

STOPMAX Voices

Solitary Confinement Testimonies

The AFSC's STOPMAX campaign to stop prison isolation and related forms of torture holds up the voices of prisoners in solitary confinement. These prisoners share their stories with us through letters, pictures and calls or interviews. After AFSC responds to the prisoner, selected testimonies are posted here anonymously unless the prisoner has indicated otherwise.

Testimony from Women's Control Unit in FLA
Friday, June 27, 2008

I knew I couldn't just "sit here and pass time" and I would emerge from this abyss unchanged. I had to do something, something different from my first CM stay (where I broke) – I had hung myself and was cut down by my "torturers" – revived and sent to an outside hospital for observation (lack of oxygen and throat damage). I'm lucky I didn't break my neck...

I just knew back then (2003) I wasn't "CM material." I couldn't live like this – so deprived of EVERYTHING because I'm a "needy" person and CM is not a place for the needy – "indeedy..." There were a lot of different factors at play that pushed me to decide to kill myself before they killed me.

Nevertheless, here I am again, back in prison – chewed up and swallowed by the beast who didn't get its fill of me the last 2 times and here I am CM-ed due to prior CM placement and a history that marks an inability to live in open population without disrupting the orderly running of the facility – YEAH! (smile) and being a threat to the security of the institution.

I have been indigent since August and owe \$28.00 to medical.. So I can't get anything to make myself semi-comfortable or (get) the proper food to eat for my Hep. C. I can't get any more batteries, nor can I even buy (wear) sneakers or shorts or t-shirts on cool days...I would be floored if I could eat tuna & drink V-8, listen to the radio, have my own writing paper, a stock of hygienes and whatever is close to a "necessity!" I would love to be able to order stuff once a week, like 66 of the women here (only 4 of us are "poor"). There are only 70 CM women in Florida State prisons. Lowell (here) is the only CM for women. So, I'm one of their Public Enemy #1's

Within a Cage
April 16, 2008

How can you
Lock me in a Cage,
Within a Cage,
For some misdeed done,
Within a Cage?
All you can do,
Is feed my rage.
You can't teach me anything good,
Within a Cage . . .
Except Monsters control the Locks,
And in terror I've lost the keys.
Within a Cage,
I plead and pray,
But it simply gets worse,
Every day . . .
Within a Cage,
Animosity worsens,
Empathy is lost,
And
The Days turn into,
Daze . . .

Within a Cage.

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Family-Reflection

December 31, 2007

“There’s no way I can exaggerate or in any way overemphasize the impact that these last 11 years has had on the total movement of my life. During that time I lost my best friend (my dad) and “watched” helplessly as my mother went from a spry, hard-working wonder-woman to a virtual invalid. In the interim so many things have become clear to me, like the emotional and psychological ripple effect that my bad behavior has had on people I never meant to hurt, my family included. I look back at the person I’ve been and to be perfectly honest, I’m ashamed.”

(11 years; Alger, Michigan)

Scars of Mental Anguish

Friday, November 16, 2007

This person was confined to a “close management” control unit after seeking anti-depressant medication and the possibility to see a psychiatrist.

“I decided to let you know my experience of what may amount to torture, or at least in the public eye, as I am convinced that I bear the scars of mental anguish...I did not eat for ten days due to a hunger strike. While being held as a suicidal [I only received] a shroud of a short blanket for warmth in a freezing cell (suicide alert prisoners often do not receive sheets or long blankets). Over a month elapsed and in that time period I was beaten with the fist by two officers. I was made to stand barefoot on the concrete floor while an inmate shaved my face with electric clippers that shocked my face. I could feel the electricity run from my chin to my earlobe. The pain was excruciating, and my plea for it to stop was met with laughter and threats of reprisal. ...The struggle of survival didn't end there. The next year or more has been met with physical and mental abuse where I had to rescue myself...I sit in a cell the size of a small bathroom with blinds over the window for over a year and the memory of isolation I know will linger...The anguish of incarceration, separation and careless custody and control must be met with a strong mind...because peace of mind they will take...if you aren't exercising peace in the midst of evil.”

