

W O R D S U N C A G E D



Spring 2019

Insight into Insight

Sister Mary Sean Hodges Helps Prisoners Develop Insight

By Allen Burnett

It is 8 a.m. and the doors to the Facility 'A' Multi-Purpose Room open up to a group of prisoners dressed in chambray blue prison garb and bright orange foul weather coats. They file into the room, one at a time, filling empty chairs, talking among themselves, some blowing their warm breath into their cold hands. Everyone is relieved to be indoors and out of the frigid desert winds. They are an assortment of prisoners, life prisoners, life without parole (LWOP) prisoners, and a few men whose life sentences were commuted three days before Christmas. They are all excited to see Sister Mary-Sean Hodges, founder of the Partnership for Re-Entry Program. Although Sister Hodges is a regular visitor at California State Prison-Los Angeles County today is her sixth time volunteering to conduct her Insight workshop on the Progressive Programming Facility (PPF). There is a strong feeling of hope and anxiety lingering in the room. Hope for the men sentenced to LWOP that one day they may have an opportunity to appear before the parole board to discuss their transformation and insight into their life crime; anxiety because each man understands that without Insight they will not be found suitable for parole.

The Board of Parole Hearings gives considerable weight to Insight when determining whether a prisoner is suitable for parole. The lack of Insight amounts to an automatic denial of parole ranging anywhere from three, five, or seven years. Unfortunately, many prisoners have very little understanding of Insight due to no fault of their own. The reality is most prisoners do not have an opportunity to be housed at a facility like the PPF where the population fosters the development of Insight and personal transformation. Most prisoners spend years, even decades, transferring from one institution to another trying to survive while navigating prison politics. Developing insight or personal transformation holds no value to a person who has no hope of ever being released from prison. However, over the last few years,

California is experiencing a consistent push for prison reform, which has led to a number of laws that are bringing prisoners to their initial parole suitability hearing sooner than anticipated. Presently, there is a flood of prisoners taking the necessary steps towards self-improvement and parole board preparation with the hope of returning to their families and communities. Yet, for many prisoners, Insight remains an abstract concept that needs to be explained before it can be developed. For most of the men in today's group, Sister Hodges will give them their first insight into Insight.



Sister Hodges enters the room to a chorus of good mornings and applauds from the men. She removes her coat, lays it on the back of an empty chair, and smiles at the men while scanning their faces and nodding with approval, "I am sorry I am late we were talking and missed our exit on the 14 Freeway and spent thirty minutes sightseeing through Canyon Country—it's very nice," she says with a hint of irony. She immediately takes control of the room asking for volunteers, okay, who is going to the Board soon?" Several hands raise. She points to the four men sitting near the front row. Three of the four had their sentences commuted from LWOP to life; they are all scheduled for their parole hearing this summer. As they make their way to the front of the classroom, their nervousness is palpable. One man—Kincaid begins to fidget uncontrollably with his glasses while Sister Hodges addresses the room, "I will be asking these brave gentlemen each a

question.” She turns and acknowledges the four with a reassuring smile before beginning again. “When they are finished answering then we will open it up for questions and comments from you.” She extends and waves an open hand to the room. “You will be our panel.” She looks back again to the four nodding for their approval giving them an opportunity to interject.



With pens and note pads in hand, the men listen intently as Sister Hodges begins to lead the four volunteers, one question at a time, into their path to crime. Occasionally, she interrupts long-winded answers asking for clarification. Cautiously, she unpacks their social history from childhood and family structure, to teenage years. Then, with the compassion that only comes with personal experience, she invites the four to share the traumatic events that shaped their self-perception and belief system, which lead to their poor choices. Overcome with emotion, Kincaid jumps out of his chair and rushes out of the room into the hallway. Fighting back tears, he places his back against the wall, “I had LWOP for thirty-nine years. I thought I was gonna die in here—now I’m going to the board—it’s unreal.” He says shaking his head in disbelief. Kincaid takes a few minutes to regain his composure before coming back into the Multi-Purpose Room. Sister Hodges is addressing the men from her chair taking questions and listening to comments. She notices Kincaid immediately, nods in his direction, and smiles, “Thank you for sharing and for coming back.” She turns her attention to Jamil as he begins to speak, “Developing insight helped me understand that the dysfunction of my early life led me on this path. I needed to understand how I got here so I won’t make the same choices again.” Another man sentenced to LWOP raises his hand. Kelsey has been in prison for over thirty years, “For me, developing Insight helped me see my actions from

the victims in my crimes standpoint [sic] and the impact and ripple effect, its pushing me to rebuild myself everyday into a better person.” Sister Hodges Chimes in, “What is good in myself? What is it I need to change in myself? How can I become a better—a much more loving person? Are the questions we should be asking ourselves daily.” She stands signaling it is time to go.

