

Can you imagine what it would be like to be sentenced to 280 months in prison at the young age of 18?

That is 23 years and four months to be exact, a lifetime by any standards, day for day, and no chance for early parole. I know what it's like because that's my life and I'm living it now.

As I write this, I'm sitting in my small cell here at the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem, and I'm wondering if this story will give you a different perspective on prison life or prisoners for that matter.

I am surrounded by people, but no one is like me. We are all different. Some will be getting out tomorrow, and some will never taste the sweetness of freedom ever again. This will be their forever, and hundreds more, perhaps thousands will be touched by DOC (Department of Corrections) by the time I make it home; this life is not fun!

I could speak extensively about the struggles and injustices that take place in here on a daily basis.

The heartaches and headaches and frustrations that I've had to tolerate for the past 15 years are very real and they affect not only myself, but the community in more ways than one.

But to me there is something else that surpasses in importance even the harshest of mistreatments and living conditions in prison, my 16-year-old daughter, Angeles.

I was a kid myself when she was born in 2001. That's when I felt true happiness for the first time in my life, but I didn't know what else to expect or how to process what happened next. It was a bittersweet moment and to this day I continue to feel the same way.

Angeles was one of many premature babies that were born that year. At 1 lb. and 8 oz. she was a miracle child. She spent the first 3 months of her life inside an incubator in the Doernbecher neo-natal unit at OHSU in Portland. Her mom and I visited a few times a week, but were not allowed to touch her, and that was something that I had not anticipated.

I always thought that being a dad would be different. During those 3 months Angeles went through several surgeries, two of which were major, and it was scary. Suddenly being a dad was a scary thing to me. But when she was released from the hospital things became somewhat normal. I

changed diapers, made bottles, and I helped bathe her. I always held her in my arms until she fell asleep, and whenever she cried, I always worried that she was hungry or hurting because underneath the pink little outfits on her tiny body there were

several scars left behind by the same surgeries that saved her life, but no one could see them. No one knew they were there. They were reminders to me of how lucky I was to have her and how easily she could be taken away from me.

Now, this is my story so I will be honest and tell it like it is. I've been gang-affiliated since I was 14 years old and back then I didn't see, or couldn't see, the difference between what was important and what I "wanted" to be important in my life. I had

no sense of direction or purpose; no goals or motivation. I was just a kid trying to figure it out on my own.

One night I went out as usual and I never came back. I've been here in prison ever since. It has been 15 long years. I'm no longer a kid! I'm still a dad, but I don't feel like one, however, I have learned a lot about myself, who I truly am and where I want to be in the future. I will be 34 years old in a few months, and I'm happy to announce that in eight years, I will be released from prison. I will get a second chance in life.

