

W O R D S  
**UNCAGED**   
Monthly Newsletter January 2020

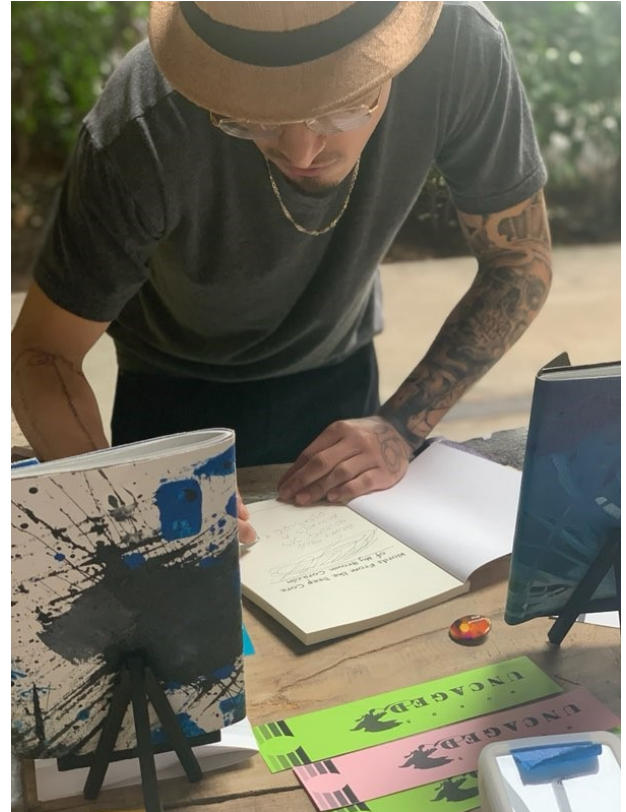
### Houser & Wirth Holiday Market Musings

Lizette Toribio

Just as the holiday season was picking up, Words Uncaged participated in Hauser & Wirth's Annual Holiday Market on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of December. Like LIT LIT, this event was hosted at the Hauser & Wirth Gallery in the Los Angeles Arts District. As weather started to get nippy in Los Angeles, it was nice to see the faces of families gingerly walking along the gallery, stopping to pick up gifts for their loved ones. We were ready with a second lot of the journals that were hand bound by the men in Lancaster and, like last time, the journals were a hit. Our booth also featured copies of *Disconnected/Reconnected: Writing from Lancaster Prison*, art prints, tote bags, and some of George Sanchez' poetry books.



As usual, I find myself taking in these moments of community by observing those around me. As I watched José and Tobias share the mission of the Words Uncaged project with curious passersby, I recalled reading Tobias' work three years ago before ever having met him. He warmly greeted kind faces who he met at LIT LIT in the summer and graciously took pictures with whoever asked. George was tasked with sharing our updated [www.WordsUncaged.org](http://www.WordsUncaged.org) website by writing it on the back of bookmarks designed by José. As I tried to snap pictures of George at work, he let me know that he was writing in very particular style so people could see that his penmanship was an artform. He took a menial task and made art with it, much like he does with his poetry.



By the afternoon, George had signed several of his books and written on the back of many bookmarks—Always with a smile on his face. At some point, he returned to the Words Uncaged booth excited about having met another poet. To support her, he decided to purchase a copy of her book at the Holiday Market. He had no idea he interacted with Yesika Salgado, author of *Corazon, Tesoro*, and *Hermosa*. She also happens to have about 122K Instagram followers. I thought about how sincerely brave George is after we shared that exchange.

While asking me why he hadn't seen any of my hustle that day, he reminded me of the significance and value behind the work of Words Uncaged. He was right, I was too busy watching him, and Tobias, and Jeff and everyone else who was helping. I was taking in the all of the work everyone involved with Words Uncaged does to keep the little engine running. I rubbed my hands over the beautiful painted canvas covers of the handbound journals,

smiled when I came across an illustration of Nelson Mandela, and reflected on the success of the organization over the years. All of your hard work and support is invaluable.

**PRISON:** A state of confinement or captivity. 2. A place of confinement for law-breakers, for example, a prison; to imprison/confine.