Once again, the men applaud Sister Hodges, line up to shake her hand and say a few words. She promises to come back. Kincaid is the last man to say goodbye. She says a few words privately to him; Kincaid nods, thanks her again and walks out the door.



Sister Hodges sits at the table quietly capturing the conversations and the faces of the men. “I think that went well,” she says. “People have asked me why prisoners, why Insight—I believe in the dignity of all human beings and when I am sharing about Insight, I am sharing my truth, everything I do is my truth. It is the positive relationships that we form that make us better people.”

Federal Correctional Institution of Victorville

by Caroline Chavez

During the week of February 19th, men at the Federal Correctional Institution of Victorville Medium 1 were told that they will be put on a lockdown for two weeks. Reason being? The facility had to train Correctional Officers. On Saturday, February 23rd, the men were officially put on lockdown and were not released from the lockdown until March 10th. A lockdown for those unaware is when a facility locks all incarcerated people in their cells and only lets them out of the

cell for an hour a day so that they can shower and eat. During the lockdown the incarcerated men do not get access to visitations or phone calls.

Is it necessary to put people on lockdown for two weeks just so that Correctional Officers can get trained? To a formerly incarcerated man, Milton Chavez, this seems extremely unnecessary. Before being put on lockdown, Mr. Chavez had said in a phone call to his daughter, "Why is it that we have to suffer just so that they can get trained, honestly, I do not feel like they will be training anyone. I feel as if they are just doing this because they have the power to do so." So, do you think this had to do with power?

Jeff's Tips for Re-entry

By Jeff Stein

For April, I have the honor of sharing two valuable insights into transitioning with a high level of functioning.

Simply put, stick with the people who got you here. If GOGI, ARC, Cal State LA, Words Uncaged, Unlock Tomorrow, or PREP were highly involved with your transformation--as well as generating support letters on your behalf, then stick with them when you are released. Volunteer with them, network for job and career opportunities with them, hang out with them during your free time. We owe these people a righteous debt. It can be our turn to give back instead of being helpless, in the can, and needing their support. Too many of us can't wait to get as far away from these good people fast enough--and I notice that their transition lacks a certain elegance that could be achieved by sticking with the people who got you there!

Just as important, while you are banished don't take Anger Management or N.A. once and expect to come out here and function at a high level. I challenge you to take every class, group, and therapy offered throughout your term as often as possible. I have seen firsthand how much difficulty parolees who did the bare minimum are having once they return to the community. The truth is, we will never take enough classes, groups, and therapies. Each coping skill you learn and apply regularly will make all the difference once you are released. The one who thinks they know it all will have the worst fucking time of all. It's frustrating to watch. Be humble; stay teachable. Listen to trustworthy people--those who have served time and those who have not. For God's sake, sign up for another round of any and all classes, groups, and therapies offered. The ones who fail to do this will end up like one-legged dudes in an ass-kicking

contest--woefully ill-equipped to thrive. I trust that none of you will go out like that! Those who do keep kicking it up a notch all the way till they hit the gate will live a charmed life and enjoy their freedom in its fullness.

Much love and respect to everyone still in the can.

The Spot

By Elanor Carpenter

We have a new space!! I was lucky enough to be able to attend the first Words Uncaged board meeting there as a graduate student representative. I felt a little out of place at first, as our wonderful board members touched on their impressive work resumes. We have doctors, graphic designers, urban planners, Harvard graduates, professors, tech savvy business women, and most importantly in my opinion, men with first hand incarceration experience, all working together to make Words Uncaged exceptional for



you! It was a truly magical atmosphere and I feel so lucky to have been able to witness these good people coming together in hope, even as we mourn the death of one of our most cherished local activists and musicians, Nipsy Hustle. Rest in peace.

