDU (solitary confinement) prior to that. He is talking about some very unusual activity going on. He is in SMU in Florence, AZ one of the worst SUPERMAX prisons in the United States. I have a few questions if someone wouldn't mind please answering me. Have you ever heard of them doing research on inmates who are in MAX?

Have you ever had or heard of devices being used to read minds?

Have you ever had or heard of heat ray guns being pointed at people from behind a concrete wall?

Have you ever had or heard of a device that vibrates the body and is destroying internal organs?

I am really looking for the truth. Is my son being tortured like this or is he suffering from schizophrenia?

Best Regards,
Charlene

Charlene, a lot of abuse takes place in supermax prisons, but as far as we know the types of things you describe are NOT being done. Solitary confinement is known to make mental illness much worse, and to create psychotic symptoms in individuals who never had them before. We hope your son gets out of the SMU soon and gets the treatment he needs.

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