

ISOLATION

I'm a man that's currently on display in this subculture of humanity; otherwise known as "The Concrete Zoo". This is a place that's within, yet completely out of the scope of what most know as society. One where the mental abuse that is isolation causes many here to digress into an almost animal like state of being. Sadly many of the adult males, some who were once men, and others that were never taught how to be men, lose their will to fight what seems like a losing battle. Not having the spiritual & mental capacity to withstand the onslaught to their senses that comes about as a direct result of prolonged isolation. So, many release themselves into a state of conformity. They accept the lie that them being housed in cages merits them acting & being treated like animals. Without even realizing that they're doing so, they embrace that role. Inside the Segregation Building one feels even more trapped than when they are out in the prison population. There's never a time when people aren't screaming & shouting. The aura in that place is so dark & heavy that it literally feels like an anchor has been tied to the core of your being, pulling your soul out of your body leaving a shell of your former self to remain in a cell until it rots and dies. Bloody tears flow from soul as I pray after witnessing the pain & despair in the eyes of broken hearted men. Men whose Hopes & Dreams have been lost in the maze that is the Court System; Minds battered with ever changing policies & procedures; Spirits crushed under the weight of bricks & steel; Potential forever lost in time passed due to lengthy prison sentences. That's just a peek into the world of ISOLATION.

A few weeks before my son passed away last year I took a job that changed me in way I never knew were possible. On this job I've been humbled, wearied, strengthened, and frustrated, along with a number of other feelings. In a word I've been BROKEN! Not like an object in need of repair, but in the sense of being stripped of any superficial beliefs I had about people having an innate quality of goodness. Initially I thought the job would be simple due to its description. Basically I would have to keep the building clean and maintain the stock of supplies needed to operate the building. I prayed about the job before taking it because I had no desire to be in that building under any circumstance. After receiving an answer I took the job; having no clue of what I would be in for. Believe me when I say that since taking that job I've been stretched in uncomfortable ways that produced growth within me in areas where I never knew I was lacking. That caused me to see & think about things in a way that I never had before. For years I couldn't sleep without Lavinia being close enough to me to hold her. I thought about a hug my sister KaShonna gave me over 25 years ago after I taught her to read the book A Kiss For Little Bear, and how good it felt. I closed my eyes and I could smell Blue Magic grease and feel my mother Susan holding me between her legs as she combed my hair. That memory is replaced with the feeling of my maternal grandmother Essie's warm, wet thumb wiping cake batter off of my face after I had licked the big spoon clean. With a sorrow I can't explain I feel the warmth of my son Antwiane Jr.'s body laying on my chest listening to my heart beat so that he could fall asleep. Each of those accounts involve physical contact of some kind with a love one. Rarely does one grasp the importance of a moment until it's gone. My son's death taught me to value, respect, and appreciate each moment that I'm blessed to have because it could very well be my last. Thank you son! Even in death you're still lacing me with knowledge. Why didn't I see the closeness of my sleep with her as a place of comfort rather than just a sleep habit? How could I have neglected to appreciate the power in something as simple as a hug? Why didn't I realize that the firm way my mother held me to comb my hair was an expression of her love for me? How could I have known I'd miss a saliva covered thumb so much? Rest In Peace Granny Goodwitch! Who knew that the heart that my son once listened to in order to fall asleep would be pierced through with pain after he passes away at age 16? Rest In Peace Ah-Jeau!

