

THE SEPARATION

At the old Owen Sound Jail
A Short Ghost Story & History Lesson



A.J.L.

Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada

HALLOWE'EN - MMXXIII

IN MEMORIAM WAYNE JOHN MILNER[†]

1960 WALKERTON – OWEN SOUND 2023

A SURVIVOR OF INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT AS A
YOUTH, LOCKED UP TOO YOUNG AND TOO LONG SOMEWHERE
IN THIS PROVINCE OF OURS, HE NEVER FOUND THE WORDS
TO DESCRIBE THE HORRORS THAT FOUR WHITE WALLS
COULD BRING. WAYNE DIED FROM EXPOSURE ON THE
OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN DURING THE WINTER OF 2022–23.

Copyright © 2023

Rights Reserved by their Respective Owners

The Separation: At the Old Owen Sound Jail

Unpublished Manuscript – First Draft

Edited By: A.J.L. with AI

Location: Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada

Cover Photo By: Chestnut Park R.E. (Editor's cell in the jail, inmate in 2002, at age 19).

Other Photos of the Owen Sound Jail By: [Freaktography.com](https://freaktography.com)

(Photos Used via Fair Dealing, this work is non-profit, limited reach, and educational. Not for resale).

† “Gathering remembers 'kind and gentle' man who died by rail trail”

– Owen Sound Sun Times, January 2023.

*“I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain, to be immeasurably worse than any **torture** of the body: and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye and sense of touch as scars upon the flesh; because its wounds are not upon the surface, and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a **secret punishment** which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay.”*

– Charles Dickens,¹ on Solitary Confinement, in 1842.

*“External objects produce decided effects upon the brain. A man shut up between four walls soon loses the power to associate words and ideas together. How many prisoners in **solitary confinement** become idiots, if not **mad**, for want of exercise of the thinking faculty!”*

– Jules Verne,² on Solitary Confinement, in 1871.

1 **Dickens, Charles** (1812–1870). American Notes for General Circulation, 1842.

2 **Verne, Jules Gabriel** (1828–1905). A Journey to the Centre of the Earth, 1871.

*“...the Owen Sound Jail should have been
shut down long ago and perhaps preserved
as a heritage building – monument to
human ignorance and tragic waste of
redeemable human lives.”*

– [Phil McNichol](#),³ Owen Sound Sun Times, in 2011.

3 McNichol, Phil. Owen Sound Sun Times Columnist.

THE SEPARATION



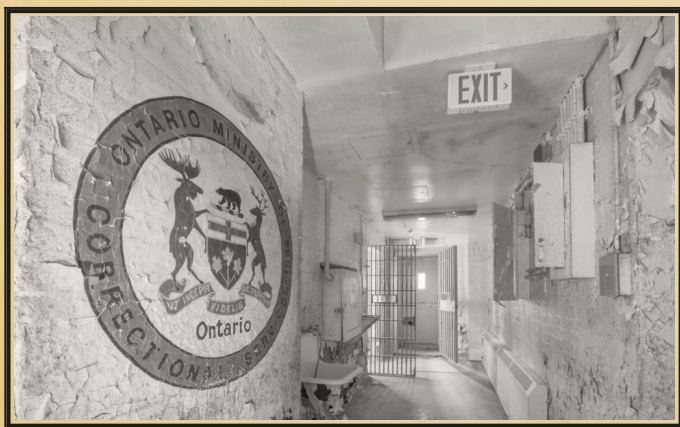
The shadows of the old [Owen Sound Jail](#) stretched long and ominously as the last scarlet rays of the setting sun touched its weathered stones. The building had long been abandoned, its imposing structure haunting the memories of those who had heard the tales of torment whispered through generations. In its heyday, it was a place of despair and suffering, where the antiquated [Separate System](#)⁴ was ruthlessly employed. Now, less than two decades since its closure, it stood transformed into something utterly inconceivable—a novelty [cocktail bar](#)⁵, where ne’er-do-well patrons reveled in the macabre history that clung to its whitewashed walls.

4 The **separate system** is a form of prison management based on the principle of keeping prisoners in solitary confinement. When first introduced in the early 19th century, the objective of such a prison or "penitentiary" was that of penance by the prisoners through silent reflection upon their crimes and behavior, as much as that of prison security.

5 "Plans for old courthouse and jail in Owen Sound outlined at meeting"
– Owen Sound Sun Times, September 2023.

