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## **EFREN PAREDES, JR. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION DURING INCARCERATION**

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In 1990, while at the Michigan Reformatory, Efren earned his GED certificate. He was 16-years-old at the time. Because of his age he was not officially awarded his GED certificate by the State of Michigan until he turned 17. Prior to receiving his GED certificate, Efren received his GED scores from Washington, D.C., and was permitted to attend Montcalm Community College at the Michigan Reformatory. Ironically, he could attend college at age 16, but could not receive his GED certificate from the State of Michigan until he turned 17.

While attending college, Efren also worked for a special education counselor/teacher in the ABE/GED school. He was later promoted to school office clerk where he maintained employment until being transferred to another correctional facility in 1991.

Efren was transferred to various correctional facilities between early-1991 and late-1998. In 1991, while at the Riverside Correctional Facility, he successfully completed an office occupations class that consisted of enhancing typing skills; learning to operate a dictating machine; record keeping; filing; operating an electronic printing calculator; and learning how to use a computer.

Equipped with the knowledge and skills he acquired while previously working as a school clerk and completing the office occupations class, Efren began working as a teacher's aide in 1992. He went to his new employment highly recommended by the office occupations' instructor, who recommended Efren be hired for any teacher's aide, school clerk, library clerk, etc., position.

Efren's desire to help others receive a sound education increased as he advanced his knowledge of various teaching methodologies. This resulted in him working as a teacher's aide at four different correctional facilities. Often Efren was much younger than the individuals he tutored.

While employed as a teacher's aide at the State Prison of Southern Michigan in 1995, Efren enrolled in another office occupations class while being a teacher's aide. Here he learned how to operate the newest in computer technology and software (e.g., Windows, WordPerfect, Microsoft Word, etc.) and remained in the course until he received new employment.

In 1995, Efren was hired by Michigan Braille Transcribing Service—now Michigan Braille Transcribing Fund (MBTF). MBTF is a non-profit corporation that transcribes textbooks into braille for the blind and visually impaired. It is the largest braille production facility in the nation.

Less than a year after being hired at MBTF—at age 24—Efren became a certified literary braille transcriber. He received his certification from the U.S. Library of Congress, in Washington, D.C. Efren remains employed with MBTF and enjoys his work immensely. He has been working for MBTF now 10 years.

The only time Efren has not worked for MBTF during the past 10 years was when he was transferred from the G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility (JCF) to the Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility for 10 months from December 1999 to September 2000. While at the Baraga prison Efren was employed as a teacher's aide

for three different teachers.

Upon his release from prison, Efren hopes to continue his work for the blind and visually impaired. He devotes a great deal of time and energy to his skill as a braille transcriber and is confident he will continue touching the lives of many in the years to come.

Efren has received outstanding work reports from his employment supervisors. He has been described as displaying maturity well beyond his years; having initiative and motivation which helps to foster the learning in others; a tremendous asset to a positive and productive classroom setting and environment; possessing excellent typing and file developing skills; one who exhibited highly developed interpersonal and problem-solving skills; among many other traits.

In January 2006 Efren earned a Doctorate's Degree in Religious Philosophy from Universal Life Church. He will soon be pursuing a degree in psychology once approved by the prison he is housed at.

During his incarceration Efren has been unemployed only a short time between transfers from one prison to another. Overall, Efren has maintained steady employment in the field of education and has done so of his own volition.

Efren has been an active board member of Latino organizations such as Latin American Spanish-Speaking Organization (LASSO) and Hispanic Americans Striving Towards Advancement (HASTA). The organizations seek to increase awareness about Latino culture, history, education, and politics, and work to assist prisoners with their re-entry back to society. Efren has served the organizations in various capacities, most often as President.

Efren has also received certificates for his voluntary participation in group counseling. In 1993 he voluntarily participated in the creation of a videotape to be used by the warden of the Michigan Reformatory for a presentation to the Michigan Bar Association. The video reflected the sentiments of young men who were charged as adults in the adult court system when they were juveniles (i.e., what it was like to experience the juvenile justice process; go through the waiver process; and finally be sentenced to an adult institution).

According to the warden, "[T]here is quite a bit of interest in the juvenile waiver process and I think those directly affected should be heard when changes are considered."

