

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | July 24, 2014

The following two poems come from Ricky Silva, who is currently serving a life sentence at Florida State Prison. Silva, 34, has been held in close management, or solitary confinement, for over four years. Regarding the first poem below, entitled Killed by the Dark, Silva expresses his sadness and anger at the suicide of another prisoner, also held in isolation. He writes:

The poem to go along with this post is dedicated to Johnny Reed who was murdered by the department of corrections.

. . . Johnny was not perfect, but I liked him and neither he nor anyone else deserves to go through what we are going through with this long term solitary confinement.

The poem pretty much says how I feel. I just found this out yesterday so I don't even know what to write. But it is a reality check for me. We are all mortal and I have been real close to ending my own life many times. But Johnny will not be forgotten, at least not by me.

In his second poem, Silva makes a plea for people on the outside to write to someone held in isolation. Of his poem, he writes:

Imagine being so alone you feel you are surrounded by darkness. Having so much to say and no one to say it to. So much love to give yet no one to receive that love.

You want for a normal conversation the way a thirsty man wants for water in the desert.

You want for human contact, any kind of human contact to remind you you're alive.

A letter would be wonderful but it seems all the people in your life who cared have drifted away like a leaf in an autumn breeze. You recognize the wrong you have done and often blame yourself for how bad things are though you know deep down no one deserves this treatment. Not even you.

You contemplate suicide but somehow find the strength everyday for just one more day. You hang on by a thread of hope because tomorrow might be different.

I can tell you when I feel like this, a letter alone makes all the difference. So if you're reading this blog, take time to write a letter. How can it hurt? Even if you don't write to me. Choose anyone who is living in a concrete cage like mine. Write to them if for no other reason than to give them someone to talk to.

Open your heart and through you, you could bring the hope that keeps a man alive from day to day with only a caring letter.

The following poems originally appeared on Silva's blog, [Concrete Cage](#), which is maintained by a friend on the outside. Silva can be reached by writing Ricky Silva, L24722, Florida State Prison, 7819 N.W. 228th Street, Raiford, FL 32026-1000. Lisa Dawson

KILLED BY THE DARK

dedicated to Johnny Reed (died December 2012)

He sat in the darkness, for almost 10 years
Striding forward each day, swallowing his tears
He was not perfect at all, but he didn't deserve this
To rot in a cell, with no one to love or to miss

He was quick to laugh, when he was feeling well
Or to tell a joke, to get us away from this hell
He was a man of his word, this I know to be true
If you gave him respect, he would in turn respect you

But with each passing day, his world became black

The darkness covering a world, he would never get back
Life became heavy, a great struggle each day
depression set in, and would not go away

Than one day the wing became loud, with everybody banging
The guards went to check it out, and they found Johnny hanging
They broke his fucking ribs, trying to pump air into his chest
And then let him die, saying that they did their best

Johnny for what its worth, Im sorry you had to go
You were one of the few in here, I was happy to know
I cant lie and say, it has not crossed my mind
Ive come very close myself, from time to time

You were a warrior Johnny, make no mistake
But even a warrior, has only so much they can take
Just want you to know, you will be missed
Not just another soul, claimed by the darkness

REACH OUT

Beautiful colors dance,
across a velvet sky.
As a waterfall of souls,
waves its good bye.

With a deep breathe of tomorrow,
we live on today.
I was told to pay attention,
but never did pay.

The darkness of the past,
is now taking its toll.
As my pen unloads its ink,
my life slowly begins to roll.

I flush memories away,
though some I badly miss.
Even in a picture perfect moment,
I couldnt picture this.

Stripped of all human rights,
though human we are.
Eating through a metal hole,
or between the likes of steel bars.

Locked away frozen in time,
sometimes even for years.
Laughed at when we cry,
for worthless are our tears.

The holidays come,
and slowly they go.
As we suffer a loneliness,
that makes us feel so small.

We send out letters,
often written in our tears.
And may not ever get a response,
and this is what we fear.

But with that one letter,
in which someone choose to respond.
We have the strength building,
that will allow us to go on.

So if youre reading this reach out,
to someone in solitary.
Write a letter, it cant hurt,
even if its not to me.

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

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September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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Theres updates, beautiful poetry and nearly a different theme in rickys blog, concrete cage. Worth a look

I read the article in the above link and found it to show extreme bias. Important details are left out and found Mr. Silva has been misquoted and unfairly represented in other media too.

Its true that prison culture would require a man to do what he did to do this convicted child rapist; no man Ive spoken to has informed me he wouldve been compelled to do anything else.

This is another case of a person with a lesser sentence being forced into a situation where he or she never leaves prison.

If you are unable to change the whole system, there is at the very least the opportunity to support individuals.

I would encourage readers to find it out the exact physical and mental effects on a person in longterm solitary confinement;

..and remind that more than 2 wk in solitary is internationally recognized as torture.

<http://www.tcpalm.com/news/martin-inmate-cellmate-needed-be-killed-videos>

In the dysfunctional world of prison, waking up to your roommate masturbating while holding pictures of children in your family is deemed a capital offense by most inmates.

In fact not acting against such men in prisons could get you killed.

This interview should give anyone interested in writing Silva some insight into this code of conduct.

Silvas concern for his friend and his moral outrage over his roommates sick behavior shows he has compassion. In such an unnatural environment his action was expected by his peers. That is just the way it is. If we dont like it then we need to change the system.

Even though Ive done time, and my own brother died this way in prison I question the wisdom of following them down the rabbit hole by writing.

Was really hoping to find a reply or 2 to my comment above, so that i could reiterate what Id previously said, for reasons of hope someone, if only one, would take notice of what Ricky Silva va has to say in his work.

I hope everyone else has found the poems as emotive, as profound, and so incredibly raw that they and their messages cant be brushed aside.

He intonates that the lives of human beings hang on by a fragile thread, and that thread will snap shown in his poem dedicated to fellow inmate Johnny who hung himself after 10yr in the darkness.

Its pathetically inadequate to label his poetry as touching. If his words fail to compell at least one person to stop that thread from breaking by picking up a pen, my heart breaks again. You dont even have to include an address; Ricky shows an unselfish nature by making this plea not just for himself but for anyone living in such hellish conditions. Just to remind, you could be responsible for saving a life

we contemplate suicide, hoping that one day will be different..Id implore you to answer the plea, an envelope, a stamp, the few seconds it takes to mail a letter of support, or a card simply expressing love..thats an easy task. How many people have to use the mail anyway? Would one extra letter be all that difficult?

You may want to share some of your own poetry, stories and anecdotes, you may save a mans life

I applaud the sentiment in Rickys poetry, and know, as a letter writer, the power of writing to prisoners, in my case to death row rather than to those in solitary who are in as much need as the guys on the row. I only wish I had the answer to Rickys request to get more people to pick up a pen and write, when so many of us think of this as an outdated, unnecessary mode of communication.

I suppose the only way is to continue to talk and write about its importance and hope to convince a few more.

We are all more than the worst thing we ever did and none of us are beyond human consideration and friendship.

I really like the poems , is true the things u wrote in the poem,my brother went thru that ,suicide himself ,but thank god nothing happen to him,his detained in NC .

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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