

- The Slight of Solitary -

An essay on the prison experience by S. Kohut

I am currently confined to a 10 x 8 x 8 ft concrete cell. I can come out of this cell 3 times per week for 1 hour of "recreation" in a fenced cage that is actually smaller than my cell. The only "perk" to this recreation period is the ability to breathe fresh air. Fresh, clean, free air - one of the "little things" I took for granted prior to my incarceration.

Either before or after my recreation periods I am allowed a 15 minute shower. Other than that, it's me, my meager possessions (a few books, writing materials, toiletries & clothing) & a whole lot of cold, hard concrete.

The housing unit I live in is one of the most secure in the country & was built with divisiveness in mind. There are 12 "wings" that consist of 4 or 5 cells in each wing. We are considered the incorrigibles, the "bad boys," the worst of the worst.

The administration at this institution would probably lump me into one of those categories but I would disagree. I'll admit that I'm controversial & of the criminal element but I'm just being myself & living my life free of ~~outside~~ external persecution.

This is my third stint in this housing unit in the last 2 years.

The first round (10 months) was for assaulting another inmate. The second round was for investigation over a murder (4 months) that I had nothing to do with & was cleared of. This time (1 month & counting) is because six razor blades & a letter ^{were} found in my cell. I'll most likely pull a year on this one.

Solitary Confinement can do one of two things to a person: it can either break you down or make you stronger. I believe the effect it has on an individual is dependent upon (1) the strength of their mind & (2) what they do with their time.

(2)
Solitary breaks the spirit of a lot of people. They are hope because their situation is dire, their surroundings are stiff and their passions are merged. I've seen it happen to many people over the 20 years I've been in & out of prison.

When a person is alone with their thoughts & they know not ^{what} to do with the ample "free" time they have, they sometimes begin doing things that are out of character.

These things are stark full of men who storm mad day & night. They kick & bang on their doors & toilets. They spit in their own faces & show themselves to deterioration to a point that they are unable to return from. The only thing left for them is a handful of medication to try to keep them under control.

Me? I feel stronger. I accomplish every minute of every day with things that make me a better, stronger, more intelligent human being.

I work at & do Celestines stuff
day. I read non-fiction educational
books & magazines. I write poetry,
articles, Short Stories, essays &
people who travel, or never, write
back. I know how to do Blitzy
Contentment & thrive in situations
that are specifically made to break
me down. Each time I am placed
in Blitzy I come out better. What
it is meant as punishment on-
ly serves to improve me. Kind
of like, "If life hands you lemons,
make lemonade." I sometimes feel
as if I dwell in a lemon orchard.

I do not mean to paint the
picture that I enjoy Blitzy or
to take away the hardships of these
living conditions. It is rough &
I by no means enjoy it, however,
what choice do I have but to make
the best of a bad situation?

Before I began this essay I
wondered to myself if I would
be able to survive what Blitzy

Confinement is really like. I can explain it & I can describe what things are like, but to know what it's really about, to actually understand this life, you have to live it. You have to hear the screams, see the degradation, feel the loneliness, smell the stench, & touch the cold, unforgiving concrete.

An individual can understand the concept of Solitary, & mentally try to envision what it's like, but conception & reality are sometimes separated by a large margin. Until you experience this sort of Confinement for weeks, months & years... you cannot understand it!

I put the word Solitude in the title of this essay because I am able to find Solitude in these types of settings. I am at peace with my self, am comfortable with my thoughts, & enjoy my own company. I'm not sure that many others in my position would use Solitude as a definitive

for this sort of confinement, but
they are not me.

What can I say I'm just
at working hard. -E

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Saw no more victims at
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