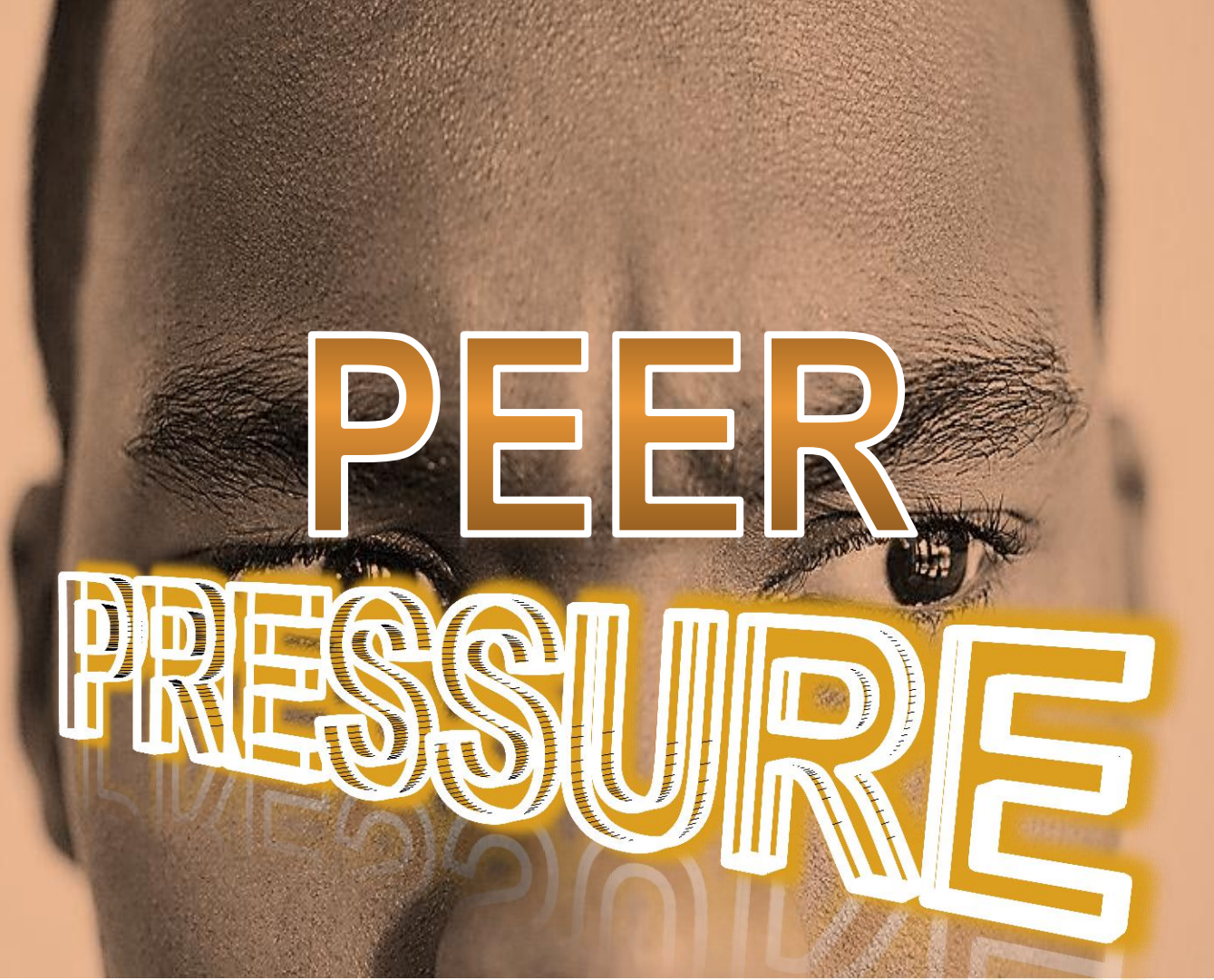


TWO ROADS

A close-up photograph of a person's face, focusing on the eyes and forehead. The person has dark hair and is looking directly at the camera. The text 'PEER PRESSURE' is overlaid on the image in a large, bold, white font with a yellow glow. The word 'PEER' is positioned above 'PRESSURE'.

PEER PRESSURE

Volume Twenty-Two

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

To All Readers

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

Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

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

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

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

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

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

Our Mission Statement

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



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Stock photo



Created by: Charles Murray

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TWO ROADS

THE PEER PRESSURE ISSUE

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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.



TWO ROADS

PERSONAL

TRANSFORMATION

TWO ROADS is accepting submissions for this current issue. We believe everyone has goals to achieve and we'd 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 to express yourself and inspire others.

