



# Prison University Project

A Newsletter of the Prison University Project

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## Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

In February I had the great pleasure of sitting down to interview PUP alumnus Pat Mims, Program Coordinator of the Sexually Exploited Minors Program at Bay Area Women Against Rape (BAWAR). Excerpts of that interview begin on the right.

Pat left San Quentin in 2009, after serving over 20 years for second degree murder. Our conversation reminded me of the daunting challenges that face people who leave prison after serving so much time. Most former lifers are subject to parole conditions that prohibit them from leaving a 25-mile radius, whether to visit or live with family members, accept job offers, or attend school. Many grapple with social isolation, sensory overload, and complex reunions with family members. As they search for decent paying work and affordable housing (with a landlord who will rent to them), many will also learn how to use cell phones, email, and internet for the very first time.

The fact that so many alumni are thriving is testament to their extraordinary perseverance and resiliency. Yet I wonder what more we all could do to support them, so that they might complete their degrees and move forward with their careers as quickly as possible, without getting bogged down in excessive student loans or other forms of debt.

They don't only need leads on scholarships and other grants, affordable housing, job openings, and good deals on used cars; they also need the active support of CDCR, and specifically Paroles Division, to maintain the extraordinary momentum they have established while inside. It's not just these individuals who stand to gain; it is their families, their communities, and the society at large who will reap the benefits of their academic and professional accomplishments.

*With warm regards,  
Jody Lewen*

## Advocating for sexually exploited minors: *A conversation with Pat Mims*

**JL: Tell me about your organization.**

**PM:** Bay Area Women Against Rape – BAWAR. It's one of the biggest rape crisis centers in the nation and I'm very proud to say that I'm the second man hired in the history of the organization. That's powerful, and a big responsibility to hold up. About three and a half years ago, Marcia Blackstock, the executive director, approached me in regards to a position that was opening up in a sexually exploited minors program that she wanted to create. We had first met years before, when BAWAR came into San Quentin to help set up Brother's Keepers, a suicide prevention program.

**JL: What was the job like at the beginning?**

When Marcia offered me the job I went out to see what was going on. What was going on was that the Oakland Police Department was targeting sexually exploited minors, kids that were being commercially sexually exploited by adults, and they were bringing them in. They would go out – they'd hold a special operation in the middle of the city, behind the Safeway or something, and there'd be a command post. They'd have undercover cars, regular police, a big van, and they would go out, basically as decoys to solicit sexually exploited kids.

As the decoy would come in contact with the sexually exploited kid, they'd let a patrol car know, and that patrol car would come pick them up. And when they'd bring them back to the command post, I was watching and saying, whoa, these are kids that are out here – 10, 11, 12 years old, at one in the morning. And I was wondering what their life was like. I know what my life was like prior to prison – it was horrible, and there was a great deal of trauma involved. I was saying to myself, where are the services for these kids? That's when it all started.

We started bringing them some water, food, clothing, and referring them to another agency. Well that wasn't enough for me. I was starting to wake up in the middle of the night saying, hey, what happened to that kid? So I said no, we need to advocate a little more for those kids that are coming through this system. They were being taken to juvenile hall, and no one was seeing them, and no one was going to court for them.

So I said no, this program has to go further – we have to go to court, we have to visit them, we have to advocate for them, we have to find out what's the safest plan for them. Because as we found out more information about the kids, some of the exploiters were their own family – their parents, their uncle, grandmothers, grandfathers, their siblings – I mean, it was really terrible, what was happening to them. So we developed a first crisis response, and advocacy for the kids, to where now we're working alongside law enforcement throughout Alameda County.

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**JL: As you get to know these kids, do you see certain common themes, repeating patterns in their lives?**

**PM:** Lack of education. Generations of lack of education. A culture that glamorizes exploitation. If you listen to hip hop, all it talks about is pimps, hoes – I mean there are songs that glamorize this, to where some of the kids actually believe that this is the role they should play in society.

Another common theme is that kids are growing up with a great deal more violence now. They're witness to homicides, to domestic violence, they are victims of violence. Their trauma goes deep. They are victims of sexual assault at early, early ages. At seven years old they're victims of sexual assault. So it's a number of things that have built layers of trauma in these children.

**JL: It sounds like you are extraordinarily good at your job. Why do you think it is that you understand these kids so well?**

**PM:** It was my experience as a child growing up. I grew up in Berkeley – so this is my community. Home was difficult – dad was abusive. I was a runaway at 13. I ran to the streets, which was the only place that would embrace me at that time. I dropped out of school in the 9th grade. I received my GED when I was in prison.

