

# IF THE SHU FITS

Voices from Solitary Confinement

[www.nrcat.org/if-the-shu-fits](http://www.nrcat.org/if-the-shu-fits)



## Description, Acknowledgements, and Permissions for **If the SHU FITS**

**If the SHU Fits: Voices from Solitary Confinement** shares voices of the survivors of solitary confinement telling their stories. Included are excerpts of letters, blog entries, government reports, and speeches of family members, all organized into a Reader's Theatre Format. The script published here is designed to be flexible, and except in the initial section we have not designated assigned roles. We feel it can be presented in as informal setting as a living room or church committee meeting to a full-blown production in a theatre. You may choose to change the order, to eliminate and/or add material. We have kept this short, as a tool to facilitate discussion of the issues presented and action to be taken. We strongly urge any presentation of **If the SHU Fits** to be supplemented by some sort of follow-up - a panel or individual presentations, or participation in a letter-writing, advocacy, and/or direct action campaign.

© 2013 by **Andy Griggs and Melvin Ishmael Johnson**  
andy.icujp@gmail.com      dramastage1@yahoo.com

**This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.** To view a copy of this license, visit [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/deed.en\\_US](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/deed.en_US).

### **Special Thanks, Acknowledgements, and Permissions:**

First of all, to all the individual prisoners and family members whose voices are represented here, we thank them for their courage and willingness to let their experiences be told and shared. This is their play!

**Dolores Canales and Irene Huerta of California Families to Abolish Solitary Confinement (CFASC).**  
[www.abolishsolitary.com](http://www.abolishsolitary.com)

**Earlean Anthony of Dramastage Qumran.** [www.dramastage-qumran.org](http://www.dramastage-qumran.org)

**Laura Magnani**, Director of the Healing Justice Program, **American Friends Service Committee.**  
[www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

**Bonnie Kerness**, Coordinator of the Prison Watch Project, **American Friends Service Committee.**  
[www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

**Laura Markle Downton** and the staff and board, particularly **Virginia Classick**, at the **National Religious Campaign Against Torture.** [www.nrcat.org](http://www.nrcat.org)

**Elizabeth Hailey** and the board of **Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace.**  
[www.icujp.org](http://www.icujp.org)

**Gordon Clint** and **Barbara Leighton** for their description of their visit to the Immigration Detention Center beginning on page 14. Permission for use granted.

**Jean Casella** of **Solitary Watch** particularly for the information from their PowerPoint, Solidarity 101 (including the voice of Herman Wallace). License for use granted. [www.solitarywatch.org](http://www.solitarywatch.org)

**Christina Fialho** of **Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC).**  
<http://www.endisolation.org>

**Human Rights Watch** for the use of the video *Growing Up Locked Down*. Permission for use granted.  
[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

# IF THE SHU FITS

## Voices from Solitary Confinement

Compiled by  
Melvin Ishmael Johnson and Andy Griggs

Commissioned by  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
and  
Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace

Partially funded by a grant from Fund for A Just Society of the  
Unitarian Universalist Church

© 2013 by Andy Griggs and Melvin Ishmael Johnson

**This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/deed.en\\_US](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/deed.en_US).**

**READER**

My name is Sean Swain - Mansfield Correctional Institute - Ohio. All I have is this pen, this paper, and the truth. I write to you as a survivor of torture soon to experience more, in hopes that you will use my account here as you see fit to shed a light on the use of torture in the United States.

**READER**

Within a Cage  
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.

*@ JRF 2008, 4/16/2008 Posted by Naima Black*

**NARRATOR**

Solitary confinement is the practice of isolating inmates in closed cells for 22-24 hours a day, virtually free of human contact, for periods of time ranging from days to decades. In Oregon, long-term isolation units are called Intensive Management Units (IMUs); in Pennsylvania, they are called Restricted Housing Units (RHUs); in California and New York, they are Security Housing Units or SHUs. California and other states also use another euphemism, Administrative Segregation. Despite the variety of names, the general practice of incarceration in these units and facilities are solitary confinement. Let's see if the SHU fits.

