



TWO ROADS
PRESENTS

PROGRESS

A LOST TIME ABSTRACT

An honest chronicle of the stories and service of the Incarcerated Women
and Men of the Illinois Department of Corrections

PART TWO

VOLUME 34

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.

TWO ROADS

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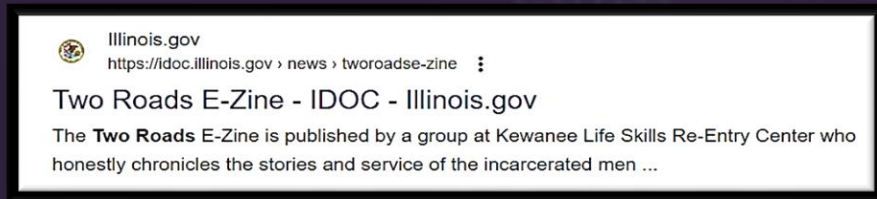
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Or type it in:

idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoads.html

We encourage you to screenshot this page with the hashtag:

#TWOROADS



Then LIKE and SHARE the post!

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WELL WISHES

TWO ROADS would like to send our well wishes to our Associate and Content Editor Mr. William Jenkins as he is on his way to bigger and better things. Will is responsible for the issue *Reimagining Corrections* and he will be dearly missed. We hope that he continues to take on the challenges that are in front of him and not look back at challenges from the past. You have always given your best when it came to editing, and your talent will be missed.



PROGRESSING IN 2025

Kelly (K.B) Bennett

Senior Editor, TWO ROADS

I look at this life I have lived as stages of growth, and as you progress in this life, you outgrow certain things. I really believe anything that is not growing is dying slowly. Take, for instance, the things I enjoyed as a child; I found no interest in those when I became a teenager, just as an adult I no longer find interest in childish things. I have grown tremendously while paying my debt to society, and in this journey, I discovered the value of time – also how precious it is. However, life itself is more precious than the time, for without life, does time really matter? Please allow me once again to apologize for my actions that caused a family great pain. You are forever in my thoughts and prayers. As we move into the New Year, I have been preparing for my return to

society, also to my family. I have been incarcerated for over two decades and there are many new things I have not experienced, yet I am ready for the moment. There is an old adage or cliché that says: do your time and not allow the time to do you. I took that as saying the time is mine to do the things I needed to do. I could easily document all the certificates I received over the years and place them in the folder of progress.



However, to me progress must be more than the paper the certificates are printed on. Progress had to be more substantial going forward, because I was in a battle with many demons from my past. First, I had to recognize the demons and where they originated; that, in itself, was a difficult process. I had to be honest with myself and look closely at my intentions in all my affairs. To me progress will be a day-to-day process because, at any given moment and any set of circumstances, a bad decision could be made, and with that comes the consequences.

I can say wholeheartedly that I will never ever wear a blue suit again in this lifetime, yet some of the decisions I make will probably hurt someone's feelings, and that is something I would like to avoid. Each day should be one of growth and with mistakes will be made, then the learning process begins again. I have found this life is all about growth. Each day anything that is not growing is

dying slowly. Think about the day you began walking; every step you took was a mini expedition seeking something new. That brings me to 2025 and my next journey into society. I pray each day be one of growth as I live this life H.O.W. (Honest, Open-minded, and Willing). That has become a part of who I am these days – makes my life so much simpler. Honesty in all my affairs and relationships, open-minded to realize people are gonna always have their own opinions and ideas, and willing to accept the things that I may not agree with. Life goes on, each day consists of 24-hours; make the best of them. Your time is yours and mine is mine. H.O.W I choose to use mine is entirely up to me. Keep progressing.

Thank you for your time
Kelly (K.B.) Bennett



TWO ROADS IS CALLING OUT FOR ALL THE ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDE

We here at TWO ROADS are offering all our readers an opportunity to thank those unsung heroes who have stood with us as we go through the ups and downs of incarceration . We would like everyone to celebrate with us as we celebrate our loved ones, who without complaint support us as we move into the New Year . All submissions are welcome.

Submit Now

Outsiders ,Staff, and Individuals in Custody with Staff support. Please send your submissions and scanned photos if you choose to :

DOC.TWOROADS@ILLINOIS.GOV Subject: ATTITUDE

Without Staff Support. Mail submissions and photos to: TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee Ill 61443

SWEET LITTLE LIES

Ron Janssen
Pinckneyville

When changing yourself for the better, you have to make a conscious choice to do it, and rethink things that you have done because you “thought it was ok”, “everyone else does it”, or because you “just don’t care.”

As a young teenager, I did not see what the big deal was about lying. Everyone does it, right? “Oh, your new haircut isn’t so bad”; “Those jeans don’t make your butt look fat”; “It’s not a big deal that you forgot my birthday”; “No one is ever going to remember your embarrassing incident.” Those are just a few of the countless lies we tell or hear every day.

What I didn’t realize back then, and most of us don’t realize until rehab/recovery or even much later on, is how corrupting, corrosive, and destructive lies are. Not only to our lives, but to those around us. Lies are

the ticket to the magic ride to self-destruction. They are the secret ingredient that makes our addictions and self-destruction possible. It all begins with lies.

Lies help us hide who we are, and what we do, even from people we know and love. We do not want people to see what we are really like, and what we are really doing, even the people with whom we indulge. Lies help us to manipulate people and help us to avoid the ugly reality of what we are doing, to ourselves as well as others. They help us not have to deal with the consequences of our actions, avoid conflict, and make it easy to continue our downward spiral without having to stop and think about what we are doing.

Lies sugarcoat the reality and make it seem like it is not a big deal or that it may even be a good thing. We lie to everyone; mostly we lie to ourselves about what we are doing to ourselves, or how bad it is, or why we are doing it. The lies are everything from

“I’m holding it for a friend”; “It’s not a big deal”; “I don’t have a problem”; and of course, “I can quit whenever I want.”

The lies start off small and come occasionally and become bigger and come constantly, until they consume your life and ultimately consume you. You end up not knowing what is real and what is a lie.

It is a lot easier to admit to others that you have been lying to them than it is to admit you have been lying to yourself. Sometimes you really want to tell yourself a lie – “Just this one last time, then I’ll quit.” Sometimes you really want others to lie to you to keep you from having to deal with reality.

Either way it is the same.

Part of the recovery process and stopping your thinking errors is to stop lying – not only to others but to yourself as well. Become aware of how your lies affect others and yourself. Be honest and face the world with truth. It’s not always easy but better than the world of deceit. When you live in a world of truth, it is harder to fall back into addiction and self-destruction.

So, embrace the truth. Free yourself of the toxic poison of lies; it’s so much easier and simpler to live that way.

Ron Janssen has been incarcerated since 1978 (46 years)

ATTN:

The Two Roads Team would like to thank all of those who continue to share their stories with us. Without your genuine, heartfelt, honesty and creativity this could not happen. It is a great duty and pleasure to share these stories with the world both inside these walls and outside. So, from all of us here on the Two Roads team: thank you for your contribution. Please keep writing.

BEFORE ALL THIS

Nathan Price
Galesburg

Before becoming a part of the system, I was a self-serving selfish man and not using my time constructively. I sold drugs, which I now know is because of my selfish ambitions and greed. I did not work in my field of expertise that was (HVAC) Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning. I took work for granted and settled for the fast money at the expense of people addicted to drugs. I regret those decisions, and I am sorry to the persons who lives I negatively impacted.

Now I am a changed man, and I

want my power to be used to encourage and serve others. I do not intend to ever sell drugs again. I now value my skills and education; I use my spare time studying to continue my HVAC education and skill.

This is all so that I can start my own HVAC business when all this ends. Since this all began, I have adhered to all the rules and enrolled at Lakeland College; right now, I am on their waiting list. I was placed on the waiting list for the maintenance dept. here, hoping to become a worker. I want to create a better future for myself by learning what I can by actually working a job and experiencing the power of learning.

NOT FOR SELF...

Ramiro Chavez

Illinois River

No one outside of the Justice System understands how corrupt it is, because while we are free it never comes to mind unless we watch a movie or a series. But this is part of my progress, to tell people of the side of justice that is never heard of or spoken about in the public. Ratings is what news channels look for in a story, but I am thankful to Two Roads and Kewanee for the blessing to share a lost time abstract of a person in custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections...IDOC

At every turn in life, at some point, we always look back; it is in the looking back that we do the searching to find ourselves as to "Who are we, truly?"

Today I ask you to travel with me down memory lane of 22 years and counting in the prison system. It's a journey of mixed emotions, fears that come with only two choices. Either you face them head on, or you will spend life thinking that you can outrun them... even when they live within you. From

the age of 18 to 40 years old, I still found myself running from things I couldn't outrun, and once I understood how valuable time is, I am becoming who I want to be for God and Family.

In 2005 I was sent to Menard – the worst prison in the state of Illinois. I was 21 years old at the time, and since it was my first time in prison, the mixed emotions came. I had to pick a side as to who I wanted to be; the Justice system, by all means, told me that I was an animal, and my mom always reminds me who I truly am. Because I came across as different, gangs took care of me and carried me as one of their own brothers. If you expected a story full of hate towards my brothers, this is not it, and it is about how relationships of respect can build bridges.

I learned English by being around people who didn't look like me, some had fun at how I sounded in the beginning, and at times they still have a look on their face as to what I said. But I do the same when they try to speak Spanish. The village made me and

shaped me in so many ways. I'm writing my story, but I want the public to know: So many brothers and sisters are walking and living a life worse than mine. "Not for Self" is the title of my story because, in the end, I want us to understand what's at stake. Families, we all hold the hands of time. Dreaming for change, and it has to come at the hands of unity. Faith always fights back against all odds and fears. In 2022 a black brother helped me get back into the court system, and today, after more than 16 years of nothing, I'm back fighting for freedom. I also got great lawyers who filed my clemency and as hard as one is fighting to get me home. I will continue to do my best. Writing is part of my progress; I don't want to be silent as to what the prison system is, and change will come.