**JL: It seems like a lot of people inside the prison system have been sexually exploited. Is that your observation?**

**PM:** Very much so. Lack of education, victims of serious trauma. In some of the groups I sometimes participated in at San Quentin this used to come out. This wasn't just me, an isolated incident – a number of guys had experienced

some type of serious trauma. And this was not to blame or make excuses for why they were there, it was just to get an understanding as to what had happened to them, and how they had come to a point to commit their crime.

**JL: Let's come back to the question of prevention.**

**PM:** With most kids, the average age of entry into sexual exploitation is like 13. So if we're getting the kids at 15 – two years into it – that's far too late. We have to go back and change things socially to really make a dent in what's happening today. That's my first thought. It's an economic problem. It's a social problem. It's class.

To start, there aren't enough jobs. The majority of kids that we have are African American, Latina. The education level is so low. The schools they go to – other schools are preparing kids to go to college – at Richmond High School they have a police station on campus. It's like they're preparing the kids to go to prison.

It's been going on for so many years. We've lost a number of generations due to drugs, due to violence over the years, to where parents are teaching their kids these things. This isn't a problem that just came up – this has come over a number of generations and the only way that we can really work on it is to think 50 years down the line. We're helping this generation to help the next generation, and the next generation... It's a change in self-esteem, in educational literacy, emotional literacy. It's a change in how people think and how people behave. It's a change in culture.

I've worked with kids whose parents do not provide them

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An education is the most worth having possession one can have. Yet, inexplicably, there are a slew of people, especially in prison, who appear to be entirely uninterested in getting one. Some think they are too old for it. Really? Others convince themselves that since they are going to be in prison for life anyway, what will they need an education for. They are all wrong.

Let's talk about this. First of all, whether you are in prison or a free man on the streets, an education is never without value. If you are educated outside, your chances of having a good job are much greater than otherwise. The same goes in prison. Let me give you a for instance. Can you be a clerk in any capacity if you

cannot read and write very well? Absolutely not. But putting all that aside, what about when you talk to people? Don't you want to be able to couch very well what you are saying? Your auditors take you more seriously if you express yourself very well. And if you have some health problems, don't you have to be able to fill out that medical form and explain clearly what your problem is? This is impossible to do if you cannot read and write. Believe it or not, sadly, there are some of our fellow prisoners who don't know how to read and write.

I had a cellmate once who always used to ask me to fill out his job applications for him. The first time he asked me to fill out a P.I.A. [Prison

Industry Authority] application for him, I thought that was more than a bit bizarre. But I politely read the questions to him and he told me what to answer.

It wasn't until the second time I helped him with the same task that I realized what the problem was. That time, he started to do it himself. He wrote his name and CDC number on the form and then asked me to tell him what the first question said. "He can't read and write," I very, very sadly thought to myself. I wanted to be absolutely sure, though. I read the question out loud to him and I gave him the application back. He then asked me if I could write down the answer for him, confessing, "I don't read and write too good."

## *A Few Words on Ed*

with the basic essentials to go to schools. Bus money, lunch money, clothes. And the parents are saying, get it yourself. And if that's the message they're projecting to the child, then this is what's going to happen.

**JL: So another point of intervention is with the child who has no support financially – providing for them –**

**PM:** – or just saying, I'm proud of you.

**JL: So their vulnerability is both economic and emotional. You're saying that what we're up against is that total lack of support system for the child – that vacuum in the child's life. So do you imagine group homes for those kids?**

**PM:** Yes – where they could thrive, where their trauma could be dealt with. And do I mean therapy? Not in all cases. I think therapy can be great, however, sometimes I think some of the therapists and what they've learned in school doesn't really work for the culture that they're dealing with. You kind of have to have lived it to understand it, the way that it really is.

**JL: So this is my argument for your getting a master's degree, and a doctorate! You need not only to be a practitioner, working with these kids, you need to be training those other clinicians. Would you talk about the therapist who is well-intentioned but perhaps a little clueless? What are they missing? What do they need to know? And don't worry about being polite.**

**PM:** You can't take someone who has grown up, who hasn't seen any of this for their entire life except maybe seen it on television, and – I went to Princeton, and came back with my degree, and now I want to work with kids! Because I am a therapist!

You also have to remember that these kids are being raised in areas where they are not interacting with people of other races. They've been taught that White people run the world. White people are the reason why – and this goes back generations – from their mothers, and fathers, and all the way back to slavery – and now it comes forward hundreds of years to where they've heard it over and over again. And most of the people who have tried to purchase them are White. And then you put a White therapist in front of them?

