

# Torture in Pelican Bay State Prison SHU.

In November 1986, I was taken off the General Population yard of Old Folsom and placed in the newly opened Security Housing Unit (SHU) of New Folsom. The reason I was given was that there was a confidential memo in my C-file that connected me to a so-called prison gang.

As I later found out under appeal, there was no such memo in my file, but by this time, there were already a few other memos from "debriefers" that would take the place of the non-existent memo.

I was told that if I wanted out of SHU I would have to confess to all the illegal activities I had ever been involved in in my life, and I would also have to inform on and incriminate others. This is called "debriefing".

In January 1990, I was sent to the SHU at Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP).

Is there torture going on here at PBSP-SHU? Most definately, yes! But it's not the kind of torture that's easily spotted or proved to exist. Nobody's finger nails are being pulled out with a pair of pliers; nobody's flesh is being burnt off with a blow torch; nobody's on a rack having their bones broken — in fact, nobody's even being water boarded, (at least not that we're aware of). What's going on here at PBSP-SHU is a psychological torture.

My dictionary defines torture as, "the act of inflicting excruciating pain, as punishment or revenge, as a means of getting a confession or information, or for sheer cruelty."

While other prisoners can come to the SHU for a variety of disciplinary offenses — even assault and murder — and have a set SHU term for them (three to five years in the worst case scenarios), many of us are here solely for "administrative" reasons (non-disciplinary), and we're here indefinitely — which means till we parole, snitch, die, or go insane.

The conditions here are well documented in the case of Madrid v. Gomez, 889 F.Supp. 1146 (N.D. CAL. 1995), in that we are, "... severely deprived of normal human contact ... conditions in SHU amount to a 'virtual total deprivation, including, so far as possible, deprivation of human contact'." (Id. at p. 1230). Unfortunately, this court stopped short of holding that the conditions were unconstitutional — but then again, it was only considering cases where prisoners had only been subjected to these conditions for about 3 years. Now, here we are, and we've been here over 20 years, and nothing has changed for the better.

In fact, now we have the "Short Corridor", where about 200 of us have been isolated from even

the rest of the SHU. The visiting schedule has been impacted by the creation of this "Short Corridor", making it even more burdensome for any family or friends who may visit, many of whom travel close to 1,000 miles to get here — and the actual visit is only for an hour and a half!

You see, regardless of any written policy or goals of the institution about fostering family bonds and ties to the community, just the opposite is true. This institution wants to ~~break~~ as many ties and bonds to family and community that it can. It's all part of an effort to apply even greater pressure so that the prisoners who haven't broken yet, do break and become "debriefers".

The latest tactic has been to turn up the stopping of our personal mail. Our family and friends are sent threatening, menacing notices that accuse them of "promoting gang activity", "circumventing mail", "third party correspondence", "unauthorized business dealings", or sending "contraband", and they are not even told that they can appeal it — let alone how to go about appealing it. It's not even pointed out to them why or how these conclusions are reached. Our family and friends are made to guess at what it was they said for staff to accuse them of such transgressions. They shouldn't have to guess.

We, the prisoners, are then left to appeal these mail stoppages, and that's when we're hit from a different angle of trying to get all our appeals in in a process where we need to appeal within 15 working days, but then we can only submit one appeal every 7 days. So it's a battle just to get your appeal in without having it sent back for any number of reasons; and in effect, placing you beyond the time limits to appeal.

But even if your appeal does make it through, it's sent to the Institutional Gang Investigations Unit, the very unit that stopped the mail in the first place. And the 3rd level of review merely rubber stamps the denial.

This is all designed as an effort to frustrate and disrupt any and all bonds we may have with family and friends on the outside. It's very hard to carry on a conversation through letters when the mail is continuously stopped. Many people on the outside just decide to stop writing rather than endure the frustration.

Many people may not know what it's like to be isolated for so long, the way that we've been here, and I would say that it's like being locked in the trunk of a car with just enough weather stripping removed so that you can breathe, and with enough food

and water stuffed in every day so that you can physically survive. You're soon going to realize what it actually means when it's said that we're social beings. You're going to crave social interaction and human contact. Soon you'll be hollering out the cracks of the trunk to see if anyone is out there, "anyone" who you can at least talk to for even a brief time. Just like that Pink Floyd song says, "Hey you, out there beyond the walls, can you hear me?" And yet everytime you talk, everytime you act like a human being and interact with other human beings, you're told that that's gang activity and you have to stay another 6 years now before your next review.

A book was found in my cell on 12/8/08, that my neighbor had let me read. It had his name and number on the book cover. This same neighbor also shared with me some pages from a Readers Digest that someone had sent him — the jokes section. These pages also had his name and number on them. It was concluded by staff that, "A friendship with a validated gang member proved through this lending and borrowing personal property solidifies the association with the gang itself." My next review will now be 2014.

Now let me say this, there are many of us who can endure this and much more — to the very end, hasta la puratita muerte! But you know what? It

doesn't make this existence any less "sorry". It's a sorry existence no matter how well you can endure it. I myself can, if I let myself, get lost in my own little world within the trunk of this car, reading my books and drinking my little pulque. I myself can, if I let myself, become "comfortably numb". But that's sorry, and so I've got to struggle in whatever way that I can.

The US is under the jurisdiction of the United Nation's Convention Against Torture (CAT), and under CAT torture includes "...any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted..." Using indeterminate total lock down to extract confessions is torture by international standards, as is the use of prolonged solitary confinement.

And here we are, we're being tortured!! We're being held in prolonged solitary confinement, trying to break our bonds and ties to family, friends and community in an effort to extract information from us, in an effort to make us "debrief".

There's this giant junk yard over here in Crescent City, full of hundreds of wrecked cars, one stacked on top of another, and there's "human beings" locked in each of the trunks — can't you hear us?

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