

# WALL CITY

A person is seen from behind, walking away from the camera down a dark, arched prison corridor. The person is wearing a blue t-shirt with the words "CDCR PRISONER" printed in yellow on the back. The corridor is dimly lit, with light coming from the far end, creating a sense of depth and isolation. The walls are made of concrete and have a series of arches.

The Struggles of the  
**INCARCERATED**

Spring 2020  
Volume 3 Issue 1





### The Dungeon

The dungeon is a black tunnel about 50 feet long, with seven small cells on each side. The ancient mass of rock and concrete had the musty odor of a tomb; no sunlight had touched its moldy walls for almost ninety years, and the foul air had no place to go, for there were no windows and the cell doors were hand-forged iron. Each cell was nothing more than a niche cut into the stone, and the walls and floor were bare. There was no light, no bed, no ventilation, no toilet facilities, not even a bench. There were sometimes three or four men in one cell, and there was no place to sit except a triangular block of concrete in one corner. Prisoners slept on the damp floor, with one blanket if they were lucky, and they got bread and water at the whim of the guards.

—*The San Quentin Story*, By Clinton T. Duffy





11

**On the Spectrum**  
Joe Krauter's Odyssey through Autism

14



**To Tell or Not to Tell?**  
The Lingering Scars of a Sexual Assault

16



**Deportation After Rehabilitation**  
They're Fit to Reenter Society—Just Not Ours

## The Units

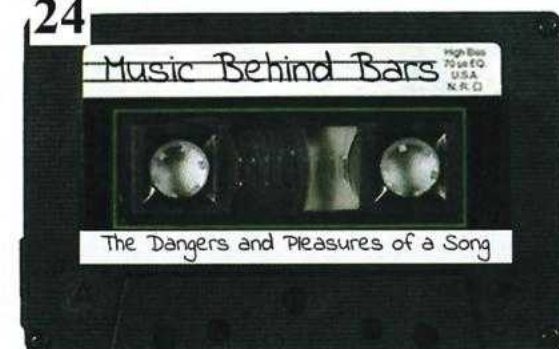
|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| The View            | 2  |
| Arts in Corrections | 6  |
| Health              | 8  |
| Crossword           | 29 |
| Cartoon             | 29 |
| Legal               | 30 |
| Over the Wall       | 31 |

22



**Death Row Buddhism**

24



26



**Discovering Money in Banks**  
The Antwan Williams Story

This page (clockwise from mid right): Lt. S. Robinson; File Photo; Eddie Herena; courtesy of Sok Song; Illustrations by iStock.com/Ponomarevov, maria; Gerald Morgan

## WALL CITY

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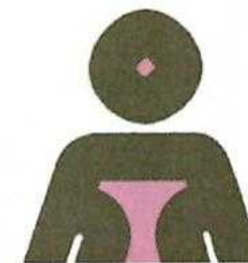
### WALL CITY

#### MISSION STATEMENT

Wall City magazine seeks to publish long-form stories to inform people outside prison walls about the lives of incarcerated men and women. In addition, incarcerated readers get news they can use to improve their lives and become better citizens.

Wall City educates readers to the value of providing rehabilitative services to incarcerated people. It seeks to advance social justice and public safety, which supports public interests.

Answers from Crossword on Page 29



#### Anonymous

is incarcerated in the United States. She has detailed her experience being sexually assaulted in prison and the aftermath.



#### Susan Shannon

is a Buddhist chaplain and a student and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism for more than 45 years. Since 2011 she has lovingly devoted her work to the men on the mainline and Death Row in San Quentin State Prison, who embrace their own transformation with endurance and dedication.



#### Rahsaan Thomas

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas co-produces and co-hosts the international hit podcast *Ear Hustle*, writes for *The Marshall Project* and contributes to the *San Quentin News*. In his spare time, he advocates for non-violence and restoring voting rights for incarcerated people, and attempts to play basketball.



#### Aron Roy

Aron Roy has been writing since he was very young. He won his first award—for a young author's contest—when he was only seven years old. A coder-in-the-making for The Last Mile computer coding program by day and a writer by night, he also finds time to read, tutor, and attend self-improvement classes.

## Call for Submissions

Wall City is accepting submissions of stories and personal narratives on an ongoing basis. All submissions become property of the *San Quentin News*.

Please use the following criteria when submitting:

Know that articles will be edited for content and length.

The publication is not a medium to file grievances. (For that, use the prison appeals process.) We encourage submitting articles that are newsworthy and encompass issues that will have an impact on the prison populace.

Please do not use offensive language in your submissions.

Poems and artwork (cartoons and drawings) are welcomed.

Please mail articles directly to:

San Quentin News, 1 Main Street, San Quentin, CA 94964

Clockwise from top right: Courtesy of Susan Shannon; Michael Johnson; Eddie Herena



By Aron Kumar Roy

## “More than what you see”

With Ronald “Gabe” Gabriel’s Prison Art



In the shadows of the plethora of art programs offered at San Quentin, an underground art scene thrives.

Lurking in the corners of the San Quentin Lower Yard, Ronald “Gabe” Gabriel shares his art with aspiring artists and cultured connoisseurs.

“I make prison art,” Gabe said. “It’s not about dogs and cats and birds and shit. Prison art is about doing the time.”

Sixty-eight years old and incarcerated since 1985, Gabe commemorates the prison culture of the past through his art. He uses ink pens to draw on 18" x 24" two-ply tagboard.

Gabe’s art is far from traditional. Instead of traditional

realism, which is prevalent in prison art, Gabe mixes a degree of sensationalism into each of his pieces. He seamlessly blends clowns, skulls, and demons into the scenes of cages and gun towers. And rather than signing his artwork, Gabe embeds himself within the collage, a la *Where’s Waldo*.

“I developed my style through trial and error,” said Gabe. “I kept trying until I found my true self. Just being in prison is an influence in itself.”

When people started to recognize his talent, Gabe saw an economic opportunity. Rather than taking a prison job that pays pennies per hour, Gabe sells his monochromatic art to buy necessities at the prison canteen such as food and hygiene products.

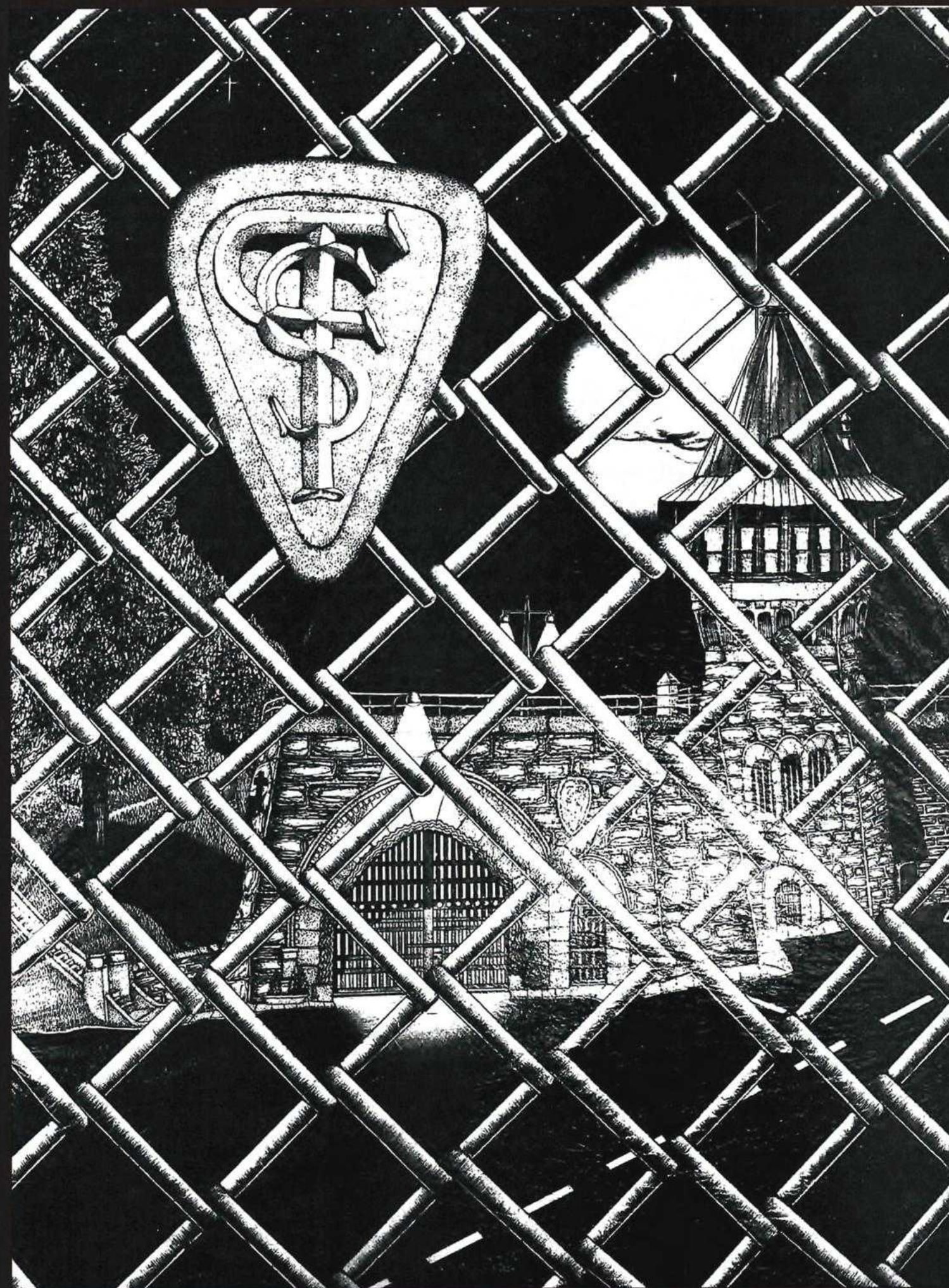
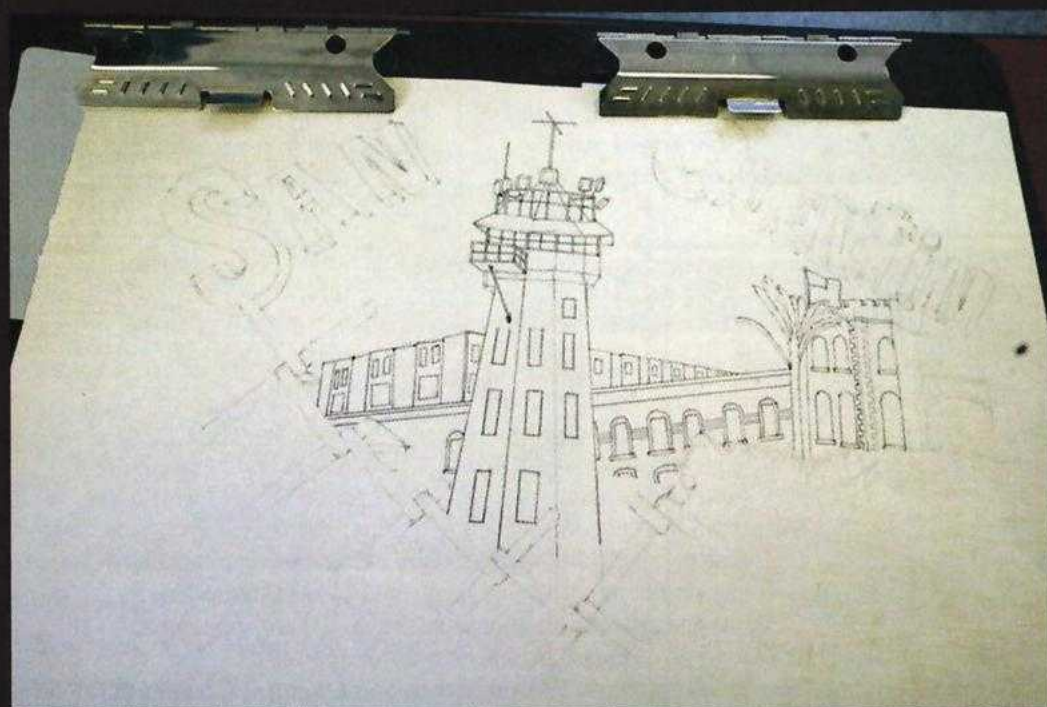
Before creating an original piece of work for a prospective client, Gabe walks laps with them around the yard to get to know them. He aims to create personalized works of art, which represent the unique lives, values, and experiences of each individual incarcerated patron.

Gabe also creates art as a form of therapy.

“It relieves my stress levels and keeps me from illegal activities,” he explained. “I draw inspiration from within myself because I draw what I live, see, and feel from my years in CDC custody.”

He encourages new artists by assuring them that creating original artwork provides an unparalleled sense of satisfaction.

