

Parker Kehrig:

Now I've got to get 10 seconds of silence again.

Patrick Bates:

I'm Patrick Bates with the Confronting Conditions of Confinement team for the University of Michigan Carceral State Project. And this is...

Parker Kehrig:

Parker Kehrig. The date is Thursday, February 20th, 2020 and we are in Detroit, Michigan with...

Jose Burgos:

My name's Jose Burgos. I'm a former juvenile lifer who spent 27 years in prison. I went in at the age of 16 and I was released at the age of 43.

Patrick Bates:

So, I guess my first question to you would be where and when were you born?

Jose Burgos:

I was born in Puerto Rico. Ponce, Puerto Rico, 1975, March 21st. My father's name was Benjamin Burgos and my mother's name was Maria Martinez.

Patrick Bates:

So what is, in those days, what would be your earliest memory from childhood?

Jose Burgos:

My earliest memory was with my father. It was actually one of the only memories I have of my father. And I remember I was about three years old and he was driving and he had me on his lap. He had me on his lap, he had my hands on the steering wheel and I remember driving and it was off the coast of Puerto Rico. The ocean, it was a lot of, a lot of palm trees and you could see the ocean. So I think that's always been one of my earliest memories, probably one of, like, the best one because it's the only one I have of my father.

Patrick Bates:

What did the world outside of your family look like when you were growing up?

Jose Burgos:

The world outside of my family, I come from a poor family. I remember being young and leaving Puerto Rico for the first time. I think that my family, they came over here. We had family in the United States, but came over here, just seeking that better life. Trying to provide because things in Puerto Rico were kind of tight. So that's when we ended up in Florida. There we stayed for about a year. Things really didn't go that well in Florida because they were working in the orange fields and stuff like that, so that's when we moved to New York.

Jose Burgos:

In New York, I went to the kindergarten in New York. It was Brooklyn, New York, and we stayed there, probably about another year, and then finally in about '79, '80 we made it to Southwest Detroit.

Patrick Bates:

What was that like in Southwest Detroit?

Jose Burgos:

It was cool. It was cool. I went to first grade. I remember going to first grade there. I was living with my grandparents. When we first came over here I was living my aunt, my mother's sister. And so we lived with, my grandparents were there as well. They had came over here with us. And little by little, you know, we adjusted. They ended up getting an apartment. My mom, on the other hand, because she had a boyfriend in New York, she was always going back and forth. So me and my brother and my sister, we stayed with my grandmother and my grandfather.

Jose Burgos:

My mom finally decided to move over here, back to Detroit permanently. It was agreed upon that my grandparents would take guardianship of us, only because we were already kind of stable with them. They didn't want to destabilize us, so we stayed with my grandparents, even though my mom was living over here now with her boyfriend, but we used to see her a lot. Just growing up, my grandfather was, he couldn't work, so he was collecting social security. Then my mom, my grandmother, because she had custody over us, the state was giving her some assistance for us. so we was kind of, I ain't going to say... We weren't broke-broke, but we weren't rich. Poverty was always around us. We had enough to eat. We had a roof over our table, over our head. My grandparents had a car. We was clothed and stuff like that. Growing up in the neighborhood, growing up around drug dealers and stuff like that, as a child, you would see these things, and be like, man, these are things I want to acquire. So that was growing up in the hood. It wasn't always easy, but it was wasn't always bad either. You know what I'm saying? We had some really, really, really good times growing up in Southwest Detroit.

Patrick Bates:

Back to your grandparents that raised you, what were they like?

Jose Burgos:

My grandpa, my grandpa actually, he wasn't, like, he had married my grandmother after my grandmother already had kids. So he wasn't, he was, like, my mom's stepfather. But he was cool. He was an old cowboy. I mean, literally, always had a cowboy hat, he used to have his little drink. He was doing that. He was real cool, man. He was Puerto Rican. Old school, real old school. We're talking about way back in the day in Puerto Rico, he was driving horses and shit like that, man. That was his thing. Horses was his thing. He used to live on a farm, all type of stuff, you know?

Jose Burgos:

Then my grandma, my grandma, she's the lioness of the family. She was the one that had the solution to all the problems. Real old school, too. Her and my grandpa, they used to have little arguments, but it was... I used to just laugh at them when they used to be going at it. They were old school and yet they sound like two young chickens. When they was doing their thing, man, they was doing their thing. But there was never abuse, always supportive, didn't have much but provided as much as they could. So

they was, my grandma, she'd been taking care of kids since she was... for a long time. We always had kids at the house and stuff like that. Everybody loved them. Real cool, just real cool, old school. Never really assimilated to the system. At home, the culture is still is still strong, because my grandmother's been over here all these years and she don't even speak English.

Jose Burgos:

But she'll get by though. When she used to go pay her her DTE bills and stuff like that, when she used to come visit me when I eventually got locked up, everybody loved her. Because one way or another, she was going to be understood and they was going to understand her. By the grace of God, my grandma's 86 now, she's still around. My grandfather, on the other hand, he passed away back in 2006, but my grandma, she's still holding it down.

Patrick Bates:

What did your grandparents teach you?

Jose Burgos:

Work hard. Work hard. They used to always push education. That's something that, at a young age, it just didn't register with me. It did, it did, because I used to love science. They didn't have the internet back in the day, but computers were already, were already around, so I liked messing with computers. And things were good up until the age of 13. At the age of 13, my mother, the same boyfriend that she had, the only guy who I, aside from my grandfather, the only guy I looked towards as a stepfather, because he used to always take me with him when he used to go do carpentry or he used to paint cars and stuff like that, so I used to always shack up with him. You know how that young boy looks to sit next to his father on a milk crate being taught basically how to be a man. You know what I'm saying? So that was kind of dope.

Jose Burgos:

But then, at the age of 13 tragedy struck. My mom, my stepdad, they was having some issues and they had separated. And my mom, it really got to her, you know what I'm saying, like, emotionally. It just tore her up, whatever it was, because even to this day, we don't understand exactly what caused the initial problem, but she fell into a bad depression and shit and took bottle of pills, my grandfather's heart pills, and took the whole bottle. And she, it was a wreck. After that, I was 13 years old when that happened, and from that point on it was over. My whole life just took a downward spiral.

Patrick Bates:

I just want to give you a second to sit on that for a minute if you need to.

Jose Burgos:

No, I'm good. I'm good.

Patrick Bates:

Okay. So we're still speaking on family, so, what about, how was discipline handled by the people who raised you and in your family?

Jose Burgos:

They disciplined me, but I had an aunt, and I still got that same aunt. I'm 44 years old and if I get out of pocket, she going to be, she going to put me in line the very same way she would have, back in the day. She tells me that all the time. My aunt, she was the real disciplinary for the whole family. Because I don't care how distant of a family member you are, if you was part of that family, you got to align. My aunt going to let you know. She was a tough one. With the disconnect in cultures, as far as with me and my brother and my sister and with my grandma and my grandpa, because they were such a, because they, they didn't assimilate to this system, there was a lot of things that we were being exposed to and that we were seeing that they couldn't identify, because it's not the way they grew up.

Jose Burgos:

It's a whole different culture, so they didn't understand the ways of these streets, of Southwest Detroit and of the people that were there and the things that we were getting involved in. I hate to say it, but I think being young and being an adolescent, at times, we took advantage of that. Because they didn't really understand it, so we knew how to mask it. Okay, I knew how to maneuver and get around with them not knowing exactly what it was I was doing. I could come home and be that good kid at the crib, but the moment I walked out that door, bro, it was like, I'm out here on these streets, and I got to maneuver and I've got to navigate through what I'm seeing every day.

Patrick Bates:

You alluded to 'us' in the household. Who else was in the household as you were growing up?

Jose Burgos:

I've got a brother. I've got a brother who is two years older than me and I've got a sister who's two years younger than me. Me and my sister had the same mother and father and then my brother has a different father. My brother is older. Like I said, he's two years older than me. It was cool, man, we had a good relationship growing up. From as far back as I can remember though, I've always been, I've always played the older brother role. Even though he's two years older than me, I was always, like, the big bro. And it's like that to to this day. I don't know why it was like that, but it was.

Jose Burgos:

I was, like, out of the three of us, I was more smooth, man, with my stuff. I've always been a person with a real calm attitude, real poised and shit, man, like that. You know, I ain't the real loud boisterous kind, I'm just the smooth, just chill cat. That's how I've always been since I was a kid. So I think there's a maturity that comes with that and that's how people was treating me. Because I was already, at a young age, I was already conducting myself as a gentleman, so a lot of people kind of really vibed with that. And my brother was, like, the whole total opposite, so they looked at him more so as being the one that was more immature. Me, I was young, didn't know that what I was putting out was, you're going to respect me.

Jose Burgos:

Without even saying it, that's just how I conducted myself. I think I got that from my grandpa. My grandpa was real old school. My grandpa, he was smooth, and I think I got that from him. He would look at me and he'll give me that nod or he'll ball his fists up. And I already know what he's telling me is, you know, "Be strong out there. Nigga, I don't know what you're doing, but if you're going to do what you're going to do, be a man." Be a man, conduct yourself as a man and just, you don't have to yell out to

somebody, "Respect me!" You can do that with your body language. When you walk in that door, you gonna, it's just a natural thing. I think I got that from my grandpa.

Jose Burgos:

But my brother and my sister, to get back to the point, it was, it's cool. My sister, she's still around. I see her on a weekly basis. Me and her, you know, since I came home from prison, we've been real jam. But then after that stuff happened to my mom, they too was affected, big time. My brother, that, that put him, sent him in an alcoholic hookup. Here he is, he's 46 years old and he still battling alcoholism. It affected all three of us in different ways.

Patrick Bates:

We've talked a lot about your household. What about outside of your family? What did the world look like outside of the house? Outside of your family? Out of the nest, so to speak?

Jose Burgos:

Like I said, I'm from Southwest Detroit and I think one of the things that I enjoyed most about our neighborhood, I never got exposed to racism in Southwest Detroit. You had blacks there, you had Latinos, you had, you know, Asians, you had, you know, people from the Middle East, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans. You know what I'm saying? Everybody was just cool. We was just cool. So we didn't, we weren't exposed to it. That's not to say that it didn't exist, but it was just on the big scale, it wasn't like that. We was all Southwest. We was Southwest Detroit, but Southwest is its own city. Growing up in Southwest, there was a lot of guys hustling. That was back in, you know what I'm saying, I was growing, by the time I got into my teenage years, that was in the '80s, late '80s, crack, the crack era, people out to get money.

Jose Burgos:

You out to get money and you're seeing this, you're witnessing it. You want a part of it. You want to be part of it, because after that happened to my mom, the streets, I was looking towards the streets to try to find something that was missing at the crib. My mom wasn't there, and then if I can go back a little bit, when my mom, when she committed suicide, the family ostracized my stepdad because they was blaming him all the time. I'd be sneaking out, even after my mom passed away, I would be sneaking out the back door and going to find him and meet him to basically give him the rundown of what was going on. I used to tell him, "Bro, you got to go, because my uncles are going to kill you if they see you." Because they feel like he was the one that that really at fault for creating that situation, and so he left. When he left, he never came back. I essentially both lost my mom and I lost the dude that I looked at as a father, so I lost them both at the same time.

Jose Burgos:

That's what I was looking for in the streets. I didn't know it at the time, because I was just a young guy, but that's what I was yearning for. I was looking for that family, that part of that family that I lost, because no matter what, even though my grandparents was doing the best that they could, can't nobody replace, man, your mother or the person that you consider your father or your actual father. Can't nobody replace that. But when you're young, you don't know that. You out there on the streets and these older people, these older guys, the old heads, yeah, they was teaching you a little bit of game, but at the same time they was using you to their benefit. They really didn't care. But when you're young like that, man, you don't see that, you know?

Patrick Bates:

Were any of the members of your family... were they incarcerated?

Jose Burgos:

No, actually I was the first one. I was the first one in my family to get incarcerated, at the age of 16.

Parker Kehrig:

How did they cope with that?

Jose Burgos:

It was hard. I think one of the hardest things for me, when I first got locked up, was having to sit across that table and explain to my grandparents that I had did what I was, you know, got locked up for. Because, it was just, it was embarrassing. It was embarrassing. I was ashamed. Because that's not how they raised me. They ain't teach me no shit like that. But at the same time, because they're so loving, I also had to explain to them that it wasn't their fault. Because they had took upon some of that blame. You know what I'm saying, like, "We failed you." It wasn't your fault. I placed myself in this situation. I surrounded myself with the type of people that were involved in things that ultimately led me to get locked up. So it was, it was real tough on them, but again, going back to the cultural thing, because there was such a disconnect in them and their understanding of what the system was, you know, it was almost like they were just sitting back being supportive, but at the same time feeling helpless, because there was nothing they could do for me.