TWO ROADS would also like for the those who are close to 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
doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"ATTN: TWO ROADS Personal
Transformation"

Mail submissions to:

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry
Center
Attn: TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

Deadline is 8/11/23

Editor's Take

WELCOME to this edition of TWO ROADS. We had a lot going on over the last few months with the Truth in Sentencing and the Mother's and Father's Day editions, and I must say that it was fun, but let's get back to the basics. This month's edition is on "Peer Pressure". Peer pressure is something many of us deal with, but never talk about. It's moved by others challenging you. Some pressures from our peers are good, from lifting weights to going the extra mile, to not eating that extra piece of cake. The mental aspect of accepting these challenges allows you to accomplish anything that was initially unattainable. At the same time, you have those situations where the peer pressure is brought by those who are trying to get you to act in negative ways. From bullying, to double-dares to outright disrespect;

these attribute to pain and suffering and worse, someone else's pain and suffering.



Kenji Haley
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
TWO ROADS

When I was 13 years old, I was hanging out with a few guys, and we were in the neighborhood and there was a check in this girl's house.

One of the guys dared me to take it, calling me "scary" if I didn't. Now, I wasn't a thief, but that desire to be seen as a badass gave me the energy to do this foolish thing. Worse, this check was for her rent! (But I didn't know this at the time). So, I took it and left, as if I was never there.

The next day, I was on the bus heading to the mall with this \$300 check. I wanted to get me some gear from the good stores. I couldn't afford the good stores at the time, so this was my opportunity. I wouldn't have done it, but that pressure was already there. I went into the store to find something from *Karl Kani's*, *Cross Colors* and *JNCO's* and I was set, but there was one problem; I didn't have ID for the check.

I went from store to store and had the same dilemma, no ID. At this point, I hopped back on the bus and returned to the neighborhood. When I went down into the creek, I could see the blue Chevy Impala with the police badge emblazoned on the side. They were at the same place the check went missing...the same one I took because I wanted to be recognized as badass.

When I came around the creek, they had already been told I was at that house, and I could've taken it (I still wonder how they knew...). When they searched me, it was there in my pocket. They cuffed me, put me in the back of the car and took me to juvie.

Luckily, all they did was play “*scared straight*” with me because there was no harm/no foul...the check was never cashed. They called my mother and she had to come and get me, but the lesson was learned, and my ass was promptly whooped.

Some of you have been thrown into this cage because of the peer pressure that was brought on by the same circumstances I dealt with as a child. A friend, a homey, dude from the block, that wanted you to prove yourself as “*respected*” or “*loyal*”. The culture has been the same since the beginning of time and as always, we lose.

I hope you're able to read these stories and see the harm that's come to these men and women due to the impact of negative peer pressure. There's also information on how peer pressure happens and how you can combat it, if you're up to it! (S.W.A.G!!) Lastly, I want to touch on the culture now when it comes to Peer Pressure. YouTube, TikTok, Reelz and others, creating our kids to look a certain way, act a certain way and do dumb stuff!!

Both of these situations lead to common issues: Depression, stress, and pain.

Never feel you must do something because someone is asking you to do it. Never feel you must do something to prove yourself to anyone. Always know you're strong, powerful and have all the love and support from people who care about you. Remember, "*Misery loves company*" and you're not miserable! Are you??

We'd like to thank all of the people on the outside who've written letters to the TWO ROADS communities in the last few issues, as well as their words of encouragement. Please continue to be part of this movement.

Finally, we would like to apologize for leaving the community hanging for the last 30 days. We have been working out the kinks and getting our ducks in a row so that we can make sure that you are receiving quality issues each month and on time. With that said, **we now have a new email address**, so that it will be easier and convenient for people to send their submissions and photos. That address is doc.tworoads@illinois.gov

Lastly, we are so thankful for the endless ideas that have been given for our topics each month, but we at *TWO ROADS* want more. We are asking our community to present idea for the 2024 issues, from beginning to end. The goal is to give the reader the opportunity to "be a part of the process" and show that we are one family. Your feedback is needed. **Next month, we will provide this information to you.**

Someone Else's Decisions

Death

Who Likes Me

How Others

Others Taking Care of Themselves

Treat Me

Others Being

If someone else keeps trying

Kind

Who Loves Me

What I can't control

What I can control

Being Kind

Doing my Homework

Responding Properly

Studying for Tests

Being Accountable

My Decisions

The Friends I Choose to Have

Forgiving

How I Respond to Challenges

Trying Again

Doing My Chores

How I Spend my Free Time

Being Honest

Asking for Help

Working Hard

Apologizing

Past

Mistakes

How I Respond to Others

If

Others

Others Being

Forgive Me

Honest

Height

Skin Color

Others Asking for Help

Just a reminder...

