

AUGUST 20, 2013

" AT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE IS A LOVING HEART THAT CONTINUES TO BEAT AND THAT WANTS THE BEST FOR EVERY PERSON. ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO HELP FOSTER THE INTELLECT AND SPIRIT AND EMOTIONAL GROWTH OF OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS, THAT IS OUR JOB. THOSE OF US WHO HAVE THIS PARTICULAR VISION MUST CONTINUE AGAINST ALL ODDS. LIFE IS FOR SERVICE... " -QUOTE BY: FRED ROGERS, "MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD"

HELLO WORLD,

SINCE I LAST BLOGGED, THIS PAST WEEK WAS A VERY BUSY, YET, FULFILLING ONE FOR ME. IN CALIFORNIA, THERE ARE 33 STATE PRISONS AND THE STATE HAS DULY SPENT MORE THAN \$5 BILLION IN THE PAST TWO DECADES BUILDING AND EXPANDING ITS PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. CONVERSELY, THE STATE HAS BUILT ONLY ONE (1) NEW STATE UNIVERSITY (CSU-MONTEREY).

I MENTION THIS BECAUSE SAN QUENTIN STATE PRISON, ONE OF THE STATE'S OLDEST AND MOST NOTORIOUS OF PRISONS AND HOME OF THE STATE'S "DEATH ROW", IS THE VERY BEST PRISON FOR A PERSON INCARCERATED IN THIS STATE TO BE AT. SOUNDS CRAZY, HUH?

YOU SEE, AT THE OTHER 32 STATE PRISONS, THE PRISONERS ARE OFFERED NO REAL FORM OF "REHABILITATION", AND MANY HAVE SPENT YEARS IN "SPECIAL HOUSING UNITS" (SHU) OR "BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION UNITS" (BMU) FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN BEING "VALIDATED" BY THE STATE AS A GANG MEMBER OR ASSOCIATE. MANY

OTHERS ARE DENIED HEALTH CARE FOR "SECURITY REASONS". AT THESE OTHER 32 PRISONS, THE STATE IS RESOLUTE IN SHATTERING THE LIVES OF THE MEN AND WOMEN HELD THERE, BECAUSE THE CALIFORNIA PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX IS, BY ITS VERY ESSENCE, ~~IS~~ AN INSTRUMENT OF EQUALIZED CASTIGATION AND EASYGOING INHUMANITY THAT PULVERIZES THE VERY LIFE AND SPIRITS FROM ITS CAPTIVES.

HOWEVER, SAN QUENTIN STATE PRISON IS AN "ANOMALY" IN THIS SYSTEM. HERE THE 4000 "GENERAL POPULATION" PRISONERS HAVE ACCESS TO "EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS" AND OTHER "SELF-HELP" THERAPEUTIC GROUPS IN ORDER TO INCUCCATE THE PRISONERS, WHO ~~WHS~~ WISH TO PARTICIPATE, WITH THE SKILLS AND VALUES THAT ARE REQUIRED TO ENTER INTO, AND MAINTAIN, A CRIME-FREE LIFESTYLE. DUE TO THE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF THIS PRISON (SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA) ~~AND~~ THE DEMOGRAPHICS, AND THE INSIGHT OF THIS PRISON'S ADMINISTRATION; THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF VOLUNTEERS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS WHO COME HERE, WEEKLY, TO HELP THE MEN HERE TO "REHABILITATE" THEMSELVES.

FOR EXAMPLE, THIS PAST WEEK, I ATTENDED AND PARTICIPATED AND SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A 30 HOURS OF TRAINING FOR THE "RESTORATIVE JUSTICE VICTIM-OFFENDER EDUCATION GROUP" AND AM ~~4~~ NOW A GROUP "FACILITATOR". THE PURPOSE OF THIS TRAINING WAS TO PREPARE ME AND THE OTHER 25 PRISONERS TO LEARN HOW TO FACILITATE A GROUP PROCESS WITH ~~PEOPLE~~ PEOPLE WHO ARE INCARCERATED TO ASSIST THEM TO UNDERSTAND AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE IMPACT OF THEIR CRIMES AGAINST THEIR

VICTIMS AND TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CHANGES IN THEIR LIVES IN ORDER TO LIVE A PRODUCTIVE LIFE FREE FROM PRISON. IN THIS TRAINING, I LEARNED HOW TO FACILITATE A GROUP PROCESS, TO WORK WITH VICTIMS OF CRIME, AND TO FACILITATE DIALOGUES BETWEEN VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS OF CRIME IN A GROUP FORMAT. NOWHERE ELSE WOULD I BE ABLE TO RECEIVE SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY IN THIS STATE'S PRISON SYSTEM EXCEPT, MAYBE, ONE OR TWO OTHER PRISONS.

THEN, ON FRIDAY, I ~~AGOTTE~~ ASSISTED IN THE ANNUAL "T.R.U.S.T. HEALTH FAIR" WHERE OUTSIDE PROFESSIONALS SUCH AS DENTAL HYGIENISTS, CHIROPRACTORS, HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS, ETC, CAME TO THE PRISON IN ORDER TO PROVIDE FREE SERVICES TO THE MEN HERE. IT WAS A DAY-LONG EVENT ON THE PRISON'S LOWER YARD WITH LIVE MUSIC (PRISON BANDS), GAMES, AND OTHER EVENTS. AT NO OTHER PRISON DO EVENTS LIKE THIS HAPPEN. MY QUESTION IS, WHY IS THAT?

HERE AT SAN QUENTIN STATE PRISON, THE MEN ARE GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO "FEEL" LIKE A PERSON AND PRISONERS EVEN IN THE DEEPEST OF DESPAIR CAN EXPERIENCE A FEELING OF SOME HOPE, DESPITE THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF HUMANE TREATMENT OR DEMONIZATION THEY MAY HAVE FELT AT OTHER PRISONS.

SOCIETY HAS TO ASK ITSELF "WHAT TYPE OF PEOPLE DO WE WANT COMING OUT OF ITS JAILS AND PRISONS?" DO YOU WANT MORE HARDENED, VIOLENT CRIMINALS OR DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD HAVE MORE PRISONS LIKE SAN QUENTIN? SHOULD SOCIETY START A MOVEMENT WITHIN OUR COUNTRY'S PRISON SYSTEMS THAT ENCOURAGES CONSCIOUSNESS, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND CREATIVE AND PRO-

DUCTIVE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RE-ENTER SOCIETY?
ASKS YOURSELF THIS QUESTION, "WHICH WOULD YOU PREFER?
AND REMEMBER THIS, THE MOST DANGEROUS
CREATION OF ANY SOCIETY IS THAT PERSON WHO HAS
NOTHING TO LOSE...

IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS OR WOULD LIKE TO CONTACT
ME DIRECTLY, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO DO SO AT
MY RETURN MAILING ADDRESS.

PEACE...