2018 was the year Statesville prison took a chance on giving me a job; in this place I witnessed the beginning of my transformation, and I was given the opportunity to take part in the first ever committee to form a better understanding between staff and people in custody. They gave me two certificates, one for positive peer role model and the other for overall positive

institutional adjustment. But there came a time in 2019 when covid-19 happened; I was working in different jobs, and it came with fears unknown to me. To see people die or hear about it, shook me to the core. A letter of commendation from Warden Gomez in Stateville was given to me for the hard work in all the years of covid-19. Now that I'm in Illinois River prison, I started to do bible studies from outside the prison, and I made it to what's known as "The River Wing," because of my positive behavior. In Nov. 2024, I started a program from CAT Caterpillar Excavator Simulator. They have also given me opportunities to have jobs, but as many brothers and sisters know, rehabilitation came and comes from us – not from the system in place.

Progress is a choice that has to be made each and every day in every second of the clock. At the age of 18 years old, as a first-time offender, I was looked at and judged as an animal. Although I have always taken full responsibility of my actions, the justice system and the prison system ain't what you may think they are. There comes a point in life

where you find yourself at a crossroads,
good or bad, only time will tell.

But always keep moving forward and be
what God meant for you to be.

The outside noise will always be there.
But you don't have to!

Editor's Note: We would like to thank
Warden Jones for his innovative ways in
showing progress in a place where it is
not deemed to happen. Warden Jones

was also innovative during his time in
Kewanee, where he helped adopt the
KLSRC Rotary Community Corps, which
is the ONLY Community Corps Charter in
the world in a prison setting.

Individuals and staff at IRCC should be
honored to have a great leader who
believes in progress.

PROCESSING

Christopher Scott **Western Illinois**

I read about how you want to know
how I'm progressing and how I have
been using my time productively during
my incarceration.

I purposely have enrolled in
numerous correspondence mail
courses, such as Criminon INC, Bible
Studies GM, the Salvation Army Bible
Correspondence and Herbert W.
Armstrong College to obtain certificates
to show to the courts and prisoner

review board I'm being productive.
It is difficult to enroll in any programs or
college classes with the amount of time
I have because Western Illinois
prioritizes classes and programs for
those with shorter sentences first and
waitlists for those like me that have 15-
69 years to serve. I have to go outside
of the department of corrections to
obtain knowledge and stay busy or seek
a transfer.

I was not doing this in the past
because there was no hope. We had no
programs at Menard Correctional
center from 2004-2017, so I fell in line

with the prison environment of gang banging and gambling. I decided I needed to change my way of thinking because I was getting bored of doing the same things daily and I wanted to obtain knowledge and growth.

Progression: I learned criminal and civil law and helped others get free but have been unable to get a criminal reversal on my own until year 5-29-2024 because the new judge was fair; my friends who are lawyers advised me to stay out of trouble and get a job and be a part of programs. With a little motivation and blessings starting to flow from friends you will be forced to change or seek change on your own if the prison system will not do it for you as they are supposed to. The struggle

continues and with the fight comes change by force.

I think more slowly, so that I can have time to process my thoughts to make proper decisions, and I listen more to others so that they have no choice but to listen to me. I surround myself with those who have the same goals as me, and that's to eliminate conflicts. I have created my own opportunities due to the fact the department of corrections have waitlists for those like me who have lengthy sentences.

I read books that I can apply to my life, so when I'm free I can help others with their cases to stay busy. Obtaining knowledge changes your way of thinking.

REHABILITATION INSTEAD OF HOUSING

Thomas Jones

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

To start this off, I just want to say that everyone has his or her own view of what prison needs to be. I am not going to say that prison needs to be like

Kewanee everywhere, but it would be a start. There is so much untapped potential in the prison system that if the state were to use the people in them, then the city and state would benefit for it. I believe that there should be a step-down process for every prison.

By that, I am saying that if someone comes in with several years to serve then they will have to go to a prison like Menard, but at that facility there needs to be a step-down process before leaving that facility. Every prison needs to have at least one house that is run like Kewanee in the aspect that they have more free movement and schooling. This will give people the drive to do what is right to get into that house, so that they can grow as a member of the community. By having this at each facility it will offer more individuals in custody the opportunity to get the schooling that they need.

I also think that there should be a place for individuals, that have less than a year to do, should go as well. I will probably upset some of you with this comment but let me tell you why first, and those of you that have done time might agree with me. I have been in the position at several facilities, and I have seen people come and go a lot over ten years. During that time, I have seen several people come back to prison many-many times. Around 98% of the people that came back were the ones that served under a year or two. This is where I say that if someone comes into the system that has under 2 years needs to go to a prison where they will be

required to finish their education if they do not have a high school diploma. If they do, then take a college course that would be structured towards showing them the basics of living. I have seen many individuals come in and not even know how to pay bills or wash their own clothes. Not only would they have to take the schooling, but they also would be given a job while there as well. This would give them the drive to want to work once out, AS LONG AS the job is a skilled trade that they can use once released.

Now, as for the individuals that have done many years in DOC, they will be sent to a work release program in their area they are going to parole to. There needs to be more work release programs in the state. There needs to be one in each of the bigger cities beside just Peoria and Chicago. There are prisons in or around these cities like Jacksonville and East Moline. There can be a wing at each facility with the extra work, but also it will help individuals. By doing this, not only would it help the community with the extra work but also it will help individuals to gain employment before their release. This will help those individuals to stay out of prison and give them the work experience they might not have.

It would also give them some money to start their life out with. This is something that I really am passionate about, due to the fact that I have been gone for some time and to go out into society with nothing but what I have from prison would be hard. A work release job where I can save up some money for my final release would help me to start my life over.

The prison system needs to be self-sufficient. By this I mean everything that we can make for the prison system needs to be done. There should be a Garden at each facility to support the prison in all its Dietary needs and farms for the meat. All the cities that the prisons are in should never be run down because the prison can send individuals out to clean up and fix anything that is needed. Throughout the time I have been in prison, I have seen so many talents go to waste because of them being in prison. This will give us the jobs for the work release programs at those facilities. By paying a regular pay for those jobs, even if they are in house, and having industry jobs would create revenue for the city and helps us to save money for our future. By creating jobs in IDOC for individuals to work, once they are able to work, in the work program side. Industry jobs would be 10 years

and under and work release jobs 5 years and under. By giving us this amount, it would enable most individuals the ability to buy their own homes and vehicles once released. It would also give them the extra money that if they have family (KIDS/PARTNER) to help out as much as they can so that maybe their families won't have to rely on the state to get by. We all have made mistakes in our lives, and this should not punish our families.

Lastly, there should be NO reason why DOC needs to be buying items out of state when most of everything that DOC needs can be found in state. I remember years ago that I found out that the state was paying for cable at a company in Texas. This revenue should go to the state instead of another. By keeping people in prison for extended terms, of which most of them are life sentences without the name, it is not a prison like the United States said that prison was. I remember a program that I watched on History that talked about prisons in other countries and the one that stuck out the most was one that operated off what the U.S. said they were doing. All prison have become in the United States are housing like animals. The prison system needs to focus on rehabilitation instead of

housing. If they were to do this, I believe whole-heartedly that the prison population would be less than half what it is today.

If true rehabilitation was done, there would not be enough people in the prison system to worry about not having enough staff or funding. This is why that I believe we need to focus on rehabilitation and not housing. Throughout my time here at Kewanee, I have seen that happen here. I have seen people come here and change their view on life. I have seen many

people that I have met from other facilities here. Most of them have changed for the better. You can tell the difference between Kewanee and other facilities. The overall vibe of this place is about bettering yourself and both staff and individuals help you to do that.

This is what I think that a broad look at a different DOC and what it needs to be like. Thank you for your time, and I hope and pray that everyone reading this has a blessed day and keeps their mind in the right direction of bettering themselves.

SUBMIT NOW

**SUBMISSIONS NEEDED FOR AN UPCOMING ISSUE:
WAS IT A MISTAKE OR A BAD DECISION?**

**WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM THOSE INDIVIDUALS
IN CUSTODY WHO HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO
EXPERIENCE SOMETHING BETTER THAN THE NORM AND
MADE A MISTAKE OR A BAD DECISION THAT SET THEM
ON A COURSE TO RETURN TO CUSTODY .
IT'S YOUR STORY; PLEASE TELL IT YOUR WAY – NO
JUDGEMENTS OR CRITICISM .THERE ARE LESSONS TO
BE LEARNED IF YOUR STORY IS SHARED
"EACH ONE TEACH ONE".**

LOST TIME

Javante Oliphant

Pinckneyville

1 Corinthians 13:11 states “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

I learned this bible verse at the age of 17 and tried to live my life as it pertains to this verse. Yet for the next fifteen years, I still acted as a child, and safe to say, I lost time. During my incarceration I ran across a lot of good people. To see what type of demeanor these people

were showing, I knew at my age, it was time to put away my childish things.

Today, I feel like I am more susceptible to my family and friends' feelings and more open in my conversations. Now, I write down short- and long-term goals in hopes to achieve them, something I did not do during past incarcerations. The change I have made in my progression is keeping a strong and focused mentality when life seems like it is too much to bear. Therefore, I have used my time to become a productive man.



PROGRESS

Malik Shabazz

Joliet

My name is Malik Shabazz, and I am a person who has progressed physically, mentally and spiritually over the past 10 years of my incarceration. I am the person who wanted to “go out with a blast” when I shot 2 detectives in my neighborhood in Chicago. I went from being a flat-line to surviving nearly 100 rounds fired into my car by police. I was a quadriplegic who had lost hope of ever walking again, but I now walk with no assistance.

In the beginning, I was mentally drained of ever recovering and my spirit was broken, but now I inspire others with my testimony of surviving. And even years later, I went through a mental breakdown, but I managed to get back up after receiving treatment at the Joliet inpatient treatment center. I’ve progressed extremely as I was a lost soul, searching for my purpose in life, and now I’ve found it.

Now I use my time writing books,

poetry and studying the law, as I am a pro-se litigant in the federal courts. I’ve completed 3 books so far, with more to come as I am striving to be a known published writer. My first published poem was on Two Roads. I am working on getting my name and story out there to build momentum for my up-and-coming work. I’m looking for resources and assistance in getting my books published because I have so much more work to come.

In the past I was that person who never completed anything I started, but now I sit down and focus on one project at a time, as I plan to rise to the top with success. It was hard to get my mind out of the prison norm of wasting time. It was also extremely hard to forgive myself for the mistakes I made in life, which landed me here in prison, but my most difficult task was to take full accountability and show sincere remorse for my actions. I glorified things that were not only negative but counter-productive to my true purpose in life.