Jerimichael Cooley

So here we are, writing about one of the biggest problems in the world and yet, the least understood. Before I can write about a world without prisons, I must first define what a prison is and so far, by definition—this is a broad pen. I have had to sit back, rub my head, and really think. As I see it, a world with prisons is what we have. So, to envision one without is hard. Then it hit me, a prison can be anything and everything.



I mean literally, as I grow in my walk of faith and rehabilitation, I have come to understand certain principles. One is you get what you put in. I mean, you can walk around just moving through life, same rut day in, day out. Life gives you the same in return. However, if you give your time to others, invest in making society a better place; it seems that life gives you a better place. I know so many people who live in bubbles. Yes, like the movie bubble boy! I mean seriously, think about it. They walk around in a bubble in which society placed them. They drive the same route every day by the same homeless encampment. They think to themselves that the police should do something about that. They continue in their life never hearing the gunshots or screams from the child being abused next door.

They go to church and step over the man lying in the gutter. They see crime and say, someone

should pay but who? That to me is the real prison, the one that is more like the story of the *matrix*, it feels like life but you are actually in a coffin just waiting to get flushed. The more people I talk to, the more I hear the same story—it is different out here, it is not the same. However, what does that mean? If you are choking, should I just watch and call 911 or should I get involved? What is your character? What prison are you in?

See, I envision a world without prisons more like this. One where people get involved in their community. When you see someone in distress, take a minute to show some compassion. Be the person that helps a stranger and gives back to society. Look for a way to help those in need. I mean what truly sets you free?

I have found in my life that what I have taken can never be returned so I make what I call a living amends. Now look at what just one man in a prison can do. I have literally helped thousands of people change their lives. I have seen situations and addressed them. If someone needs just a moment to know I care...I stop. What is the big deal? Is this not what real freedom is? I am and have not been in prison in years. I am more free, more alive, and feel more like a human being right here in an actual prison than others outside of these walls. Therefore, to me, a world without prisons starts with the individual, each one teach one as the saying goes. If I teach you kindness in a situation, then in turn, you do a kind act for someone else, and that person does the same then just from that one act, you start a collision of blessings. Do you see? Is the picture vibrant? I have this way of seeing what most either cannot or choose not to. I am criticized for helping certain people. Like why are you helping him, wow... he talks to her. Yes! I know where I came from, who I was, and if I can help, you see that, there is hope in your situation then once you have hope, you can give it to another and in the end, and a world with hope is a world without prisons.

#### GEORGINA'S LEGISLATIVE COLUMN

#### *Assembly Bill 3109- Criminal Proceeding Testimony*

Assembly Bill 3109 stops a party's right to waive their ability to testify in a criminal proceeding. Before this bill, if a victim filed a claim or lawsuit for alleged sexual harassment or sexual assault, they were forced to enter into a clause that waives their right to testify in a legal proceeding regarding alleged criminal conduct or sexual harassment on the part of the other contracting party, or the other party's agents or employees. This bill changes that clause by making it void and unenforceable.

This is impactful for many reasons, the biggest being that those in positions were previously able to pay for people to remain silent when it came time to face criminal charges for their misconduct against them and others. As of now, this bill allows victims to speak up in criminal proceedings where they would have otherwise been paid off to remain silent.