“Art is a gift of the human experience, a way to express yourself without words or sound,” he said. “Art for me is a way to show that there is more to me than what you see.” 1





## Lost in Paradise

### One Incarcerated Person's Search for a Mental Health Solution

As he walked into a computer coding study group at San Quentin, Matthew Christian Paradise easily commanded the attention of his peers. Upon hearing his name, the leader of the group said, "Oh, you're Matt Paradise. We've heard so much about you!" Paradise flashed a smile. A tall white man, Paradise looks like an all-American guy who hasn't had any struggles in life. Paradise took his seat and started to analyze computer code. On the surface, computer code seems like it should be easy to understand because the words are all in English, but to the layperson, it's a convoluted mess. Periods, semicolons, commas, and brackets fill in spaces that regulation English would never allow. Yet each one needs to be perfectly placed for the code to do its job.

Paradise once thought that life was easy to decode. Once he started dealing with mental health issues, he realized how many different components need to line up for things to work right. Sometimes it's as simple as a comma that should have been a period, but sometimes the fix is more complex. Paradise is serving a 16-year term for second-degree robbery. He has struggled with mental health issues and has tried to commit suicide several times.

"I went through a very difficult time," he says. "My wife left me and didn't want anything to do with me. I was alone in California, because I was born in Washington state. I had nobody to visit

me or comfort me. I had all these years to do in prison on a level three mainline yard. Prison got very dark and ugly for a while."

Dealing with mental health issues and incarceration at the same time is not easy, even for a man who on the surface appears so self-assured and handsome. One prison where Paradise was serving placed him in its Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP), a fancy name for mental health treatment. Generally EOP participants are not housed with the general population.

He remained in EOP after his transfer to San Quentin; here, EOP participants receive a higher level of care than other incarcerated individuals.

Paradise credits his five years in EOP with helping him on the path to health. Crucially, EOP provided Paradise with Prozac, which he says eases the pain of his depression. "Everything about EOP is designed with healing, growth, and rehabilitation in mind," Paradise says.

In addition to medication, EOP provides incarcerated people with the opportunity to participate in a wide range of rehabilitative groups and services, from art therapy to anger management training, from depression groups to positive psychology classes. Those programs have helped him understand how he got where he is.

Paradise and his sibling suffered verbal and physical abuse from their father while growing up.

"That's what I remember most, the slap on the back of the head," he says, "and a comment or question about me being stupid and messing up."

EOP has showed him how his abusive and traumatic upbringing added to his mental illness, he says. "That contributed to my drug and alcohol use to numb my suffering, which developed into an out-of-control addiction, which was a direct cause to me committing my crime, because I could no longer support my addiction."

His mental health issues came to a head one Christmas morning when his mother announced that she was leaving his father and taking the kids. Paradise began to steal, fight, listen to hateful music, smoke, drink and fail classes. After a particularly intense argument with his mother and sister, he even attempted suicide.

"I was officially fed up with everyone and everything in life," he says. "Particularly I was fed up with my mom. I was going to kill myself and make it so that my mom was the one who found me." He swallowed hundreds of prescription and over-the-counter pills that night, and she did. He woke up three days later to the sight of his mom's face.

#### Somehow Surviving

Even though he survived, Paradise still went back to his troublemaking ways—and eventually got locked up.

That's when he learned how incar-

cerated culture stigmatizes people with mental health issues.

"My stress level went up and so did my apparent symptoms of longstanding mental illness that I had covered up with street drugs," Paradise says. "I was instructed by career criminals that I don't want to be like those 'J-cats' who take psych meds and smear feces on the wall."

As the months passed, Paradise's symptoms worsened. The stress of fighting his case from county jail led him to what he describes as a complete breakdown.

"The people who were associated with me were quite upset that I had not gone along with their instructions," Paradise says. "They warned me that I would be screwed when I go to prison because I would be flagged by the homeboys as no good."

The scare tactics didn't sway Paradise from continuing treatment. Upon his arrival in prison, he learned that he had rights as a mental health patient—that the horror stories the incarcerated spun "were just a myth." Which is not to say that prison was any better.

#### Entering a Nightmare

He describes his time at reception in High Desert State Prison as a nightmare.

"It was violent, ugly, plagued by machismo staff and inmates," he says. "Food was scarce and miserable." Overwhelmed, Paradise again attempted suicide—several times. That's what finally got him placed in EOP and what finally led to his diagnosis: *Bipolar II-Depressive Type*.

At San Quentin, EOP participants now live in a specially designed dormitory in H-unit. In 2018, CDCR integrated participants in the EOP program with the general population. Previously, participants in the program were either isolated in their own facilities or housed on Sensitive Needs Yards.

Unlike the main cellblocks, where the incarcerated typically sleep on bunk beds and share cramped cells with another incarcerated person, the incarcerated people in an EOP dormitory do not have to share their individual living area, just

## What Is EOP?

CDCR's Enhanced Outpatient Program or "EOP" is a mental health outpatient program whose goal is to identify issues preventing an incarcerated person from programming on mainline, address the issues through individualized treatment plans, and return the incarcerated person to the least restrictive environment — mainline. The clinical team provides incarcerated people with individual weekly therapy, structured clinical groups, and recreational therapy. The program staff includes medical staff, mental health staff, and correctional staff.

#### Program Requirements

1. Every incarcerated person in EOP has a primary clinician.
2. See a clinician weekly and a psychiatrist monthly.
3. Attend assigned groups each week. (Decision of what groups to attend is made by the incarcerated person, clinicians, and custody staff.)
4. Yard activities are Monday through Friday, morning and afternoon, as permitted by custody staff.

Incarcerated people remain in EOP for as long as needed. There is no established length of treatment. An incarcerated person's need for continued EOP is reviewed after the initial Treatment Team meeting and every 90 days thereafter. Incarcerated people who refuse to attend assigned groups may be reviewed more frequently, typically every 30 days. Transition from Psychiatric Services Unit (PSU) and other MAX-A Programs can be difficult for a few incarcerated people, primarily due to the decreased structure and the "openness" of EOP. However, the vast majority of incarcerated people successfully adapt after a period of adjustment. Discussion with a clinician is often helpful for the incarcerated.

#### Treatment Team

The EOP Interdisciplinary Treatment Team (IDTT) is comprised of health care staff, custodial supervisors, and other staff working in the EOP.

#### Services Available

- A. Primary Clinician:
  1. Joint preparation of your treatment plan
  2. One weekly therapy session in primary clinician's office
  3. Treatment Team holds a quarterly review
  4. Parole planning (if appropriate)
  5. Respond to emergency needs (including crisis sessions if needed)
- B. Unit Psychiatrist:
  1. First appointment: Initial interview, reviews your medication history, Writes current orders
  2. Monthly appointments: progress on medication and clinical progress
- C. Recreation therapist:
  1. Provides various groups such as: Music, Social Interaction, arts & crafts, and communication Skills
  2. Participates in treatment team sharing clinical input with team members
  3. Writes monthly group notes on each patient.

Most patients remain in the EOP for about three to six months.



the main "dayroom" and the bathrooms. This arrangement helps ensure that overcrowded living quarters do not exacerbate any mental problems they may have. (Not having to share a bunk with another person is not a feature of all EOP programs in the state.) And the increased integration means that participants in the EOP program have the opportunity to be housed in prisons that may be closer to their homes or at facilities with increased opportunities for non-mental-health-related rehabilitative programs.

### A Better Life on the Yard

Despite the better living situation, the yard integration was not easy for Paradise. According to Paradise, soon after the arrival of EOP participants at San Quentin, one man was attacked by several men in general population. "Now that we are coming up on two years of yard integration, things are really great," says Paradise. "The people I knew who were highly upset and on edge in the mainline are now happy-go-lucky full-programmers who interact with everyone, regardless of their prison classification. I can see obvious change in them."

Paradise's father also decided to work on himself by going to therapy. After working on personal healing, Paradise and his father were able to fix their relationship.

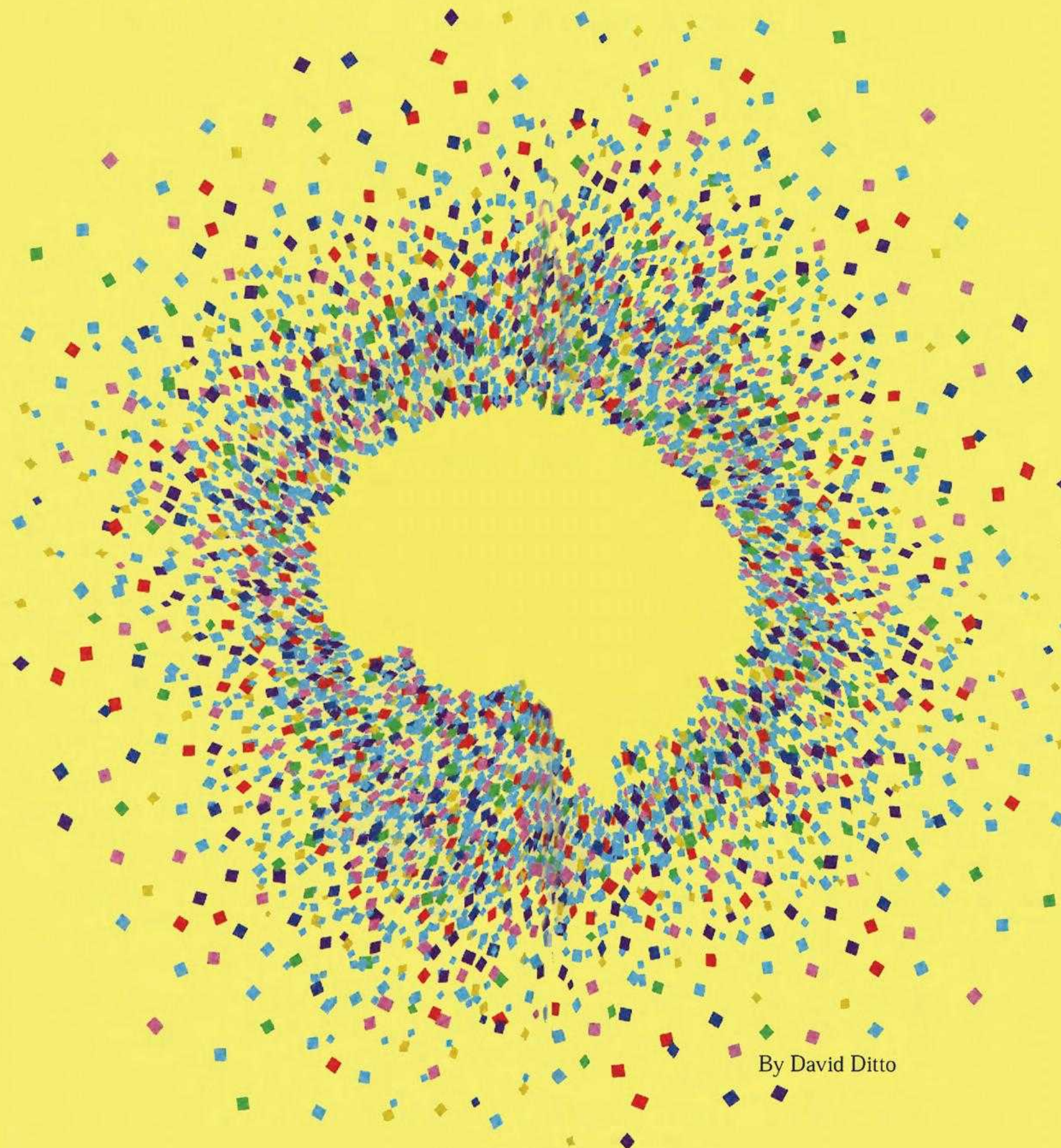
"One really interesting thing about me coming to prison is it triggered a family crisis," says Paradise. "Everyone suddenly woke up and realized we have a big problem: 'Matthew's in trouble and we all need some help, not just him.'"

That included a lengthy and emotional conversation with his father about his childhood. It was during this conversation that they decided to work on having a positive relationship. Paradise's father supports his mental health treatment and is there to give him strength when he is having a tough time.

Paradise, originally from Walla Walla, Wash., may have to serve his parole in California, even though his family and support network are two states away. However the situation plays out, Paradise is optimistic about the future. If he ends up staying in California, he hopes he'll be able to complete an A.A. degree through PUP (Prison University Project). Life after prison may not always be easy for Paradise. Dealing with mental health issues can be a recurring challenge throughout life. "Either way, I know I'm going to be all right," Paradise says, "because now I know that I have to take care of my mental health." ¶

# On the Spectrum

## Joe Krauter's Prison Odyssey through Autism



By David Ditto

## IT'S 2004.

Joseph Krauter is a 23-year-old in jail, waiting for his trial. He is facing a double life sentence for first-degree murder. Something about him causes his trial attorney to suspect he might have a mental disorder. Psychiatric factors affecting a defendant's decision-making could have great impact on the trial, jury and sentencing.

"Joe, we want to test you for Asperger syndrome," his lawyer says. "It's a form of high-functioning autism."

"OK," Joe replies. He had never considered the possibility that he had autism, but he trusts his attorney. Joe believes in anything that might relieve the anxiety, fear and confusion he feels living in jail.

Joe meets with psychiatrists who test him for autism. He begins to hope he has found a fascinating piece of himself he never knew before. The mental health staff send their report to the trial attorney. "You don't have autism, so we're going to try something else for your defense," the lawyer tells him. Joe is disheartened. Still trusting, he never reads the report, nor does he know his attorney has asked the jail officials to monitor him for suicide.