The space is very cool, positioned right in the middle of a modern bustling office complex for what looks like mostly startup businesses. There is a nice little coffee shop above us and plenty of places to grab a bite while you're working. And that's exactly what we'll be doing, putting out noses to the grindstone to plan and organize prison and re-entry programs for our community. And as CP said, the spot is really there to support your entrepreneurial goals and to facilitate your self-empowerment. So stop by, or tell your family to stop by, and let us know how we can help!

Removing the Mask of Masculinity

A New York Times bestselling author, two professional athletes, a television producer, and a renowned entertainment attorney visit a maximum-security prison

Ever since New York Times Best Selling author, Lewis Howes and friends spent the day on the Progressive Programming Facility, his book—*The Mask of Masculinity*—has become one of the most sought after reads on the prison yard and the basis for a Saturday night men’s support group. *The Mask of Masculinity* is relatable to anyone struggling to overcome the age-old misguided, masculinity myths and improve the quality of their life. —Allen Burnett



*Author Lewis Howes, JD Roth creator and producer of *The Biggest Loser*, Attorney Todd Weinstein, NHL great Brooks Laich and New York Giants Super Bowl Champion Steve Weatherford visit the Helping Youth Offenders Understand Their Harm (Y.O.U.T.H) class at CSP-Los Angeles County’s Progressive Programming Facility.*

P o e t r y
U n c a g e d



“A Smile”

By Jesus Salgado

Smile,
It might brighten your day
Like if you won a prize
At your city fair.

Smile
It might help you get through a day
Like some one pushing you in your wheel chair
When you're injured and can't bare.

Smile
It might bring you joy
Joy like a little kid playing
with his Christmas toy.

Smile
It might bring you comfort
Comfort like when a child is embraced by their mother
Because she loves & care.

“A smile” can go a long way
I believe if more people smile
The world would be a happier place.

“Forever gone”

By Michael Ogg

hopeless emotions
that never stop,
lonely nights
keep me from sleep,
hopeless plans
that never come true,
heartfelt dreams
that don't go through,
loving family
I turn to see,
empty eyes
looking back at me,
jealous tears
that won't quite fall,
devoted soul
that'll give its all.

Make sure to check out www.wordsuncaged.com/new-submissions.html for more work from Jesus Salgado, Michael Ogg, and many others. Both men are currently in Lancaster State Prison. We are grateful for their contribution.

CPI Speaks:

Congratulations! We did it. You know we have a spot, a space that is uniquely our own. On the grass-root-level we call it "The Spot". This is where we come together to commune, to inspire and to strategize. At the spot entrepreneurship and self-empowerment are the focus. Your art is here. Your poems are here. Your books, your pictures and the people who love and support you are all here. Everyday we tell the people who you are, of you're worth and the great need for you in our society. Believe it, feel it and move in it.

-Cp1

Cp18, "We anxiously await your arrival. Anthony "Bomani" McDuffie, Black Rose, speak to the people, speak!"

Concrete Rose

By Anthony McDuffie

As a seed I was planted in the concrete soil,
Watered by the cesspool of America's inner-city slum.
Given the statistics of gang homicides,
Multiplied by drugs,
My life expectancy was at .001.

Some may ask,
How can a rose grow from concrete soil?
I reply, by daring to look beyond a concrete prison and grow.
Like a prisoner daring to be free,
looking beyond a sentence of Life Without the possibility of parole.

On the contrary, hold back sympathy,
Marvel at my tenacity,
For this is the rarest story ever told.
I am that seed that grew
Into a beautiful Concrete Rose.

George Sanchez Visit Ms. Flores's Roosevelt High School English Class.

I, Stephanie Flores, am currently a student teacher at Roosevelt MSTMA High School in Boyle Heights, teaching 12th grade English. My students were working on poetry portfolios during the months of February and March. They were asked to create eight original poems and choose one to recite in front of their classmates. My students thought that poetry was just about the written word. I wanted them to take the emotions they placed on paper and express them through their audible voices and physical expressions. However, some students had never been asked to write creatively and were unsure of how to begin this kind of writing process. I was given the opportunity to invite Jose Cubias and George Sanchez to visit our classroom and talk to students about the creative writing process, Words Uncaged and Unlockedtomorrow. George Sanchez was an incredibly powerful guest poet.

