

Richard Boyde, B-76395

WordsUncaged Submission

(Essay)

“Trauma – Crime Prevention”

My name is Sunjai (Richard Boyde). I am the senior coordinator for the organization, Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). I am also a part of many other groups here. One of the many groups I’m associated with is WordsUncaged. They have allowed me to be a part of their journal, so I’m going to write this about Trauma and crime prevention.

I was raised in 1950s and 60s. Early on in my life, I was faced with some of the most brutal beatings and trauma. A part of the mental and physical abuse was growing up in a racist community. The school system did not protect children of color. I came from the old Jim Crow rural south (Arkansas). At an early age, I learned how to fight and hurt people. I also started stealing and being rebellious at home, and school. The sexual abuse my sisters faced from my stepfather was brutal because he beat us senseless sometimes. Imagine having to live with a molester and bully every day, as if it was normal.

To the outside world that did not know, we looked like an ordinary family just trying to make ends meet. Our cover-up story was to put on a happy family face. As I got older, our family moved around because of financial status. Trying to make friends in a racially charged, integrated society was most troubling emotionally and psychologically. I started to get into more trouble and eventually, I started to do time in the California Youth Authority (CYA). That turned out to be more trauma because it would appear that all I did was rebel even more against society. I became more anti-social. I even ended up homeless at one point. I never felt a sense of family. I ran away to avoid that trauma and cruelty. The streets became my stage for failure, crime, inflicting harm and pain on everyone else. All that did was lead me to my first term in prison.

That was a hell of an experience. More trauma, more criminal thinking. I had a newborn son during the tripe to prison. Now I’m a father and incarcerated. I didn’t utilize my 4 and a half years in prison wisely. I made no real preparation for life after prison. I had no relapse prevention program either. No gangs could recruit me in CYA nor prison; I associated with Islamic people mostly. However, I still did not have a reentry transitional lifestyle post-prison. I just wanted out of the cage of prison. Once I got out and the two-week honeymoon period was over, I had nowhere to go, not much to do of anything. I spent little time with my son. At times, I felt afraid, alone, disconnected, not a part of anything. The little money I had ran out. Now, I’m broke with a new girlfriend.

I started to feel insecure, inadequate, and shameful. Instead of talking to someone, I acted out. I went and got a gun and started back up to where I left off at from my first trip to prison (armed robbery). Only this time, I killed a man. I took someone's brother, son, nephew, friend, from this earth. That was cold, cruel, senseless. I victimized a community, society. My decision and choices were criminal. As a result, I got sent to death row. In my early 20s, I ended up on death row. More abuse and devastating trauma. I was so used to that. I spent 30 years on death row. I endured two execution dates while I was there. The early days (the first three years) were the most mentally cruel. The way we were treated by the Correctional Officers was unjust and inhumane. Death row changed because of a civil lawsuit we inmate's filed against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). However, the law of capital punishment stayed in place. I began my move towards change and getting off death row.

During my stay on the row, I obtained a paralegal degree, a GED, a degree in ancient African history. I also helped write children's books with a couple other inmates on the row. Eventually, my case was overturned by the 9th circuit court and here I am now, at Lancaster prison. Now my plight is about crime prevention. I'm literally working with inside and outside groups to help change laws. We're working on prison reform, stopping mass incarceration, ending all Life Without sentences, ending the death penalty. I realize through most of my studies and works that, to effectively prevent crime, gangism, drug addiction, trauma, abuse, mass incarceration, is to work exclusively early on with children, young people, young adults.

Our society, as a whole, has a fascination with glorifying crime, drug addiction, gangism. Domestic violence is a leading causative factor in violence and trauma as a whole. We, as a people, need to stop investing into these well-dressed politicians who only know how to make more laws and never work on prevention. Especially towards people of color and poor people. I'm desperately trying to prevent crime, abuse, drug use, exploitation of children, women, men, and this constantly locking people up. I live and lead by example. I'm now saving countless lives of every color. Thank you kindly. I'm Brother Sunjai.

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