In the Spring of 2004 Efren participated in a 12-week University of Michigan Creative Writing Workshop held at the G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility. The workshop facilitators were college students involved in the University of Michigan Prisoner Creative Arts Project (PCAP). While in the poetry workshop Efren was an active participant. He composed several extraordinary writings of poetry which have been well received by their readers.

Efren's writings speak volumes about his maturity, the success of his self-education while in prison, and poignantly describe his wrongful incarceration—providing an unparalleled glimpse into the experience he has endured, not previously so eloquently articulated by others his age.

At the conclusion of the workshop prison administrators permitted the workshop facilitators and participants to read some of the poetry they composed during the workshop to the prisoner population in the facility's gymnasium. Efren was selected to emcee the event which was attended by the prison's Assistant Deputy of

Programs, University of Michigan professor Buzz Alexander, and students involved in PCAP.

In September 2004 Efren applied to enroll in a second University of Michigan Creative Writing Workshop at the G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility. His application was accepted and he participated in another workshop.

May 9, 2005 Efren received a letter from Buzz Alexander, University of Michigan, Department of English Language and Literature, professor — and founder of the University of Michigan Prison Creative Arts Project — informing him that his poem titled, "Naturicide," was selected to be published in an anthology of poems for the 2005 United Nations World Environmental Day.

The anthology, "A Crack in the Concrete," was displayed at the United Nations World Environmental Day in San Francisco, California, June 3-5, 2005. It is published by the University of Michigan Prison Creative Arts Project and the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

Another one of Efren's poems, "Snowflakes," was selected by the International Library of Poetry in 2006 for publication in the book "Immortal Verses". According to the International Library of Poetry, Efren's poem was selected on the basis of his "unique talent and artistic vision."

In April 2006 Efren was also nominated as poet of the year by the International Society of Poets and will be formally inducted July 20-23, 2006 as an International Poet of Merit and Honored Member of the International Society of Poets for 2006-2007. Due to his incarceration Efren was unable to attend the 20th Anniversary International Society of Poets Convention and Symposium.

Efren has also served on the Warden's Forum at various prisons across the State of Michigan. The Warden's Forum is a group of prisoners at each Michigan prison elected by the prisoner population to address their grievances and submit proposals to the prison Warden to help improve conditions at the prison. Warden's Forum members meet with the prison Warden once a month.

Generally each prisoner housing unit elects two prisoners to serve in this capacity for six month terms. In most cases there are anywhere between 10 to 20 members that serve on the Warden's Forum to represent a population of between 500 to 1,700 prisoners. During the several terms Efren has served on the Warden's Forum he has been elected to serve as Warden's Forum Chairman on a number of occasions.

Efren receives weekly visits from his family and he speaks with them daily via telephone. During his nearly 18 years of incarceration Efren's family has visited him every opportunity allowed by Michigan prison policy. Efren has received over 1,200 visits during his incarceration. Maintaining frequent contact with society, and enjoying strong support from family and friends, has significantly contributed to Efren's continued growth and development. Having strong family ties has also greatly diminished the prospects of Efren embracing destructive behaviors and other negative characteristics prevalent in the adult prison setting.

An avid reader, Efren immerses himself daily in books, magazines, journals and newspapers in incessant pursuit of knowledge and new information. The vast majority of young men who enter the adult prison setting as adolescents frequently exhibit negative behavior, have no interest in educating themselves academically, and often develop into more sophisticated criminals. Efren has not followed in those footsteps and, when juxtaposed with others his age, his remarkable success is an anomaly in the prison context. He refuses to sit in prison and allow his mind and talents to deteriorate.

As of the date of this writing, Efren has remained misconduct-free for 11 years. This is a remarkable feat to accomplish, particularly being housed at the prisons Efren has been incarcerated at during that time which are well-known for their high rate of issuing misconduct reports to prisoners. Remaining misconduct-free for several years is indicative of Efren's exceptional conduct. ■

*To learn more about Efren Paredes, Jr. visit [The Injustice Must End \(TIME\) web site at www.4Efren.com](http://www.4Efren.com). To stay abreast of all the latest developments in Efren's case, and read various writings about Efren (as well as articles written by Efren himself), you can visit our blog at <http://4Efren.blogspot.com>. You can also sign a petition to support Efren's release by visiting our On-line petition which can be found at [www.petitionspot.com/petitions/4Efren](http://www.petitionspot.com/petitions/4Efren).*

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