



# To All Readers

Our monthly newsletter focuses on three phases: *Rehabilitation, Restoration and Re-Entry*. These are the necessary phases of a successful incarceration.

***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 chronicles of the stories and service of the incarcerated women and men of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Join our movement.

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

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**\*\*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 our guidelines.

# *Our Mission Statement*

“We're 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.”





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SPECIAL EDITION**



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## 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.



*The Two Roads Editorial Staff*

# Guest Contributor

Warden  
Tyrone Baker  
Galesburg

## **What does Father's Day mean to you?**

It's a day set aside to honor the father in your life, to appreciate how your father has provided the things you need in life.

## **How was your relationship with your father? How did this help/hurt you growing up?**

I loved my father; he taught me not to be lazy and give everything you got in what you believed.

## **As a father and a Warden, do you think more can be done to encourage men who want to be better fathers while in custody?**

Leading by example, let men know their voice is important and need to be heard. When men know they are valued and have hope, it can change lives.

## **What are things IDOC could or should implement to assist men in becoming better fathers (or better men, in general)?**

I believe our fathers give us our identity, our affirmation of who we are as men. These men must define themselves of they were created to be and don't let what they did or do define. This might come off wrong, but I don't

necessarily think IDOC should, but we could implement programs to assist men in becoming better fathers.

The reason I said not necessarily should because you must want to do it for yourselves. We could implement a mentoring program or classes on how to establish your identity that you are worthy/valued as a father despite what might've happen, there's always a redemptive solution to reestablish who you are as men.

**A lot of men in custody may have not had a great relationship with their father, or no relationship at all; what do you believe they can do to not “repeat the cycle”?**

I believe the Holy Scriptures the Father has created us in his image, and we must be leaders in our family. What does that mean...to me it means when trouble comes in the family, we take charge and lead by examples for our family.

## **Final thoughts...**

At the end of the day what do you value the most, your behavior reflects what you value. Even what you speak, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, blessings!!!

*Warden Baker has exemplified the qualities of being a devoted father, warden and family man. His wife, Lt. Paula Baker, was a contributor in our TWO ROADS HERstory: Narratives of Womanhood, Character, Resilience and Becoming issue (Vol. 18, April 2023).*



# TWO ROADS

## PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

TWO ROADS is accepting submissions for this current issue. We believe that everyone has goals to achieve and we would like you to share your experiences. From losing weight to motivation and career changes. From learning a trade or furthering your education, this is an opportunity for you express yourself and inspire others.

TWO ROADS would also like for the those who are close to their release to express their transformation and their future objectives outside of their incarceration. Families and former individuals are strongly encouraged to submit their experiences.

**Outsiders and Individuals-In-Custody**  
**(With Staff Support)**

Please send your submission and scanned photo to [penny.rowan@illinois.gov](mailto:penny.rowan@illinois.gov)  
"ATTN: TWO ROADS Transformations"

**Mail submission, photo to:**  
Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center  
Attn: TWO ROADS EDITOR  
2021 Kentville Road  
Kewanee IL 61443

# Deadline is July 31st

# Editors Take

**Kenji Haley**  
**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
**TWO ROADS**

This issue is about appreciating and giving credit to those who rarely receive it, whether inside or outside of these walls. I, myself, am a father of four and was lucky enough to have my father in my life, but I do know certain men who were not as fortunate.

We're appreciating a special father this year, Founder of TWO ROADS, Jim Estes. He's a father of three and someone who rarely gets the credit he deserves. Although I haven't met him, I've been told this man is very compassionate and thoughtful when it comes to other individual's feelings. At times, he pushes his own problems to the side in order to help those who need it. Mr. Estes has been away for the last year, as he's been dealing with a personal issue, but the editorial staff at TWO ROADS would like to thank him for the path he has created and hope to me you soon.

Men like this aren't appreciated enough for their efforts because it's those moments that are required to help some of us get through the day while maintaining our sanity. Today, we say thank you to Jim Estes and all of the fathers who take their careers seriously and lovingly because you'll always be a father. I believe it takes certain quality to be considered a good father. For me, and I'm not the authority,



*Jim Estes*  
**FOUNDER, TWO ROADS**

but having character is big. I like being led by someone who I can trust and believe in. A father is supposed to be a major point of reference for a child (as well as a mother), so they may form their personality not just from outside influences surrounding them day to day, but from those who affect them the most whom they see every day.

Lastly, I'd like to send a call to action, for the men in custody who've been away from their children. First, don't you ever feel your worth to them isn't important. You're amazing! You're powerful and wonderful, but what we need as fathers, are to be MEN to our children!! Because we're not there physically, doesn't mean we're not there mentally, because our kids carry our traits, and that's what keeps us whole.

Remind them of who you are and that your mistakes don't define you. When you have the ability, send them a card, draw something and make it funny (even if you can't draw). Be a clown and make them laugh on visits and video visits. When you're on the phone, tell them you love them and let them know you mean it! It's imperative to help your kid(s) know you're in their lives. Never once allow them to feel you're not available for them.

**We encourage you to read all the stories and to embrace them as we come upon Father's Day. I wish all the fathers (individual in custody, staff and mothers and grandmothers who've been the father to their kids) in the world a Happy Father's Day.**



# Brother's Keeper

Evelyn Jackson

Logan

All praises due to Allah for his blessings. It's truly a blessing to have a father and three brothers who've been the greatest men and fathers. Being the only girl surrounded by men has taught me what an ideal man is supposed to be. Traits of my three bros. and my Pops have impacted my life with the good and the bad.

My Pops, Marty, is my #1 fan, the greatest father. I'm the poster child of a *daddy's girl*. My parents divorced when I was 8 years old. My brothers wanted to stay with me and my dad; so I did the same. My dad didn't want my brothers and me separated. The great responsible man in him kept us.

He struggled in his addiction, yet, he made sure we had what we needed. Never once were we hungry or homeless, nor lacked on any holiday. My dad kept a job to take care of his kids. He hustled on the side to ensure we were good.



He remarried in 1991 and has been with my stepmom ever since. He was a good and bad example of a man, which my brothers and I learned from him. Never once have I seen my dad drop a tear. The look in his eyes, during challenging times, showed his emotions. In which all of us have picked up that from Marty.

Being my #1 dad, he was not the only person I've seen and heard yelling "NO" at my bond hearing when I was arrested 23½ years ago. I can still hear his supporting voice. That disappointment put some fire in me to make him proud. I feel I have by completing school doing this incarceration.

Pops, thanks for motivating me to reach my goals, for showing me how to be a single parent. Thanks for always being my #1 fan.

Boo, my oldest brother (may he rest in paradise); he was a quiet storm. In which I picked that up. He taught me the loudest person in the room, is the weakest person in the room. I looked up to Boo. He was my big bro who didn't fight me. He picked up that hustle like our Pops did. That in turn created his drug addiction, like dad, but that brought him in and out of prison.

His wife and two kids slowed him down, a lot! He found his passion for painting and made a career out of it. He did what he had to do to take care of his family. His addiction wasn't more important than his family, in which he got from his Pops. He ran to drugs to suppress his feelings, yet never once exposed his children to that.

I'm a "mini-Boo" with actions and looks. Our presence is louder than our words. Just like our dad after his first marriage, he took his kids and was a single parent. He gave his kids what our dad gave us until his last breath with our dad holding his hand. We connected through letters when he was in prison, in which he was my strength to get through the time. Thank you for being my ally during this time, helping me protect myself. We're each others keepers.

Tony is the example of a good man. He stayed married for eighteen years for the sake of the kids. After his divorce, he took custody of three kids, just like our dad and older brother. He made a career in driving trucks and been with the same company for the last thirteen years. Tony is the "Preacher" of the four of us. He talks to you in a way that grabs your attention and allow you to conquer whatever comes your way. He's the glue that holds us all together.



He's been my rock through every death I've experienced during my incarceration. Thanks for being the stern brother and keeping us in line.

Eric, my baby bro, my favorite, best friend and advisor. I get it, you're not supposed to have a favorite sibling, but, it was just him and me most of the time. He was my shadow. We did everything together and I did all I could for my son and my baby bro. I hustled to get them what they wanted and needed. He looked up to all three of us, but he was the closest to me.

I couldn't let him down, but I did when I was arrested. He didn't follow in my (or my brother's/dad's) footsteps by hustling. He completed trucking school and has been driving for over fifteen years. He has two boys and teaches his kids responsibility to earn what they get. He's four hours away from his oldest son, yet he didn't miss a beat on his life. We talk almost every day. He's also been my rock during my time away.

Our bond is stronger due to the youngest of the four. Thank you for being the best baby bro. I know you say you wouldn't be where you are today with me, but you hold me together everyday. I'm proud of the man and father you are.



These four men have impacted me as a woman which cannot be explained. We all we got, so we're each other's keeper. It's us against EVERYBODY. Our parents taught us to never lose our bond and we haven't—it's grown stronger. These men have shown me love and dedication to our family. The *SELFLESSNESS* in them is amazing and remarkable.

Not many men have these qualities, but I'm blessed to have these irreplaceable men in my life. Allah has blessed me abundantly. I'm not the oldest, but I'm the only girl. So, I mother my brothers and dad as well. I'm their homie. Whatever or however they need me, I'm there.

Therefore, **I am MY BROTHER'S KEEPER!**

You cannot choose your family; you can only choose how you deal with them. I choose to stay close, as I can, to the best men ever!!

**Happy Father's Day**

**Evelyn "Lil Baby" Jackson**

# Paternal Gifts

**Peter 'Rome' Saunders**

**Big Muddy River**

It's ironic that I never had parental figures in my life until I was incarcerated, I thank God for three people who have taken on those roles, while having a major impact in my life.

My stepdad, Henri, came into our life just as I was incarcerated. Henri was a great man, who treated my mom like a Queen, while advocating and providing for me like I was his own. For over 30 years, he was the real father who had contributed to my life as well as many of my friends. Henri passed away almost 4 years ago to the day, and while life will never be the same, it's much better because of him.