His words resonated with many students. I wanted students to understand what it was like to be in the midst of writing poetry, the challenges that came with it, the expression of vulnerability, and the space writing provided for all of their voices. It was important for students to be exposed to different narratives especially because the literary canon is mostly composed of Eurocentric white-male texts that lack representation of diverse voices, including the voices of students of color. Hearing and seeing George Sanchez speak about his writing process, his time incarcerated, and his book publications inspired students to tell their own stories. Students had a chance to ask George questions at the end of his recitation. One student asked what George usually wrote about since he felt most of his classmates defaulted to writing about depressing events. George told them that poetry doesn't always have to be sad. That it could be happy and loving; it could be anything they wanted it to be. The following day, during our community circle, many students expressed the

impact George and his poetry had on them. For students like Jazz and Anahi, they heard their relative's stories being told through George's poetry, family members that had also been incarcerated at a very young age. For other students, George's poetry retold their own story and their experience at juvenile hall. For students like Joel, who could not relate to George's poetry personally and who didn't know anyone that had similar experiences, were reminded about the oppressive institutionalized systems in our society. Nonetheless, these high school seniors were very impressed, impacted, and inspired by our guest poet. The task of writing and reciting their original poetry seemed less intimidating and more inviting.

My Friendship With Tobias

by Erik Vargas

It was like any other day. I got off work, rushed home to eat, got things ready for school, drove to school, parked off campus, and skated in. My headphones were in. I was in a rush, probably late, as usual. I entered the elevator on the bottom floor.

The elevator ascended. It reached the first floor where about 4 other individuals joined me. I was standing next to the buttons, so I took out an ear bud,

"What floor?"

A few different floors were requested. I pushed the corresponding numbers, and the elevator began to ascend again. We were half way to my stop, and only 3 of us left inside. A tall, well-dressed man asked me a question.

"You going to the 6th floor as well?"

I responded in affirmation, and our conversation continued.

"Yup."

"So you're headed to the English Department, right?"

"Exactly. English Department is the 6th floor."

He turned to look at his friend.

"Alright, so we're good," he told her.

He looked back at me.

"We have a meeting. We're here to meet with Professor Roy."

"Oh, okay. Yea, you're in the right place. His office is there."

"Great, thank you bro. I'm here to work with Dr. Roy. I'm part of the group Words Uncaged."

"Really? Me too. I'm one of the grad students in Words Uncaged."

A huge, contagious smile spread across this man's face.

"I appreciate you brother. My name is Tobias Tubbs, and I'm one of the brothers you helped to win his freedom."

"Whaaat?!"

I can't remember the exact order of movements or faces I made, but I remember my hands were on my head and Tobias was laughing.

"I'm Erik. Great to meet you man, great to see you, and here, at school!"

We smiled, we laughed, I grabbed his hand, and we embraced in a hug as the elevator came to a stop. He introduced me to his friend Stephanie, and I walked them to Professor Roy's office.

Like the majority of other students in WU, I first met Tobias through his writing. He was featured in the first journal, and while I knew there was the possibility of someday meeting him or others from the inside whom I had met through writing, I never would have guessed it to happen in the elevator at CSULA only a year and a half later.

I now see Tobias every Monday at the weekly Words Uncaged meeting, and we, along with all of our brothers and sisters in Words Uncaged, incarcerated and beyond, continue the fight towards rehabilitation, social justice, education and legislative change. Tobias and I are currently working on a youth focused program that incorporates some of our shared passions—rehabilitation/writing and plants/gardening.

When I think back to how I first met Tobias through his piece in the journal, "Critical Pedagogue One," to how I met him in person in the elevator, to how we grad students at Words Uncaged went from being on our own in a room with a stack of letters or journal entries from the inside to now being in the same room, learning from and planning with some of our liberated brothers, I am reassured, rejuvenated and affirmed that we can and do produce change—that the story being written is only in its beginning stages.