Facing life without parole, Joe accepts a plea bargain. He pleads guilty to murder. The judge sentences him to 15 years to life in prison. Joe feels disillusioned, abandoned and depressed.

At 26, Joe is among a row of men talking on the phones along the wall of a California prison cellblock. He has lived his post-conviction years surrounded by a thousand incarcerated men. The noises, smells and bright lights in prison overwhelm him. A sign on the wall reads: "The calls made on these phones are monitored and recorded."

"I met with a friend and her son at the hairdresser," Joe's mom tells him. "I told her how much her son reminds me of you. He looks, acts and talks just like you." Joe holds the phone up to one ear and plugs his other ear to hear his mom over the noise in the housing unit. "My friend told me 'I hope not!' and I asked, 'Why not?'" she continues. "My friend replied, 'Because my son has Asperger's.'" A spark of hope reignites in Joe's chest.

*Has my mom found a connection to my psyche that my lawyer overlooked?* Joe wonders.

Joe's mom mails him two books on Asperg-



er syndrome. The books change his life forever.

"Asperger's syndrome is a neurological condition," begins one of the books, *Asperger's from the Inside Out*. "It is one of five diagnoses that comprise what's called 'the autism spectrum.'" According to author Michael Carley, the executive director of the Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership, Asperger syndrome has two primary characteristics. The first is an inability to instinctively understand the interpersonal cues necessary for social interaction and nonverbal communication. The second is a difficulty understanding that others don't necessarily share your thoughts.

Every page Joe reads reveals truths about himself as though he were looking into a mirror. "I was flabbergasted—blown away!" Joe says. "Both of those books spelled out my life from A to Z." They explain so much, including his social awkwardness, discomfort in personal interactions, and difficulty interpreting communications that other people understand effortlessly. Joe relates to the stories on a deeply personal level.

Carley's book explains further: "Having autism can mean having great abilities, but it can also mean never leaving the home of one's parents, never holding down a job for any extended period of time, and perhaps never enjoying a satisfying intimate relationship. Yet if these conditions were understood on a broad level, circumstances would enable most diagnosees to lead happy and productive lives."

The book's promise of happiness inspires Joe. "This ignited a fire in me to seek diagnosis and treatment," he says.

With renewed confidence, Joe contacts his trial attorney, asking for the psych evaluation from before trial, which Joe still had never read. When Joe finally gets the evaluation report in 2009, it's filled with psychological lingo. He can hardly understand it. The summary on the final page, however, concludes that he has several symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This evaluation of Joe's condition, if true, could have affected his trial, his treatment during incarceration, and his prospects for parole.

"Either my lawyer was grievously mistaken or he lied to me," Joe says. The discovery injects fuel into Joe's journey of self-discovery. But even the highest hopes struggle to survive the isolation and threats within high-security, razor-wired prison walls.

Where Joe is in prison, the race-based "prison politics"—a set of unwritten rules dictated and enforced by the prisoners—do not allow a White inmate receiving mental health care to remain on the yard. Prisoners with mental health issues are considered weak, or a liability for their race. (Prison politics vary

by race and by prison.) Joe, who is White, knows that just for seeking help, he would likely be "removed" from the yard. A removal is a group attack aimed at getting prison officials to transfer the victim to another yard, or even another prison, for his own protection. Joe would be beat up at best. At worst he would be stabbed. He decides to pursue testing anyway.

"I gambled with my life," Joe says.

Joe takes his psych evaluation and books to his mental health appointment. The clinician looks him over and tells him, "You don't have autism." When Joe asks for more information, the clinician pulls out a mental health guide, asks a few cursory questions, then slams the book shut. "You're not my problem. Beat it."

Even though his attempt was a failure, Joe now faces violence if the Whites who call the shots find out that he tried. His cellmate is discovered seeking mental health care. Joe witnesses a five-on-one attack to remove him from the yard. Joe requests a transfer to a different prison to escape the politics and violence.

Joe is moved to a different prison in 2012. He requests help again. The mental health department at his new prison responds, calling him in for an appointment. The clinician asks Joe his story. Joe recounts his trial, his mom's friend, the books she sent, the trauma from life disruptions, the sensory overload of prison life, and his discomfort with social interactions. The clinician's response surprises Joe: "We don't test for autism." Joe is disheartened once again.

Then Joe suffers another major disruption. His best friend in the world, his crime partner and emotional anchor who has been side-by-side with him through three prisons, is transferred away to a

different prison. After 10 years of incarceration, frustration and disappointment, Joe spirals into serious depression. He gives up.

"Autism spectrum disorder cannot be cured," says a report by Marilyn Augustyn, M.D., titled "Patient Education: Autism Spectrum Disorder." Augustyn describes ASD as "a neurodevelopmental disorder that impairs the development of social and communication skills."

As many as one out of every 40 people have autism, according to the report. At that rate, 3,000 people with autism could be among California's prison population. Yet according to California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) mental health care staff, there are only 39 diagnosed cases of autism statewide in CDCR.

Providing mental health care to autistic adults in prison is challenging. The CDCR Mental Health Services Delivery System *Program Guide* does not even mention autism. According to mental health care staff, CDCR does not have a specif-

ic program for autism, but mental health staff can diagnose inmates within CDCR's Developmental Disability Program assessments.

Adult ASD diagnosis is rare because symptoms of the life-long neurodevelopmental disorder are usually recognized in early childhood, according to Augustyn's report. The report says the primary symptoms are impaired social communication, repetitive behavior and sensory hypersensitivity.

After another year of imprisonment with no relief, no help, no hope, Joe transfers to San Quentin State Prison. When he arrives, he sees almost every White boy from other prisons he hoped he would never see again. Many try to pull him into racial prison politics, violence, drugs and gangs. Joe becomes more depressed. "I was going down in flames," he says. Though terrified, Joe asks for help once more. He fills out another request to be tested for autism.

"We don't test for that," responds the nurse in the mental health clinic.

"Of course you don't," replies Joe, accepting what feels like the final nail in his coffin.

"But we give a full mental illness diagnostic test," the nurse says. "Do you want to try that?"

"Sure," he answers.

A week later, Lizelle Cline, another mental health care staff member, calls Joe in for a consultation. She listens to him for hours. "You are very depressed," she says. Joe cries. For the first time in his life, somebody has broken through to feel what he feels. "Hold on with everything you've got," Cline tells Joe. "I'll see you in two weeks."

The next week, a doctor tests Joe for autism over seven days.

She calls him in to tell him the results. Cline is there. After six years of seeking treatment, the doctor officially diagnoses him with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder.

This diagnosis instantly relieves so much of Joe's pain, fear and stress. His tenacity is paying off and even Cline is thrilled. Diagnosis, however, is just the beginning. Joe's greatest battle still awaits him—treatment.

The affirmation of the positive diagnosis energizes Joe to persist in seeking the treatment he needs. But it's not easy. "I've had a lot of victories and a lot of heartbreaks," he says.

Joe knows no other inmate with autism at San Quentin, or anywhere else for that matter. Outside of the clinic, who can he turn to who will understand what he is going through? Even the mental health staff who support and advocate for his wellness seem to have zero experience treating autism and don't know where to begin.

The threat of transfer to a facility for people with more se-

vere mental health issues looms over Joe. It would be easier for San Quentin staff to move him to a facility with more experienced mental health staff than to figure out themselves how to provide the therapy he needs. Joe has seen that type of yard, where patients drool and wet themselves, screaming and pulling their hair out. If Joe continues to insist on getting the care he needs, he could be sent to one of those places. Still he persists, hoping for something better.

Joe stays at San Quentin, and a team of mental health care staff develops around him. They teach him the cognitive and emotional coping skills to better understand and interact with people. Staff clinicians visit Joe every month and he meets with interns weekly. He receives cognitive restructuring therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, medications, and an annual review with psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and clinicians.

Joe can recognize others as autistic now. He shares his self-awareness with them. He gives advice to another autistic inmate and his niece about sources of social anxiety, dealing with sensory issues, and the importance of receiving professional care.

Throughout his progress, he never forgets the first people who helped him, starting with Cline.

"This woman single-handedly saved me," Joe says. He also credits his first intern therapist, saying, "Thank God she never gave up on me." Their kindhearted, patient care provided the tools Joe needed to start interacting more successfully in social situations through understanding his anxiety, thoughts and feelings.

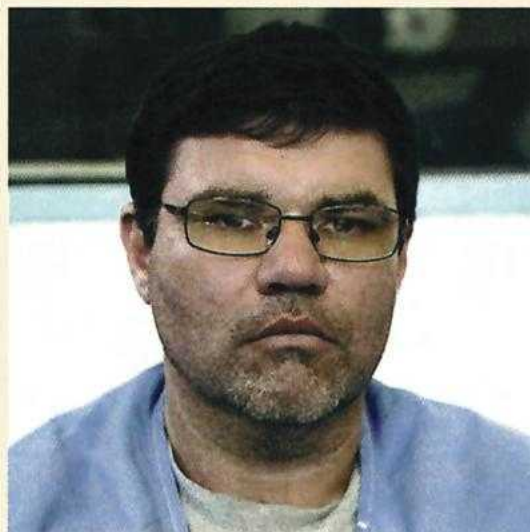
After 15 years of incarceration, Joe understands himself better than ever. He has the skills to address his fears and depression. He

has the confidence and hope to carry forward.

Joe's advice for other inmates with mental health needs: "Have the courage to advocate for yourself. There will be many challenges and some failures, but there are people—even inside prison—who want to help you. Asking for help can be terrifying, but it's worth it."

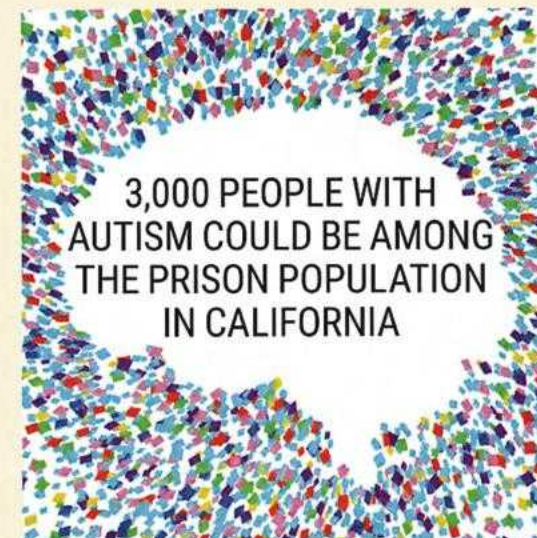
In 2020 Joe is found suitable for parole. "I'm terrified about getting out," Joe says, expecting to be released from prison soon. His primary concern is where he will live. He may be dropped off at a halfway house. Employment, medical care and mental health care are also major challenges for an autistic returning citizen. In December 2020, Joe was released.

"I'm determined to put a new life together," says Joe. He says he is ready to apply his newly acquired skills to the challenges of the world at large. His family and public programs will provide some support. As with his previous challenges, Joe intends to keep moving forward. ¶



Joseph Krauter

Illustration by iStock.com/iStock.com/ivcandy. Photo by FirstWatch





## The author of the article below

is the victim of sexual assault in an American prison. In her piece, she writes about why she hesitates to report the incident, despite the laws in place to protect people who are assaulted behind bars.

These laws fall under the umbrella of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (or "PREA"). PREA was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2003 after passing unanimously through both houses of Congress. The goal was to create a zero-tolerance policy around rape in prison—an issue that has long been a subject of concern for human rights organizations and legislators.

PREA's passage was precipitated by a 2001 report by Human Rights Watch—an NGO that reports on human rights

abuses around the world. The study, titled "No Escape: Male Prisoner Rape," uncovered a glaring lack of data about rape in prison. Over three years, Human Rights Watch asked 47 corrections departments for data about rape or sexual abuse. Only 23 were able to provide data. The rest responded that sexual abuse was so infrequent that they did not keep statistics on the subject.

By contrast, the report documents prisoner after prisoner giving testimonies to the contrary. It also provides in-depth research into why incarcerated men were not reporting rape or sexual abuse. The threat of being transferred to a different prison, as well as fears for one's own safety, ranked amongst the

barriers to reporting.

"[T]he first time I was raped, I did the right thing. I went to an officer, told him what happened, got the rectal check, the whole works," an incarcerated man in Texas wrote to Human Rights Watch in 1996. "Results? I get shipped to [another prison]. Six months later, same dude that raped me is out of seg and on the same wing as I am. I have to deal with 2 jackets now: snitch & punk. I . . . had to think real fast to stay alive."

Since PREA was passed, more prison rape is being reported. In 2012, the Justice Department issued "National Standards to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Prison Rape." These new standards require incarcerated people to have multiple avenues to report sexual abuse. They also mandate that every allegation

be investigated.