Before Henri passed, Bill Ryan came into my (our) life and his presence has always been that of a Godfather, because he's a blessing. Our relationship began with letters, then phone calls, before many wonderful visits. Our last visit at Dixon, Bill came to see me just a couple of months before COVID, and it was a great time. Bill also visited with my family when he was in (Las) Vegas as well as Chicago when they came to visit me. For those of you who don't know Bill personally, he has touched so many incarcerated lives over the past 3+ decades.



He has advocated for those on Death Row, co-created *Stateville Speaks*; diligently fights for the *Elderly Bill* and the long-term individuals in custody and so much more. Bill took a particular interest in me because I came to prison with a juvenile life sentence and was able to turn my life around. Now many years later at 56, it has been his genuine love and support which has helped me get through the mentally tough times.

Then there's Ray...the only cellie I've had an *authentic blood-like* bond with. We arrived at Dixon only weeks apart, and we were literally the antithesis of each other. Ray was an aging 78 years old white guy who previously worked at the Sears Tower (now known as the Willis Tower) after his stint in the Air Force.

I, on the other hand, was a young 52-year old black guy and former gang member. Little did we know God put us together for a reason. Over the next three years, I saw the aging process take a toll on Ray as he turned 80. It was rather emotional for me, because I started looking at him as a grandfather. Despite being unable to accomplish anything but a personal change over the last 37 years, the most fulfilling thing I've done, was taking care of 80-year old Ray after surgery.

I'll always consider him the grandfather I never had, and he will forever be family. They are my parental gifts.

- Rome

# "The Man Before Me"

My father was a man widely known for being that guy. He was that bad ass when it was needed and then he was just that person you had to be around. I grew up in CABRINI GREEN housing projects and my dad was and still is my hero, my idol, my heart; the funny thing is I've never met my father!

He was taken from me before we had the chance to breathe the same air or at least I can't remember breathing the same air as him. There's this story my mother and grandmother would tell me. It goes—Boy your father asked for you before he took his last breath. He said, "Where's Carlos? Where's my son?" and then he was gone. The night he died, he came to you. My mother:

I was sitting on the bed watching TV and you started laughing. I asked you why you were laughing and you said, "Mom, tell my daddy stop tickling me. I can't breathe." Now I would've been talking rather quickly given the fact my father died when I was merely eleven months old. Now, as a boy who didn't have a father hearing that made me feel like I meant more



*Carlos D. McDougal*

**HOUSE POET  
TWO ROADS**

to him than anything.

What child doesn't want to have that type of love from any parent? The life I lived without having him caused great depression and pain. The desire to have him in my life was so great that I used to wish and pray god took my life so I could be with my father. The brutal way in which kids express themselves can be detrimental to the mental state of a son longing for his father.

Father's Day is something I can't wrap my head around though. I have a son myself, but I can't celebrate this day in the way most people do and I don't know if I ever have. I don't want to be a downer on this particular subject but these stories need to be told. There are millions of people like me who grew up fatherless and couldn't get life right.

I can't say if my father was a great man or if he was someone who deserves to be honored. All I know is what I've been told. I can't give a firsthand account on the character of my father, but what I can say with complete certainty is he was loved by those who feared him and those who were closest to him.

He was, and will always be, the most important male figure in my life. He saved me from the grave more times than I care to count. He's a man I never knew. Before a couple of weeks ago, I'd only seen one photo of him from when I was eight years old. I love my father if you haven't pick that up in the words you're reading by now.

Father, you were taken from me before we had a chance to connect, but death didn't stop you from coming to me. I wish you did it when I was able to remember you. When I look in the mirror I see you, but how do I know that?

How could I say with certainty that the face I see is your face? What do I have to go off of? Your legend is something I aspired to be in order to feel close to you. I've loved you even before I knew what love was and now that I have a son, all the love you were going to give me, I now give to him so he feels the love of his father and grandfather.

# From all of us at TWO ROADS



HAPPY  
*Father's*  
DAY



# My Father (and the other Father's in the world)

Derrick Graham

Kewanee



My Father is brave  
My Father is honest  
My Father is loved  
My Father is humble  
My Father is a good person  
My Father is a man of his word  
**My Father is a prime example of a good dad.**

To me, being a father is building a healthy relationship with your kids and step kids.

I ALWAYS let my kids know I love and care about them a lot. I tell my kids that success is an option and failure is not, and I always let them know anything is possible. Just have the will to succeed.

As a father, I keep open and honest communication with my kids. To all the fathers out there, you need to fix

what's been broken in the relationship you have with your kids, and to motive them to take responsibility of their lives.

Happy Father's Day to my father, friends, cousins, uncles, grandfathers and mothers out there who had to take on the role of being a father.



# For Jeremiah

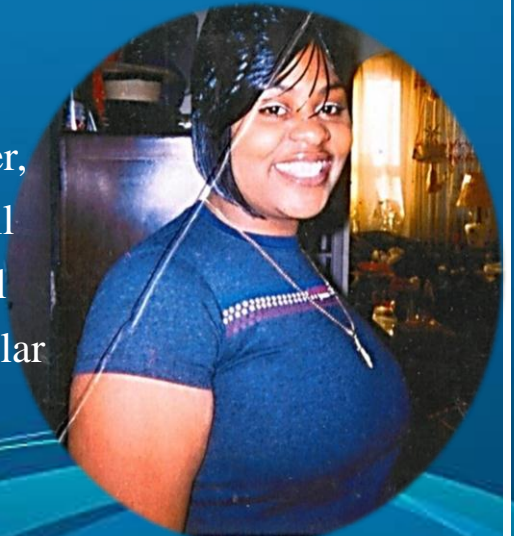
Jeanine Elam  
Logan

Is it weird to say that when I hear rhythmic beats, I visualize hypnotic moves, coupled with bopping music notes uplifted from the staff lines they rest upon? I think not – I come out of the womb this way! However, it was the gentle waves of my father’s heartbeat that my infant soul began to hone in on the melodies that erupted from the speakers of the vinyl keeper. My being no bigger than a sack of potatoes, perched on his chest as he belted out the words to whatever track was playing.

Now, my father was no Luther Vandross, but, the vibration of his voice, coupled with the movement of his breathing magically kept me quiet and like a rocking chair, sent me to dreamland.

For as long as I can remember, my father was my biggest supporter, drill sergeant and #1 fan, pushing me to excel at any and all academic and extracurricular activities such as sports and the arts.

In kindergarten, I was introduced to the



*Yamaha recorders*, as well as ballet and my father loved it.

The following year, he pushed me to join the beginner's band, but I wanted to play the sax. I chose the clarinet, but it was the flute in which I bonded. Through music and dance, I performed at a number of theaters, schools and museums growing up, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, yet my most memorable is the 4<sup>th</sup> grade at the Chicago Children's Museum, where I performed lead in a Russian piece named *Petrushka* (a ballet composed by Igor Fydorovich Stravinsky)

After the performance ended, my father emerged from the crowd and presented me with a single red rose. I'd never felt so special hearing the "oohs" and "ahhs" of my classmates and it felt so good to be admired by the other girls, especially being the chunky girl.

Dad, I remember trying to comb my hair and taking me to the doctor's visits. On beautiful days, he would snatch James and me, out of school for picnics down at the zoo. I also remember the first slaps to my face he gave me when I "assumed" that I was being grown with the boys.

His 5'9" frame towering over me. Those dark brown eyes piercing through my soul, as the place where I once sought comfort,

*“I don’t want you with 4-5 kids with all these different daddies living on public aid...YOU HEAR ME!”* he barked. “Is that what you want?” his voice now an octave louder (and deeper). “No daddy”, I answered through tears. “Go to your room”, he growls continue to slap me with his eyes.

I witnessed a beautiful union fall apart, due to a sick child and pride mixed with escape from reality with drug use and at the age of 14, my father left. I hated that he left my mom, but he never left James, and me for he was only a phone call away. At the age of 21, dad says to me “I bet you can’t even play that flute no’ more?” angered, I asks what he wants because I got a lot going on in my life and I can do without the B.S. He tells me Aretha, his girlfriend, whom he’s been with for years, is pregnant.

What? I’m basically grossed out, letting him know that he’s too old for those types of activities. On October 2, 2001, my baby brother, Jeremiah is born. November 4, 2001, my father dies.

I write this piece for my baby brother, Jeremiah , whom never got to experience laying on a pallet, watching action flicks, eating popcorn and drinking Kool-Aid; him showing up at your school to cheer you on, no matter what activity you were in; or yes, you getting the leather to the backside for not filling up those *ice trays*....facts!



This time has separated me from sharing a true dose of who our father was. He was not a perfect man, no one is, but he was a good man who loved his kids and only wanted what's best for us. Through my eyes, you will know him Jeremiah, and if he were still here, I'd show him that I could still play the flute!

Rest in Peace Daddy

# **Crucial Crossroads & The Catalyst**

**Earl Milton, Jr.  
Centralia**

Be happy, because you're beautiful. Be aware of the value of you. Your individual expression is as unique as your fingerprints. Don't lose sight of the beautiful work of art that you are amongst the others that exist as well. Each snowflake is different, but when they fall to the ground, you only see snow even though each flake differs from the rest. Know that you matter. There's no one who'd express what you express exactly how you'd express it, because you're the pearl of great price. Your DNA has materialized to this point in time

for a particular reason. You have a part to play, working with like-minded individuals, or isolated for a time to produce your contribution to the world while you retain your individuality. Everything is for a specific reason. Your job is to discover what good is this bringing out of me.

The most inspiring songs, poems, movies and books were wrought in the depths of pain or some other great emotion expressed in ways to help others relate or move them to tears of joy, sadness, or laughter; because of the personal expression you've unveiled and displayed masterfully. You have something in you. I want you to know. You have something in you just let it grow.