Those are questions I never entertained because I took for granted how vitally important touch is; and that I would always have those levels of closeness at my disposal. It wasn't until I saw the horrible effects that isolation has on the guys in seg. that I began to seriously think. I thought about all of the times that I had been fortunate enough to enjoy the often taken for granted blessing that is Human Contact, and why I never saw the importance of a simple touch. Prison is a very isolated environment. Even with so many people housed in these places, loneliness is felt more than any other emotion. That feeling is intensified when a prisoner is placed in the seg. building for the purpose of disciplining them. Across the nation Prison Systems blatantly ignore how crippling & debilitating extended periods of isolation can be. By definition Isolate means: To set apart or cut off from others. When a person is stripped of the ability to be social and placed in an environment where physical contact is none existent (with the EXCEPTION of physical abuse) something inside of that person is damaged. Isolation is without question a direct assault on mental health. The twisted irony is that most seg. buildings are known by the acronym H.S.U. which means Health & Segregation Unit. Being in a state of isolation will re-fashion a persons' perception on life. It makes one so paranoid that even the simplest things are over scrutinized. Unconsciously that behavior carries over into relationships with love ones; causing some of them to deem the relationship not worth the "Drama". Therefore, many of them walk away never knowing or understanding the ways that being isolated has changed the person they once knew & loved. Even in population we're still isolated, and forced to deal with this harsh existence alone. Letters, phone calls, and visits are nice for those that are fortunate enough to receive them; But many in these places never get any of those things. I've come to understand that nothing can replace instant access; the ability to reach out to someone you can trust with the matters of your heart in the moment that you need them most. That was never more evident to me than after my son passed. I've spent countless nights in tears grieving for my baby. I have an continue to do it alone because this situation has cut me off from others, leaving me alone to deal with my thoughts & feelings. Thankfully I haven't been consumed by my loss while in this constant state of isolation. I know that it's only because of God's love, grace, and mercy that I haven't lost my mind, and I still know who I am. Unfortunately there are so many in seg. that have lost their God given identity. I remember shortly after taking the job that I was asked to clean a cell. The moment I stepped into the cell all I could do was close my eyes & pray. I prayed for strength, for the man that had been in the cell, and that the images before me wouldn't hold me hostage. I can't explain it, but you could feel the weight of darkness in that cell. Feces & blood had been used to write hate filled words all over the cell, and to draw giant pentagrams with the numbers 666. I spent over an hour in that cell power washing it with a coworker, and was drain beyond belief when we finished. I was so weak that I couldn't process all of the questions that my mind was saturated with. When I saw the man that was in that cell later that day, he looked me in the eyes and said, "Twon I don't know what happened to me! That wasn't me! It was like I had no control of myself!" Then he apologized for me having to clean that cell. All I could think was Ephesians 6:12. If I could I'd paint a word picture so you all could see & feel what I saw & felt, but I can't. Since that incident I've seen & heard things that have left me numb. Urine, feces, blood, and semen being thrown by guys at each other and the guards! Spitting! Words being used as weapons to inflict pain; all in an attempt to entertain themselves. Guys so thirsty for attention of any kind that they provoke guards into making cell entries. After those incidents I'm left in a state of confusion. On one hand you have a man that has been wounded in every area of his being. In most cases he's been beaten, tased, gassed, or a combination of the three. Sometimes there's a false display of bravado as he boast about how many guards it took to subdue him; how much gas he was able to withstand, or how he took multiple shots from a taser. On the surface one pretends to be fine, but inside he's enduring

Pain that life hasn't prepared him for. On the other side there are people that have been assigned to protect prisoners. They are trained to prevent us from hurting ourselves, each other, and them. Yet I see them in a twisted state of enjoyment as they take some morbid form of pleasure out of hurting someone that's already dealing with more pain that they will ever understand. For those Correctional Officers I have a question. Where is the correction in laughing, joking, and describing in great detail how 6 or more guards storm a cell in full battle gear with offensive & defensive weapons to inflict pain on an unarmed prisoner? My confusion comes about because I can't figure out what happened in their lives that robbed them of their compassion; and who between the two groups are the most miserable. Can a person that behaves in that manner really be seen as an Officer? After all Officer mean: On who holds an office of authority or "TRUST" in an organization. I know the prisoner's pain, but I have no clue how people that are able to daily enjoy the comforts of home, family, friends, and the many liberties that come with freedom can be in such a bad place that hurting people makes them feel better. It's a tragic thing when a person is physically free, but their mind & spirit is caged. I've come to the conclusion that not only does isolation affect those that are isolated, but also those that are entrusted to guard & care for the isolated. Those are just a few of the surface issues that are produced in people that are isolated. I realize that a disciplinary system must be in place to maintain order; However, it is my opinion that isolation does more harm than good. It's unnatural to leave a man completely alone with no physical contact from love ones (especially, but not limited to that of a woman). We are not designed to be ALONE! Don't take my word for it. Read Genesis chapter 2, verse 18. "It is NOT GOOD that MAN should BE ALONE; I will make him an help meet for him." I know that prisons are viewed as the bowels of society; But us that exist in these places must be seen as more than waste. Everyone that you know, including yourself, is only one bad choice away from being one of "The Isolated". It's my hope that these words are not only an informative eye opener, but will provoke you to be grateful for every moment of closeness that you're blessed to have. It's my hope that every reader of this piece will walk away with a greater respect & appreciation for the gift that is Human Contact. When the opportunity presents itself, hug a little longer; kiss with more passion; take a refresher course on the art of holding hands. There is power beyond belief in one simple touch. Hopefully I've been blessed to touch you through my words.

Special thanks to my dear friend Ms. Dee (Lovely Lady) Elaine for helping me with the resources to bring this piece to the world. I'm sending crazy love to Texas, you "Little Twit"! :-)

If these words have touched you,
please contact me at:
Antwiane Sago #428132
W.C.I. P.O. Box 351
Waupun, WI. 53963-0351

*P.S. Sorry about
the mistakes. I
had to get this
out, and I wrote
uncut.*

*Salt in A
Flavorless
World
Antwiane Sago Sr.
A.K.A.
A.M.*