Under these requirements, the number of allegations of sexual abuse nearly tripled nationwide. In 2011, there were 8,768 allegations of prison sexual assault and harassment across the country. By the end of 2015, the number had jumped to 24,661, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

However, the number of accusations that were found to be true has hardly increased. Of 61,316 investigations completed between 2012 and 2015, only 5,187—or 8.5 percent—were found to be true, *The Marshall Project* reports. The rest were determined to be false or inconclusive.

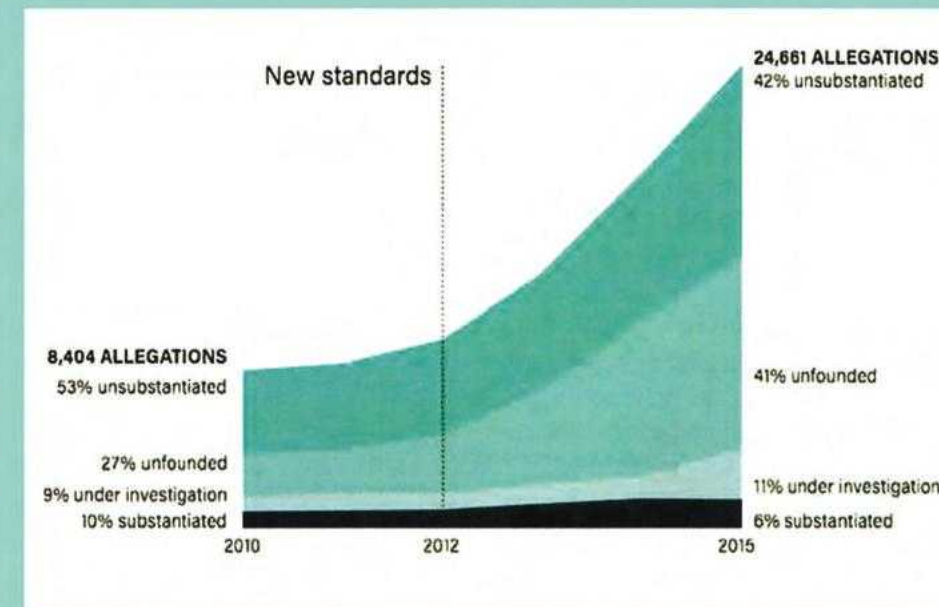
The Bureau of Justice Statistics data also shows that allegations made by prisoners against staff made up 58 percent of reports and constituted less than half of the allegations that were proven to be true, at 42 percent.

As more incarcerated people are reporting incidents of sexual abuse across the nation, these statistics have

caused critics to question whether PREA is effective at curbing prison rape. The story shared by the anonymous writer of the following article echoes many of the testimonies given to Human Rights Watch in the late 1990s: embar-

assment, shame, fear of retribution. "You see in prison, more than the free world," she writes, "reporting a rape is even more risky than rape itself." ¶

—By Alastair Boone



Source: US Dept. of Bureau of Justice

# To Tell or Not To Tell?

## The Lingering Scars of a Sexual Assault

By Anonymous

I have always known that in prison, the chance of rape is high. If your case has any sexual component to it, the risk is even higher. Before I came to prison, I imagined the various ways it might come and how I would handle it. In prison, there is no snitching, so I considered how I would just live with it and move on. It was not as if I had not been raped before. I knew I could survive the physical part, but rape has a way of messing with your head and emotions. It does not matter how many ways you envision it happening; nothing prepares you for the reality.

Sometime between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m., my attacker entered my room where both my roommate and I were sleeping. I was lying on my stomach and felt someone kissing my back and neck.

At first, I could not tell if I was awake or asleep. The person was sucking on my skin and biting me. I reached my hand back, felt the head of the person, and recognized who it was. This immediately had me fighting past sleep. The person was getting more aggressive, biting my ear and back while grabbing for my breast. I pressed myself deeper into the mattress. She tried to reach her hands into the waistband of my shorts. I pressed my hips into the mattress. I still could not speak. She gave up reaching into the shorts and grabbed for the crotch. I managed to make a sound and then my roommate made her presence known. The attack stopped. The attacker whispered in my ear that she would be back. Before she left the room, she turned and said, "If you tell anyone, I won't know what you are talking about."

After she left, I told my roommate "Thank you." She did not know what I meant. She was up and getting ready to go shop. She said the woman had come in and told her to get up, brush her teeth, and get ready for shop. She said that she did not know if I was awake or asleep but had seen the woman go to my bunk area. When she left to shop, I was alone in the room. I was so worried the woman would come back as she said. I took a sticky note and used the sticky side to wipe my back in the area where I had been bitten. My roommate returned, and I jumped when she opened the door.

Between 11:00 and noon, my friend from down the hall returned from her class. I gave her the laundry I had done for her that morning and asked if we could talk a minute. I told her what had happened and asked her to look at my

back. She confirmed there were marks on my back. I told my friend that I was scared because the woman had said that she would be back. My friend said if I was not going to report her, and the woman came back into my room, I should close the door and yell, "medical emergency." This was an idea I was willing to consider. My friend also suggested that I could punch her in the mouth. It was not as if the woman could tell, because the cops would ask why I had punched her. I could not hit anyone, so my friend let me know that she would be close and keep extra eyes. We agreed that I should be safe Wednesday through Sunday morning because the good staff was on duty.

Later that night, the woman who had attacked me returned to my door. She spoke first to my roommate and then

asked if I would come to the door. I did. She began by saying that she was sorry for what had happened. She said she felt "so small" as she had left the room earlier in the day. She told me that she had not been with a woman in 23 years and did not know what it was that would cause her to act that way. I became upset and told her I had been in a dead sleep and did not know who she was at first. I became emotional as I told her she had marked me. She knew how sacred that was in my world and how dare she mark someone who does not belong to her. She promised it would never happen again. She put that on "everything she loved." She went on to say she did not want it to ruin our friendship. At that point, I just wanted her to go away. I told her we would be fine and just to never speak on it ever again. I was going to try

to forget it myself. She agreed and left.

I really did try to get over it, but rape in prison is not like being raped in the free world. In the free world, your rapist will usually avoid you afterwards. In prison, your rapist is most likely part of your daily life. I see this woman every day and usually several times a day. I cannot avoid her even if I never leave my room. I tried to carry on a conversation with her in the presence of others, pretending all is well. Inside I want to scream and yell. Then that sad pathetic side of me comes out, not wanting to hurt her chances to go home. She goes to parole board next year. I do not want to embarrass her or me. Everyone would love the gossip feast of a PREA situation. You see, in prison, more than the free world, reporting a rape is even more risky than rape itself. ¶



# DEPORTATION AFTER REHABILITATION

## They're Fit to Reenter Society—Just Not Ours

By Joe Garcia

### Tith Ton

earned parole almost 24 years after being sentenced to life for the murder he committed as a teenager. His family waited for him, never giving up. But upon Ton's release from San Quentin State Prison, there were no hugs, no kisses, no tearful reunions—only a contracted private security van ready to whisk him away to Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Now, he waits to learn whether he will be deported to Cambodia—his country of birth, but a country nonetheless foreign to him.

"He should be coming home to us," said Ton's brother, Sok Sang. "Isn't that why he was granted parole?"

After Ton was found suitable for parole last July by California's Board of Parole Hearings (BPH), Governor Newsom had the mandated 150-day period to review Ton's case and potentially revoke his release. Two ICE agents showed up at San Quentin on day 151 to tell Ton they'd be taking him into custody.

"But first they congratulated me for earning my parole," said Ton.

Any prisoner found suitable for parole after a life sentence faces a whirlwind of emotions during those 150 days of un-



Ton speaking with his mother at ICE's Yuba County Jail facility.

certainty—hope, anxiety, fear, stress.

Parolees with an "immigration hold" on their record face even more turmoil—the imminent threat of deportation or of aimlessly sitting in ICE detention. Their release from state custody may amount to nothing more than the trading of one set of prison bars for another.

Nate Tan, co-director of the Asian Prisoner Support Community (APSC), believes California prisons may hold as many as 11,000 people with deportation removal orders. (The number is not limited to Southeast Asians but includes

people from all over the world.) Although the current emphasis on deportation has its roots in a 1996 law signed by President Clinton, the Trump administration has strengthened ICE enforcement since 2017.

Anti-deportation activists stress that deportation contradicts the state's belief in rehabilitation as an essential component of the criminal justice system. They are pressing Governor Newsom to end California's longstanding practice of handing paroled individuals over to ICE, especially after he vetoed a 2020 immigration bill that included such provisions.

"Families, including Ton's family, are tired of constantly being torn apart by institutions," said Tan.

Two advocacy groups, the APSC and the Asian Law Caucus (ALC), asked Newsom to step in on Ton's behalf. The governor has on rare occasions issued full pardons to paroled individuals whose criminal records make them subject to deportation.

Holding banners emblazoned with "When We Fight, We Win," they organized protest rallies at the State Capitol in Sacramento and later at the San Francisco detention center where Ton was first taken. Ton's family and

Photos courtesy of Sok Sang (2)



Ton's 3-year-old niece waits for the ICE van in San Francisco.

many supporters held up signs with Ton's photo and the hashtags #KEEP TITH HOME and #ICE OUT OF CA PRISONS.

"The fight often seems hopeless. It's important for Tith's family to know they are not alone," said Hien Nguyen, APSC program coordinator.

ICE agents sat with Ton while the transfer van approached. Ton later told his brother that the agents treated him

graciously and empathized with his plight.

ICE quickly moved Ton to an auxiliary housing unit in Yuba County Jail, where family and friends now visit him weekly. Separated by heavy security glass only several feet apart, they speak via the jail's visiting phone.

"I don't really like the idea of putting my family through all this—a trial, the social campaign, the whole process,"

Ton said. "But my mom told me, 'You did all this time, and we supported you all these years. You can't do another two years for us?'"

"She's right—I'll fight to spend time with them here. And maybe I can make a difference for the guys I know will be in this same situation after me," he said, naming a half-dozen friends still at San Quentin.

ICE gives detainees like Ton two options—either waive their rights to fight deportation or take their case to court. Tith's detention in Yuba County could last well over a year, maybe even two.

"The way I see it, with all the coping skills I've worked on during my incarceration, I'll get through this."

Ton survived being born into a forced labor camp during the Khmer Rouge massacres and came to America with his family under legal refugee status. He was barely two years old when they were resettled to Chicago.

"Half my family members were wiped out working in the camps," explained Ton. "My parents, especially my Mom, used alcohol to cover the trauma."

Ton's childhood memories are filled with images of the crack epidemic of the late-80s, particularly in Chicago's inner city. "We were just happy to be in America," he said. "It was one of this country's worst ghettos—but to my Mom, it felt like paradise."

The family eventually relocated to Fresno, where Ton became involved in gang activity. When he was 16, he shot and killed a rival gang associate. Following his arrest and conviction, he began his prison term at Salinas Valley State Prison when he was 18.

"It was nothing but dirt and concrete walls," Ton recalls. "All I thought was, 'Damn, I've got to spend the rest of my life in a place like this?'"

He coped by drinking and getting high every day until 10 or 12 years later. On



# #ICE OUT OF CA PRISONS

Immigration reform advocates rally with Ton's family in the State Capitol



one of his parents' visits in 2008, Ton's folks told him they'd stopped drinking.

"My family always took a lot of blame for me getting locked up," said Ton. "I decided to take their cue and get sober. I could see how much they changed. Once I stopped drinking and all the other stuff, my mind became clear, and I started to change also."

Years later, at the California Men's Colony, Ton completed a college degree in Social Welfare, and his eyes opened to broader issues. "I realized maybe I could try and be of service to my community in here," he said.

Ton was accepted into the Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP) at Solano Prison. Once he completed all the training, OMCP placed him at San Quentin to help start their substance abuse program.

"It's incredibly hard for one prisoner to trust another," Ton said about his OMCP mentoring and counseling experience. "When they break through, it's very painful for them. But when that light bulb comes on, you see it. That's why I love my job."

Ton has numerous career opportunities waiting for him in the San Francisco Bay Area. But even sitting restless in Yuba, he offers mentorship and support to the detainees around him.

"Most have never did time before. It's sad to see the new arrivals," says Ton. "Their only crime is coming to this country illegally."

"I'm trying to get the program coordinator to let me facilitate some self-help groups, so at least guys can go to court with something that shows they're working on self-improvement."

Ton's legal immigration struggles are not unique, particularly for prisoners from war-ravaged places like Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The shadow of ICE looms heavily for more and more once-documented individuals as parole opportunities grow.



## Hieu Nguyen

came to the United States from Vietnam when he was 14. Sentenced to life for a murder committed at age 18, Nguyen was found suitable for parole in December after serving over 20 years. He is in the midst of his own 150-day countdown, wondering if he'll get a notice from the governor—or if ICE will come calling.

Left: Photo courtesy of Hieu Nguyen; Right: Photo by Javier Jimenez



"It makes no sense. All my family's over here," said Nguyen. "We left Vietnam after the communist government killed my father. He was a colonel in the South Vietnamese army and fought right alongside American soldiers. My mom had to witness his execution after the US troops pulled out.

"Why would I want to go back? Over there, I'm like the enemy."