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



## **The Recipe**

Anthony Hernandez

Find a patch of land...  
Pave out roads and streets and boulevards.  
Raise apartment buildings, a dozen houses, and a few projects.  
Separate the blocks with eight-foot walls,  
settle legions of foreign immigrants, move in industry,  
fast food, swap meets, and malls.  
Build a school...  
provide minimum to average wage jobs.  
Give them televisions, give them radios,  
moreover, sell them images of graphic imagery  
and luxury clothes, jewelry, and cars.  
Raise a billboard promoting sex, and setup  
dealerships with glamorous rides they cannot afford.  
Provide a pastime: sports.  
Import drugs and guns and  
handout scholarships to just a few.  
Construct a clinic to provide abortion.  
Forge a ministry, a chapel, a woman's lib and  
from amongst their ranks elect three:  
    a Reverend; to arouse their rage and anguish and rally  
them against oppression,  
    a Priest; to calm and sate their angst and qualms,  
    a poised and poignant Feminist; to cite the rampant views  
of injustice and inequality  
inside the traditional cult of men called culture.  
Assemble the Sunday congregation and preach hope, prosperity,  
and faith...  
from dated texts.  
Assemble the students in the school auditorium and deliver a  
speech  
on individual freedom, uniqueness, and self-discovery.  
Confuse them, contradict the views,  
cause a culture of revolution: "The Youth's Rebellion."  
Raise the living expenses by constructing a city around the slum.  
Introduce an armed militia equipped with guns, batons, and cuffs  
to instill stability,  
hire the muscle from the swelling ranks within the city's growing  
populace.  
Erect a jail.  
Arrest the addicts and watch the dealers  
recruit new clients.  
Arrest the dealers and watch the neophytes craftily restructure  
the booming system of their forbearers.  
Pass an injunction,  
try juvenis as adults.  
Stuff the jail beyond capacitance, now  
build a prison far away...and wait.

## **"H-72800"**

Lester Polk

I may be known as a number  
    H-72800  
An unknown entity to those  
Charged with cataloging  
And warehousing me  
But actually,  
    I am a creative being  
To some,  
    I am the 72<sup>nd</sup> thousandth  
800<sup>th</sup> person to fall  
    Into the trench of the  
Hotel series of lost causes  
    H-72800  
But I am,  
    A source of volcanic vision  
    Wanted and unwanted  
I am the strength of a geyser  
The force of a hurricane  
I am the truth that  
    Will not die  
No matter how many  
    Attempts are made on  
    It's life  
I am freedom,  
    H-72800

## **The One Who's Caged**

Travis Hoffmeister

While looking through the bars  
    at a pretty blue and green,  
itty-bitty bird  
    that was staring back at me,  
  
I wished I'd had some bread to give  
    Or maybe some bird seed;  
I'd have loved to offer something  
    then just sat and watched it eat.  
  
It hopped around a little bit,  
    and then started to sing.  
The song was really beautiful,  
    like something from a dream.  
  
But then it took flight through the air  
    and flew away so free,





## SO ON WE BREATHE: PHOTOS FROM AN INCARCERATED LIFE

OPENING RECEPTION: SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup> 6-10PM

EXHIBIT RUNS SEPT 7-JAN 7 2020

INTIMATE STORIES OF PRISON LIFE, AS TOLD THROUGH THE PERSONAL PHOTOS OF INCARCERATED MEN AT LOS ANGELES COUNTY PRISON, LANCASTER. THESE NEVER BEFORE PUBLICLY VIEWED PHOTOS OFFER A UNIQUE LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA PRISONS FROM THE 1970'S UNTIL THE PRESENT DAY, AS WELL AS INSIGHT INTO THE HUMAN COST OF MASS INCARCERATION.

CURATED BY RUSSELL SALMON



THE MEDALLION BUILDING (LOWER LEVEL)  
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**Editors and Contributors:** Elanor Carpenter recently earned her master's degree in English at CSULA. She has been involved with Words Uncaged for the past three years. **Lizette Toribio** just earned her master's degree at CSULA in English. **Erik Vargas** also earned his master's degree in English at CSULA. **Jose Manuel Cubias** graduated from CSULA with a Master's in English Literature student. **Jerimichael Cooley, Anthony Hernandez, Lester Polk, Kenneth Webb (PostFiction), Travis Hoffmeister**, thanks for the contributions this months. **Georgina** is currently finishing up her Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice at California State University, Los Angeles.

**Special Thanks to Bidhan Roy, Tobias Tubbs, and Ray Adornetto and our board members.**

Make sure to check out the radio show **Think Outside the Cage**. Words Uncaged hosts the radio show on the 2nd Saturday of the month on KPFK 90.7. Also listen to **Sentences Podcast** this month for content featuring writing from Words Uncaged alumni. Find it on iTunes or SoundCloud.

Don't forget to follow us on Instagram for updates on upcoming events @wordsuncaged

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