

October, 2022 V.14

# TWO ROADS



## **Meaning Makers : Narratives of Transformation**

An honest chronicle of the stories and service of the incarcerated men and women of the Illinois Department of Corrections

# *Two Roads Mission Statement*

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



**Two Roads Tech Guru**  
Leondus Carter

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Two Roads House Artist



**Charles Murray**

*Opal Lee - Pioneer in establishing  
Juneteenth holiday*

# Publisher's Letter

## Penny Rowan

This month's issue, *Meaning Makers*, marks our second edition with this theme. We feel it merits repetition because this idea of a moment in one's life changing one's direction and purpose in life is integral to the rehabilitation process.

Working with individuals in custody in class every day, I hear so many stories of the moment when people made the decision to change their lives. These are those who have decided that they simply cannot continue to live the life they were leading outside of prison anymore.

Some are too focused on their children and how much of their lives they've missed, so they don't want to risk missing more; others recognized that prison may well have saved their lives, as a continued life in the streets would likely have killed them by now; still others have simply come to the realization that they are too old to keep up with the life anymore. The reasons are as varied as the students who walk into my classroom.

This decision is not, in my view, a sign of weakness, but rather an indication of great courage. It is not an easy thing to start over in your 50's or

40's or even 30's. It takes determination and strength of character to learn how to earn an honest living, especially when you've known nothing but the street life up to this point.

I know a lot of you guys have had honest jobs out there, too, or never grew up in the streets, but handling life with a record is another challenge altogether. I believe each man and woman in custody has the capacity to utilize their skills to make a new life for themselves. The present economy lends itself to this challenge, as business are desperate for workers who are reliable and hard-working. More and more are welcoming men and women leaving custody.

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Two Roads is also having a meaning-maker moment. With the publisher, Jim Estes, out of work for an extended period of time, the men at KLSRC who build each issue have had to strengthen their resolve to get each issue out in a timely fashion.

They've done their best under the circumstances and have grown overall, as noted with the set schedule for submissions and the consistent publication schedule. As the one trying to assist them, I am thankful for their hard work, and hope I can even begin to meet their expectations. My greatest hope is that Mr. Estes returns soon! 😊

# Letter from the Editor

Nicholas Crayton



I have been incarcerated for approximately 24 years, and in that time, I have come to learn a great many things about myself and others. When I first became incarcerated, I was 18 years of age and the street culture was a part of who I defined myself to be. I have to be honest and say that I am **not innocent of my crime**, and in **accepting my guilt**, I am allowed to move forward with the burden that I must now carry.

As many of us know with doing time, you must find a way to distract yourself or else the time itself can feel like a **crushing weight**. My beginnings happened at Statesville; “The Sky and the Wall,” as they say, is all that you will see for your stay there. I’ve never seen a more depressing situation as the design behind a maximum security facility. It absolutely leads to feelings of hopelessness, despair, and defeat.

Places like that are designed to deal a crushing blow to those that are confined there, and it is absolutely effective. I experienced that feeling and could not see a way out. I thought that my life was over, and I almost advanced it to my reality.

Despair is a real and dangerous force, but what is even more powerful is **HOPE!** A light shined on me in the form of a family member who reached out, and because of that gesture, I wanted to live again. They breathed a sense of remembrance in me that I’d allowed these walls to take away. I was reminded that I was not born in this place, nor was it my home. **My new goal was not just to survive, but to come out of this place a better man than the one that entered into this place.**

I began by making a list of all the areas in life that I believed were hurting me. I can still remember the original list that I made: smoking, the mob, meat, alcohol, etc. These were things that I believed were hindering my life, and so I made an active decision to give up those things because I wanted to live.

Now, I have learned to **deal** with (run with) the time as opposed to running away from it. When I say this, I mean that, some people do their time by distracting themselves in creative ways that don’t necessarily help them towards progress. I chose to make the time benefit me by making goals

# Letter from the Editor -2

## Nicholas Crayton (2)

for myself that would guide me in the future life that I wanted to have. Ask yourself, “What am I doing right now that will give me a chance at a good life in the future? **Who** am I right now? **Who** will I be in 10 or 20 years? **Where** will I be? I ask you this because you don’t want to look up 20 years later, and when asked what you have done for the past two decades, you have nothing to show. That time in the cell right now is extremely important. Do not think that because you are sitting in a room all day, bored to death, looking **through the T.V.**, that this is meaningless time. Snap out of it! This is your life and if you don’t care about it, no one else is responsible for it either.

Start planning for your future life now. Do not sit around complaining about what everyone else is not doing for you. **What are you doing for yourself?** Begin to take the steps that you need to make your life better. No more procrastinating and excuses. If you want to learn something, seek out the tools that you need. What books do you need? What resources do you have available? Instead of buying \$200 in commissary this month, maybe buy some books on the subjects that you know will help you. I promise you that this is not a wasted investment.

Know this, you are in the Department of Corrections and they can come in that cell and take away everything that you purchased from commissary. They can throw away your magazines, photos, and electronics that you say are yours, but they can’t take away the most important thing that you have . . . your mind. Build up the one thing that will absolutely benefit you and those that love you. This time that you have to yourself right now is essential because you are clear headed without the stress of real life. This is the time that you have to strategize because people outside of here don’t have this time to think and make plans, you do. Use it and turn this liability into an asset class by showing that you are something of value that deserves to be free. This is about your self-development.

**This is your beginning!**





# Associate Editor's Note

**Keith P. Talley**



This year's **Meaning Makers** issue, an annual issue dedicated to sharing the stories of personal discovery and transformation, has reached us during a special, more broad time of transformation for the Two Roads e-zine and team. For starters, under the tutelage of our out-going Editor, Nicholas Crayton, this is my first sole project at editing and formatting the e-zine. Before coming to Kewanee, I didn't possess these marketable and transferable skills.

Additionally, we are introducing the newly installed Two Roads editorial team members. We are all excited at the opportunity to serve in this capacity, and owe a sense of debt and gratitude to those Two Roads change agents that came before us.