**ALL**  
**August 12, 2012. Short Corridor Collective Announces**  
**Agreement to End Hostilities**

**NARRATOR**

Representatives of the California Hunger Strike issued a statement today calling for an end to all violence and hostility between different groups of prisoners throughout the state of California from maximum security prisons to county jails. The statement asks prisoners to unite beginning **October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**.

**READER 1**

We can no longer allow CDCR to use us against each other for their benefit!! Because the reality is that collectively, we are an empowered, mighty force, that can positively change this entire corrupt system into a system that actually benefits prisoners, and thereby, the public as a whole.

**READER 2**

We simply cannot allow CDCR/CCPOA- Prison Guard's Union, IGI, IGU, OCS, and SSU to continue to get away with their constant form of warehousing of tens of thousands of prisoners, including the 14,000 plus prisoners held in solitary confinement torture chambers for decades!!!

**READER 3**

The people have the power to change things now.

**READER 4**

Know this: Our spirit and resolve remains strong and we know we can count on you all!

**ALL**

Together we can make it happen, not only for ourselves, but more importantly, for the generations to come.

**READER 1**

Torture is unequivocally unacceptable under any circumstances. But what has been unfolding in the SHUs is a systematic use of torture by the state for years and decades.

**ALL**

Torture of both minds and bodies ---

**READER 2**

Of many thousands of prisoners ---

**ALL**

To break them.

**READER 3**

To either have them die in long-term solitary confinement or be driven insane through the psychological torture of years and decades of isolation.

**ALL**

With the Utmost Solidarity, Love and Respect - Onward in Struggle, Pelican Bay State Prison ***Short Corridor Collective***

**READER 1**

Arturo Castellanos, ***Short Corridor Collective***

**READER 2**

Antonio Guillen, ***Short Corridor Collective***

**READER 3**

Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa, s/n R.N. Dewberry,  
***Short Corridor Collective***

**READER 4**

Todd Ashker, ***Short Corridor Collective***

My name is Todd Ashker. They'll never let me out. I'm going to die here, I know that. But I have a choice. I can slowly rot or I can fight. Fight to change things.

**NARRATOR**

**The Road to Isolation**

**READER 3**

My name is Sitawa Jamaa, s/n R.N. Dewberry. By the time I reached age 22 in 1980, I was falsely convicted of a murder I did not commit. I was sentenced to serve life in prison for first-degree murder. A series of violent racial wars broke out within the California prison system and numerous of my fellow Black prisoners were being stabbed, shot and killed on a regular basis. On June 19, 1982, I was faced with a life or death situation to become a causality of war during a racial riot (war) or become a beacon to my fellow (Afrikaan Brothers) prisoners and defend myself and my people.

**READER**

My name is DeAndre Williams. I am being held illegally in Prison (solitary confinement) in Malone, NY. In 1997, I was arrested upon false charges brought by my ex-girlfriend. At the trial, I had a seven count indictment and was forced to represent myself against a biased judge and two district attorneys. The judge submitted over my objection, assault 2nd degree as a lesser included offense after the evidence was closed and after closing arguments. I was acquitted of all seven counts and convicted of assault 2<sup>nd</sup> degree and sentenced to 25 years to life. I was transferred out from the Westchester County jail to Riker Island in NYC where they had me jumped and my nose broken. I was then sent to Queens House of Detention where I was stabbed in the eye and beat in the head with a phone by a C.O. resulting in loss of hearing in one ear and seizures. All of this was done to keep me isolated and in a state of hopelessness, so that I would do what the authorities wanted.