Nguyen pointed to his CDCR paperwork, where it clearly states, "International Prisoner Transfer to Viet Nam Completed—Denied."

Federal immigration courts conduct Convention Against Torture (CAT) hearings, where petitioners must show that grave danger awaits them should they be deported back to their country of origin.

"You have to prove you'll be tortured or murdered, but how can we prove that?" said Nguyen. "It's like I have to go there

and get tortured or murdered first for them to believe me."

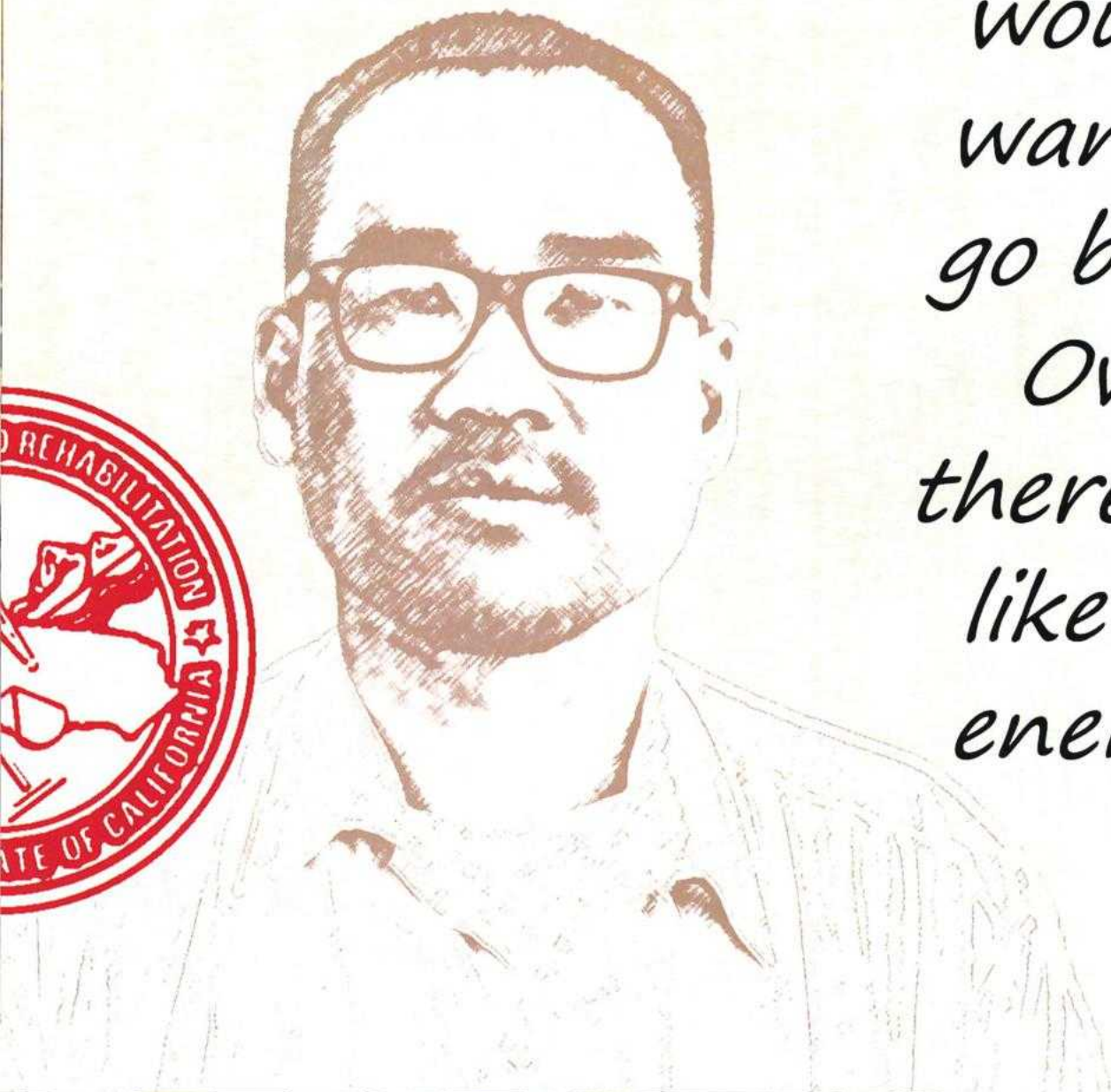
Many criminal justice hard-liners and victims' rights advocates maintain that if these individuals truly needed asylum, they would not have squandered that protection by committing crimes.

"There should be a distinction between short-term offenders and lifers who went through the parole board process," says Nguyen. "We've proved that we're no longer a threat.

"Just look at the recidivism rate for lifers—they almost never commit another crime, never break any law. They become good citizens. I deserve a chance to be a good citizen now also."

Nguyen continues to be a positive voice within San Quentin as his 150 days creep by. He mentors peers as they prepare for the board, and he still participates in all the self-help groups that contributed to his own transformation. His mom waits for him to come home.

*"Why  
would I  
want to  
go back?  
Over  
there, I'm  
like the  
enemy"*



Sak Uppasay addresses students and faculty at Diablo Valley College.

# Sak Uppasay,

another former prisoner, frequently walked the San Quentin yard with Ton and Nguyen and paroled one year ago after 26 years. At the time, his deportation seemed highly unlikely because Laos does not have any immigration agreements with the US.

ICE still detained Uppasay for four and a half months upon his release from San Quentin, in the same Yuba County lockup that Ton sits in now.

"That was the worst time I've done in all my years of prison," said Uppasay. "I waived all my rights to fight it, since my country doesn't accept us. But if the international relationship between the US and Laos changes, they'll pick me up again and deport me."

After ICE released him, Uppasay went to live at a transitional home known for its strong reentry support network. He's among friends and professionals who care about him and know him well through his positive work at San Quentin. His parole officer recently granted him permission to visit his father in Idaho. It's a trip Uppasay's dreamed of for years.

"I'm just grateful and thankful for the opportunity to be out again—to be reborn," he says. "There's no way I'm going to waste this second chance."

Uppasay has given guest lectures at several universities and high schools and led discussions on domestic violence, the culture of rape and, of

course, immigration reform.

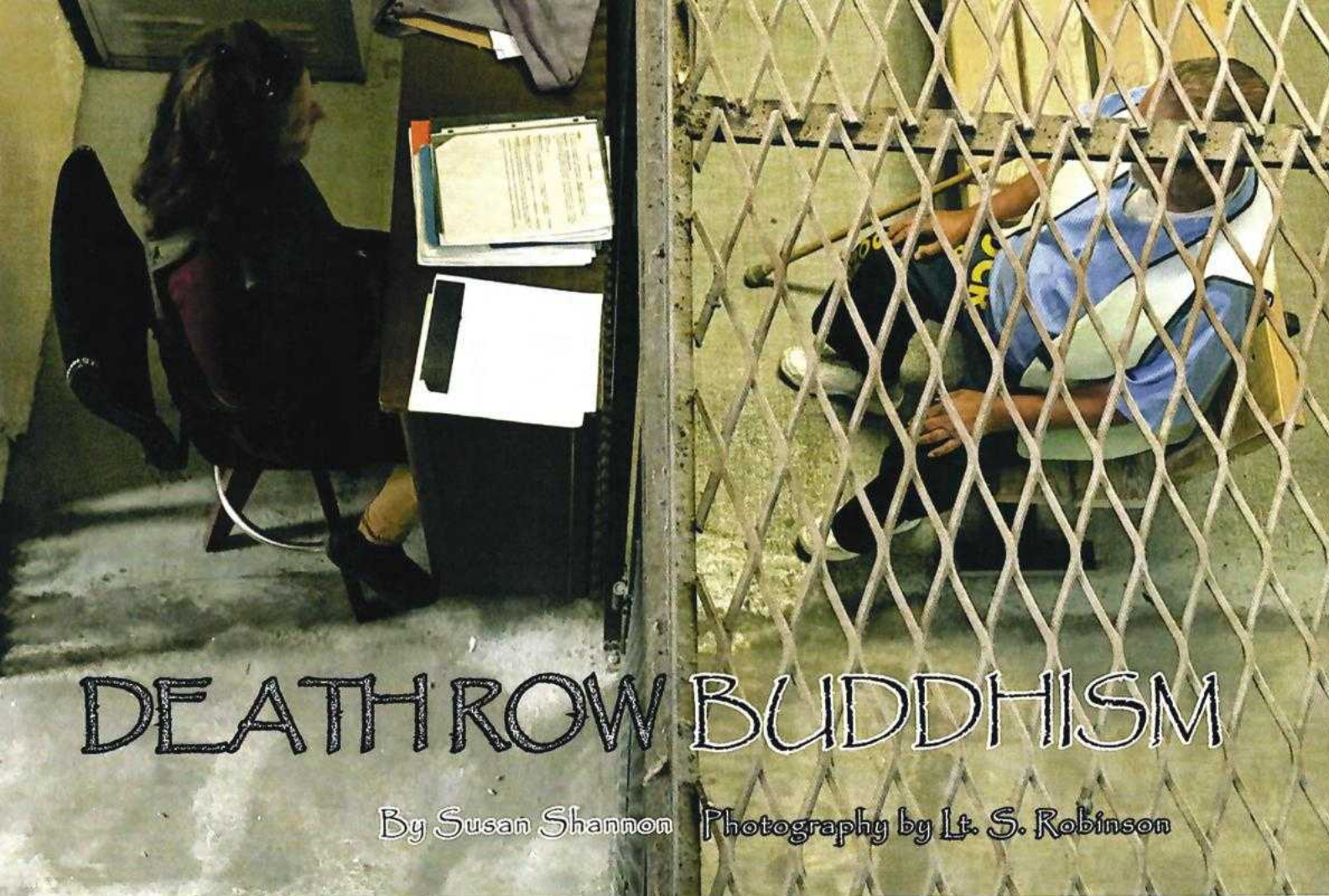
"How else can we break the cycle of violence?" he said. "I've seen even the worst offenders go through unbelievable change. We all are capable of healing ourselves. We just have to be willing to accept help and offer it to others."

And even though he is eager to pursue a career in domestic violence counseling, immigration problems complicate his newfound freedom.

"Right now, I've got no green card, and I have to check in with ICE every three months," Uppasay said.

It's one more reminder that the work of rehabilitation, and proving oneself, never ends. ↑





# DEATH ROW BUDDHISM

By Susan Shannon Photography by Lt. S. Robinson

Susan Shannon facilitating a Buddhist service in the Death Row Chapel.

two shower stalls, still in use, which I must pass in front of to get to my little podium.

I visit with several groups of men who are separated into different yards, depending on their crimes and gang affiliations, amongst other factors. The groups range in size, from three to ten men at a time. Every time we meet, we follow a basic structure of the elements of a Buddhist service. One of these is called Dedication. Dedication plays a huge role in Buddhism, one that can help foster a sense of purpose, and connection to the rest of humanity.

This is especially important to those who feel or really are isolated from others. We discuss how dedicating our actions for the benefit of others can open hearts, and change the way we engage energetically with the rest of the world. In Buddhism, we call this cultivating Bodhicitta, the Awakened Heart. This is the essence of Buddhist practice. As we learn to dedicate all the actions of our body, speech and mind to relieve the suffering of all beings, we go through an almost alchemical change, a softening, and a greater sense of connection and interconnection gives more meaning to everything we do, think or say. Our vibration changes on an inward level, and over time, sometimes immediately, our outer lives begin to change. Whether incar-

cerated or not, this is the transformative element of Buddhism.

I start each service by leading the men in guided meditations on our intentions. First, we focus on posture and breathing. We take several counted breaths together, then scan our bodies for tension, breathing into those spots with loving awareness. After meditating, we often move on to studying one of many Buddhist texts that teach about cause and effect. We talk about how the intention we put into everything, from turning on the tap to drink and remembering all beings who have no clean drinking water, to watching TV and praying for the suffering beings. One man told me that every time he exercises in his cell, he remembers all his homies, his family, his victims and his friends and says a prayer for their health. When he dresses, even though he only has two shirts, he thinks of all the people in the world without clothing. In this way, we can actively engage with others in everything we do throughout the day.

I call this a journey becoming a Warrior of the Heart. It awakens us to our own Buddha nature, or "Christ Consciousness"—however we want to name it. Transformation is a birth-right of all of us, no matter where we live. In Buddhism it is often said that when one has the wish to Awaken, and to live to benefit all beings, no matter what one's past has held, positive transformation is not only possible but supercharged. This is how intentional dedication changes the men on Death Row, where spiritually there are limitless transformational possibilities.

However, this practice is not always easy on Death Row, where most of the men will never get out to see a tree or animal again, where their contact with the rest of humanity is limited to their attorneys, their loved ones or friends if they are still in contact, or with the yard of men they've been assigned. Some of them have been here on what they call "the shelf" for upwards of 30 years. Despite these difficulties—or perhaps because of them—the men are very open to these lessons. Like all of us, they are not defined by the worst moments of their lives. They are hungry, in fact starved, for ways to be of benefit to the world on the outside.