Guard the seed that you are then you'll see the sprout, the stalk, and then the ear. No matter what's happening now, remember seeds grow under the darkness of Earth. So, obscurity is no longer a concern for the hidden seed in the Earth that you might be at this time. Resist the urge to unearth yourself too soon. Let it grow naturally. Then one day overnight it'll seem that you're a big fruitful tree with healthy leaves and delicious fruit. If you'd just endure these growing pains of life with the smile they deserve because they'll catapult you into all you're meant to be. Let these words of knowledge be your catalyst in any and every great undertaking.

Remember you're a priceless jewel just as you are and there's a place for you if you only knew. Know this many times in life we're being prepared for what we're meant to have, be, and do. Many times our people and our place are being prepared for us. So, here's a crucial crossroad where many lose their way.

They give up and give in because the pain is too much. Whatever the pain, it's creating everything you need to be all you can be. Its helping you reach your full potential. Diamonds are created from intense pressure, pearls are created from the irritation of the calm, and marble is created from limestone under great pressure. Beautiful things come from the ugliest places. By ugly I mean deep places. In the depths of my greatest sorrows, I found I had everything I needed to succeed and thrive in all areas of life. I had to sit down and sit still to see what was there all along.

We all have something within of great value. But we don't all have the privilege of being sat down by force with the revelation of why, and the knowledge of what to do about it and the wisdom to do it. So, sit still and know!! This is much better than by force. Lessons from under the valley. To all my brothers that are force to sit, Happy Father's Day!

# My Dad, My Hero

Sarah Gumm

Logan

From the moment I first  
remember,

I've known I always had  
A loving, caring supporter  
To me his name is Dad.

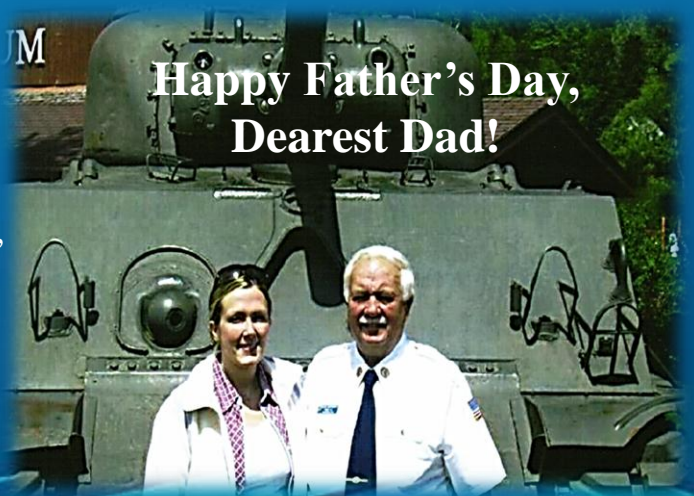
He picked me up when I fell  
down,  
Would wipe away my tears  
Dad gave me strength I've never  
known,  
And helped chase away my fears.

A dedicated Marine,  
Purple Heart received  
He fought through hell in  
Vietnam,  
Saw things you'd never  
believe.

Dad sometimes had a temper,  
It's true, you'd hear him  
shout  
But you've never met a more  
big-hearted man  
Of that I have no doubt.

Dad's resting in heaven now,  
And it hurts me every day  
Not having the chance to hug  
him,  
Or tell him things I've left to  
say.

I know I'll see him again one  
day,  
Seated near my Heavenly  
Father  
Till then I pray he always  
knows  
How proud I am to be his  
daughter.





# Happiness, Healing and Hot Jook

(How I Found my Korean Prison Dad)

**Andrew Suh**

The first snow of the season had already taken fall. It was the start of a bitter winter. I was working the chow line of the prison kitchen, scooping ladles of mystery slop onto hard plastic trays. “On the new!” I yelled out, notifying everyone that new arrivals were lining up to get fed.

Looking over the motley crew, I saw an outlier amid the usual black, brown and white faces. He was a tiny thing. He stood about 5 feet and weighed nothing. His silver hair was matted and disheveled. His eyes were bloodshot red and his skin was weathered from a lifetime of hard work. The little old man was dressed in one of the thin cotton, mustard yellow jumpsuits, designed for new arrivals.

He shivered from the cold as he blindly plodded forward with the rest of the scared, tired, hungry newbies. Something stirred within me. I instinctively knew he was Korean. I walked over to the old man and tapped him on his shoulder.



I greeted him in our *Hangul* language.

*(ahn young ha say yo, ahu buh jee, gwan chan yo)*

“Hello father, are you okay?”

He looked perplexed. But after a few moments, there was a flash of recognition. I saw his dull, tired, almond-shaped eyes light up because he realized I was talking to him in our native tongue.

Exchanging a few quick words with him, I knew he needed my help. I placed my hand on his little shoulder and told him, again in Hangul *(ah buy jee, ddah gwan chan ah yo)* “*Everything is going to be alright.*”

He looked back at me. A thin smile spread across his face, and his weary little eyes started to water as he nodded with understanding. I volunteered to be his interpreter and was summoned to orientation for new arrivals. I smuggled him a winter hat, a pair of gloves, a bar a soup and a small bag of peanuts. His fingers trembled as he accepted my meager gifts.

He thanked me, and called me “sir”. I was taken aback and embarrassed that this man, who was many years my senior, thought this was necessary. Unable to speak English, this petite 75-year old Korean man was thrown into the American criminal justice system to fend for himself.

He would spend the next year navigating the brutal world of incarceration, where he tried to avoid the predators of prison and came to rely on the kindness of strangers..”

I pulled a few strings and had him moved into my cell for the next 18 months, so he could finally breathe. He no longer needed to worry about navigating the prison alone. I was there to be there and would be his voice.

During our time together, we developed a familiar bond. I don't remember how it happened, but I jokingly started calling him my *ggangpae ahbuhjee*, which literally translate to *gangster father* in Hangul. The old man laughed when I shared this, and he readily embraced his new newfound moniker. From that point forward, he was my prison dad, and I was his prison son.

When I started down this path, it was simply instinctual to help a Korean elder. How could I have possibly known then that my kindness towards him would help me heal my own traumatic past? I had a biological father who loved me, but cancer ripped him from me when I was 11 years old. Then through this serendipitous set of circumstances, destiny intervened and brought me a prison dad to heal my wounded soul.

I cooked for him, cleaned up behind him, spent time with him and listened to him talk. I still see his wrinkled face and hear his quirky little laugh as he reminisced about days long gone. Over countless hours in our tiny cage, we talked in Hangul and bonded together as father and son. In a desolated world of incarceration, we found a glimmer of love, happiness, and healing. As with most stories, there are highs and lows.

Unfortunately, my prison dad had to deal with the reality of his declining health. He had a laundry list of ailments: high blood pressure, diabetes, a broken bladder, a serious case of insomnia and a persistent cough, which would later be diagnosed as lung cancer. As his interpreter, we spent hours together in the prison sick cell waiting to see an empathetic medical professional.

I knew he felt guilty that my days were consumed with his problems, but I felt this was my filial duty and I loved him. Once, I remember he hesitantly told me he was unable to hold down any solid foods and had not eaten anything since the day before. It was the weekend, and the prison's medical unit was a ghost town.

Reaching up into my old-school Korean cookbook, I whipped up some *jook*. For the uninitiated, *jook* is a bland Korean version of rice porridge that's served to the sick or infirm –it's comfort food when you're feeling horrible. The preparations are simple enough on a stovetop. You need regular rice and a bit of time. But try making the dish in a dingy prison cell, with a rigged up prison-issue tea pot and some rehydrated instant rice.

Despite it all, I managed to pull off a copycat version any respectable *halmeoni* (grandmother in Hangul) would be proud to say was her creation.




I prepared a small table for him. A mug of cold water, a bowl of steaming hoot jook and a spicy and salty hot sauce concoction to dress his bowl. I positioned my prison dad in front of his meal.

After a few small spoonful's, he put the plastic spoon down and started to sob. He grabbed my hand, looked at me and sighed heavily. He composed himself and, in a shaky voice, said “You take better care of me than my biological son.”

Listening to these words broke my heart because of all his suffering, but it was validation too, because he saw me. He knew I loved him. When my prison dad was released, we both shed tears. We knew the bitter unspoken truth – we would never see each other again. I had too much time remaining on my sentence, and he did not have enough time to survive my incarceration.

Holding him close for the very last time, I felt him trembling. He sobbed and whispered to me the same thing I told him the very first time I saw him: “Everything is going to be alright.”

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Mr. Suh originally wrote this article for *INSIDE: Prison Journalism Project*, which was published this spring. To read other inspiring journalists that are on the inside, please go to [www.prisonjournalismproject.com](http://www.prisonjournalismproject.com). He is also an editor for KEWANEE HORIZONS, which is a weekly IDOC newsletter. 

# Untitled

## Felix Whiteside

### Shawnee

I'm so fortunate to still have my father in my life today. He's always been a part of my life—even through my struggles to stay crime-free at my age of 55 years old.

My dad met my mom when they were both 17 years old. My mom had a 3 month old boy, but that didn't stop my parents from becoming a couple. After dating for 7 months, they married while my mom was 6 months pregnant with me.

Despite being an eighth grade dropout my dad managed to maintain employment and raise my brother, my two sisters and me. He held 2 jobs up until his retirement 13 years ago.

Today, my dad continues to be a great voice and leader in our huge family. I'm happy to say this year my parents have been married 55 years; the same years as my age. I can truly attest I have the best father ever. He deserves Father's Day every single day.

Happy Father's Day Bruce Whiteside!



# A Word From Daddy

So many years have come and gone  
So many things have changed,  
So much I wanted to say to you  
So much I can't explain,  
I know mere words are not enough  
To take away the pain,  
I wish that you could understand  
How much I feel the same,  
It hurts me deep down inside  
To be absent from your world  
I'm so unstable to not be able  
To help my baby girl,  
I wasn't there to see you grow  
I missed those precious years  
I wasn't around, when you fell down  
To wipe away your tears,  
I wasn't there to see you walk  
To hold your little hand,  
I left no imprint on your life  
No example of a man,  
A twisted mind I use to have

My eyes, they could not see,  
In the land of make believe,  
Is where I choose to be,  
I sought the things, that were  
not real,  
The things that were "I lost"  
Never in my wildest dreams  
Did I think, I'd pay the cost?



