

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2021/07/07/voices-from-solitary-double-doors/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | July 7, 2021

Ethan Macks, 30, originally of Flagstaff, Arizona, began serving a seven-year sentence in the Arizona State Prison Complex at Yuma in 2018. He was recently released from a ten-month term in a maximum-security solitary confinement unit. In this piece, Mack describes a setup colloquially known as double doors, which in the name of security adds another layer of isolation to the cells in his unit. Sara Rain Tree

The door to my cell closed after I walked in. I put my back against the food trap and the officer began to loosen my belly shackles. Once the lock at my back was released I had to grab the belly chains and turn around with the chains in hand. I was still cuffed and had a handful of chains. This was for the officers protection. Not mine. Next, I shoved my hands through the trap while holding the chain so I could be uncuffed. The officer, at this point, tells me to lockdown. Already behind a closed door, I had to walk through another door in my cell. The second door closes and now the two officers jobs being done walk away.

Okay, so let me paint the picture for you. The type of housing I found myself in at this time was called double doors. I had a regular cell with all the amenities, toilet, desk, and bed. There was a door to this part of my cell. When I looked through the windows of that door I could see the small 6 by 6 cell with a phone in it. Then beyond this little room was another cell door. On the other side of that door is where the cops would walk their walks. So basically, like the name says, I had to go through two doors to get into my cell within a cell.

There are only two ways to get completely out of the cell. When you get a dayroom, you simply get access to the room with the phone in it. The dayroom is inside the cell. Recreational shower time and court are the only two ways you can go past the day room. Even medical sees you through the other side of a door. The hassle with recreational/shower time is that you have to sign up. In order to sign up you have to be awake at 5 am, even before breakfast is served. There is no real system to do this, no alarm clocks, no warnings, just being up is the only way to know. Some choose not to sleep at night in order to ensure they will be alert at the proper time for this. Being subjected to this method of being forced to break up a normal routine to simply take a shower is torture.

Staying sane in such a high level of isolation is purely an unjust punishment. Torture does not describe the better portion of the experience, but definitely covers the whole scope of the indescribable struggle you go through while behind these double doors. Some, if not many, will contemplate suicidal acts during their time in solitary. This seems to be the norm. Though most do not act on these thoughts, you will see people disappear overnight and you know they went to medical watch. On suicide watch, you go to a flat cell with no toilet and no clothes. Believe it or not, there is a special suicide watch for those housed in double doors.

Staying sane is a daily struggle. The only way you can communicate with other people is through the cell vents and toilets, yelling into one of the two trying to get a conversation started with someone else in isolation. Granted, I got to know myself really well, I feel I also got to know other people very well by communicating through vents. I know some very intimate details of some people I may have seen maybe once or twice on trips to the showers. The downside is you cannot prevent eavesdropping and some do dedicate their time to interrupting and messing up someone elses day. Fuck those people.

I found myself in this type of housing for the better part of a year. I did get used to a routine and after a while even found myself enjoying my time alone. Reading and writing kept my mind active and took up hours upon hours of my long days in double doors. I heard stories in there of people who had done years like this. My heart goes out to those survivors that braved the time in a place where you can become your own worst enemy. This is hard time and it psychologically changes a person. Since my time in isolation, I have been moved back to general population. This caused me to go through a hard adjustment where it felt weird to be around other people.

To all my brothers and sisters in isolation, I want to give a word of advice. Stay strong, you are not alone in your struggle of being alone.

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.

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