We focus a lot on the Buddhist act of dedication. I use what they have access to in order to work this muscle: By focusing on themselves, their thoughts, their words and actions, they can develop true compassion for the suffering of all species. Even through the simple act of witnessing the suffering of others, we begin to resonate with our own interconnectedness with all beings.

As we move through our practice week after week, change begins to manifest in the men in my class in small ways. One week it might start with one student finding that he no longer wants to flush spiders down the drain. The next, another student might make a new friend. At one Buddhist service, a Death Row student disclosed that after decades of practicing medication and mantra, some major new developments had been revealed in his case, which could lead to a re-sentencing. Not only that, but a handful of old friends and relatives had resurfaced in his life. "I don't even feel like I am HERE!" he said. "I mean, I know I am here, but not HERE here," he exclaimed, pointing to the walls around us.

I am proud to say that this practice has brought new life to the men on Death Row, not just through greater connection with the world outside, but also in their relationships on the Row itself. During one particular service, I walked into the little makeshift chapel and found two students were giggling, giddy with excitement. One man had his hands behind his back and the other

was leaning into him as if they were hiding something.

I couldn't help laughing, as they were so obviously up to something. "Hey you guys, you look like two kids at Christmas," I said to them. "What's up?"

A few seconds more of shuffling and smiles, and the first student said, "Okay, show her, show her now!" The second student then turned towards me and lifted up something that was so foreign to this dark place that my mind couldn't grasp it at first.

The second student was holding a little pot made of the bottom of a bleach bottle, decorated with candy wrappers.

There were six strong, healthy green plants growing inside. I'd never seen anything green here, except for the guards' uniforms. There are no plants anywhere here on the Row. In the middle of the little grove sat a crocheted white bunny, as if peacefully grazing in this piece of heaven.

"This is so incredible!" I stammered, when I could speak again. The first student was beaming. "Isn't it great!" he said. "I think we should bring this every time we meet. It adds something to the space here, don't you think?"

The second student explained that the plants were Fuji apple seedlings, grown from seeds. He had dug dirt out of the cracks in the cement on the yard and made compost in his cell out of tea bags and leftover vegetables. In this dirt, he planted the trees; new life flourishing in the place where life is meant to be condemned. ¶

On Death Row, there are limitless transformational possibilities.



At 2:30 pm on any given Tuesday, I begin my Buddhist service on San Quentin's Death Row. As I sit in the makeshift chapel with the men who attend my services, we are separated by a metal screen. As always, the 735 men in the five-tier block are yelling to each other and moving around their cells. A cacophony of voices and movement engulfs us. The thunderous sound nearly drowns my voice as I begin our opening meditation. But then something miraculous happens. Inexplicably, the voices begin to fade—even those of men several tiers away, who are able to hear our mantra. By the time we are finished with our meditation, the noise has entirely ceased. On some days, the block gets so quiet that it almost feels like you can hear the other men breathing along with us.

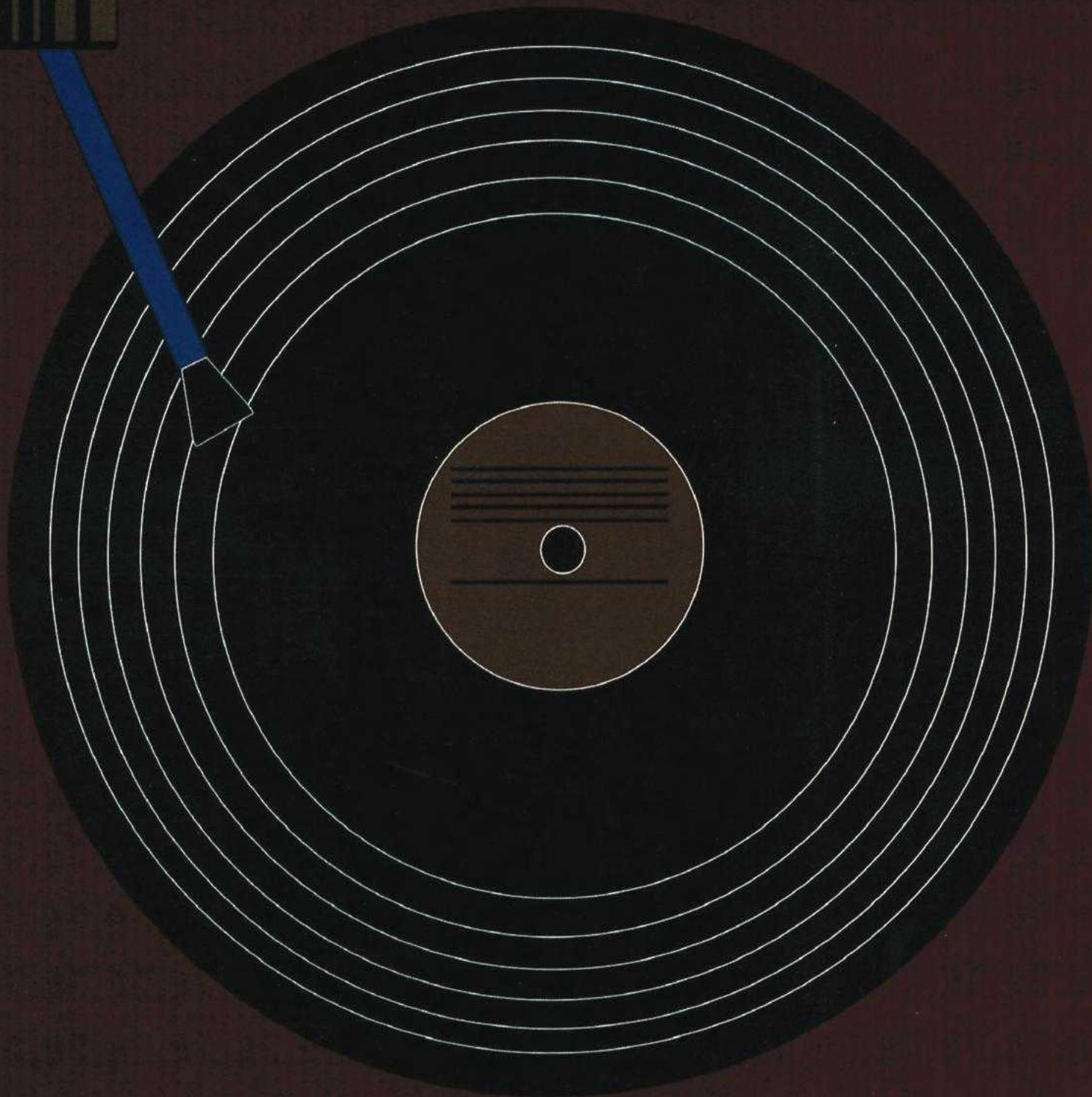
This kind of magic occurs frequently during my weekly visits to the Death Row chapel—a converted shower about the size of a handball court at the eastern end of the cell block. Around the perimeter above it is a gun rail with an armed guard always present. To the far side is a sally port with stairs uniting both sides of the block. To the front is a small platform about the size of two telephone booths, separating the rest of the "chapel" from where the chaplains and ministers sit. The body of the chapel has three well-worn, thick wooden benches, bolted into the cement floor with black cast-iron hardware. This is where the men sit, facing me. Directly behind me are



# Music Behind Bars

## The Dangers and Pleasures of a Song

By Timothy Hicks and Marcus Henderson



"I Wish It Would Rain" by The Temptations blares inside Nate McKinney's translucent headphones, as he takes in San Quentin's bustling Lower Yard, watching other prisoners exercising, jogging or walking on the uneven half-dirt, half-pavement track. "Sunshine, blue skies, please go away," the band sings. "My girl has found another and gone away."

Many of the prisoners around him are sporting the same type of accessory: head phones on their heads or ear buds in their ears, whatever it takes to transport themselves to another place and time. "In prison, it's like you're hiding in plain sight," McKinney says. "You're feeling all these emotions—the pain, the grief—but the rain is helping hide your tears."

That's what his MP3 player does for him, he adds. "Music is a form of meditation when you are on an emotional rollercoaster," especially in a place where toxic masculinity can make it hard to show your feelings. Music in prison is like music in the free world, then, but it is also more. It can be a distraction, an amusement, or a theme song to your life. And for those of us inside especially, it can be a stress reliever and a coping mechanism.

Past the yard, you can walk through any of San Quentin's dark, damp housing units, up the ancient five tiers, and hear a chorus of music blasting from antique radios. Rap; R&B; jazz; rock; pop; gospel; mariachi; and, on very rare occasions, classical music trickle through your eardrums.

As you walk the lines of cells, you can often guess a prisoner's mood, age, and demographic by the music they're listening to. Slow music or love songs can signal that someone's writing a letter to a love interest or daydreaming about good memories to relieve stress. That also

means that, to the trained prison ear, a love song means: "Leave me alone!"

Teddy Fields pauses to turn down "Anything You Wanna Do" by the 70s funk group Cameo, playing on his headphones, to reminisce. "Cameo is a group that me and my brother used to listen to when I was out on the streets," he says. "Music reminds me of the better days, and it puts me in a better place."

Fields stops and begins to sing the lyrics. "Just keep on sticking to it, you shouldn't give a damn about tomorrow," he croons. "All that's there is there/sometimes your past is full of sorrow/but the past for sure won't get us anywhere." He stares off in deep thought. "Yeah, music helps me get through things I go through." He replaces his ear buds and walks away down the tier.

Leo Zaragoza was incarcerated 15 years ago on attempted murder charges. One of his favorite songs to listen to as he trims the flowers and foliage around the education building is "True Colors," by Cindy Lauper. Music give him hope, he says; he listens to all kinds but enjoys classical the most. "I was mad and sad all the time once I received my term," he says, "but when I started listening to music, I listened to the words and it helped me relax."

Music unifies across race, not an easy thing in prison. But it also exposes generational gaps, with each age group declaring their era the era of "real music." And it turns out people feel strongly enough about that argument to cross racial barriers they don't usually cross. Young Black and Latino rap fans swap CDs; older folks who prefer R&B or classic rock bond over their dislike of "all that noise." The 45 to 55 age group pride themselves on the golden age of rap, the mid 1980s-2000. The next generation after that listens mostly to the oldies.

During the summer you can see this dynamic play out during the yard shows that take place once in a while from morning until midday, near the dusty track. Prison management puts up a stage and sets out chairs, and bands from both within San Quentin and outside play for what can be very different audiences. That can make for a strange

dynamic, if a funk group from San Francisco plays right before the newest rapper from inside. As soon as the first set ends, the older and younger groups switch, sometimes in a hurry.

You can mostly find the youngest prisoners in a circle on the yard, on the tier, or pretty much wherever they are, exchanging lyrics by the latest hot rappers or any of their cities' regional stars. In contrast to older prisoners—who understand the gravity of prison life and the decades that have passed—they still hold a connection to the streets, not feeling too far removed from the society they just left.

Gary Townes is known as "the guy with the tapes." He's a rarity, one of the few San Quentin residents who still owns a cassette player. "I'm not into this new music, all the auto tune stuff," Townes says. "I'm into real bands and real instruments." He runs down his list of tapes, from the Barclays to the O'Jays. "My music reminds me of the good times, of high school dances and house parties without violence." He's in the process of upgrading to an MP3 player, but the device costs around \$80—and a \$1.75 per song. "With the tapes, I have the whole album, but with the MP3, I will have to focus on my favorite songs," he points out. Not exactly a positive change.

It can often seem like you don't make any good memories in prison, so your good memories have to come from music. But that can make your relationship with music dangerous, a trap or a time warp. If music is your escape, your happy place, you can get stuck there and miss what's going on around you.

That means some of us stay away from the music that's closest to our hearts, to protect ourselves from the memories that go with it, memories that might be too painful. We stick with songs that are new, or new to us, without the extra weight of history.

Maybe The Temptations capture it the best when they sing: "Everyone knows a man ain't supposed to cry/ listen, I got to cry 'cause crying eases the pain/oh yeah, people, this hurt I feel inside words could never explain/ I just wish it would rain." ¶

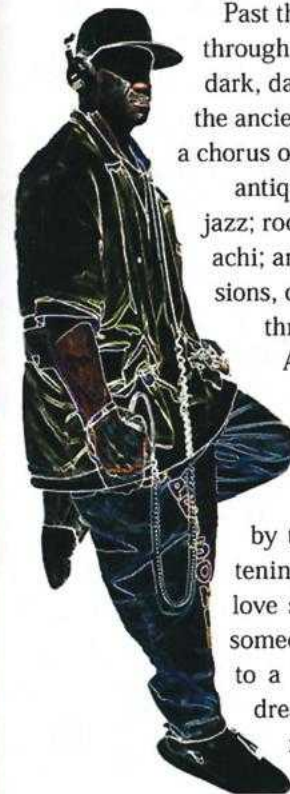


PHOTO BY JAVIER JIMENEZ / ILLUSTRATION BY JONATHAN CHIU



**One** day in 2006, Antwan Williams sat in a crowded, hot courtroom holding pen with discarded brown paper bags and mystery meat on the ground. He and several other men were waiting to see a judge on various charges that could net them serious prison time. In the midst of that misery, he couldn't believe what was going on a few feet away. A tatted, scruffy, slim White man with an urban swag had all the guys, who would normally be stressing or fighting, tuned in as he performed a spoken word piece about living in the ghetto. "I have more time on the block than ticks on clocks," he said to his pent-up audience.

