

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/05/01/voices-from-solitary-you-are-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | May 1, 2013



The following poem was written by Nicholas Zimmerman, who is currently incarcerated at Attica Correctional Facility in New York. He has been in prison for twelve years, and in solitary confinement for ten of those years. He writes: Since being in The SHU [Special Housing Unit], I have had a stroke, I have been diagnosed with depression and anxiety and I have tried to commit suicide twice, and very often get these thoughts, but I fight really hard to keep my mind! It is very hard to cope, but If I can get help on the outside from all of you reading this! This all can change for me and for many other prisoners like me! Thank you for listening! The poem was provided to Solitary Watch by Nicholas Zimmermans family member Desiray Smith, who works against solitary confinement with the New York [Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement](#). Jean Casella

.....

You are the most profound form of Cruel and Unusual Punishment known to mankind, yet the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution seems to have no effect on you?

You are only 6 feet by 8 feet in size, but your impact is devastating and long lasting.

You are a silent killer, slipping in and out of prison cells late at night to claim your next victim.

You are the Department of Corrections most effective weapon in inflicting mental and physical torture upon its captives.

Your existence is undeniable; you've been around for hundreds of years.

Numerous experts have complained about you for decades to no avail.

You are the cause of my depression, my high blood pressure, my anxiety, my sleepless nights, and my restless days.

I've watched you kill people without laying a hand on them.

I've watched people hang themselves from your support beams within minutes of being in your clutches.

I've seen people slice and dice themselves with hopes of escaping your misery.

And I've also watched the Correctional Officers and Mental Health staff enjoy every minute of it.

You're a Bitch in my eyes; not man enough to show your face and fight me one on one, but coward enough to attack me while I'm sleeping and inject fatal thoughts of suicide into my dreams.

Through lawsuits, maintenance, funding and security, you cause the taxpayers billions of dollars per year to stay afloat, yet they know very little about you and how unnecessary and counterproductive you really are.

Lately, you have been under fire by the media, however. But will this end your reign of terror? Only time will tell.

I've been battling you for the past 10 years and everyday I look at you and grin knowing that you are on your last leg. Your defeat is imminent, but your history will be legendary. Tomorrow you might be a thing of the past, but today at this very minute, as I write these words, you are torturing another soul and plotting your next murder.

And you legally get away with all of this simply because of who you are!

You are

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT!

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

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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I Believe That Mr. Zimmerman was and is a very Intelligent Individual. Who Scared The System With His Crimes. And They Locked Him Up until They Was Sure He Could Not Be A Danger Or Use His Intelligence to Cause Harm and Danger To Other. I Believe He is A Paul Manafort!

@RC, I hear you that a criminal must take responsibility. My question for you would be: what helped you come to that realization? was it years in solitary confinement? I suspect not let me know if I'm wrong!

The problem with solitary is, as the writer of the poem says, that it is both torture AND unproductive. It does not create the conditions for self-reflection and personal growth. We achieve vengeance when we inflict depression, sleeplessness, suicidality, even psychosis on a criminal. We do not achieve correction which is what you are describing in its true sense. A process that leads to change from a self-absorbed, person who blames the world for their condition, to a person aware of the harm they have caused, aware of the needs of others, and willing to act on that knowledge.

That is a real world reason to end Solitary.

The ethical reason is; this man may or may not be a good person, but I am. Ethically I am not willing to inflict torture on this man, whatever his crime. If he needs to be kept out of society do that. If he needs rehabilitation do that. If he needs to do restitution, make him do that. But as we learned in pre-school, 2 wrongs do not make a right. These are my tax dollars, and they are being spent immorally to meet out vengeance. For that reason alone I want solitary to stop. Not in my name.

Nicholas happens to be an innocent prisoner view <http://www.FreeNicholasZimmerman.com> to view evidence. No matter what you crime NO one deserves to be tortured in solitary confinement I can see prison for reform, but solitary makes you crazier and worse off than when you first went into prison! then these same guys/ women are expected to function like normal, productive law-abiding citizens in society upon release? Think about it?? Would you want to walk down the street next to a deranged man that did decades in solitary confinement with no rehabilitation??? Because that's what's going on here!!!

I admire your comment RC, owning up (man up, in today's vernacular), to what it were. I also have been there 1958-1965. Have not been back, nor ever had any desire to do anything placing me in the position to go back (other than smoking some dope).

The man caught me in my shit and I got locked up. I always viewed it as an occupational hazard which I suppose kept me from a blame-the-victim thing. I mean like, if I choose to rob and maim I take a chance on getting locked up and I know the man can do whatever the fuck he wants to do to my dumb ass once he has me on his turf. That's the way I look at it. So (for me anyway), the answer was to not do any dumb stuff that would let the man get me in that position again.

As always as I read the poems and stories of my fellow criminals, I can only wonder. Did they ever stop to think for one minute about the pain and suffering they have brought to the many victims in their lives? I heard the cries of innocence from my first entry into jail in 1966. I even pleaded innocent to the many crimes I myself committed, worked the system and got the deals and played that game. All the while knowing of my guilt and anger because I did not get or achieve my own desires and I would at that time take and do anything to satisfy ME yes it was always about me and my needs, that where beyond my own capability at the time so I became and was a top predator. Because I was good at playing the system once convicted I dropped the facade of not being guilty; I laughed at society for being so stupid; until I realized I had lost everything meaningful to me Children, family and friends I was paying the price of my own choices. Somehow, I learned through study and education, looking really Looking into myself and what I had become (a pure unadulterated piece of shit predictor of the first order) not a nice thing to see looking back at you in the mirror. How much hurt and pain and suffering I must have caused so many. Even in the small theft, no criminal thinks I stole a trinket, which may have been the only memory of some love

one, I sold it for shit No one thinks of the suffering they metered out. Until it is their turn and they start to cry poor me I am suffering, help me.. I believe there is a point that we turn justified punishment into victimization, where that point is I do not know and I believe that is the discussion society has to have I also believe before one need to cry about themselves they need to cry about the victims that they laid waste too I could spend the rest of my life helping others and giving what little I can back to society; and it still will never cover the devastation I did to others around me in my criminal career; that is the reality, so I say from one predator to another, fucking man up, and look at what you caused before crying and blaming others for where you put your own ass

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