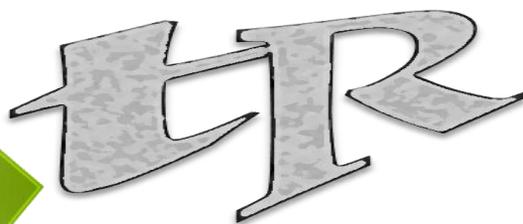


TWO ROADS ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDE 2023

Volume 36

A NEW YEAR OF
APPRECIATION

New Format!



TO ALL READERS

Our monthly e-zine focuses on three phases: *Rehabilitation, Restoration and Re-Entry*. These are the necessary phases of a successful incarceration and transition back to society.

Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

Restoration reflects the refined version of one's self that we've become and our restored self seeks service of self-worth to the world.

Finally, *Re-Entry* is the ultimate goal one accomplishes through class study, self-study or modification programs completed during one's incarceration.

We are TWO ROADS, and we want to be a viable resource for our readers. We serve you by sharing the honest chronicle of the stories and service of the incarcerated women and men of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Join our movement.

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

****Please Note:** All letters, emails and photos will be reviewed by personnel **PRIOR** to being received by the TWO ROADS editorial staff. All information that is not pertaining to TWO ROADS will be discarded. Thank you for respecting the guidelines.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

We are committed to empowering those most impacted by harmful systems to become dynamic leaders and agents of change. Using the connecting, restorative power of these stories we hope to do our part in bringing us all together to overcome societal ills, such as violence, poverty and mass incarceration.

DISCLAIMER

TWO ROADS is built for bringing integrity and honesty about the people who are submitting their stories. There are times where the editors are required to make changes due to spelling errors or grammatical structure. Please know that **we will never take away your voice**; however, understand that we take pride in our work and strive to be the best in our representation of your voice. Thank you.

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Illinois.gov

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The **Two Roads** E-Zine is published by a group at Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center who honestly chronicles the stories and service of the incarcerated men ...

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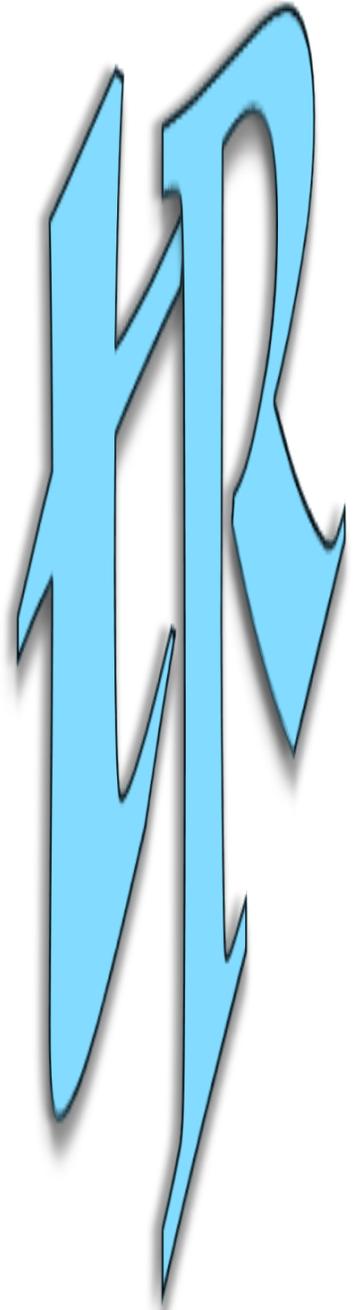
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All the people here at TWO ROADS
would like to welcome and introduce
you ALL to our newest member:

Mr. Francisco "Sisco" Sanchez



He comes to us from Hill C.C. and brings with him several decades of experience and wisdom in rehabilitation. We believe here at TWO ROADS that he brings with him the knowledge that will be well received by all who read and enjoy his writings—balanced by gravity and humor. He also brings with him an ambitious, assertive creativity and design outlook which unapologetically affirms diversity breeds innovation AND GROWTH.

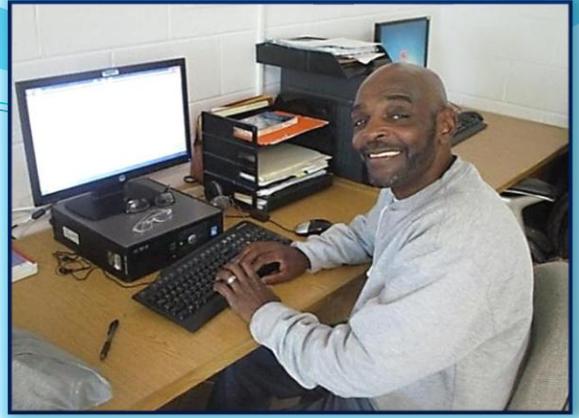
Attitudes of Gratitude is his first work of art!

