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Words Uncaged
(Memoir)

Hidden Treasures

I've hurt many people in my life and I'm certain I've disappointed even more. I have burnt a lot of bridges also; some of which I am glad to never have to cross again, others to sore regret. Sometimes my past haunts me, but only to a certain extent. I don't allow it to hold me hostage nor do I dwell on it, but occasionally I shove a sharp stick in its eye in order to help me on my journey forward.

I have been incarcerated for seven and a half years now, but that's enough time for me to learn many things about myself and my past. I've been blessed to be placed on this particular prison yard. It's a unique place and great for inmates that want out of the gang life in order to earnestly be rehabilitated. It's a place that I have found many hidden treasures.

Located in Lancaster, California, 'A' yard is known as a (PPF) Progressive Programming Facility. It's unique because it's generally free of gang activity and violence and its many programs provide the much needed recipe for recovery and rehabilitation. As a direct result of its many opportunities, several of the men here have taken full advantage of it and have completely changed their lives.

Three of the men (inmates) on this prison yard, have been instrumental in my personal quest for change. When I first arrived here in 2012, I had never been in prison and I carried my heavy sentence around each day like a dead carcass shackled to my feet. I moped about aimlessly as my hope slowly diminished, but when I met the first of the three men that would play a significant role in my recovery, things began to change.

When I first met Lester Polk, he reached out to me in a very brotherly and human way. He noticed my dilemma and honed in on me. One day, with winter fast approaching, he came up to me with two brown paper bags in his arms. One of them contained a heavy-duty sweatshirt, pants, and tennis shoes. The other bag had food from canteen. I was not expecting that. How did he even know that I was not equipped for winter? I later found out that old Lester had a long history of doing things like that. He has a heart for giving, and he looks for opportunities to bless others. This spoke volumes to me. He showed me that it is all right to be selfless and it's a good thing to put others first. Throughout the years, I have seen him be constant in this regard. He's always available for me or anyone to lend a helping hand or just give sound advice.

Dortell Williams is the next one that began leading me in the right direction. I first started working with him in 2014 through a program called Men For Honor. I was impressed with Dortell right off the bat. His wisdom was contagious and he walked and talked as someone who was not even in prison. He began to teach me about the "inner work"—how to dig deep within to recognize and fix character defects. For example, he helped me with an assignment called Victim's Shoes. Victim's Shoes is an exercise of insight that demonstrates the perpetrators' level of understanding and depth of the harm caused by his/her actions. It was not easy for me, but he showed me that by being extremely honest and breaking down walls of vulnerability, I could do it, and in so doing, overcome big hurdles in my journey for change. Through the years, he has graciously opened the door for me to come to him any time, and he is a source for me and others. This is not because of my stunning personality, but rather his own passion to help others. I'm so glad he is my friend and more.

Tobias Tubbs became my friend in 2015. He is a man that is simply hard not to like. He is a master of "people"—charismatic and free within. He drew me in with his big personality and once I was in, he would teach me no matter what. He is another that has done so much inner work that now only his beauty shows. He sat down with me one day and helped me identify certain things about myself. In a gracious and loving way, he showed me some of my hidden inconsistencies. Who could do that without being offensive? He could! Tobias loves people and he makes that known abroad. He is another constant in this facility that goes about his life as a beacon of hope, desiring to see people change.

These are not the only men on this prison yard who are instruments of change; there are many, but these are my men, my counselors, my mentors, my father figures because I never had one. These men are my friends and my hidden treasures. It's an honor see God make beauty from the ashes of these men. They are multi-faceted men of great value.

They have learned one of life's greatest lessons—to give back and help others! They hold true to the concepts and precepts that they have been changed by. Another important thing that these three men have in common is they are men of faith. They love God and easily give him the glory for all the good they do.

They see the potential in people and go to great lengths to help people see that in themselves. They are helping this community by creating new men that stand as assets to society and developing an army of mentors and leaders. These men are of great value by teaching other inmates how to overcome the type of thinking that leads to criminal activity. Irrespective of the crimes they were convicted of, they work diligently through a network of programs and resources to return a better man to his community.

These men have become some of the best that the world has to offer. They have a gift and a rare outlook on life. Could it be that such men can only be found behind prison walls? Is it possible that people in the free world would desire to learn from such translucency? It's clear to me that it would be advantageous for people to learn from these men.

I leave you with a few passages of scripture to ponder over. Isaiah, chapter 42, verses 6-7 and 21-23, reads as follows: Vs. 6 "I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and will give thee for a covenant of the people for a light unto the Gentiles;" Vs. 7 "To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." Vs. 21 "The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law and make it honorable." Vs. 22 "But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore." Vs. 23 "Who among you will give ear to this? Who will hearken and hear for the time to come?"

So, I challenge you to jump into this conversation and ask the hard questions. Who will open the gates for these Hidden Treasures? Will their immense value to society be shut up in a prison house for the rest of their natural born lives? Is there anybody out there? Who will listen? Who?