"He was raw, and he had all these gang members captivated," Williams said. "I saw that and wanted to do it too."

Williams's first piece was about guns—but, as he says, "not glorifying them, just about their destructive power over us." He started out shy, sharing it with a friend in jail. "...but these are

gifts and how to use them.

But for Williams, prison is where he discovered his gifts and how to use them.

**Williams** grew up in a severely broken home. As a child, he lived for a year with his older sister in an abandoned house with no heat or hot water. His older brother was in prison, and his mother and father were missing in action.

"As loving as my parents wanted to be, they just didn't have the adequate tools to help cultivate talent," Williams said. "When I did get support, it was from my homies. But not in the things I wanted; in the culture of hanging out and chasing money."

Williams participated in an armed robbery chasing money in 2006. That's when he landed in the holding pen with the un-



## DISCOVERING MONEY IN

the guns you make / you promote, you give, you take," he spat, "and for the right amount of cake, you send people guns from outta state." Two guys sitting nearby overheard, and they started telling others in the pod about Williams. He was asked to recite his piece again and again. In doing so, he discovered his power to captivate people.

That power increased over the years, finally reaching star level in 2016, when Williams became the sound designer for *Ear Hustle*. The hit podcast started at San Quentin State Prison with co-creators Earlonne Woods, who paroled in 2018, and volunteer Nigel Poor. It quickly became a sensation, with millions of downloads.

I work with Williams (who we call Banks) on that podcast, and he is one of the most talented artists I have ever met. Besides spitting spoken word, he can dance, rap, produce videos, sew and draw. Growing up in South Central, Los Angeles, though, Williams didn't know he had so much talent because he wasn't exposed to an environment that cultivated or valued art. Instead, he was immersed in a culture of violence and gangs.

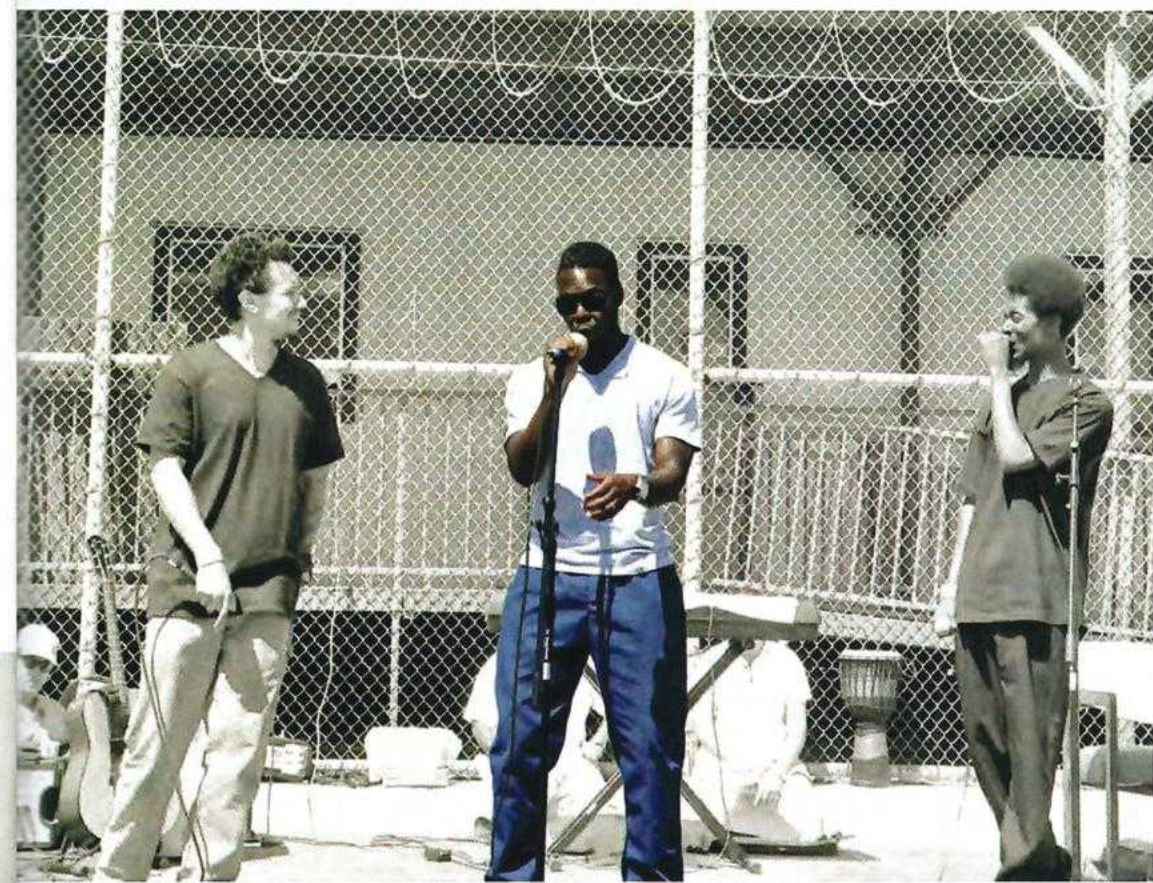
Prison, as it turned out, is where Williams discovered his

likely poet, and then Los Angeles County Jail. He stayed there during his trial, as he faced multiple life sentences at 18 years old, leaving behind a young woman pregnant with his daughter, Ah'janae. Stressed out and stuck in an environment filled with racial politics and violence, crammed in a space so overcrowded that eight people often slept on hammocks in cells designed to hold six, Williams started to write poetry.

"When your whole life is at stake, it destroys a person mentally, physically, emotionally because you're dealing with the darkest times in your life," Williams said of that moment. "I started writing poetry to combat the feelings I was having, to stay mindful, stay positive."

Williams ended up taking a 15-year deal for the robbery and was sent to prison. There, spoken word turned into rapping, after others heard him spit his poetry and said he should try it to a beat. The passionate-spiritual brother became known as one of the top rappers on the yard, famous for his turned-up music rooted in consciousness and infused with grit, pain, bass and melodies.

Then, Williams began dancing—at California State Prison Corcoran of all places. In the 1990s, a Correctional Officer



**LEFT:** BANKS PERFORMING ON THE LOWER YARD STAGE AT THE AMALA WALK IN 2016. **FAR LEFT:** BANKS PERFORMING WITH ANOUTHINH PANGTHONG (SECOND PHOTO FROM LEFT) AND OTHERS IN ARTISTIC ENSEMBLE IN 2016. **BELOW:** IN THE PRODUCTION STUDIO FOR *EAR HUSTLE*



# BANKS

THE ANTWAN WILLIAMS STORY BY RAHSAAN THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY BY EDDIE HERENA

blew the whistle there on guards setting up incarcerated people of different races to attack each other, then shooting the person being attacked, usually someone Black. It wasn't a place where men danced.

One day, after his cellie went to work, Williams watched a TV show called "America's Next Best Dance Crew." On the screen, a dance crew called Poreotics showed off their finger tutting, a style of dance that consists of pop-locking hand gestures, and it captivated Williams. He began finger tutting too.

"I would board up my window up so nobody could see inside my cell, and I would just dance," Williams said. "It was a way for me to just be me and not worry about being seen or being judged." Finger tutting turned into full-on dancing, limited by

the small space between the metal cubbyholes and bunk bed. The whole time, Williams kept his boogying a secret.

**Although** Williams felt drawn to the arts, it wasn't until he reached San Quentin State Prison that he found an environment that encouraged, cultivated and provided outlets for artistic expression.

"I credit the OGs for my growth and the collective community that inhabits San Quentin," Williams told me. "So many people pushed me in the direction I am now. It took a village to help me get to where I am."

In 2012, a close friend, Lamar "Maverick" Harris, asked Williams to help create music for one of his pieces in a Marin



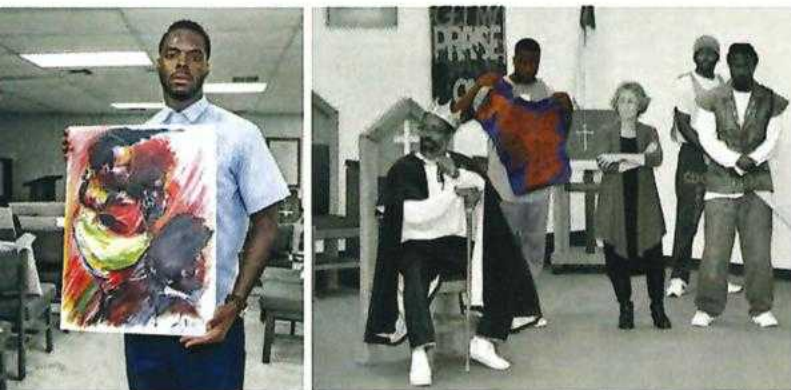
Shakespeare production at San Quentin. Williams went to the play and started getting small roles. That culminated in his playing the lead role of King Richard in *Richard II* and King Leontes in *A Winter's Tale*.

Williams could always draw, but it was after seeing the strokes put down by a teacher at San Quentin's Arts in Corrections program that he first put a brush to canvas in 2014. But, to his frustration, his initial painting "kinda sucked."

For Williams, painting is about trying to get the images he sees in his mind onto a canvas. His first try came out in a swirl of blue hues on white paper that resembled a woman's face—but not the lady in his imagination.

"I still wanted to make that image in my head, but I never got it," Williams said. "Every painting I put out is another attempt to free the image in my mind."

Williams became hungry to learn more about the arts. He took art history in the Prison University Project and learned that his style is a blend of impressionism, realism and abstract art. In 2016, his creative eye turned towards filmmaking with



was Muslim, there was no autopsy. He was 48.

"That almost broke me," Williams said, with tears welling up in his eyes. "I got a lot of support from guys here. At least 20 people came up to me with pictures of my brother and my mom, letters from 20 years ago. A lot of people here knew him, and that meant a lot to me."

In the wake of this tough moment, Williams turned to his art. He wrote a song pouring all his pain into the lyrics.

**When** I last saw Williams, he sat at a keyboard making music on the computer. He cuts his skin-faded hair himself, and he looked immaculate in his state-issued blue uniform, with a flair that defied the words "CDCR Prisoner" printed on them. Posted on the walls around his workstation were portraits he painted with the abstract flair of Picassos. Many of them were of his wife Breana, his best friend from high school who he married in 2013. The 4-foot-10 woman moved from Los Angeles to the Bay Area to be closer to her husband and is a huge inspiration to him. He once told me he can't stop painting her.

"She's always willing to be what it is I need when I need it to be a better person," Williams said. "I would break out of heaven and dive to hell for her. That's my baby, man."

Williams paroled in October. Now he plans to use his talents to positively impact society with a six-month tour. He'll make stops up and down California at various high schools and colleges, sharing

music, stories and experiences in order to change the way audiences see the world.

He calls his Outlook School Tour a "musical motivational tour." On a grander scale, it's meant to unite communities and expand people's belief in what community can be.

"System-impacted communities include more than the ghetto," Williams said. His belief is that all communities are connected and affected by each other. He wants to share that perspective with kids in richer schools and provide clarity for kids at poorer schools. He plans on using dialogue, his experiences and music to reach young people in an engaging way. Williams is on a mission to not only expose people to the arts early, but also to show society the value in giving everyone access to opportunity.

Prison isn't normally a place where men find themselves, but somehow Williams managed to reach San Quentin, a prison that offers so many opportunities for artistic expression. Before he paroled, I asked him about which accomplishments he felt the most positively about: his poetry, maybe or his music?

"Not letting prison break me, not letting prison thingify me, dehumanize me, objectify me, consume me, corrupt me," he said. "That's what I'm most proud of." 📖

FOR WILLIAMS,  
PRISON  
IS WHERE HE  
DISCOVERED  
HIS GIFTS  
AND HOW TO USE THEM.

LEFT: ARTWORK MADE FOR DAY OF PEACE. RIGHT: BANKS IN 2018'S KING LEAR WITH CHRIS MARSHALL

First Watch, joining an all-incarcerated crew to produce videos of men taking accountability for their crimes and showing their remorse.

He danced in front of a live audience in a production called *Artistic Rebirth* that was filmed at the prison. And he joined Artistic Ensemble, which uses dance to express emotion and tell stories. As an actor, he even started to dress the part. That same year, Williams was punished with solitary confinement for his burgeoning sense of fashion. He had a gray cardigan V-neck sweater and argyle socks officers recognized came from an unauthorized source.

Between his time in solitary and his return to a lockdown of his unit, Williams missed a lot of the first season of *Ear Hustle*. Once back at work, he soaked up music production and sound designing lessons from Pat Mesiti-Miller, another *Ear Hustle*'s sound designers. Today, Williams produces music like "Float Away," as performed with fellow incarcerated musician Eric "Maserati E" Abercrombie and featured in the *Ear Hustle* episode, "Inside Music." To date, that episode has been downloaded more than 500,000 times.