*"It is the disposition of the
thought that altereth the
nature of the thing."*

-John Lyly

ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDE

EDITORS TAKE KELLY "KB" BENNETT



I open today with a very heavy heart, you see once again I am dealing with the loss of someone special to me. Over the many years I have spent as an individual in custody I have grown to know and love many of the men who have stood shoulder to shoulder with me in the trenches. And today I would like to acknowledge them all, the ones who are still a part of this journey; in addition, give a special thanks to the ones who did not make it this far. You are forever in my heart and my prayers, thank you all for the all the love and support over the years; you all mean the world to me. Always been the family away from the family. Could not have made it this far without you all; God knows as well as you do who you are. Now to the staff who has played major parts in my development as a student, mentor, and advisor, thank you for your understanding and compassion. I have grown to be a great man with purpose; a light worker thanks to you.

The clinical service staff at Hill C.C will forever have a special place in my heart; they were a driving force for this attitude of gratitude.

Mrs. Sharer and Mrs. Overton are two people who I will never be able to say enough about, through the deepest darkest moments they were there to counsel me—to experience the loss of loved ones back to back to back was a devastating blow to my heart, soul, and psyche. Yet with care, empathy and understanding, Mrs. Overton and Mrs. Sharer took the time to explain to me the many stages of grief; also how to handle and deal with them properly. Sharing that knowledge with me afforded me many opportunities to assist the men I came into contact with whom may also have experienced a loss. This is commonplace for individuals in custody, thank you for giving me the tools to help another in their time of need.

This attitude of gratitude also comes from the many men I have had the pleasure of just having an honest sincere talk without the mask we are forced to wear. Often times because of fear of being hurt or even vulnerable, we do not allow anyone to know the authentic person until a certain level of comfortability. I have become grateful to the many men who allowed me to get to know the authentic man. During my mentorship years I cultivated many relationships I treasure today, and will forever. Those relationships are some of the roots of my attitude of gratitude.

To the amazing woman I had the pleasure of making my wife: Mrs.

Bennett . I have known this woman since the age of 15 and I found myself in awe as to the woman she has grown to be. This strong survivor of a woman, she came back into my life when I had no intentions of entering any relationship. Because I still had a decade to complete, to pay my debt to society for the pain I had cause many people—which I really regret to this day and will forever. With her warm demeanor and calming disposition, she taught me about empathy and sacrifice for the greater good—all the while loving me until I forgave myself to love me and her back—sharing her vast knowledge of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, bringing me to foster a great relationship with him as well. My relationship fueled the need for me to strengthen my love and relationship with my siblings, which today is great. The many years away from them all has done nothing but created this unbreakable bond of love, trust, and loyalty .This is why I awaken each day with an Attitude of Gratitude. I am blessed and highly favored to have so many great people in my life.

Thank you for your time and please, surround yourself with people who will, without intention, foster this same attitude within you.

EDITOR'S TAKE REVISITED

Since the start of this issue a lot has changed in my journey, which I am the type of man who welcomes change. You

see my time here at **KLSRC** has come to an end and the next part of this journey has begun to take shape. That leaves me thinking once again of the many things and people I am grateful for. KLSRC has been and will continue to be a true blessing to those who take full advantage of the many opportunities of growth they offer. For that was the premise behind the creation of the topic **ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDE**. See, we here at **TWO ROADS** found ourselves thankful for this platform and the many responsibilities that come with it. The entire staff here have been a blessing to me and I would like to thank each and every one of them. I can say each day was filled with a sense of joy (attitude) as I went through my day. I could go on naming individual people and their contribution to my growth; however, that would be unfair to those looking for the Kewanee experience. So what I will give you is: get it right, start the work needed to get here and experience Kewanee for yourself. I found everything I needed to propel me into the next stage of life for me, which is ATC. The platform of TWO ROADS has given me a voice, and from day one I relayed to you my truth, always being open and honest, hence I say KLSRC offers everything a man needs to succeed in life going forward.

However, you must do the work necessary, it is said "give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach him to fish and he eats for a lifetime." KLSRC puts in front of you everything you could want and need to succeed, you must want it for yourself, and work to get it. I have taken everything KLSRC had to offer me and in return I gave KLSRC everything I could to ensure those coming behind me could enjoy what great men left for me. Come get what you need to succeed and leave a legacy for those coming. I leave you all with an **ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE !**

*Peace and blessing, Thank you for your Time,
It has been a great pleasure. Kelly "KB" Bennett*



ON THE NEW

BY: CHRISTOPHER "BIG CHRIS" TROTTER

I have been incarcerated for 26 yrs. And I finally made it to Kewanee LSRC. Those who have been on this mass incarceration journey, and that have come from where we have come from, have seen what we have seen and experiencing what we have experienced, and then make it here, all felt what I'm feeling now.... Like the Heavens open up, with access to resources with the universe finally allowing you to tap into all the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that you seek and can bear.