After so long I realized I was only holding myself back from my success. I was my own enemy and downfall, so I decided to let go of the past, to forgive the people who I felt betrayed me, to forgive myself, so that I could spread my wings and soar in the wind because I finally see that I am

something great. I acknowledge it, and I own it!

Now I see and know that this is my time to shine, and I want it more than anything I've ever wanted in life. And this is what fuels my drive...to look back and see my PROGRESS!

"ELEVATED" MINDSET

Nick Roepke
Vandalia

I HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED AT Vandalia C.C. for 18 months and have 84 months remaining to fulfill my debt to society. At first, I was skeptical on how I would make it through this portion of my life; however, I have grown substantially throughout this journey. In maintaining a proactive mindset, I have made it a goal to reshape my identity and participate in all that is offered.

When you reach the darkest, most hollow point in your life, there is no better feeling than to overcome adversity and be reborn. It's almost as if you receive a front row seat in the

theatre of miracles to be born again. You get a second chance at life and that type of offer is priceless. For many of us, in order to see the light, we must be placed in the darkness first, whether that be from trauma, depression, addiction or through incarceration. For a large portion of my life, I've lived in denial until it came full circle, and I had to face the reality of checking all the boxes. After being sentenced to 10 years at 85% in 2023, I had a spiritual revelation which unveiled my future truth.

My purpose is to live out my God-given identity so that other people can outlive their life expectancy. My goal is to help other people lead epic lives through finding their zone of genius,

so they can maximize their capacity while on the journey of becoming mentally, spiritually and physically fit. I want to be that flicker in the darkness with the power to spark a thirst for evolution and show people how to become obsessed by their future goals, not haunted by their past failures.

After my arrival at Vandalia C.C., I worked as a cook in the officer kitchen for 6 months and then became the personal property clerk for the past year. As I was working, I also became Civic Aide certified, CAT excavator certified and became a mentor for the Foundations for Life program. I attend church services, AA and Celebrate Recovery weekly. I have not received any disciplinary tickets during my incarceration at Vandalia. Over the past year, I have been a facilitator in the Building Block Program, which is a programmatic living unit aimed at providing peer-led cognitive behavioral therapy courses.

In utilizing my Bachelor Degree of Marketing, I have created my own

program, which is called “Elevate Mindset” where I teach business operations, leadership and the art of human health and longevity. I enjoy working out, cutting hair and helping entrepreneurs put together a strategy to conquer a market.

Most of us experience two lives, and the second one starts the moment you realize you only have one. God throws his hardest battles at his strongest soldiers and the sharpest of swords are forged in the hottest of fires. I’ve learned that in order to stay out of the throne of misery I must keep myself in the present moment and only control the things I can control.

I do know that the potential of your impact is a reflection of the intensity of your commitment. My advice is to take the time now to focus on who you want to be. Find clarity and make decisions that are aligned with your core beliefs and values, because even though you’re locked up, when you discover who you are, you’ll be free...

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Timothy Youngblood

Editor At-Large

Lawrence

For the duration of my incarceration, I have been challenged to constantly seek new ways to grow and contribute. I have been dedicated to growth and lifelong learning; I feel a strong kinship to the Japanese principle of Kaizan, or continuous improvement. My mission in life has always been to use my skills, talents, and finances to help those less fortunate than myself. While most individuals-in-custody withdraw into relative obscurity, I have chosen a different path.

Since losing my freedom, I have continued with my mission of helping others through the prison commissary, by giving away some of my purchased commissary food items for more than a decade. I began tutoring others, negotiating peace in the prison system, and writing essays that are informative and entertaining.

Many can argue that I am having a

greater impact now than when I was in society. I have created this impact by continuing to learn, grow, and find ways to make things happen. I am committed to advance, to move forward and higher to succeed. Success can be defined as the degree to which one moves forward and upward, progressing in one's lifetime mission despite all obstacles or other forms of adversity.

Over the past twelve years of the ordeal, I have been reading and writing non-fiction. I began to take it seriously rather late; my love for reading first hit me nine years ago, and I loved nothing but that. I was encouraged by the reading experience Malcolm X said he had while he was in prison, at least up to a point. I devoured the small libraries in the prisons I was transferred to. My choice in the books I read varied from Socrates to Satire, the Eden project: The search for the Magical other, Notes from underground, these are some that

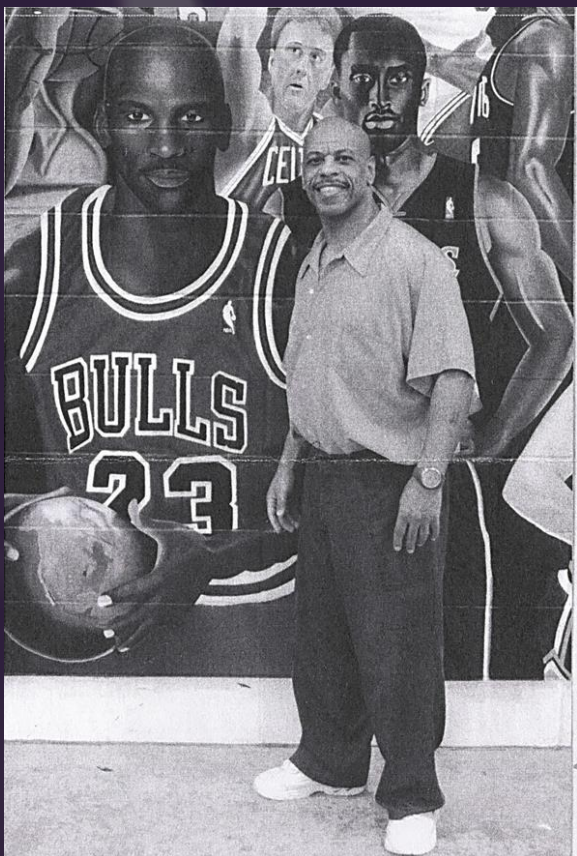
stick in my mind why?

I read those all three or four times, because (one cannot read a book unless it is a simple child's book): one can only reread it; we must have time to acquaint ourselves with it. We have no physical organ that takes in the whole picture until a second, third, or fourth reading. The past three years I have been writing non-fiction essays for *Kewanee Horizons*, *Two Roads*, and *Insiders Perspective*, which is a local newsletter here at Lawrence.

It is my personal belief that there is something unique about me that prepared me from birth and propelled me throughout my life toward non

-fiction writing. Throw as many obstacles in my way as you like, and still, I persevere toward my goal, often with nothing more than a vague idea of what that goal might be, I achieve it. Nothing – even the most severe rejection of some of my essays – can impede my progress. I like to write; I find writing fun –something that, in itself, yields pleasure. Anyone can write. The problem with me is that I cannot do anything else. I am obsessed with the art of writing. I am not saying that I am not capable of anything else, programming computers, running a small business, or winning chess tournaments. I have found writing a calm solution from the chaos, such as flooding my cell, setting my mattress on fire, or asking for a crisis team (L.O.L just kidding); it makes me happy.

It fills a need, whether that need is longing for self-expression a quest for immortality through the written word, a soothing distraction from this cruel life of incarceration, Kaizan, or continuous improvement, or just to show how my missions in the past affects the present and even the future.



IN A BLINK OF AN EYE

Vincent 'Vinny' Spencer
Graham

When the judge passed down that 37 years sentence on me, life was sucked right out of me "in a blink of an eye." The whole event was earth shaking, as if my life was consumed in an earthquake; I was shattered mentally, and emotionally. How could I ever be a father to my child, be restored to my place in the family or even see myself worthy of being a functional human being? The burden I carried was heavy. In the midst of these traumatic events, which was overwhelming at the time, I needed to find real meaning, and a cause to move forward. A concerned neighbor that was on my cellblock asked me if I was interested in having a one-to-one bible study in the visiting room, "members of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization were visiting prisons and jails conducting bible studies," the setting was somewhat informal, (not like going to church) but it was more personal. And even though

the visit was sporadic, seeds of hope had been planted. I found a place for forgiveness, and renewed strength; I punched the clock, and got back in the game. From day one of my walking through those prison doors, I vowed to make my stay as productive as possible. The passing of my TABE Test practically went unnoticed; I just assumed it was part of the process; nevertheless, my name was submitted for the GED class. Two years into my bit there I was, sitting in school, studying for my GED. In my mind I was saying, "How did I get to be so fortunate?" So many other people had been longing to be in my shoes, but there I was, fresh in the joint and already in school. I had also scored one of the better jobs at the facility working as a inside grounds worker. In both aspects I think, it was the initiative I took that allowed the opportunities to open up. I didn't wait for an offering to come to me, I went out and found it. In the meantime, I'm progressing spiritually, keeping up with my attendance at congregation meetings,

studying the bible, and strengthening my relationship with God, which has allowed me to have a proper perspective in life.

I begin to share my story with others and offer hope to those who were in despair. By 2008 I passed the High School Equivalency Test (GED) and went on to use my time productively. I worked in general store, and was a clerk in cold storage, I operated the fork-lift, did good orders, and kept the books. In the eyes of my peers, I was doing well, but yet and still, I remained humble. Those first ten years at Menard were full of many tribulations, excessive lockdowns, unruly cellies, plus all the craziness that goes on in prison life. For me, I truly believed that I only perservered through the strength of God. In 2014 I transferred to Western C.C. which, in my eyes, was two steps up from Menard; no more small cells, more recs and yards, and more showers. Things begin to change.

In 2015 I made public my dedication to Jehovah God, and Jesus by getting baptized. This was a pivotal moment for me; I had finally committed to something great and extraordinary. I felt a sense of maturity; I was more tolerant, reasonable, and made better decisions.

I went on to attend Lake Land College in pursuit of my liberal arts degree. Doing the work at first presented its challenges – my grades wasn't up to par; I was making D's and C's at best, but I had a talk with a friend, and established better study habits, and then, soon afterwards, my grades improved. I'm two classes short of getting my degree. Lake Land College hasn't been offering academic classes at the places I've been. I still need an English and humanity classes, I've accumulated 92.0 credit hours, with a GPA of 3.34. I have certificates in Horticulture, and culinary arts, along with several behavior modification certificates, and did a year in transformed life academy where we studied a slew of subjects.



