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I was in the Hole in so many facilities, in Paso Robles, in Los Padrinos, in Preston. Those were all Youth Authorities and then I graduated to Soledad, Folsom, Corcoran, San Quentin. Three years on Death Row till the courts ruled it cruel and unusual punishment according to the Eighth Amendment. So I can tell you why some people call solitary confinement torture.

Even before Paso Robles I was 14 years old in Juvenile Hall and that was the first SHU I went to. It was like this: somebody had got a book of matches we were like, *hey, we've got a book of matches—let's smoke!* We were looking for stuff to smoke, pencil shavings from the classroom, leaves off the trees. So I went to my dorm and rolled up some leaves and started smoking and *Boom Boom Boom* they caught us. It was like they had caught us killing somebody. They threw me in the hole—X Wing—and that was the first time I experienced total sensory deprivation and the darkness. What was unique about that experience was we had big loud flushing toilets in the corner of the cell. That toilet flushed very very loud and so basically I was peering there all alone in the darkness and I was just in a state of readiness, my alert system, my alarm system, in case someone came to the door or someone came out the walls and rushed me. And when I flushed the toilet it was my most terrifying moment. I couldn't tell was someone trying to creep upon me or not and I was just standing there ready to fight.

I think with the deprivation, the senses become more acute. You got five senses and I believe you can use one sense to access another sense. You hear somebody talk about a hamburger and you can access the other senses and smell it. There's a sense that runs underneath all the senses—the sense of feeling—so you can coordinate your sense of sight, hearing, touch, and smell and pool them together in an interesting combination. I think being deprived of a lot of those typical outlets in terms of the senses, I have a tremendous inner vision. You're in a meditative state all the time and maybe it helped me to grow inward and develop a vision that is the kind of vision you see in your dreams.

People call it being tortured and for a long time I felt like I was tortured. Because in the Hole, different states of mind would come on me. The state of mind out here that we're in, we call "reality"—the so-called "reality". So in there, it's the so-called "non-reality" and I would say, *oh, man, I'm tripping 'cause this is not real, I'm going crazy*. What you see, what you hear, people coming out of the walls. And this is typical, they say *oh, the guy went mad, the guy became delusional. The guy did this crazy thing, the guy did that*. But years ago I read about some indigenous cultures from Sonora, Mexico. They had some *brujos* with some knowledge and these people, these Native American people, their dreams are just as real as our everyday walking-around reality. So they incorporate the dream. They don't say *oh, that was a dream* or *that was a trip*. For us, everything that doesn't come from our conscious mind we say *oh man, that was far out*. We shame it. From the way we've programmed our conscious minds, right? So when you go into a situation that's gonna call on you to go deeper into yourself, that's gonna call on your mind to expand the little regions that it had typically existed on and felt security in, it won't be able to find security there. So it's gonna have to expand and then delude itself with the ultimate delusion: *I'm insane, I'm crazy, I'm must be going crazy*. But the only reason you reach those conclusions is you are comparing what you are experiencing with the programming you had previously been through.

I didn't accept the dreamworld at first. I struggled at first like everybody else. I didn't realize all these things. I was alone all the time. It was a struggle and I felt tortured. But now I'm kind of jumping ahead and this might interest a psychologist. I had the realization that crazy is an illusion. It's based on thinking this is how it's supposed to be, so the comparison to what it's supposed to be and what I actually experience makes me think *I'm crazy, I'm nuts. I'm going nuts*.

Now that I'm out, I still sometimes enter the dreamworld when I'm wide awake. I incorporate it as my valid life experience.

I was incarcerated this time for 45 years and this is first time in my life since I was 14 years old I've been off parole. I've been out over three years. But previous to that, I was just a crazy kid. I couldn't never stay on the streets long. And now I'm wondering about my life. If a person was sitting at a desk and reading about me on paper, he must be thinking this dude must really be bad, you know, and then I walk through the door and I'm personable and nice and polite and I watch people be befuddled. I think I learned some of the lessons I needed.

One turning point, I was in San Quentin and the dude came around fumigating and I said *No, I don't want no fumigation in my cell*. I mean, there's a cockroach on the wall and what has it ever done to me that I should kill it? I came to value all life. I became a vegetarian. I don't condemn people who eat meat—if you do it consciously and take responsibility. You have to take responsibility for it if you take life and for me now, I can't see killing a living thing just to feed my appetite. Respect for all life—that is part of my growing.

I learned you can find a little bit of heaven even in the worst hell. Just like they say there's a blessing inside every curse and also I guess a curse inside every blessing. We have to sort that out.