Lastly, and with personal pleasure, we want to say thank you and farewell to our out-going, soon to be released Editor, Nicholas Crayton. A wise man



once advised, "You should leave any place, situation or relationship, as you found it or better, but never worse." Clearly, during his leadership tenure with Two Roads, Mr. Crayton chose . . . **better**.

Our brother's body of work while at Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center is a direct byproduct of his existential commitment to excellence and service, a commitment that began as a mere teenager when entering the Illinois Dept. of Corrections.



# Associate Editor's Note (cont.)

I had the personal privilege of meeting our brother for the first time while attending a weekly inter-faith meeting for individuals in custody at Illinois River C.C. Right away, our mutual appreciation and competency at reading, writing and understanding semantic languages, namely Hebrew and Arabic, prompted us to spend our time comparing and defining words and terms like a pair of 12<sup>th</sup> Century Andalusian sages .



Being marginally older, it wasn't long before it became evident that I shared a brotherhood with someone different.

*Don't get me wrong, he was no more special than the next man in blue; however, he passionately embraced a realistic vision for success that was unshakably tethered to his focused and prioritized action.* The body count of those who have benefitted from him, whether directly or indirectly and in an abundance of ways, is in the high hundreds.



"The Hebrew," as I amusingly refer to brother Malaki, like so many, is a **Man of Promise**. As he transitions to the next chapter in the book that is his life, he should know with certainty that he doesn't leave alone. With him, goes our sincere supplications for his happiness, success and holistic well-being.



# F.A.T.H.E.R.

## Antione Shenta Johnson



I grew up in a two parent home with my father being a part of my life, which was both a gift and a curse. I am the youngest so my mother spoiled me, and despite my father being a tough cookie, I still loved him.

My pops taught me many things, like how to work on a car – explained about different tools – how to keep the trash empty – how to cut grass - and to never argue with a woman because she is always right, even when she is wrong. However, the one thing that stuck out with me the most was that a man should never sit around with his hand out; he should be the provider for himself and his family. Although I have misused it in many ways, I try to live by that rule.

Even though my pops wasn't the best, he is still a good man. To my siblings and I, he was:

*Fantastic*

*Advocating*

*Thoughtful*

*Honorable*

*Eminent*

*Reliable*

Our father, Papa J, is 84 years young and still kicking. On behalf of my siblings and I, I just want to say thank you for being in our lives.

**The Two Roads team apologizes to Mr. Johnson and his family for the oversight in the last issue.**

# Time Well Spent

## Byron Jones



At times, we do things in life only for the purpose of gaining the reward that comes with it. The reward is what motivates us. For example, in prison, you have guys who go to school or work specific jobs only because they will be granted time off their sentences for doing so. If that incentive wasn't present, those same guys wouldn't think twice about school or working. But just like other men, I too am one of those men who accomplished all that prison has to offer (degrees, certifications), but because of truth-in-sentencing, I did this with no incentive involved whatsoever. The only reward I received was self-fulfillment. So now I ask myself, "Why would I choose to be productive with my time knowing that I deserve what others are rewarded with?"

As a kid, we learn how to be men

according to the society in which we are born. You start to understand life through learned behavior by imitating what you see as a child. We hear what our parents tell us, defining how to be a good kid, but we also listen to the opinion of our peers as to what type of kid we should be.

Then your environment and neighborhood imposes that you need to be a certain way in order to be accepted. As a kid, trying to decipher whose opinion we give the most attention to, most of us choose our peers and become afraid to be true to ourselves because it's regarded with contempt. At that moment you start steering away from who you are, you value the opinion of others to dictate who you should become. It is those opinions which create our behavior, and we start pretending to be who and what we are not, believing that this is the route to get ahead in life. Then, the inevitable happens....**prison.**

When you come to prison, you get stripped of everything worldly and are forced to just deal with **SELF**. If used properly, prison becomes a pit-stop. Just like cars racing around the tracks up to 200 mph and they have to pull into the pit for various check-ups, that's what prison allows you to do. You have to stop and strengthen your body to prepare for the long journey ahead of you.

# *Time Well Spent (cont.)*

**Byron Jones**

Also, you have to feed your mind with positive thoughts and outlooks. You have to change your way of thinking, getting rid of all those deluded thoughts that the streets brought upon you which distorted your mind to believe that you were this person society influenced you to be.

As you restart your thinking process, searching for direct answers to some simple questions, you should ask yourself, “Do I want to be who I have become?” “Is that person really who I am?” You have to be courageous and completely honest with yourself, confessing that I didn’t like the person I was because I wasn’t being authentic. You can’t be two people at once, and although I showed signs of who I truly was, I didn’t truly believe in that person enough. I’m not a drug dealer, a womanizer, a liar, a follower, and definitely not a murderer. At this stage, I realized that I am a dependent, just as I was in adolescence when my parents saw all the potential I possessed, and before becoming tainted with the opinions of society.

**So now, I don’t have to try and be somebody I’m not in order to get ahead. My only way to progress in prison is through preparation in executing what I envision for my future. That entails understanding that I have a purpose greater than what my actions had shown - believing in myself - realizing my potential - and knowing I don’t need approval from others to validate my acceptance.**

So what is my reward for being productive with my time??? It’s what I feel as a human being, knowing I’m being righteous, because all the things I accomplished in here is preparation that contributes to me never visiting prison again. It’s confidently believing that I’m an honest and intelligent man with a heavy work ethic, and striving to be an entrepreneur as I seek to create a traditional family with a wife and child. All the while, it’s becoming a leader in this world that helps cultivate young kids to believe they can leave extraordinary legacies. Ultimately, it’s the Greatness I found in me to become the **Real Byron Jones.**

# Miracle

## Victor Davila



When I first got arrested and was the only person escorted into Division 1 out of the 80 people in the middle of the night, I had an eruption of emotions flowing through me. I was scared, angry, disappointed, and sad. Keep in mind that about 10 years had gone by from the day of the crime, to the day that I was arrested. So in the 9 + years that I was on the run, I had gotten married, had children, bought a condo, and had just bought my wife a brand new car. So I was definitely worried about them. I was so angry that these detectives were still on my heels after all of these years, disappointed in my early life decisions, and sad because I was ripped apart from the life that I was now accustomed to. The first six months of my incarceration, I was taking my anger out on others and drowning my sorrows in alcohol and drugs.

