

Cellblocks To Mountaintops
Video Episode 05: Excerpts from “The Bucket”
Transcript

TEXT CARD:

"The Bucket" is an ensemble play about solitary confinement written and performed by inmates at Oregon State Penitentiary and directed by our podcast host Phil Stockton.

It won first prize in the PEN America Prison Writing Contest.

Sterling's performance in the following three scenes are based on his own transformation.

WARZONE
SCENE 1: ANGER

Ben Pervish: Truly, each breath is a blessing. We may be physically held in a place we don't want to be, but we can still appreciate the beauty of our existence and find meaning in relationships, art, and God. Young man, young man, life don't have to be perfect to be wonderful.

Sterling Cunio (WARZONE): Aye old man. Shut the fuck up, with that bullshit. All you ever do is talk about how good God is, how beautiful life, how good people help people. Man shut the fuck up. You sound like some old plantation slave nigga preaching that pie in the sky after we die bullshit. Ain't no God, ain't no heaven, just this concrete hell.

Aye old man, you ain't fooling nobody in here with that life is good bullshit. I was raised in the streets. Literally, slept on the fucking asphalt, seen mothers abandoned their own babies for dope. They own baby. Because human beings? Man, we the worst type of animals when desperate to survive. Aye where your proof anyway? Where your proof of a loving God and a beautiful life, huh? Ain't none. This shit don't exist in the warzone. Where all we do is shoot our enemy. Policeman shoot crook, crook shoot crook, solider man shoot bad man, and wild ass kids running around shootin' anybody. Where's your God in all that?

Troy Ramsey: What about Jesus?

Sterling Cunio:: Jesus. Man, that cat ain't coming back to save anybody. And if he do, he'd better have on a bulletproof vest otherwise he get nailed again, I hammer him myself.

Hey, yo, y'all hear this old slave fool? Talkin' about we can find art in here? Man, ain't no art in the bucket, just a bunch of G.E.D. dummies talking about the politics of politicians and none of them give a fuck about rehabilitation. Yet you clowns sit around talking about who best for the country. Man fuck this country. It ain't never cared about us.

Hey, yo. You call your old slave shit art if you want to, but the truth is, you're just wasting your days coloring to keep from admitting that you done gone crazy.

Now shut the fuck up so I can get some sleep. Stupid, silly motherfucker always talking that life's good bullshit.

WARZONE
SCENE 2: 27 years Later, SORROW

Sterling Cunio: Aye trench mate. Trench, mate. You awake over there? Yeah, I know it's early, but uh, I wanted to talk to you before the rest of these guys woke up. Ya know, we done became pretty good friends down here at the bottom. So, when it's all said and done, I want at least one other person to know the truth. Today is 27 years, been in prison. Yeah. Came to prison 27 years ago today. A young thug. Angry at the world. Hostile, to everybody. Spent the last nine years in the bucket.

And honestly, the ghost of all them innocent people I harmed. They startin' to haunt me, real ghosts haunt. I'm tired of it man. Tired of the regret, the wasted potential. I'm tired of sleeping by myself, every night. No woman, no hugs, no touching, no kissing. Just me, by myself on that fucked up mattress. I'm tired of being hungry, and wishing for some food that was hot, and not served through a hole in the door like some type of food truck. I'm tired of these bright ass lights waking me up with a headache every day.

I'm tired of waking up being surrounded by misery, hostility, and noise. The hatred, it's made me weary. I'm tired of not seeing the sun. And something, something in my soul misses the moon. I'm tired of being a prisoner. I'm already everywhere I'll ever be. My humanity, forever stained. Fuck this. I'm through. It's over, it's over I'm done.

Inmate: Warzone don't do it man.

Sterling Cunio: Aye, ain't no changing my mind. It's my death, it's the last thing I ever get to do. Let me do it with my ideas of dignity. My mind's made up. If I'm destined for hell, I might as well arrive on my own terms. Skip the cancers, the organ failures, and cheat the state out a few decades. I just hope that some part of death is dark and quiet, so that I can finally hear some silence and escape these lights.

Who knows? Maybe in the afterlife, God will grant me some forgiveness if I can explain that it was really pain that caused me to hurt so many. Hey, enough of that. You want my property or what?

WARZONE
SCENE 3: PEACE, 43 IN

Sterling Cunio: Hey good morning, everybody.

Inmates: So, Warzone Willie, how are you feeling man?

Sterling Cunio: Blessed. Happy to be alive.

Inmate: Oh, man hey, you ever finish that poem?

Sterling Cunio: Matter of fact I did, finished it just last night. I feel like it took me a whole lifetime, but I think I'm gonna call it, uh... Willie's Life Gems from a Warzone.

Key Davis: Okay, you gonna let us hear it.

Sterling Cunio: Yeah, yeah I say it. In these concrete tombs, that most call cells, resistance is survival. Art and creativity enables some to transcend negativity. Sleepless nights, the perfect time to write. Cold, hungry, and alone, we draw pictures of warm places with abundant food for many companions. Barren environment void of stimuli, we make gardens of our mind. Planting seed and fertilizing self-actualization we sing songs of resistance heard by none because we are the voiceless who transform the STRUGGLE into the substance of stanza.

Cellblock scholars, handcuffed residency, master's degrees in captivity, and unaccredited doctorates of deprivation. We in theaters of the oppress use ink from Sunday comics in coffee-stained toothbrushes to paint bright murals inside of dark tombs, where monk like meditation reveals the inner alchemy necessary to transform tombs to monasteries. Paranormal paradox. Instead of being spiritually crushed, we evolve in the box, thrown in the hole and told we never see the sun again. We are those that still blow kisses at the moon. Cause indomitable wills create artistry out of sufferance, and thus, even with handcuffs on wrist, we can build peace from inside the prison industrial complex. Where resilience is survival and love our salvation.

Key Davis: Hey old man! Shut the fuck up

Inmates: with that bullshit!

Inmate: Talking about love in this place...