I utilized my skills by becoming a cook and a garden crew worker at Big Muddy. While there I also did volunteer service as a vaccine ambassador for Covid-19; I went around asking people to get vaccinated, and I was a mentor for their first transform life academy course. I've filed two clemencies in the past five years, my last one was denied March 2024, but I've already started work on a third, with more to add. I'm currently working in the kitchen here at Graham, trying to work my way up the ladder. I'm also in the volunteer service here joined by a collective of inmates that brainstorm ideas and come up with suggestions to promote positivity here at Graham. My most recent endeavor was going public with my thoughts on enlightenment; I had an article published on Two Roads.

In hind-sight to this time that just went by "in a blink of an eye," I've learned a lot about myself, and about life. I know that in order to make real progress a valiant effort must be put forth. One must look deep beyond the

surface to accept change, and find meaning, and purpose in life. Despite my precarious situation, I've managed to have joy at the end of the tunnel. I now have 8 1\2 years left on my sentence; justice reform is making big strides, my health is holding up, and my relationship with God is intact. I understand that life isn't all roses, but when I focus on my potential instead of my limitations, I can be more confident in putting one foot forward, maximizing the full benefit life has to offer. The time spent in prison may not have been valuable to some, but for me it has been an experience of great benefit, something I will treasure for the rest of my life.

"True, no discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but it is painful, yet afterwards, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Hebrews 12:11

RIGHTEOUS THOUGHTS

Oscar Lee Brown Jr.

Southwestern

Refusing to allow negative thoughts to remain, I am now able to resist temptations, which eventually causes pain. The son has called my name sheltering me from the rain, my actions now confirm I am not the same; I am grateful, and overwhelmingly thankful for the given opportunity to switch lanes, NEVER, EVER, for decision I now make.

I shall explain, I let my actions confirm my righteous thoughts, hate hasn't nor ever will have a place of living in my house, if hate attempts to enter my mind, it should be considered as a battle which was lost, only love prevails here, and my mind only now accepts, righteous thoughts.

I WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL & TRUE!

THE SWEET DEMON

Sarah L. Mecum

Logan

I have come to realize that being a vegan (no meat) has opened up a whole world of craving which is un-satisfiable ...no matter the amount of raw sugar-cake batter, icing, brownie mix. No matter the pre-packaged beauties-chocolate covered, cupcakes, pop tarts. They leave me feeling like an addict, how to get more. I do believe that the joy of one bite miracles will come back to me eventually but for the moment, while trying to tame my senses and

cravings, if I'm going to stuff myself and barbarically search for more, then it's going to be freshly grown mother earth. I love myself, I love my body, and I love my soul. The taming of the sweets demon takes more time than I have yet to know. One-year lock up, still learning and moving strong.

You roar up inside me like the beast in the wild, caught in the eyes of a child. In the moment of amazement is the overstuffed behind a smile. The danger is never mild. I must tame the beast. I must, I must, not overeat...

WHEN A WIN IS A LOSS

Earl Milton Jr.

Centralia

A win is not really a win, if it causes you to lose the ground you have gained. If the win will cause hardship, loss pain, discomfort, is it really a win? A real win is followed by a reward. A loss dressed up as a win causes unnecessary stresses and regrets. A mental tally is very useful in making decisions that will ultimately benefit you. Thoughtful consideration will bring the clarity that you need to perceive, when a win is really loss. In addition, it will help you to learn to discern, when what seems like a loss is actually a win. We all have goals in life that we are hoping to achieve. Some are short term and others are long-term pursuits. Anything that would throw a monkey wrench into the gears should be avoided like a plague. Only you know what you want out of life. Nobody should be able to cause you to make choices that would thwart your own plans for a better life.

Some thing's actually do not even

really matter, as much as they seem to matter. Moreover, something's that do not seem to matter that much are vitally important.

I believe that every person would like happiness in life. If we want happiness, why would we allow ourselves to be pressured into making decisions that would cause us avoidable unhappiness? When a win is a loss, it has a cost that you would much rather not pay. A real win can be identified by the benefits that it provides. Think before you jump out there: because sometimes when you win, in the end when the smoke clears, you will find that you actually lost.

So, in closing, make sure that your win is an actual victory. Think for overall life designed fulfillment. Nobody but you knows everything you want out of this life. I implore you, my dear friends, to do that which brings you closer to what will actually make you happy. Keep your eyes open, so that you will know when a win is a loss.

Take Care.



FROM CELLS TO SALES:

How I Went from Doing 10 Years in Prison to Earning \$10K a Month

Marcus L. Harris

**Outside Contributor and
Former Content Editor**

TWO ROADS

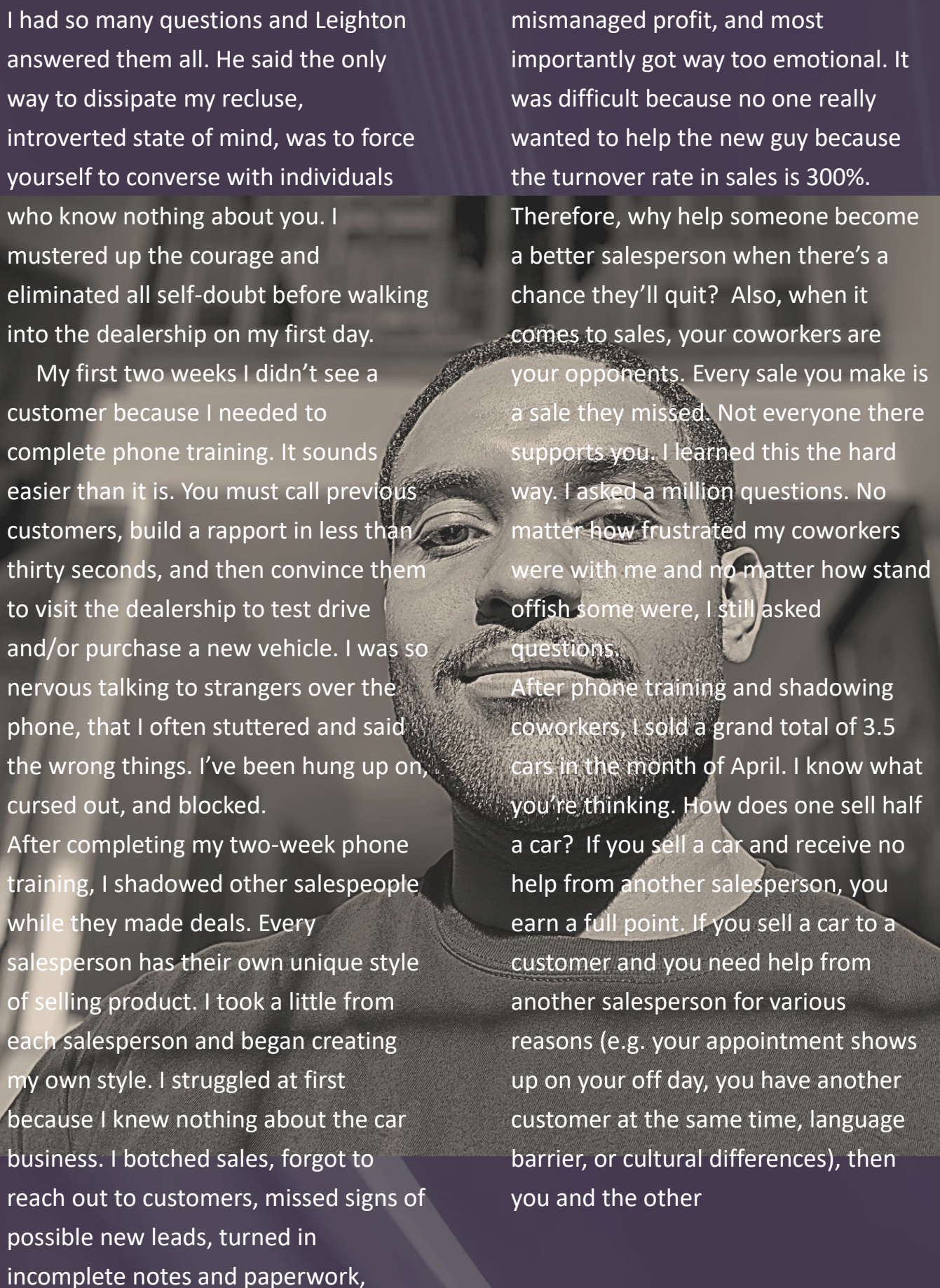
I was informed in June of 2023 that my parole date will be recalculated from January 2028 to January 2024 due to a new house bill going into effect in January. I was both excited and nervous because everything I learned from the past ten years; I could potentially put into effect upon my release. I released from Crossroads Adult Transition Center January 4, 2024, and the next chapter in my life began.

Finding a job while on ankle monitoring was difficult. I had to wear it for sixty days and my curfew was from 7am to 4pm. Not many places hire individuals with such limited availability. After two months of job opportunity rejections, I finally called a childhood friend of mine, Leighton, who's a sales manager at a Chevrolet dealership. I asked about employment, and he said, "I think you'd do great as a salesman." I disagreed at first and expressed to him I've only conversed with convicted felons and IDOC staff regarding prison topics for a decade. I really didn't

know how to relate to the average person who's never been through the prison system. He told me to stop overthinking and visit the dealership to shadow one of the salespeople.

I came in one Friday to observe how the car business is operated. Leighton offered me a sales position immediately. I accepted the position, but I had many doubts. I'm supposed to talk to strangers about financial topics that were considered "taboo" to discuss when I was growing up.





I had so many questions and Leighton answered them all. He said the only way to dissipate my recluse, introverted state of mind, was to force yourself to converse with individuals who know nothing about you. I mustered up the courage and eliminated all self-doubt before walking into the dealership on my first day.

My first two weeks I didn't see a customer because I needed to complete phone training. It sounds easier than it is. You must call previous customers, build a rapport in less than thirty seconds, and then convince them to visit the dealership to test drive and/or purchase a new vehicle. I was so nervous talking to strangers over the phone, that I often stuttered and said the wrong things. I've been hung up on, cursed out, and blocked.