*John "Jay-R" Williams*

**HOUSE POET  
TWO ROADS**

With tear filled eyes, I searched  
the skies,

Unable to see the sun

A foolish man, who fail to plan,

Dear Lord, what have I done?

The streets, meant so much to  
me

A selfish man was I,

I didn't bother, to be a father

I refused to even try,

So much I didn't understand

So much I didn't learn,

The love a father is blessed to  
have

Is the love He has to earn,

I really miss you baby girl

These words I write are true

For what it's worth, its hell on  
earth

Because there is no you,

Many tales have been told of  
me

I'm sure you've heard them all,

Scandalous lies to cloud your  
eyes

To make your father small,  
I've heard it said, that I was  
dead

A victim of the streets,

I give no glory to that story

So falsely people speak,

So many things I wanted to  
say

So much you need to know

How can I explain, or make  
it plain

Just how I love you so,

Please dry your eyes and  
ignore the lies

For this troubled man,

I pray you see, what you  
mean to me

I hope you understand,

I love you more than life  
itself

For truly, you're my world,

A gift from god, you truly are  
My precious baby girl



# Love From the Outside

**Samantha Rodriguez**

Hello! My name is Samantha Rodriguez and I wanted to submit a story on behalf of my husband Jeffrey Rodriguez, who is in Centralia Correctional Center. I want to start off by saying it's been proven that children who grow up with an absentee-father can suffer long lasting damage. They are more likely to end up in poverty, drop out of school, become addicted to drugs, have a child out of wedlock, or end up in prison. Absent fathers can honestly affect a child's development as well as their behavior.

In fact, these studies are proof how Fathers are an essential part of a child's life and how fathers truly make the difference when growing up. Having your father incarcerated can be a challenging experience for any child, especially when you're trying to build a relationship with that parent. From the position of the Father that is incarcerated, I know that being incarcerated puts them in a burdensome place as well.

From our experience, being incarcerated complicates being present for some of your child's milestones and it will also serve as a

stumbling block since you are limited to what you can do for your child. At this moment I want to speak on my husband, Jeffrey. He grew up without his father and is a statistic to a fatherless home. In spite of that, He has done a tremendous job in his role as a Father to our kids. From being as present and available as he can be for them, to making sure he goes out of his way to ensure their birthday, holidays, graduations, award ceremonies, etc. are extremely special.

Jeffrey is excellent at setting aside undivided time for all 3 of our kids to "catch up", to have personal conversations about life and future goals. He does an exceptional job when he holds them accountable to their goals and supports them if they ever miss the mark. When he has to have tough conversations with them, he does his absolute best to do it in love. He will walk them through the process of their decisions as teenagers (both good and bad) while helping them understand how their choices now will affect their life in the long run!

He helps them to develop good habits with expressing their feelings/emotions along with how to establish healthy relationships with others. He truly has had an impact in their lives to the point that they won't make decisions until they can get advice from him. We now have a 16yr old son, 17yr old daughter and a 19 yr old daughter.

Jeffrey has made efforts to take parenting classes while being incarcerated to further his understanding of his role in their life and the results have been astonishing. I admire all of his efforts with our children and his ability to love them beyond measure. He may be limited with his ability to be available to them at the drop of a dime, but he doesn't limit himself when they need him. He will move mountains to make a phone call, write a message or arrange an in person visit. He strives and will continue to have a lasting positive effect on our children. They trust that he will always have their back and come through when they need him without fail.

We have had such great success with our children even with the limitations that we have because of who Jeffrey is as a father. The relationship he has with his children has developed into a powerful and impactful one, a relationship that has changed the course of our lives forever. We thank him on this special day for who he is and we honor his efforts in all he has done. We don't know where we would be without him! He is a blessing, and we can't wait for the day that he can be home with us.

We love him and appreciate all that he has done to be a huge influence in all of our lives. Thank you for this opportunity to highlight my husband and the father of our children.

Sincerely, your wife  
Samantha Rodriguez

# Juneteenth

In 2021, Juneteenth became recognized as a federal holiday in the United States. For some Americans, it's a new holiday to learn more about. But for many Black families and communities across the nation, it's a well-known time to celebrate liberation, culture and joy.

## What is Juneteenth?

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the *Emancipation Proclamation*, which declared a formal end to slavery in the United States. However, change was not instant after the proclamation. Nearly two and a half years later, on June 19th, 1865, the enslaved African Americans of Galveston, Texas, got the news by way of the Union army troops that freedom had come at last.

The next year, the people of Galveston commemorated that day as Juneteenth, a celebration of freedom. Since then, it's been observed in communities and states as a holiday, but officially recognized as a federal holiday in 2021.

**Why is the holiday called Juneteenth?** The name blends the month and the day this news reached the people of Galveston: “June” plus “Nineteenth” is Juneteenth. It's also often called *Emancipation Day* or *Freedom Day*.

HAPPY JUNETEENTH FROM TWO ROADS



# Father of the Last Four Decades

**Richard "Richie" Bryant  
Kewanee**

To the lady who's earned "Father of the past 4 decades," I want you to know that even though I'm far away from home, my memories of it are vivid and heartwarming; and in my thoughts, you are always present.

I'm extremely blessed to have been raised by a woman like you. You nurtured me with patience and understanding. You sacrificed so much on my behalf; you often forgave me for the indiscretion. You tolerated my shortcomings. Most importantly, you molded my character and showed me the true meaning of love.

Were it not for you, I would've never been exposed to the values of honesty, sincerity, loyalty, trust and have true meaning of love.

I wouldn't have learned the qualities of perseverance, tolerance, compassion and



forgiveness. You introduced me to all of these, not by words alone, but by example, and I'm proud to be my GRANDmother's son.

I want you to know that none of my poor decisions are a reflection of the beautiful things you instilled in me. I'll always cherish and love you dearly. Thank you for your unconditional love and understanding.

I love you Grandma Lynn!  
Happy Father's Day  
Your only son, Richie



# Chess Pieces

Robert McCullough

## Danville

I started off a pawn in my mother's chess game. My father would move here, my mother would move there, so I didn't meet my father until I was 5 years old. My mother kept me away from my father and told me how he didn't want to be in my life. So, I grew up really hating this man.

As I got older, I became a young knight and started seeing both my King and Queen Perspective. My dad was not a one-woman's man, but did that make it right for my mom to keep him away from me? Fast forward 30 years later; my dad and I have had the most wonderful relationship a father and son could have.



I'm the oldest of 8 children, but my sister is 5 hours older than me and we don't have the same mother. What I respect the most about my dad is he never gave up on being a part of my life. Also, he's a major part of me being the man I am today. I may be bigger than you now Dad and I may have not listened as a kid, but I'll always be your baby boy and what I didn't get then, I get now.

A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him. **I love you pops.**

# **OI Hec'**

## **Margarita Castillo**

### **Logan**

To everyone, you are just Hector, “OI Hec”. To the kids, you are “Papa”, and needless to say, you play an important role in everyone’s life. To me, you are more than just a father; you are my dad, and my safe haven. You are the rock and foundation to our family. You are a protector and provider. You always said it didn’t matter what someone tried to do to you – just don’t mess with your “ladies”! Some tried to test that and quickly learned he wasn’t someone to mess with – crazy guy.

You brought mom to the states and y’all built a life together, the way you support her and have her back shows your commitment to her. You have both instilled strong morals and convictions in us that as now being an adult, I can appreciate. You taught us “always put God and family first”, in that order! You showed me the true meaning of friendship and loyalty in leading by example.

Raising three daughters could never be an easy task. I get it...girls suck! I’m sure we tested your patience to no end, caused



you headaches, made you worry, and even mad at times, and I'm sure that we are responsible for some of your gray hairs. But hey, it's okay...you still look good old man. Is this why you always said, "All you wanted was a boy?" you were joking right? Maybe this is why you have such a good sense of humor. I get it!

Dad, you have carried our family through some of the hardest and scariest moments – never changing face or letting your faith waiver. Last year, I faced one of the toughest seasons of my life. I don't think I ever felt so defeated and "out of fight". I was in a state of pure brokenness. All I could do was cry. There was no fighting back the tears. You told me to cry until I couldn't cry anymore. You said it was okay to question God and be mad, but reminded me not to stay there. God sees, hears, and feels every tear. You told me to pick myself up, dust off my shoulders off and keep moving forward lie I know how to do.

You said "*today things are what they are, but we'll see what it's gonna be.*" In that moment, it made sense and it was exactly what I needed to hear.

Growing up, you always said when we got older; we wouldn't need you anymore or want to hang out with you. The truth is, I will always need you and some of my favorite moments are hanging out with you – even if we are just talking over a good cup of coffee and *pan dulce* (sweet bread).

You have touched lives in wars you can't imagine. You are a father figure to many; you are kind and generous to all. You have three daughters who will always need you, two grandsons who will do everything for you and two granddaughters who simply adore "Ol' Hec'!"

Thank you for always loving me, supporting me, and standing by my side. Maybe your favorite guy, *George Strait*, was up to something when he sang about the "secret to a father's love..." Daddy's don't just love their children every now and then; it's a love without an end. Amen.

I love you Ol' Hec'  
Magaly  
"Dott" Head



# In My Absence

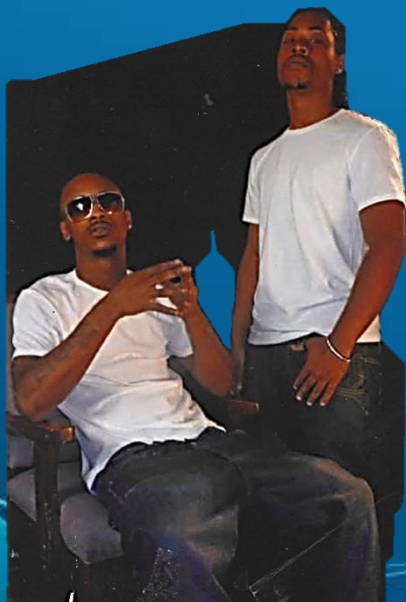
Milton Jones

Kewanee

One Thursday morning, March 6, 1986, while in school, I was called to the principal's office. Upon my arrival, I was informed my dad passed away in his sleep and I was to be sent home. In truth, I don't remember much about my father. However, I do recall he drank heavily, was extremely comical and loved to cook. Who knows, maybe that's where I developed my love for culinary artistry.