Truth of the matter is, I have been incarcerated longer than I have been alive on the streets. My kids were babies and now they're grown with babies. I got to be somebody they're proud to call Dad and Granddad. We as dads and granddads need to fulfill the duties and be worthy of those titles. Here you have the resources for the becoming your best higher self. **IF YOU WANT IT!**

Since I got here I've been scared to go to sleep, cause I don't want to wake-up at my old facility with a c/o at my door telling me that we are on level 1 lock-down, and a nurse asking me if I want my meds. So, no more sleeping! I slept for 26 yrs. My shoes was tied tight when I got off the bus, and I'm up and running. All these resources and help is a BLESSING. I haven't even been here a week. The sky is the limit, let's fly high! And to those that I left behind, know this... **Your time is coming!** The next page is dedicated to you because after 30 days, things began to happen!!!!

...Now lets fast forward 30 days from the previous thoughts. Well actually it is not a thought any longer for becoming my higher self is now being manifested each day. It is in these four words: action, control, humanity, and community, that I find the courage to move forward.

Action & Control is about acting on the opportunities placed before you to manifest the thoughts of betterment. You are also in control on how you act upon them, you act upon them at your own pace. full capacity, just a little, or not at all. Whatever your into it is not given to you, you have to go for it like life itself—you are in control.

Humanity is being treated like a human being verses being treated like a 200 lb. animal. A big change and adjustment in how you communicate with the staff and others.

Community, action, control, and humanity added together with like-minded individuals equals community; a community focused on building towards goals. Now do not get it twisted, you are still doing time, and you will have ups and downs – **THAT IS LIFE**. However, this really is what the three words say it is: Life, Skills, Re-Entry center. To build self and focus is the main goal: re-entering society as a successful and productive individual.

I am thankful to have this opportunity. I have been elevating myself so fast so imagine my level if I check-in 30 days from now . The business is getting handled on all levels, and I feel I am worthy to be called Dad and Granddad.

*Thank you for your time,
Christopher Trotter*

THROUGH THE LENS OF GRATITUDE

BY: FRANCISCO "SISCO" SANCHEZ

I'm grateful to be alive. I shouldn't be here. God saved me. On multiple occasions, I've been very close to being DONE! (gangbanging; young AND dumb!). I know God has a purpose for me. For this I'm grateful. It's a wonderful thing to experience life with a sound mind and a sound heart. This is why Gratitude is at the core of who I am. It's been an incredible and stabilizing source of power and light in my life. It has shattered old, dark, and misguided attitudes I once firmly stood upon and given me a new found appreciation for life. **(Shout out to TWO ROADS and Kewanee LSRC for providing me with the platform to express my gratitude!)**

I'm grateful for my family. I'm thankful for my grandmother; a true leader and brave matriarch. I'm thankful for my mother (**Te Quiero 'Ama**); she showed me how to love and fight to the end. I appreciate my dad for showing me what it means to be a father and a man (**Gracias Jefe!**). I appreciate my sons for forgiving me and loving me regardless of my failures. I'm thankful for my sisters; their resilience in life reminds me that I can overcome too. I'm thankful for my nieces and nephews; their dreams and struggles remind me that there is so much to live for, but nothing is easy. To my uncles, aunts, and cousins: Thank you for your love and for showing me how to be selfless (**Muchas Gracias**).

I'm grateful for my homies. To have someone to talk to, and someone who listens, continues to be vital to my growth. In a place designed to do the opposite, your presence, conversation, and fellowship breathes life into mine. In a place I never thought would be possible, your selflessness, patience, and kindness have taught me how to be a friend. In an environment that is so grimy, your strength, courage, and uprightness inspire me to elevate myself and follow your example.

I'm grateful for the people who have been consequential in my life.

(Shout out to the staff at Hill Correctional Industries! BIG SWAG!!! Much love and respect! 'Preciate you looking out for the Big Samoan!)
To Joe, Ryan, Wallace, Richardson, Taylor, Mrs. Rodgers, and many others: Thank you for your guidance, counsel, and example. Seeing you guys work, grinding it out—and dealing with us in prison—has shown me that I can work my ass off, work with people from all backgrounds, AND keep my eye on the ball. To all the staff at Hill, including COs that were always respectful and professional: Thank you! I know you are a father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife, and ALL you did was your job. I appreciate that.

To the staff here at Kewanee and Warden Carothers: You've not only been respectful and professional, you've also been kind, welcoming, and very supportive. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this thriving community; for providing me with the resources, information, and education to BETTER MYSELF; for providing me with the fuel that has ignited an explosion of unrealized potential in me that laid dormant for far too long; for allowing me to make my own small contribution to this community; and more importantly, for treating me like a human being.

GRATITUDE revitalized my attitude towards life. It's a life-giving force that has enabled me to appreciate life in a way I never have before. The simple realization that people take the time to DO things for me—even while they are going through their own struggles—moves me. The grace with which people treat me; the love, the support; I appreciate it all . I'm grateful to be alive and experience it in a whole new way. I pray you can experience it and ...