Nowadays, I feel blessed, and I feel renewed and transformed. I am happy and the answer as to what got me from point A to point B is that GOD appeared to me in a dream. I really don't like to call it a dream because it was so real to me. It was about 6 months into my incarceration. He spoke to me and pulled me out of the gutter both mentally and spiritually. The very next day I began a journey of studying the Word of GOD, putting it into practice, and powerful prayer and meditation.

My life is still not what it is meant to be. That is what awaits me in the next phase of my journey. **What I have learned now is that the best me was hidden inside of my worst experience, and that's my greatest miracle.** For everyone has to go through their own experiences in order to find themselves, and to find GOD.



# Path to Freedom

## Jesse J. Meyers



To begin, may the peace of Allah(GOD) be upon you all. My journey began full of anger, arrogance, hate, lies, judgment, shame and guilt. I'm serving 15 years at 85% for aggravated domestic battery. For my actions, I blamed my current girlfriend, her mom, my kid's mom, childhood, my lawyer etc. . . I pointed fingers everywhere, so much so, that my own reflection became blurry and hard to see. By filing frivolous motions in hopes to cheat my sentence, I gave false hopes to my loved ones.

Change began in 2014 when three (3) Muslims showed me kindness , mercy and love when I did not deserve it. Ignorantly I boasted and mocked them and their way of life, In return they

showed me something new. The three men showed me tolerance, kindness, patience and love. When I disrespected them, they respected me, showing true humility.

Then one brother asked me to give him 15 minutes to tell me about Al-Islam. He invited me to be open-minded, and if when he was done I desired to hear no more, then we would discuss it no further. Islam stood out to me; therefore I started studying, reading the Qur'aan and asking questions.

The brothers were open to me and showed me the way through books and their example. In this sea of truth, I first search for falsehood, but truth was all that I found. Islam is a complete way of life, the Qur'aan is a guidance for mankind – a warning to those who do wrong – and a message of hope for those who do good in this life; it also includes instructions for daily life, prayer, purification of the body and heart, economics, good character, community, business transactions, family, marriage inheritance, charity and more.

# *Path to Freedom (cont.)*

## **Jesse J. Meyers (2)**

With faith in my heart, I began performing salat/prayer and grew closer to Allah. My five (5) daily prayers consisted of bowing, prostrating, seeking forgiveness and guidance. I became convicted of my wrong doings.

“ Surely prayer prevents against shameful and indecent behavior.” (Qur’aan 29:45 Which means: it removes sins by conviction of one’s heart through drawing it close to our source of power (Allah).

I eventually took ownership and was honest about who I used to be, my sins and my crimes. All the while, I found remorse for those whom I had harmed.

Now, finally “free,” things in my life began to fall in place. My daughter has re-entered my life; I am now a proud grandfather. I have a wonderful woman in my life whom I plan to marry. Last year I got the opportunity to facilitate Building Blocks with some very good men. The program’s principles are in accord with Al-Islam: integrity, respect, responsibility, ownership, community, empathy and honesty. Also, I was afforded a chance to lead the Lincoln C.C. Muslim Community alongside my closest brother Keenan Harris.

Now I’ve been blessed to come to Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center with my best friend. This place will help me gain life skills that meet society’s standards and become a more complete man of integrity.

**All praise and thanks to Allah for guiding those three men. For sure, they showed me what it means to be a man, and showed me the path to true freedom.**



# Triple Darkness

Daniel Moore



Imagine being deaf, dumb and blind and not being born that way. You just happen to be that way due to not being conscious.

When I was on them streets, I had no sense of direction what so ever. It was like I was literally driving down a one way street, the wrong way, and at night with no headlights . Now, that's what you call triple darkness. It's only two things that can happen with no sense of direction, you're gonna crash or you might crash and take someone else's life and end up incarcerated.

When I say crash , don't take that in the sense of driving under the influence. Instead, look at it in the sense of running the streets causing ruckus – bringing trauma into others' lives – and making selfish decisions while not even knowing that your actions not only affect you, but also those that are a part of your life, like

your children and other loved ones who care for you the most. But of course, none of these thoughts come across your mind when you are lost in triple darkness. . .

**It took for me to get incarcerated to open my eyes and see how precious my freedom and life is - for me to open my ears and hear what those who truly cared about me were saying – for me to clear my mind and seek knowledge, wisdom, and understanding – and for me to seek out tools like education and programming.**

I stand here an individual who is no longer lost in triple darkness. I never knew how strong I was until I had no other choice but to be strong by stepping out of the darkness and into the light of positivity and prosperity. Now, my heart has softened and causes me to feel pain and remorse for all the wrong I've done. Although my journey isn't complete yet, I now have clarity in my life. I now know what hope feels like, and if I can come out of that triple darkness phase, then so can you my brothers and sisters.

# *Holy Discontent*

## Ronnie Carrasquillo



GOD bless you! A confession, a story told or a testimony of things that happened in one's life is not an easy thing to let out. Considering that in the streets you are "Born & Bred" with the code to keep your mouth shut.

What would cause one to [unlock] from a built reputation of the deadly and nasty street life? What moment, what event or what process causes one to come to that "Holy Discontent" time in their life? The "I had enough!" moment. What will it take for you? I know what it took for me.

The environment that I grew up in, Humboldt Park, was stigmatized as gang infested. It was a violent area, but it was home to me. You see trauma that you shouldn't see; you participate in things that you should not. Your youth tells you

it's okay, but there is another reality you'll find out.

My "Street Life" led me to prison with a 600 year maximum sentence attached. You would think it was something brutish, something thugish that would cause the "Holy Discontent" moment in my life, but it was not that at all.

It was a simple statement during closing arguments where the State's Attorney called me ignorant, as well as all the people he used against me were mocked to be ignorant. I was but a teen and that did not sit well in my immature mind, especially when you think you're all that.

What a reality I had to face. I immediately went to work on correcting my flaws through self-leadership. What I learned, I gave to others, always for free. People would say that the "game" is to be sold, not told, but not for me. We needed to fight against ignorance that we thought was not.