Because this traumatic event occurred while I was attending school, my view of school became skewed...it came to symbolize hurt and failure instead of success.

I have three siblings; two wonderful sisters and a brother whom I love dearly. My brother, Larvel, was born with a mental disorder which made it difficult for my mother to maintain employment. This expedited my road to independence.



I picked up a job shining shoes in the Loop (downtown Chicago) that provided daily wages from the tips I'd receive. At the end of the night, I'd stop at Coconut Records to purchase albums of music artists I liked. I'm talking real vinyl not a CD or MP3 player or none of the technology of today. This was the birth of my record collection and my aspirations of becoming a disc jockey. After shining shoes for hours and my exploits at the record shop, I'd give my mother the remainder of my proceeds to purchase more food for the family.

I was born and raised in the projects on the Southside of Chicago which is an extremely tough environment to grow up in.

Finances aren't the best and it's usually single-parent homes. These homes were some form of apartments—either high rises or row houses. Over the years as my disk jockey skills progressed, our financial issues regressed. Things rose to a point where not having money was no longer an issue. The notoriety I gained led to me becoming a businessman. There was a time that I owned a record company, a record store and a nightclub.





As my ascension to stardom took place, our financial situation wasn't the only thing that changed...I did as well. I was a businessman by day and a gangster by night. This lifestyle tainted my businesses and, along with some other things, led to my businesses failing. Lack of education, lack of planning and lack of setting attainable goals were all contributing factors to my failure. The failure of my businesses and my imprisonment are the results of choices I made, no one else's.

There's another place in my life where I failed more so than any other and that's in my role as a father. I'm a father of five grown children who I love dearly. Due to my incarceration, I've been physically absent from their lives for over two decades. I'm absolutely ashamed of that and I regret it. Fathers are supposed to be special to their children, they are their personal super hero.

I want to sincerely apologize to my children for not being present during their shortcomings to let them know everything will be alright. Just as well, I'm asking their forgiveness for not being present to share in their accomplishments. I love all five of my children unconditionally, and I'm very proud of each one of them. Their resilience is unmatched. It's absolutely moving to see their greatness despite my absence.



# Back and Forth, but Loved

**Melvin Nelson**  
**Danville**

Dear Readers, Mothers, Fathers, Sons and Ladies:

My name is Melvin Nelson. I was raised by my grandmother (father's mom), Hattie Buford, on the south side of Chicago B.K.A. Bronzeville A.K.A. Chicago Housing Authority – Ida B. Wells on the Low end.

Growing up as a little kid, my momma and father spent a lot of their time in the streets indulging into bad lifestyles before and right after I was born. I was the last born of my biological siblings, so I grew up not having a Father Presence due to his length of imprisonment because of his street involvements, but I always LOVED my pops—Mr. P. Melvin *Mustafa* Buford.

My father left me alone with my mom when I was 3 or 4 years old in the late 80's, so I grew up really not knowing how it felt to have a father around. During times when I'd be seeing family members, friends, and strangers with their fathers, enjoying it or not, I would honestly feel literally so jealous. These blessed people, who had a father in their life back then.

The only time I'd saw my pops is when I looked at Prison Photos. I also would only get to talk to him during phone calls, especially, on our birthdates and holidays.

So by the time I was in my mid-teen years my father had been released from prison and by this time I was used to living my life and doing what I wanted without a father in my life. I was also gangbanging and being so disobedient and unruly at the same time when I think about how I was back then.

Upon my pops re-entering into society, he was still entrenched with a lot of his old negative ways afterwards in the late 90's; he was out for a little bit over a year then before the year 2000 arrived, he'd then got 10, locked up again, but only this time he committed another crime and got shot directly in the spine and was paralyzed too, so I continued my childhood years without my father once again.

Before me and my fathers birthday, which is February 10<sup>th</sup>, my father got released and I was turning 25 years old. By this time of my life, I learned and experienced so much without him and he became a grandfather as I had introduced him to my little daughter during a visit. and I still LOVED him as my father no matter what. During 2012 of June, I committed a murder which is what I'm incarcerated for,

but upon me being incarcerated for the 11 years I've been away, I've learned a lot of wish I wouldn't have took my freedom and parenthood for granted too.

I miss my father so much and appreciate my pops and his best friend/brother, Bey Yah, for always being in my corner 100% faithfully, financially and spiritually too before my one and only pops passed away and left me alone while incarcerated back in October 2020. I just knew God-Allah was ready for the unexpected when I wasn't.

My message to all of the blessed, that are the fortunate individuals to have a breathing father, is to love thy father and enjoy all the moments. Only if it's possible for all whom are reading this, no matter if it's on the phone, in person or on a visit, or out in the free world.

Happy Father's Day to my pops, the strong mothers raising kids alone (no offense) and all the rest of those missed and loyal Fathers!

P.S. My Pops and I would like to express how much we miss and loved his daughter (my sister) Miesha Nelson...(RIP)



# CRIME

# DRUGS

# PILLS



*Let's End This!*

In accordance with National Recovery Month in September, TWO ROADS presents you with an outlook of our community, as well as the communities on the outside. Submissions are now being accepted for **ADDICTION & RECOVERY** issue. You may talk about the addiction that you are trying to defeat or you can talk about the recovery you have had from an addiction. The goal is to support one another and encourage those who are in need.

**Deadline is Thursday, August 31<sup>st</sup>**

# ALCOHOL SEX GAMBLING

# A Message From Me to You

## DeMilo Fox

The struggles of being a father while being incarcerated is a subject that's extremely hard to talk about because there's an enormous amount of feelings involved. At the same time, it's a topic that needs to be discussed. I'll attempt to do so as best as I can from my personal experience and I'm quite sure a lot of y'all can relate to what I'm saying.

I was immature on so many levels when I began my bit.

However, that didn't stop me from making a promise to myself that I'll do everything in my power to better myself while I'm doing this time. In my quest to be better leaving prison than I was coming, I faced huge obstacles.



I can't lie, it was hard but I kept pushing and didn't allow other people's negative thought process or actions stop me from doing what was right for me (first & foremost), my kids, and my family as a whole. Forgiveness of self was the first in the process. Although it pains me to say it, admittedly, I wasn't a good father when I was in the streets.



My problem was I thought spending money on my kids was showing them love when quality time is what they needed. This is something that needed to be fixed a.s.a.p. after I came to that realization. This resulted in me making a vow to do whatever I could to better the relationship I share with the mothers of my kids. You wanna talk about hard work? That's exactly what that shit was and it was by my own doing. There was pain I caused them while I was out there and in here that was damn near unbearable for them. Because of this, I knew it was gonna take some time so I stayed patient.



During that time, I let God work on me while I earnestly prayed He'd be working on them as well. To give you a glimpse into my world so you can get a full understanding of what I was dealing with, I have four kids and none of them have the same mother. Yep, 4 kids by 4 different women. Believe me when I say God worked a number for me...there came the point where 3 out of the 4 of my kids' mothers were able to talk to me.

I entered the conversations with them in a dangerous manner; I asked them two questions and gave them the floor. These are the questions I asked:

“What do you think about me?”

“What do I need to do or change in order to keep a relationship with you?”

You thought I was capping when I said “dangerous”? All of the things they said to me about me hurt like hell, but I listened without interrupting. I would’ve never done that in the past and each of them recognized that. They took note of this new me and after countless calls, I earned their respect because they saw my actions were real. There was healing taking place on both sides (mine and theirs) and I was grateful for the road we were on.

Acknowledgement of the hurt I caused them was something else I did...not some of it, all of the hurt I’d caused. I did and it took time as well. The more they saw of this new me the more receptive of me they were and I earned more of their respect. My change and maturation was as real to them as it was to me...they say I was walking the talk.

After picking up on the change I made through my conversation, they recognized I was ready to have an adult conversation with them. By “adult conversation” I mean we could talk without me interrupting them when they said something I disliked.



I've been gone 14 years, and with some changes and it took me 8 of those years to find and love myself. After all I've been through, I'm now able to talk to the mothers of my kids about what's most important and that being our kids. It actually feels good talking to them without all of the fussing, cussing, and hate. When the parents of children are no longer together but still have a good relationship, it allows the noncustodial parent (most times the father) to build better relationship with the children. That's where I'm at in life right now.

I talk to my three daughters every day, with the exception here and there; there's nothing we don't talk about. The love my daughters have for me means the world to me! You can't tell them their father is a bad man and you damn sure can't say anything bad about me in front of them. Try it and they're gonna check something about their dad. L.B.V.S. (laughing but very serious). I know y'all saw them at the "Daddy/Daughter Dance" so you know everything I'm saying is real.

This is a small part of my story, but I'm sharing this so y'all know what it takes. I didn't give up because my kids' mothers hated me, I put it in God's hands. When He felt I was ready, He opened their eyes to the changes I made and gave me everything I needed which is a strong bond with my daughters.

Be clear, I'm thankful but I'm not satisfied because I still have one daughter I don't talk to. Her mother just isn't ready right now and I understand. I have to keep praying for her healing because everyone doesn't heal at the same time or in the same timeframe.

Here I'm being patient again and I urge you to do the same. You also need to humble yourself...do what needs to be done so you'll be able to build with your kids. I know it's 3 out of 4 mothers and daughters I talk to but that's a blessing. Hell, I still remember when I wasn't talking to any of them so I can't complain.

Work on your mind, body, and soul. If I can do it, y'all can too. I have faith in my brothers behind these walls and I know we can do better if we put our minds to it.