What is PEER PRESSURE?

Have you ever done something you didn't want to do in order to “belong” to a friend, group or because you were worried about looking cool? These are classic results of peer pressure, and it is not just limited to those who are adolescents. It is commonly defined as *any external force of influence on our decisions that might have an effect on our physical or mental health.*

Peer pressure happens quite frequently – on social media, amongst our friends, groups, at school and sometimes even in our home. Peer pressure is often thought of as a negative, due to influencing decision-making, but it can also be a positive thing. Positive peer pressure might look like encouraging friends to join a play; the pressure to do well on a test or at work or influencing friends to do the right thing. Unfortunately, peer pressure also has the ability to be negative if it restrains you from making a decision yourself or causes emotional or physical consequences.

Peer pressure is more than someone asking you to do something that you are uncomfortable with. The following were listed as the top pressures experience by those 18-25:

- 29% felt pressure to “look good”
- 28% tried to fit in certain groups (gangs included)
- 21% pressured to be better than the next person (using illegal vices), and
- **61% felt pressured to use drugs and alcohol**

Adults carry the pressure of wanting to “keep up with the Jones’s” and that leads to purchasing items that you cannot afford to maintain an image...

You can experience peer pressure from people without them saying anything to you and you can experience it from direct remarks made by others.

Implicit peer pressure is the subtle type that pulls you into conforming to a social group to increase your chances to acceptance. For example, seeing other people who you think are cool, or top dog.

We hear more about **Explicit peer pressure**, as it is easier to detect and recognize as problematic. It sounds like someone telling you to stop worrying, start having fun and be a part of the group by participating in something you don’t feel comfortable with. Examples are “*you can’t hang with us if you ain’t smokin’ weed*” or “if you’re not going to drink, you’re a lame.” Factors leads to:

- People may be less averse to risk, loss and punishment
- People may be more vulnerable to the effects of reward and
- People favor immediate (results) over delayed prospects

PSST... SPREAD THE WORD



Encourage your family, friends and
others to take part!!

idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoadse-zine.html



"Peer Pressure"

**Lakisha Woodard
Logan**

Peer pressure is very common; a lot of people go through it.

Peer pressure wants you to feel a sense of belonging, but that's not where it's at.

Peer pressure wants you to grow with it. It'll make you feel like you're helping to impact others; it's lying to you.

Peer pressure likes to find your weaknesses, and prey on you. Peer pressure will tell a story about you.

Peer pressure, it doesn't like to see self-improvement; it loves to see the reflection you used to be.

My sisters and brothers, don't relate to peer pressure anymore.

Please think about peer pressure. You don't have to run with it anymore.

You've been around it too long. Plan and work your plan!

The Bible says, *"I will prepare a table for you in the presence of your enemies."*

Believe in your self-produced good fruit, and your Higher Power will make room for a different avenue for you.

"My View on Peer Pressure"

Ojo Webb
Kewanee

People always seem to view peer pressure in a negative light. I believe everybody from young to old is influenced by peer pressure to some degree every day. Just like everything in life, there are always two sides the yin and yang, there's good peer pressure and bad peer pressure.

I grew up on the east side of Chicago in the Woodlawn area where there was a lot of gang violence and drug activity, but it was also a community where people looked out for one another. So, I always had the angel on one shoulder (positive peer pressure) telling me to stay in school, focus on football, slow down before you end up dead or in jail, and the devil on the other shoulder (negative peer pressure) with people encouraging my deviant behavior by feeding into my pride and ego.

For some reason, I'd always succumb to the negative peer pressure and not the positive, and I had to ask myself why? I may have never pondered this question if not for my mother asking me a seemingly easy

question when she came to visit me in Menard years ago. We were talking about two of my friends who were recently murdered, and she asked me, "Why I joined a gang?" It seemed like an easy question to answer, but I found myself struggling to do so. I remember I gave her some surface answer just to change the subject, but the question lingered in my mind.