# *Holy Discontent (cont.)*

## **Ronnie Carrasquillo (2)**

Scripture says you don't choose GOD, HE chooses you. It also says, "not to be conformed to this world, but be 'TRANSFORMED' by the 'RENEWING' of the mind." GOD gave me the ability to communicate with favor to some of the most reputed names in the system. People who are considered the worst and yet had begun walking the pathway of transforming their lives through the renewing of their mind. We need to unlock our yesterday's reputation to rebuild restoration for our futures.

My life: A journey from the streets, to the prison, to transformation, to self-leadership, to the profession of uplifting others by influencing their transformation, so that together we will see the journey move towards Restoration and eventually Reconciliation.

# Bright Light

## Franklin Heindricks



The moment my transformation took place is when I decided that I wanted to be more than a statistic. It didn't happen all of a sudden, but was a work in progress. I started using at 8, and by 15, I was shooting heroin and meth. I spent my life traveling across the U.S.A. living like a gypsy. I lived in different cities, at different hotels, and with different girls, all the while being a full blown addict. The rest of the time I was in county jail. Finally the courts got sick of me and gave me an ultimatum.

My mom found me a rehab center where I thought I would be in for only 60 days. I could get the courts off my back and then go right back at it. Well, this program was called MBTC (Mission Bible Training Center); it was an 8 month program that took me 12 months to complete. I grew up in

church so I did enjoy it. I had always believed in GOD and read the Bible, but I never truly surrendered and applied the knowledge. However this program worked things out for you. I was always real quick to anger and violence, so much so, I was in anger management from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade until I dropped out of school in my sophomore year. ***The day when I finally gave in and surrendered, it felt like a weight came off my shoulders, and the light finally came on.***

GOD then used this program to introduce me to my fiancé. We grew up in the same neighborhood, went to the same school and knew the same people. We even knew each other's family, but we never met until we attended the Mission program. Except for holding hands, she was the only physical contact I had for a year. It wasn't until we graduated and became engaged did we have our first kiss. She gave me hope, and for the first time in my life, there was someone who saw the good in me; subsequently, the light that had turned on grew brighter.

# *Bright Light (cont.)*

## **Franklin Heindricks (2)**

We both stumbled and fell back into our addiction and were both incarcerated. Nevertheless, I had a new attitude and a new outlook; I wasn't going to be the same idiot. I would take advantage of the time.

Since incarceration, I was told that I had too much time for school, so I paid and now have almost completed the Blackstone Paralegal course. Also, I am halfway through with my Associate's in Theological Studies. I kept my head down and let that light get brighter. Now, at Kewanee, I'm given so much freedom and options to let my light shine brighter. I am grateful to GOD, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and for the love and support from my fiancé and family.

# The Vow

## Halik Williams



Arrested for murder at the age of 18 (1999), I was both immature and naïve. I thought that I was smarter than I actually was. During my 3yrs. in Cook County Jail I pursued my GED off and on. In hindsight, I was preoccupied with my upcoming trial. That, combined with illicit distractions, made it hard to focus on obtaining my GED.

At the age of 21 (2001), I was convicted of murder and sentenced to 30 years. The guilty verdict and sentence were an epiphany. I never envisioned growing up in prison. However when you find yourself growing up in prison, you grow up in prison .

There's no formula or blueprint to overcoming adversity. However, from the onset entering Menard C.C., I knew

that I wanted to turn a negative into a positive. I vowed to myself not to allow a hostile environment get the best of me. Also, that given the opportunity, I would obtain my G.E.D.

Because of something called phase, I wasn't allowed to purchase my audiovisual until after 90 days. During this time, I would stay up late reading Proverbs, a book out of the Bible. At the age of 21, Proverbs was my first encounter with words of wisdom. Each night that I read Proverbs, I felt as if I was receiving direction and guidance. I found Proverbs to be poignant. I was 21 year old with a 30 year sentence in a maximum security facility.

**"I vowed to myself not to allow a hostile environment to get the best of me."**

Fast forward to 2008, after requesting for six years to be placed in G.E.D., I was finally given a second opportunity to obtain my G.E.D. I started class July (2008) and

# *The Vow (cont.)*

## **Halik Williams (2)**

received my G.E.D. February (2009). Although I was proud of myself, I took more pride in the fact that I kept the vow that I made to myself.

Obtaining my G.E.D proved what I could accomplish when I applied myself. I kept this momentum when I was transferred to Western C.C. where I would receive an Associate's in Liberal Studies degree. Also, when transferred to Danville C.C. where I currently reside, I obtained an Associate's in Arts degree. I am currently pursuing a Bachelor's in Arts from EIU.

All praise and glory to GOD for giving me fortitude and allowing me to be resilient. I was shown time after time that the future is brighter than the darkest moment. As I fought and strove to progress/change, ALLAH fought with me and on those days and in those moments when I felt exhausted, BAM, he gave me strength.

By not being afraid to grow and change, and being selective about those who I communicated with in and out of prison, I became a better version of myself. I believe we all have the potential to be great and do great things. We just have to apply ourselves. . . **the time is now!**

# Changing Roads

## Donial Garrett



Why do people ever reach the point where they feel like there is no longer any hope? There's probably many ways to answer this question. We all feel like we should give up when we no longer have a purpose. Sometimes we have to find that one thing that's worth fighting for. I was in those shoes. I know what it's like. My heart literally dropped to my stomach when I was sentenced to 20 years. I had three very young daughters. My daughters were 6, 1, and 3 months old. I knew that I would be missing from their lives and that left me devastated. Child Services got involved and my kids were placed in foster care. The mother of my kids put forth little to no effort in regaining custody.

The result was that my kids were adopted. Years into my incarceration, I had no clue as to how I was going to finish my 17 year bid. I had little outside support and even that began to gradually diminish.

I was hanging by a piece of thread. I wasn't eating and my hair began to thin. I suffered from rapid weight loss. I was headed downhill fast. One thing that kept me afloat was the contact that I seldom got from my oldest daughter. She was separated from her sisters. They were adopted and she was left in a group home.