So you know that I've been in some of the worst prisons in California for many many years with what society said are the worst people. Society told me I was bad and I've been involved with some of what society has ruled are the most heinous, worst, toughest guys in the toughest places but what really impressed me, invariably there would always be some shining face would jump up and say *hey, whazzup, man, how you been doing? and you hungry?* Good souls even in the worst place you could imagine. I been with the worst of the worst and I seen beauty in a whole lot of these guys. If there had been another kind of way that they could've been treated, the world could have benefited from some beautiful people.

But you want an example how it was. In the Hole—this was in the old County jail, 306 North Broadway, 14th floor. I'll never forget that place. They had a toilet in the middle of the floor, they flushed it every third day by outside control. You had no toilet paper, you had no bedding. You had a blanket, you got a tee-shirt, you had your socks which is really important 'cause you could play handball in the dark. There's no light and you ball your socks up into a ball and you bounce it and you catch it and I guess that's a sensory experience too in a way because there's no light to see. Let me express this to you. You're on what they call a restricted diet. That's bread and water for two days and on the third day you get what they call a "juke ball" and the juke ball is composed of meat, potatoes, salad, bread, everything rolled up into one ball. *Oh man, here come the juke ball*, and you like the bread and water days better than the juke ball. Now I don't want to offend your senses but you couldn't tell whether it was day or night until they open the slot to push your tray of food through. So you try to go close and for that moment you try to see. You learn how to identify your food, 'cause you're eating in the dark, 'cause they close the slot and you have to eat your food by the feeling of it. *Oh, that feel like corn bread. This sloshy stuff must be spaghetti.* So you learn to go to the slot and look when it's still light so you can see where everything is, but then I made a shocking startling revelation, discovery right there. I looked at my fingers and my fingers were so dirty, you could see encrusted dirt like fingerprints. There were no showers, see. And I looked and wow, I was really really dirty. Then the light go and then—what can I say?—I'm eating it all with my hands.

But here's the little bit of heaven. Palm Hall. That was what they called the Hole in Chino. But the camaraderie, people were so great with each other. So I go in there and this guy says *Look, man, if they have butter on your tray, save your butter and if you get bread on the tray save your bread* so I save my butter and I save my bread and I was trying to explain to you how they would make a line. People would pick the threads in their clothes and pull a little thread, pull the thread and keep pulling but if you pull it hard it will break, and some guys would even weave that together or braid that together to make it stronger. Then you had to get something that was weighty enough so that you could tie it to four corners of a little sliver of soap that could slide and slide it and you tie the string to one end of the soap and you slid it out to another guy and then another guy

he would slide it out. He would throw his line across my line so I would gently pull his line back. Now you can transfer stuff. So if you got the bread, you tore the little package of the bread wrapper and you put the bread inside and you pull it back and you got to slide it outside and you got someone sliding it. You'd be amazed at the things you saw slide, some people so adept they can go to the next tier. This is something you have to see. All of a sudden you see something going up up up. And what was the beautiful part about it was timing. Soon as the guard would hit the door *shoo shoo shoo* everything would disappear. He'd walk up and down the hall and he wouldn't see nothing. As soon as the door closed, *shoo shoo shoo shoo shoo* all these things would come out again.

We didn't have beds. We slept on metal slabs. So this guy he scraped the whole paint off the corner of the bed and he made a grill. Never underestimate the resourcefulness of a convict!

We had these bombs, these toilet paper bombs, and he'd light it till it got really really hot. We could smoke then so we had matches and we had toilet paper then—you didn't have to ask for it. You could take rolls of toilet paper and wrap it around to make a big bomb to last for a long time and lit it and then you'd close it up at the end, make it like a donut. If you did it right you could have a flame go through the middle and very little smoke. The guy at the end he was adept at doing this and he scraped all the paint off the corner of his bed. That's an arduous task, too. How you gonna scrape the paint you don't have no scraper? Some guys would use the—what you call? that holds books together? A staple. They would get a little staple off of a book and straighten it out and use that. Later on they outlawed books with staples in them.

They study us and they find out how to make it more hell. Whatever you use to translate that hell into heaven. As these prisons became more and more modern, they became less and less life-affirming to the guys that were in. The more modernized, the more sterile, more control they get. They don't walk the tier now. They watch on video, watch you all the time. There's no privacy, nothing. They learn this meticulously, year after year, taking away whatever makes you feel, you know. Take away the camaraderie.

