

SUCCESS STORIES PROGRAM

Following this year's symposium theme of restorative justice, the UCLA Criminal Justice Law Review is proud to feature works highlighting restorative justice in action. The following pieces come from the Success Stories Program, a restorative justice program borne out California state prisons.

Kevin Shang and William Baker, Editor-in-Chiefs

Written by Kiki Reitano and Chantal Coudoux

“Justice demands integrity. It's to have a moral universe — not only know what is right or wrong but to put things in perspective, weigh things. Justice is different from violence and retribution; it requires complex accounting.” – bell hooks

Imagine: a world that necessitates accountability over punishment, prioritizes integrity over shame, and always chooses love over disposability.

Patriarchy poses a public health crisis in its stifling of the emotional, physical, and psychological well-being of boys and men, further implicating all people and specifically oppressing women and children. From a young age, patriarchy promotes a life in which violence is acceptable, people are objectifiable, and money is a primary pursuit.

Success Stories Program is an alternative to prisons that builds safer communities by delivering feminist programming to people who have caused harm, in order to reveal and restore an individual's whole self, in integrity, outside of the expectations of patriarchy. The 12-week course was founded in 2014 by two 21-year-old best friends, Richie Reseda and Charles Berry, while they were incarcerated at the Correctional Training Facility (CTF) in Soledad, California. Since its humble beginnings inside of the California state prison, the program has grown into a non-profit organization and shared its curriculum in and out of carceral spaces around the country. The course is led entirely by people directly impacted by the prison system who are either currently incarcerated facilitators or formerly incarcerated staff coaches.

Inside the Correctional Training Facility in Soledad, California, Richie and Charles recognized that the programs offered in prison failed to challenge the culture of toxic masculinity that led people to violence,

harm, and ultimately – incarceration. Programs also did nothing to examine systems of punishment as part of that very same structure of patriarchy. Together, they developed a curriculum that was heavily influenced by Black feminist theorist, bell hooks' books *We Real Cool*, *All About Love*, and *A Will to Change*.

bell hooks describes integrity as a state of being where people are emotionally whole and prioritize their goals and loved ones, instead of living into the patriarchal societal pressures of gaining social status through dominance, violence, objectification of others, and accumulation of wealth.

While the goal of the program is to restore an individual's whole self, nothing about it seeks to restore the conditions of the carceral system. Instead, Success Stories Program is focused on addressing the root cause of the punishment system and transforming a culture based in domination that upholds harmful patriarchal norms, with the ultimate goal of rendering the prison system obsolete. The curriculum encourages participants to challenge the status-quo under patriarchy. Facilitators utilize a "relate-investigate-recreate" framework; using their lived experience to connect and foster a trusting environment, to collectively examine the costs of buying into patriarchal culture, and shed light on the process of transformation and healing.

"Success Stories created a space for me to challenge ways of thinking and being which I never even imagined I would question... It helped me to not only serve my Top Five, but to look at humanity in an entirely different light. I am forever grateful." - Graham Finocchio, Current Success Stories Program Coach, former facilitator at CTF, and former member of a white racialized gang.

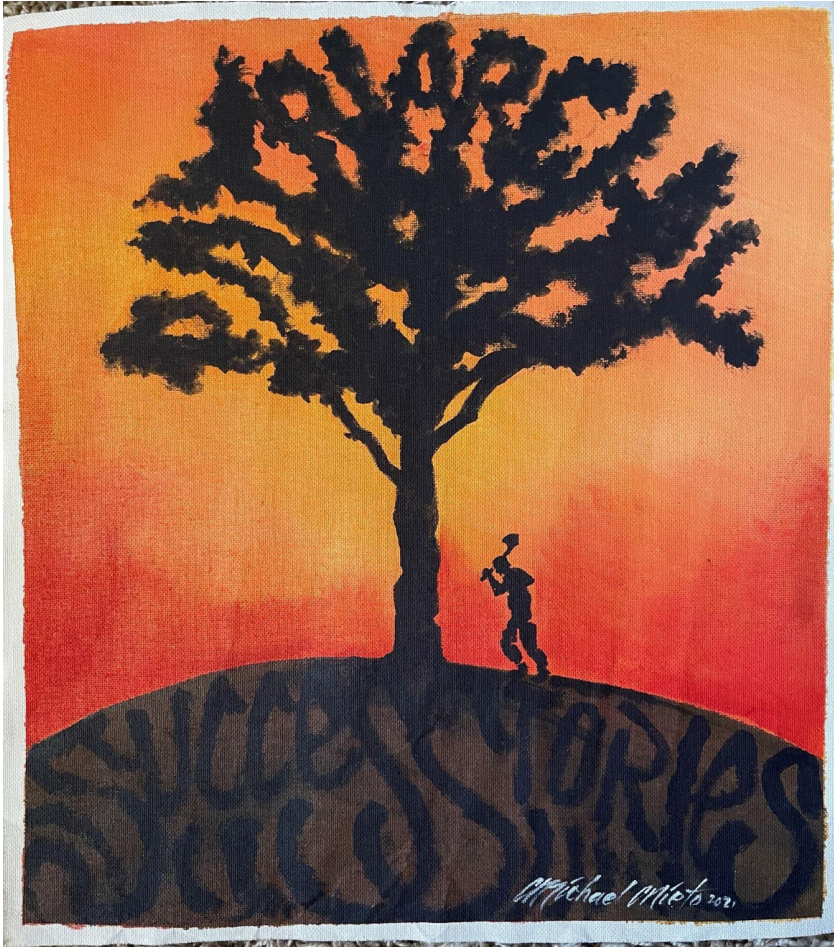
"Success Stories has invited a reevaluation on my life, on what I've been taught adds value and makes me a man. I've learned through Success Stories how to search and find the real problem of my anger and fears. The curriculum creates a space for transformation on an unprecedented level." - Don Lacey III, Facilitator at Delano Modified Community Correctional Facility