Jose Burgos:

Because they didn't understand what I was going through. The only thing they knew how to do is, "Okay, we're going to just be there for you. You're going to have to figure this out on your own because you understand English. This is something that's going to affect you for the rest of your life, but all we can do and all we can offer you is just the love that we've always displayed."

Jose Burgos:

So I was like, "Hey, don't worry about me. I got this. Don't worry about me. I'm going to take care of myself." And I never, never, in all the time that I was locked up, did I ever call them and say, "Hey, I'm in trouble." Or, "I'm in the hole." When I was in the hole, I did my time. I didn't put that on them because I don't want them worried about what's going on with me in prison. I'd call every now and then, sent letters every week just to let them know, "Hey, I'm good, I'm good." Yeah, it had a real big impact on my grandparents, on my brother and my sister. I didn't really even know that about my brother and my sister, I didn't know how much it had impacted them until I got out.

Jose Burgos:

Because what happened is that at that early age, your relationship with your siblings is still in development. It hasn't really blossomed into what it can become as siblings. That was cut, boom, cutting the umbilical cord way too soon. When I went to prison, yes, I communicated with them, but the disconnect was there. But I didn't know how much it affected them until I got out here. When I got out here and I was able to talk to them and I was seeing their reaction towards me being home, I understood, like, damn, this got them too. It's that, the crime ripple effect. It affects everybody.

Patrick Bates:

So what about education? What schools did you go to and what were they like?

Jose Burgos:

I went to kindergarten. Like I said, I went to kindergarten in New York. First grade, I went to a school called Webster. Actually, I flunked the first grade, but I think it was just at the time I still didn't know English real, real good so they held me back the first grade. But after that, second, third, fourth, fifth, all the way up to sixth, when I went to sixth grade, in sixth grade, I was going to an elementary that had sixth grade in it. So I didn't go to junior high school for the sixth grade. And then I entered seventh grade and I went to junior high school then. And that was the same summer that my mom had passed away, I went to junior high school. So I went into junior high school already with this on my back.

Jose Burgos:

I didn't know at the time, because I can reflect back now and look back. And I gained a lot of insight into what I went through at that time, when I was doing my time and just reflecting back. I used to always press rewind. I was trying to figure out okay, how did I get here? How did, where did this all start at? And every time I thought about that, it always landed at my mother's death, around that era, around that time. It was hard to accept that, because when you look back and it's your mom and she went through what she went through and she took her life, when you turn back the hands of time and it keeps landing there, you have this guilty feeling, because you don't want to come across like you're blaming her for what ended up happening.

Jose Burgos:

But there came a time in my life where I understood, like, you know what? It's okay. It's okay to be able to look back and say, "Okay, this is where it all started." Because what 13-year-old wouldn't be affected by that type of trauma? And when I came to that understanding, it was like, all right, bam. Now I have figured it out. I went back. That's where it all happened, now the healing can begin. So, you know, it gets deep, man.

Patrick Bates:

Yeah. So, I know you alluded to, somewhat to influences, like, people that influenced you, but I want to be a little bit more direct with that, and ask you, who influenced you the most growing up?

Jose Burgos:

Influenced me, like, in a negative or positive way?

Parker Kehrig:

Whatever you want. Both? Neither?

Patrick Bates:

Yeah, however, both, neither. One or the other.

Jose Burgos:

I was influenced. I'm going to tell you who, one of my, one of my biggest influence and he don't even know it. He still don't even know to this day. It's my uncle. I had an uncle, still have him. He was in the military, always coming back and forth from Puerto Rico. He would stay with us and then go to the military and come back. And my uncle, when he used to come home from the military, he'd come in all his military gear and he came with that military discipline. It was just, it radiated from him. I used to love that. As a kid, I used to gravitate towards that. Like, man, just his whole stature. I liked that, when he walked in that room he had that poise about him that just automatically, again, going back to what I said earlier, just automatically demanded respect. And to top it off, he was a keyboard player. He was a keyboard player and he had his own Puerto Rican salsa band. And this guy was just, my uncle was, and still is, just the coolest shit.

Jose Burgos:

I'd sit on a milk crate and I'd sit there and watch him on his keyboard. He had a nice little big bad ass keyboard, writing music. He was addicted to the shit. He had stacks of music. He even had a record. He had came out with a record when he was younger in Puerto Rico. So from a positive influence, I think he had a real big influence on me, and again, he don't even know it to this day.

Parker Kehrig:

Do you think you'll ever tell him?

Jose Burgos:

I think I should. I think I should, because he's up in age. He has his, you know, he has illnesses and stuff like that. So I think maybe I need to sit down with him one day and let him know, "Hey, believe it or not man, I really, really looked up to you." I think that would be cool, because he's still that same dude. He's still got that keyboard. During the summer times, he throws parties. I went to a party last summer and he was jamming. It was like deja vu, because I'm like, "He's still doing it." He had a passion. Music is his passion. And it's more, it's not, like, on a grand scale, but he went to, he played at social clubs and stuff like that. But he does his best when he's down in his basement with his crew, in his man cave man and they going at it.

Jose Burgos:

He was the most positive impact or influence, and then negatively, the dope boys in the neighborhood. They influenced me because I wanted what they had. And not only that, but when I started selling dope in the neighborhood, it was a dope boy who approached me and made that pitch to me about, "Hey man, shit, we can get money, bro." And that started it off. That started me getting involved in selling drugs and stuff like that and put me around a lot of people that was heavily involved in drugs, at a young age, too.

Patrick Bates:

So alluding back to a young age, what about the relationship with your peers, other students, teachers, staff members, whatever title you want to put on that?

Jose Burgos:

Growing up in school, I was cool. Like I said, I've always been real, real quiet. I had friends, I still had friends though. I was one of them real curious kids. I remember, man, having his friend and I don't know



why I don't remember his name, but I remember me and this kid in the neighborhood, we used to go to abandoned buildings and we'd go looking for spiders and shit. We'd find spiders and then we'd go to library and get a book and identify what kind of spider it was.

Parker Kehrig:

I love that.

Jose Burgos:

So, you know, that was my thing. Then from there, I got into bikes. I got into bikes, I had a garage. I mean, if you want to see me smile, bro, you just give me a bike part.

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Jose Burgos:

I used to love going to family houses and members and friends and if I see some bike person in the yard or something, I'll be the first one, "Hey, what's up with that? Can I get that?", you know what I'm saying? Like, "Yeah, go ahead." I used to have a trunk full of bike parts, but I had my little garage and I used to always, I used to tear them apart, paint them, put them back together. Like a little hobby. Then that led up to mini bikes. I developed a hobby for mini bikes. I'd take little lawn mower motors, take them all apart, put them back together. So, that's me growing up with the kids in school.

Jose Burgos:

With the teachers it was the same way, but again going into junior high school, seventh grade, right after my mom's death, that all changed. As far as my relationship with the teachers, I was real combative. I didn't want to pay attention, skipping school. Just everything went bad at that time.

Parker Kehrig:

Did you ever have anybody at school that ever checked in with you or tried to see what was going on?

Jose Burgos:

Actually yeah, yeah. I was, at junior high school I had flunked the first time around. So the second time around, there was this lady by the name of Maritza Melendez, she used to work for the social service department. And I joined a drop out prevention group that she ran, I used to go with her after school. And basically they would just take us out on trips and take us to museums and stuff like that. Just keep us busy after school. And she tried, she tried, but by the time she got ahold of me, it was, like, already too late. I was already too deep in the streets and I wouldn't let go, just hanging out and hanging out and being around the wrong people. It kept just drawing me into a lot of negative stuff.

Jose Burgos:

But like I said, prior to that I loved school. I used to love going to school. But once I got to school it was like, after my mom's death it was like my concentration was gone. I couldn't understand why, but it was like whatever they were teaching me, it was just, and I think, I mean I can look back now and I wish one of those teachers or one of my counselors would've been able to see or to try to dig in as to what was going on. And they might've found out that I went through that traumatic experience and maybe I could've got the help that I needed. But, it's like I slipped through the cracks.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

So, man, I'm going to go a slightly different direction right now, if you don't mind. So what about the government as a young person? What was your ideas and perceptions as far as the government?

Jose Burgos:

Actually growing up at the crib, because of that culture disconnect, we ain't even paying attention to the government. I didn't care one motherfucking thing about the government. The thing I can remember probably back in the days, I remember people talking about Reagan and shit, like on TV. But, I did meet the governor one time, I remember that. I was part of a science class and our science class had won or we had scored real high throughout the state, something like that. And I remember it was pre, elementary, it was the fifth grade, my teacher was, I think it was Mr.Garcia or something like that. And we did real good on that test so we had found out a week before it happened that the governor was going to fly in to the school to just a little photo op, take pictures with the kids and stuff like that. So that's what happened, they landed the helicopter right there in the school yard.

Jose Burgos:

And somewhere out there, somewhere in them archives, there's a picture of me and a group of kids with Governor Blanchard. I think, maybe now that you mention it I might start looking for that picture.

Parker Kehrig:

If you can find it and you want to give it to us.

Jose Burgos:

That would be cool, yeah.

Parker Kehrig:

To use. That would be lovely.

Jose Burgos:

Yeah, that'd be cool. Yup.

Parker Kehrig:

Also, before we keep asking questions, and I will cut this out when we, in post, but do you mind if I take pictures while you guys are talking?

Jose Burgos:

Oh that's fine. Yeah, I'm cool with that.

Parker Kehrig:

Amazing. Because there was one moment where I was like oh damn I need a picture of this, but I didn't already ask. Anyway, sorry.

Jose Burgos:

No that's cool.

Patrick Bates:

Okay. So, I mean, we alluded to government, what about, I don't know what type of term you prefer to use as far as criminal justice system, is that police, courts?

Jose Burgos:

I didn't like the police. My first bad memory of a police officer was, I was probably fourteen years old and by then I had already been smoking cigarettes. I started smoking cigarettes, I forgot when it was. Anyways, I remember I was going across the street one day, it was me and my buddy was going to cross the street and a police car was driving down Verna Highway, right in the middle of the neighborhood. And I'm smoking a cigarette and he's smoking a cigarette too and the police officer, it was a gang squad, literally just pulled up in front of us, got out the car and my man reached back, as far back as he could and just blasted me for no reason. I mean I was a kid, I was, like, a little small little puny little thing. So that nigga just rocked my world.

Jose Burgos:

Then my man got the same business. Boom. Blasted his ass. And that was my first real experience with a cop. I was like, man, I was so motherfucking mad, like man this is some bullshit. And then moving forward, the more I think, when I was out in the streets, a lot of times it was a lot of occasions where they would just pull us over, harass us. We just out there just hanging out, just having a good time, we ain't into nothing. They just come out there and harass us. So that, just has always left a negative taste in my mouth. And I know all cops ain't like that, but as a child, being that young, the last thing you want to do is leave that type of negative impact on a child being that young.

Patrick Bates:

Yes.

Jose Burgos:

Because now, from here on out, it's going to determine, it's going to have a big, what am I looking for here? How I view them. How I view them all goes back to that. And until you show me otherwise, I'm going to think that you're one of them. So yeah, it didn't turn out too good with them as well.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

When was your first contact with the carceral system?

Jose Burgos:

The first time that I got locked up was curfew, a curfew violation. Just being out late after I think it was like after 11:00 or something like that. I was arrested and my grandmother had to come get me in the middle of the night. But that was, I mean most of my incarcerations were stuff like that. Just literally

curfew. I got caught one time in a raid, in a limousine. We had a limousine come pick us up at the school and the principal had called the police on us. So like, literally we stopped at a stop sign one day, that day, and the raid van and everything, all the police jumped out and they raided the limousine.

Jose Burgos:

And it wasn't nice. It wasn't nice. And the only thing they found was some weed. We had some weed, we was just young, bunch of young kids just trying to have a good time with a little bit of weed and drive around the neighborhood. We thought that was the shit. Driving around in limousines. It's what we saw. This is what guys did in the neighborhood. Just getting money, you was going out and rent a limousine and bounce around the neighborhood, trying to put that image out there, that status.