After completing my two-week phone training, I shadowed other salespeople while they made deals. Every salesperson has their own unique style of selling product. I took a little from each salesperson and began creating my own style. I struggled at first because I knew nothing about the car business. I botched sales, forgot to reach out to customers, missed signs of possible new leads, turned in incomplete notes and paperwork,

mismanaged profit, and most importantly got way too emotional. It was difficult because no one really wanted to help the new guy because the turnover rate in sales is 300%. Therefore, why help someone become a better salesperson when there's a chance they'll quit? Also, when it comes to sales, your coworkers are your opponents. Every sale you make is a sale they missed. Not everyone there supports you. I learned this the hard way. I asked a million questions. No matter how frustrated my coworkers were with me and no matter how standoffish some were, I still asked questions.

After phone training and shadowing coworkers, I sold a grand total of 3.5 cars in the month of April. I know what you're thinking. How does one sell half a car? If you sell a car and receive no help from another salesperson, you earn a full point. If you sell a car to a customer and you need help from another salesperson for various reasons (e.g. your appointment shows up on your off day, you have another customer at the same time, language barrier, or cultural differences), then you and the other

salesperson each earn half a point. I taught myself how to speak Spanish while incarcerated and it's paying dividends. Non-Spanish speaking salespeople miss out on numerous deals because they never took the time to learn the language. When I approach a Spanish-speaking customer with a prompt, friendly, enthusiastic greeting, I progress the sale in Spanish as much as I can. If I believe I've done my best and the customer hasn't signed to buy the car, then I tag in a Hispanic salesperson to close the deal. I'm not too proud to share half my commission check with a coworker to close a deal because half a commission check is better than no check.

You must put your pride and emotions to the side and focus on winning the **WAR**, not the battle.

After selling only 3.5 cars for the month of April and being ranked last in the sales ranking, I kicked it into high gear. I began making over sixty cold calls a day and introduced myself to every service customer. I realized sales are a numbers game. The more hands you **shake**, the more money you **make**.



I watched numerous videos about the different features and specs on all Chevy vehicles. The more I **learn**, the more I **earn**. I make sure my appearance is professional because the more **attractive** you **look**, the more **deals** you **book**. Once I applied myself and focused on my desired-positive outcomes, everything shifted. I began selling more vehicles every month. I went from being ranked last (13th), to consistently being in the top 5 every month. I'm currently ranked second (as of 9/20/2024); behind the number one salesman Elvin. I relate to Elvin because he did thirteen years in prison. We bonded quickly over sharing ridiculous prison stories with Barry, one of our sales managers, who's also a convicted felon.

We're all former convicts earning good money for ourselves and our families. Out of us three, I'm earning the least amount at \$10K monthly. But Elvin and Barry gross between \$150K-\$180K annually.



Sales isn't for everyone. The hours are long. You spend more time at work than with your family. If you don't sell a car, you don't earn any money. You must have a hustler's mentality because your paycheck isn't guaranteed. On the other hand, working for minimal wage isn't for everyone either. Think about how many customers a Wal-Mart employee helps in an hour to only earn \$17.

Now, imagine selling a customer a car for an hour and earning \$1,700. Working in sales, you could earn someone's **monthly wages** in **one hour**. Once you work for commission, you'll never see yourself working an hourly-based job again.

I don't view me being a salesman as a job. I'm a business within a business. I'm using the dealership's resources to earn as much profit as I can. You must sell yourself. I'm challenging those of you who aren't interested in working an hourly-based job to dive headfirst into a sales career. Learn how to connect with people and bring value to customers. Customers are more willing to buy something from you if they really like you. Make yourself **likable** and always smile. Negotiating is a transfer of feelings. When you're energetic, happy, and positive, so customers will be.

Therefore, when you parole, apply for a sales position where you **MUST** communicate with customers to earn a living. If I can go from doing 10 years in prison to earning \$10K a month, **SO CAN YOU!**

Sincerely, Marcus Harris

LIFE OF PROGRESS

Marcus E. Harris

Graham

Hello, my name is Marcus Eugene Harris, born and raised in Chicago Illinois. I am currently 37 years of age and serving a sentence of sixteen years. I have two years left to serve. I am a writer; the one thing I find great joy in is expressing my thoughts. I am in the process of writing this book titled *The Journal of a Conflicted Prisoner*. It is a compilation of a summary of my incarceration, raw and honest journal entries, essays I have written, and poems all created to document my journey of self-development. I would like to be a participant in all the publications, as a writer, if possible. Here is some of my story.

I have been incarcerated for the last twelve years on a journey, searching for my place and reason in this life. I came to prison with my body,

mind, and spirit in shambles twelve years ago. I am proud to say, today I am not that person anymore; it has been a long road of recovery, reflection, and intense refinement.

I will forever be a work in progress because I will never be perfect, and there is always room for improvement in my life. Over the years, I have not had any spectacular achievements to speak of because many of the facilities do not have opportunities available – staffing seems to be more of the issue at hand. Academics have never been a big issue with me; it has always been my train of thought than my thinking has gotten me in more trouble.

With that said, I have been involved with different mental health groups where I received certificates of completion. In addition, I did complete the custodial maintenance course. My journey has been more about personal growth through honest self-reflection, self-inventory, and self-correction.

I am proud to say that I have observed and adhered to all the rules that were placed before me except for the small length of time I was in C grade, two months to be exact. In my spare time, I read, write, meditate, and exercise daily, in an effort to be the best version of myself...mind, body, and spirit in tandem. I would like to now share with you a poem I wrote some time ago, titled "Life".



Life

Inspired in my sleep, I awakened motivated. Inhaled fresh possibilities, exhaling raw ambition.

Eradicated of all fears, heart of a lion, compassion of a poet for innovation and an unquenchable thirst for understanding. A starving hunger for deep knowledge digested through continuous self-improvements. The roads of complacent were paved with marble smoothness, yet the roads of endless possibilities were littered with nails, rocks, broken glass, broken dreams, only to be navigated by the enduring tenacity – a brethren to progress.

Procrastination is a cousin to time elapsing, forged by fire made strong however, only as strong as the weakest link in my foundation, mirth, solace. It is my understanding of reasons and seasons, the world is given to the meek, humble, and resilient. Only with time does one find success before work. As sure as birds fly, life is given; sure as ants crawl, death will eventually come. Do not merely just exist – but live!

SELF STARTER

Jeremy Green
Illinois River

First and foremost, I do believe that, armed with knowledge, time is one of life's most valuable assets. During this journey, I have been using my time wisely by reading self-help books with substance. Such substance consists of knowledge, wisdom and understanding that can be applied accordingly and to its full capacity. And having a reflection of yearning to become a better person going forward, which involves taking program classes, earning certificates, and college courses to earn an associate's and being certified in environmental health and safety services.

When it comes to reflection and mindset, a person must reflect a “**Can Do**” attitude. Reflection must reflect independence, initiative and entrepreneurship, which help me focus on the future with renewed optimism. Rehabilitation is all about picking yourself up and running in the right direction and inevitably encountering an

unforgiving world.

Then you discover a very forgiving world for those who demonstrate sincere efforts to change their lives for the better. For instance, having jobs while incarcerated is a glimpse of what I spoke on. The changes that I have made, that I was not doing in the past, are having a profound understanding that **FAITH** is a perspective. Meaning that whatever you say, that's what you are harvesting and what you harvest, that is what you are sowing. So, if you hope to challenge your innermost self in finding out who you are, then that is the first step into learning self. Moreover, the mind – and everything of self – starts within you.



Having an understanding of self makes you better equipped to face any challenges and obstacles ahead, which gives you perspective, and enhances the mind with the ability to foresee what you desire.

Now if you desire, you therefore hope, because of your desire. In continuing to hope, that brings about faith, which gives you the strength to

persevere for however long you can stand within the mind. So, one must ask himself or herself, is having a perspective of the mind, a fore shadow of thought? Also, changing for the better helps others because only when you change your mindset, do you have the ability to change the world you live in. To do better, is to be better – food for thought.

THE POWER TO DEFINE

DeMarcus Hillsman
Danville

Greetings to you brothers and sisters, may peace be upon all of you who are continuing to strive for the best wherever your physical being is presently residing. I'm peaceful, blessed, and continuing to stand strong in this fight as I patiently wait on my moment. Having served close to a quarter of a century in prison on a 32-year sentence, I can personally say that

I don't believe that the "system" which consists of the courts, IDOC, etc. cares about their mission statement nor reform/rehabilitation. Mission: to serve justice in Illinois and increase public safety by promoting positive change for those in custody, operating successful re-entry programs, and reducing victimization. Reform/rehabilitation these two words should go hand in hand with IDOC's mission statement.

Is not over 20 years of working within the IDOC; over 20 years of structured programs-ABE, college courses, lifestyle redirection, thinking for a change, anger management, parenting classes, etc; over 50 certificates; fewer than 8 infractions; is this not at least worthy of consideration for a sentence reduction under IDOC's mission statement, or under reform/rehabilitation through the courts or a clemency petition? I have under 8 years left to serve on my sentence, and without any incentive(s) from IDOC, I will continue to strive towards what "I" personally believe is the best for me. I'm out of the IDOC mission statement, as well as the "System" take on reform/rehabilitation, until I start seeing real meaningful changes.

They went from calling us convicts, inmates, and now "Individuals In custody," what is the difference? This attempt to clean things up might be more disrespectful seeing how the administration from the top on down is at the current prison that I'm at, and I'm sure other's outside of Kewanee continues to treat us.

When it comes to basic things, to me, reform and rehabilitation is something

to be defined personally. To me, IDOC and the powers that be are still standing strong upon crime and punishment.



Yes!! I see all of you brothers and sisters highlighting your achievements at different prisons in Illinois, I salute all of you, keep up the good work, and know that the power to define is yours.



MY PROGRESS

Antonio Woodson

Pinckneyville

My progress first started, as I know of it today, when I CHANGED my MINDSET, my way of THINKING, which alternately CHANGED my BEHAVIOR and because of it all made me the man I am today. A MAN that is more respectful, responsible, positive and productive; I am A MAN today with a PURPOSE and passion for my life, others, and my craft. Even though I don't have everything figured out. I continue to work on myself by staying focused, positive and productive as I continue to improve every day. How??? When I'm not at work, for the most part, I'm in my cell working on my plans for my future on the outside of prison, as well as figuring out different ways that I can do my part in trying to help others.