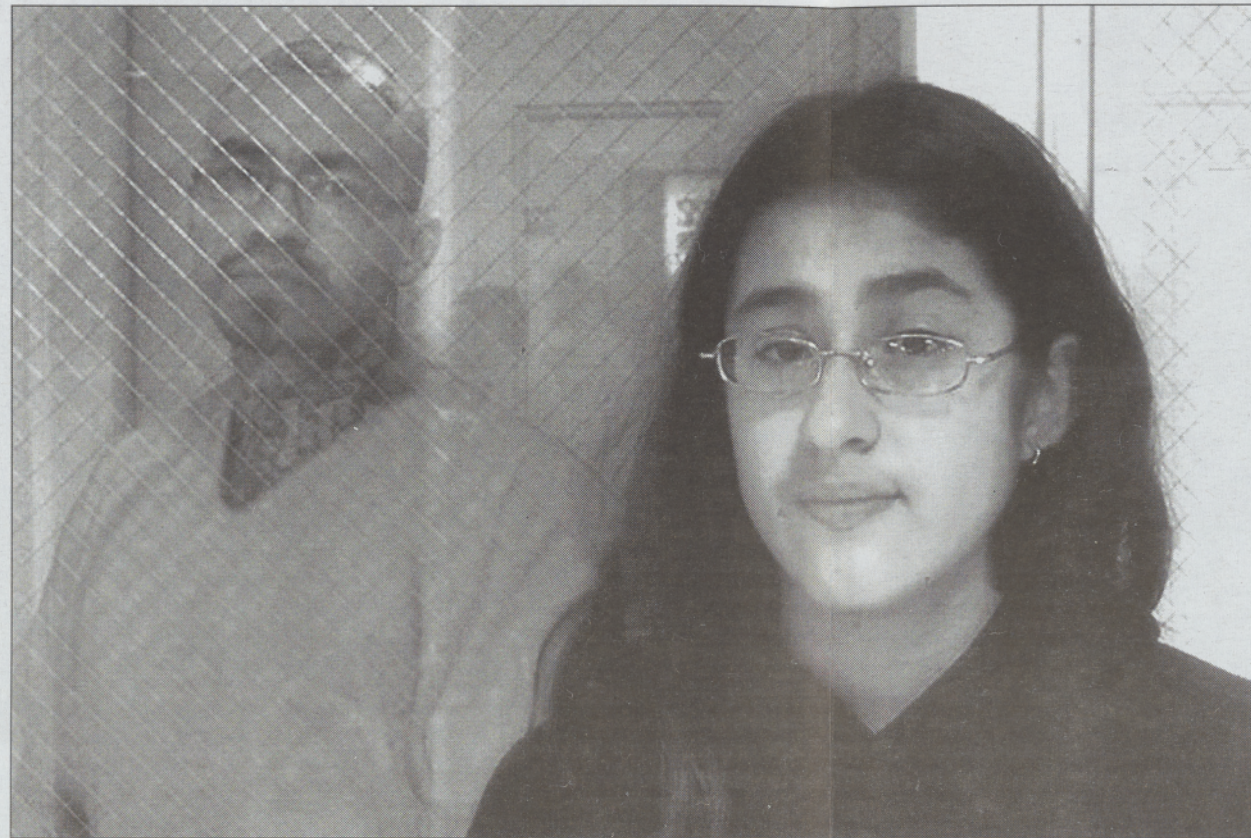
What I have lost I will never get back! I left a little baby who is a teenager now. Soon she will be a woman, and I'm OK with that.

I have a personal belief, my own philosophy if you will. I believe that life does not teach us, we teach ourselves, and we learn only if we are willing and ready to learn. I have learned a lot! I have goals now. My whole outlook on life has changed dramatically. My way of thinking, my ideas and even my taste in music and literature has changed, but part of me still struggles with my reality. The reality that I created for myself and for my loved ones, for my daughter.

She says that I'm the best dad because I'm funny and I listen to her and because I know how to give her advice in a way that makes sense to her and because I have always found ways to get her something on her birthday or for Christmas. Because I write and call constantly and because I send pictures and drawings and I share my poetry with her. Because I engage her and challenge her mentally with questions about history and Islam - which is her religion.

She says my tattoos look cool, but I know

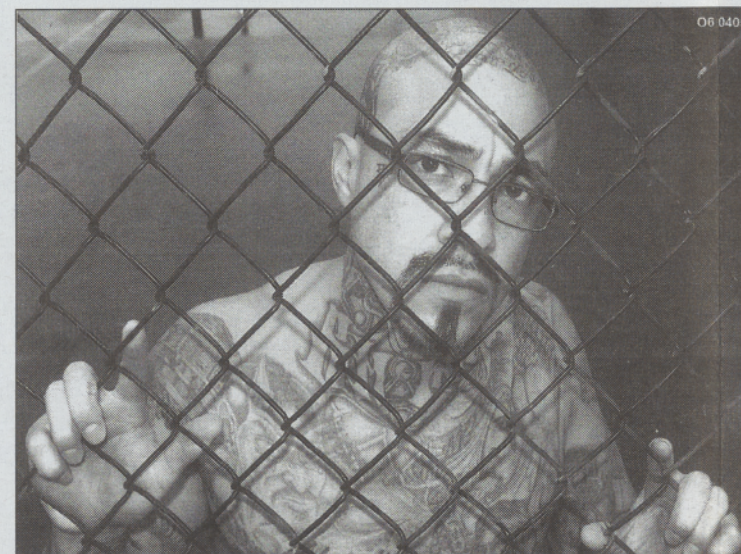
*Enrique is an inmate at Oregon State Penitentiary who enjoys writing, drawing, reading and learning about history, religion and places. He says most of all, he likes to meet positive people.*



Enrique Bautista visits with his daughter in 2014 at Two Rivers Correctional Institution. She was 14, and he said he was being kept in the hole. She had been crying just before this photo was taken.