Jose Burgos:

And at that time, when we were doing that, we weren't getting no money but we were putting our fronts up. And people was like, man, where y'all boys are getting that money. We ain't got shit. Everything we had, we paid for this limousine. So yeah. And that was it really. Curfew violations, got arrested in that raid and then went to the current case that sent me to prison.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

So why-

Jose Burgos:

So I didn't have, not to cut you off, so I didn't have no, when I went into the system, I didn't have no real experience with the system. Again because I was only locked up overnight, my grandmother, for a few hours really. I wasn't really locked up, I never went to court for none of that, there was never charged me, they never wrote no ticket. So it was, okay, we're going to hold you for a few hours, your grandma's going to come get you and that's it.

Jose Burgos:

So when I got locked up at the age of sixteen, it was a motherfucking shocker. It rocked my motherfucking world because for the first, my first time arrested and actually charged with a crime, I was charged with first degree murder. I was facing life without parole. So it was like, that shit fucked me up.

Patrick Bates:

Wow. So I mean, on the subject of being locked up, what correctional, I'm going to ask a question first, what correctional facilities were you incarcerated in? And when? Actually can you stop that?

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah, I think.

Patrick Bates:

So what was incarceration like for you?

Jose Burgos:

Man, that's a loaded question. Because it was 27 years. So you can't, there was just so many different aspects of it. I was sixteen when I got locked up, and for a year, I spent a year in the Wayne County Youth Home fighting the case. I got found guilty six months into that year and then took another six months to get me sentenced. At the time when I got sentenced, because it was a first time offense, at that time the judge, I was being tried as an adult, but the judge still had the option of sentencing me as a juvenile to the age of 21 in the juvenile system. But it didn't turn out that way. I remember a few times my sentence had got postponed. They had did a psych evaluation, the social services department had did an evaluation on me.

Jose Burgos:

And basically it was three departments that did evaluations, your PSI, social service department, psych evaluation. And each of them either recommend adult system or the juvenile system. The social services department recommended I be sentenced as a juvenile. The lady who does the PSI, she recommended I be sentenced as an adult. And then the psych evaluation was very interesting because the psych evaluation, after he evaluated me, he recommended the juvenile system. He said he felt that the juvenile system would be best for me, but then when I go get sentenced and they read his report, he has supplemented his report and said that after speaking with his colleagues, he had changed his mind about his recommendation. And then changed his mind and said okay I recommend adult system.

Jose Burgos:

Never really explained why it was that he changed his mind. I think he did say one thing, at first when I interviewed him, kind of felt sorry for me. Actually got personal with me and liked me, just in the way that I presented myself to him. But then after talking to his colleagues, he had to give more of a professional opinion about it and said that he recommended the adult system. So I had two recommendations to adult system, one recommendation to the juvenile system. And the judge, when I went, I remember when I went to get sentenced that day, I thought I was going to get, they were going to postpone it. They had already been postponing for six months, I said okay here's another postponement.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Jose Burgos:

And every time that we went to court, my grandma and grandfather were always there. I used to always hate having to tell them yeah come and then it'd get postponed, it's like back and forth. They were already older. And then but this day, it was, I'll never forget, it was June 15 1992, I remember it was at 3:00 in the afternoon still, there was no movement, I was being held in the holding tank. And when you're being housed in a youth home and charged as an adult, they would transport you from the youth home to the court building, to adult court building. And you would just sit in the bull pen by yourself. Sometimes we'd be there for hours.

Jose Burgos:

And this day was like 3:00 and I'm thinking okay they're going to postpone it. All of a sudden they call me in there. So when we sit down and the judge starts talking, I knew based on what the judge was saying, yeah, it's about to go down. At that moment, at that time I was still thinking that I was going to go to the juvenile system because being in the youth home for a whole year, I was seeing a lot of young guys that were coming through, same type of crime, some different color, but they ended up going to the juvenile system. But I was okay, it was my first time.

Jose Burgos:

And then the circumstances of the crime, as well, I think I felt were mitigating reasons to send me to the juvenile system. But it didn't happen that way. That day, we go to court and the judge starts talking, I start to realize okay it's about to go down. They asked me did I have any words to say and I told the judge that I was sorry for what I had did and what I wanted to do moving forward, like yeah I'm going to get to school, get my life back together. And the judge, one of the judge, when she started talking she was like, one of the first things she said and I'll never forget, she was like, she believed that the statute, the law itself was unfair for both parties. She said because on one hand if I sentence you as a juvenile, you're only going to do five years. But on the other hand, if I sentence you as an adult, it's going to be life without parole.

Jose Burgos:

Her exact words were, "I find the limitations of this statute to be unfair to both parties". That's what she said. But then she went on to say, so with that being said, I have no choice, I must sentence you to life without parole in the adult system. And I'll never forget them words, it just, I was fucked up.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

Shit.

Parker Kehrig:

I don't have a fully formed thought about that because there's just so much there.

Patrick Bates:

Yeah there's a lot.

Parker Kehrig:

But I want to ask a question, I don't have it.

Patrick Bates:

Well, what I can-

Jose Burgos:

It was fucked up. I really did, at the time I understand it like damn, the fuck, like without parole.

Patrick Bates:

So. You all right?

Jose Burgos:

Yeah I'm good, I'm good.

Patrick Bates:

Just making sure. I mean, I want to ask you something, I mean, before we move onto, I want to ask you what was that Wayne County Youth Home like? You spent-

Parker Kehrig:

Awhile there.

Jose Burgos:

The Wayne County Youth Home, I think, shit, it sucked. It sucked. And I think one of the things that I disliked about it the most was that the only people that were allowed to come see you is your grandparents. So, I couldn't see my sister, I couldn't see my brother. I couldn't see nobody, just my grandparents. And so that was kind of hard, and then you couldn't use the phone, we didn't have phones. The only way, like, every now and then you would be able to ask counselor, hey I need to make a phone call. And they'd let you make, like, a three minute phone call. That's, like, every few months. So I'd hurry up, hey bro how you doing, hey sis, how you doing? You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

But other than that, they used to lock us down real early, like 6-7:00, you're locked in a room by yourself. Hard bunk. Cold room. It was, it sucked, man. And then this being my first experience in the system being locked up, mentally it was like fucking torture. It was like, you know, you're a child, that claustrophobia instantly kicked in. So you had to get over that shit, you had to get used to that shit. But no matter how long you been there, you just would never get used to it. And then facing adult charges. You're a kid, you're facing adult charges and they got you locked in this motherfucking room. Like, I don't give a -- leave me in that motherfucking room, at least just open that motherfucking door. Just leave that motherfucker unlocked, I ain't going to go out that motherfucker.

Jose Burgos:

But just when they used to lock that motherfucking door, mentally it would do something to you. It was, I think it was designed by purpose, just mentally at an early age just fucking break you down. Like okay, let's just, because that shit'll tear your spirit up. You're a kid. And you're in that motherfucking, and you're a kid at the same time you're in a correctional environment, so even at that young age, you're from the streets, but when you in that motherfucking room, you're going to put up that persona like, yeah, I can do this shit. But when you lay on that bunk, the motherfucking tears come out your eyes. You're going to cry, you're going to be balled up because what you really want to say is, I need my mama. I need my daddy.

Jose Burgos:

But you have to, you got to suck it up, you ain't got no choice. That's just the way it's designed and you got to just find a way to rise above that shit. Like, no, fuck that. You ain't going to fuck me up. I'm going

to get through it one way or another. Music, thinking, fantasizing and shit, man, just imagining some shit. You'll find a way to mentally get away from that motherfucker and you did the best you can at that age. Like that survival instinct just kick in, like, okay, this some fucked up shit but I'm going to make it somehow.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah. You talk about using your imagination as a form of coping. Was there a particular place you went in your head when you needed some time?

Jose Burgos:

I used to travel the world. Yeah, I used to travel the world. When I first got locked up, after, when I went to prison, I'll never forget the best advice that a old head first gave me was don't let the world forget you. And I was like, what do you mean by that, old school? He said, "Listen, man." He said, "A lot of guys come in here young, got a lot of time, their way of coping with that time is to isolate themselves from the world and concentrate on what they're doing in here. But the problem with that is, is that when you choose to develop that type of attitude, do your time like that, you essentially don't exist in the world no more. So if you don't exist in society, you definitely ain't going to exist in prison. In prison you don't exist, that's not life. Ain't nothing normal about that shit". You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And so he was like, "When you write somebody, bro, and they don't write you back, he said, man, fuck that. Three months later, write them again." He said, "What's going to cost you man? 25 cents, 23 cents," that's what stamps cost back then. And so I developed that attitude, I'm like, you know what? You're damn right. If you didn't write back I didn't take it personal. As a matter of fact, it wasn't even really for you, it was for me. I'm using you as fucking therapy, I'm writing your ass. But that was my way of staying alive in the world. Whether you wrote back or not, you was going to be at somebody's house, "Man guess who I heard from the other day". And that's how you was keeping me alive, because I was part of the conversation even though I was locked up.

Jose Burgos:

I was watching the news. I'd read newspapers and shit. That was my way of staying up to date on what the hell was going on out here. I had never knew, I had never had my hands on the internet, but I knew what the internet was because I paid attention. I started paying attention to politics, always watching the news, staying on track on what the hell was going on in Lansing. Staying on track of what was going on in Washington DC. I fell in love with Middle East, Middle Eastern policies and all that shit that was going on over there, Iraq, Lebanon, all those, you know what I'm saying? I don't know what it was about it, I'd always see, watch CSPAN, I used to watch PBS. And I used to just, I think in another life I was probably a politician or some shit because to this day I'm still, I watch this shit. I can have a constructive dialogue about all types of political shit. So...

Jose Burgos:

I lost my train of thought.

Parker Kehrig:

No that was great.



Jose Burgos:

But that was again, not to cut you off, that was-

Parker Kehrig:

Cut us off.

Patrick Bates:

Please cut us off.

Jose Burgos:

That was, that's how my mentality going through the prison system, that's how I decided to do my time. And that's what kept me alive, that was my coping mechanism and that's where I went mentally, I stayed out here. I stayed out here at all times. I knew about shit that was going on in the neighborhood maybe before the people in the neighborhood knew about it. I made it my business to know. My people still lived there, my friends were still there. So like shit, hey, just because I'm gone, physically I'm gone, but mentally I'm there.

Patrick Bates:

You alluded to, in another life you was a politician. That you could've been a politician. So, it just prompted something, did you deal with any type of politics or anything like that while you were inside? I'm not just talking about, I mean just in general with politics.

Jose Burgos:

Oh absolutely. Absolutely, you know what I'm saying? Politics, man, prison politics. Ain't no difference, it's a society. It's a world within a world. You have police politics, you have prisoner politics on the yard, both negative and positive. So, I mean, being part of organizations, organizations were structured. We knew how to hold a house down, we knew how to govern a body of people. Our only thing was that we were doing it in a negative way. So, like, I was a president on my yard, that's how I conducted myself. I was in the yard full of presidents and we, that's just the way it was. Coming into prison I decided, okay, am I going to be a pawn? Am I going to fall victim to the system? Or am I going to do the time how I best see fit to me?

Jose Burgos:

And I had a couple other old heads, I had two old heads, I remember I had two old heads that were starch enemies. I mean these guys they was gangsters and they was enemies, man, to the core. I just happened to be cool with both of them at the same time. And these guys, I used to always remember, we used to go on walks on the yard and they would give me the game. They would always give me advice, but they would give me both sides. They always told me, one of them used to call me Joe, hey Joe man, if you want to live a righteous life, you live it honorably, this is how you conduct yourself. He said, "But if you choose to go the other way, then there's rules to that as well. Always be a man of your word, always be somebody man that people respect. Just be honorable, there's nothing wrong with trying to gain an upper hand or something if you're doing some business with somebody, but you ain't got to be a snake about it. Be bold about it".

Jose Burgos:

So I took that shit and I was like a sponge, just soaking that in because I was like, you know what? These are things that are going to help me maneuver my way through the system because it was full of sharks. It was full of sharks and you were just going to become a fish and be eaten or become a shark your motherfucking self. And not a shark that took advantage of other motherfuckers and shit, other people, other inmates, but just be somebody that people just respected. I wasn't the toughest guy on the yard, but I had to develop and learn how to hold my own. I was a kid in prison.

Jose Burgos:

When I went to prison, I'll never forget being in quarantine telling myself, "You know what? You're going to be here a long time. You're going to be here a long time so don't think about the time". Put it aside, because the number one thing when you enter prison, the number one thing that you have to work on, the most, I think, is your mind. You have to mentally prepare yourself for what you're about to go through because if you don't develop that mindset, it's going to swallow you. You're going to die in this motherfucker, you're going to either die or you're going to be growing old, bitter, mad, hateful, racist all that shit.