*...live life through the lens of Gratitude,
Francisco "Sisco" Sanchez*

*“Eaten
Bread
Is
Forgotten.”*

-Thomas Fuller

FINDING PURPOSE GRATITUDE AT WORK

BY: CLIFFORD BAKER (PINCKNEYVILLE C.C)

I wrote this to show people that it is never too late to find purpose in your life. I have been locked up since I was 15 years old. My purpose in this life has changed many times as I have went through some rough times. Where I even felt as I had lost my purpose. Getting put in prison as a kid forces you to really grow up quick, become an ugly statistic, or fall victim to the vices and negative influences of the prison system.

Feeling like a failure and disappointment my entire life, I decided quickly that I would not be a victim nor would I make victim noises. I would work hard and be better each day to succeed and make my way home. This is the very first time I have been in trouble with the law and I await a second chance at this life. I have spent 15 years of my life in prison—I have spent more time in prison than I have as a man walking in the free world.

There are those times when my situation gets the best of me, especially seeing men come in and out. I was sentenced to 85 years at 100%, so I do not get to go to school; it is not an option for me. Nor can I get a job, so I am forced to sit in a cell all day and rot away, or I can use this anyway I can to be productive—I CHOSE THE LATTER. I graduated from the Blackstone paralegal Program in 2021; I have written a book; also, I consistently work on my artistic skills to perfect my craft as an tattoo artist and painter. I have read, in my spare time, books on business and ways to become financially stable. When this comes to an end, I want to open a tattoo shop one day among other things.

I am not perfect , I have had fights, struggle with alcohol use, and my mental health sometimes gets the better of me. There are times I wanted to completely give up , whether that is because family support is fading, or out of helplessness and loneliness; it all comes with prison. Now do not get this wrong, I do find myself with an attitude of gratitude because I have someone in my life who brings me joy: Bethany. She reached out to me and my purpose returned. I had found myself sinking because I am not given the opportunities because of the time I have. That does not look good on paper; that fact that I have not gone to school or work in 14 years. I am trying to file these court appeals and my clemency petitions. How does one show the world what he does in the confines of his cell day in and day out?

That alone would make a person lose hope, this is why I am so grateful for Bethany , she gave me the boost I needed, as we all sometimes need. I like to help people and tell my story, even though at times I may be dysfunctional and often crazy. I always try to remain positive with an attitude of gratitude. I like to laugh and make others do the same. Who wants to be around a grumpy person all day. I hope I can motivate you to find purpose in this life no matter the situation. It is never too late. I learned everything I know in prison, I can cut hair, tattoo, paint, draw, cook, and I am a writer. Many people watched me grow up in prison, and if I can change my attitude from the person I was to who I am today you can too. **Find your purpose.**

Thanks to all involved in my journey.

Especially you Bethany!

Clifford Baker

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

BY: EARL MILTON JR. (CENTRALIA C.C.)

The faithful, reliable - master of all that is - is so good to us all. He gives us oxygen to breathe each day. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done or omitted to do, God's own goodness prevents Him from failing to provide oxygen for us all. He doesn't give gravity to only the good people and let the not so good people float off into space; people that deny His existence don't cause Him to remove the ozone layer from them while only protecting those who believe in Him from the heat of the sun or the coldness of outer space.

The goodness of God is not just a normal goodness, it is an everlasting eternal goodness which He provides generously to us all without fail.

We are alive today because of the goodness of God. God is so good that He has provided a refuge and a dwelling place for us with Him forever after we die. The grace of God has enabled me to express, to the best of my ability at this time, the goodness of God. I give all glory to God for every freedom and privilege that He allows me to partake of. The goodness of God is speaking loudly in all parts of his creation. Thank God for His great goodness that He has provided this day and every day since we have been alive. The goodness of God is beyond words. It is an every day experience which takes conscious awareness to recognize, realize, and relish.

The goodness of God is absolutely perfect.
Earl Milton Jr.

DISAPPOINTED BUT NOT DISCOURAGED

BY: EARL MILTON JR.

There are events and seasons of life that could potentially be disappointing.

We must come to a complete stop when faced with a disappointment;
because it could lead to discouragement,
if we let it go further. Let's face it, life is a beautiful variety of experiences.

There are things we are happy about,
then there are things that let us down.

Yet, we must keep our heads up, and our hearts strong;
as we go through whatever it is that we must,
in order for it to spur us on.

Causing us to find out that we have
more potential in us than we were ever aware of.

Be strengthened
and taught by
all of life's lessons.

So it is okay, disappointment is a part of life,
but discouragement doesn't have to be.

Shake that off and crush its head.

Good times, and bad times,
have so much to teach us about
ourselves. Disappointed but not discouraged;
be encouraged; and let all parts of life teach

you what you need to learn, in order to move pass them. Stand in
the storm with the knowledge that everything is for good reason.