We went from letter exchanges to exchanging e-mails, texts messages and face-to-face dialogue. We used to infer one another's tone through writing; we now get to send each other emojis. Tobias and I consistently exchange emojis of power fists, plants, and butterflies. Recently, I brought lemons from the tree at my aunt's house, where I live, to a crop swap event, and witnessed Tobias taste a lemon for the first time in 30 years.

I will reiterate something that Tobias wrote in the aforementioned piece: "To be incorrigible is not a part of the human DNA."

Calipatria State Prison Visit 3-29-2019

by Jose Cubias

It's about a 4-hour drive to Calipatria State Prison. George, Ray, Bidhan aka Dr. Roy, and I left Los Angeles around 4:45am. We're schedule to give 3 presentations about Words Uncaged and Unlock Tomorrow's programs to a group of men. Joel, lead mentor on D-yard, gathered these men

in the chapel because of the decisions they've made to challenge themselves, to rediscover themselves, and to push away from who they thought they were and cross over to an unknown place, a place that is as close to freedom as you can get in a state prison.

We arrived at 8:30am. I had just finished reading a letter from Justin, who is incarcerated in Calipatria. He asked me to make some adjustment to his book *If I Knew Then: What Joining a Gang Really Means* (I will write about his book in the next newsletter). As we walked to the facility, George said, "I forgot my book". He gave his last few copies away. He wasn't sure what he had to offer the men who had not three week ago heard him recite his poetry. I told him not to worry.

Once inside the chapel, the men greeted us. The room filled with positive energy. Everyone settled down after 15 minutes. Ray and Bidhan took the stage and informed the men about the programs that will help them inside the prison walls and outside once they're released. George spoke after them. He did not read poem. He spoke from his heart, but after the first presentation was over, he told me that he felt like he let them down. Before the second presentation had started, George ask Bidhan for a piece of paper and a pencil.

For the second time, Ray and Bidhan spoke to the men while George wrote a poem. George took the stage for the second time, said a few words, and then proceeded to read what he had just written. Within the span of 15-20 mins, George was able to write a poem, "Fulfilled", that said everything those men needed to hear. I can't explain it in any other way. His poem made the same impact the second time around. Read it for yourself and you will see what I'm talking about.

"Fulfill"

by George Sanchez

The sparkle of a talent.
The sweat on the forehead.
The sad stories for an audience
Glorious wars be told 4 an audience
And the hand reaching out
From the dark,
To hold something.
Possess the sparkle
The truth, and the brutality
Of the scars on my flesh
And the sweat that lands on my papers
As the memories
And tears of my mother,
Of my people land
On my poem.
Descriptions of fallen
Soldiers, reminisce
When you sat and spoke
To a faceless being
Wearing a hood.
I seek the belt
And stand on a pyramid.
I feel the warmth
as my words
Touch the fallen.
Once the moon
Comes, he went from turning
To a wolf; transforming to a hero.
The pits that consume
You in flames,
Shredded papers
But so you still
Read my conflicts
As the jobs got

Harder
And the neighborhood
Continued to recruit.
Being a father
To orphans. Continue
The hopes through the
Jails and the streets.
Hands together
I was praying
For forgiveness.
Black skies that held
People's personalities,
People's stories,
Their zodiac signs...
Does it begin
From standing on
A street, on earth
Looking up and
Counting the stars?
Following a sign
Fulfilling dreams to the
Hopeless; giving a
Plate of food to the
Homeless;
Reading a speech
To an audience
Because our talent is everyl's talent.

W O R D S
UNCAGED

Helping incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women to address past traumas, as well as to imagine new empowered narratives for themselves, their families and their communities.

Grand Opening & Fundraiser



Saturday April 27th 5-10 PM

The Medallion | 334 Main St | Los Angeles 90013 | Unit 5016

Exclusive Art Prints for sale by Incarcerated Artists

Music | Drinks | Limited Edition WordsUncaged Merchandise

All proceeds support WordsUncaged prison and re-entry programs in our communities

REWRITING LIVES, RESTORING COMMUNITIES

www.wordsuncaged.com

“We thank our fellow CP (Donte) for the artwork, “Compton Black”, on the WordsUncaged event flyer.”