I remember one SHU. In isolation, yeah, men try to talk to each other through the vents, or shout to each other. These two guys are talking and the guards come in, *Who's talking?* so everyone starts shouting at once. Except the guy in the cell next to me. Quiet guy. And I hear the guard go to each cell on the tier. And they beating the men. One, then another. Down the tier, beat another. The cell next to mine was this old guy, old white guy, and he wasn't talking at all. Wasn't talking to anyone. I hear the door open and he's saying *I didn't do it* and they beating him and beating him. Then it's my turn and they say *Get down on the floor*. That's what they want, you down on the floor, when they coming in. And I thought, no, I'm not gonna lie down so they can beat me. So I stand up like this. I'm big and I'm ready to fight. So the first one comes in and kicks me in the stomach and bam, I just punch him. Knock him down. The other come in and hit me in the head with his flashlight and I hit him. Knock both of them down and I'm thinking *Look what I did. What's gonna happen now?* So I push them out and I close myself in the cell, I close the door on myself. But you never know. The Captain come

and he says let us in and we're not going to do anything to you. We'll take you to get that head injury checked out for medical care. That time I had a little victory.

But Palm Hall was something else. It was like a village and with people of different ethnicities. This was one of the places where it wasn't ethnically divided. No racial divide and this gave me my first awareness of how a village could be like a United Nations village or a village of all different kinds of people that could co-exist. I had a sense of that and I knew that is the best way to live. I think that's one of the ways to end suffering also, for us to be in a society based on the value of everyone. You end racism right there, classism right there. John Lennon's song *Imagine* could be the Pledge of Allegiance to that kind of existence.

So we had bunks with metal slabs. So you got this guy with the corner of his bed. *All right, everybody send me your bread.* There it goes *shoo shoo, all right, throw me your line. shoo shoo Oh, man that's so good. Who's next? I'm next!* One by one everybody sends their bread and this guy sends it back. Then my time came and I'm like *whoosh whoosh, how great can it be? a piece of bread with some butter on it.* Then I got that buttered toast. *Man, this is so good!* It was like I said. The sensory experience 'cause it's so acute, I become aware of all the grains in the bread and the pores in the bread and how the butter melted into the bread and the crust on the bread and all like that. I never looked upon a piece of bread the same way. I never looked the same way on some old loaf on the shelf that you could discard. No, it's too valuable.

I'll tell you another hard revelation. There's no such thing as being powerless. You think you're powerless if you're in your regular routine state of mind and you enter situations that overwhelm what you thought you were before. All the meanings you had before are shattered. You have to ask *Officer, officer, I need to get a drink of water.* Your whole sense of self is threatened. You know, the people who orchestrated the punishment, they put a guy in a box and give him some books so I studied and I found out that the worse kind of punishments that they devised in the Western world was not hanging or guillotine. What they thought was the most effective punishment, the most hell on earth is to put you in a little box without a lot of distractions. If you mess up there, then they take you to another smaller box with less distractions so now you get to the torture.

When they leave you handcuffed with your hands behind your back, after an hour, the pain is so bad, well, it's torture. And ideally, we want to stop all torture in the world. And maybe we can't stop the torturer, but we can stop our feeling defeated and tortured. So yes, solitary confinement is torture, but what if you were of a different mindset? What if you was a Buddhist monk who spend all these years sitting on a mountain? The point is that you don't automatically go insane by being in this condition. Because what I found out, I realized I could do *something* about *anything*. OK? I could do SOMETHING about ANYTHING. There's no thing that I can't do *something* about. When I was a fighter in fight school—'cause you know, growing up, the only legal thing I wanted to be was a boxer—we said *Defeat is a state of mind. As long as I can breathe, I'm not defeated. You can hit me, as long as I'm still breathing, I'm not defeated.*

Let me tell you, there's enough crimes to go around. One of the things that really offend me are the people who sit with those robes and they believe they have the sanctity and the justice inside of them to condemn a person and say *oh, you're gonna do five years*. I've studied the law and I know the law is wrong wrong wrong. I think the reason the law sustains itself is that *some* laws are in harmony with the laws of nature. People who rule in a correct way according to the truth, the people have no complaints about justice. But if you're unjust and you impose the laws on others, the only way you can hold that together is by force and bullyism and the guns and killing people out here on the street. That's the only way you can enforce unjust laws.

The plantation law. Slavery. What kind of law was that? There was this dude in Quentin, skin as black as mine, but I dissociated myself from him and his attitude. Even called him a few names. But he did say something I want to tell you. He said, *There's a seven year statute of limitations for something, five year statute of limitation for something. There's no statute of limitation for murder. But did the statute of limitation run out on slavery? On those rapes and kidnaps and murders? Is that over with? Kind of selective statute of limitations going on.*

It's not right. The other day I was talking to this little girl. Everyone is a teacher, you know. She was so beautiful. She told me, *what they try to teach me in school is just like telling me that a square got three corners to it*. Wow! Just let me trip on this for a minute. Don't even tell me nothing else. Let me see a square with four corners first and then ask me to say the pledge of allegiance.