Just as Williams found a way to thrive in prison, he faced his toughest moment: the death of his older brother, Deon "Shaka Jihad" Brooks in April 2018 of unknown causes. Since Brooks

## How's Your Latin?

Across

- Actor Gibson
- 23, 22, 21, 20 of 26
- Weight measurement (Abbr.)
- Haul back
- Odin, Thor or Loki
- Rapper
- Change
- Pass through a block
- Desire
- The fact of a case to be proved (Latin)
- Ball
- Certain
- Naval rank (Abbr.)
- Common knee tear (Abbr.)
- R&B artist Bridges
- Propel
- When doubled, a train sound
- McCormack of *Will & Grace*
- Deprived
- One must yield to the times (Latin)
- Control
- Rapper Fiasco
- J&J cancer-causing powder
- CA Female institution (Abbr.)
- Women's footwear (brand name)
- College format
- An incarcerated person's necessities
- '90s rap artist
- Spy org. (Abbr.)
- To render homage (Latin)
- Indigo plant
- Hair net
- The \_\_\_\_ Not Traveled
- "To Live and Die \_\_\_\_"
- OK capital

70. Women's name

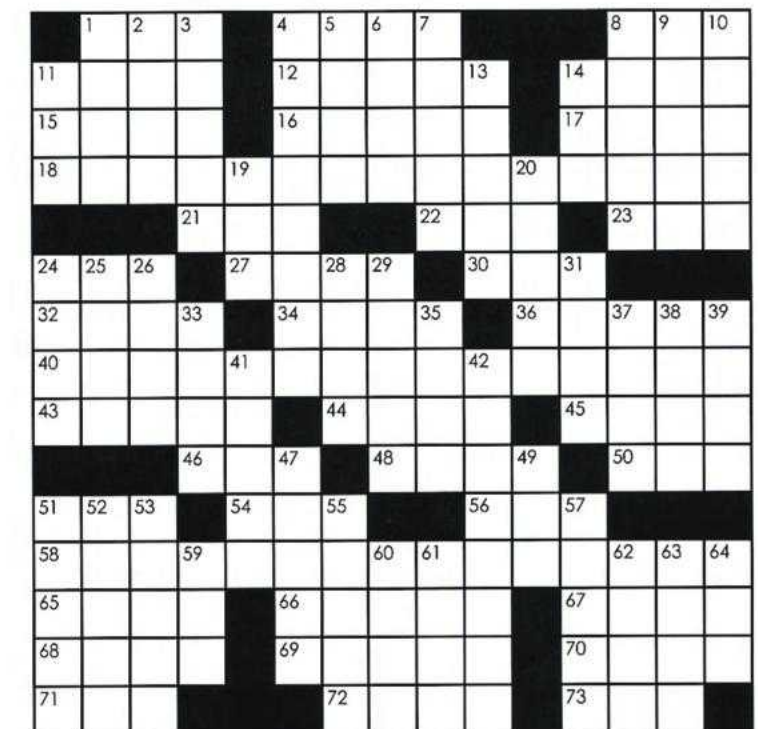
- Carly \_\_\_\_ Jepson
- Shaming body shape
- '90s website

Down

- Custody designation (Abbr.)
- Type of fall
- Addicting pursuit
- What you don't want on a hot summer day
- Anna Chlumsky show
- Type of error
- Entertainment recording sets
- "Perfect Places" artist
- Already started
- Curtails
- Game changer (Abbr.)
- Canon model
- One-liner
- Web initials (Abbr.)
- Compensate
- Shows
- Artist Baker
- Capital of Togo
- Voiced
- Springing to one's feet from lying on one's back
- Crooked
- Oil org. (Abbr.)
- Superhero's accessory
- Dutch cheese
- Boring
- Community org. (Abbr.)
- Pipe fitting
- Wood used for closets and chests
- Subjective measuring spot
- Artist Vicious

## CROSSWORD

By Jonathan Chiu



- Oversee
- Character on *That '70s Show*
- Beam
- Early morning
- Dealing with the matter directly (Latin)

- In the style of
- 56 Across' enemy
- Activist Parks
- Long time
- Black \_\_\_\_
- State govt. agency (Abbr.)

## CARTOON

By Jonathan Chiu

### THE INCARCERATED MIND EXPLORED

**FRONTAL LOBE:**  
Imprinting where you develop a cognitive behavior of standing by the cell door when they're about to call "Chow Time."

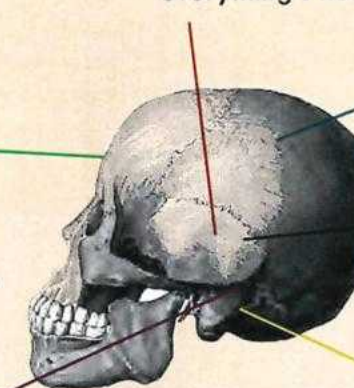
**HIPPOCAMPUS:**  
Working memory in where you can recall who won the 1978 NBA Finals and SuperBowl and MVP but can't remember if you unplugged the hot pot when you went to the yard.

**AMYGDALA:** The guard dog that alerts you to the sound of someone walking with keys so you can hide your contraband and act like everything's normal.

**MOTOR SKILLS:**  
Fine tuning your sports skills in faking an injury and calling foul and "accidentally" tripping over the other team.

**ADDICTION CENTER:**  
Where you have been drinking caffeine for so many years, you need to make a shot of coffee in order to go to sleep.

**OLD BRAIN:**  
Years of incarceration trained the body to recognize when sh#t's about to go down and then suddenly finding yourself going to a ducat.





By Kevin D. Sawyer

# Getting Old, Getting Out?

## Taking a Look at AB 1448—Elderly Parole

Since time immemorial, people have considered the pathway to their mortality. In prison, dying takes on different importance. When a defendant is convicted and handed a lengthy sentence of life, with or without the possibility of parole, in many instances this civil death is interpreted as death by prison.

There's a particular misery associated with aging and dying in prison. Over time, the body slowly signals the knell of looming death. While in most cases the mind remains intact, the loss of muscle mass, the need for eyeglasses, sickness, soreness, weakness and other ailments tiptoe into a person's shell; all of these age-related frailties can be particularly problematic in such a volatile setting.

Incarcerated people in California are staying longer, and they age over a protracted period of time. These two factors contribute to an older population and overcrowding—a situation that prompted lawsuits, court rulings, and ultimately political action.

On February 10, 2014, according to

the Prison Law Office, a federal three-judge court overseeing a California prison overcrowding class-action lawsuit required the state to create parole processes to release some incarcerated people early.

In 2018, under pressure from the court, then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law Assembly Bill 1448 (Shirley Weber, D-San Diego), the Elderly Parole Program. Some call this the "60/25" law because it allows incarcerated people to appear before the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) once they turn 60 and have served 25 continuous years.

Wade Anthony Morman, 59, is serving more than 100 years to life. Under his current sentence, he would not be eligible for parole until the year 2234. He's already served 23 years, but because of AB 1448 he'll be eligible for parole at the end of 2020. "I wasn't even expecting to go to the board," Morman said.

Studies show that older people are less likely to commit crimes, either because they have become physically incapable or, more likely, they have simply

matured.

In considering the release of an incarcerated person, the law states, in part, "the Board shall give special consideration to whether age, time served, and diminished physical condition, if any, have reduced an elderly's risk for future violence."

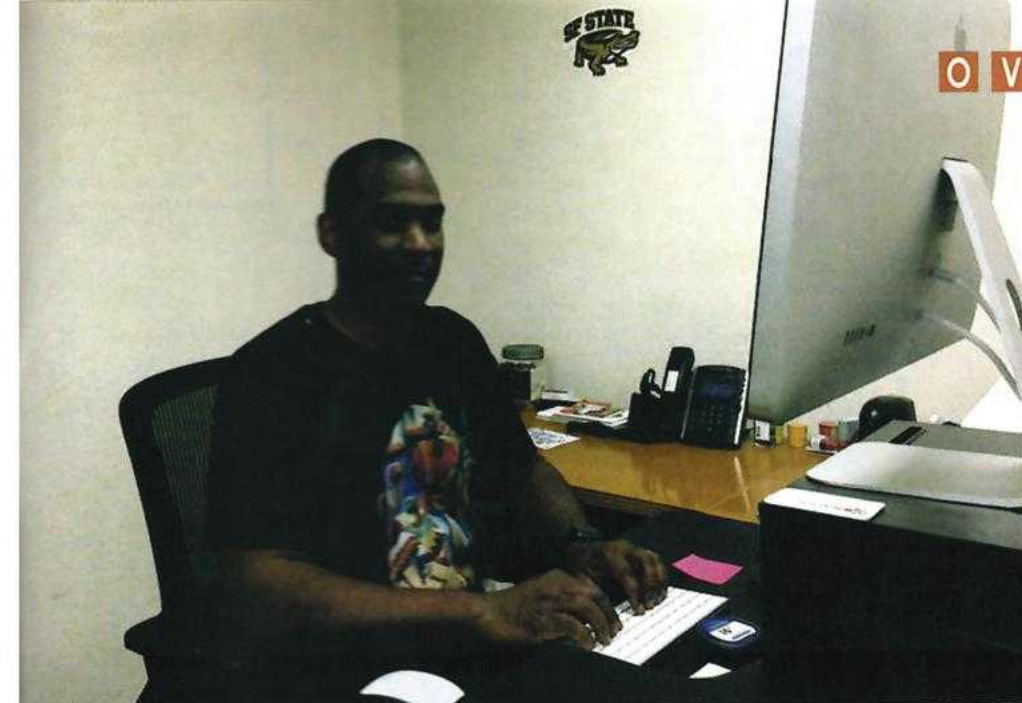
Excluded from AB 1448 are those sentenced to death or to life without the possibility of parole, as well as those sentenced under California's "Three Strikes" law. The new early parole rules also exclude those convicted of first-degree murder of either a police officer or a former police officer if the killing was in retaliation for the performance of the officer's official duties.

Seven percent of California's 130,000 incarcerated were over age 60 in 2016, according to California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) numbers. Two decades earlier, only 1 percent of the state's prison population exceeded 60 years of age.

In 2005, the CDCR's medical system fell under federal receivership because of the inadequate healthcare it provided to the incarcerated. The courts ordered California to reduce its prisons population to 137.5 percent of design capacity. These two developments paved the way for certain elderly incarcerated to receive early parole dates.

Last year, the CDCR reported to the federal court that in the four years since its unofficial elderly parole program started, there were more than 2,600 hearings for incarcerated people eligible for elderly parole. Nearly 700 incarcerated people were found suitable for parole. More than 1,700 were found unsuitable, and more than 200 stipulated to unsuitability, according to the Prison Law Office. <sup>1</sup>

Illustration by San Quentin News



Top: David Cowan at work.

Bottom: At lunch, Cowan helps orient other newly released individuals

## Paying It Forward by Taking Care of His Own

David Cowan thought his last day of freedom would be September 15, 1989. On that day, he began serving a life sentence in California State Prison. On a cool winter day twenty-two years later, he was released. It was December 27, 2011. He thought about his last prison job as a program clerk for San Quentin's college program, Prison University Project (PUP)—a job he had held since 2009 and one he would continue as a free man.

"In some ways, I got used to being free

within the hour," Cowan said. "In other ways, I'm still getting used to it—we continue to learn and grow."

Years after getting out of San Quentin, he returned to talk about opportunities in the free world.

**JH:** Talk a little about your job as PUP clerk.

**DC:** I helped manage registration, drops and withdrawals. I [made] sure instructors had the materials to run the class seamlessly. I definitely feel I gained more than I gave. The expecta-

tions that they [held] were from outside values and standards. It helped me feel free while incarcerated.

**JH:** Describe your current job.

**DC:** I am the director of operations for PUP and the director of Bonafide. My work with PUP includes financial, HR, operations and systems management responsibilities. With Bonafide, I get to coordinate meeting people at the gate when they're released, help them [re-acclimate] to life outside, and [support] the awesome formerly incarcerated community.

**JH:** Talk about coming back to San Quentin as a free man.

**DC:** I hate seeing the suffering and love seeing the resilience. When I go inside there is a part of me that exhales in relief seeing some of the people I love and left behind. It's also odd [because] so many people are out now, and the place is noticeably different without them.

**JH:** What is your best memory of San Quentin?

**DC:** I have so many good memories of San Quentin. I think that the most satisfying and proud moments were when people would act as a community. My most fun times were when we would play volleyball together and just play and laugh. Oh! And of course the day I left.

**JH:** What is your worst memory of San Quentin?

**DC:** I have so many bad memories as well. I think it was hardest for me to be there while someone was being executed.

**JH:** If you could give currently incarcerated people advice, what would it be?

**DC:** [Internalize] the lessons that you learn within the programs. Take every opportunity to practice healthy living and thinking while you're inside. You're not practicing to stay in, to be the best prisoner. You're practicing to be out here being the best you. <sup>1</sup>



Photos courtesy of David Cowan (3)



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