**READER**

My name is Hector Gallegos - Pelican Bay State Prison. The heat inside the bus was as stifling as the tension which lingered in the surrounding atmosphere. As the bus roared angrily down Highway 101, the trance inducing drone of the big diesel engine lulled me into reflections of my life. Memories that had soared past me like the scenery flying by outside the barred, tinted windows of anonymous Grey Goose and as swiftly as the life I had led thus far. The restless dismal chimes of shackles and chains broke me away from the melancholy spell I had fallen under, and there followed the sudden realization that the world of oceans, mountains, and landscapes would all soon be but a memory of another lifetime. Looking around me I found myself not to be alone in this realization, for the other prisoners there seemed to be entertaining similar thoughts, but no one dare speak of them. What awaited us at the Pelican Bay SHU with its eerily silent corridors was a purgatory of sorts, a vacuum of uncertainty, sealed off from every thing and every one. A place where one is virtually entombed in a concrete vault with scarred and pitted walls depicting the idleness, boredom and, in some cases, the lunacy of a previous occupant. It's a world of its own where, for most, refuge can only be found through a dreamless state of slumber.

**(Cont.)**

There is a look in the SHU prisoner's eyes that is haunting. A foreboding look from eyes that have themselves stared into the eyes of madness and human cruelty. Eyes that have looked far into the abyss of emptiness. Eyes belonging to a species of a lesser God.

**NARRATOR**

Pelican Bay State Prison is a supermax prison in Crescent City, California explicitly designed to keep California's alleged "worst of the worst" prisoners in long-term solitary confinement. It takes its name from a shallow bay on the Pacific coast, about 2 miles to the west. The prison lies in a detached section of Crescent City that is several miles north of the main urban area. Prisoners in the SHU are there for varying lengths of time and are placed there for varying reasons. If one has committed a specific crime or breaking a prison rule, he is given a determined amount of time in Administrative Segregation. But for those who have been accused of gang affiliation - also known as "validation" - their sentence is open-ended or indeterminate. Often the only way for them to get out of the SHU is to "debrief" - or name others who have gang affiliations.

**READER**

My name is Luis Esquivel, Pelican Bay State Prison. I've been in here 15 years, and if you knew for what, it would make you sad, and I don't want that for you or anyone. I was once asked why I didn't like to talk about this place or solitary confinement and well, I say it's because if I share it with you, it's like letting you in into this world, and what I experience here you would also live that and I wouldn't want anyone to experience solitary confinement. I'm 44 years old, I have been in prison 17 years. You might be asking how I end up in solitary confinement? Well you see most of the time is by people having tattoos or drawing certain stuff of each race culture and by other people fabricating lies to benefit themselves and by that I mean lies about other people which end up in solitary confinement and once you're here it's difficult to get out and that's how I ended up in solitary confinement. Good night and thank you for listening.



### READER 3

My name is Sitawa Jamaa, s/n R.N. Dewberry. KDK (CDC) has held me in solitary confinement for the past 28 years for my political beliefs and spiritual morality as a **"New African Revolutionary Nationalist" (NARN)**. If I undergo their "debriefing," to which I have refused to do for the past 28 years, and shall not change my mind!!! I ask myself, "What weight does customs hold under the law?" For though it may be termed "debriefing," using a euphemism does not change what it is: betraying a confidence, committing an act of treachery for personal gain. Considering how our community in the U.S. was brought into being and considering the command and control needs which existed from the 'get-go,' if any community has a historical aversion to stoolies, tattlers, rats and the like, isn't it ours? Therefore, I shall die before my tormentors (KDK(CDC)/U.S. government) turn this freedom fighter into a debriefer. **I shall never be found among the broken men of my era!**

### NARRATOR

This is the reality of isolation.

- **NOTE: Herman Wallace** Audio and Picture projected upon the screen as the video is played.  
<http://audio.theguardian.tv/audio/kip/standalone/world/1334585861759/5478/gdn.ps.120416.hermanwallace.mp3>

### NARRATOR

Herman Wallace was a courageous fighter for justice, a political prisoner who this system locked up in conditions of torture, in solitary confinement, for 41 years. On October 1, 2013 Herman Wallace was finally freed after a federal judge ruled that his original indictment in the killing of a prison guard had been unconstitutional. Three days later, on Friday morning, October 4, 2013 Herman Wallace died of cancer in New Orleans. He was 71.

