

Sunday  
December 16, 2012

I wrote this poem on August 24, 2004, shortly after entering the California penitentiary system. At the time, I was in the reception center, where I spent a minimum of 23 hours locked up in my cell. With nothing but a few pens and some paper, there really wasn't much else to do, and the more I wrote, the easier I found it to deal with my feelings. This particular piece was about a strangely beautiful mural I seen painted in the San Quentin dining hall, a mural painted with shoe polish, and what it meant to my rehabilitation.

SAN QUENTIN  
August 24, 2004  
By Shawn L. Perrot

Double fences, razor wire and tall smooth walls,  
all designed to keep us in.  
Guards armed with high-powered rifles,  
to shoot the violent men.  
I see these things each morning,  
as I make my way to breakfast,  
but there are more important things to see,  
such as the men I must walk past.  
And see I must, everything I can,  
for what I miss could cost me my life,  
because even though weapons are forbidden,  
almost everyone in here has a knife.  
And with it, a list of wrongs,  
to right with that wicked blade,  
some may never have even met you,  
stabbing you just to get "made."  
It's their initiation into this world,  
of hatred and greed,  
where others are fueled by their desire,  
to see someone bleed.  
And in the middle of this bloodshed,  
lies a truly incredible sight,  
a mural that took more than 5 years,  
to make it just right.  
It's an oasis of peace,  
in this desert of violence and strife,  
and every time I see it,  
a calm enters my life.  
Three different murals,  
each several hundred feet long,  
a rag, some shoe polish,  
a man who was wrong.

And while serving his time,       vsbr"  
    paying off his debts to society,  
he painted about life,  
    about America's history.  
Both World Wars,  
    the industrial revolution,  
He painted for his sins,  
    he painted for absolution.  
It's not so much the painting,  
    it's his sheer dedication.  
Several years and more,  
    to fulfill to his satisfaction.  
A man with that much patience,  
    could do anything he wants.  
Like his time spent in prison,  
    making it just this once.  
And if that's what happened,  
    then he beat them at their own game,  
and his lessons will live on,  
    even if I don't know his name.  
When I leave that mess hall,  
    and reenter the violent yard,  
his dedication will stay with me.  
    It will always be close to my heart.  
To use as an example,  
    when I'm frustrated and bitter,  
I can learn from him,  
    I don't have to be a quitter.  
If he can put that much effort,  
    into a meaningless wall,  
then I can do the same with my life,  
    to stay outside those walls.

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