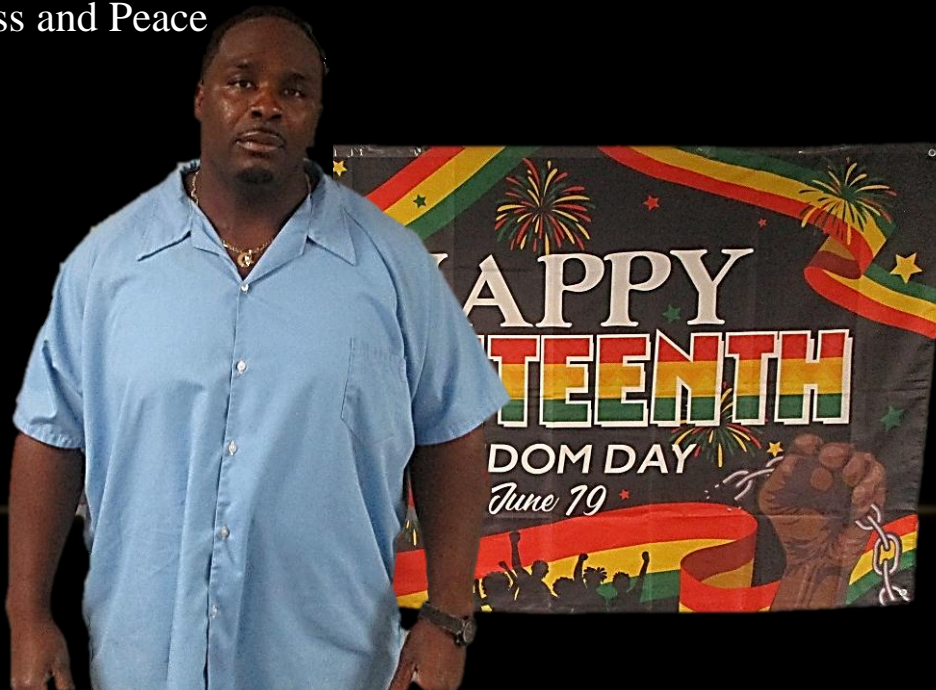
Little did I know that the question she asked would spark a deep journey of self- reflection which would help me understand who I was, why I was the way I was, and who I ultimately wanted to become. The environment I grew up in was all about who's strong and who's weak. The weak would get their shoes and bikes taken; they were labeled as lames and schoolboys. The strong did not get ridiculed or bullied; they were at the top of the food chain. As kids, we'd wrestle and slap box, and as we got older, we'd fistfight to prove who was the strongest.

I learned this behavior early in my household and in my neighborhood. I was always quick to fight to prove I was strong. In my mind I was the biggest and the strongest. I'd get praise from my peers who only made me become worse.

That behavior ultimately led me to where I'm locked up for murder sentenced to 30yrs at 100%. As I sat in my cell thinking about that question my mother asked me, peeling away the false sense of pride and ego until I was able to humble myself and answer the question truthfully. *I joined a gang because everybody else did, and I did not want to seem weak, or lame or scary.*

That's right! The person who thought he was the leader, the one who thought he was doing what he wanted to do, was really a follower the whole time. That was my turning point. Now, I choose to surround myself with positive people. There's nothing wrong with peer pressure; it's human nature to be influenced. The key is to have the strength to not succumb to the negative peer pressure and the wisdom to heed the positive.

God bless and Peace





"Peer Pressure"

Ramiro Chavez
Illinois River

Today I know what peer pressure is. As a child and as a young adult, I mistook it to be liked. As a child, I was pressured to get into fights with kids my age and sometimes older.

In Mexico, we had to fight as entertainment to the older guys. We did this to be liked and accepted by others. To the people in Mexico, this was our form of being respected. In my country, it was hard to hear how people from the United States glorified the *cartels*. But, at the same time, they talked about how messed up it was in our country.

What I dealt with as a child in Mexico was no different than things were, and still are, in Chicago, Texas, California, New York or other states. It might happen around the world every day, but generation after generation, we face the same thing, and it's just recently that we know this pressure as "*bullying*."

With cameras on iPhones, people are able to record fights. This shows how certain peer pressures cause you to do things you wouldn't do if you were alone. Today, I'm serving a 58-year prison sentence at 100% because of helping a friend who asked me to assist him in getting his car back. He asked two others at the same time. This resulted in someone losing their life at the age of 15 years old.

On July 17, 2002, I was told the kid was grabbing a gun and because of this peer pressure, I grabbed mine from under my friend's seat and shot once. I didn't know I had killed someone because that wasn't my intention. Once this took place, I took full responsibility of my actions. Any walk of life, there are bad leaders who've mislead others into things by playing mind games with the youth.

Once again, some people glorify violence of others until it hits home. When it does hit home, it becomes a problem, and they feel it has to be dealt with. Today, I want kids and young adults to know when the same people who ask you to do something won't do it themselves, it's because they know better and they're cowards.

