



# Video Story Transcript

## California's Arts-In-Corrections: Hope in the Midst of Madness

**By: Storyteller Michael D. McCarty**  
www.havemouthwillrunit.com

**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnn6I-PWIS4>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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My name is Michael McCarty. Since September, I've been working in prisons in California's Central Valley teaching storytelling to inmates. And it's been an amazing education for me because all I knew about prisons was the Shawshank Redemption. Well, one of the things I found out in prisons is that the prisons in Level 4 are divided by race. And then, within race, by gang. So, one of the guys in my class, I called him, Big D, was a young guy, in a juvenile facility got transferred to a major prison, had a black cellmate. One day, he's out in a yard, a group of skinheads, come up to him and say, "You got to get a white cellmate."

He said, "Well, I don't mind."

They said "Well, we do. If you don't have a white cellmate by tomorrow, we're going to kill you." And that's the way that was. And he got himself a white cellmate.

Now, things are divided up. At the same time with this program, with this arson corrections program, things happen. So, I've got these guys in my class; four black guys, one Latino. And Latino guy sits a couple of chairs away from the black guys. They all acknowledge each other, but it's clear that some separation. One day, when he's telling his story, he tells the story, how his best friend growing up was black. Then things happen. He ended up in prison, this Latino gentleman. One day, he finds out there's about to be a throwdown between the blacks and Latinos. And on that same day, his friend, his black friend, is in the prison. And he said, "I stopped believing in God, a long time ago. But I asked, 'God, please don't let my friend be here when this throwdown goes down.'" And the next day his friend was transferred. So, he told that story and the black guys in that class had a very positive reaction to him.

So, got another guy in my class doing 20 something to life. Been in prison for over 20 years, since he was a juvenile. Very frustrated. Feels he's being judged still by what he had done over 20 years ago. And he says, "I've changed." And he has issues with the corrections officers in general, but with the white corrections officers in particular. When it's his turn to tell the story in my class, he rants. He's angry. One day, we're sitting around doing our talk story thing, and he remembers this corrections officer, white correction officer, that, he'd met when he first came into the prison system as a juvenile. And this guy would talk to him and say you need to stop this gang bang and then get away from all this. And in time he did it. Well, over his time in prison, he kept encountering this corrections officer and every time he encountered him, he'd pull him in on projects, positive things. And this guy, who I call WP, found out that when he would see his name, he would say, "I know this guy. He's a good guy." Well, that became a theme. One time he comes into a prison, finds out that this corrections officers, that he calls the men, and he pulls them into a program, that's like Scared Straight without the scared. And. Again, he's doing positive things. Once, he found this story, when it came his turn to tell a story he wasn't rant'n.

And this was done. This video was done and put on the website of one of the organizations that I'm working with. This lieutenant in the prison had to view, to approve the video before it went on. Well, he was watching it and I watched him. I was there when he was going over it. And I watched him watching this video. He was looking out for gang signs or anything like that. And so initially, he was very stern as he watched, very serious. When this guy starts telling his story, all of a sudden it was, "Oh," a leaning forward, story trance happening. And him saying, "Wow!" He connected with that story. That's one of the things that happens with storytelling in general. But with the storytelling and the prisons, this has been an amazing thing.

But check this out. The young man, who was in the prison from the juvenile facility and told by the skinheads that he have, he had to have a white cellmate, well, he was in my class, a couple of times in the last few months. Now, he's in a level two facility where all of that stuff is nonexistent. He's in a gospel choir with a bunch of black guys. He's in my class and he is telling stories and helping others to find their stories. This has been an amazing project. It's been amazing education for me.

We'll leave you with one last little story. Got a guy who's also doing life for committing a murder. He did a breakdown, an analysis of his crime, and he developed a workshop. He broke down all the things in his life. Things that he had no control over, things that he brought into his own life. And he put together a workshop and he calls, These Sticks. And he has people either bring up a stick or he gets a stick depending on if it was something that came into his life beyond his control, or something that he had control over. And he puts the sticks in a spot, a pile. And he says how these sticks were the things that accumulated, that would become the fire, that was the murder he committed. And then he did a further analysis. What could have stopped this? What could have prevented this? And to his mind it was forgiveness. Forgiveness would have been a water that would have put out the fire or kept the fire from happening in the first place. And he does this workshop with perpetrators of crimes, and victims or the families of victims, to help them get further insight into understanding what happened to their loved ones. Story is so powerful! It's so amazing that these things happen in a prison.

And I lied. I'm going to end with one more story. This guy sings and he sings beautifully. Sings gospel. These officers and inmates, he did a concert for. There were four officers who didn't make it. The next day they came and they said, "Will you sing for us?" And he sang a couple of songs. And like I said, I heard this guy sing. He is amazing. The officers left. One came back later and said, "I got to thank you for what you did for me."

He said, "I just sang some songs."

"No, no. You don't understand. I was going to commit suicide until I heard your songs."

And I told him, "Think about this. You're in prison and you saved a life. The life of an officer." And that is the power of story. And that's the end of that.