Keep moving forward toward your purpose, and your goals. You got this,
and you will be made stronger in the latter, because you matter; your life

is a blessing. *Stay strong my friends, in the end you will be better for it.*

GOD BLESS.

MUCH GRATITUDE AND THANK YOU!

BY: JEREMY GREEN (ILLINOIS RIVER C.C.)

My Attitude of Gratitude of unsung heroes are and goes out to Ms. Sharer, Ms. Schultz, Ms. Overton, Mr. Patch, and Ms. Wetzel,

who have been giving much of themselves as they can without any reward or complaint—year in and year out. Their intelligence goes far beyond teaching because they compass in ways that is not textbook written. Their guidance has channeled me along in genuine, authentic, conducive, and nurturing ways that, only when you change your mindset, you have the ability to change the world you live in. Their constant teaching, dedication, and preaching of learning core beliefs is conducive to the environment.

Just as a person thinketh reveals our thoughts, shape our character, and manifest themselves.

I've accomplished many certificates and degrees; and received tireless help from amazing and great teachers and staff during my journey at Hill C.C. These program classes, such as: **Aim Higher, Start Now, Thinking For A Change, Substance Abuse**—and obtaining a trade in **Environmental Health and Safety Services**—has equipped me and given me a sense of direction that I can build upon to further my growth and understanding of what matters most, as well as who has shown me that I matter as an individual as well. I am appreciative because I've been able to learn more about my strengths, weaknesses, and discovery steps in preparation to see what stages of life I'm in.

These unsung heroes and many more embody strength, fierceness, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and great minds with great ideas who are willing to give their time and help to see a change for the better as a whole.

Even considering how agonizing and imponderable situations or circumstances you have all come across, you all still remain to be uplifting to us as students, and treated us as people, which can never be forgotten.



*Much Gratitude
And
Thank You!
Jeremy Green*

*“Most people return small
favors,
acknowledge middling ones,
and repay great ones with
ingratitude.”*

-Benjamin Franklin

GRATITUDE TO GOD

BY: TYLER GULLI

Before anyone else, it's the utmost Gratitude to God; there hasn't been a trail I've walked in life that I don't realize He was walking with me. But more than that, the times He carried me through when I know alone I would've never made it. Beyond that, it's the people He's put in my life.



First and foremost, being my Ma, all the craziness of my life prior to my conviction and through these years inside, she's been the only one **TRUE AND CONSISTENT** support I've had.

To the brothers I've made behind these fences—that have helped mold me into the man I am today—without yall, I don't know who I'd be today.

To the supervisors in maintenance at Graham C.C., for giving me the chance and taking the time to teach me so many valuable skills not only in the trades but in furthering my growth as a man. I truly found myself in that shop—because of them I know I've got what it takes to succeed.

Tyler "Shorty" Gulli

GRATITUDE

BY: MANUEL E. ACEITUNO

I have been incarcerated since 11 days after my eighteenth birthday, and I am now 44 years of age. My journey has not always been positive, my early choices reflect a youth trying to survive in a system of adversity. Be that as it may, there are a few special people who have believed in me and stood by my side, throughout my adolescence and into my adulthood, whose blood, sweat, and tears helped to transform me into the man I am today.

My mother Tamara Pantoja, who has never for a moment lost hope in me. Her presence in my life is a pillar of strength; her unconditional love has never wavered. When I was incarcerated at Tamm's Correctional Center for eight years, over nine hours from Chicago, with no means to make phone calls, mom wrote letters. Even when doing so was very painful due to the arthritis in her hands. She pushed through her pain so that her son would not feel so alone within the devastation of isolation. Her faith in me as a person/son continues to drive me into the fight for freedom. **I love you mom.**

It is said, "When you get locked up, you will find out who your true friends are." This is the simple truth. I met my friend/brother Miguel Arellano when we were about nine years old. There is not another person who has shown me the true meaning of family and friendship. Since day one he was there for me, had my back through whatever I was facing, and was my brother I needed to face the trials of incarceration. He became my best friend, my family, and my brother of the heart and spirit. Miguel Arellano passed away due to COVID-19 complications. And as I write his meaning in my life... my heart breaks, tears fall from my eyes in remembrance of a beautiful person inside and out. In my heart, his light continues to be a guiding presence. I go into the future knowing that a piece of his spirit lives on in my heart and memories. Rest in Peace my brother.



Edwin Aceituno, my beloved brother. As children we grew up like twins, us being a year and a day apart in age, we fought all the time and had each other's back through it all. Throughout my early incarceration things were not always peaches and cream, yet he still stands by me to this day. That, in itself, after 26 years, speaks volumes. No matter the time, no matter the distance, **just having my brother here in my life has meant the world to me.** His steadfast presence as a brother and friend today—and our plans for the future—is a contributing factor to my positive direction in life. Love you brother.