I am Dying Every Day

I am dying here every day, mentally and physically. This is happening to all of us. We have been ignored, locked up in the middle of the ocean for years. Rather than humiliate myself, having to beg for water, I would rather hurry up the process [of dying] that is going to happen anyway.

I would like to die quietly, by myself. I was once 250 lbs (17 stone 12 lbs). I dropped to 130 lbs (9 stone 4 lbs) in the first hunger strike. I want to make it easy on everyone. I want no feeding, no forced tubes, no 'help', no 'intensive assisted feeding'. This is my legal right.

The British government refuses to help me. What is the point of my wife being British? I thought Britain stood for justice, but they ... abandoned us [British residents], people who have lived in Britain for years, and who have British wives and children. I hold the British government responsible for my death, as I do the Americans."

Restraint Chairs

March 28, 2007

In the restraint chairs your hands and feet are each shackled, then 2 seat belts are put in an X across your chest. You cannot move except your head. Think of being strapped into an electric chair only more secure. They do not allow you to use the bathroom or eat or drink while you are strapped into the chair. In the intake area there is a row of them- sometimes filled with people. They are on rollers to they may be moved around either while empty or with a human strapped down into them. They also sometimes put a net over your head to keep you from spitting on them, they say.

-Prisoner from Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, AZ

An American Jail

March 19, 2007

I could tell you about the WORST horror stories at the Maricopa County Jail system. They're chaining inmates to bare cement slabs, strapping them into chairs, withholding food and water and the use of the bathroom so they are forced to go in their pants, throwing inmates' unwrapped, uncovered food down on to the concrete floor and leaving inmates in cells with no toilets so they must defecate on the floor with no toilet paper and then leaving the inmates in the cell without removing the human waste.

The abuse at the 4th Ave Jail is so incredible you would not even believe you were in an American jail. There are so many roaches falling from the ceiling at night that when they hit your sheet it sounds like rain coming down...The COs had beaten me black and blue from head to toe while I was passed out dead. I requested pictures of my body to show the black and blue and yellow and green marks all over my body from the severe beating I received, but MCSO refused to document my injuries.

-Prisoner at Maricopa County 4th Ave Jail

Paranoia

March 1, 2007

Paranoia effects everyone, some won't admit it due to ego and pride. Any change in the routine of time – breakfast, lunch, dinner, phone calls, mail, nurses line, shakedowns, store, library, lights on, lights off – can and will cause PARANOIA and have people thinking conspiracy. SuperMax forces people to be creative, deceitful, and show Einstein-like geniuses and craftsmanship that rivals the masters of guerrilla warfare. For the gangsters, lockdown is a time to plan, prepare, and plot their next cross out. Death Row was peaceful compared to SuperMax because on the Row there are no politics and you always know where you stand. In SuperMax you never know. In SuperMax, people bang, flood, start fires, go on hunger strikes, refuse to lock down in showers and rec cages and get gassed by the A-Teams with pepper spray. The cops have masks but the whole pod and cluster choke for 20-30 minutes.

-Prisoner in Arizona, Eyman (I)

Roaches and More...

Thursday, February 22, 2007

I have received 24-7 harassment for 5-6 MONTHS now for complaints about the ROACH infestation problem here to the Govenor and others - they come "CLEAN" my cell with FILTHY mop water about 3 times a week now - they wake me up 1-2-3-4 AM almost everday to give me my mail. My cell has been searched 6 or 7 times in 14 days. It is ABSURD the harassment i am receiving for complaining about the ROACHES and the torn up-worn out ROACH INFESTED trashed bed mats inmates are forced to accept...I have been told it is ADC standard policy to harass inmates that complain about conditions and such - I have been sleep deprived for 5-6-7- months now since I started complaining about ROACHES and such.

-Prionser in Arizon, Eyman (I)