Jose Burgos:

So, it was like immediately going in, my mind. I can't lose my mind. I can't lose my mind because in order to deal with these grown men and these prisoners and these criminals and shit, this element, that young, being 5'1, 130, little small little kid in prison, that shit going to eat me up. So let me boss up now. I didn't have to be on the yard barking loud, but I walked upright. I didn't walk with my head down. I stayed out the way, mind my own business. And that's how I survived. That's, I had to do it that way.

Patrick Bates:

This is a lot to take in.

Jose Burgos:

Come on with it.

Patrick Bates:

You was talking about how you survived in prison. Could you break that down, maybe, a little bit more? As far as, maybe like, financially, emotionally, socially, mentally, physically, any of those or all. Whatever's comfortable for you.

Jose Burgos:

At the beginning, coming to prison as much as some of these old heads taught me good game, and they did, because I did learn a lot of stuff from them, I can look back now and also recognize the fact that some of them took advantage of me being young. Here I am, I had just turned seventeen into the system, life without parole. I didn't go to no juvenile prison, I went to adult prison, I went to one of the worst prisons in the state of Michigan, the Michigan Reformatory.

PART 2 OF 5 ENDS [00:58:04]

Jose Burgos:

Back when the Michigan Reformatory was a gladiator school. I seen young men go in there, man, and get crushed. When I went in there, the old head Latino brothers, they embraced me. It wasn't a real big population of Latinos at that time. Since we were such a small group on the yard, we all gravitated to one another. We stuck together like a family. A lot of them started grooming me because in their minds, you're the future generation of the Latinos in prison, so we need to groom you so that when the other younger guys come behind you, we got somebody who's going to take over our spot when we either go home or die. And at the time, I thought that was the coolest shit. I'm hanging out with ... these guys are gangsters. These guys have been in prison for years, they was bosses in the world, so they continue to be bosses on the yard. So I started affiliating myself with them, so me being affiliated with them, shit, I became a boss. At the time, because you're young, you're trying to be influential.

Jose Burgos:

Because again, you don't want to be no follower. I'm going to be a leader, man. I found myself, you know, becoming the thing that I told myself I wasn't going to become. I was becoming prison. I was on those yards, I'm shaking, baking, hustling, getting money. I was writing, I have multiple females writing me, I'm being manipulative and shit. Here I am doing a life sentence and I'm telling them, hey, I'll be home in a year. I was running bullshit on them, man. But this was something that prison had taught me. This is what I learned on the yard. Man, you got to just sell them a dream, baby. And I became good at it because I was young, and it was like, you know, at that, I'm at an early age of developing, my hormones are going crazy, I'm in prison around a bunch of men. If I got a female writing me, I'm laying that pen down. That's just the way it was. But it was crazy, man. Them old heads, again they gave you some game. But, you know, they sharks too, man. They sharks too, and they, some of them fed me a lot of bullshit too. I knew how to discern, I knew how to take it all in, spit out the bullshit, and keep what I felt was beneficial for me. But later on in life, all that changed.

Patrick Bates:

You were talking about ... you used a phrase like moving and shaking. What did, could you break that down for someone who doesn't know what that type of language means?

Jose Burgos:

The drug game, hustling, hustling don't stop in prison. You want the greater things in life, at some point, I had to become a man. I couldn't depend on my grandparents to send me money all the time. Prison, here it is, it's the year 2020. I entered prison in 1992, which is what, like, 27, 28 years ago, and prison today pays the same wages that prison was paying back in 1992. I mean, literally, man, you're making a dollar something a day. I'm telling you, you busting your ass, man, for that one dollar something. You get paid once a month, you got 20 something dollars to your name, you got to buy soap, you got to buy deodorant. They taking half of that because you owe restitution or because you owe some child support. So if you didn't have a family looking out for you, you was bold. You was going to be doing some real rough times. I didn't want to be that way. I loved to work, so I was always working. Even though they was paying pennies, I was still working because that gave me access to the prison and into everybody.

Jose Burgos:

But again, it's the same old heads that were teaching me the game. The moment I walked into prison, they was like, "Here go this bag. Here go some weed. This is nickels, you do 25s. Bring me back this, you keep that." I was a young guy. I can look back now and thank God that he had his hands on me because I

was a young kid by myself in a yard full of men, full of sharks selling weed at MR, Latino. All the odds was stacked against me. Still, because the way I carried myself, not once ever did somebody approach me in a bold way. They brought they money, they got what they had coming, and that was it. We ain't got to kick it, I don't want to talk, I ain't trying to be your friend, give me that bread, take this weed. And so now, what that developed was, throughout a lot of my time. Every prison I went to, I wanted to be associated with that in-crowd because there was a world inside of a world. The guys that knew who was calling what on the yard, we knew the tattoo guys, we knew the guys that had the wine, we knew the guys that had the weed, the cellphones, the underground of prison. That's real.

Jose Burgos:

It may not be the best way to obtain the things that you need, but at the same time it was necessary because that underworld in prison actually kept a lot of shit from happening in prison. The staff, they would frown upon you having a positive impact on the yard. It was crazy. But we kept a lot of shit from happening because it was just that community. That camaraderie. And even then, don't get me wrong, even in the world inside of a world, even then, you still have to be on point now. You're not immune from somebody at least coming at you or trying. But if you had your shit together, you didn't have to worry about that. So it was something, you had to hustle. Find ways to hustle, one way or another, you had to get that money.

Parker Kehrig:

You said something about the COs on the yard frowning upon having a positive impact, what does that mean? What does that look like?

Jose Burgos:

Man, the officers in there, I'm going to say 99 percent of them, they used to be on some bullshit.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah, they're still on some bullshit.

Jose Burgos:

Simple mistakes that people just make in general just in life, there ain't nobody out here perfect. I mean, something as simple as, I forgot my ID on top of a TV in my room somewhere. Who doesn't forget their wallet or their purse here in society. They just happen to pull you over one day on the yard, they want to frisk you, you ain't got your ID, now they're writing you a ticket for being out of place. A simple mistake ends up costing you time, loss of privileges, on top lock, if you had some good time, they take some good time from you. Might restrict you from visits or whatever the case may be. Just something simple. There was no understanding whatsoever. Other officers who used to see bullshit would be scared to correct it. You got officers that ran the unit, that were regular unit officers, these guys that they see on a daily basis. They know how you conduct yourself and they know you do good time. You don't be all in they face. Here comes a rookie officer who only working overtime in the unit, he wants to come in, and all of a sudden he wants to change all these rules, regulations. That's what guys just didn't want to be bothered with. They're just doing they time, leave them alone.

Jose Burgos:

They were intentionally ... it wasn't something that somebody was doing and they were reacting to it. They were being proactive and trying to get you off your square, to do whatever. They weren't cool. Plenty of times, man, plenty of times they would push and push and push. It was messed up. I seen some real fucked up shit that are monster crimes all the way across the board, but, you know, it's a good old boy system. So, like, they ain't going to say shit. They just turned the other way.

Parker Kehrig:

Why do you think they wield their power that way?

Jose Burgos:

Job security. It boils down to job security. They ain't going to do nothing positive about you going home because the more guys go home, prisons are closed, they lose jobs. Job security all the way across the board from the rookie all the way to the warden. They just develop a, like, it's us against them type. And for guys who understand the system, I understand a structure of a system, and I understand there's a job. Okay, that's your job, but your job doesn't entail you having to come in here and harass me. I'm already locked up. I'm doing life without parole. You come along with your problems and you putting them on me. I ain't trying to hear that shit, leave me the fuck alone. Let me do my time. The way they talk to you, there's no respect. They just strip away your humanity, your dignity. Intentionally do things like, for instance, when you're strip searched, they make you bend and spread. You can tell the ones that are just doing their jobs and then you can just tell the ones that are just being spiteful. They having a bad day, so damn it, you're going to have a bad motherfucking day too.

Jose Burgos:

There's been so many guys in prison that are mentally free walking around with a smile, positive as hell. They don't like that shit. They don't like it. And they can't tell me no different. I don't care what they say. I lived it. I lived it 27 years, I seen that shit, I lived it, I was a victim of that shit, and they can't tell me no difference.

Patrick Bates:

You're talking about this type of stuff that was going on, is that more at a specific facility or any, which facilities? Or was it --?

Jose Burgos:

In a sense, it happened to a certain degree probably at every facility, but the ones ... and I hate to say it, but I'm going to be blunt about it and be straight about it. The ones that were predominantly, all prisons that were ... or, completely all white staff. There's no checks and balances there. The northern prisons, they're all like that. Up north, in the upper region of, section of Michigan, up there it's like they're their own MDOC. They'll tell you flat out, we don't give a fuck what Lansing says. Up there, they do what the fuck they want to do. Down here, in the lower, closer to Detroit, stuff like that, Muskegon, places where you have black and brown officers, now they can't be so blunt about the ... the white officers can't be so, because even though the black and brown officers still will let them get away with a lot of bullshit, there's still a line there that they ain't going to cross. They ain't going to cross that line because they know it can cause some friction with the black officers, the brown officers. Like I said, the black and brown officers still let them get away with a lot of shit. But there's a balance there a little bit. The more of a balance that there is, the better the flow of ... why? I don't know. It's not as bad with the abuse, but it still happens.

Patrick Bates:

So, okay. So, I mean, maybe, we talked a lot about the bad. I mean, I don't know where the bad or the good would be. But I'm going to ask you a question. Where did you find joy in prison?

Jose Burgos:

Man. That's a good question, bro. I think I found the most joy when I started developing a sense of self. There came a time, I was probably like, 12 years into a life without parole sentence, and I remember I got sent to a maximum security prison to segregation where I had to do some segregation time. First, segregation was horrible, it was horrible because I was placed on a floor where they had mentally ill prisoners that were being treated that were also in segregation. That was like a living hell. I mean, the noises that you hear at night, screaming, yelling, crying. Officers blatantly just gashing these guys. Because even, like, they were mentally ill prisoners acting out because they were mentally ill, but yet being punished because the officers felt like these guys were doing this, they're just trying to manipulate the system, they're just looking for attention. You see a guy open his guts up and pull his guts out, and their reaction to it, oh, he's just looking for attention. Nobody in their right mind's going to do no shit like that. Nobody in their right mind is going to literally take a staple, a staple, and carve a hole in his stomach, and pull his guts out, and put them on the window for you. That's not normal. And your response is they're looking for attention? No, man, that person needs help.

Jose Burgos:

But they would put general population prisoners in the same areas with these guys. It was like a mental torture. Eventually, I was moved to a different unit where it wasn't that type of stuff. Going into it, it was a horrible, horrible experience. But I'll never forget one day sitting in that cell. I had, like 12 years into a life without parole sentence. All my appeals were exhausted, meaning that I had life without parole, it was over. There was no more going back in court and trying to get my sentence changed. I was on STG 2, I was designated as a security threat group member STG 2, which is the more harsh one. You have to be in level five, there's a lot of restrictions that's come with it. And I'm in segregation in maximum security. So you've got maximum security, STG 2, doing life without parole, all appeals exhausted. I'm sitting in this cell, one day just sitting there. I'll never forget it, it was probably about 9:00 or 10:00 o'clock at night. I'm looking around and I just started having a conversation with God. I was like, "This can't be it." And that was my moment.

Jose Burgos:

This can't be it, man. You have to have something more for me than this. Two weeks later, I get a knock on the door. There's a sergeant that says, "Hey, you got some legal mail." I said, "Legal mail, I ain't got shit in court. Who the fuck wrote me?" That's the first time that I got a letter from [Debra Lobel 01:14:30] from the ACLU telling me, "We're doing a study on juveniles that were sentenced as kids to prison with life without parole and we want to know if you want to participate in this study we want to do. We're going to send you some questionnaires and stuff like that." I was like, "Hell, yeah. Cool." It was the first time that I seen ... it was a long tunnel, but I seen some light. Damn, this shit sound good as hell. I don't know what the hell unconstitutional means, but the shit sound good. That's when I decided I got to change. I got to do something, I can't sit around and wait for everybody else to do it for me. Here I am, I think I was probably about, at the time I might have been about 29, 28, something like that. I go, "Yeah, this shit got to change."

Jose Burgos:

So when I finally got out of segregation, I was on 23 hours lock down, so I would only come out one hour a day. I was in my cell all motherfucking day, just reading. I would read, read, read, and just started writing letters. These questionnaires were coming in, these studies were coming in, and I was going back and forth. Getting involved in my own fight I think was just the ultimate fucking feeling because it empowered me. I used to just feel good as fuck. I went and got me a typewriter, I didn't know how to type for shit, bought me a typewriter and became good as a motherfucker at typing. And I was writing letters to everybody. I didn't give a fuck if they wrote back or not. I went back to thinking about what that [inaudible 01:16:04] told me. Fuck if they write you back or not, write them. I was sending all these petitions out. Informational leaflets and shit like, hey, y'all know that Michigan has the second highest amount juveniles in the United States, that it's unconstitutional that the United Nations ...