Editors and Contributors: Elanor Carpenter is currently earning her master’s degree at CSULA. She has been involved with Words Uncaged for the past three years and is currently Dr. Roy’s lead graduate assistant for Words Uncaged. **Caroline Chavez** is an undergrad student earning her degree at CSULA. Chavez’ father, Milton Chavez, is currently serving a sentence at the Federal Correctional Institution of Victorville. **Erik Varga** is currently earning his master’s degree at CSULA. **Jeff Stein**, originally an incarcerated student in Lancaster State prison, is currently earning his BA at CSULA. **Stephanie Flores** teaches AP English at Roosevelt High School in East LA. **George Sanchez** is a poet and playwright who was release from juvenile detention 4 months ago. **Jose Cubias** is a graduate student at CSULA and secret poet. Allan Burnett is our man in Lancaster State Prison. **Tobias Tubbs aka CPI** is our resident guru and spiritual voice. **Anthony McDuffie** is a poet. Thanks to **Jesus Salgado** and **Michael Ogg**.

Special Thanks to Bidhan Roy and Ray Adornetto and our board members.



Make sure to check out the radio show **Think Outside the Cage**. Words Uncaged host the radio show on the 2nd Saturday of the month. Also listen to **Sentence Podcast** for content relate to Words Uncaged. Find it on iTunes or SoundCloud.

Don’t forget to follow us on Instagram for update on upcoming events @wordsuncaged



WE WANT YOU!

Now That You Are Released, Labor Finders Wants To Be Your Employment Partner

We offer work opportunities for unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled positions. We pay daily (in most offices) and have short and long-term assignments.

This Is Your Opportunity:

- To get paid work experience
- For a new start
- To learn a new skill
- For employment

Call Us Today! →



WE ARE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER, DEDICATED TO A POLICY OF NON-DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ON ANY BASIS, INCLUDING RACE, CREED, COLOR, AGE, SEX, RELIGION OR NATIONAL ORIGIN.

- Bakersfield**
3801 Buck Owens Blvd., Suite 108
Bakersfield, CA 93308
(661) 396-8162
- Escondido**
1305 Simpson Way, Suites H & J
Escondido, CA 92029
(760) 480-2300
- Fresno**
4325 N Blackstone Avenue
Fresno, CA 93726
(559) 221-2023
- Hawthorne**
13030 Inglewood Avenue, Suite 105
Hawthorne, CA 90250
(310) 675-7900
- Modesto**
1800 B-2 Tully Road
Modesto, CA 95350
(209) 551-6201
- Palm Desert**
77682 Country Club Drive, Suite F3
Palm Desert, CA 92211
(760) 324-2014
- Paso Robles**
2727 Buena Vista Drive, Suite 103
Paso Robles, CA 93446
(805) 221-8044
- Riverside**
7209 Arlington Avenue, Suite C
Riverside, CA 92503
(951) 549-8884
- Sacramento**
9739 Fair Oaks Blvd., Suite A
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
(916) 961-1475
- San Diego (Metro)**
8055 Clairemont Mesa Blvd.,
Suites 104 & 105
San Diego, CA 92111
(858) 492-5162
- San Diego (South)**
310 3rd Avenue, Suite A-1
Chula Vista, CA 91910
(619) 691-0058
- San Fernando**
16151 San Fernando Mission Blvd.
Granada Hills, CA 91344
(818) 894-6851
- San Jose**
1560 N 4th Street, Suite 101
San Jose, CA 95112
(408) 262-2423
- San Leandro**
14780 Wicks Blvd.
San Leandro, CA 94577
(510) 678-3461
- Santa Ana**
2525 N Grand Avenue, Suite Y
Santa Ana, CA 92705
(714) 769-7046
- Santa Maria**
1782 S Broadway
Santa Maria, CA 93454
(805) 346-6083
- San Francisco (South)**
10 Rollins Road, #115
Millbrae, CA 94030
(650) 231-8250
- Vallejo**
1621 Tennessee Street
Vallejo, CA 94590
(707) 559-8686
- Victorville**
14368 Saint Andrews Drive, Suite C
Victorville, CA 92395
(760) 951-7800

LABORFINDERS.COM