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Subject : Life in Solitary Confinement

I came to prison at the age of 17 for stealing money from a congressional campaign I volunteered for. While serving a 3-year prison term I wrote a letter threatening George W. Bush. The feds took this prank and transformed my life forever sentencing me to 21 years in a maximum security federal prison. I was thrust as a near child into the waiting arms of terrorists, gang bangers and Mafia types. I was 19 when I saw my first in-prison homicide. I was 19 when I experienced my first robbery. Once the inmates stole my property without reprisal they decided to extort me. I was told to call my mother and ask for money and I was reduced to tears when she informed me she would let me die before forking over \$50 to extortionists. I went to the correctional officials for help and they did little more than get me labeled a snitch. The final insult was when the inmates decided to sexually assault me by beating me relentlessly until I submitted to the rape. This went on for months and the kid in me died. My soul left my body, my heart turned to stone and the blood in my veins turned to

ice. One day one of my tormentors entered my cell to stick his penis in my rectum to humiliate and abuse me and I struck him in the head with my fist until he collapsed and continued to beat him until he was a bloody mass of flesh upon my floor. He lived. I went to the Special Housing Unit and the prison staff viewed me warily. I was then determined to be meaner than anyone else. Over the next 2 1/2 years I stabbed, beat, choked everyone who entered my cell or challenged me on the recreation yard. I was recruited into a gang and tasked with hurting enemies and informants. An artist in brutality I became until one day as I looked into the eyes of a man I was steadily stabbing his fear touched the humanity left inside me weak as a dying ember in my heart. As if struck by lightning the anger, hate and resentment inside me was extinguished and replaced with guilt and overwhelming despair. What had I become? It didn't matter, my behavior had earned me a place in solitary confinement at the supermax in Florence, Colorado. This place was described on 60 Minutes by

a former Warden as a clean version of hell and he was right. Cold, sterile, and foreboding this place has long stretches of silence broken explosively by use of force teams, fires, concussion grenades. The staff are pleasant but indifferent. They don't care if you live or die. They don't care if you suffer. They have zero empathy and view the Constitution with open contempt. A man can lose his mind spending every day in a concrete shell devoid of human contact and social interaction. Eventually you come to realize you were sent here to die and absolutely no one cares what happens to you. That knowledge leads to suicide in some, homicide in others. Without hope men are savage beasts. I think suicide will be my end but not before I tell the world my story. I don't seek sympathy for I chose to become a monster. But I was once a sweet kid who was merely a petty thief. It was the penal system that taught me hate, violence and depravity. By taking who I was and subjecting me to the very worst of human nature I was evolved against my will into what I am today.

I no longer seek to hurt others, only to die to escape this nightmare that has been inflicted on many others like me. I am the result of the "Tough on Crime" experiment. America must come to realize that brutal retribution in meting out justice is a recipe for disaster. As for me I stopped living long ago. While my heart still beats my mind is a dark void inside which lies horrible thoughts. But still somewhere in that darkness lies a tiny light, the light of compassion, love and empathy. I do not know what will become of me but I fear it will be terrible for me and for many others. I am broken beyond repair. But the world must know that what is done in these places is terrible and consequential in ways I believe society and politicians never fathomed. A society is judged by how it treats its powerless, and if so what happened to me and so many others deserves nothing but shame in the final judgement of us all. If there is a tomorrow I hope it is bright. I thirst for the light, for love, for happiness even as I reside in the dark valleys of American Justice.

Steve