Six years into my incarceration, I had a surprise court date. They had found a woman who wanted to adopt my daughter, but they needed consent from a biological parent. I gave the consent because I did not want my child living in a group home. At 12 years old, she was adopted.

Although I was still contacting my daughter through a case manager, it made me feel better every time. I had made up my mind. I needed to fight for her. A year later, my daughter contacted me and gave me the address to where she was living. She told me that she wanted me to contact her straight through, and that she was tired of the letters which were taking forever to get to her. I shed tears that were visible to no one. From that point on, I never wanted to let her down.



# *Changing Roads (cont.)*

## **Donial Garrett (2)**

Changing roads had already happened to me before I was even aware of what Two Roads was. I knew that I needed to change directions in my life. I knew that I needed to become better to give back. I picked up books and started to educate myself. I enrolled in college which led to me obtaining my Associates Degree in Science and Arts. My relationship continued to grow with my child. Our bond developed into something special. I am a better man today because I didn't give up. I found something that was worth fighting for. 15 ½ years later, my daughter is now 21 years old and awaiting her father's arrival into society.

When we've hit rock bottom and feel like there's no hope, find that something that's worth fighting for. We may believe we're surrounded by darkness without light in our view until we get up and realize that there's actually a beam shining through the tunnel. There are always two roads in life, the road that we're on and the road that's not taken. It's never too late to change directions. It's all about the energy that we put into making that change.



# *Subtle Currents*

## **A Contributor**



When we reflect on change in the world, it is tempting to focus on the sensational: on earthshaking events, profound discoveries, and headline personalities. These oversized elements shape what historians call “the master narrative”. The story it tells, the story found in most history books, is incomplete and deceptive. It marginalizes the masses of incidents, persons, and ideas that form the vast tidal forces of change—and it attributes as agents of change those things that are but its most tangible effects, slow in the making and brought into being by more subtle and powerful currents.

We face the same temptation to create master narratives of personal change, and so miss the subtle currents at play in our own lives. We look at our “formative” experiences and overlook the countless small decisions—our own and others’—that led to them.

We celebrate the people who made great differences in our lives, and neglect the many others who helped us become more receptive to the lessons of our teachers and mentors. We spotlight our most transfigurative insights, and forget that epiphanies are merely our recognition of existing images formed by thousands of differentiated pixels.

One danger of this narrative focus is that it tells others who hope to make changes in their lives that they must wait on some revolutionary event, inspiring teacher, or breakthrough revelation before they can start. It also supports the illusion that the most dramatic change is always swift, that our thoughts and behavior can turn on a dime.

# *Subtle Currents (cont.)*

## **A contributor (2)**

My own change has been far from swift. And when I look hard at what appeared to have been my story's most pivotal moments, figures, and ideas, I see they are nothing compared to the innumerable pivot-points of my daily thoughts and actions, which together have bent the arc of my existence into a monumental curve. Each act of kindness, understanding, or calm resolve bends it further in the direction I wish it to turn—and each act of casual cruelty, indifference, or unreasoning frustration to which I am still all-too vulnerable kinks it slightly backward. These common and relatively dull moment-by-moment actions tell the true story of change in my life, not the master narrative which is more interesting in the telling.



# The Beauty of Change

## John Williams



I'm not the man, I used to be.  
Though some, may think it's strange.  
That I cast aside, my foolish pride  
In order, to make a change.



I took a look at the life I've lived;  
really, I opened my eyes.  
I searched and searched for purpose  
and worth,  
but all that I found were lies.



I counted the years, so filled with tears.  
I counted the dreams I lost –  
Those moments in time, that'll never  
be mine.  
The price, that ignorance cost.



I thought of the people, who  
believe in me –  
my daughter, my sons and all.  
The selfish decisions, that clouded  
my vision,  
that stopped me from hearing their  
call.



I'm not the man I used to be,  
For GOD, has opened my eyes.  
HE allowed me to see what it means  
to be free.  
HE helped me to realize.



That, life is such a precious gift.  
Each moment, a treasure for sure.  
With all our might, we hold it tight,  
to make it be secure.



I've come to see the reality,  
that life, means so much more,  
than prison cells and gangster tales,  
and waiting, to go to the store.



Life is the freedom, I left behind.  
The scent of a summer's breeze.  
The sprinkler, that cools each blade  
of grass.  
The sparrows high in the trees.



# *The Beauty of Change (cont.)*

## John Williams (2)

It's those Sunday dinners and  
snowy winters,  
movie nights with my queen,  
the stolen kisses,  
while washing dishes,  
those things in a convict's  
dreams.



My reason for change,  
is not so strange,  
In truth, I just wanted more.  
I wanted to enjoy  
this life of mine,  
to be better, than I was before.



We all arrive, at a place in time,  
when things can't  
remain the same.  
When we hear a voice,  
then make our choice,  
to start our lives again.



**CHANGE IS A GOOD THING.  
DON'T BE AFRAID TO DO IT!**

# Personal Inventory

## Robert Petty



When I travel through the population of my thoughts back to my youth, I can see how life is full of many unexpected events and changes that constantly created a long lasting ripple effect of ideas, choices, actions and outcomes. All of these now fill me with many pleasant and unpleasant memories and emotions.

While processing these experiences, through reminiscence, I decided to ask myself a couple of life maturing questions. For starters, what type of outcomes were created from those unexpected events and changes? Secondly, how did those unexpected events and changes influence the strength and development of the person I used to be, as well as the person I've grown to become today?

In hindsight, I now recognize that during my youth, I was caught up in the vicious cycle of fantasy and belonging. I see that, even today, with the younger generation, with the cleverness of social media, the game is still the same – just with different players.

My trouble began when I first started off looking at my life as boring and absent of adventure to some degree. What did I do to fill the void? Well, as a youngster, I secretly created an outlet to plug into hood ties through the people within my neighborhood who sparked my interest. They were people who were either doing what I wanted to do, or had what I wanted to get.

