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I write, consult and lecture on white collar crime situations.

## Escape Artist: Memoir of A Visionary Artist on Death Row

*ESCAPE ARTIST REVIEW*

*BY WALT PAVLO, FORBES.COM*

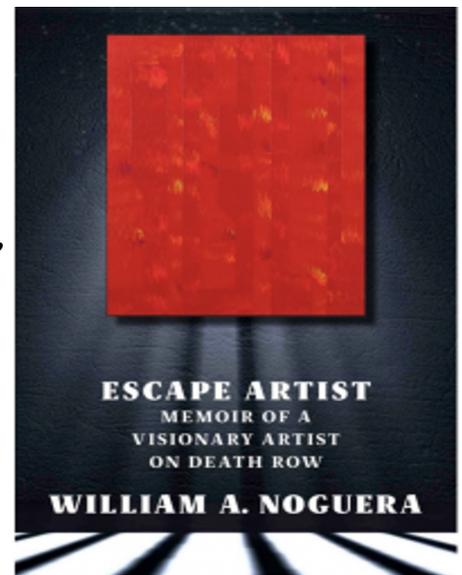
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*Noguera writes about his journey of being condemned to death by an Orange County jury for murder in 1983 and reflections on his life, his art, and the role it played in his repentance from a teenage boy to the man he is today.*

*The book is a chilling look through his eyes with nothing to lose in this life except going to his grave without being understood. Noguera is a gifted storyteller whose story is not only valuable, but must be told.*

*Each chapter catapults readers through his teen years into his life in prison, leading to the deeper meaning he discovered within himself, his rehabilitation and the importance of sharing this ascension to help others.*

*Noguera's story is one of reflection, discipline, creativity and, above all, hope.*



My first visit with [William Noguera](#) was in June 2013 at San Quentin's Death Row visiting area. [I had been introduced to Noguera through the executive director of his Trust, Melissa Ysais.](#) I was led into a cage of 5x10 with three chairs inside, then I was locked in awaiting Noguera. Once he arrived, we spent the next five hours talking about sports, art and life. Shortly after that visit, he asked me to take a read of the beginnings of a book about his life on death row and his transformation as a result of his art. That book has come to life and will be released in January 2018.

In [Escape Artist: Memoir Of A Visionary Artist On Death Row](#), Noguera writes about his journey of being condemned to death by an Orange County CA jury for murder in 1983. The book is a reflection on his life, his art and the role that art played in his repentance.

The book is a chilling look through the eyes of a man who has nothing to lose in this life except to going to his grave without being understood. Noguera told me that has always been his biggest fear and the reason he embraced art from his first day in San Quentin. *"My motivation from the first day that I started to create art was the day that I said I wanted to prove to that jury and that judge that I was a better person."* Initially housed in the San Quentin's Adjustment Center for a month, he drew a mural of the San Clemente coast where he surfed as a teenager. Emerging from this solitary confinement, a guard said of the drawing, *"That's amazing, I've never seen anything like it. You're gifted beyond words. You're an artist."* It was the beginning of his devotion to the arts.

Each chapter of the book leaps from his life in prison, to his teen years where he both revered and feared his abusive father. He captures his art in detail and provides the motivations that led him to create with limited supplies, space and light. What he has learned of art, he has learned himself inside the prison walls of San Quentin.

I invited Noguera speak to a business class I taught at [Endicott College](#) back in 2015. At the time, our class discussions were about people who had gone through an ethical crisis ... employees at WorldCom, Enron, and general cases from the news. I wondered if we could find someone who was in the midst of an ethical crisis right now and would be willing to share it. William Noguera came to mind.

Noguera is a disciplined man, who for three decades has lived inside San Quentin among the most hardened criminals. He wakes up, works out, meditates, paints, writes and does his job at the prison. Around him is temptation to deal drugs, get involved in violence, join a gang ... all things that could earn him money and a reputation among the other inmates. Instead, he chooses to live another life inside of the hell that is San Quentin. To me, Noguera was the man in an ethical crisis every day of his existence.

Noguera enthusiastically accepted the opportunity to share his story with my students and on a cold January day in Beverly, MA, he called into my class. *"This call is from an inmate at San Quentin State Prison,"* said the recorded preamble, *"press '5' to accept the call."* My cell phone, to which Noguera was calling, was plugged into the room's acoustic sound system so all 40 students could hear. I sensed their nervousness as they all anticipated the call. *"Hi Walt,"* Noguera said ... this was about as real as it can get.

He spoke for 30 minutes, interrupted only once by the 15-minute call limit that necessitated that he call back. The students heard about art, his routines, how the other inmates left him to himself and how he lived a life giving back through his art work. They were mesmerized. Here was an example of a person living on death row choosing a life of meaning, a life of living by an ethical code. Everyone in the classroom was awestruck.

Noguera's message allowed us to understand more about him, more importantly, how much he has overcome to become the artist that he is today. Many of us have a curiosity about what life is like for inmates on death row, but our expectations for redemption are minimal. In Noguera's case, our students felt a sense of awe in his ability to create, a sense of hope that he could find purpose in his life and an understanding of the role that discipline plays in all our lives. It was truly a message these students will carry with them for years to come.

Noguera is as gifted a storyteller as he is a painter or sculptor. His canvas is a view into the mind of a brilliant man whose subject is the prison that holds him captive. With his art, he not only escapes his cell, he provides a glimpse of what powers we have ourselves to free our spirits to be better. The reviews of [Escape Artist \(here, here and here\)](#) provide a better understanding of the power of this work.

When Walt is not writing on white collar crime, he works with experts who present on it. Check out 500 Pearl Street Speakers or contact him at [walt.pavlo@500pearlstreet.com](mailto:walt.pavlo@500pearlstreet.com)