There are many others who have given freely of their love, time, and effort. My cousins Michael and Audrey Lemon have seen me through some of my most painful moments. My friend Anna Vargas, whose inspirational attitude has helped me to develop my writing. My sister-in-law Lydia Herrera has believed in me since the day I met her. Her support and trust has helped to strengthen my hope and continues to believe in me as I go off into the future. I want to recognize my Appellate Lawyer Mrs. Emily E. Filipi who has never let me down even when we received so many continuances, and after years of fighting a denial. I really see the hard work you have done on my behalf. I am enjoying the "overruled" decision, which should give us a chance at seeking my freedom. Thank you kindly for your time and effort.

Finally, there are all the people who have come and gone, whose blood sweat and tears may have been for a moment, but none the less are remembered for the profound effect they have had in my life. From the inside or the outside, I appreciate all that you have done on my behalf. You all know who you are. It is with gratitude that I send my heart out to you all for choosing to be a part of my life's journey.

*Thank you for your time,
Manuel Enrique Aceituno* 26

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE: THANK YOU

BY: TIMOTHY YOUNGBLOOD

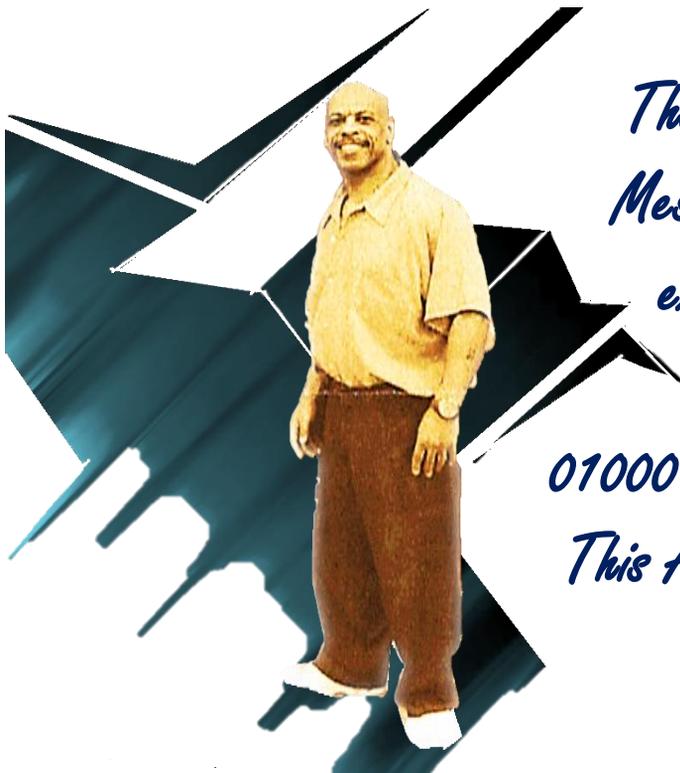
How do you put your feelings into words when someone does something special for you? Although a quick thank you note may be enough for a home-cooked dinner or a housewarming gift, what can you do to express gratitude to people who have helped you, galloped to your rescue, and stood beside you during this difficult time of incarceration?

You may have already sent your gratitude by e-mail, or mailed a short handwritten note. But somehow your effort still does not seem equal to what S/He did for you, and you still have that nagging feeling that S/He does not really know how grateful you feel. For you even more than for the person you are indebted to, nothing feels more dismal than under thanking and nothing feels more virtuous than sending a letter of genuine thanks.

A thank you letter is not just longer than a thank you note but also philosophically broader, signaling that you are aware of how blessed you are, and putting the whole matter on permanent record. E-mail is far too offhand, and even a traditional handwritten note doesn't commemorate significant help the way a longer handwritten letter does. Writing by hand acknowledges that something important, above the ordinary, exists between the two of you. Personal letters show that you know you are part of a relationship that is strong enough to sustain large efforts and financial assistance, and that you know you are doing your part by being grateful, on paper.

Finally, it's almost never too late to re-thank someone. Although you may never have written a thank you note to your unsung hero, now you can write a personal letter. Your belated personal thank you letter, if you don't load it with melodramatic excuses, can make up in length for what it lacks in punctuality. A letter of gratitude also keeps the channels open for more help in the future.

Whether you have been blessed with a substantial financial gift, or simply the patience and ear of someone who deserves more thanks than you have already sent, you can write a letter that puts you in a state of grace that comes only from having properly thanked someone who truly deserves it. Unfortunately, since I have no family or friends, I have only God to thank for helping me, galloping to my rescue, and standing beside me during this difficult time of incarceration.



*Therefore, I am sending this
Message In A Bottle to God,
expressing major gratitude:*

Thank You

010001000110000101100100.

This ASCII Bixary code means:

"DAD"

“Ingrate...

He... who denies that he has
received a kindness;

he... who conceals it;

he... who makes no return for
it;

He who forgets it.”

-Seneca

A NEW YEAR OF APPRECIATION

BY: CLARENCE PRATHER (HILL C.C.)

