

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/01/22/inmate-allegedly-placed-in-solitary-for-refusing-to-bribe-guards/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | January 22, 2010

This story by Adam Lynn, about Washington states McNeil Island Correctional Center in Puget Sound, appeared recently in [The Olympian](#). Its one extreme example of the retaliatory use of solitary confinement by prison staff.

The guardians of a state prison inmate who suffered brain damage when he tried to hang himself claim in a lawsuit that at the time he was hurt, corrections officers were accepting bribes in return for granting special privileges. Access to cell phones and unauthorized conjugal visits could be bought, and money was extorted from prisoners who wouldn't pay, the lawsuit says

[In September 2008, Leon] Toney, then 31, tried to kill himself after Department of Corrections officers retaliated against him by putting him into solitary confinement when he refused to meet their bribery demands, according to the lawsuit, which was filed last week.

They knew he might be a danger to himself because of previously diagnosed mental health issues, the suit contends. DOC staff knew or should have known that improperly locking him in solitary confinement would aggravate his serious depression and suicidal ideation, the suit states.

Belinda Stewart, communications and outreach director for the Corrections Department, said Friday that the agency would not comment on the allegations raised in the lawsuit.

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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god thank you and no wise thout is like the mameth no longer in or on this planet or so it seems but realy i was on the pelcan bay site

warden gives his photo his home phone his work phone and oh yes how to get to his home when he is at work and when he is at home is it just me or is that like saying to the inmates hey when you get out the shu come find me we can go out for dinner LOL like umm news flash dumm warden had it coming lol or dose lol like you want billy to drop by to thank you for the 20 years you held him in the shu oh ya he loves you really wants to have dinner with you warden lol then take you to a back street and shoot your ass or the show where they show you the lay out and complete specs of there shu well bet so former inmates just watched that lockup show lol fuck tailing the bus he going to tell his friend how to brake the shu instead lol like sens WTF WTF use your brains lol

To Sandi Meyer,

I agree with much of your comment and you do sound like a compassionate person. I can also believe that you had a circle of coworkers who were likeminded. Now I am not going to make a religious argument here but have you ever watched the Passion of Christ? The point is that abuse of prisoners is timeless and has no borders. We have just taken it to a new level of late in this country.

Read the sad history of such institutions as the Mississippi State Penitentiary, formerly called Parchman Farm, the Tucker State Prison Farm or Cummins State Prison Farm in Arkansas, the White House at the Dozier School for juveniles in Florida and of course Angola Prison in Louisiana. I heard the first hand stories of inmates while I was down there in 1969-70.

Now I can almost hear everyone thinking out loud well of course they were in the Deep South but I can also give you personal accounts of abuse in California.

For instance take the day in 1962 that a guard at L.A. County Juvenile Halls solitary confinement unit took a dislike to a 125lb, 13 year old boy after they had exchanged harsh words. While the kid lay in his bunk later that same day the 250lb guard soaked a towel in urine and rushed into the child's cell and placed the towel over the youth's mouth. The guard then used his full weight to hold the youth down while keeping the towel over the youth's mouth until the child lost consciousness. So desperate was the youth that he tore his sheets in strips, tied them into a rope and asked to see the doctor. When he was being escorted to the clinic he made a desperate attempt to escape. He never but was captured on top of a cell block about an hour later. I believe that there has never been an era where these incidents did not happen. I am sure you have heard of the college study using students that had to be stopped short because even playing roles the guards became abusive. Oversight is the only solution. Oh that youth of which I wrote about was another brother and the cell block that he was found on top of was mine.

Back in my day when I worked for the CA Dept of Corrections, there were correctional officers who were stand-up guys, who were talented with people, and who knew how to keep the prison working efficiently (certainly not now, but back in the 70s). These were guys the inmates trusted to follow the rules, and also trusted to bust them when they didn't follow the rules (however, if the inmates followed the rules, they were left alone!). Everyone knew where these officers stood, and they could not be bribed nor manipulated. In short, they were excellent role models, as well as being excellent officers! The officers of today have no creativity, no sense of duty, no self esteem, and certainly do not have an inkling of managerial expertise. On top of that, they are sadistic and self-centered just the kind of modeling that most of the inmates had as youth before they went to prison! Almost any mother I know could run a prison better. And even those mothers who might tend to say My way or the highway could be counted on to be consistent. I say we replace all the so-called officers with the PTA, and see if we're not better off! After all, this inmate who was so tortured will be back! His family and friends would be foolish NOT to hate the man after this so we've created a whole little army of terrorists. Hello!!!!!! He's not going to be happy when he gets out and gets behind the wheel of a car or dates your daughter!! IS THERE ANY FREAKIN COMMON SENSE LEFT IN THE WORLD? Much as we pretend it's not true, these prisoners are humans, and as humans would actually respond to enlightened leadership (or any leadership!), which would not only make them better, but help improve our entire community!

This hits home because my younger half brother was allegedly hung himself in a California SHU. Now what makes me wonder about the validity of this is after doing 12 years in solitary he was due to be released very soon. He threatened the guards that when he was released he was going to sue them for abuse only two weeks before his death (he was beaten many times). After my brother's death the prison system posted a letter on the door of his bedridden father's (my step father) door and so it was only after the death of his father that we learned that he had died. By then his remains had been cremated and tossed into the ocean. I carry a heavy burden of guilt for not remaining in contact with my brother but he had requested that no one visit him. Only my mother ever did (inmates call mothers the rock) so I believe they knew they could get away with murder. Either way like this man they are responsible for the inmates under their care.

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

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