-Milo



*Before press release, Mr. Fox alerted the TWO ROADS staff that he's now communicating with **ALL OF HIS DAUGHTERS**. We are thankful for him and are encouraged for communication of all Father's and their kids.*

# Untitled

## LaKisha Woodard

### Logan



To my father, Clifton, rest in heaven.  
Happy Father's day to you.

I cannot believe how long it's been since you passed away. When I think back to the times we shared together, my heart leaps with joy. Dad, you were an absolutely beautiful person and an amazing father. You were my favorite person in the entire world. Dad, you always had time for me. Anyone that knew you knew I was your number one priority, and how you loved to be a father. You took your responsibility as a single parent seriously. You played an ongoing role in my life.

Thank you, dad; your love for me never changed, even when I became a product of my environment. You were always there to help in any way possible. I love you dad. I miss you so much. I could remember when you would be cooking, how good it would smell, and how my mouth would water. You also cleaned up the house real good to be a man.

Dad, I always looked forward to spending time with you. You were so fun to be around. You would always find something to do with me. I would rather spend time with you than the other kids. You would always take me around your friends; a proud father you were. We would talk, walk, play, and shop. It was a relief to have a father that was present my entire life. You filled my heart with love. My soul warms with thoughts of you. It is truly a blessing to have had you as my father. I appreciate you in ways that I could never repay you.

Love,  
Your only child  
Kisha`



**MICHAEL JORDAN**

“I can accept failure. Everyone fails at something.  
But I can’t accept not trying.”

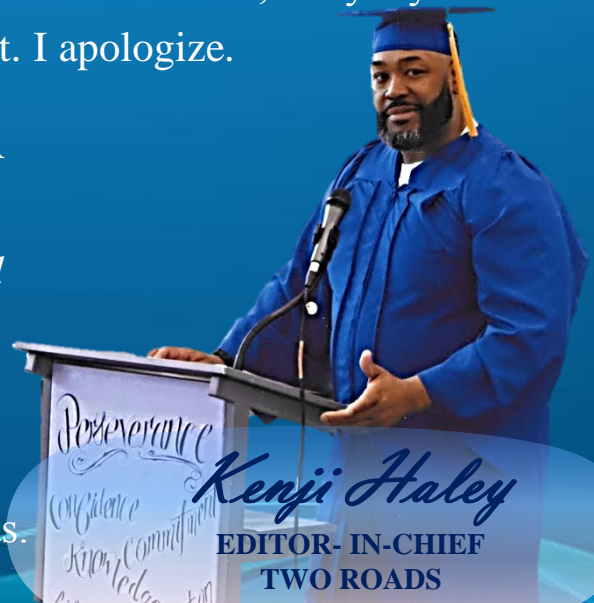


# I Apologize...

My first thoughts are to apologize. I've failed you. In my mind and heart, I failed because you gave me the outlet to be a better man; to lead and not follow and to be successful. I was given the tools that allowed me to further my education; to have responsibility and to live my life.

I am blessed. Blessed because I was given the opportunity to have my father in my life. Many of the guys who I was friends with didn't have this opportunity, as their fathers were gone in the wind. I was one of the lucky ones. I apologize. My memories are so rememberable, like the time you picked me up from school to take me to the "Transformer" movie at the Country Fair Theaters. I knew you didn't want to be there, but yet you allowed me to have my enjoyment. I apologize.

You taught me to NEVER think I could stand up to you. "*I don't care if you are 45, I will still beat you're a@@!*", and when I tried you in 2004, talkin' big to stand up like you, and you showed who the "bigga figga" was.



Eventhough I was bigger than you, you were still the man of the house. As I drove towards my girlfriend's (now wife) house, I realize how much you cared, although you had the “I brought you in this world, and I will take you out” mantra, it was all love. I apologize.

You are that lion my mother and sister needed. You taught me to be strong and to use the word “have” and not “got”. You encouraged me to be the best athlete and to go to the park every day, and toss the discus until you can walk 150 feet and it was further! You encourage me to be the one to know the lessons and to read everything. *"Don't use your head for a hat rack, son."* I apologize.

I remember the evenings, coming home from a long day's work, having your beer and just wanting to go in your room

and lay in the waterbed, but was willing to take me to Pizza Hut to get my personal pan pizza from the "Read It Book It" program, yet, you would come home and warm up your Banquet Chicken Pot-Pie (and still don't understand why you love those things to this day). I apologize.



You are the epitome of what a father is: blue collar, hard-working,

loyal, sincere, and tranquil. You made sure on your Sundays off from work, you'd go to church to usher and take part in building or fixing things, for the sake of the church members. I apologize.

I remember vividly when you were sitting in the visitor's chair at the county jail. You had to catch the bus because you didn't have the legal ability to drive. The red and water that were in your eyes broke me. In all my years of living, I had never seen you cry.

The man who wanted me to be better than he was; the man, who was the oldest of 5; the man who lost his brother Mark to illness as a young boy. The man who left the slums of East Saint Louis, to attend *Louis and Clark Community College*, to pursue being a pitcher in the MLB. The man, when he threw out his arm in the minors, then went to serve his country in the U.S. Army.

The man who wanted his kids to have a better life than he and his wife did; The man who encouraged my sister and me to attend college, and to be successful; The man who lost his mother to cancer and his brother to a drug overdose, shortly after he was released from prison. I apologize. I wish that I would have done better, had a better outcomes, been more responsible, done the things that you ask. Pops, I want you to know you are AMAZING. You've been with me since day negative 270 and that, as your son, I'm appreciative to have you in my life.

All the things you've done, has been a blessing and powerful to me. There's not one day that a lesson you taught to me, have I not taken into account. There are men and fathers who are out there; but you have one thing many will never have: *resilience*.

My life is far from over, but I thank you for being a part of it and continuing to love me unconditionally. You are a wonderful man and a great father. I hope this Father's Day you know your child thanks you for all you've done for me and will do for me in the future. I love you and I hope you accept my apology.

**Step Up!**  
**Franklin Heindricks**  
**Kewanee**

O'men of the world  
Where have you gone  
Some of us locked up or dead  
The rest, Arguing over the rights of others  
All cuz they don't like the way,  
They talk, dress, and act, pushing their beliefs on others



Passing down hate, instead of passing on  
love  
Wondering why ur sons & daughters  
end up in messy relationships  
When we can't even treat their mothers right  
See, abuse breeds abuse and excuses don't  
excuse bruises  
See, sometimes you gotta swallow up pride  
Be the bigger man  
Talk with ur words instead of ur fist  
See, the way we been doing things  
Ain't changed nothin'  
So maybe it's time we change somethin'  
Hate comes from ignorance  
and lack of understanding  
While love comes from a knowledge  
of hope and grace  
So men, whether you have kids or don't  
It's time to step up and change ur generation  
There's too many young kids living without  
fathers & uncles, brothers & cousins  
So, be a man and show other men what  
this means.



# By All Means...Father

Charles Childs

Western (Mt. Sterling)

Through what lens do you view your father? I'm my dad's first-born, but we never developed the relationship every child deserves. Nevertheless, at my mother's request, my dad (who lived separately) had the 'man-to-man' talk with me sometime around my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday.

I was so excited in the days leading up to his visit . we finally sat, side-by-side, on the front porch steps. We talked for hours, but I don't remember anything before or after his words "*I'm still mad at your mother for not getting the abortion.*" That statement sliced me like an axe. What I heard is: my life had no value to you. The man who should've been my hero had robbed me of an unknown something , and it punctured a hole in my soul.

Years later, my daughter (and only child) sat on the stool next to me in Menard Correctional Center's visiting room. She stared up at my face and asked: "*Daddy, why are you in prison?*" my heart paused for seemed like an eternity. I know firsthand how words could wound, so I thought carefully about an age-appropriate answer. "*I'm here because I did something bad.*"

“So you’re in time-out?” she asked. “Yeah! I’m in time-out for grown ups.” When she asked how long my time-out would last, I didn’t want to confuse her by trying to explain the appeals process, nor did I want to mislead her, because she was pretty sharp for a 6-year old. So I simply said: “I got a really long time-out.” After a moment’s thought, she said “My teacher lets us out of time-out early if we apologize, so, if you apologize, will they let you out early?”

“No.” I answered. “It doesn’t work that way when you are all grown up.” “Yes it do!” she insisted, while tugging at my arm to encourage me to stand up. “Tell the officer you’re sorry so you can come home early!”

The more my daughter spoke the quieter the visiting room became. Meanwhile, she continued pulling my arm until finally she let it go and ran down the aisle to the sergeant’s desk. “My daddy is sorry. Can he go home now?” The visiting room fell silent. I imagined kids approached with these kinds of pleas often, though the sergeant seemed to be genuinely caught off guard.

I myself was paralyzed with intense shame. As a diversion, he offered her some crayons and coloring pages – but she insisted on an answer. I gently brought her back to our table. This was a pivotal moment in my life. It’s where I realized that I had to change the lens through which I viewed fathering. I had discovered the value I held in my family’s esteem, and especially my daughter’s.

This awareness led me to write my father a letter, detailing how sad, angry and disappointed I was for the pain that he had caused me.

I didn't expect any reply, but I needed to tell him that I forgave him. In doing so, I began to heal, giving myself permission to release all the negative feelings I'd accumulated for him. There is more to fathering than physical presence. Likewise, there is no substitute for spending time and being hands-on with a child's mind, by imparting knowledge, articulation phenomena and developing their critical thinking skills.

Letters, phone calls and visits were the only means available to me at this time. I relied on my imagination for the best ways to be at the time. I relied on my imagination for the best ways to utilize these, in my effort to become as available-intellectually, emotionally and spiritually as possible. My wife would put the phone on speaker and together we would help our daughter with her homework, having family discussions, or dissect any other issues life may have presented since the last time we spoke. Divvying up my energy and finding that balance between the realities that come with being in prison and pouring into my daughter became my priority. There were times when this was a real challenge like when mail was 2 to 3 weeks behind, or when the prison would be on lockdown.