Jose Burgos:

The United Nations has a convention that's called the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that convention, there's an article that says no child under the age of 18 should receive a life sentence. 137 countries signed onto this shit except the United States. And so I was informing people of this shit. And I remember one day I get a letter and it's a fucking response from a lady. I went to the law library and got an address out of the bar journal. Some organization, I sent them a letter. And she had wrote back, she said, "I didn't know this was going on in society." So I had sent her a petition because at the time, they were collecting signatures for petitions trying to push for changing the law. She said, "I took the petition to work, I had my friends sign it, I wish you well." And that was it. And that was one response from a gang of letters, but then I was like, "Okay, you're on to something." All it took is that one letter. That's it. Now, that's one person who had 10 or 15, it was a petition, probably 15, 20 signatures. So she's filled the whole signature out, so I'm sure that when she asked people to sign it, she had to explain what the hell they were signing.

Jose Burgos:

So through that one person, through that letter, people were getting informed. It just felt good getting into that fight. It was almost like a rebirth. Here I am, 12 years into this life bit, and now there's a little light. I also knew, okay, when you get out of max, what are you going to do? You got to go back to that yard, you're going to be surrounded by the same bullshit, same officers, same prisoners. And I just had to make that conscious decision, I had to find the balance. I still got to do my time, so I'm going to still hold my yard down and hold myself down, but don't go overboard. I knew how to still conduct myself more, but be a little more protective of myself, and not think like a lifer. I had to start retooling my brain and start thinking, like, you got to go home. It just felt like the more and more I let negative shit go, the more and more ... and I always say this, I always use this analogy, freedom's arm was literally had went through the fence and had grabbed me. Every time that I was letting shit go, the more and more negative shit I was letting go, the more and more that tug was getting stronger and stronger. Okay, motherfucker. I need your ass out here.

Jose Burgos:

And I just developed that mindset like, I'm getting the fuck out of prison. I don't know how the hell this shit's going to happen, but it's going to happen. I really got involved, I stayed in the law library. I would pay attention to what was going on not only in Michigan, but throughout the country. I knew exactly what the hell was going on throughout the country about all the states that were trying to do something with juveniles and shit, because I wanted to be informed, I wanted to educate myself. And I was able to, not only was I taking that information in, I was able to share it with guys. Now, other guys was like,

"What'd you hear, bro?" So now, these guys that lost hope a long time ago, I'm able to drop that seed, so now every time I'm going to a different prison, that same group of people, we all meeting at these different prisons, and now we developing that camaraderie amongst us. We just started thinking, like, man, we were all kids when we came to prison. I didn't have to know you to know what you went through. If you was 15, you was 16 years old, when you caught your case, and you went to prison with a life sentence, I don't give a fuck where you was from, you is my brother. Because I knew --

Jose Burgos:

It's almost like the same type of relationship that foster kids develop when they're in these foster homes. We don't have our parents, but we have each other. Foster kids, they lean on each other like that and develop brotherships. Black, white, Latino, it didn't matter what the fuck you are. We all going through this shit the same. So it just felt good to get back in that fight.

Patrick Bates:

What facility was that, that, with the 12 year ...

Jose Burgos:

I was at Standish. I was at Standish Max. That's when that happened. When I left there, I did three years there. And when I left there, I went to, they sent me to URF. Again, a northern prison.

Patrick Bates:

What was that like? What did these facilities look like?

Jose Burgos:

Well, Chippewa. The northern prison I was talking ... I was there three different times. This is a prison, it had a more modern look to it. I think it was designed, it had that design, there was a purpose behind the design. I think that throughout the years they had come to the conclusion that these walled prisons and how just the physical structure of that prison, the mindset, it created a different mindset when you're inside those walls opposed to being in a prison where there's fences and it's a little more open. I'm almost certain, I don't know if there even exist any type of statistics, but I bet you any money, I can put my money on it that at a prison where there's a walled prison opposed to a prison that's got a fence around it, it's more violent inside that walled prison. But it was, there at URF, there was three, at the time when I first went there, there was, three units were level three units. Level three. So in the system, you have from level one. When I went to prison, it was from level one to level six. Six being supermax. Five being max. Four being closed. Three was in between a two and a three. You had a two, and then you had the one, which is a minimum security.

Jose Burgos:

So yeah, URF was all white officers. They had three level three units. They had one unit that was a level four unit. They had one that was a segregation. They called that Steamboat. They had one level one unit, that was outside on the other side of the main compound. You had the education building, that housed, they had the gym there, the school, classes, stuff like that, library. You had health services that was connected to the chow hall. Then, you had the control center. The control center, that's where they had the visiting room, that's where all the administration was at. And it looked -- I mean, for somebody who, like, if you wasn't part of prison, you would walk in that prison and think, like, oh, man, this looks okay.



They have flowers everywhere, they used to try to beautify it, especially when they had people coming in, visitors and shit. But it was far from that. I don't care how much they try to paint a prison to make it look cute, prison is still going to be prison. No matter what, the same ... even though, like I said the walled prisons were probably a little more violent, like I said, prison is prison, there was still a lot of shit going on in a place like that.

Jose Burgos:

But every -- for instance, URF, which is Chippewa, at the time was a regional facility. They used that same design. For instance, it used to be called Chippewa Regional Facility. Then, Carson City had a regional facility, Muskegon had a regional facility, and Macomb County had a regional facility. And they were all, they all had that same design for the most part.

Patrick Bates:

What did, you've talked about the housing units, and how... What did that look like inside? What did it look like?

Jose Burgos:

The housing units at MR were cells. They were single man cells. They had, there was two blocks. You had I block and you had J block. They went from the first floor to the fifth floor. Every floor had at MR probably about, maybe like, 250, 200 inmates. Something like that. You had the showers. They had open showers at the end of the hallways. Like I said, they were all bars. Then, the other facilities were double bunk cells where smaller units, the units had 240 guys per unit, 60 guys per wing, there was four wings, you had, every wing had their own showers, you had a couple phones on every wing. Then, you had, like, three main day rooms, a TV room in the middle, a game room, you know, a couple game rooms, microwaves, and stuff like that to cook the food and shit. A couple offices for the counselors and desk for the officer. Laundry room. Like I said, a self-sustainable little small little building.

Patrick Bates:

You talked about the cells. What did the cells look like?

Jose Burgos:

I always compare the cells to your average bathroom. Just imagine, go in your room, in your bathroom, and close the door. And just turn the lights off and see how long you can stay in that cell, in that bathroom. You're going to want to come out that room. Imagine spending 30, 40, 50 years in that small little bathroom in your house. That's what those cells were like. They were all, most of them were all white color, double bunk. Like I said when you have double bunk, hard mattress, you had a count light. They had a light in there, then you had a count light. The count light, every time, five times a day, they would count the entire facility. They would lock everybody down and they turn the count light. Once you see that light comes on, you know it's count time. You had to get on your bunk to make sure that everybody was there. The cell with the bars had a mental ... it did something to you mentally. I remember that first night, me going into the Michigan Reformatory. I was on I2. I'll never forget, it was I2 something. I want to say 69, but that might be wrong. I remember it was I2. That was the quarantine cell, so when you went to MR, that's the first place you go to. Then, they designate you to one of the other wings. But I remember looking at them bars, man,

PART 3 OF 5 ENDS [01:27:04]

Jose Burgos:

and looking in that yard. You know what I'm saying? Doing yard time. When you first got there, you have to wait a seven day quarantine before you can go to yard. So I was confined to my room, but I used to look in the yard, and just like, it was just a sad look, bro. You know what I'm saying? I'll never forget, one of the first thoughts that I had when I went to prison is when I went in the prison and it was predominantly black, right. And my first thing, like my question to myself when I used to have these self-talks with myself, "Man, how the fuck are they getting away with this shit?" You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

To see so many black men. You know what I'm saying? Young and old. You know what I'm saying? How is that shit possible? You know what I'm saying? How was that shit possible? You know what I'm saying? You got 1,000, 1,200 prisoners, man, and like, 85% of them are black. You know what I'm saying? That shit didn't sit well with me. You know what I'm saying? At the time, I really didn't ... when I was in the neighborhood growing up, I wasn't exposed to racism. You know what I'm saying? I was exposed to racism, but I learned racism in prison. You know what I'm saying? You know what I'm saying? In prison you don't learn that shit in the streets, man. Man, we from the hood, man, fuck that shit. We ain't got time for that racist shit man. Let's get this money. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

But in prison man, just, it was like a sad, at same time it was like a sad fucking sight, man. You know what I'm saying? Like, when you see so many black men. You know what I'm saying? Young men in prison, man, that shit fucked up, man. And I still can't figure it out. I still can't figure out how they keep getting away with this shit. You know what I'm saying? Because something's wrong with that fucking picture man. You know what I'm saying?

Patrick Bates:

You talk about how the structure of the prison looked. And how everything looked like, where the certain thing was. I don't know if I missed you or not. He was talking about like the chow hall. Did you mention the chow hall?

Jose Burgos:

Yup.

Patrick Bates:

If you did or if you didn't. What was that like?

Jose Burgos:

The chow hall? Shit. Man, the chow hall was like another yard man. You know what I'm saying? You have to be on point in there. You know what I'm saying? Because it's a confined place, at any given time, you know what I'm saying? You got, depending on what prison you go to. Because some chow halls are bigger than others, but on average, you know what I'm saying? You've got a couple hundred guys in here, man, moving around. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And another thing that you used to see back in the day, at some prisons you still see it. You know what I'm saying? Where you go in the chow hall and one side's all black and the other side's all white. You know what I'm saying? And I remember when I went first into a prison, man, where it was like black and white, I felt, "I'm Puerto Rican and shit." You know what I'm saying? But because I wasn't really thinking about myself as either black or white, like I would think, "Man, okay, where the fuck do I sit?" You know what I'm saying? Who do I, where do I go? You know what I'm saying? Because I want to go somewhere where I ain't going to be ostracized and shit man. Or, you know what I'm saying? You know, somebody's going to have a trip about it. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

So I learned that Latinos, we have our own little table. You know what I'm saying? And so that's where we all sat at. You know what I'm saying? And it's funny how at places, like URF, going back and always going to go back to the URF man, like, the officers wouldn't say shit about that. You know what I'm saying? And so what that told me was that they were accepting of this separation. You know what I'm saying? They didn't want for the blacks and the whites to get along. You know what I'm saying? Because they figured, "Well shit, as long as they're at war with one another." You know what I'm saying? You know, shit, "They ain't going to be paying attention to us, they ain't going to be," you know what I'm saying, doing the thing they ain't supposed to be doing." You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And the funny part is that it wasn't, I mean, even though yes, racism did exist and yes, there were issues between black and white prisoners. But shit, for the most part, the very same, these two groups, when you go back to that block fuck, half of them lock with each other. You know what I'm saying? But when they go to chow hall, they didn't want to eat with each other, you know, and that shit was promoted. It was promoted. Because a lot of prisons, you know what I'm saying, they allowed it, and there was that divide and conquer tactic, you know? So that was the chow hall.

Patrick Bates:

So we're still in the chow hall right now, right? What was the food like in the chow hall?

Jose Burgos:

The food was horrible, man. The food was horrible. I seen the best and the worst in the food. When the state ran the chow halls, it was okay. When I first went to prison, the food actually wasn't that bad when I first went to prison. And I remember somebody had took a menu, one of the officers had took a menu, turned it over to, this was at URF, turned it over to the news people, and they splattered this menu all over the news. And these prisoners are eating better than kids in school and all that stuff. You know what I'm saying? And really made a big deal of this shit. You know what I'm saying? And so that was the beginning of the downward spiral of the food there.

Jose Burgos:

I remember, when it went into, when the private prisons, when private prisons took over, not private prisons, sorry about that. When the private companies, they hired private companies to feed the prisoners.

Parker Kehrig:

Got it, got it, got it.

Jose Burgos:

That was, like, horrible. They put out this menu, I remember when they first came to this system and hired, what was the company's name? Anyways, when they hired this company, it was a private company and they gave them a contract for like three years and they put out this menu and the menu looked cute. It looked, you know what I'm saying, oh yeah, this stuff sounds good. You know what I'm saying? But let's not forget, it's a for-profit company. You know what I'm saying? So yeah, it looks good on paper, but they have to mass produce this shit and do it in a way where they can still make money. So they didn't care. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

Number one, all the staff that were hired in for these companies, these are staff, man, that were getting paid minimum wage. They have absolutely no training in how to interact with prisoners. You know what I'm saying? So they didn't know how to demand quality food in the chow hall, stuff like that, man. So the food we had went down dramatically, to the point where they actually removed that company because it just got real bad. Mold in the food, maggots in the food.

