

**Solitary Confinement:
My Typical Day as a Teenager in the Box on Riker's Island**

4am. The c.o. is walking the tier, taking a list of whoever wants to go out for recreation later. I'm supposed to softly knock on the cell door as he walks by, to let him know that I want to go outside. If anyone speaks or yells to alert other people who are sleeping, the few who did knock will be burned for the day, no rec. I never did make it outside.

5am. I'm jolted awake by the sound of the c.o. banging her keys against the steel door of my cell. The feed-up slot pops open and she drops a plastic tray on it. If I'm not quick enough, she'll close the slot and I'll miss my chance to eat. She knowingly smiles at my predicament as I walk hunched over and embarrassed, trying to conceal my morning wood. Breakfast is lukewarm brown slop called "birdseed". There's a white gelatinous film over the top of it. It's disgusting. I eat it all, along with four slices of stale bread and an eight ounce carton of milk. I'm still hungry. I slide the tray out under the door when I'm done. Large roaches clean the tray of any morsels.

6am. Just standing at the door with my face pressed against the 5"by18" vertical pane of glass, waiting.

7am. I spot the morning shift c.o. walk in the block. I start yelling, "45 cell on the shower"! I then hear a number of other guys yelling their own cell numbers for the shower list. I have to turn around and stick my hands out behind my back thru the feed-up slot to be cuffed. The cell door slides open. The c.o. grabs my arm and walks me to the shower cage. I'm locked in the cage still handcuffed. I have to turn around and push my hands thru a slot in the cage to be uncuffed. I ask for a razor. I try to shave with no

mirror, using my fingers as a guide. There's no shower curtain. My naked body is in full view of at least two dozen cells on the two tiers across from me. Most guys try not to look, they fear being called gay.

8am. I'm watching the guys being escorted one at a time out of their cells for rec. I would never want to go out there, just to pace around a cage set next to other cages, where entertainment consists of spitting on each other. Plus, they have to get strip searched before and after going out. As a 16-year-old boy, I still find the strip search process truly dehumanizing. Going through it before and after visits is enough for me to feel truly violated. It consists of stripping off each piece of clothing one at a time for the c.o. to check until I'm completely naked. Then I have to open my mouth, show my gums, stick out my tongue, run my fingers between my gums and teeth, lift up my arms, lift my testicles and penis together so he can see underneath, then drop my testicles while still holding up my penis, turn my body around so that the c.o. is looking at my back, lift each foot behind me and wiggle my toes, then bend over at the waist while using my hands to pull apart my ass-cheeks, exposing my anus, then I have to cough three times while the c.o. stares at my anus. That is what I have to go through before every single visit. That is the process before each visit both in solitary confinement and in general population. I've had my body stripped naked and examined like that hundreds of times.

9am. I try to read a book. It's hard to focus with the sound of my neighbor kicking the wall over and over again. That's his version of rec. At least he didn't rub his feces on the wall again. That smell was terrible.

10am. That damn lunatic is still kicking the wall and shrieking hysterically. I can no longer ignore him. I curse his family through the air vent over the sink, saying the

worst possible things I can think of. I just want him to curse back so he can stop banging the wall.

11am. I'm enraged, stressed, and have too much energy to burn. I do 200 pushups, 200 squats, 100 jumping jacks, and burn calories with my hand. I don't feel much better. I'm starving and have a headache.

12pm. Lunch. Liquid mashed potatoes that slides thru my fork with some kind of nasty shriveled up sausage and stale bread. I'm so hungry that the stale bread tastes like the most wonderful birthday cake. I ask the c.o. for toilet paper. I ask every c.o. I see for toilet paper as I can never get enough. They only give out a few sheets at a time. Why can't I just have a whole roll instead of just a dozen squares? Anyways, I'm so hungry all the time that I can barely shit.

1pm. A kid across the gallery from me has his arm in the feed-up slot and refuses to pull it back, a desperate act of protest. The c.o. breaks his hand by smashing it with a heavy-duty walkie. The kid's cell opens, two c.o.s and their supervisor run inside it. They beat him savagely. Punching, kicking and stomping his body, then spraying him with pepper spray. They leave him writhing and crying in pain on the floor of his cell without ever calling medical.

2pm. The kid with the broken hand squirts a mixture of feces and urine from a lotion bottle under the cell door, hitting one of the c.o.s that beat him earlier. We are all yelling and cheering him on for his tenacity. Then we are all screaming and cursing as six c.o.s storm his cell and beat him unconscious. They drag him away by his feet, leaving a long crimson stain of blood behind him.

3pm. I'm full of rage, stress, and built up energy. I do 400 pushups, 400 crunches, 200 jumping jacks, and burn more calories with my hand. I don't know any other way to expel this tension.

4pm. Dinner is cold spaghetti with tomato sauce, rancid sweet potatoes, and stale bread. I devour it all. I'm still so hungry. Damn, now I won't receive any more food until breakfast. There's no commissary in solitary.

5pm. That wall-banging asshole is taking a nap. I kick his wall for 30 minutes straight. Revenge for this morning, I want him to know how it feels.

6pm. The noise in the block is starting to hurt my head. It's a non-stop cacophony of a hundred raging voices all day from about 7am. I drink some water and look out the window at the East River. Through all the filthy dust covered steel mesh I watch the Manhattan skyline as the sky darkens.

7pm. About a dozen of us are yelling to each other out the window. We take turns roasting each other. Then we team up and roast the adults from the floors above and below us, as well as from the building across from us. Some of them are in the box like us while others are in general population. It's no wonder they violate our juice with feces.

8pm There's a lull in the chaos long enough for me to write a letter to my girlfriend. Fantasies of a life we might have, yet will never be.

9pm. I go thru a third explosion of build-up rage, stress, and energy. A third round of excessive calisthenics and hand love, at this point the amount of exercise is doing more harm than good. I'm losing weight every day. What else can I do?

10pm. The four of us that share an air vent exchange stories by yelling thru it. Most of it is probably made up. We don't care. A good story is better than a real one.

Girls, videogames, violence, drugs, money, houses, cars, sex, and whatever else our damaged teenage minds can conjure up to pass the night.

11pm and late into the night. The conversations become more localized. We go from screaming between 12 people to loudly talking between four, to lightly speaking to the one person on the other side of the vent, and the conversation becomes more private and truthful. Friends are made and our suffering is shared. At some point way late into the night, the cell lights are shut off and I lay down to sleep. 179 more days to go.

Experienced by John Katehis.