### READER

My name is DeAndre Williams. **Food for thought.** Sometimes I feel as though I'm walking through a cemetery of lost souls. Seeing as how almost everyone around me is either already dead; in the process of dying or simply withering away like a corpse left to rot away in some decrepit grave with the name and epitaph erased away. This is where I am force to dwell.

(Cont.)

In the abyss of shame - weary and full of frustrated rage and soul wrenching pains from prolonged battles that start anew -night after night and day after day.

#### READER

##### **The Torment of Isolation**

I never seen the sky, or felt the warmth of the sun, or breeze pass by me, the trees and grass or a rain drop, I never knew how painful it could be to be denied nature itself. I had a small narrow window which does not open, but all I could see was brick walls and nothing more. I remember from those brick walls was a small plant growing from within the cracks of the brick, that was my only part of nature that gave me hope.

As the wind would blow against the leaves of this plant, I would actually close my eyes and pretend this very wind was blowing against my face. I know it sounds crazy, but it was the only part of nature that I had. Then one day I could not stand it and I so desperately need to feel real air, so I started to scrape the seal from the window with my finger tips, I was determined to make an opening. For three months of every day I scraped and scraped where my fingers bled, but I managed to make a very small opening and I only had room to place one side of my nose against this opening at a time and I would take such a deep breath where I was finally able to inhale a very small amount of air but it was all I needed in order to survive. The officers there felt sorry for me and they would bring me a paper and a pen to keep myself busy with being I had nothing and there is where I started to doodle on paper and from there was how I became an artist. I never in my life knew how to draw, I couldn't draw a heart to save myself, but after three years of the madness of being locked like an animal instead of letting it get to me I put all my pains on paper and before I knew it I had art!

***The author of this letter (name unknown) is a 45-year-old mother of three who was housed in the segregation unit of a New Jersey prison.***

**NARRATOR**

Over 80,000 prisoners languish daily in some form of segregation in U.S. Prisons, and 25,000 of these inmates are held in supermax prisons – facilities made up solely or mostly of solitary cells.

**READER**

My name is Toby Chavez. New Mexico Penitentiary. Living life in solitary confinement has been the most horrendous experience I have had to endure in all my 43 years on this earth. I have been in prison for 15 years, 13 of them in solitary confinement. Solitary confinement is designed to dehumanize, cause a person to become dependent, and spiritually break an inmate to the core of his soul. Each and everyday that comes and goes takes a piece of humanity away from me to the point, I don't really know who I am. The lack of human contact I have with other inmates is like being thrown into a black hole and completely forgotten! I haven't been able to hug, kiss or hold a family member in over 14 years! I'm not able to receive visits from my wife or have any type of real quality time with my loved ones. I'm stuck, alone and have very few words I can speak with other human beings. I'm forced to eat every meal, exercise, and play games by myself. I laugh at myself sometimes because it's the only voice I can hear. My own shadow has literally become my only friend. If and when I get the opportunity to speak with my wife, mom, or loved ones, I have to put on a mask with a smile, because I never want them to see the monster I'm becoming by the psychological damage created by solitary confinement. I live each day contemplating death, throwing in the towel and just calling it quits. A person can only take so much loneliness.