In one foundational exercise called "Top Five," facilitators ask participants to list the most important people and goals in their lives. Participants are prompted to examine the ways that their beliefs have been influenced by toxic masculinity and caused harm to their top five. Facilitators then provide tools to support behaviors in service of participants goals and loved ones.

Earlier this year, as a means to highlight the artistic talent of our alumni, we asked participants to submit works of art that reflect their Top Five:



Untitled, Michael Nieto



Untitled, Michael Nieto



Untitled, Michael Nieto



Untitled, Michael Nieto



Introspection, Wei Miao

Painting

Artist description: I see many inmate repeatedly recall back to the jail. It must be something wrong with this person or the systems. It make me thinking. This painting is 100% original. I learn the art from the jail by myself.



Bone of My Eye, David Carson

Pen and charcoal

Artist description: This expresses the longing for things just outside of our reach!



Bob Marley Early Years, Raymond L. Smith, Sr.
Pencil



Black + White, Arthur Perez

Black ball point pen

Artist description: Just seems as if child has no worries and at peace



Dreams of Hope, Horacio López

Acrylic on canvas

Artist description: After some time it came out of my heart!



Transformation, Dannie R Sledge

Charcoal

Artist description: The ability to come out of one's self, and truly see the full scope of how we are abundantly blessed to have one another to rely on in times of devastation, give us deliverance from what was into the love and hope of tomorrow. It is not an occasion, but a constant and an honor to have a life transformed by a kind gesture with positivity.

Success Stories Program has graduated more than 2,000 participants and received recognition from the California State Assembly in 2016 for the program's contributions to public safety. In 2017, rehabilitative achievement credits (RAC) became available, which have allowed graduates of the program to earn time off their sentences for their participation. Upon graduation, alumni/participants stay connected through the Alumni Network, which provides support through resource sharing and accountability. Many of the program's alumni have been released early, including all formerly incarcerated current staff members. Alumni report returning home to focus on healthy relationships with family and friends, sharing that the program has provided a transformational shift in thinking, away from previously embraced patriarchal beliefs.

Success Stories Program continues to grow into new spaces to share its transformative feminist work, inviting others to join in actualizing a world of love, accountability, and healing, unrelent on systems of punishment.

To learn more about Success Stories Program, watch the CNN feature documentary, *The Feminist on Cellblock Y*, visit successtoriesprogram.org, and follow on social media @prisonfeminism.

Written by Roy Duran Jr.

My name is Roy Duran Jr., but to the “justice system” I am In-mate #AF4808. I was sentenced to 15 to life, punished, and warehoused for a heinous crime against a precious member of our community. I do not have any excuse or logical reason for murdering George Robertson, Jr. He was a young man with four beautiful children who desperately needed him then, and still need him today. I robbed Mr. Robertson, his children, his brother, sisters, and everyone who was touched by his life of the love and light he had to give. There aren't words to describe how remorseful I am for having made that choice that brought about irreversible and immeasurable pain and harm.

Maybe it would be helpful to give you some context to shed light on who I was at that time and of the things that contributed to how I became that person who was willing to commit such a heinous crime. I met my dad, Roy Duran Sr., in a Federal Penitentiary when I was approximately 5 years old. My dad was a gang member, a drug dealer, and an addict who had so much trauma that he not only didn't come to terms with, but didn't have the support and resources that he needed to process. My mom, Loretta Rodrigez, was a single mother that experienced horrific abuse and trauma growing up in her childhood home. They likely met at a “kick back” (a house party) at the young age of 19. They were both looking for love, likely for unconscious reasons, which may have been to heal their trauma and develop the capacity to authentically love. This love story

didn't end the way we see love stories typically end in the movies, but truth be told the story isn't over for all the people involved.

I grew up with an older brother, Eddie, who is 4 years older than me. We grew up in poverty and due to pressures in patriarchal society, my mom made certain decisions to provide us with our basic needs. She moved her new boyfriend into our home and as the patriarch of the house, he resorted to physical and psychological abuse to maintain his patriarchal position as "the head of the house." He was raised to believe that his position and value as a "man" was determined by his ability to control his household, among other things. He, as you may assume by now, was also traumatized by patriarchal expectations and experiences.