Jose Burgos:

And then they hired a second private company, and then that second private company ended up doing the same shit. You know what I'm saying? Took like \$130 million, you know what I'm saying, from the tax payers for a three year contract, didn't finish the contract and left us, you know what I'm saying, to dry. Used to find rocks in the food, literally maggots. I mean, and this is something you can look up online on the internet and you'll see where maggots and stuff, man, was being found in bags of potatoes and bags of rice and stuff like that. So the food wasn't good. So if you were a prisoner who was only getting paid 15 dollars a month, you were starving. You were having issues with the food. So now that created a black market. You know what I'm saying? Because now, "I got to go out to eat." You know what I'm saying?

Patrick Bates:

Wow. Wow.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

You mentioned the black market and then you also mentioned that you maintained employment while you were in prison the whole time. Where did you work?

Jose Burgos:

Man, I did a little of everything. But check this out, when I first went to prison, again, I just turned 17. I was 16 when I caught my case and I just turned 17. And so I went to the Michigan Reformatory and they had a factory there. The factory there, MSI, Michigan State Prisons, Michigan State Industries. And they make furniture, you know what I'm saying, for the facilities, they make beds, they make bunks, desks,

you name it, they do it. Some of them do license plates. You have central laundries that wash clothes, or they actually make prisoner uniforms. And so MSI was my first pick, my first job I wanted to work at.

Jose Burgos:

But can you believe that when I requested to work at MSI they wouldn't let me work in MSI due to child labor laws. You know what I'm saying? Here I am. Okay. I'm 17 years old. I'm doing a life without parole sentence.

Parker Kehrig:

They can put you in prison, but you can't work.

Jose Burgos:

You can put me in prison, but I can't work in this factory. And here it is, it's 2020 and I still have that paper in my cell where it says, wants to work at MSI when he turns 18. I kept it my whole life because I just couldn't believe it. So I ended up having to get yard crew job. That's when you go around picking up, you know what I'm saying, paper from the floors, cutting grass, shoveling snow. But I worked there. I had several jobs in health services, not health services, in food services, cleaned up in the chow hall or serving food.

Jose Burgos:

At one time I became a clerk. I was the commissary clerk, the payroll clerk. I worked in the law library as a clerk, laundry man, porter, that's a person who cleans up around the unit. Yeah. I had all type of jobs man. The best job that I had, the best job that I had was, in 1997 I was transferred to the Cotton Correctional Facility and the Jackson Prison, it's in Jackson, Michigan, the Jackson Prison behind the walls, like the level fours they used to have what's called a Braille program there. And it was like one of the largest, actually one of the largest Braille transcribing services in this country. And it was all being done by prisoners. It was ran by the Jackson Community Schools and the Lion's Club, and they would, people would, like, colleges from all over the country, from all over the world would send these inmates books, school books to get them transcribed into Braille for the blind.

Jose Burgos:

And I remember that Braille company was being moved from behind the walls over to the Cotton Correctional Facility and I was walking in the yard one day and I seen this construction going on. I asked the guy I was walking with, I said, "Man, what they doing over there?" He said, "Well, they're building this new factory. They're going to bring all the workers from, you know what I'm saying, from another prison, they're going to start the Braille program here." I said, "What the hell is Braille?" He said, "Well, the little dots man, you know people who are blind, they read. So you take a book and you transcribe it into Braille for them." I said, "I'm going to get a job in there, bro." He said, "Man, you can't get up in there. You ain't got no GED." You know what I'm saying? I said, "I'm going to get my motherfucking GED, dog." I said, "I'm getting a job, man, in that fucking Braille, bro. Watch what I tell you."

Jose Burgos:

And this was, like, six years into my sentence. When I first came to prison, I would go to school. Because I was doing life without parole, I would get mad and say, "Fuck school. What the fuck I need a GED for?" You know what I'm saying? So it took me six years because of that. Not because I couldn't do it, just

because I didn't care about no GED, I'm doing life without parole. What the fuck is GED going to do for me? You know? But now I went to a facility where unless you have a GED, you couldn't get a job. But before I even seen the Braille, I was hustling, so I didn't give a fuck about no job. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And then, But now I wanted that job. So I enrolled back in school. So I enrolled back in school and what I didn't do in six years, in four months I achieved my GED. You know what I'm saying? Because I took it serious.

Parker Kehrig:

That's amazing.

Patrick Bates:

That's amazing.

Jose Burgos:

I took it serious. And actually that was the first time in my life ... at that point that was the first time I ever realized that if I apply myself to something, man I can achieve it. You know what I'm saying? And so I was real proud when I got my GED because literally the moment I got my certificate, when the school, I'm getting my certificate and the Braille guys are coming in from the control center. They're just now getting moved in, the building actually finished when I got my GED. So now how do I get in that motherfucking factory? You know what I'm saying?

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Jose Burgos:

And so the guys that came over, you had about, man, about 25 inmates, that came over. You know what I'm saying? That were going to start the program there from the other prison. And out of the 25 there was like six or seven of them that happen to be Latinos. You know what I'm saying? At the time I was the president of HASTA, HASTA was, it was like a social organization in prison, it's called the Hispanic Development ... Hispanic... Man it's been so long.

Patrick Bates:

Hispanic American-

Jose Burgos:

Hispanic Americans Striving Towards Advancement. It was an organization and it was really, I'll be honest with you man, there was just a fucking front, man, on the yard, man. You know what I'm saying? Yeah. We did some positive shit man, but it was a gang itself. You know what I'm saying? Without it being a gang, it was a gang. But because I was a president of HASTA, you know what I'm saying, one of my jobs was that when other Latinos would come into the facility, I would greet them, "Hey, what's going on?" Basically welcome them into the compound. But again, because I'm a likable person and shit, man, you know what I'm saying, I started taking these guys for walks and, "Hey man." You know what

I'm saying?" I get to know them, get cool with them. "Hey by the way man, I'm about to put a application in to the Braille, bro." You know what I'm saying? "Put a good word in for me."

Jose Burgos:

And they were like, "All right man, cool man, we got you bro." You know what I'm saying? So a lot of people submitted because they had put some signs up about the Braille factory. So a lot of people had submitted to get in the Braille factory and they ended up doing, like, 150 interviews. Out of 150 interviews, four people were hired and I was one of them. You know what I'm saying?

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

That's great.

Parker Kehrig:

That's amazing.

Jose Burgos:

So I got in there man and it was great. I mean walking into Braille was like literally like the movie Back to the Future. You know what I'm saying? Except this one was like, back to the present. You know what I'm saying? Because the moment you walked into Braille was all computers. It was like stepping out of prison into the world, you know what I mean? Because it was all this modern tech, you know what I'm saying, tech shit and computers and you've got all these printers printing, I'm like, "Hell yeah." You know what I'm saying? This is a career in prison. This is the closest you can do to a career in prison. This is it. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

I remember my first 10 days because when I got hired, it was like halfway into the payroll time. You know what I'm saying? And my first 10 days I made like a hundred something dollars or some shit. You know, I'm saying? That's coming from a job where I was only making \$20 a month. Now I'm getting a hundred something dollars with the potential of making three or four hundred dollars a month. That was a good ass job. You know what I'm saying? It was the best job in the system. And I had one of them. So that was one of my best jobs in the facilities.

Parker Kehrig:

Oh yeah. So we're going to pivot a little bit here. What was visitation like? Who visited you in prison? What did those spaces look like? What did the visits feel like?

Jose Burgos:

Visits for like the first year of my incarceration when I was in the youth home, because I was only like 25 minutes away from Southwest on East Fourth Street, my grandparents, literally the whole year that I was there, I think they probably missed maybe like five or six visits because it was daily visits. So they used to drive up there, not knowing no English, they'd go down there, they'd just say my name, after a while the staff had got used to them. You know what I'm saying? So they were able to come up and visit

me. But at the youth home, again, the only ones that are allowed to come visit you are your legal guardians or your parents. You know what I'm saying? My legal guardians were my grandparents.

Jose Burgos:

So they used to come all the time and at times I used to feel bad because even during, I mean, winter storms. So you know what I'm saying? And I'll tell them, "Don't come up." You know what I'm saying? They'll show up, for that one hour visit, they're going to show up. So it was real supportive. And I think that was important in a sense. Even though I sometimes used to feel bad because of course like the weather, they were old, at the same time, I'm glad they did. I'm glad they did because you know me facing a life without parole sentence. You what I'm saying? What better way to start, man, than to have the people, man, that love you the most, man, supporting you. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

But when I went to prison, visits started to get a little difficult. You know what I'm saying? Because now we're talking about three hour drives. You know what I'm saying? And they couldn't drive with it by themselves. When I got sent up north, that was like a six hour drive. You know what I'm saying? Going up there was taking a vacation. And even then my grandparents would, they would ask my uncle or aunt or something to go with them, they'd find their way up there. And so visits were important, visits were important, man. It was like visits were like the window to the world. At first, it was like... then my sister and my brother and them, you know what I'm saying, they would come whenever they can, with my grandparents and my aunt, my uncle.

Jose Burgos:

But throughout the years, throughout the years, through the entire 27 plus years, visits played a real big role, man. You know what I'm saying? Like that was a time when you can just be you. You know what I'm saying? You can get out of prison, man for that one hour or two hours, however long your visitor came up there to see you. You go out there and on visiting day you see everybody ironing clothes and everybody getting, I've been telling you, these guys, man, it was getting done up. It was like going to the club. You know what I'm saying? Like, "Where are you going?" Said, "I'm about to go on view." You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

If I had a friend of mine, you know what I'm saying, who was from the same neighborhood? "Hey, my people coming up here man." You know what I'm saying? "Your mom come, my mom, your sister come, my sister." Whatever, you what I'm saying? And that was just our way of, man, of helping one another out. You know what I'm saying? Because for our parents and for family and friends and girlfriends, whatever you had coming to see you. You know what I'm saying? That was a big burden. You know what I'm saying? You got people who had lives out here, who were working out here, had kids and they were taking time, you know what I'm saying, to come see you and support you. But they got to go drive three or four or five hours. They ain't have that type of money. You know what I'm saying? But somehow they pulled it together and they made it happen.

Jose Burgos:

And visits were also a way where visits kept you in check. You know what I'm saying? Because if you knew you had your people coming up next weekend, they're going to take a three or four hour drive, probably that week you're going to probably be laying low key because you don't want no problems.



You don't want to lose your visits. You know what I'm saying? But there were times when at certain prisons, man, the thing that I didn't like about it was how they would treat the family members. You know what I'm saying? My grandparents, they didn't commit no crimes, man. You know what I'm saying? They have been law abiding citizens, man, tax paying citizens, man, there's no reason why when they come and see somebody that they should be, you know what I'm saying, treated, you know what I'm saying, any other way. You know what I'm saying? These are citizens. These ain't prisoners. These are citizens, man. You treat them with respect. They're coming here to see a loved one who may never come home.

Jose Burgos:

They're coming to see a loved one who, they might be breaking some bad news to him, man, about somebody who passed away and they get dogged. I remember and I love visits. You know what I'm saying? But visits weren't always fun because of the treatment of the staff. I remember my worst, if there's a worst, I think this is the worst visit experience that I had. I was at the St. Louis Correctional Facility and I had just came from being up north, hadn't seen my family in about three or four years because when I was up north I would try to let them know like, "I don't want you driving all the way up here." You know what I'm saying? I'll just call you, or whatever.

Jose Burgos:

So they had came there to St. Louis and it was my grandmother, my aunt, and my cousin. Well my aunt and my cousin, I had another aunt and my cousin who came to see me who has the same name. And they had the same name or they, both names were Maria Rivera. I remember how I took my aunt off my visiting list because she moved from out of state. Well they ended up taking the wrong Maria Rivera off the list. You know what I'm saying? So my cousin drove up there for like three hours and couldn't come in. She couldn't visit me. She had to wait in the visiting room off their mistake. Not mine. You know what I'm saying? I took the right person off.