**READER**

My name is Martin Bibbs – Pelican Bay State Prison. **A view from the SHU.** The SHU on the mind is like drowning or being caught in quicksand when you first realize your plight, you fight fruitlessly with all your might to save yourself. But at some point you realize that your fate is irreversible and your ultimate demise only a matter of time. So you let go, hopelessness sets in, believing no one can hear you, no one will help you and no one cares. You are so mentally worn out and emotionally exhausted that you cannot even help yourself! That sense of helplessness is the final distress that befalls a long-term SHU

**(Cont.)**

prisoner before the cruel and stupid sadistic part of it all begins the descent into madness. SHU syndrome now is when you begin to live and adapt to the distorted world of the SHU. In order to survive, exist one must distort his mind to make an abnormal existence normal! It's the vision of reality. As you must adjust your eyes to light, to bring into focus that which is around you. So must a SHU prisoner distort his mind in order to bring into focus, his new reality. One cannot hold onto normalcy. For normal in an abnormal world is craziness! This fact is the battle of a SHU prisoner's soul. The death grip of sanity! The irony of it all is that for a SHU prisoner to hold on to his sanity, he must embrace - accept his insanity. It has been said for hundreds of years that those whom the gods wish to destroy first they drive mad! That is the SHU objective. But, there are no gods amongst mortal men, only the Spirit of Christ Jesus.

So no one has the right to drive another human being to madness - deliberately by any means! Yet the casualties of the SHU are numerous. Hundreds of SHU prisoners have been driven mad, stir crazy, by long-term SHU isolation, and although not directly, but indirectly all society has contributed to those atrocities. For it is your votes and your tax dollars that feed the SHU machine that destroys men's souls. Love, kindness and compassion are the nutrients that feed to giver more than the receiver!

I/we don't ask for reprieve of my prison sentence, only for compassion and release of the mental torture of long-term isolation.

May your heart be full.

**READER**

My name is Darrell Burnett—Pelican Bay State Prison. Despite the mental, emotional and physical challenges of enduring life inside these concrete tombs, based solely on the politics of paranoia and presumption of guilt, my spirit remains undauntedly resilient. Free and strong. I too consider myself progressive and being warehoused inside these modern dungeons for almost four decades does not define my identity nor personhood. I reject the dehumanizing, demonizing and denigrating labels of language that marginalizes my worth as a human being to be no more

**(Cont.)**

valuable than a chimpanzee or other captive species imprisoned at the city zoo. While reading your four guiding principles that represent your core values and tradition, I could not help but think of the life legacy of Dr. Martin L. King and the upcoming celebration to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the march on Washington. He once said

**READER**

"Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle. The tireless exertion and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

**READER**

On many levels Dr. King would be disappointed; especially when his own life and legacy has become so marginalized as if he was a new age Santa Claus. He is only relegated to the, ***I have a dream speech***. He is portrayed as less critical, less challenging, less provocative. He would probably feel betrayed by some of the men who stood shoulder to shoulder with him. But now misuse his name for personal gain and ambitions. No one ever speaks about his position on war, poverty, and hunger. He would be disappointed at the indifference, lack of tolerance, mistrust, fear mongering, economic inequalities, mass incarceration, economic disparities, homelessness, torture, senseless wars, racial profiling. I think we honor his legacy by continuing his unfinished work.

**NARRATOR**

What about the families of those locked up in these tombs for the living dead? How does being isolated from their loved ones affect them? Many of them do continue the work.

**READER**

My name is Irene Huerta and I am the wife of Gabriel Huerta, my husband has been in Pelican Bay Prison for 28 years, and I stand here as a proud wife because he endured all 3 hunger strikes. I told him that CDC was not going to budge and let us continue the fight. Here we are continuing the fight. And I want to thank all of the families.

**READER**

My name is Marie Levin. My brother is Sitawa Jamaa who is in the SHU in Pelican Bay. Today is day 24 of the historic Hunger Strike of prisoners held in solitary confinement. The five core demands are just human things that you and I would respect: End group punishment and administrative abuse; abolish the debriefing policy and modify the gang status criteria; comply with the U.S. Commission recommendations to end long-term solitary confinement; provide nutritious food; create and expand constructive programs. Who would not want a person locked in solitary confinement to have a program that gets them acclimated to the public? We stand together on the outside as they stand together on the inside.