My eagerness for those things inspired me to create a gradually evolving platform of defiance and insolent tendencies which I wore around like a badge of honor. I got to a level of corrupted social independence, until eventually, I made the critical mistake of getting caught up in my own inventions and confusion, while at the same time being introduced by the criminal court system to my newly found nemesis called: Repetitive Incarceration.

# *Personal Inventory (cont.)*

## **Robert Petty (2)**

I had to step back after several incarcerations and take a good look at myself. I had to do some personal inventory, and question myself about my life and my future. For instance, how can I get to a privileged position of uniqueness where I can actually activate and command a positive difference with enduring roots of longevity within the structure of my life? Next, what can I do to reverse the self-defeating cycle of ignorance that never relaxes its efforts to make my detriments outweigh my benefits? Lastly, how do I eliminate relapse back to incarceration, and my stinking, criminal thinking? I asked myself these questions because I knew that I wanted out of this nightmare, and it is on the other side of this nightmare where my freedom resides.

I knew that some better choices in my life had to be made if I wanted to have a fighting chance in hell of getting out and staying out.

I had to teach and force myself to listen and communicate differently than the way I used to. I had to

**“I asked myself these questions because I knew that I wanted out of this nightmare, and it is on the other side of this nightmare where my freedom resides.”**

re-invent myself and create a new mindset through the power of education and attending social disorder groups.

Through education, I have learned to recognize the scheme of ignorance that was surrounding my life. I am mentally strong now, and am able to avoid mischief. Also, on the flipside of the coin, I am able to embrace prosperity, love myself and humanity, and all that's good. No doubt, it was by the grace of Allah and me having the willpower to put my best foot forward through counseling and education that made a difference and ultimately saved my life.

# Numb

## Luis Diaz



Throughout these past 23 years of my incarceration there have been very few instances in which I have been asked to reflect on my life. However, as I sit here attempting to summarize my journey I can't help but think of that naïve 16 year old who thought that he had life all figured out.

Looking back, I am not ashamed to admit that when I got incarcerated, I was just a lost kid trying to fit in and trying to be something that I wasn't. The best word to describe the early years of my incarceration is "numb." Images of handcuffs, court rooms, bullpens, and a whole lot of chaos flashed through my mind as I recall those early years.

In what seems like a matter of no time, I went from being a freshman in high school, to a 17 year old convict walking into Statesville to serve a 24 year sentence.

I see a lost kid going through the motions, numbness preventing him from fully comprehending his new reality. The only human emotion that I can recall from that time is the look of despair on my parents' faces watching helplessly as their child was taken away from them. The first few years were just about trying to survive, the constant chaos of lockdowns, segregation- bids, and all that comes from doing time . All this made it impossible to have a moment to reflect on my new reality.

The only thing I do remember feeling was that I didn't belong, and that I didn't want for my story to end in that manner. The change in my life from that kid to the man that I am today was a gradual process that took years. The harsh realities that come from doing time in a system that doesn't forgive, eventually forced me into self-reflection and finally being honest with myself. However, all that took time. If I didn't want these walls to define the rest of my life, it was time to make some drastic changes. I cut my ties with the mob, and began living according to who I am and not the characters that I used to idolize around my neighborhood.



# Numb (cont.)

## Luis Diaz (2)

Although every day is a learning process, I am at a point in my life where I choose not to dwell on the past. I would much rather focus on the present with the intent of improving the future. My advice for anyone out there who is beginning a tough journey is to take advantage of every day, regardless of where you find yourself. Even if you are stuck in a cell for most of the day, read a book, learn something. They can take a lot of things from you, but one thing nobody can take away is your mind. . . knowledge is power. Be your best, do your best, and always make the most out of every situation. Regardless if you are here, or out there, every day that passes by is another we can't get back, so make the most out of each one of them.

Don't ever stop fighting to be better, even when things seem like they can't get any worse,  
I know that even  
realize it, GOD  
my side. Now  
he is there,  
much

you are never alone.  
when I didn't  
was always by  
that I know  
life is so  
easier.



Artist: Carlos De Santiago

# *My Awakening*

**Carlos D. McDougal**



The word loyalty and the meaning of it was taught to me very early as a kid. That meaning stuck with me and when I was faced with the decision to be loyal or turn my back, I picked loyalty.

I grew tired of people who weren't loyal to me. I started to think about change, but what would that look like? I was afraid that if I chose to walk away from the old me, I would be ridiculed. I really didn't know if I was strong enough for that.

There were two reasons why I wanted to change; for starters, I was exhausted from living a life of looking over my shoulder. Secondly, I gave my all to everyone that came into my life, and those closest to me exploited that. So I decided that it was time that I was loyal to myself for awhile.

The time came for me to stop talking about change and start living it. One day while I was working out in the gym, two guys from my neighborhood got into a fight. My first instinct was to help, but now was that moment where I could continue to talk or actually live that change I was seeking. So I continued to workout and when the dust settled, I was ridiculed. The time to stand on my own had come and it was liberating!!! Now I was able to keep the promise that I made to my mother many years ago: **I Will Stand Tall.**

# *December 31, 1997*

## **Tyrone Delaney**



My biographical account is expressed in these words - I am a son of GOD. This hasn't always been my affirmation. Being born in rural Mississippi in the early 1960's, life was harsh (racially divided) but beautiful for our family was the source of my happiness. Living through the post-era of slavery and its continued social injustices, my family made the decision to uproot us, and we moved north. The great migration north vastly improved job opportunities for people of color. This move was embraced by all in the family, but as time progressed, I would soon realize that this move will undoubtedly define my entire life.

I am the last child of 16, and being born with a darker hue (skin

color) during that time made my life a living hell. Growing up in the projects – Robert Taylor Homes – gave me many images to upload and emulate. For awhile, I managed to manipulate some, but not all, for the challenges/obstacles were vast. My early childhood was traumatizing. I lived in an environment where you either assume the role of the sheep or the wolf. I became the wolf and gave as good as I got, and before long, the negative seed of doubt found shelter within me.

I began to idolize a behavior and lifestyle that was corrupt. I detested kindness, human dignity, and intimacy, for my soul had been seduced by a malevolent spirit (the cause of my rigid heart). I was trapped by the impervious and impenetrable walls of self-hate.