# My daughter

By Enrique Bautista



Enrique at Oregon State Penitentiary in 2016 before his last stint in IMU, which is a form of solitary confinement. He hopes his writing will help people see beyond his tattooed exterior to the man inside.

Read Street Roots four-part report on Oregon state inmates' experiences with solitary confinement at [news.streetroots.org/caged](http://news.streetroots.org/caged)

she secretly wishes I wouldn't get more.

We share a love for books and over the years we have been building our own library.

I order books in the mail for her which she reads at home. I order a copy for myself which I read in my cell, and we discuss the books in the crowded but cozy visiting room here at the OSP. There used to be a program with the same concept to bond with one's children through the reading of books back when Angeles' favorite was "Diary of a Wimpy Kid." When she used to sit on my lap for me to tell her stories of when she was a baby and I was still out. Eventually she became "too old" to sit on my lap anymore. And the board games we used to play became boring. The card tricks weren't amusing anymore and I was forced to learn new ways to be a better dad from prison.

I took the parenting class which is offered to us a couple of times a year here at OSP. I read countless books and I participated in different seminars and groups such as the mentorship class through the UHURU SASA club also here at OSP.

In 2004 I began to record my daughter's growth and development as well as our bond and our father daughter relationship because some day I want her to see that no matter how far I was from her, she was always in my heart and no matter how many months and years I spent in isolation trying not to lose my mind, she was always with me, giving me motivation and strength to make it out of there as a man and not as a creature on medication like a lot of people end up turning into only because they have no support from anyone, anywhere.

I have bought a journal on canteen for \$6. The best investment I've ever made. In that journal I've written stuff ranging from the loss of her first tooth and to the first concert she went to and the bully at school that took her book while she was reading it and threw it in the trash can. How that made me feel and how she must have felt. I also put pictures in there to show her how she went from knee height to being in high school and having a crush on Luis.

I plan on giving it to her on her 18th birthday. The same age I was when I came to prison and I hope that in that journal she finds the answers to some of the questions she may have in the future.

But my question is will I ever be a real dad? Will I ever "feel" like a real dad? I don't know. All I know is that my daughter loves me and I feel it when she wraps her skinny arms around me and she says "I love you dad."

**ERIC LIU, from page 7**

little bubble that will be drained of its vitality, of its creativity, of its diversity.

A city is a microcosm of humanity. You want diversity of class. You want diversity of race, of worldview and perspective. You want diversity of ways of solving problems. You want scientists, but you also want artists. You want tech people, but you also want journalists. You want folks who are builders with their hands and people that are builders with code.

**M.W.:** How does class play into this, in terms of political power?

**E.L.:** When we who are middle class or upper middle class or prosperous take inventory of our various forms of capital, political, social, relationship capital, we face the choice. Are you going to hoard it, or are you going to circulate it? We need to be neighbor to neighbor, member of the Y to member of the Y, member of a community club to member of a community club, peer to peer, be changing a culture to say, "Hey, we have a responsibility to start circulating our privilege." That means investing these various forms of capital to help empower people who are right now more on the margins of political power.

**M.W.:** The Seattle City Council recently passed a law barring landlords from discriminating on the basis of past criminal record. And landlords are saying, well then we have to deal with these people who may not be the best tenants.

**E.L.:** Yeah. We have to deal with "these people." Their risk perhaps has increased nominally, but what they mainly have to deal with is the stories they have in their head of who these people are. It's analogous to the conversations that are unfolding in the country post-Charlottesville about white privilege and white supremacy. It's easy to say, "I'm against white supremacy," when what you mean is people carrying torches in a parade. It's different to say, "I'm against white supremacy," when that means if you're white, "I'm going to give up on the college alumni admissions preference for my white kid." Or "I'm going to defer in a meeting when a person of color might have an idea that I also had."

**M.W.:** Are we really more powerful than we think?

**E.L.:** I open my book with this story of the tomato pickers in Immokalee, Fla., who were living in conditions of modern-day slavery until the early 1990s, when they committed the magic act of organizing. That allowed them to generate brand-new power where it didn't previously exist. They created this cascade of change, in the working conditions, but then in the broader agricultural economy. Almost anybody who's reading my book has more starting capacity and capital than the tomato pickers of Immokalee did in 1992. If they could do it, why can't we?

Reprinted from Real Change News, Seattle, Wash.