

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/07/09/voices-from-solitary-no-human-being-should-be-treated-this-way/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | July 9, 2012

The following is an excerpt from testimony submitted by the ACLU of Connecticut to the recent Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing on solitary confinement, on behalf of a man who had spent nearly two years at Northern Correctional Institution, Connecticut's supermax prison. With a history of mental health problems, he was placed in the Administrative Segregation Program, where inmates typically spend 23 hours a day in a 712 cell. He testifies about the dehumanizing conditions of solitary, and details witnessing others engaging in self-harm as well as one of his own suicide attempts. Sal Rodriguez

On December 11, 2010, just 8 days after I had arrived at Northern, I was placed on suicide watch. I was placed in Cell 101 on Cell Block 1, in a strip cell, which is no different from a regular cell, save for the top iron bunk bed and the table-stool unit being removed. On suicide watch, we were often left in handcuffs, shackles, tetherchain and pad-lock, for hours and sometimes days on end. The cell was freezing, and it was impossible to properly use the toilet or feed ourselves. After being placed on suicide watch in Cell 101, I was placed on this in-cell restraint status, for 24 hours unprotected.

Shortly after this, I witnessed an incident that traumatized me, and truly impressed upon me the conditions at Northern. In February of 2011, I watched a prisoner as he started bashing his head against his cell door window. That man was suffering and had been completely denied the mental health care he needed; he was depressed and hurt, he needed someone to understand. So it seemed to me then, when he started banging his head, that it was more like a cry for help BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! However, he started to gather rhythm; he gritted his teeth BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! And I realized that he was self-seducating. The physical pain was quickly becoming preferable to the psychological and emotional pain. I watched him in his agonizing bliss as his tears mixed with blood from his wound.

A prison guard had been by earlier and had seen the prisoner hurting himself, but there was no injury then so the guard kept going. Now he stopped; I could tell by the guard's profile that for just a brief second he softened and humanity was coming through, but just as quickly as it came it went, and he walked away as if those streams of blood were water. While he walked past my cell I asked him to help the prisoner he said, It's just a little blood.

In March 2011, I again attempted suicide by hanging. That time, my cries for help were met with a cell extraction. Guards rushed into my cell, beat me, and sprayed mace in my face. Following this, I was taken to yet another strip cell, placed again on suicide watch, in the same mace covered restraints. I remained hogtied in chains like this for 72 hours. A third suicide attempt in May 2011 met with a similar response. On all three occasions, my days-long confinement in the strip cell only exacerbated my mental condition.

At one point, I angrily protested to a corrections officer that no human being should be treated this way. He responded, That's even considering you are a human being.

I saw other prisoners accept this notion that they were, or had been made, less than human, and attempt to end their own lives.

This should come as no surprise. Can less than 20 hours of group programs compensate for 6,807 hours of social isolation and reduced environmental stimulation, as well as the repressive cavity and other search and restraint policies? Is this current curriculum prudent, and in its current state, is it worth the communities tax dollars and resources? Does the said amount of isolation and sensory deprivation pose a risk to the mental health of its subjects, and thereby, the community at large once these individuals are released directly from that tiny cell into your neighborhood? You cannot isolate chaos and expect rehabilitation.

When prisoners are smearing their blood and feces on walls, eating food out of their toilets; when they are swallowing pens, overdosing, asphyxiating, cutting, and hanging themselves, one should begin, at the very least, to do a thorough evaluation to find out what and put in place the reforms needed.

As a man of many mistakes, but even greater dreams and hopes, I am compelled to declare out of the isolation that enveloped me that it is time for institutions like Northern to be reformed. I believe in the American ideals of equality and individual dignity, and I know we can and must do better.

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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September 30, 2022

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September 6, 2022

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Dear reader,

Thank you. All of you. When I wrote this testimony I was in a place many have gone and few survive. But thanks be to Our Creator I stand on free earth, and I am alive. In my spirit. I am engaged to be married on my bride's birthday in October of this year. I am the Co Founder of Hartford Strong. A Hartford based tradesman service that boasts thousands of views and over ten thousand dollars quarterly. I have earned several certificates via local drug rehabilitation program and have helped others turn their lives around. I am working to rebuild my community one brick at a time. I am very grateful to Attorneys Hope Metcalf and Sal Rodriguez for their efforts to shine light into such a chaotic void known as NCI. And if I can give anyone a good word who is going through solitary or has and is still plagued by its memories it is this: there is life. That life is within you. Physical, mental and emotional torture cannot destroy that light unless you will it to. That life is founded upon hope and that hope is light and however dark or deep incarceration takes you you have an obligatory duty to shine that light, shine that light until all of the oil in your spirit for that light is consumed and you go back to the source. God bless you all.