**READER**

My name is Alex Sanchez. Thank you to all the families members who are here that have loved ones inside of the prison. I would like to say that in 1993 there was a truce among the gangs. We know that getting people involved to do violence prevention in our communities have to come from people who used to be part of the problem. Support the Agreement to End All Hostilities in the prisons of California.

**READER**

My name is Georgiana Williams. My oldest son was in the SHU at Pelican Bay. You worry day by day if your child is OK. You can't visit them because they are so far away. They can't call you. All you can do is write them. You wonder if they are alive or dead and the only thing I can do is pray.

**NARRATOR**

In the top 50 of the 250 plus immigration detention facilities across the United States, on any given day, 300 immigrants are held in solitary confinement. Most of these detention centers are privately run. This is Ana's story. Ana is a victim of sex trafficking, and instead of protecting her, the U.S. government detained her in a county jail contracting with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). She was unable to contact her daughter and male guards abused her - taking away her mattress and forcing her to sleep on the cement floor of her cell while she was in solitary confinement. Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC) ended her isolation

**(Cont.)**

and abuse by connecting her to a volunteer visitor who visited her for a year and a half, an attorney, and her 8-year old daughter. Ana eventually received a T-visa for victims of human trafficking, was released after a year and a half in confinement, and lives in the United States.

**READER**

"U.S. immigration detention is built upon a system of isolation, not only because we rely on solitary confinement more than any other democratic nation in the world, but also because the system legally deprives immigrants of any connection to the outside world. Ending isolation starts with ending the practice of solitary confinement." *Statement of Christina Fialho, Co-Founder and Executive Director of CIVIC*

**READER**

On Friday, October 11, we drove 130 miles from our home in Newbury Park out into the desert. We were invited to tour a modern corporate prison and detention center located along the old 20 mule team route to Death Valley. We turned off highway 14 at California City Boulevard somewhere north of Mojave.

**READER**

The landscape there is a vast dry valley of sand, desert rock and creosote bush. We could see a dark patch of green, perhaps 20 miles away, which was the small town of California City. Further beyond the town, before the far ridges, were some long white rectangular structures that stood out from the desert terrain. This was the California City Correctional Centre, owned and operated by the CCA – Corrections Corporation of America.

**READER**

When we walked into the pod for solitary confinement, called the SHU or secure housing unit, we saw two tiers of locked cells behind a locked chain link corridor. Instead of tables and stools there was open space with a desk for guards and one Lexus Nexus computer encased in its own cage. As the warden explained the labels on some of the cells (AD SEG), some of those locked up started whooping and yelling for attention. We weren't able to meet with any of them. We were told that some are in solitary for their

**(Cont.)**

own protection and others because they are a threat to other people or the prison. They said that detainees in solitary confinement must be reviewed every 30 days.

**READER**

Overall the massive infrastructure seems carefully designed to warehouse humans, separate them from their families and deport them as a commodity in a very successful business model. According to Forbes.com, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) earned \$430 million in 2012 from contracts to imprison non-citizens. The total cost for immigration enforcement last year was \$18 Billion.

**NARRATOR**

As part of a report done by the Heartland Alliance National Justice Immigration Center and Physicians for Human Rights, entitled Invisible in Isolation: The Use of Segregation and Solitary Confinement in Immigration Detention, investigators spoke with a detainee at the Oakdale Federal Detention Center (Louisiana) who was held in solitary confinement for nearly eight months without review. Guards told him they "could hold him as long as [they] wanted" and that he was not going to be released from solitary confinement. The man was never found guilty of violating a facility rule, but was kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and placed on a no-meat diet to accommodate his shellfish allergy. He ate "more peanut butter sandwiches than [he] would care to remember" and began to feel weak after a few days.

