

NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXPLORING SOLITARY. THREE “EVERYMAN” VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE LIVE WINDOW INTO SOLITARY CONFINEMENT EXPERIENCE.

Volunteers Occupy Re-creations of Solitary Cells Beginning Friday, April 2

**Live Webcams and Outgoing Twitter Feed Viewable at ExplorerSolitary.com
and The National Museum of Crime and Punishment**

**Honored as “TV with a Conscience” by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences
Explorer: Solitary Confinement Premieres Sunday, April 11 at 9 PM ET/PT
on the National Geographic Channel**

(WASHINGTON, D.C. — April 1, 2010) Alone in a cell for years or even decades, more than 80,000 Americans are estimated to be in solitary confinement. Cut off from human contact in an 8 x 10 cell: Some say solitary is the only way for correctional officers to safely handle the worst prisoners, but others claim it amounts to psychological torture. In an age when we are all hyperconnected, when rapid-fire interpersonal communications are routine, what’s it like to be suddenly cut off from social contact and experience the claustrophobic isolation of solitary confinement?

On April 2, three volunteers will open a window into that experience when they occupy re-creations of solitary cells constructed in the greater Washington, D.C., area for up to one week. They will inhabit 80-square-foot “cells” with a sink, toilet, bed, desk and chair. Initially, the contents of each cell will replicate the “lowest level” of solitary in many prisons ... no TV, no computer or reading material, and minimal human contact — meals are served through a slot in the door; participants are allowed one hour of solitary exercise and a brief shower daily. Their experiences will be shared in real time via outgoing tweets (they will receive no incoming communications), while a camera in each cell will stream 24/7.

This is not meant to be an authentic replication of punitive solitary confinement, with one profound departure being that participants stay as long as they choose, up to one week, and can opt out anytime. The intent is to provide an “everyman” perspective specifically into the experience of social and claustrophobic isolation that are key hallmarks of solitary confinement. The goal is to spark greater conversation on this widely used and controversial penal practice as a complement to the April 11 premiere of **Explorer: Solitary Confinement** on the National Geographic Channel.

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The live video and Twitter feed will be available at <http://www.ExplorerSolitary.com>, which will also offer perspectives and context on solitary confinement, as well as background on the volunteer participants. [Livestream](#), which provided live streaming of the most recent Academy Awards, will make it possible for a virtually unlimited audience to observe their experiences. An exhibit at [The National Museum of Crime and Punishment](#) will incorporate a projection from the live webcams with an adjacent monitor displaying the twitter feed from the volunteer cells.

The Web site will include a broad range of insights: from prisoners who have spent extended periods in solitary; wardens who use solitary as a tool for modifying dangerous inmate behaviors; as well as scientists and doctors studying the effects of solitary and social isolation. It will also link to news perspectives from the [USA TODAY](#) archive. In addition, USA TODAY will run a story on April 8 on isolation in our society and the mental health effects of deprivation of human contact and interaction.

Volunteers will receive a daily stipend for each full day in solitary, and a matching amount will be donated to a nonprofit of their choice. An additional pool of funds will be split among participants who stay the entire week and their respective nonprofits. All volunteers were evaluated medically and psychologically to determine their fitness.

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ABOUT:

Explorer

One week after focusing on solitary confinement, **Explorer**, the longest-running documentary series in the history of cable TV, will celebrate its historic quarter-century milestone with a two-hour television event hosted by correspondent Lisa Ling. **Explorer** has been honored with nearly 60 Emmys, a 2010 Television Academy Honor for "exemplifying television with a conscience," as well as hundreds of other awards. Premiering Monday, April 19, at 9 p.m. ET/PT, this special highlights some of the most riveting topics **Explorer** has examined, including the very first look at the undersea wreckage of *Titanic* and the rediscovery of the so-called "Afghan Girl" whose haunting green eyes captivated the world from the cover of National Geographic magazine. More recent accomplishments include 2007's undercover report from inside North Korea and 2009's exclusive coverage from inside the controversial detention center at Guantanamo.

National Geographic Channel

Based at the National Geographic Society headquarters in Washington, D.C., the [National Geographic Channel](#) (NGC) is a joint venture between National Geographic Ventures (NGV) and Fox Cable Networks (FCN). Since launching in January 2001, NGC initially earned some of the fastest distribution growth in the history of cable and more recently the fastest ratings growth in television. The network celebrated its fifth anniversary January 2006 with the launch of NGC HD which provides the spectacular imagery that National Geographic is known for in stunning high-definition. NGC has carriage with all of the nation's major cable and satellite television providers, making it currently available in nearly 70 million homes. For more information, please visit www.natgeotv.com.

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