First and foremost, we have to give God thanks for being here with us spiritually, mentally, and emotionally; without Him, real gratitude and appreciation wouldn't be understood or accepted. Outside of my mom (Annie) and brother (Tyron) who recently passed from A.L.S., my girlfriend (and mother of two of my beautiful kids), Shante has been a true rock. She has sacrificed everything in her belief that I will be the man that she deserves when I come home. Unfortunately, like so many of us, we've had some of our lowest moments of our life while doing this time. And through it all Shante has been here with me all the way. And you know, I ask myself, WHY? I believe, for me at least, that's an important question to ask yourself. I don't have no real money; I'm a felon; I'm doing 14 years at 85%; I've cheated; I've gotten caught red-handed and still lied about cheating. What would make or allow these people in our lives to still be here after we've done so much wrong to them? Because a lot of us, if we're being honest with ourselves, know that we really don't deserve it. To me gratitude is something we really have to understand AND receive ourselves; that's when real appreciation takes effect.

I want all whose eyes are falling upon these words to really sit back and think about how fortunate you are to have people in your life— whether you're in prison or not—and tell me your heart isn't moved with gratitude. We all know individuals who never touch the phone or go to commissary, receive visits, etc.; whenever we receive any of the above, we need to take a minute to thank God for putting it in our families' and friends' hearts to be there for us (when they could've easily walked away). Don't think it's some sort of "game" we have that keeps our women and

family around (only the simple-minded do that). I want us to embrace and meditate on the fact that **these people really do love us and want to see us WIN in life—on every level!**

They believe us when we say what we're going to do when we get back home. And if we don't live up to that, yeah, we hurt them, but not more than we hurt ourselves. We have to take ourselves seriously and respect the blessing of having someone on our team—especially our beautiful women who put their lives on hold for us—in hopes of us being better men, husbands, fathers, sons, etc.

Shante I know it's never going to be perfect, but I thank you for always pushing me to try. You never let me slack. I've had to produce in being a man for you and my kids.

And to my brother Tyron (R.I.P.), I'm forever thankful for your words man. You've shown me how to BE me, and as long as I stick to that, the pieces to my life's puzzle will always fit in the right spots.

Love you,
Clarence "Cleo" Prather

HOLDING ON TO THE RICE

BY: ANTONIO "JEDI" ESPINOSO

Years ago, a friend shared an ancient story that originates in China that had made something painful for my Family & me very clear. It comes from the way traps were set for little monkeys that were considered a nuisance in their society. A coconut was hollowed out through an opening that was cut to the size of a monkey's open hand. Deliciously cooked rice was then placed into the carved out coconut which was then tied to strings & mounted to the base of a tree trunk. A hungry monkey would then smell the rice & reach its hand in. But once fistling the rice, its hand no longer fit back out through the opening. Feverishly attempting to free themselves from the simple trap, the monkeys who were caught were those who would not let go of the rice.

As long as the monkey maintained its grip on the rice, it was a prisoner of its own making; no amount of yanking would free their prized possession. The trap worked because the monkey's hunger was insatiable, & its attachment became the master of its reach. The lesson for us reverberates tremendously.

This story begs us to ask ourselves, what is our rice, and what is keeping us from opening our grip and letting go? There is much more opportunity afforded to us when our hands remain open. In fact, closing & stubbornly maintaining our grip is often what keeps us stuck, imprisoned, & locked in a state of suffering. Though we want to blame everything & everyone else, especially what we are holding on to.

When this story was shared with me, by a dear friend of mine, I found myself meditating deeply on its inherent truths. Through this

meditation I have come to find that it allowed me to see under muddied waters clearer than I had ever seen or felt before. There was a deep state of suffering and fear within me from **being absent in my Son Anthony Giovanni's life.** I was holding on to so much shame. I was having these dreams where I was able to see him, and I was asking him if he remembered

me. Through this story, when I meditated on it, I found I was holding on to the fear that my Son would not remember me. The fear for abandoning him was buried deep within me. Suddenly, I realized that **this HAS been my rice**—the more time that passed, that I've had no contact with my Son, the tighter my grip. My hunger for him knowing my love has been the master of my reach, even in my relationships with my family. At times I was applying pressure on them to reach out to my Son, and they were in pain from it as well, almost as if I was luring them to the rice-filled coconuts themselves. I had been a caught monkey, unwilling to let go.



I have since unraveled the grip in my heart & spirit. I had to release the rice through a practice of scrapbooking and writing to him within it in the hopes that one day, when he is ready, he may read it and deeply understand. This was cathartic. For me, this became a profound challenge of surrender. For all of us, it's not just letting go, but letting go of something we yearn for. The simple yet inescapable truth is that food is everywhere, though the stubborn monkey believes, in its moment of hunger, that there is no other food; **it only has to let go for its life to unfold.** Our journey to love others and feel their love is no different. For though we stubbornly cling, believing in our moment of hunger that there is no other possibility of love, we only have to let go of what we want so badly and our life will unfold.