**READER**

The man told investigators that he was occasionally denied recreation time because of an emergency in the facility. He claimed that the criminal inmates would get to make up recreation time, but immigrants would not. While he was held in solitary confinement, he regularly requested to go to the law library because he did not have an attorney. He found that the library had no materials on immigration law, and the last time he visited, the library had no books at all. He filed multiple complaints to both facility leadership and ICE staff, and would regularly speak with an ICE officer informally when she visited the facility. The officer told the detainee that "she would like to help, but she was told that her job was not to question policy."



**READER**

My name is Sean Swain. All I have is this pen, this paper, and the truth. I write to you as a survivor of torture soon to experience more, in hopes that you will use my account here as you see fit to shed a light on the use of torture in the United States. The fact is, when you give your passive consent for your government to torture anyone you have relinquished power to your government to torture everyone. Your government subjected me to torture. I'm first. You're next.

**READER**

During one retaliatory stint in segregation, I learned of **Torture Cell 182**. I do not know the name of the man who was in that cell, the cell next to mine. He spoke only broken English. His cell had no bedding. He had no clothes, no toothbrush, no soap. The temperature was uncomfortably cold for me with all my clothing and wrapped in a blanket, so the victim in **Torture Cell 182**, to keep from experiencing hyperthermia, had to pace 24 hours a day. All night, all day. For days. 18 months later, I was punitively transferred to Toledo Correctional, where I was harassed from the moment I arrived. Within months, in retaliation for documenting retaliating and contacting the appropriate authorities, I was placed in segregation "under investigation." I was knocked unconscious when, hand cuffed and defenseless, I was used as a battering ram to open the steel door leading to segregation. I was left unconscious, my clothes cut off with a Xacto knife, naked in a "Suicide cell." I came back to Mansfield Correctional in 2009 and was placed on the gang list for my religious belief. I was not taken to segregation. Instead, I was taken to a row of cells hidden behind the medical clinic. The cell I was placed in had no bed, no mattress. I had no pencil nor pen to notify the outside world of my treatment. No toothbrush, no shower, no recreation. My food was served in small Styrofoam containers that held only starvation rations. The cell had no heat, and I could see my breath in the early morning. Just like my neighbor long ago in **Torture Cell 182**, I had to pace 24 hours a day to stay warm, I could not sleep. I survived. Since September, two other of the state's victims have not. I do not know their names, but 2 prisoners have died on Torture Cell row since I was fortunate to be removed from there. They died, perhaps

pacing the same cold cement floor that I paced, hour  
**(Cont.)**

after hour, day after day, feeling ten thousand miles  
 in the mouth of a graveyard. Their deaths were  
 investigated by the same officials who tortured me. I  
 now face the rest of my life at Supermax, locked in a  
 concrete tomb, dying in complete isolation. I have  
 been approved to be transferred to this torture  
 facility by **psychological professionals who affirm  
 that I am sane enough to be driven crazy.**

**I Shall Not Die**

I shall not die a thousand deaths of compromise  
 Giving up names in exchange for food or blanket.  
 I will bite my own arm to smother my screams  
 And rob you of the satisfaction when you disassemble  
 me. I shall not die shamefully, my chin against my  
 chest, kneeling before the humiliating hole I dug  
 for myself, waiting upon the pistol shot. I will  
 always refuse the blindfold. I shall not die abandoned  
 and alone obliterated from the memories of those  
 I love. My fate never questioned. Someone will always  
 stand in the rain outside your office window,  
 my name on a cardboard sign.  
 No matter how many times you cut my throat  
 or hang me from my own bed sheet, Bludgeon  
 me with your night stick or fire your bullets  
 into my brain, whether you encircle me in a  
 South African Bantustan,  
 Or a coca cola factory in Bolivia,  
 Or alley behind the stonewall,  
 Or a prison in the heart of it all,  
 I shall not die.  
 A million times-  
 I shall not die.  
 You will only get my corpse.

Because I spoke out against injustice, my government -  
your government is going to purposely and methodically  
 destroy my mind and disassemble my personality, over  
 the course of years and decades. My name is Sean  
 Swain. All I have is this pen, this paper, and the  
 truth. Please remember that I lived.