As the evening deepened, a solitary figure approached the entrance, his footsteps echoing eerily against the newly cobbled pavement. His name was Wayne ~~Milner~~,⁶ a man who had once been an inmate of the Owen Sound Jail, a man who had suffered the cruel horrors of solitary confinement as a teenager there. Wayne had heard whispers about the transformation of the jail into a bar, and morbid curiosity had drawn him back from exile to the place that had haunted his nightmares for so many years.

The thick heavy door creaked open as Wayne stepped inside. A wave of nostalgia and dread washed over him, and he was instantly transported back to a time when this place had been his prison. The dimly lit corridor stretched ahead of him, the flickering mock candlelight casting eerie shadows up the damp, mildew-covered walls. The air was thick with the scent of musk and the cheap cologne of the interlopers there.



6 The ghost in our story is just named Wayne, a compilation character of the thousands of men and women who served time in the jail during the century-and-a-half it operated.

Wayne approached the bar, which was fashioned from an old rusty cell door. He recoiled slightly at the sight of an old [slop bucket](#)⁷ holding champagne on ice, as a bartender in a kitsch warden uniform greeted him.



"Welcome to *The Separation*", the bartender said, handing Wayne a leather-bound menu that bore a haunting image of the jail in its prime. "Our specialty cocktails are inspired by the grim history of this place. May I start you off with something dark and intriguing?"

Wayne nodded, his voice barely a whisper. "I'll have the 'Solitary Confinement', please."

7 Slopping out is the manual emptying of human waste when prison cells are unlocked in the morning. Inmates without a flush toilet in the cell have to use other means (formerly a chamber pot, then a slop bucket, now often a chemical toilet) while locked in during the night. The reason that some cells do not have toilets is that they date from the Victorian era and were therefore not designed with plumbing. As a result, there is no space in which to put a toilet, together with the expense and difficulty of installing the necessary pipes.

The bartender nodded, turning to craft the drink. Wayne felt a cold shiver as he glanced around the bar. The cells that once held him captive were now private seating areas, each still with their iron gate to separate them from the rest of the establishment. Patrons sat inside, sipping cocktails and laughing, completely unaware of the horrors that had unfolded within those very walls.

The '[Solitary Confinement](#)⁸' arrived, a deep crimson concoction garnished with a twisted sliver of lemon peel. Wayne took a cautious sip, the flavour a haunting blend of bitterness and sweetness, much like his memories of this place. As he savoured the drink, he *couldn't help* but overhear a conversation at the neighbouring table.



-
- 8 The psychological effects of isolation continue long after individuals are released from solitary, affecting society as a whole. Upon their reentry into society, many individuals who have spent long periods of time in solitary, especially during their youth, report having difficulty adjusting back to life outside the prison walls. They are often startled easily, and avoid crowds and public spaces. They seek out private spaces away from others because public areas overwhelm their sensory stimulation.

"Can you believe they once kept human beings in these tiny cells?" a woman casually remarked to her friends before adding, "There wasn't even cranks for them to turn!"

Her friends nodded, their faces a mixture of drunkenness and indifference. Wayne clenched his glass, his knuckles turning white. They spoke of his suffering as if it were a distant legend, a mere curiosity to be recounted over cocktails.

Unable to bear it any longer, Wayne rose from his seat and made his way towards the bar. The bartender, a solemn expression in his eyes, met him there. "Is everything all right, sir?" he inquired.

Wayne's voice trembled as he spoke. "I was an inmate here, back when this place was a house of horrors. I endured the isolation, the cold, the torment. And now, they've turned it into a mockery, a place for people to revel in our pain."

The bartender's gaze softened, and he nodded in understanding. He removed a card from his pocket. One prepared for such expected occurrences as this. He read it to Wayne in what seemed like a rehearsed manner. "I know it must be difficult for you, sir. We try to honour the history of this place while also providing a unique experience for our patrons. We don't mean any disrespect to those who suffered here."

With that, the bartender handed the card to Wayne, showing him the voucher on the back entitling him to ten-percent off his next drink purchase.

Wayne clenched his jaw, torn between anger and despair. He knew the bartender meant well, but it was impossible to convey the depths of his suffering and the scars it had left behind. What use is a bartender who has never read [The Ballad of Reading Gaol?](#)⁹ A bartender that couldn't spot an existential crisis if it were asking them to sample a [Cask of Amontillado](#).