Jose Burgos:

So then when my aunt and my grandma came in, I remember after an hour or something like that, my aunt was like, "Hey, we want to take some pictures." And I was like, "All right, bet." You know what I'm saying? "You got to go out there and get some picture tickets." And she's like, "All right." She asked how much it costs, I told how much it cost. "Yeah I'll be right back." So she reaches in her pocket and she pulls out a \$20 bill and she's holding the money in her hand with no malicious intent whatsoever. You know what I'm saying? So I actually went to the officer, said, "Hey my aunt wants to go and buy some picture tickets." He said, "Yeah you have to go in the lobby." You know what I'm saying? "Go out there and get them."

Jose Burgos:

On her way out, she has the money in her hand. He sees it and he asks her, "What are you doing with that money in your hand?" She's like, "I'm going to go buy these picture tickets." You know what I'm saying? He said, "Oh you can't have no money in the visiting room." You know what I'm saying? My aunt's like 55 years old, you know what I'm saying? My grandma at the time, I don't know, she's probably in like her 60s or some stuff like that. And they terminated my aunt's visit because she had that money. You know what I'm saying? They wrote up, they kicked her out, wrote a visiting restriction. You know what I'm saying? And I was blocked from seeing my aunt for, like, five years. You know what I'm saying? Because of that \$20 bill over a picture. You know what I'm saying?

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Jose Burgos:

So that wasn't cool. You know what I'm saying? I didn't like the way they treated them. Because, she obviously did not, had no, you know what I'm saying? They searched her when she came in and because she had some little tight pants, maybe they went over her pockets or something like that. You know what I'm saying? And didn't feel the money, but they searched her. You know what I'm saying? So when they searched her, she came in, she don't speak no English, so she can't read the rules. You know what I'm saying? So it was a real innocent situation, man, that just got blown out of proportion. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

But aside from that time, man, I mean, I used to love getting visits man. I used to have a lot of friends, man, and a lot closer to when I was going home. You know what I'm saying? I had a lot of people, man, that really, really started supporting me. You know what I'm saying? Because by then my mindset had changed. You know what I'm saying? My communication with people out on the streets was genuine. There was no manipulation involved. You know what I'm saying? It was real genuine. You know what I'm saying? And the more people were seeing the change in me, the more they wanted to be supportive. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And so, you know, at the same time, you know what I'm saying, them being supportive of me, you know what I'm saying?, had gave me off to the mindset like I don't want to let them down. You know what I'm saying? So I want to strive. You know what I'm saying? So visits was definitely a very important part of that rehabilitative, you know what I'm saying, process. You know what I'm saying? But it's not something that, and even then, you know what I'm saying, they put a lot of restrictions on visits. You know what I'm saying? You've got some states now and some county jails that are doing video visits. You know what I'm saying? Like, that's too impersonal, man. You know what I'm saying? Like you got somebody, man, who's doing life without parole sentence man or he's just got a long time and you telling me he'll never see his people, he got to see him on the screen? That ain't cool.

Patrick Bates:

So you talked about the space and you know how it being impersonal. If it's on camera or whatever. I think my next question is what does that visiting room look like? What-

Jose Burgos:

The visiting room, it was usually located in the control center. It was like a real big, just like a real big room, bro. If you put maybe three average living rooms side by side, that was probably your average, and you could fit out there maybe about a hundred or something prisoners at one time. Or a hundred something people together, including prisoners and family members. You had single chairs against the walls. You know what I'm saying? So for instance, if one person came, saw you, then he will sit in a single chair. Then you had in the middle of the visiting room, you have little tables with maybe like six chairs around them. You know what I'm saying? So if you had a big group come and see you, then you can just sit around a table and they have vending machines out there where you can buy some food and share

some food, you know what I'm saying, together. There was always a camera man out there, so if you wanted to take some pictures with your families, like \$1.50 or something, get you a couple pictures.

Jose Burgos:

There was always an officer in the visiting room. They had cameras in the visiting room. When you went into the visiting room, they searched you, give you a pat down. When you left the visiting room they would give you a strip search. You know what I'm saying? You take all your clothes off, you know the routine. But it was, you know, one of the things about by the visiting room was, man, seeing kids out there. You know what I'm saying? Seeing kids out there, man, coming up, man and seeing their parents, man, and seeing the fathers, man. You had some of the coldest gangsters on the yard, man. Then when you went out there, man, and you saw that man hugged up with their family, man, like a whole different person, man, would come out of him. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

At one time I became a camera man in the visiting room. You know what I'm saying? And that was important to me. You know what I'm saying? I remember I was working at, it was the Saginaw Correctional Facility. I had a job as a general maintenance on the yard. And they had came, the recreation lady had came and offered me a job in the visiting room, but told me that it was going to be a pay cut. You know what I'm saying? Again, we're talking about these dollar something a day jobs. You know what I'm saying? But she was telling me how, "Well if you go to visiting room and work, you have to take a pay cut." You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And I thought about it, I mean, at the time, you know, I really wasn't pressed for money. You know what I'm saying? So I wasn't doing it for the money really. You know what I'm saying? I'm just doing it just keep myself busy. And I thought about the visiting room, man. I was like, "Man, the visiting room of the prison, man, that's the window to the world." You know what I'm saying? So why not go out there and socialize and mingle with people. You know what I'm saying? And so that was cool, man, because I got to know mothers and fathers on a regular base that was coming in and they were cool with me. I seen, you know what I'm saying, kids coming in for their birthdays. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And I would always do my best, man. I learned how to use the printer that we were using, it was a color printer and it had all these little different graphics. You know what I'm saying? On my downtime, I was sitting there playing around with it and learned how to put names on pictures and put the borders on them. You know what I'm saying? So guys that were getting married up there. You know what I'm saying? I'll take nice pictures of them, put the date on it, so that was cool, man. I enjoyed that visit a lot, man. You know what I'm saying? Again, you what I'm saying? Just I was socializing with people. You know what I'm saying? That was something, man, that even though inside prison, you're socializing with other guys that are there in prison with you, or some officers or school, whatever. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

It's different when you go out there, man, in the visiting room, man, and you socializing with people. You know what I'm saying? You're seeing the latest fashion trends. You know what I'm saying? I mean all that. You know what I'm saying? The latest smells, all these different smells and colognes and perfumes

that you haven't smelled in years. You know what I'm saying? So, it was literally the window to the world. That's what the visiting room to me was.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah. The way you describe visits, it feels like a lot of care goes into that.

Jose Burgos:

Oh yeah. Yeah. I didn't realize that more ever than when I came out here. You know what I'm saying? Because as I reiterate myself, man, back into just the daily, you know what I'm saying, just daily stuff, living. You know what I'm saying? Working and having responsibilities. I do eight hours of work a day and do just run a couple of errands and I'm beat. You know what I'm saying? And so you had people that were coming to visit me, man, that were doing their eight hours a day. They're being husbands, they were being wives, they're being fathers, and being mothers. You know what I'm saying? And still found the time to come see me. You know what I'm saying? And I knew that was love. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

Because they were coming into a prison that wasn't necessarily treating them right. You know what I'm saying? They were coming in with a pocket full of quarters to feed me a sandwich or a pop from the vending machines. You know what I'm saying? They were taking pictures with me. They were going home and sharing these pictures with me and showing everybody and talking to everybody. Amen, bro. Doing good. You know what I'm saying? So, being out here, definitely, definitely has given me a greater appreciation for all the love and the support, man, that people, you know what I'm saying, showed me. Especially towards the end of my sentence, man. You know what I'm saying? It was so important for me to feel that because I knew that I was being, that my people, my family, my friends and my closest friends, you know what I'm saying, were going to embrace me back out here, man. You know what I'm saying?

Jose Burgos:

And that was so, so important to that transition, man, from prison to come on out of here. You know what I'm saying? So a lot of love, man, goes into the visiting room. You know what I'm saying? And I'll never forget that. You know what I'm saying? The people that took the time to come see me, man, I'm talking winter storms.

PART 4 OF 5 ENDS [01:56:04]

Jose Burgos:

Winter storms, rainstorms. I have my homeboy, man. When he and I reconnected for eight, nine years. Was coming to see me every month, introduced me to his wife. We had our relationship. This is somebody who I met when I was a kid. We actually went to elementary school together. For us to get back in contact with one another and him instantly just embracing me. I used to always tell him I was going home. Before the laws changed, before I got re-sentenced, I'm going home and I would always come down here and explain to him what was going on.

Jose Burgos:

And he loved me. So, when he was looking at me and I'm telling him these things, he was hopeful for me. But he wasn't as optimistic as me because he wasn't going through it himself.

Jose Burgos:

So, he was telling me, he said, "Bro. When I got out here..." We sat down one time and we were talking, he was telling me, he said, "Man." He said, "Remember all them times, man, you was telling me you was coming home?" He said, I used to remember thinking that. It made my homie trip, man."

Jose Burgos:

But he said, "But I was willing to ride it out with you. I ain't give a fuck if they let you go or not. I was going to stick it out with you."

Jose Burgos:

And so he may not ever believe wholeheartedly that what I was telling him was actually going to happen. Because he didn't understand the system. It wasn't that he, of course he wanted me to come home. But he didn't understand it. But, you know, he was like, "I don't necessarily believe that shit, but I'm going to ride with you any-motherfucking-way."

Jose Burgos:

And then for him to see it actually happen was big, because he was the one that came to pick me up from prison. Yeah, him and his wife. Took me to the first gas station. He asked me, he said, "What's the first thing you want to do, man, walking out of prison, bro?"

Jose Burgos:

I said, "Man, I want to go to the first gas station that you see, bro. I'm going to walk out this car and exercise my freedom for the first time in 27 years. If that just means going to the gas station and getting me a cup of coffee and walking back out, that's the first thing I want to do." And that's what we did. We went to a gas station, bought me a cup of coffee and a confusing-ass coffee machine with a billion buttons and gave me \$5 and I played some Powerball.

Jose Burgos:

Give me an easy piece, man. I'm feeling lucky as hell today, man. That was about the first thing in it all. That moment started from the rekindling of a relationship that started in the visiting room. So visits are important.

Parker Kehrig:

That's beautiful.

Patrick Bates:

You talked a whole lot about reentering just now. Could you tell us a little bit more about re-entry? First, maybe, what was your parole process like?

Jose Burgos:

Well, as a juvenile lifer, you know, after we went through the entire process, getting re-sentenced, I was re-sentenced to a 30 to 60 year sentence after serving 27 years and four months of a life without parole.

Jose Burgos:

After I got re-sentenced, when I went back to the prison to give them my time sheet and I was actually three years past my out date. So I seen the parole board immediately. Within three weeks of seeing them, they gave me my parole and sent me to the re-entry facility at Macomb Correctional facility.

Jose Burgos:

They called it re-entry by name, but the program itself sucked. There wasn't shit about it. They signed you up to a culinary arts class. I was in that culinary arts class for like two months. Never once did I see the teacher. Never once did the teacher come out in the area where the students were at and had any interaction with the students that was there.

Jose Burgos:

And what that told me was, man, we're just here on paper, you know what I'm saying? We're here on paper. The state was trying to satisfy the courts because, of course, we're getting involved and why is it that they weren't providing programs for juvenile lifers? And so they're, hey, we'll sign them for a class that really doesn't even exist. It's just all on paper. I didn't have to go. I could miss all five days of that week and not one time would they get a phone call saying, "Hey, where's, where's Burgos at?"

Jose Burgos:

So the re-entry program itself, that aspect of it was a joke. Now coming home, it was deep, man. It was deep. It was deep, man, because, you know, autumn years, man. Autumn years. And I remember the first, that day when I was sitting there in that visiting room. And they call my name, they dress me out with some clothes that my friend had brought me. And just like that, I had signed my name and I was going home. And I thought to myself, I went through all that shit and all it took was one signature and I'm walking out of prison. All that for that one signature.

Jose Burgos:

I came home, that first day I had to see my parole agent as soon as I left prison. You know, you got to see him within that 24 hours. So that's the first thing that I did. It was my friend and his wife and my sister who came to pick me up.

Jose Burgos:

And going home, man. My grandmother used to always talk about this dream that she had. I just dream of one day you're going to come, you're going to knock on my door and it's going to be you. And I was able to fulfill that. My grandmother, when I came home at the time, she was 84. She lived by herself. So I was so happy to come to her. She was still alive, vibrant. She had some Puerto Rican food ready for me. All my family was there at the house waiting for me, man. It was such a day, man. I'll never forget it.

Jose Burgos:

And just that process, soaking it in. The first couple of nights, it was hard sleeping. Slept, stayed up all night playing with the telephone, trying to figure that out. I think that, I want to say the first month was

cool. I'm getting out. Seeing people I haven't seen in a ton of years. People are helping me out, they're giving me money and stuff like that.