Respectfully and truly yours,
Malcolm Rahmeen
hartfordstrong@gmail.com

I also endured the torturous conditions for two years in northern CI. I was also in administrative segregation during that time. I was often extracted from my cell and beaten and maced and even released a 505 gas in my cell that was meant to control riots. I was often left in cell restraints for 3 days or more. During this time I was covered in mace and unable to eat my food. I had to throw it into my mouth from a cup because my restraints did not allow my hands to go above my waist. The days and nights are full of pain, depression, screaming and banging, and violence. So many suicides. It literally makes you go insane. After 2 years alone and the traumatic and disgusting conditions the world seems warped.

I have a friend whose son Jack Thomas # 665331 has been placed in confinement twice within the month and does not appear to be getting out any time soon. He is on Administrative Confinement now and pending an investigation of misconduct by a Florida Department of Corrections employee. He was recently injured and was sent there for medical care and recovery. Some recovery. This is at a time when the prison cells become torture chambers due to the excessive heat. Cruel and unusual punishment, yes. He is supposed to be there for his protection. If anyone in Florida is interested in helping please email the governor's office. I might add the inmate Jack Thomas is blind inmate and has special needs. Few of those needs are being met. There will likely be more about the case as I plan to get the word out. I am going to ask him to tell his side of the story. He has spent close to 3 to 4 weeks in solitary confinement. Much more to follow. Thank you for taking an interest in those for whom society has little interest in.

Look into your own heart, discover what it is that gives you pain and then refuse, under any circumstance whatsoever, to inflict that pain on anybody else.

Karen Armstrong

At least this can be a visual aid to those held in solitary when they use the exercise court.
Click on the following text in the link and the video will begin at that point.

Recently, we've begun to work with those men who are segregated in what we call Supermax facilities. They've incurred violent infractions by becoming violent with guards and with other prisoners. They're kept in bare cells like this for 23 hours a day. When they have meetings with their review boards or mental health professionals, they're placed in immobile booths like this. For one hour a day they're brought to these bleak and bland exercise yards. Although we can't bring trees and prairie plants and frogs into these environments, we are bringing images of nature into these exercise yards, putting them on the walls, so at least they get contact with visual images of nature. This is Mr. Lopez, who has been in solitary confinement for 18 months, and he's providing input on the types of images that he believes would make him and his fellow inmates more serene, more calm, less apt to violence.

And so what we see, I think, is that small, collective movements of change can perhaps move an entity such as our own prison system in a direction of hope. We know that trees are static entities when we look at their trunks. But if trees can create art, if they can encircle the

globe seven times in one year, if prisoners can grow plants and raise frogs, then perhaps there are other static entities that we hold inside ourselves, like grief, like addictions, like racism, that can also change.

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/nalini_nadkarni_life_science_in_prison.html

On the matter of death penalty justice here is a chilling quote made by Tom Junod in a recent article in Esquire Magazine:

American citizenship is no more a refuge against the attacks of American drones than farflung geography; the secret deliberations of the executive branch count as due process and even due process does not guarantee judicial process

<http://www.esquire.com/blogs/politics/abdurahman-al-awlaki-death-10470891?click=pp>

Indeed no one should be treated so poorly that they lose all hope and harm themselves.

http://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice.html?quote=1385

The following excerpts are from a TED speech given by Bryan Stevenson the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, fighting poverty and challenging racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. Bryan is someone that understands the need for hope and the results of hopelessness.

Mass incarceration, in my judgment, has fundamentally changed our world. In poor communities, in communities of color there is this despair, and hopelessness.

We have a system of justice in this country that treats you much better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent. Wealth, not culpability, shapes outcomes. And yet, we seem to be very comfortable.

The opposite of poverty is not wealth the opposite of poverty is justice.

Death penalty in America is defined by error. For every nine people who have been executed, we've actually identified one innocent person who's been exonerated and released from death row. A kind of astonishing error rate one out of nine people innocent. I mean, it's fascinating. In aviation, we would never let people fly on airplanes if for every nine planes that took off one would crash. But somehow we can insulate ourselves from this problem. It's not our problem. It's not our burden. It's not our struggle.

The politics of fear and anger have made us believe that these are problems that are not our problems. We've been disconnected.

There is no disconnect around technology and design that will allow us to be fully human until we pay attention to suffering, to poverty, to exclusion, to unfairness, to injustice.

I've come to TED because I believe that many of you understand that the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. That we cannot be full evolved human beings until we care about human rights and basic dignity. That all of our survival is tied to the survival of everyone. That our visions of technology and design and entertainment and creativity have to be married with visions of humanity, compassion and justice.

And my own view is that the lack of hope lowers one's resistance to violent impulses.

I would like to suggest an outreach program using the acronym of H.U.L.K..

Hulk's racially neutral image and obvious need to control his violent impulses would make a great mascot.

H is for Hope the first requirement needed for change,
U is for Understanding between the races, race is the primary catalyst for prison violence,
L is for Leadership to promote positive leadership in this regard, and finally
K is for Knowledge the key to anyone's future is known to be through education.

Such an organization is needed to inspire hope where there is now only despair.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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