As he walked away from the bar, Wayne's steps led him deeper into the transformed jail. He passed by the cells-turned-seating areas, each one filled with oblivious patrons, their laughter grating on his frayed nerves. The memories of his own time in those cells as an adolescent rushed back with each passing moment, threatening to overwhelm him.

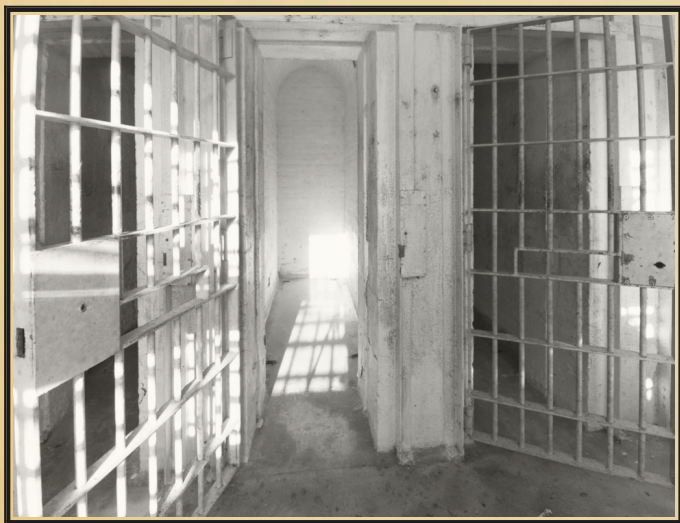
9 *Each narrow cell in which we dwell
 Is a foul and dark latrine,
And the fetid breath of living Death
 Chokes up each grated screen,
And all, but Lust, is turned to dust
 In Humanity's machine.*

– **Oscar Wilde** (1854-1900), *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, 1897.

In one of the cells, he noticed a group of young people playfully posing for photos behind the iron bars, mimicking the suffering that had taken place within. They seemed completely unaware of what their ancestors could have suffered here, and how this nineteenth century Victorian dungeon was designed to crush the spirits and identity of all who entered it.

The irony of a jail like this being turned into a bar – one source of inter-generational trauma turned into another – seemed lost on everyone but Wayne.

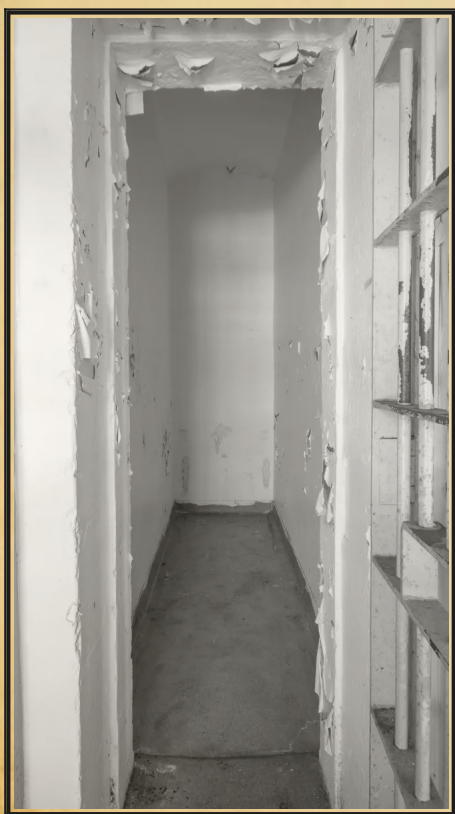
Wayne couldn't bear to watch any longer. He stumbled through a dark corridor and found himself in yet another empty chamber, another cell whose secrets ultraviolet light could only hint at.



He sank to his knees, his fingers tracing the cracks and grooves in the cold, brick wall. Tears welled in his eyes as he remembered the solitude, the darkness, the relentless mental anguish. He had been neglected and

abandoned here much too young. Those days never left him, they reverberated throughout his life, haunting whispers that had tormented him, suffocating his existence and trust in humanity, forever.

As Wayne wept in that desolate chamber, the laughter and revelry from the bar seemed distant, like the fading echoes of a nightmare. He had returned to confront his past, but the transformation of the jail had only deepened his pain. It was a place that had taken his humanity and now sought to trivialize his suffering.



What seemed like hours passed, and Wayne finally emerged from the chamber, his spirit heavy with the weight of his memories. The bar had grown quieter, and the patrons had mostly dispersed, leaving the jail to its ghosts.

