



**Paula J. Pearlman, M.D.'81** - I have been an emergency medicine physician at Kaiser Permanente in West Los Angeles for nearly 30 years. Every time I step into the Emergency Department, I am exposed to the vast and fantastic cultural and ethnic diversity in this city. I meet and intimately interact with people of every color and from every socio-economic stratum. We are different, yet we are the same. It's a gift to know and embrace this truth - a gift that comes from this great city.

Compelled to give something back, about eight years ago, I started volunteering to do tattoo removal at Homeboy Industries. The organization was founded by Father Gregory Boyle and is recognized as the largest gang intervention and re-entry into society program in the county. *Nothing Stops a Bullet Like a Job* and *Jobs Not Jail* are their mottos.

The tattoo-removal program is aimed at eradicating the inked obstacles that stand in the way of employment for ex-gang members, ex-prisoners, young kids from detention camps who arrive in shackles, and , anyone who wants to make a change to improve his or her life and self-esteem. I happily return to my "homies" several times a month to "blast away the past." The tattoo removal is done by laser; it's free but it's a painful, intense process; it hurts way more taking off the ink than putting it on. After waiting on a list for up to two years, the patients begin treatments, returning every six-to-eight weeks for five-to-10 sessions, until all the ink is gone. The stories I hear are sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes uplifting. I've learned so much. And every single person says, "Thank you."

For me, it is immensely gratifying. I am able to contribute to the shot at redemption that my fellow Los Angelinos seek to help those who grew up under the same L.A. sky, yet light years away from my happy childhood in Westwood. These people bravely walk through the doors of Homeboy Industries toward a better life by erasing some of their past.

For more information about Homeboy Industries or to volunteer in the laser tattoo-removal program, visit <http://homeboy-industries.org>