

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/03/20/voices-from-solitary-live-from-lockdown/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | March 20, 2011

Tewhan Massacre Butler was leader of a New Jersey chapter of the Bloods street gang. Convicted in 2006 under federal racketeering statutes, he is currently serving time in solitary confinement at the U.S. Penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. [Live from Lockdown](#) is Butlers blog, created by [RaiseUp Media](#). In his welcoming statement on the blog, Butler writes: Im currently serving a 30-year sentence that cannot be undone. Here, my life behind bars offers understanding for those of you who venture into the life with no understanding of its consequences: the adversity, the obstacles and the journey one must travel alone when the gavel is slammed, your cell is locked and the lights go out. The following are several posts that recently appeared on Live from Lockdown.

16 March 2011

In a hole, within a hole, inside a prison is where I dwell- the Special Management Unit at USP Lewisburg. Days to nights, nights to dawn. I roll out my rack to the sight of nothing.

How did I get here?, I ask myself. Is there anything I would have done different, you might want to ask. Only a FOOL thinks not. Trouble is in the fact that I am here and what I couldve, I shouldve but didnt

The tiny space I call home allows me a few feet before I am at my door peeking out of a rectangular shaped window that permits a view to a blank tier and adjoining cells. This particular prison was constructed in 1932. Its concealed conditions are inhumane and utterly unpleasant. Anywhere but here, yet this it.

I take the bitter with the sweet and swallow that which destroys me innermore. When I go, will I return? Already I am fearful of the future. The number of those who reenter continues to climb. First, I must make it home.

Wall to wall- hardly enough room to shape my physical I push up as if the weight of the world rests heavily upon my shoulders. When I can go no more, I go further, harder. The associated matters, which modify my course of development provoke me to exert the force within. One of the few positive pushes permissible and, for now, its this or staring at the walls in effort to impede the ever-tightening grip of this unilluminated dungeon.

From down the tier I hear the cries of another inmate. Although I can place no face LET ME OUT!, he wailed. His sanity gone forever. What he was going through I know so well. Had I not been afraid of my cries falling on deaf ears, I too would holler LET ME OUT!!!

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15 February 2011

Rapture

This day I find myself angered, almost to the extent where I set caution to the wind and lashed out never worrying who felt what it was I ached to unleash. Frustration from feeling many degrees below failure.

How did I get here?

This place eating away more and more each day. So lonely, so cold, no house, no home; only a close dark prison cell. Lightless, so far from the free world. You couldnt understand!

The experience steals, without hesitation or delay, the last ounces of sanity one has. We appear intact, complete, whole; in truth, underneath, we are pained, ill, bare fragments of our true self. The damage this place has done is incurable for a lifetime. The mental and physical anguish swallowed shall infest ones rationale through all time.

Am I the same man who walked into this abysmal hole years prior?
NO!

In some bearings better, in others worse. Heaven and hell, point by point, with their established differences driving and dragging me in and out of the knowing. Momentarily, the straight line is there; seconds later, no longer. CRAZED!

Trapped by outside forces. In turn, I cage away the slightest show of emotion I hold. Bottled up, contained so only I know and for now, you.

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27th December 2010

Reality Sets In

Its been four months since I walked into what they like to call the BIG HOUSE- the Special Management Unit (SMU) at maximum-security United States Penitentiary Lewisburg. At first glance I thought nothing of it. Now, as I sit here, all but strapped inside this dungeon also known as a cell, reality is beginning to set in

You will eat, sleep and shit wherever we assign you for the next twenty-four months gentlemen., thinking back on the words spoken by the Lieutenant when I first arrived. When I call your name, you give your number!

Stepping in the front of the single-man holding cage the Officer yelled, Butler!

Quickly, I barked back with the number that had been attached to my name the day I entered the Bureau of Prisons (BoP) 2-6-8-5-2-0-5-0!

After being strip-searched, photographed, and X-Rayed, I was led to what is known to be the worst unit at USP Lewisburg- G-Block. Still, its where I remain.

Roaches. Mice. Peeling paint. Vents that are nothing more than holes in the wall. A pipe that runs directly through the cell provides my heat during this already cold and snowy winter.

In this short period three bodies have dropped, all the result of being forced into a cell with even your worst enemies. Two men, two different walks of life, trapped. Neither dares to close his eyes at night. Panic buttons, there are none.

Cries for help fall on deaf ears in here.

Sanity is my last true friend.

To be ContinuedTrue Story

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9th November 2010

Isolation

Once again I sit here fighting myself to find the right words to describe a place and feeling that is indescribable. A place where we fight to maintain our sanity as obstacles, trials and tribulations are constantly placed before us in an attempt to cripple our social and emotional intelligence.

Isolation never calms the beast, for it is metal massaging metal with a coldness in its tips hardened enough to send chills through the very steel that disconnects us from the free world.

This place is a burial ground for the disenfranchised, despaired and dreadful cries of dead men walking with dreams of reincarnation.

How does one maintain a sense of compassion when all has been stripped away and replaced with concrete, confusion and the most adverse of circumstances?

Some attempt to ease the feeling by marking down the days on their calendar, but what about those who have lost track of time? For their freedom will only come when the reaper marks the night in search of its next victim.

IsolationDo you know of such a place or such a feeling?



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.

Keep writing, I am impressed by your ability to express yourself and convey the conditions of your life. I hope there is hope for you to go back into society. You move others by your writing. KEEP EXPRESSING YOURSELF.

Deeeep!! I can't begin to understand ya Story but, I'm listening and I wish u da best. hold ya head.

yes i do know of such a place in my life shes not as bad as yours but still in many ways the same scars and the same fight i went through there oakhill school my hell that looks as to be a small bit of heaven but i know heaven it is not but a shard of justice it should be i feel your pain and can only say may there be light in the darkness of justice

I have never heard of this man before, but, no matter what, no one deserves this kind of inhumane treatment, cruel/unusual punishment??? Absolutely. What can we do? Solitary confinement must be abolished! Like the death penalty! If he had done something, maybe unspeakable, to my beloved grandbabies, still what would this kind of punishment do for me? Revenge? That would only prolong the sickness and agony in my heart. it would only serve to entrap me in forever bitterness

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Solitary Watch

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