The tired bartender approached Wayne one final time, now his expression filled with sympathy. "I'm truly sorry for what you've endured, sir. We never intended to hurt anyone with our concept. We

only wanted to share the history, albeit in a unique way."

Wayne nodded, his voice trembling but resolute. "I understand your intentions, but the past should never be trivialized. This place holds the echoes of countless tormented souls, and it deserves more respect than this."

With that, Wayne turned and walked away from *The Separation*, leaving the old jail and its macabre transformation behind. Stepping out into the cool air, he couldn't help but wonder if the ghosts of the past were still lingering within those walls, yearning for a more dignified remembrance.

As the darkness reclaimed its hold on the building that had witnessed so much suffering, Wayne slipped into the night, his heart heavy with the burden of his memories, determined to ensure that the full history of this place was never forgotten – never whitewashed over like its walls. *Castigat ridendo mores!*¹⁰

KIND & GENTLE WAYNE,
THERE'S BEEN ONE LIKE HIM IN EVERY SOLITARY CELL.

10 *Castigat ridendo mores* is a Latin phrase that generally means "one corrects customs by laughing at them," or "he corrects customs by ridicule." Some commentators suggest that the phrase embodies the essence of satire; in other words, the best way to change things is to point out their absurdity and laugh at them.

Cocktail Menu

Whispers of the Void \$6.50

Tequila's fiery rebellion, mellowed by absinthe's ethereal touch, evokes the prisoner's fractured dreams and fragmented thoughts. Lime, a fragile lifeline, lends a tart embrace to the forlorn soul, trapped in the desolation of isolation.

Echoes of Solitary \$7.75

Mezcal's smoky tendrils embrace agave's resilient sweetness, as if capturing the dichotomy of solitude's torment and the human spirit's determination to survive. Each sip carries the weight of isolation's relentless echo.

Solace in Shadows \$6.00

A somber fusion of bourbon and blackberry liqueur mirrors the prisoner's longing for warmth and connection. A gentle drizzle of dark chocolate essence, symbolic of fleeting memories, reminds us of the fragility of human resilience.

Igloo Archipelago \$8.50

A chilled concoction of gin, blue curaçao, and tonic water mirrors the prisoner's icy solitude. With a single floating cube of ice that captures the lonely voyage through the frozen tundra of one's own mind.

Solitary Confinement \$5.50

A complex harmony of whiskey, amaro, and honey reflects the prisoner's inner battle for salvation. A lemon twist, with a hint of bitterness, signifies the scars left by long-term confinement.

Subdued Suffering \$7.00

Vodka's icy detachment collides with lavender's fragile grace, embodying the muted suffering of long-term isolation. A solitary dried rose petal, preserved but faded, symbolizes the heartache of forgotten connections.

Confinement Concoction \$3.50

Cough syrup's warm embrace meets bittersweet elderflower liqueur, encapsulating the prisoner's isolation within a decrepit cell. Garnished with a lone olive enshrined within an ice sphere, symbolizing the fleeting moments of clarity within the haze.

Lingering Desperation \$6.50

A dark alchemy of rum, coffee liqueur, and black coffee embodies the lingering desperation within the prison walls. A solitary coffee bean, sinking into the abyss, symbolizes the prisoner's fading dreams.

Some of the known short & long-term risks of Solitary Confinement of youth...

