

Introduction

In a single generation, America's prison population quadrupled, making us the world's leading jailer. More than one in every one hundred Americans are behind bars today, compared to one in one thousand forty years ago—an increase so explosive it has cost the nation over three trillion dollars to contain it. The incarceration boom was led by California, where more people are imprisoned per capita than anywhere else worldwide. It was here where I saw first-hand how prisons have become a dysfunctional institution, factories of violence run by savage gangs on *both* sides of the law.

My career encompassed not only this rapid expansion but the blurring line between good and evil. For sixteen years I worked as a guard in California's highest security prisons, serving meals to gang bosses and serial killers in lockdown cells and patrolling yards filled with the world's most violent felons. I belonged to the elite Investigative Services Unit, responsible for solving horrific crimes that took place inside the prison walls. While employed with the original *supermax* prison—a nickname for maximum security prisons—Salinas Valley State Prison, I was a decorated veteran with senior stripes when I blew the whistle on a secret gang of corrupt, sadistic guards who called themselves the *Green Wall*.

My story, *The Green Wall*, is the true and still unfolding drama of my fight to uphold the integrity and honor of the law enforcement system against a corrupt California state prison that turned against me for revealing the truth. My actions were further challenged as the government and media failed me at every turn, putting me and my family's life at risk.

Ordered by the warden of Salinas Valley State Prison and the Internal Affairs Unit, I was to secretly report ongoing atrocities committed by my own colleagues—a prison guard gang calling themselves the Green Wall. My efforts to expose the Green Wall gang were betrayed by the prison warden himself and his superiors.

I was labeled a snitch and ostracized, my career destroyed, my marriage ruined, and my life threatened so often that I was forced into hiding. Only reluctantly did I make my story public and become a government witness.

My story is a classic tale of personal integrity in the most dishonest place imaginable, of courage amidst brutality. It parallels the story of Frank Serpico; the New York City cop who exposed corruption in the city's police department in the 1970's and became the subject of the classic book, *Serpico*. Reading his story during my exile inspired me, while giving me the courage to come forward publicly, as Serpico did.

My televised state senate testimony exposed a scandal that led to terminations, sudden retirements, and a restructuring of the system that is still underway. In 2005, I won a whistleblower lawsuit against the California Department of Corrections. Prison guards are employed under non-disclosure contracts that normally prevent them from telling their stories, but I was exempted from this restriction as part of my settlement. This victory has allowed me to share my story.

“You have to stand tall when you stand alone. You have to stand tallest when no one else will stand at all. You can't ignore the truth.”

D. J. Vodicka