Then they say to me, *you belligerent, boy, you not going along with our system.*

For years I had a problem with anger. I had a lot of rage and a lot of hostility. I think I told you, when I got to Death Row I didn't eat. I felt like a turkey getting ready to be served for Thanksgiving. They'd come around with a tray of food and I'm like *Get away from me!* For a long time, the least little thing would set me off in a rage. Then one day in prison I was walking around and I saw myself in the mirror. Not a glass mirror, it was a square of metal on the wall. There was enough light to see and I saw my angry face and I thought *I don't want to be that person.*

I read a lot of psychology to try and determine what sort of nut I was. I started with Sigmund Freud, and I read Adler and Erich Fromm, BF Skinner, behavioral psychologists, and Gestalt, and I was trying to get to things that could really cure your mind and your situations. Then I was reading about the concentration camps, how they were tortured, and that created a whole other psychology and I realized that the psychologists had copped out. Because if their obligation was to heal a mental malady that causes anxiety and comes from trauma, I started looking at slavery. What type of psychology do they have to cover this? That this guy is taken away from his whole life, walking down a road and he was in his own land where he had his birthplace and his memories and his relationship to the ceremonies and his own gods and his own holidays and his own everything. Over here? All of that is taken away from his mind and he's recreated into a Frankenstein and they pour into his head a whole patchwork of

what the slavemaster identified him as. There's a basic psychological question here because the slavemaster said *boy, you're whatever I want you to be and so go out there and pick my cotton*. What kind of state of mind? How's a person who went through this going to authentically heal based upon a typical psychological system? What do the psychologists have to say about that?

They're talking about it now but Sigmund Freud should have been talking about it, all of them, if they were going to be authentic to their craft. They started talking about all the other stuff. I thought, man, these people are just totally ignoring it. What are they saying, that it was natural? Or they was saying they overlooked it? That's crazy. There should be reams and reams of books coming out, that we have a history of it, so we could heal together.

But really I was so impressed with Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis. I thought this stuff was worth learning. It's limited but I got much out of it. See, they want to revisit those days when you had those traumatic experiences and then reshape the feeling of it, the energy of it to cure you. Now? They talk to you, they interview you, just to discover what category you fit in, to diagnose you, and then the drug or pharmaceutical companies take over and they give you a chemical that they ordain for you to have. So they're not even curing people. They chemicalize you.

You know, unlearning is just as important as learning. We need to unlearn the stuff that doesn't work. If it's not working, don't pledge allegiance to it. Ruthlessly discard it. So you see by the time I got out I wasn't interested in the kind of help the psychologists offer. The internal help. I needed a lot of external help.

The other thing I studied? Time. Realizing that time was another thing that they use as a weapon. *How much time you got? How much time the judge give you?* But no one can dispense time. You talk about linear time when you're confined to a box. But I began to understand cyclical time and all kinds of time. Lose time. Make time. Einstein's theory and I come to understand there's only one real time and that's Now and it's forever Now. Once a person really understands that and goes deeper and deeper and all the other times are either memories or projections into the future and so all time zones are frozen until we revisit them. We go back into those old timeframes and open them up. When you're sitting there in your cell, in that solitary chamber, you can look at these things and look at them for hours, two hours, three hours, days, and revisit this for days and days and days and you realize that I can walk back into any timeframe and recall it, bring it right into the arena of Now and change it. Every thought has a feeling attached to it. So all these thoughts are stored in your memorybank and you have power over your memories.

So I have a whole memorybank. My childhood? My family was from Texas and they were from Shepard Plantation so I got the Shepard last name, a slave name. You know the slaver named all the people who worked on the plantation *Shepard*. So my family said we fled from Texas to become citizens and came to LA and I'm so glad that I came to Los Angeles to be born because if I'd grown up on the plantation, I'd be dead,

because I wouldn't have accepted the insults, the hell those people suffered on the plantation.