**JL: What impact do you think going to school at San Quentin had on you, or on your current work? And do you think academic education can help with emotional literacy?**

**PM:** It can. I think they go hand in hand. I think education brings self-esteem, and self-esteem supports emotional literacy. To learn to critically think, that's what I learned in school – how to think about a situation, how to write my thoughts down, and how to express them. When you're able to do that confidently in a paper, you're able to do that more confidently with a person, and that's important.

**JL: Do you know where you want to be in five years?**

**PM:** I'm going to school now – pursuing a Bachelor's degree at San Francisco State University – because I want to bring about social change. Then I'm going to pursue a master's in social work. To be taken seriously, for social upward mobility, you need the degree. Education is a must for people in our position. We have a lot of work to do.



Alumnus Pat Mims

## Education – by Levelt Duverne

To this day, I never get over the truly deep sadness I felt that day. He was 48 years old. I felt like telling him that if he wanted me to I could teach him how to read and write, but I was too embarrassed for him to say it. I found myself thinking how lucky and blessed people like you and I are. And I silently said to myself, “thank you, God.”

The notion that a lifer does not need an education because he's never getting out is quite befuddling to me. There's a Haitian proverb that says, “Dépi-ou ghin tèt pa jamm dézespéré mète chapo” – as long as you have a head, never lose hope of wearing a hat. In other words, be optimistic. Sentences get overturned or lessened all the time. You never know what God

has in store for you. Why cut yourself short? And if one day God sets you free, don't you want to be equipped for the outside world? Don't you want to be prepared to take care of yourself and your family? I have no doubt that we all do.

*Note: This essay was originally written in spring of 2012 for the “Education Corner” of San Quentin News, the prison newspaper. Shortly after it was submitted to the paper, Levelt committed suicide. His cellmate, Danny Cox, wrote the following about him:*

The demise of Levelt Duverne was a colossal loss to humanity. He was the epitome of the ideal cellie: respectful, quiet, non-confrontational, and very cerebral. Education was of extreme

importance to him. He adored and attended Patten University for over a year, maintaining an A average. Levelt spoke seven languages fluently, and was tutoring several guys in French. I have never in my five and a half decades on this earth encountered anyone who studied as much as he did. I've engaged with some great minds: scholars, politicians, pundits, etc. but with no slight to the aforementioned Levelt may be the most intelligent human I have ever met. Levelt enriched my life in myriad ways; most importantly, he inspired me to never cease acquiring knowledge and to be at peace with all men. Levelt will forever be loved, and his memory forever etched in my mind. Peace eternally to a very special friend. May your spirit soar.



## Human Element

by Mesro Coles-El, Chemistry Student

*I wanted to shine like Magnesium  
But my enthalpy was too low  
So I tried to convert to Helium  
But my Hydrogen was too slow.  
I weigh ten kilograms per mole. Blast!  
I need to drop a few pounds  
But my structure's like a noble gas  
With no electrons to pass around.  
I wanted to change my name and symbol  
To fit in the Periodic Table.  
Potassium and Tungsten giggled  
When Iron said I wasn't able.  
Gold, Silver, and Copper were on my side  
With Mercury to lend a hand.  
But those metals don't react or collide;  
Results aren't in the plans.  
Sodium was salty I dated Chlorine.  
I was just trying to be nice!  
Iodine red on the scene;  
Conversion won't come out right.  
I want to balance my equation. Limited reagents  
Bring precipitation instead of combustion.  
Now I orbit the Sun, who is patient,  
Sharing light from my spectrum and state functions...*

## WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Our mission is to provide excellent higher education to people incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison, to create a replicable model for such programs, and to stimulate public awareness and meaningful dialogue about higher education and criminal justice.

We provide approximately 20 courses each semester in the humanities, social sciences, math, and science leading to an Associate of Arts degree in liberal arts, as well as college preparatory courses in math and English, to over 300 students. The program is an extension site of Patten University in Oakland. All instructors work as volunteers. We receive no state or federal funding and rely entirely on donations from individuals and foundations.



### Spring Semester 2013 Course Offerings:

- English 99A, Developmental English, Part I (two sections)
- English 99B, Developmental English, Part II (two sections)
- English 101A, Introduction to Reading and Composition (two sections)
- English 101B, Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
- English 204, Interdisciplinary Reading, Writing and Research
- Communications
- Philosophy
- Modern African History
- Social Psychology
- Biology with Lab
- History of Photography
- Spanish 101
- Stanford-San Quentin Workshop on Democracy and Incarceration
- Math 50A
- Math 50B
- Elementary Algebra
- Intermediate Algebra
- Geometry
- Statistics
- Calculus II
- Study Hall (tutoring across the disciplines)