However, I navigated my way through those struggles, it's what that six-year old that ran up to the sergeant's desk to fight for her hero would have expected me to do for her. My daughter has since graduated from college; she's a businesswoman and homeowner, artist and author of a children's book.

Upon reflection, I realize that my advice and guidance made a positive difference for one of the most important people in my life. This is due, in part, to my matured mindset, which has been BY ALL MEANS...FATHER.

## **"Donnie's Boy Finally Grows Up" Michael "Wally" Walls Pontiac**

I'm a small town guy. I grew up in Mounds; a small town near the southern tip of the state. It was one of those towns where everyone knows each other. You couldn't get away with anything because the neighbors would've called your parents before you got home. If one of your parents addressed you by including your middle name when you got home, you automatically knew you had been told on.

In this small-town environment, my father, Donald, was kind of a big deal. He was the towns' Police Chief on two occasions; served a term as Mayor; was the Assistant Fire Chief and worked for the Post Office, delivering the mail.

Since he was so known around the community, I was always referred to as "Donnie Wall's boy." If I said something to someone, "*Donnie Wall's boy told me that...*" It was almost as if I didn't have an identity of my own. Being known, or even addressed by this particular moniker continued into my adulthood.

I remember being an inmate at Shawnee in my early 20's. An individual I grew up with saw me walking down the sidewalk one morning and yelled "*Hey! Donnie Wall's Boy!*" I turned so red from the embarrassment, that I'd given a boiled lobster a close contest.

By my late 20's, I was trying really hard to cement my own identity into public consciousness. I was an ABE/GED Teacher's Aide; tried my hand at broadcast journalism and even was an AT&T Supervisor. Finally, being able to go through my day hearing people say MY name for a change; to me, it was personally satisfying.

Have you ever noticed how everybody really seems to know your name when you get into trouble? After I was sent to prison on this conviction, the roles of me and my father were reversed, negatively...and the words used were tinged with revulsion. *“Oh! You’re “Wally Wall’s Father!”*

I was talking with my father on the phone one evening, about two months before he died from cancer. It puzzled him how a guy that used be one of his closest friends had been treating him badly for nearly 12 years, since my conviction, and it really hurt him inside.

I sat down that night, and I wrote that former friend a letter (remember everyone in my town knows everyone..?). I let him know my father had always treasured their friendship and how much his behavior hurt my father. *“You can hate me all you want to”, I wrote. “But you have no excuse to take it out on a man who still believes in you (and your friendship).”*

The day after receiving my letter, that man drove out to my father’s home, with the letter in hand , and apologized for his behavior. The two of them talked daily until the day my father passed. After my father passed in 2013, I realized I really didn't recognize the true worth of a man who was not only my father, but was my hero, my mentor and my best friend.

In his lifetime, his list of accomplishments was awe-inspiring. He went from being an Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Championship –winning baseball player (1963); to a two-term Police Chief; Mayor; 37-year veteran firefighter; carpenter; and a fairly decent fisherman.

In my own lifetime, I can only hope I can be half the individual my father was. I didn't realize in my younger years just how truly blessed I was to have him in my life. I might not have enjoyed it when I was younger, but it did finally dawn on me that maybe "Donnie Wall's boy" was a pretty cool thing to be.

# **Untitled**

## **Antoine 'Dub' Ridgeway**

### **Sheridan**

Mr. Gregory Anding Sr., my grandfather who's resting in paradise, was my father figure. God fearing, loving, compassionate, hard-working, determined, World War II veteran, General Motors retiree and a host of other great qualities. What I loved mostly about him was how relentless he was when it came to providing in all aspects for his family.



My mother and biological father were heroin addicts. Throughout that trial in the lives of my three siblings and me, we were welcomed into the home of our grandparents. This is where I was taught to be who I am today. This is where I was taught to always look a man in his eyes, how to tie a tie and how to not be shy. This is where I was taught work ethic, how to manage money and, most importantly, this where I was taught how to be a father. So, as we approach this Father's Day, I'm grateful that for 43 of my 48 years, I was blessed with what I'd call the definition of a father in my grandfather—Mr. Gregory Anding Sr.

From, Antione "Dub" Ridgeway

## **Always Return** **Mishunda Brown-Davis** **Logan**

You left when I was three, I saw you once again when I was ten,  
From the absence I recall looking for a resemblance of you in the  
face of men,

I held to my heart the stories of how you loved me, so much to write  
a song,

Which is why I didn't understand where were you and what was  
taking so long,

At fourteen, you sent a letter and picture to me and my brother from  
the pen,  
I was so happy to finally see your handsome face, but most of all  
you chose to mend.  
I forgave you, of course, but too young to understand the importance  
of writing back,  
Had I took the initiative, then we may have sooner got on track.  
For the years you were away, my heavenly father took me under his  
wings,  
Protecting, loving and teaching me oh so many things,  
I strayed and was arrested at eighteen with two kids,  
Who I pray was alive for you to meet.  
My prayers were shortly answered when my mom and kids ran into  
you in the street.

She gave you a briefing and you came to the county to see me,  
You said I was just like you, I didn't agree then  
but maybe,  
You disappeared before I was sentenced and at  
21, I was shipped to the penitentiary,  
"Don't get your hopes up too high" is what my  
mom would always tell me,  
And although you hurt and made me mad, I  
always believed and knew you loved me daddy.  
I felt like it was a sixth-sense, so no one could  
tell me different, including mommy,



You left and returned many times later on in my life,  
But I realized the disappearance became shorter and shorter and I  
could tell this time that you were trying to get it right.

The last time you returned, you stayed until the day you left for  
good,

But with that time, you were a consistent father, grandfather and  
man that did all he could.

Making up for lost times you didn't give up and I love you for that,  
I guess that I am like you, still standing after twenty-two years flat,  
Thank you for introducing me to my husband Tyrone, who's  
embraced all of me down to my kids,

He's been so patient and loving as my king, standing tall and firm  
like the great pyramids.

But let's not forget that no man is perfect, no not one,

So we should look at our mistakes before judging someone.

To the readers, take a lesson form my father that in spite of life's  
twist and turns,

What counts is the most is that you try, never give up, and

**ALWAYS RETURN**

**HAPPY FATHER'S DAY DAD**

And happy father's day to ALL men, even if you're not a father,  
because as my husband's shown me, you don't have to have any  
children to play a father role in someone's life, rather it be a  
stepchild, brother, friend or stranger.

Those fatherly characteristics inside of you counts and can truly impact one's life and make the difference.

So continue to be great leaders, helping to form a better future generation by doing your part and leading our sons and daughters to the light. And to all father figures, who don't have a father themselves, look to God, your heavenly father for strength, wisdom, and guidance to direct your steps.

## **My Father** **DeMarcus Hillsman** **Centralia**

May peace be upon all of you. I've said this for years and still stand by it to this very day: "Father's Day is underrated." However, I want to salute and pay homage to the good men not only in the free society, but to all of the good, responsible incarcerated men who're still playing their roles in their children's lives even though they aren't "physically" able to be there at this moment. I was fortunate to have good men play a role in my upbringing.

The one who left the strongest impression on me is my father, Ray B. Hillsman, "The Captain." Family oriented, responsible, strong, hard-working, righteous, humble, intelligent,



peaceful, courageous, loyal, trustworthy, honest, a man of integrity, a moral compass like no other, selfless, understanding, caring, considerate, caring, and considerate...these are just some characteristics I'd describe one of the strongest influences in my life.

I was blessed with the best father in the world. My father showed me early in life what "true service" was in looking out for the community, in particular the elders. He'd help anyone in need without expecting anything in return. The examples my father set for me as a kid are what a lot of you brothers who know me see within me. I am who I am because of my father. Through me, y'all see a reflection of my father's character.

To my father: I love you for being you and for allowing me to be me and never turning your back on me even though I've caused much heartache and pain. I can't change the past, but I can make the right choices in the present as a man and make you proud.

Happy Father's Day to all of you brothers.

Peace and Respect,  
DeMarcus Hillsman



# Familiar Strangers

I look at you before my eyes  
I see how you have grown,  
So much, I find familiar to me  
So much, I've never known  
Your hands, your eyes, and even your smile  
So easy for one to see  
There is no question, your very essence  
Derives from the depths of me  
When we're together there is a distance  
A void we dare not pass,  
It's funny how time can pose it seems  
Those questions, our lips can't ask,  
When we're together we search for words  
So much we long to stay,  
Trapped inside this mystery  
Just trying to find our way  
I see the questions in your eyes  
Your silence, says it all  
Your spirit, is crying out to me  
Yes baby I hear you call  
Through these words I come to you



*John "Jay-R" Williams*

**HOUSE POET  
TWO ROADS**

In poem I speak my mind,  
There is no boundary for my love  
No even space and time,  
So tell me, all you long to say  
Those secrets of your heart,  
Share with me you deepest  
thoughts  
Don't keep a single part,  
Tell me all that's on your mind  
For truly I wish to know,  
Talk to me about anything  
Feel free to let it flow,  
Share with me, your loves and  
hates  
Tell me about your fears,  
Tell me how to make you smile  
And how to stop your tears,  
Tell me what you think of me  
Tell me how you feel,  
Don't be afraid the price is paid  
So you can keep it real,  
What we have, is what you see  
Today is all we got,  
Let's cherish life for what it is

Forgetting all it is not,  
I look at you before my eyes  
Such beauty, you have become  
A love so pure which makes me  
sure,  
Forever we'll be as one!  
I love you forever my  
Daughter....

# Challenge Accepted

## Hafis HaQQ Dixon

It's impossible for me to set aside one single day to celebrate my father, Abdul HaQQ, who took the responsibility of single parenthood when he was only 26-years old. I'm speaking about a man who set the bar of manhood so high, that at over 50 years old, I'm still attempting to reach it.

Abdul HaQQ raised his first five children without any state or government assistance (I don't look down on anyone who had). He was a true hustler; he owned stores, catering, food trucks, cabs, a limo company and other businesses, all while nurturing, providing for and being an example to myself and my siblings.