You see, I truly believe when you start putting good and positive energy into your life, as well as around you, amazing things start happening in your life. Me changing my life around was the best thing for me; my way of

thinking is much clearer, and now I view things and others differently. I've been blessed with a second chance at life on the outside. I've been blessed to give back 39 years of a 60-year sentence. If you stay away from criminal thinking and negative people and their energy, you'll also want to change your ways. Like I always say, "It's up to you!" wanting to make that change for the better.



I just thank God for giving me the strength to look over what others might think of me because I may do and look at things differently. So, the one thing that I'm currently doing now that I wasn't doing in the past...I'm thinking more with a clear mindset, which makes me want to pour out more positive

energy as well as wanting to get up and work and be more productive in my life and for others who need my assistance.

So, how am I progressing??? By continuing to think CLEARLY and by using my time wisely, and surrounding myself with like-minded people...like MYSELF



LOST TIME POSTING

Happy Holidays and God bless you all. My name is Nolan Watson; I am an individual in custody at Dixon C.C. I came here in 2003, and things had been up and down pertinent to the rehabilitation and legal aspects in my life. At one point I was close to giving up from what appeared as discouragement. I quickly realized that the only thing that could stop my growth was, in fact, me; we are the most important elements in our lives. So, I would like to challenge all individuals in custody to continue to live and grow despite the eight by ten feet cells that maintain our bodies. I am a living example. In 2017-18 I obtained my Culinary Arts Certificates while housed at Western Illinois C.C. In 2024 while here at Dixon C.C I received Certificates from the Blackstone Paralegal Career Institute, my church the Universal Life Church ordained me as a minister, granting me two doctorates in Divinity and Motivation. I have also obtained multiple certificates in the mental health therapies.

Throughout the 21 years I have been serving, I have formed an opinion that all of the legal advocacy groups in Illinois and elsewhere are vehemently and extremely reluctant to assist prisoners with their criminal and civil

So, I have taken matters into own hands by establishing the New Outreach Level Assistance Network (NOLAN), designed to address the hardships of individuals in custody. Assisting through education, economics, politics, and social development, combining unity and love as the foundation to all the relationships that are formed, my expertise in their legal field allows me to assist prisoners and families alike in their legal battles, including workshops on self-advocacy. For instance, I am litigating two consolidated civil lawsuits for over 30 years in the Lee County Circuit Courts in Dixon Illinois. We should always be mindful that circuit judges, in my opinion, lean mostly towards the state and against prisoner's lawsuits for several reasons, often granting unethical leniencies at our expense. My intent is to bring these discriminations to light, federally if need be. I have challenged all major legal advocacy groups in Illinois to assist us, however no one has contacted me.

Thank you for your Time

Nolan Watson

GRACE THROUGH FAITH FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT-REPRISE

I'd like to begin this follow up with a moment of silent reflection in remembrance of all the fallen mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, grandchildren, and all the loved ones, especially caregivers who understand the awesome responsibility to those afflicted.

I would also like to take a moment to remember those who our lord, holy father, in his infinite wisdom and will, has called home in times of our winter seasons in life.

With this, I would like to pray, Dear Heavenly God the Father. In times of joy and sorrow, we are reminded of your will, your grace, and your awesome power. Your will sustains us in seasons of joy and of sorrow and that everything is for you.

We pray that your continued grace blesses us through our faith in your son Christ Jesus, whom you sent to us and paid the ultimate sacrifice, to save us from our sins. That we may continue to grow in our faith for your will and grace,

and that it may continue to sustain us in all of our seasons. Amen!

This letter is a continuation of a previous letter sent to the Two Roads, which we would like to say thank you and tell you how grateful we are for your E-zine. I would like, personally, to thank everybody for all the prayers for the man I write about in this piece. Honestly, as his caregiver we could not have done without you and are grateful and thankful through this perilous season, a season spanning over two (almost three) years. Most importantly, over anything else, thank you God for your grace in these times

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to present to the world, through faith in the grace of our lord, a leader, father figure, mentor, teacher, one of the most technically best guitarists I've ever known, a former truck driver, a cat lover, and most importantly my friend and brother- Andrew Pfeiffer. As his caregiver and witness to God's grace, I would like to add another notch to the already blessed story

of Drew. May I present with all humility and dignity Andrew Pfeifer- **CANCER SURVIVOR**.

I cannot tell you the joy and honor of sharing the story of God's miracle and witnessing God's grace. Watching the struggle from being diagnosed with terminal cancer, (a certain season of doom) to being blessed with God's grace, and then to being Cancer Free! How I got to witness the struggle to get to the crossroad and the journey that it has been.

It has not been easy – most seasons are not. I remember being there to help him through all of it. I remember everyone's support, prayers, and blessings. I can also say that without God and music, I do not know where Drew would be today. My brother is truly blessed, and I am proud to call him my brother regardless of any situation or season in life.

I would also like to thank Drew's brothers from the L.T.S. Department who have had his back through this time of suffering. I also want to thank Warden Crowe, Operations Warden Hvarre, former L.T.S. Supervisor S. Hudson, and current Supervisor C. Hamson. Without these people, we would not have L.T.S., an Art Department, or a Music Department. Thank you so much for your time; we are grateful.

I also want to thank everyone for their prayers through all of this. Again, it has not been an easy journey for sure. I also want to end it on a special

thank you of support and prayers to Drew's Brothers in his musical family. People like Nicky Styx, Cookie, Joskie, Radio, Me-Taterhead (or Dokken), as well as an extended gratitude to Phalen, little Mr. Robinson (yeah, and you too, Gizmo), Mr. Brooks, and Snow as well. You are all cronis400 members of the musical family.

The last part of this letter is for my brother Drew. We have seen a lot the last almost three years together. Your teaching style in music is not easy. I understand your approach to students from beginning to master is one to challenge every single person to be the best they can be. It is not an easy task to be an example, to carry and understand humility, but the reward is great. I too am a cancer survivor. In my struggle, I remember being in ICU on my deathbed. It was so bad I did not want my mom to see me in case I actually did pass. It is easy to forget the blessings and miracles given to us. To put our will before the will of God (I know I have been guilty of that). We might be mess-ups, but God puts us where we are exactly for God's will and purpose. It is easy to forget the blessings and miracles we are. It is also easy to forget the people that Love us, care for us, and are there for us. Do not forget to breath and remember my brother. Love, Peace, and Chicken Grease!

-Daniel Maciewski-

Adjust to the Times

I finally made it to East Moline C.C and it is many adjustments I had to make after enduring 13 years locked behind doors. Here you are out all day and the adjustment I had to make was sleeping with the cell door unlocked - yes, I said it "unlocked". For most of us individuals in custody who have served sentences in Maximum and High Medium Facilities, security is a very high priority ,and in that moment, it became evident how institutionalized my thinking had become about things of that nature. Like every other correctional facility, it has its pros and cons, so now that I am at a Minimum Facility, the rules are a bit tight; however, a prison is a prison, and I never heard of a good prison-"So one must adjust to the times".

Upon arriving at East Moline, I was accepted into the Augustana College Program and had to leave many of my brothers behind, ummah (community and my C.A.V.E family at Danville C.C). I was already accustomed to the discipline it took to execute my educational goals; however, the APEP institutions are really challenging the students, through their curriculum, to adopt the mindset of growth in everything they do. I and the other students carry a heavy load on the schoolwork, and we are enduring all that comes with serving time in order to pay our debt to society.

For example, dealing with security oppression, maintaining our relationships with our loved ones, and trying to navigate our frustrations without the damage that comes with it sometimes. How do you know what form of stress you can handle if you are not put in stressful situations or obstacles are placed before you? We have to stay "well adjusted" because there is a bigger play being made, the world will place more difficult challenging before us that we must overcome, so we prepare for re-entry. Everyone's not as fortunate to serve a short sentence; some of us do not have support systems in place. Many men cannot escape the legacy they left behind, having to face people they had wronged, apologies are not being accepted from them, and feelings remain hurt.

All of our realities are vastly different however; sacrifices and choices still have to be made. In this game of life, when you're dealt a bad hand, the only thing you can do is play it the best way you can. One of the key motivations that keeps me focused on my goals is my son; there have been plenty of times my son helped me refrain from responding irrationally. We all cope with things differently and all we can do is adjust with the times, making the best moves we can, and keep it moving.

Honestly, I could never make this message (solely) about me and disregard the 28K people like myself that are enduring the same struggle. The truth of the matter is, the prison environment is not conducive to our growth. Our lives are packed into property boxes, and we're subjected to living in a bathroom with strangers. The rules are made by people who don't understand prison life; they have no idea about cell etiquette, and they're not subjected to the rules that are enforced.

So, given those facts, the only thing you can do is be "Resilient" or "Fold", and when you fold in prison, you're subjecting yourself to a totally different type of struggle. From me to the prison population: If you ain't accomplishing nothing while serving your time, "you in the way," and if you focus on executing your goals, make sure you stay ready to adjust with the times....

Signing off,

BR

LOOKING BACK AT CARNAGE... (BY ANTONIO ESPINO)

As these years have gone by, I have felt uncertain of myself. The levels of development have gone by feeling unnoticed internally. What others see and what I feel seem to be on differing scales, and this has confused me for some time. Where this becomes detrimental is when you are in the midst of doing a twenty-one-year sentence, and you look back wondering if you had wasted the time you were to do? I had an experience with one of my

best friends that forever shaped my ability to see myself clearer than I had before.

I have pushed myself constantly in many facets, if not all, of my character, temperament, and personality. The same goes for me on a superficial level with art, exercise, yoga, and onward. The question arose and was on a feverish level – am I really growing and developing like I think I am, or am I delusional?

One day, one of my best Friends, Justin, had been looking through my art portfolio. The first image was one I had proudly displayed of Carnage from the Marvel Spiderman Universe, and there was an American flag draped over his shoulders. This image is of the cover of the issue *Carnage USA#5*. In these years I had used amazing art from comic covers and tattoo magazines as a marker of amazing talent. I took these role models of art and attempted to emulate their works. I had shared my attempted rendition of this artwork, and I found many to compliment it and mention how much they had liked it.