December 31, 1997 it became apparent that these infectious, immoral characteristics had to be subdued, because on that day, my life was forever changed. On this date I lost my mother (Lucille) and my oldest child's mother (Shavon); however, although this was a tragedy, it would eventually become a blessing.

# December 31, 1997 (cont.)

## Tyrone Delaney (2)

My mother's last words to me before passing were from the Book of Ephesians 4:23, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind." In her words, she told me that it takes a spiritual shovel to dig and uproot all the spiritual corruption and unrighteousness that separated us from the regeneration of the Living GOD.

The Enemy knows that an unregenerated mind is in a dangerous position. We also know that it promotes mayhem and psychological dismemberment. I needed GOD to curb and/or eliminate the vicissitudes and toxic elements that were connected to the deterioration of my spirit.

**The only way I have been able to thrive and survive is because GOD has placed a hedge of protection around my life. There is a divine mandate for us to self-exterminate any and all proclivities and habits that disobey GOD. GOD is willing and able to deliver us from all helplessness and ignorance of self-bondage. A strong infrastructure is rooted in a strong foundation. What I failed to comprehend while she was alive, I was able to grasp through her death . . .**

**The essence of life.**

# *The Day Kewanee Gave Me Back My Humanity*

**Tyrone Jones**



I felt that it is necessary to first state the event in which I felt that I.D.O.C. stole my humanity. On October 28, 2005 I was being processed into I.D.O.C. at Statesville C.C.. Part of this process was for me, as well as all 15 of the other men who were in the holding cage with me, to line up against the wall side by side, remove all of our clothes, then bend over and cough while an officer walked down the line looking at everyone's butt. It was at that moment when I felt a shame that I've never felt before. Looking back now, I can see that it was the day I lost my sense of humanity; we all know that shame all too well.

On July 8, 2022 our brother Jose "Kango" Quiroqa started his eternal walk with God. This is a pain that some of us know all too well and I.D.O.C.'s standard response is, "Sorry for your loss." Then it's back to business as usual.

On August 8, 2022, the most mind blowing thing happened. The staff at Kewanee had a vigil for him. Brothers of all ages and colors came out to show their love for Jose "Kango" Quiroqa, as well as staff – yes, staff! A staff member even made paper roses for everyone to hold. Brother John "JR" Williams read a poem he wrote, and he along with brothers Ceno Jackson and Juan Barboza gave speeches.

Assistant Warden James Carothers also gave a heartfelt speech. Warden Carothers said, "He and his staff wanted us to know that we are people, and that staff see us as individuals. They recognize our humanity." As all of us stood on the yard together in unity, Warden Carothers did another amazing thing; he called over his radio and told the staff to

# *The Day Kewanee Gave Me Back My Humanity (cont.)*

**Tyrone Jones (2)**

stop all non-emergency communication, while we had a moment of silence for our brother Kango. From that day forth, I felt that we are all one big family here at Kewanee. Some of my brothers and sisters just wear different clothes.

If you are in I.D.O.C. and reading this letter, I hope and pray that your path leads you to Kewanee so you can feel the sense of family from the people around you, but most of all, you know that you are a person again.

“Warden Carothers said, ‘He and his staff wanted us to know that we are people, and that staff see us as individuals. They recognize our humanity’.”

# A Better Me

## Buford Smith



Our lives are made up of thousands of moments. We go through some and pass others by – too often learning nothing and not recognizing opportunities until they're gone. But some moments linger, traveling with us like unwanted companions. We try but can never truly forget them. We do this in vain efforts to minimize their affect. In other words, we lie.

The thing about lies is that they don't solve problems. At best they only serve to prolong the pain. Still as helpful as lies are, the worst lie you can tell is the lie you tell yourself.

I always told myself that my childhood wasn't that bad, that others had it worse. I did this so I could ignore the fact that by the time I was 13, I had known hunger and homelessness. I once lived in a family homeless shelter and had

attended 5 different schools, if I went at all. None of this helped my A.D.D. (Attention Deficit Disorder).

I was seven months into my 17<sup>th</sup> year of existence when I was detained in Cook County Jail – Div.9 on charges of First Degree Murder. Twenty-three years later, I'm 40 years old and 9 months away from Work Release (GOD-willing). **I've grown up in prison. Those who have made the biggest difference in my life have been people in prison. Men who have been big brother or father figures. They taught me lessons my father wasn't around to teach.**

Above all else, never lie to yourself. A person who lies to themselves may never be trusted. That's a lesson taught to me by Jabari Ellis, who was released in 2015 after serving 18 years. Brother Hameen taught me how to be calm and focused. Those were valuable lessons to a kid with A.D.D. He often took the time to walk me through situations, helping me train my mind.

Masjid Bilal C.C. had a motto, "You can't teach what you don't know, and can't lead where you don't go." Bombarded with support and motivation I earned a vocational certification, an Associate's Degree and learned to read the Holy Quran in Arabic.

Ultimately, this is an open letter to those who helped me become a man of substance, focus, and commitment.

**THANK YOU.**

# Choosing to Live

## Rodney Kinds



Riding down the interstate from Winnebago County jail headed to Joliet Correctional Center, I had so many scenarios in my mind. I did not really have a clue as to what I had truly gotten myself into or what was to come. As a shorty, I can remember telling my dad that I'd live in a castle, but I wasn't talking about a prison. Be careful what you speak into existence!

Bang, bang, bang, bang was a repeated sound when it was count time (steel banging on steel); it woke me up, and I didn't know what to think. Night after night I waited for my name to be called as I waited on that paper bag and a number to leave receiving intake. This scenario was an anxiety attack in the making for an 18 year old who thought he had it all figured out.

"Kinds B-75531, you're going to K-3, damn they doing you dirty shorty." The C/O said to me as he dropped a bag at my door at 4:00 a.m.

Taking that ride down the road to another castle was a reality check that this is what the rest of my life will consist of. It was seven of us that entered Statesville Correctional Center that day, four of us went to population and three went to protective custody. Soon I was standing at the front of B-west, waiting for a C/O to tell me what cell to go into, it was a six foot eight inch 290lb. dude asking, "What cha is?"