Meditation for Today: Write down on a piece of paper something you find to be "your rice."

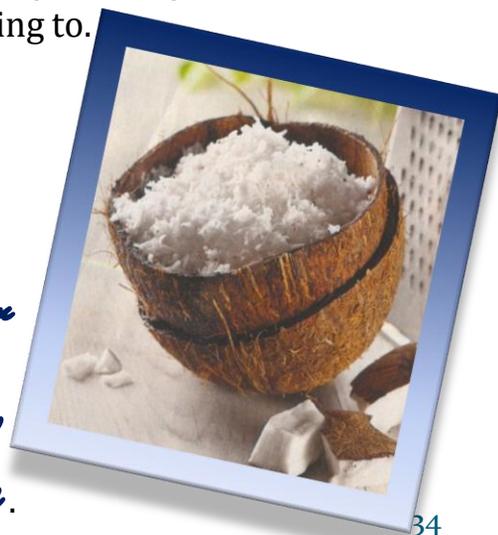
Take that paper and fold it up, small, to fit into the palm of your hand. Grab a handful of uncooked rice and hold it with the paper in the same palm. Find a comfortable seated position at a quiet time you may remain uninterrupted. Sit your hand into the palm of your other empty hand. Close your eyes and think of the contents of your paper, "your rice". Allow the feelings of the pain of holding on to it envelop you, as you draw a deep breath in and simultaneously tighten your grip on the uncomfortable uncooked rice.



As you exhale, imagine letting go of what you seek to hold onto and all together open your hand wide and flat. Rice will fall from your grasp, just allow it with no fear of the perceived mess at this time. Continue this pattern of inhaling, closing your grip on the paper and rice, imagining the pain of holding on, then exhaling, opening your grip, letting the rice fall away, and mentally and emotionally imagining letting go. Repeat this process until all the rice has fallen from your grasp and you feel the relief of unfolding; letting go of that which you find yourself suffering in and clinging to.

Afterwards, when you complete this, take a sense of renewal and softly get up, clean away the rice from your life, and throw or flush away the paper and rice.

My peace be upon you, and may our creating life force shine on your day, path, and spirit. Namaste.



"I've learned that people
will forget what you
have said, people will forget
what you did; however, people
will never forget
how you made them feel."

-Maya Angelou

TO THE POINT OF GRATITUDE

BY: ANTONIO WOODSON

In the beginning of this ordeal, things were not how they should have been for me or my family. At one point it was hard for me to accept the aftermath of the choices I made and the chaos I had created for myself. I was angry because of the situation I had found myself in, so you know what happened next? An attitude of bitterness and negativity was created towards everyone and everything. Not knowing nor understanding the gravity of the blessing to come my way—if only I were open-minded enough to see it.

My gratitude comes from a lot of small things shared while on those long lockdowns. While in the pit in Menard C.C., me and the many brothers who were in the trenches became one unit to survive. Those men took my mind away from the anger, hurt, and bitterness that consumed me for years. Many of our days were filled with jokes, laughter, fun-filled and meaningful debates all while sharing a meal put together with the bare minimum. Many of those men to this day remind me of the 20 plus burritos that I put together using 8 ramen noodles, 3 bags of white rice and 3 summer dogs and state chicken patties (Yes! Chicken patties off the state tray).

Most importantly, we made memories at the same time. The moments we shared were special, we actually kept each other from going insane or losing our minds. For it all, I am so grateful; including the bonds that I was able to build with the men despite our situation and individual problems we may have been dealing with behind closed doors. To all of my brothers that had my back through it all, I really appreciate you and celebrate you all.

The relationships I shared made me see and appreciate the gratitude of my incarceration and my situation. There have been many ups and downs throughout this journey yet there have been people who stood beside me in the trenches. Even after the denial of my parole, I still did not allow the anger—the decision created—control any part of me or my attitude of gratitude.

Today I understand the Blessings and appreciate what my incarceration has done for me, and with that I find myself grateful. I recognize how blessed and highly favored I am in many ways.

*Thank you for your time,
Antonio Woodson*



TWO ROADS...

...wants you to submit a 2-3 page article, or short poem, to our

E-Zine on the following subjects:

- ❖ **Safe Places** *(The space you find Peace)*
- ❖ **Parenting From Prison**
- ❖ **Bad Decision/Mistake** *(A bad experience from the decision/mistake you made)*
- ❖ **Wrong Side of the Argument** *(A time when you were on the wrong side of the argument)*
- ❖ **Physical Health/Fitness**
- ❖ **A topic that is important to you**
(Provide us with your picture if you want it featured as well!)

We believe that by sharing our stories we can empower and inspire our fellow men and women in prison to become dynamic leaders and agents of change in our journey of Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Re-Entry.

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*Thank
You!*

-TWO ROADS