Over the years this became one of my staples of pride and joy in accomplishment.

As I sat at my desk attempting to determine what I was to work on drawing next, my friend Justin had asked me why I had this drawing “still” in my portfolio. I was immediately confused by his line of questioning as well as his tone. I asked him why he asked, and he replied,

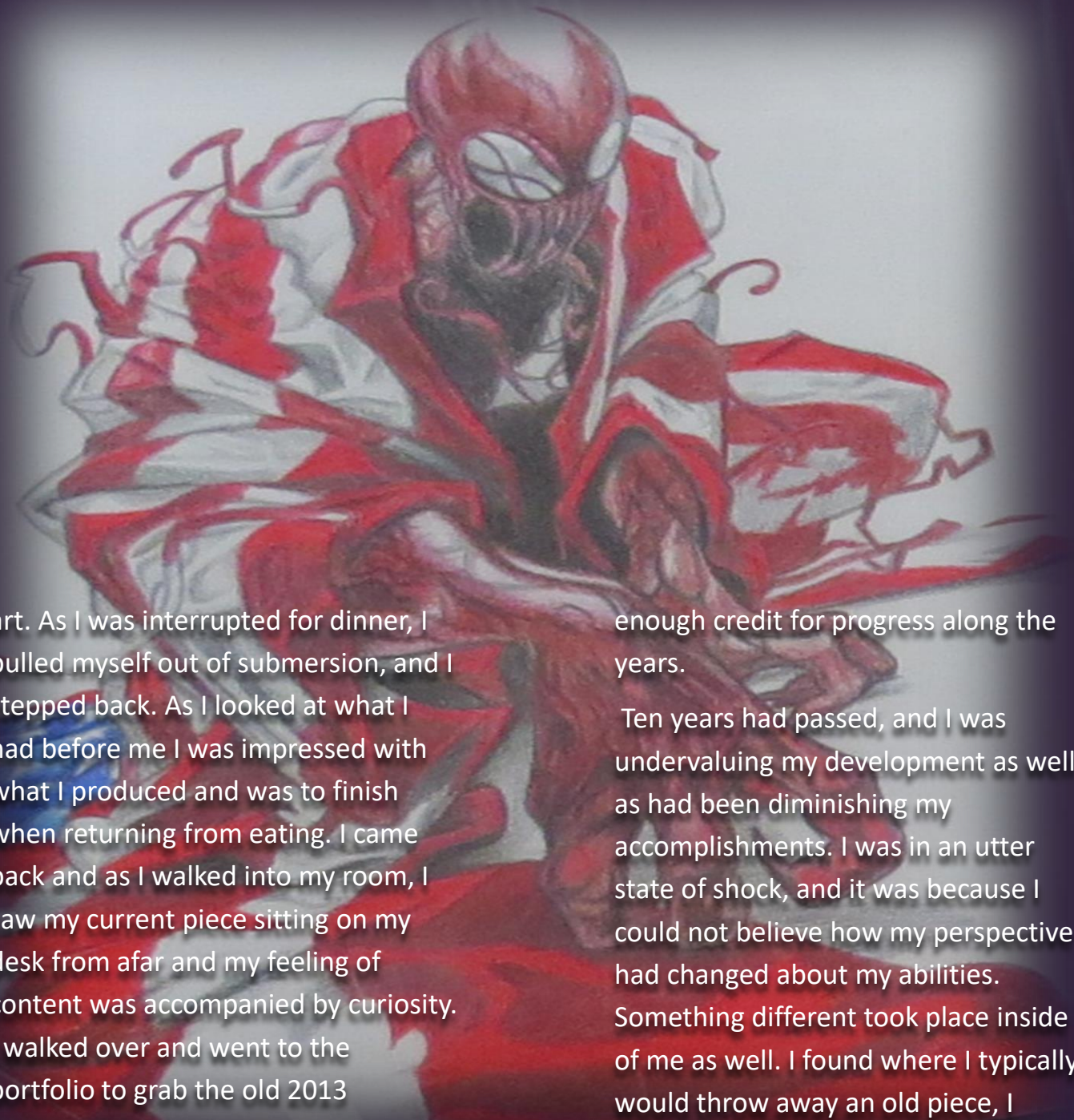
“You are way better than this. This drawing looks like shit compared to what you are capable of right now.” I reflexively recoiled within, as I felt the bitter sting of his words talking about

how this artwork ‘looked like’, especially since I intentionally had it placed in the front of my art portfolio, with pride, and considered it a pace-setting piece due to feedback.

As I defensively and curiously asked him what he fully meant by his statement, he went on to inform me of how he viewed my body of work and current skillsets as well. He went on to deliver a series of motivating and inspiring words about how this particular piece was in no way a true reflection of how far I was in comparison to this piece I was clinging to from 2013, and how my skills were beyond it. As hard as this bit of information was for me to accept, my friend Justin had convinced me that I should make another attempt at this comic book cover art. Little did I know there were a few essential lessons I had to learn in life embedded in this very experience.

It took me about a week of internal convincing to reattempt to draw this image of Carnage and our country’s flag draped over his shoulders.

I set my desk up with my series of Prismacolor Premier colored pencils, the source photo, drank some coffee, and put my headphones on and hit a playlist, releasing myself to my flow of



art. As I was interrupted for dinner, I pulled myself out of submersion, and I stepped back. As I looked at what I had before me I was impressed with what I produced and was to finish when returning from eating. I came back and as I walked into my room, I saw my current piece sitting on my desk from afar and my feeling of content was accompanied by curiosity. I walked over and went to the portfolio to grab the old 2013 illustration and had a side-by-side analysis. My curiosity was overwhelmed by shock and revelation.

I looked at the two pieces of art and found I had grown, and progressed way more than I assumed, and I realized I was not giving myself

enough credit for progress along the years.

Ten years had passed, and I was undervaluing my development as well as had been diminishing my accomplishments. I was in an utter state of shock, and it was because I could not believe how my perspective had changed about my abilities. Something different took place inside of me as well. I found where I typically would throw away an old piece, I wanted to keep it and look upon where I came from. This bit of art, even though it was beyond my current capabilities – it provided me an avenue to developing self-esteem as well as a healthy perception of myself grounded in reality.

As the years have gone by, I have found myself using this 2013 rendition, as a way to look back, when doubting my growth and progress. I have found this as a useful tool for inspiring others with the possibilities of learning and growth in art. Many of us are visual and having a reminder of the past has a powerful effect on our current standing right here, right now, in this moment. This is something I now look at to find a parallel of for other facets of my life. The insecurities we endure within, fed by our understanding of the moment, and/or the burdens of our circumstances brought on by our past actions, can deter us drastically.

Being a very goal-oriented person, as well as a visual learner, I find myself having more fuel for growth as well as a healthier perception of self by making visuals of these states of life. When I have a tangible list of things I see for myself and my loved ones' futures, the act of simply crossing it off my list when accomplished, as well as keeping this list when done, contributes to this healthier state of being.

One other important version of this, I have found to be very enlightening, has been my scrapbook for my Son Anthony. Rereading some of the challenges I was facing at earlier parts of my life has catalogued my progress as a human being, and given the sense of growth and affirmation that we do not necessarily receive while gone.

As this time passes into now, I ask how often do we congratulate someone on their accomplishments and progress? How often do we do so for ourselves? Sometimes we only notice where someone is at in that moment and assume nothing more. Where can we encourage this in ourselves, as well as recognize this in others? Why do we have expressions like "Don't compliment [them] because their head will get big"? How do we practice giving praise and recognition to others as well as ourselves, the way we had to our children for the simplest of things like saying a single word, or getting a good grade on a spelling test?



How do we accurately see ourselves and where we have growth, so we may genuinely recognize areas we may need to focus on better?

PROGRESS

BY: BRETT JAMES FLANDERS

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

-Ralph W. Emerson-

I have read this quote on many occasions, and I never truly understood the full meaning until recently. My life has been a revolving door of bad decisions. Growing up I have had every horrible role model you can think of, from addicts and alcoholics, to violent and abusive parents. Being a kid and not knowing any better, I just followed the path that was laid out for me. Trying to navigate through the years of unhealthy relationships, addiction, heartbreak, self-doubt, abandonment, and incarceration, I hit a breaking point. I remember being in the county jail fighting for my life, begging God for another way. I was tired, and I could not live with the person that was looking back at me in the mirror. I was disgusted and wanted to change. In that moment, it was as if a weight had been lifted off my

shoulders. I finally felt like I could be someone different than what everyone thought of me. It was in that moment that I wanted to be a different person and forge a path of my own. I searched for mentors and found them in books. I read, and read, and applied techniques in everyday instances. Some did not work but more of them worked than the ones that did not. The more I practiced, the more I began to tailor them to me. The more good I put into the world, the more I received blessings. Now this road has been anything but easy. I have made many errors along this new path, but I would not change the lessons I have learned, the people I have befriended, or the progress I have made for anything in the world.

WINNING WITH LOST TIME

BY: ABDUL KHABIR
TWO ROADS EDITOR

I think about all the time I spent dwelling on Lost Time. At the age of 41, I have spent close to half of my life in jail or prison. Each time I found myself back inside, I would focus on all the material things I was missing – wracking my brain to figure out how I was going to catch back up when I got out. I would think of all the people and principles I could blame for the way my life was. Not once did I think Hmm... maybe I should figure out what I can do to take accountability for myself and try something different. Never once had I thought maybe I need to work on myself; I should ask for help. Instead, I thought of how life was passing me by, and I was missing out.

Something different has happened in my life this time. I thought the change was possibly due to the time, in other words, the lengthy 11 years I have served so far. However, the more I think about it, the less I can really place my finger on any one reason for my transformation.

The main thing that has happened is that I have a new outlook on life. My ideals, values, and principles have changed. Many people have stood up to me or stood up for me throughout the years. People such as: victims of my actions, friends, family, and many others. Specifically, the victim of my most current crime, as well as my daughter, my mother, my sisters, some of my fellow peers in custody, a specific counselor (Monty Mittleman), and the wardens here at KLSRC (Jones & Carothers).