Growing up, I longed for my mother. A longing, which became so painful that I expressed my hate for her to my daddy. "I feel sorry for you then", he replied before inquiring why I felt as I claimed I did. "Because she ain't never





did nothin' for me.” Was my 7-year old logical response. There was no doubt in the mind of anyone know knew me about how high I held/hold my daddy, who’s response was *“you mother did more for you in the nine months you were in her womb, than anyone could or ever will do for you...even me.”*

Those words caused me to develop such a profound respect and admiration for my mother, and an even greater one for him, as I matured and gained a better understanding of adult issues. Although I have three older sisters, growing up, I was the one who had the most chores as I reached my teen years. I thought my daddy was so unfair and began to think he stopped liking me. I mean, why else was I the only child in the house who was responsible for cutting our lawn and shoveling the snow? Why was I the only one out of my siblings who had to go pay rent and utilities? Why was I the only sibling, through four winters, was responsible for going to the gas station to get kerosene **AND** keep the heaters filled? **WHY?**

Those questions frustrated me. How can he show me so much love but be sooo unfair? You see, daddy isn’t the kind of parent who’ll say “you need to, so ‘this’ and ‘that’”. He’s the kind of man who has always led with and by example. I have fond memories of going to work with daddy. Whether it was while he drove a cab, worked on cars, or delivered the mail as a USPS carrier. Those were some of the times in which I was given clear examples of how a man

conducts himself within his community. My daddy would also have me around (sometimes) when he was with his women. I saw how daddy treated the women, disagreed with them and how they *finessed* each other.

As I matured, I gain more and more appreciation for the sacrifice he made for his children. As for me, I came to realize that the reason why I, daddy's eldest son, had more responsibilities is because, next to daddy, I'm responsible for my siblings. I realized that the truth of the matter was always present. Yes, I was the one responsible for cutting our lawn and shoveling our snow, but my siblings would lend their hands.

Throughout such structure at home, daddy cultivated within all his children our communal responsibility with we owe in order to claim our place among humanity. Even here in prison, I pay attention to water running for no reason, because I understand who such a small thing becomes a great problem for our taxpayers. I have these lessons because of the example my daddy sacrificed to give me.

I once told my daddy "I want to be **JUST** like you!" his response was "if you are, I failed in my duty." That was when I was about eleven, and didn't quite understand that I stand within the legacy of my father, who has passed along his legacy of the men

who cultured and cultivate him. Today, I understand that the best way to honor my father (daddy, Abdul HaQQ), is to strive every single day, even when the challenges seem impossible to overcome, to be far better man than him. I ACCEPT THAT HONOR.

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY, DADDY

Your eldest Son,

Hafis

# **The Sol & Sky of My Life**

**Antonio Aguirre**

**Kewanee**



As I reminisce about my daughters and of the brief but precious moments we shared, I'm compelled to dismiss all notions that I, your Father, never cared.

As a man, I admit, I was a flawed circuit—created far from perfect, with plenty to regret, for holding back my emotions for fear of what may resurface. It wasn't until your births that I truly felt great joy and purpose. As I was always delighted to

play “The Clown” in your “Two Ring” Circus. It was funny how we danced and sang that silly banter while causing mayhem and disaster, crying ourselves hysterical in laughter.

My beautiful creations, God’s blessing upon this world as a divine donation. Every day we spent together felt like a holiday celebration. Know that your father’s love will never be extinguished nor hidden. It tortured me when I was physically removed and emotionally forbade.

My departures from your lives were not for self-centered reasons. Marriage at times can turn cold and dark like those unwanted seasons. So, slippery the slope when love turns to agony due to our heart’s calamity, shattering our sanity,

The Prison's attempt to snuff out my soul by preventing me from seeing, Yet, the memories of your voices kept me breathing, just long enough to start believing, I pictured your adorable baby styles, big cheeks and toothless smiles that radiated for miles & miles, Rejuvenating my spirit in my darkest of hours; while being trapped in those lifeless towers.

Still, I stored those wonderful images away, patiently awaiting the day for the ultimate father and daughters' reunion replay, This hope and belief has always filled me with warmth and might, encouraging me to keep up the redemptive fight, Eternally grateful for the gift of your celestial essence, knowing you’re not near but deeply feeling your presence. Especially now, thru all my solicitous strife, it’s you’re “Combined Love” of illumination that continues to sustain “The lights in my Life”!



# Happy Father's Day

Shardon 'Khalil' Gay

Kewanee

I'd like to extend high respect and honor to my dad on Father's Day this year. I believe the men of the African Race (and for the sake of this article I will use the term *Black Man* to identify our people though I highly disagree with this derogatory term) get a bad rep as men and fathers. Before I start, I am not making excuses for any man that abandons their responsibility as a parent willingly.

However, when I was younger, I had my dad in my life and still to this day. He definitely spent time with me and performed his fatherly duties the best he could in those times. It was many great memories, but there were also some tough times. I appreciate those tough times more today as a man and a dad because I realize the design to make it difficult on the black man being successful during his time was real and to be a father was just as hard.

I just want you to know that at times when you felt like you let us down or didn't do well assure you were very effective example in our lives. You showed us what life truly looked like for young black men growing up. I didn't always understand, but as I matured into a man, I realized that there will be good times when everything seems to be going your way,

but that we'll all be challenged with difficult times. I watched you navigate through life and hold your family down; even when the dark times came, you would come turn on the light. I watched you overcome obstacles that would consume most.

Today you are still making life clear to me. So I just want to thank you on this Father's Day and to let you know you are a wonderful person, man, father and grandfather. Without you, I don't even know how I would've made it through all this. So, I love you for the good and the hard because there was no bad.

To the men who are in these unfortunate circumstances hold your head high because the men we're shaping ourselves to be will allow us to be better men, better sons, and most of all better Fathers to our children from here and after our release.

So, Father's incarcerated don't beat self up too much. It is highly possible that the way we were living before our incarceration would've had more of a negative impact on our children than our absence.

Let's continue to do the work to build our character and facilitate the knowledge to our children no matter what age to guide them in the right direction. Then once we're released, take that knowledge, put into action, and be the message that we bring and lead by example. PEACE AND GOOD WILL



# TWO ROADS

IDOC's Social Justice Program

Volume 21

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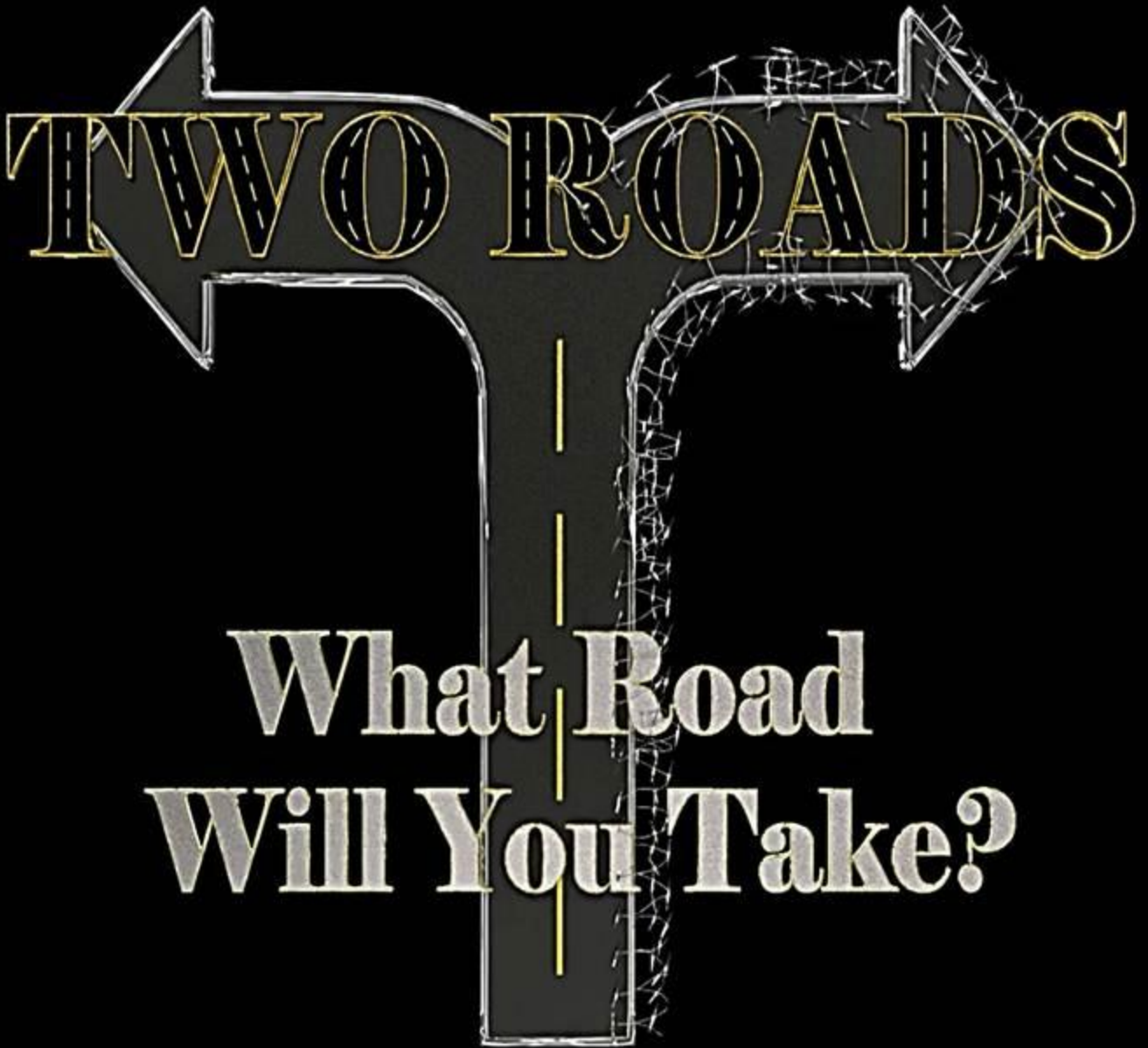
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**THE FATHER'S DAY ISSUE**

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