**NARRATOR**

U.S. prisons hold more than three times as many men  
 and women with mental illnesses as are held in mental  
 health hospitals. 8-19 percent of U.S. prisoners have  
 psychiatric disorders "that result in significant

functional disabilities," while 45 percent of supermax  
**(Cont.)**

residents have "serious mental illness, marked by symptoms or psychological breakdowns." In October 2011, the United Nations chief torture investigator called on UN members nations to ban nearly all uses of solitary confinement in prisons, warning that it causes serious mental and physical harm and often amounts to torture. Juan Mendez, the **UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment**, presented a written report on solitary confinement to the UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee, which singled out for criticism the routine use of supermax isolation in the United States. Mendez stated:

**READER**

"I am of the view that juveniles, given their physical and mental immaturity, should never be subjected to solitary confinement. Equally, in order not to exacerbate a previously existing mental condition, individuals with mental disabilities should be provided with proper medical or psychiatric care and under no circumstances should they ever be subjected to solitary confinement. My recommendations are, first, to see if we can have a complete ban on prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement. And I more or less arbitrarily defined that as anything beyond 15 days of solitary confinement, meaning someone being confined to a cell for at least 22 hours a day."

**NOTE: JUVENILE VIDEO - *Growing Up Locked Down* (3:24)  
<http://www.hrw.org/features/growing-up-locked-down>**

**READER**

What are some of the alternatives to solitary confinement? And what can we do right now? Begin the reform of the classification system using the **Mississippi Model** where the reform of the classification system led to the significant reduction of Mississippi's solitary confinement population, including the transferring out of approximately 800 supermax inmates at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. Rather than leading to an increase in problems, there were significant decreases in violence.

**READER**

Support mental health alternatives to solitary confinement in jails and prisons, including individuals and group therapy, regular access to psychiatrists, substance abuse counseling, specialized psychiatric service units, discharge planning, and community reentry assistance.

**READER**

Implement training for correctional officers on how to respond to individuals experiencing psychiatric crises in ways that de-escalate rather than escalate these crises.

**READER**

Inmates should not be placed in isolation longer than 72 hours.

**READER**

Impose a seven-day limit on supermax stays for inmates being investigated for in-prison crimes.

**READER**

Stop the brutal "cell extractions" of uncooperative and often mentally ill inmates.

**READER**

Use "informal sanctions" to discipline unruly prisoners, like taking away commissary or recreation privileges, as alternatives to solitary confinement.

**READER**

Create an Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) consisting of local volunteers who perform inspections of the facility and submit an annual report.

**NARRATOR**

A quote by Fyodor Dostoyevsky to remember, "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons."

**READER**

My name is Robert Stockton, this is my poem, *Living Tomb*.

**READER**

Suddenly we found ourselves without the world's care,

where the cold and desolate embrace our stare.

**READER**

Through endless mazes we walk in chains,  
and with each passing day it seems less and less  
strange.

**READER**

With a will not broken, tested with time,  
we send words to our loved ones, "We're doing just  
fine."

**READER**

There's nothing to compare it to but small personal  
lies; we do anything to keep away needless tears in  
their eyes.

**READER**

New rehabilitation as a castaway, whether young or  
old,  
means we're tossed into a place with no hope to hold.  
To escape, we walk circles under a steel screen trying  
to find a way to kiss the sun's beam.

**READER**

We stand alone arguing what to do;  
no one really knows the pressures we stew.  
Rules come and go, changing direction like the winds;  
when you think you've found comfort, a new struggle  
begins.

**READER**

Some stand agitated at their back of their cells;  
some scream out insane in broken up yells.  
You may have a glimpse of what we all see  
or a mental picture of a soul who's not free.

**ALL**

But no one can really see behind the gray walls that  
loom,  
or walk where we walk, embraced by a living tomb.

**THE END**