And my mother, you know, she was very smart, and I have the memory of kissing her on the cheek and feeling her soft skin and smelling her perfume. I remember as a little kid learning how to tell time and I'd follow my mother around and I would ask her, *What time is it now?* She said *It's three o'clock.* I ask, *How do you know that? The big hand is pointing here and the little one here.* So I go, *what time is it now?* She said, *It's six o'clock.* I said *How do you know. The little hand is going there....* That's the way I am, that's the way I was, I get obsessed. So I asked her how many hours in the day. She said 24. I said *well how do we get...* She said, *one second after 24 is the next day.* I said *wow. Wait minute! The hands go around like this and then they go around to the 12 again and then one second after that 12:00 o'clock is the next day?* And that filled my head and so I determined that I was going to stay up until twelve o'clock to see another day and in my head in the next day the birds was gonna be singing and the milkman would be out and the milk would be on the porch and everything. So I stayed up one night, ten o'clock, there was a clock on the icebox in the kitchen so I'd creep to the kitchen and look and go back to bed and every night I would fall asleep before 12:00 o'clock. Then one night I crept to the kitchen and it was 11:00 and then ten minutes after 11:00 and I get up and it's 10 minutes to 12:00, 5 minutes to 12:00, I'm thinking *oh man I'm going to stay here 4 3 2 1* and then *boom.* The second after midnight and it was still dark and then I said a curse word I was so disappointed.

But I said to you before inside every blessing there's a curse. We have to navigate our blessings so we don't go so far we get to the curse! My mother was at the house and a seller of books, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, came around. This was before I went to school and my mother said she would buy a whole set. A dollar down and a dollar a week, that was the deal. She gave the guy a dollar and she put the books at the head of my bed. I would go to sleep and those books would be there so I became interested in the books. I'd look at the pictures, the flags from different countries and medals from different wars and all that. Those glossy pictures fascinated me. Then I discovered fairytales and poems so I began to be obsessed by books. When people came who could read, I'd ask them to read something to me and I guess I followed along and started to know the words. My favorite was the poems and I wore my mother out and my sister out. My sister was older than me three years and I watched her go to school and I thought school's gonna be so great. I thought very soon I'll be going and I'll have books.

So anyway I went to Ascot Elementary School on the corner of Vernon and Compton and it was one of the most horrible schools in the ghetto. Violence was the last thing on my mind at the time. But anyway I went to the school and I went to kindergarten and I stayed in kindergarten one day. I could write my name, I could read a little bit so they said I wasn't kindergarten material. So they sent me down the hall to the first grade. I stayed in there one week and the teacher sent me to second grade. I walk in the classroom and there was some of the baddest dudes and the teacher says *Here's little Ernest Shepard III, he's so smart and he's so good and he's so this and he's gonna be all this and all that.* They were older than me and they weren't no fake bullies. They

were bullies would beat your head in. And I was the perfect little Lord Fauntleroy...and so I was a victim getting beat up and getting beat up and getting beat up.

One day I made a resolution that I wasn't gonna get beat up now more, and if fighting was the only way....But fighting to me was the worst thing I could imagine. Hitting somebody in the face was like an invasion, a rape to me. It was the last thing I wanted to do, but laying there in the alley in the dirt watching my blood flow down the drain I said that I was going to rise up and I was going to fight. If this was the only way that I could be in the world, the only way that the world would accept me, I was gonna be the biggest baddest dude that you ever saw and I prayed to the dirt god and the grass god and the bushes god and I became obsessed with fighting. After a while I was no longer a victim of bullies and then the shoe was on the other foot. I was really cold blooded. I became a predator. I don't like to say it, don't like it at all, but I guess that's what you would call me. And once you're a predator? Once you do that? Where do you stop? I don't want to say more about it because now I'm not a predator, not a bully and I'm opening myself up to be healed. I'm still healing, you know. Some things don't heal that easily. I guess that's why I need all the psychological help and emotional help...

But I'm so grateful for my life and I'm grateful for the things that life gave me. It took years and years and years for that knowledge, but that's the way knowledge is supposed to happen. It can't come to you all at once like a train gonna run you down.

You know I told you I met this little girl, and we were talking about suffering. So I told this little girl—and luckily with her I wasn't like this with all these tears—I told her that when you start changing yourself that's when you really start giving a meaning to your life. And I told her I believe once a person really suffers it's comparable to any other suffering that ever happened. You can't say *I suffered more than that person. Or I got hit by the lash four times and he got hit six times so therefore his suffering was greater than mine.* If you ever *really* suffered, then you connect to everybody else that ever suffered. If you suffered for five minutes—but *really really* suffered—or five years, you're at a place where there's a common denominator with everybody who ever suffered. If you're at a place where you're saying *I've suffered more than you*, then you haven't really experienced it. When you've really gone there, it's an insult for you to compare.

Your life doesn't really have a meaning until you realize you have to do something to end suffering. You can't end suffering within yourself and not extend it to everyone outside yourself. You have to do something to end it for *everyone everywhere*. That revelation, that's one of the possible meanings for my continued existence.