I said, "Huh, what cha is?"

Then another inmate came up and told me, "You're going on seven gallery, cell 25."

That night was one of the longest nights of this journey, because that night I had to decide if I was going to live or die in prison. My choice to live meant that I had to turn on a mentality that I vowed to leave in Winnebago County.

Not expecting to get any action on appeal.



# Choosing to Live

## Rodney Kinds (2)

I was letting the time do me. In 1999, I went back to court only to have the judge say, "You have not done anything for yourself, so why should I?" Hearing my daughters crying and yelling for daddy in that courtroom was more than enough to hit me harder than I've ever been hit. That man told me that I deserved that 75 years.

When I got back to Statesville, I demanded to be put in school. Seven months later, I was an ABE student and two months after that I was in G.E.D. I found out that I was a lot smarter than I thought. My first try at the G.E.D. test I knocked it out of the park, and that was a badge of honor for me. I had accomplished something, and then I started to help others by becoming Mrs. Johnson's teacher's aide. I helped so many guys improve their studies and at least 15 of them received their G.E.D. I got so much gratification from helping those brothers achieve something. Later in this bid, I ran into a few of those guys that I had helped. Having those guys thanking me and telling me how much I had motivated them was something.

When I went back to court, the judge granted me a reduction to my sentence which allowed me to get from behind that wall and helped me further my education. Leaving Statesville for the first time in 11 years was an unexplainable feeling, as you would have to experience it to fully understand it. Abruptly, you go to not seeing anything but a hundred foot wall, year after year, to then seeing cars go by the prison. Refreshing, hope and possibility are just a few words that came to mind. Beyond those feelings, I was hungry for school, so I enrolled in every college class that I could. I took vocational courses and self-help classes, and I finally received my ALS from Lake Land Community College. I felt so good because I could now see light where I couldn't see it before. I took control of my life and began to take responsibility for Rodney.

The journey that I'm on started in the House of Healing with Laurie Wilbert; I thank you. I am now in Kewanee and thankful to everyone that assisted in my growth. Now, I am in a state of mind of not allowing people or things to live rent free in my head. If I can't grow from it, or help it to grow, then I keep it away from me. **To allow anyone to hinder my growth is uncivilized.**

# Mountain Glimber

## James Gouty



The question I've always been asked, "What makes this incarceration different James?" Every time I've answered it, I answered it truthfully. Unfortunately my answers became untruths because I didn't live up to my answers, and I continued to come back to prison. Ultimately I have lost almost everything and everybody. This time is different though, because if it wasn't for a friend saving my life, I wouldn't be here today typing this for my friends and mentors in the Two Roads program.

I have been incarcerated my entire adult life. I have done four bids; I'm on my fifth now, and I'm almost forty-four years old. My last bid I did twelve years and went home in 2016. I had accomplished so much in that time, CAAP, Associates degree, certified peer educator, vocational training, facilitating and leading many peer led groups and becoming a Toastmaster.

I had convinced everyone in my family, including myself, that I had changed, and was going to be very successful upon my release.

Five months later I was back. I was now facing the rest of my life in prison...again, as if those twelve years I had just done didn't exist. I had started hanging with the wrong guys doing the wrong things. I wasn't working my program, doing the things I had taught guys to do. I had become my own worst enemy again.

I had forgotten all the sacrifices my family had made for me time and time again. I had learned so much from so many awesome people, and I had thrown it all away again. In the blink of an eye I had nothing and nobody. Incarceration had finally taken it all, even me.

My choices and most of all my criminal thinking had taken me to my rock bottom, the depths of despair and humiliation. The shame was more than I could take. The hurt I had put on my mother, father, brother, and daughter; I literally broke all their hearts. As strong as my mind had stayed through so many incarcerations, it had finally broken. In the county jail in 2017, mind broken, I tried to take my life. If it wasn't for a very dear friend I would not be here today; he saved my life.

# *Mountain Climber (cont.)*

**James Gouty (2)**

That experience has changed my outlook on life. GOD literally gave me a second chance! I couldn't see over the MOUNTAIN I had put in front of myself, and I was overwhelmed and consumed with guilt, shame, and hurt.

Now I can finally answer that initial question. It's different this time because I want to live! I want to be a good father, brother, son, and husband! I have hurt so many people over the years. Waking up every day and knowing that I'm alive is a miracle. I want to share that with those who can't see over that MOUNTAIN, and I want my family to finally be proud of me.



# SHARE YOUR VOICE!

Women and men in custody, come join the conversation. Through the connecting and restorative power of sharing personal narratives, your unique voice - **shared with thousands** - will no doubt contribute to the healing, motivation, education and inspiration of others, including yourself. Make no mistakes, your life and our experiences have value, but beyond that, they have **POWER!** Don't procrastinate . . .PARTICIPATE!!! What follows is the topic schedule for the next 10 months:

DUE DATE	TOPIC
January 1, 2023	Passions or Aspirations
March 1, 2023	Trauma
May 1, 2023	Peer Pressure
July 1, 2023	Addiction
September 1, 2023	Meaning Makers (Transformation)

## How To Submit Material:

### **With staff support:**

Have staff member electronically send submission and photo (if possible) to: penny.rowan@illinois.gov

### **Without staff support:**

Mail submission, with name and title to:  
**Attn: Ms. P. Rowan – Two Roads**  
Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center  
2021 Kentville Road, Kewanee IL 61443

# *Two Roads Team*



(L-R) Ronnie Carrasquillo, Charles Murray, Keith Talley, Byron Jones  
(Standing) Michael Lawless, John Williams, Tyrone Delaney, Carlos McDougal

## *Two Roads Mission Statement*

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

# Farewell & Thank You



I am proud to say that this is my final edition of Two Roads because my freedom is at hand; however, I am equally as proud to announce that this e-zine will move forward with the capable hands of my brother **Keith Aquil Talley**. I believe that he will firmly represent our principles and stories with the verve and enthusiasm that is needed to continue to inspire more people to speak their truth into existence.

*Thank you everyone for your support and remember, **stay productive, not just busy.***

*~ Nicholas Crayton ~*

# MASTHEAD

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