Jose Burgos:

Then came the emotions. Then came the emotions. The emotions that I didn't expect. What I learned about that period was that prison, when you're in prison, you can't feel in prison. Prison is a place where you suppress emotion. If you lose a loved one, if you miss your family, if you're sad, you suppress it. You feel it in passing. If the word depression or sadness was written on that wall, in prison you walk by that sign that says depression or says sadness. And that's how long you and that emotion connect. You can't stand there and feel, allow yourself to, as a human being, allow yourself to feel sadness. You can't allow yourself to feel lonely and stuff like that. Because it's detrimental to your mindset, your mind state, and doing your time.

Jose Burgos:

I found myself a few nights with overwhelming sense of sadness and I couldn't figure it out. I said, what is this? You just had a life without parole. You're free, but you feel sad. You feel lonely. You feel a sense of paranoia, you know? And it took some reflection. It took some time. It took some time to try to understand. Like, oh, I get it now. I'm free. I can feel. A lot of those emotions that I had suppressed all those years were all starting to surface. I was, they were surfacing and I was allowing myself to feel it. I wasn't shutting it down this time. Now I'm facing it. So that was, like, the beginning stages of my re-entry.

Jose Burgos:

Then, as things start to settle down, now we're talking about employment. How do I find a job? The biggest hurdle that I had, because I was born in Puerto Rico, I didn't have a birth certificate. I had a birth certificate, but while I was incarcerated in 2011 or 2010, there was a federal law that was changed that made everybody who was born in Puerto Rico to renew the birth certificate, meaning that the birth certificate that I had was invalid. Because there was a lot of identity theft that was going on, so they wanted everybody who was born there needed a new birth certificate. Prior to me getting out, I told the staff at the facility, I need my birth certificate. According to them, they had reached out to Puerto Rico and that Puerto Rico said, well, he has to wait till he gets out to get the birth certificate. Which made absolutely no fucking sense because everybody else was getting their birth certificates.

Jose Burgos:

So then started the bullshit. Because without a birth certificate, you can't get a state ID. Without a state ID, I couldn't get my birth certificate. So now I'm stuck in the middle. Now they're telling me, okay, well, you have to have your parole agent write a letter basically explaining your situation, that you were in prison all these years and all that. Plus, he has to put a copy of both his personal and work ID on the letter.

Jose Burgos:

The parole agent wasn't going to do that. He's not going to put his personal ID and information on a letter and give it to me and expect me to send it to Puerto Rico. That's his personal information. That's where the bullshit started.

Jose Burgos:

Because I was trying, I was trying, he was doing the bare minimum. That landed me, to have to get a job that I had to get paid under the table. There's a municipal ID, it's called Detroit ID that I was able to get, which wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. I had to actually lie about an address because even though it was in Wayne County, it was a Detroit ID. So if you didn't live in Detroit you couldn't get the Detroit ID. So I had to put down that, I had made a DTE bill with my sister's address on it to get a damn ID that wasn't worth shit. Because I tried to use that to get the birth certificate. No, it's got to be a state ID, not a municipal ID. So I said, what the fuck. Can't win for losing.

Jose Burgos:

Finally one day, I was sitting there at work at the computer and I said, well, Puerto Rico, they have a state representative that, again, ain't worth the damn paper it's written on because they ain't got no vote in Washington. So it's just a paid pawn. But I said, you know what, let me call them and see what they can do. So when I called Washington, DC, they gave me a municipal phone number in Puerto Rico. When I called Puerto Rico, they in turn directed me to this lady at that department. That was her job. She helped people who needed birth certificates.

Jose Burgos:

So they faxed me a new set of lists of questions of only questions that I would know, about my mom and dad, stuff like that, that regularly are not on the regular application. Provide all the information. Finally, I got a birth certificate. Took me a whole damn year, but I got that motherfucker. Got my ID. And then I left the job at the state appellate defender's office.

Jose Burgos:

But, I mean, throughout that year, though, aside from the ID, it's been, it's been interesting. It's been interesting. I've developed, and I always had it, I mean, I came home with it, just that desire to try to give back, man, try to help.

Jose Burgos:

It became, prison was such a big part of my life. Like, I can't, for me, you know, coming home and just being an average citizen, for me, is not going to do it. It's not going to do it because, number one, I fully understand the impact that I had on that family that was harmed in my case. So I feel like I deserve, I owe it to them and I owe it to myself to take that experience and to turn it into something positive. And if that's helping out other prisoners that have come home, guys that are out here, all these returning citizens that are out here doing positive things, I support that 1,000%.

Jose Burgos:

I've been at different events speaking about my experience, because that story has to get out. That story has to get out. And I'm a firm believer that those of us who have done prison time, whether that be a long time or a short term, that if you guys, and when I say you guys, it's the system as a whole in general, if you're looking for a solution, I'm a big believer that we deserve a seat at that table, that solution. Because we went through it. We went through it. And there's a whole bunch of us that, no matter what we went through in there, all the bullshit that we had to endure, for us to come home and still have some type of positive mindset and want to be involved, that needs to be commended and it needs to be embraced.

Jose Burgos:



And that's really, you know, I have no problem telling my story and being as raw and honest about it because that's the only way that change is going to come. It has to be real. It has to be real and it has to be brought out and the system has to be exposed and that's how we going to create this change.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

Wow. Wow. Thank you for sharing all that with us.

Parker Kehrig:

For real.

Patrick Bates:

Wow, I mean, you pretty much, you pretty much ended up with the reflections. So do you have any other reflections, as far as this process? Just your process.

Jose Burgos:

Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of reflection, bro. A lot of reflection, man. Because at the end of the day, man, things turned out the way they turned out because of the attitude that I had embraced and developed. There came a time, again, when I had that conversation with God and I said, "Hey, there's got to be something more than this."

Jose Burgos:

And so, it was just like a, you know, just my, I started feeling comfortable in being who I was. When you fall within your skin and you have that self-love, man, you develop that... This is who I am. You embrace who I am. You like it, you like it. You don't, you don't, bro. I don't have to wear the latest trends, I don't have to look a certain way or talk a certain way, man, to, you know? This is who I am. That's what makes everybody unique. Everybody has their own little niche.

Jose Burgos:

But it just felt good, man, when I embraced that mindset. You know, me, man, I put in a lot of work, bro. I put a lot of work, man. I became a youth mentor in prison. I was training service dogs. I became a prisoner who was a prisoner observation aid looking over other prisoners that were contemplating suicide. The more positive stuff, man, I became part of, started to unfold who I really was as a person and what I was supposed to be. Even though I went through that tragedy, and as traumatic as it was, there came a point in my life where I said, you know what? I'm not going to use that shit as an excuse no more, man. It's got to get better. It's got to get better.

Jose Burgos:

And so it's been a hell of a journey, man. And a journey that a lot of wonderful people present themselves in my life, bro, in ways that I would've never imagined.

Jose Burgos:

It's like, the only way a change takes place, bro, is that when people who went through this shit are able to come out here and describe whatever it was that they went through. And so it's like, on one hand, it's like damn, it took so much away from me. As far as, took so much away from my life. But unfortunately, just the way life is, bro. Change comes up on the back end, man, of bullshit. There's a lot of people that had to suffer and experience, man, and go through a lot of shit for good things to come from it.

Jose Burgos:

I look at my situation, bro. It's, like, it's hard for me to complain, number one. As much as I disliked going through that whole process, man, it's hard for me to complain because I had a life without parole sentence. Here I am today telling my story. Free. And it all started with just, again, that mindset that I developed. I started not to live like a lifer. I was doing time, bro. I been had an outdate. That's how I carried myself.

Jose Burgos:

Even when I was, I still had to survive in prison. I still had to eat in prison. I wasn't the perfect, perfect prisoner. I wasn't the best person. I wasn't perfect in general. I still continue to make mistakes. The only difference is that every time I made a mistake, now this time around, I was pulling the lessons out of it.

Jose Burgos:

And so, you know, I was maturing. I was allowing myself to mature. Even though maybe it was underdeveloped a little bit because of the fact that I went to prison at such a young age, that maturity still, I allowed that maturity to take place.

Jose Burgos:

I remember taking, and I always share this story with people, man. As a lifer, after, like, 10 or 15 years, the parole board, they come see you. Well, they'll come see you maybe, like, one time in person. After that, they just send you, every five years, they'll send you a note saying, "Hey, you're a lifer. You ain't got nothing coming." Basically, in prison they call that a flop. Like a continuance of their sentence. And every five years, I was getting these things under my door. I would take them, throw them away or whatever. And one time... I think it was like, maybe into like the, after 10 years I got a five year flop. Five years later, I got another five year flop. But the second five year flop, what I did was, I took that flop and at the time I had my typewriter and I whited out everywhere that said, okay, we'll see you in five years.

Jose Burgos:

I slid it in that typewriter and I put parole, parole, parole, parole, all the way across it. And I stuck that thing on my bulletin board. And in every prison I got, I still got that same paper at home. You got a thousand holes on it from all the little different moves and prisons I went to. And I put that on my bulletin board, and every day when I went to sleep, I looked at it. And every time I woke up in the morning, I looked at it. And that developed that... you know, I brought that shit to existence. I believed it. I believed it so hard, and then, you know, believing in it and putting the work behind it.

Jose Burgos:

There came a time when I was able to put a real parole next to that motherfucker. I got that motherfucker. The same way that I went after that job, that Braille job. Because I believed that I could get myself in there. It's the same way that I got that parole. And even though the laws did change, of

course, that created the door for me to walk through. But I put the motherfucking work in. I put the motherfucking work in.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah, you did.

Patrick Bates:

That's right. That's right. You did.

Jose Burgos:

When I seen that light shine at the end of the tunnel in 2003 when I got that first letter, I said, shit, I'm going home. And everybody who sees me today, years later, guys that I've ran into throughout the city that knew me, all say the same shit. Man, you always said it, bro, you was coming home. You always said you was coming home. You never said, I'm going to die in prison. You always said you was coming home. And here I am.

Patrick Bates:

Well, to wrap things up with this last question. Jose, what do you want people to know about incarceration in the United States?

Jose Burgos:

What did I want to know, people to know about? It's a system, man, that has to change. It has to change, man. I know the very same way that I thought walking into prison that day and seeing all these people of color in prison... Today, this morning, somebody walked into prison, man, having that same thought. Because you can't help but to be impacted when you see it. When you see it, it's like, what the fuck? How is this possible, man? All these people of color, man. There's something wrong with that. There's something wrong with that.

Jose Burgos:

This is a country that proclaims to be past racism and past slavery. And yet you have a 13th amendment that says slavery has been abolished, and I'm paraphrasing this, except if you're a prisoner. Somebody who's committed a crime or something like that. So the constitution itself says that me, as a person inside the prison, I'm a slave. That shit got to change. It's got to change.

Jose Burgos:

And it's causing a lot of bitterness, man, in these systems. A lot of families are being broken, kids. And the thing is, is that if you go into any prison and get on a microphone and say, how many of you had a father who was in prison, 85% of them are going to raise their hands.

Jose Burgos:

So what that tells me is that the one common thing that we all have in here is the fact that we didn't have a father. We didn't have a mother. We came from drug addicted families. That's the common denominator amongst prisoners. And that has to stop. That has to stop. As a society, that has to stop.

Jose Burgos:

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You proclaim, this country proclaims to be the leader in civil rights and the leader in... you know, we're the freedom of the world. We're a fifth of the world population and yet we incarcerate more people per capita than anywhere else in the world. And out of that fifth percent of the world population, the vast majority of the guys that are in prison are people of color.

Jose Burgos:

That has to change. It's not going to change overnight. And most importantly, most importantly, the people who went through it have to have a seat at the table. Otherwise, it's not going to happen. It's not going to happen.

Jose Burgos:

I don't care how much it is you love the criminal justice reform movement that's taking place. And I love people that are involved, don't get me wrong. There's a lot of great, great people that are involved in that struggle and that fight. And they play a part in that table as well, because they do bring their education and they do have ways and means of fixing the system.

Jose Burgos:

But the people who are involved in this, they have to have a table, man. We went through it. I seen that shit. You know? I lived it. I think the country's made a lot of progress. I've seen trends come and go in prison when I, while I was in there. Never in my life have I heard the word prison reform or criminal justice reform more than I have in the last year. I'm always going to be optimistic. So I do believe that it can get better, has gotten a little better, but we got a long ways to go.

Parker Kehrig:

Yeah.

Patrick Bates:

Thank you very much, Mr. Burgos. We really appreciate you.

Parker Kehrig:

Thank you so much for all of that.

Patrick Bates:

Wow.

PART 5 OF 5 ENDS [02:20:57]