The main thing for me is that I know something is different this time. I know everything is going to be okay. There is a sensible fear within me that tells me, if I make choices similar to those of the past, my life will be worth nothing. I will end up dead or back in prison for the remainder of my life. The beautiful thing is that the RAGING FEAR, the one lived inside of me most of my life, no longer resides within me. I am no longer scared to live. The reason is that I have done the work necessary to move forward with a new me.

I also know that the type of work a person like me has to do can never stop. I must always be progressing. I have known many bottoms, but I have yet to reach the top. The irony of it all is that I know that so many bottoms exist, but that there is no top for me to reach. Because, if I feel as though I have reached the top, the only way from there is down. What I have discovered is that the only Lost Time is time that I am no longer trying to be a better person. Lost Time is only in those moments that I am not trying to do the work I need to do, the moments when I am only thinking in a selfish, self-centered, self-seeking way.

My path to progress is through service, how I work to be better so that I may benefit this world instead of stripping it of all the good Allah put in it. I would say I wish I had not lost the time I did while dwelling on my failures, but I know that time was my teacher, even if I did not get the lessons right away. In prison time can be your greatest adversary or your greatest ally; all you have to do is make a choice.



EVERY SECOND THAT PASSES IS ONE LESS MOMENT WE HAVE TO GET IT RIGHT, TO DO THE RIGHT THING. ARE YOU PASSING THROUGH LOST TIME? THE REAL QUESTION IS WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH THE LITTLE TIME YOU HAVE LEFT?

PROGRESS 2025

BRADLEY JUSTICE

Greetings and blessings, I appreciate the platform. Currently I am in A.D. in Lawrence. I have been here since the summer of 2020. When the word went around about the good time and I could possibly go from 100% to 50%, my mind frame shifted, like an out of body experience. I am currently working on three different things; I will list them and why I have chosen to pursue them.

1st) the Red Cross. I saw a commercial that they needed blood, and I thought to myself, *I would like to donate blood to help with the shortage.* The response was no! We can do a lot by donating blood – hear me out. The individual in custody could donate blood if they chose, which would start to change the mindset of being locked up and cannot do anything bad for society. Perhaps give guys a chance to give back to the world, the country, the state, the community they took so much from.

At the same time, the outside public will see that the incarcerated individual is not just a criminal who the state wants to lock up and throw away the key but also is going to one-day return to be a member of society. I hope that changes the view of how society sees prisoners, to maybe show they are people also.

2nd) I create cards, not very good I must admit (LOL), but I try a little bit. On mother's day, I can make 500 cards and always run out after I begin selling them; however, on father's day I can make 10 and cannot give them away. The reason that is in my opinion the majority of us do not know OUR FATHERS, or we do not have a relationship with him at all. There are a few who are blessed enough to have a father figure in their lives and who are a part of their lives. Going through the mental health in Pontiac I did a lot of self-reflection on my life.

I do not know my father or have a relationship with him at all on that side of my family. I am in relative terms a half a person; I feel that when you began to build a new house the foundation needs to be complete. The family should have a foundation of love and understanding, with honest communication. I really tried to get this done with my family. I have been trying to convince the IDOC to allow me to conduct a genealogy test, but they will not allow me to have this test done while I am in their custody. I must submit to a D.N.A test if I am convicted of a crime. However, if I am trying to discover who I am or where I come from, I am not allowed. To reside in a place with no programs, trying to become a man with some knowledge of my family and what it may mean to be family. Not everyone can take the genealogy test, but for those who would, they could benefit from it. The majority of us were out there living an unhealthy lifestyle and might have multiple children. We have the power to stop the *I do not know my father epidemic* in our neighborhoods.

3rd) TBN has been a lifesaver for me; more to the point, many southern states have adopted the “Second Chance Program”. They have entire facilities that are like Kewanee’s environment – a safe space for growth and development, separated for something greater than just confinement. It is a seminary institute; I have been waiting to see if we can get a seminary 2nd chance place here in Illinois. God has been a blessing in my life, and I am sure that I am not the only person who can make that claim. I believe it would change men and women in IDOC and place them on a path to become productive members of society once again.

Thank you and God Bless in Jesus’s Holy Name.

Thank you for your time.

Bradley Justice

LOST TIME

BY: CHADAY AUSTIN

Lost time, is that the price I paid for the crime? 12 @ 50% I got to do the time. Adrenaline of being a hood-chemist over-powered my mind. Clutchin toys and being noid as I peep out the blinds, dodging street & law mimes while trusting none in my mind, avoiding Love & Hate 'cause I was scarred at life, no family or real support to help guide me through the time.

Mom, Dad, Brothers & Sisters all behind the iron. I thought I was gaining power, freedom & a synthetic way of life, trying to give my daughter the best life. Better than what came of mine, but it was snatched, took easily, so it was just for the time, lost time is not the only price I paid for the crime, missing the most influential precious moments of my MINI ME's life, not there to protect her from negligence, abuse, bullying & the hardships of life.

20-minute secure calls my only contact to her, being limited cause I'm in and out of seg became troublesome to her

I became a product of my environment, allowed my pride to make me violent protracted my time dealing with inferiors, self-deprivation of my self-empowerment, but I arise, being ambivalent of lost times, so sometimes you have to take a step back to get a better view of life. With every loss comes a lesson, but you got to be woke to grasp it. Time down is where I found the new me to be found, in the system where you try to get an education they say "nope", where they take rehabilitation as a joke, but what you must know is the help you are seeking is in the mirror.

I completed Blackstone for more Knowledge and a time cut, self-taught Español, so now I'm polyglot, I study accounting to bookkeep my business and all the property that I bought. Now I study real estate to fulfill my goals as a boss, so I found myself, and that's greater than a lot that I lost. My daughter gained Wisdom & Knowledge

Now she'll be better than me and go
complete college, I gained a
relationship with my mom something I
always doubted, anything lost can
always be found again except the time
wasted,

although I lost time, I gained
Knowledge, Wisdom, Humbleness, and
Patience, Self-Discipline is my current
task, but I'm grateful for another breath
enabling me to rock my crown.

STAY FOCUSED ALWAYS LEVEL

TWO ROADS

CALLING OUT

ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDES A NEW YEAR OF APPRECIATION

As we are about to come into the New Year we here at TWO ROADS are calling out all the Attitudes of Gratuities . We would like to hear about the people in your lives that have help and supported you over the years. They are the unsung heroes ,giving as much of themselves as they can without any reward or complaint year in year out . We are asking about those who blood sweat and tears have stood beside you in these difficult times let us honor them as we move into the new year.

**Outsiders, Staff and
Individuals-In-Custody
(WITH Staff Support)**

Please send your submission and
scanned photo (if you choose) to
doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"PROGRESS"

SUBMIT NOW

Without staff support:

Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

PROGRESS

AMBER (COCO) CANELLA
(LISTENING TO JONAH BY KAME)
LOGAN C.C

As we enter into this new year, 2025 has come with much anticipation of new laws, amending the old ones and pending clemencies – the hope of freedom given to many deserving of second chances. Rehabilitation might not have come in the form you wanted; however, it came the way you needed. Let that sink in. To grow, you have to get through the comfortability of your norms and stop being complacent. When you push to challenge yourself, you grow beyond any **SELF-LIMITING BELIEF** (my DEFY is showing) you unconsciously have. During any amount of time or adversity you're facing, you must ask yourself do you want to just lay down or get up and continue the fight? The answer will come to you because you are the only person in your way. The choice is up to you to make. The best days are still ahead of you – in these facilities or out, look at your past and learn from it. What do you want in your future? Progress is a process that takes consistency, determination and most of all, humility.

There are so many of us as a community that share similar traumas and triggers. Time has taught us to figure it out the best way we know to survive. The process is only going to happen when you try and don't give up!

I am asking all my fellow community members, IDOC Individuals in Custody, readers, and those who are enjoying their freedom; I challenge you to go into this New Year TRYING! Try to mend those broken relationships with family and loved ones. To keep writing and journaling your hopes releasing your fears and try to heal. The artist, draw your heart on those portraits, or sing and dance with the happy spirit that makes you feel joy in your heart. Write those grammy award winning raps, love songs. With your time, be productive (I know you can I know I am)! Give yourself credit. You're not the same person you were 10, 20, 30 years ago when you entered this process. That is progress; now what are you going to do with the rest of your life!!

Thank you for your Time.

Healing Through Thyme

Bethany McKee

I came into prison trying to use my time productively, but I allowed my self-limiting beliefs to hold me back, my thoughts full of doubts – only believing I could fail, that none of the achievements I did manage would matter. I tried toastmasters but my low confidence had me running.

I became a trainer in the Helping Paws program and little by little I learned some confidence building techniques, but why could I not just be confident? I did some time in seg, which surprisingly helped me to get out of my depression and delve deep within myself; this time helped me to heal and to look at life with a new perspective. I began learning how to not only love myself but also really get to know Bethany.

Slowly I began embracing myself despite what others thought, and it was freeing. I became particular of who I chose to socialize with, choosing to be around more women that had a positive purpose they were striving for, despite being in a helpless situation.

In 2023 I let my Bunkie talk me into writing and speaking a piece in the “LOOK AT ME NOW” domestic violence play, and I was discouraged because I broke down crying in front of everyone; I felt inadequate.

Later in the year, despite my lengthy sentence, I was able to get into horticulture with an amazing instructor. School was daunting because I do not learn the way others do. I did not participate in school growing up, but this time I found myself having fun, learning a lot and just enjoying it. I found I was interested in pursuing horticulture therapy, desiring to start my own business with juveniles, and here comes a sign for Defy Ventures.

I thought, why not? It was hard! I wanted to quit many times – my “less than” belief continued to pop up – and I was constantly frustrated. Thankfully, I had a great support system in and out of prison that helped encourage me; they believed in me and pushed me.

On December 5th I went to our graduation and “Healing Through Thyme” won not only first place, but also overall favorite and peer favorite. That is not what truly mattered to me. What mattered was that not only did my daughter get to see her mom overcome a huge obstacle, but also, I saw both my growth and that I have people in my life who really see me and are for me, like my friend Angie, who has watched me grow up even cried because of how far I have come. I did not run away, I spoke “confidently-ish” in front of about 80 people, and most importantly, I have learned to believe in myself.

Look out world ‘cuz here I come!



Time is valuable and precious
What are you doing with your time?