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder • Depression • Anxiety disorders • Agoraphobia • Panic attacks • Insomnia • Suicidal ideation • Self-harm behaviors • Loss of trust in authority figures • Social withdrawal • Difficulty forming relationships • Difficulty maintaining relationships • Paranoia • Chronic hyper-vigilance • Risk of delusions and hallucinations • Emotional numbness • Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder • Heightened sensitivity to stimuli • Flashbacks • Increased risk of re-offending • Reduced educational attainment • Lower cognitive functioning • Poor impulse control • Disorientation • Memory problems • Loss of self-esteem • Increased risk of substance abuse • Decreased problem-solving abilities • Difficulty concentrating • Developmental delays • Increased risk of self-mutilation • Heightened susceptibility to mental illness • Decreased motivation • Avoidance of authority figures • Increased risk of future criminal behavior • Distrust of mental health professionals • Increased vulnerability to exploitation • Regression in social skills • Loss of hope for the future • Decreased ability to empathize with others • Impaired decision-making • Personality disorders • Disconnection from reality • Loss of coping skills • Inability to adapt to change • Fear of confinement • Increased sensitivity to stress • Difficulty expressing emotions • Inability to process trauma • Heightened anxiety in social situations • Reduced problem-solving skills • Inability to plan for the future • Inability to set and achieve goals • Impaired emotional regulation • Decreased sense of identity • Fear of abandonment • Difficulty in trusting oneself & Chronic self-doubt • Decreased self-worth & heightened risk of self-hate • Emotional instability • Loss of cultural identity • Decreased verbal communication skills • Social awkwardness • Alienation from peers • Difficulty in finding meaning in life • Loss of independence • Cognitive dissonance • Difficulty in expressing and managing feelings • Excessive guilt • Feelings of worthlessness • Increased risk of re-victimization • Impaired empathy for others • Reduced sense of morality • Impaired ability to handle stress • Hostility towards authority figures • Reduced self-awareness • Chronic physical health problems • Reduced resilience • Heightened risk of substance addiction • Impaired sense of time • Difficulty in seeking help • Insecurity about one's abilities • Difficulty trusting others • Inability to express needs • Emotional detachment • Hypochondria • Reduced ability to experience joy • Loss of faith in the justice system • Reduced ability to advocate for oneself • Chronic nightmares • Impaired moral development • Difficulty in managing anger & Increased thoughts of aggression • Decreased sense of hope • Increased risk of self-imposed isolation • Heightened risk of reclusive behaviours • Heightened vulnerability to bullying • Impaired ability to manage conflict • Difficulty in accessing mental health services • Risk of eating disorders • Development of maladaptive coping mechanisms • Increased susceptibility to manipulation • Decreased sense of safety • Loss of motivation to participate in rehabilitation programs • Heightened risk of chronic loneliness • Impaired emotional intelligence • Difficulty in handling disappointment • Decreased sense of fairness • Reduced ability to assert oneself • Inability to set boundaries • Impaired creative thinking • Chronic guilt and shame • Loss of interest in hobbies and activities • Decreased sense of spirituality • Difficulty in accessing educational resources • Impaired physical health due to stress • Heightened risk of self-neglect • Increased risk of obsessive-compulsive behaviors • Impaired problem-solving skills in everyday life • Decreased ability to take initiative • Difficulty in seeking justice or restitution • Increased risk of sexual dysfunction • Impaired ability to manage time • Loss of interest in self-improvement • Difficulty in identifying and expressing emotions • Impaired ability to navigate social situations • Decreased resilience to setbacks • Chronic mistrust of authority • Inability to make long-term plans • Reduced sense of personal agency • Impaired ability to adapt to change • Difficulty in expressing vulnerability • Increased risk of suicidal behavior • Loss of faith in humanity • Impaired sense of fairness and justice • Decreased capacity for self-compassion • Difficulty in managing intrusive thoughts • Heightened risk of dissociative disorders • Decreased ability to cooperate with others • Chronic feelings of injustice • Difficulty in accessing legal resources • Chronic self-criticism • Increased risk of regressive behavior • Impaired ability to make informed decisions • Hyperacusis or other hearing difficulties • Chronic pessimism • Difficulty in recognizing personal strengths • Decreased ability to engage in leisure activities • Impaired ability to tolerate uncertainty • Heightened risk of identity crises • Decreased capacity for self-forgiveness • Difficulty in accessing employment opportunities • Impaired ability to maintain a routine • Loss of hope for personal growth • Impaired ability to set and achieve personal goals • Difficulty in engaging in meaningful activities • Decreased sense of belonging to society • Early Death

– It is, and always has been, Cruel & Inhumane Punishment –

“Southern Ontario Gothic meets Gonzo Historian.”

*“It tries, a sophomoric effort, the author is no
D.H. Lawrence or T.E. Lawrence.”*

*“The author is clearly mad, but in which sense
of the word? Perhaps both.”*

*“Reading between the lines I would say this is
a rushed effort with lots of AI dialog.”*

*“It reads like a subtle hint to, or even a vague threat
against, the Crown. Almost as another salvo in an ongoing
battle to limit the use of Solitary Confinement and to
someday end it completely. It’s perhaps a warning the
Crown, and indeed all of us, should heed...”*

*“Few things are more torturous than solitary confinement,
the metaphors used in this short story are among them.”*

“Proof we haven’t changed since ancient times.”