What I learned from those experiences of abuse, neglect, and trauma were *I'm not good enough, I'm not important, and I don't matter*. I came to believe that *people were selfish, uncaring, and couldn't be trusted*. To me *the world was a cold and dangerous place so if I needed or wanted anything I needed to get it on my own by any means necessary*. These beliefs were like walls that I put up to protect myself. And that was the genesis of my development as a future gang member, criminal, and convicted murderer. The truth is, as well meaning as my parents were, I grew up in a loveless environment. The common thread, the catalyst if you will, in all of our lives was a lack of love in the practical sense of resources (not limited to financial), connectedness, and a safe place to enter the world with the type of security that enables one to explore the world with a spirit of curiosity.

While I was in my seventh year of incarceration, I was transferred to the Correctional Training Facility (CTF), Soledad and I was introduced to (little did I know at the time), transformative justice. Success Stories is a program that was created by Richie Reseda and Charles Berry that is based on feminist literature written by bell hooks (sic). In Success Stories, it wasn't just the curriculum that was transformative, but the authenticity, vulnerability, and the connectedness that existed in the community that we created in the trauma breeding ground that CDCR prisons are. We found love and connectedness in arguably one of the most loveless environments, a prison that warehoused some people who committed some of the most heinous and violent crimes in California.

When I left CTF, there was an ongoing two year prison gang war. That is an example of the type of environment that we were in when we created this part of the solution to create a whole community. In this transformative program we, as Coaches, stand by our participants' side and guide them in the process of discovering their purpose in life. We rarely actually use the term purpose though. We help them to get clear on the most important people and goals in their lives and we do this through an exercise that we call "Top 5." The Top 5 exercise identifies individuals' most significant relationships and goals. We use their Top 5 as the foundation of our conversations as we use the philosophy of relate, investigate, and recreate. We use our proximal knowledge to connect and, in a real

sense, we use another philosophy that the ancient Greeks used. That is ethos, pathos, logos. The ethos is credibility. The pathos is sympathy and empathy. And the logos is logic.

We have conversations about how the culture of patriarchy and the ideology of toxic masculinity harms us as we are indoctrinated by virtually every agency of socialization to buy into the toxic ideals of what a “man” is supposed to be. Patriarchal culture, or simply put, the idea that informs us that our worth is based on our ability to dominate other people, values violence, objectification of women, and our net worth as a way to validate our self worth. This is observable on the micro level by looking at my past life as a gang member, or on a macro level by looking at our individualist capitalistic nation on a global scale.

I was conditioned to believe that I needed to fit into a mold of who I was supposed to be as a “man” rather than to exercise my autonomy to choose who I wanted to be. I was taught to suppress and repress my emotions which enabled me to harden my heart to live out those patriarchal expectations. Intuitively, I knew that the lifestyle that I lived as a gang member (patriarchy) was harmful and I betrayed my heart every time I performed according to the patriarchal script. You cannot betray your heart over and over again and not expect your heart to betray you. My heart began to betray me, and my self worth and mental health suffered as a result. I turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with my anxiety, depression, and unprocessed trauma. We get caught in this cycle where we not only recreate our trauma, but validate and reinforce our distorted beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world at large.

In Success Stories we created an action based culture that we refer to as victorious thinking. A victorious mindset is marked by accepting responsibility, being accountable, identifying potential solutions, and executing the solution that we deem most healthy, productive, and effective. We contrast victorious thinking with victim thinking, which is living in a perpetual state of shifting responsibility, complaining, blaming, and making excuses for our problems or results. We offer the perspective that integrity and love are the solution to patriarchal culture.

Patriarchy demands us to compartmentalize ourselves or divide ourselves into pieces; integrity demands that we integrate ourselves into one whole undivided person. Our specific definition of love isn't unique, in fact we borrowed it from bell hooks, who borrowed it from Scott M. Peck, the world renowned psychiatrist and author of *The Road Less Traveled*. In *The Psychology of Love*, Peck defines love as: *the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth*. Thus, love is an intentional act that requires us to push past the inertia of laziness and fear to care and invest in the evolving spirit of ourselves and others.

We have other conversations about self-awareness, time management, future based thinking, and work together to cast visions for our lives. Before Success Stories, I used to believe that I was a product of my

environment, but after I discovered my purpose through the program, I came to the realization that I am a product of my own creation. I am a product of my commitments. I am a product of my choices! This was the program and the community that transformed my thinking and my life; that led not only to my physical freedom but also to recognize that I am a smaller piece of the greater whole community. Whole communities or societal integrity = Justice.

This is transformative justice! Transformative justice concerns itself with all the people who have been harmed and need to heal in order to be whole. Of course, our priority is to be there for the people who have been directly affected by harmful behavior first and then seek to ask the question: *why?* As we often hear people say the distinction between, *what's wrong with you?* vs *what happened to you?* Transformative justice also asks, *where did we fail you?* We ask these questions because we understand that we are all a smaller part of the greater whole community.

I wonder what our world would look like if we created a culture of integrity and love? Maybe we wouldn't have issues with institutionalized racism, mass incarceration, and a divided nation or world? Maybe my son wouldn't be fighting a life sentence as I am writing this paper? Who knows?

Sincerely,

Roy Duran Jr.

Success Stories Program

Transformational Coach