

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT: TREATMENT OR TORTURE?

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The author delivers a harrowing account of the impact that solitary confinement has on the human body and spirit. His story condemns not only this traumatizing practice but also the “powermongers” who control the Pennsylvania prison system.

“Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.”

– Samuel Coleridge.

Agony, indeed. Mr. Coleridge must have been fording a stint in the penitentiary when he chiseled out those bleak lines. Every moke who’s ever experienced time in The Hole can tell you, in a hundred words or less, what total isolation can do to an otherwise sound mind. Some people say it even withers the soul. And I, for one, believe it.

The rigors of solitary confinement are nothing new. Anybody with an active YouTube account can easily discover the horrors of solitary. Studies have been done. Results analyzed. Subjects evaluated. Modern day professionals have even deemed this archaic practice to be torturous, traumatizing. After a few mind-bending weeks of isolation, even time-hardened prisoners of war start to gibber and bray.

But our Commonwealth loves to lock ‘em up anyways.

Hallucinations were one of the hardest things to cope with. Weird voices and strange sounds at all hours of the night. Of course, I could never honestly admit to such an experience, lest I endure those wretched conditions longer than necessary. Frankly, it is hard enough to wrest any measure of peace from my tormentors. Heaven forbid the breadth of misery I would invite by disclosing these symptoms.

“Restrictive housing” is no place for the soft of heart. Such dark and dire straights can be brutal, unforgiving, and will effectively crumble a spirit like tides over sodden sandcastles.

For instance, the meals yesterday were so pathetically sparse that I was markedly hungrier after I ate the tray, rather than before. Unfortunately, those precious few morsels were hard to cherish under the relentless gusts of overhead air-conditioning. The powermongers keep those units set on high, all the better to proliferate our torment.

On a side note, this entire situation is precarious for a man afflicted by petit mal seizures. I am such a man, truth be told, and have endured a convulsive disorder for

over twenty years. But today, I am cordoned to an isolation tank where harsh overhead fluorescents glare nonstop, 24/7. When I come awake throughout the night, however intermittently, a merciless blast of stark lighting will trigger an episode, essentially rendering a perpetual threat to my physical health and well-being.

Consider that madness, and tell me your definition of torture.

Grievances have been launched, arguments have been made, but no reprieve has been granted. The Pennsylvania prison system does not care about health issues, only that the punishment is extreme and insufferable.

The block counselor came by yesterday, and I told him all was well. No point in kicking the hornet's nest, I tell myself.

As the cool kids say: Gotta fake it to make it.

When the in-house psychiatrist pays me a visit next week, I will lie and tell him all is well. Peaches and cream, sir. Feeling great, sir. No mental disturbances here, sir.

Because, let's face it, we cannot reveal the terrible truth. Those alarming revelations would only warrant a longer stay in this chamber of hell. More tests, examinations. Is it really so difficult to see that the treatment is spurring the trauma?

An excellent question, of course.

So, if you happen to be reading this, remember me in your quiet prayers. Remember to be thankful for the sanctity of home and family. Not everyone is so well-off in this world. Not everyone has a quaint remark for all the hard questions.

No, sir.

Because answers don't come easy in the long, lonely hours of isolation. Nor does anything else, for that matter.