

Words Uncaged

Hello, my name is Lamarr Cooks CDCR# H-88770. I am currently incarcerated and housed at Lancaster State Prison, serving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. I am in my 26th year of incarceration. I would like to share my story with you in hopes that it will help to change how people feel about those incarcerated for murder. There is no justification for murdering anyone, but I will attempt to share with you what led me to being able to commit such a heinous crime.

At a very young age I lived with low self-esteem because of my speech impediment. Since the age of two years old I stuttered. I grew up being teased, mocked and made fun of. This brought about anger and feeling inadequate about myself. I also grew up in a dysfunctional home, whereas, I witnessed domestic violence between my parents and was also physically abused. Later, my Mother remarried a man who was also very abusive towards her, my younger brother and myself. This brought on more anger and hatred. At this point I didn't care anymore, for myself or for anyone else. I was 13 years old and this went on until I was 17 years old. In between this time, I continued making poor choices and bad decisions that caused me to come in contact with the wrong crowd. I was born and raised in a neighborhood where the environment was mostly filled with people who lacked proper education and positive role models. At the age of 13 I made the choice to smoke marijuana for the first time and drank alcohol at the age of 15. By doing this I felt acceptance by my peers. Something I had been longing for. During this time I began acting out and committing crimes, not caring who got hurt or even considering the consequences for my behavior. I was angry and hateful as a result of my abuse.

In my home, communication was done through yelling and fighting. Growing up in that environment I suppressed my feelings. Due to my lack of education and my stuttering I felt unwelcomed by my peers. However, despite my flaws I was able to find love and acceptance through local thugs and gang members. These criminals became my friends and family. I did not know, or recognize, that I started to think like them, act like them, and become them; a person I never was, or was meant to be.

I took on the belief system as a gang member; smoking, drinking, carrying guns, fueled by anger and a false sense of pride. This lifestyle became the norm and I became addicted to this way of living. These emotions plus gang participation gave me a sense of worthiness.

I take full responsibility for killing Mr. Fernando Hernandez, and the way I conducted myself in society. There is no one to blame for my actions because "I" made the choice to become this person.

While incarcerated I have involved myself in many self-help classes. I now understand the ripple effect that my life crime has had on all those who were affected, such as the victims, their family, my family, first responders and the community as a whole. Through Anger Management I have learned how to control my anger by first recognizing that I'm getting angry, and what caused me to get angry. In G.O.G.O., Going Out by Going In, I learned deep belly breathing that will calm me down. I have learned to meditate, and prayer works well, It is where I find a great deal of peace. These coping skills were essential in my recovery. Another class was S.H.I.N.E. (showing How Insight Never Ends). This class taught me that self-development is an ongoing process to my rehabilitation and that I should practice and work the steps I've learned every day. I attended C.G.A. (criminals & Gang Members Anonymous) a class that taught me the criminal lifestyle is addictive. I no longer condone gangs and their activities. These and other self-development classes were very helpful in my rehabilitation.

In 2008, I was baptized in the prison Chapel and in 2009 I earned my GED. I now live a pro-social life by writing remorseful letters to my victims, giving donations to various charities and organizations, and writing letters to at-risk youth through the foundation known as "Prison Letters to our Struggling Youth." I am also a mentor to young first term lifer's through Fair Chance Project.

I am living in honor of Mr. Fernando Hernandez by not returning to the person I use to be and always striving to be better and do better.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you. I am sorry for my behavior, and the actions that contributed to the pain and hurt victims and survivors go through.

God Bless!!

Sincerely,
Lamarr Cooks

Re: Lamarr Cooks # H88770

CSP-LAC/ A2-209
P.O. Box 4430
Lancaster, CA 93539-4430