To any parent, if you don't give attention to your kids, someone else WILL and it might not be the choice of influence you want your kid to have. I'm not in prison because my mother didn't do her best as a single parent; she did her best and at one point, I didn't see how

good of a mother she was (and still is). She's the blessing God gave me as a mother.

In closing, these are words of wisdom; *“Life is beautiful...enjoy it to the fullest.”* To the youth, you're in the journey of getting old. Pay attention to the ones who're there. To the wise...never forget that the mistakes you made lead you to wisdom. Those experiences gave you a beautiful gift.

We talk past each other. We're in prison even when we're free and they have walls which can't be seen by the eye. But deep inside, you know what I'm talking about...what's your prison?

Keeping things I saw was my prison of unseen walls. With this I'm setting myself free. I tried committing suicide at the police station after my arrest. While I'm judged as an animal for being in prison, I want y'all to know it was out of peer pressure...fear and everything else you could imagine. I tried impressing people who themselves were looking for that same gratification from people who didn't deserve it.

But, if you're reading this, know this pressure you take on to prove a point isn't worth it. Just know who the real judge is, and He loves you anyway.... God Himself loves you. Thank you TWO ROADS for opening this door to set us free.

"My View of Peer Pressure"

Between the ages of 9 and 16, Humans are the most vulnerable to making poor decisions. It's the time frame when we're forming our identity. If our parents aren't open to discussing uncomfortable topics such as sex, sexuality, drugs and risky behavior, we'll likely search elsewhere for this information. We may go to teachers, friends, adult relatives or other sources. The problem is some of these sources may deliver unreliable information. Being misinformed, we may be led astray. At this time in our lives, we care about what classmates and friends think about us. There's nothing wrong with caring about others' opinions, but what many of us aren't taught is caring becomes an issue when your values are risked in order to please others. Soon conforming to peer pressure becomes habitual.

People, young and old, who make a habit of conforming themselves to please others begin to care so much about what others think of them, they begin losing control of shaping their own identity. If they believe others dislike something about them, or gives them constructive criticism, they react



Jesse J. Myers

Associate Editor
TWO ROADS

in negative ways. They feel offended, thus reacting defensively to the point where they become off putting and offensive themselves. The double standard is they're doing everything they can to conform in order to please others. They begin shaping themselves based on what they think others want. They've become so uncomfortable with who they are, they no longer have their own identity.

When a person continually folds under the weight of peer pressure as it pushes in on them from all sides and weighs them down, they become unrecognizable to themselves and other. They now see a reflection in the mirror they feel doesn't belong to them. They're unhappy with what they see and how they feel. Often times, the people they're trying to please or impress remain unmoved as well. Becoming unhappy with self and the results of these changes they become unhappy with those around them. Many times, they lash out because they can no longer keep up with pleasing others.

Since they can no longer keep up with trying to identify with others and can't identify themselves, they lack the ability to identify what they like or dislike about themselves. They also have trouble identifying their own principles and values. All they see is an undesirable reflection shaped by others. Thus, all they see is flaws in themselves, in the world and in others. Failing to address what's within self, they set out on a journey to fix the flaws they see in others.

Trying to fix what's outside is what we do when feeling broken inside. When the world fails to conform to their standards and when people don't accept their fixing, it has an adverse effect on their spirit. This is only a small part of the chaos created as a result of folding to peer pressure.

Most of us want to be accepted. We want to fit in with the world around us. Social media, television, People Magazine, and advertisements send direct or subliminal messages to women, men, and children. For example, millions of dollars are spent each year on Super Bowl commercials targeting men between the ages of 18 and 35. Music videos and fashion magazines give their own interpretation of who's hot and who's not, shaping the minds of women and young girls' body image. Capital wealth and most of those in the pursuit of it don't care about the affects on the mental health of others.

Money is a huge aspect as to how people react to peer pressure. Many people spend what they cannot afford in order to appear they're financially stable or to impress others. We call it "keeping up with the Jones". This causes detrimental financial stress, leading stress, anxiety, and depression as well as family or marital problems. Many people are caught up in body image they feel unwanted and shamed because they believe they're not "beautiful" or "sexy".

Anxiety, stress, and depression are the results of feeling their physical features aren't good enough for what society deems perfect. They spend time and money to change who they are only to discover they're still unsatisfied. The irony is, they do this to please people who aren't happy themselves.

The first time I smoked a cigarette, smoked marijuana, and drank alcohol, I acted brave, but I was really afraid. I went through with it because it felt like a “Right of Passage” because individuals I admired were doing it as well. Each time I tried a new drug or broke the law, I had the same feeling. When I first started selling drugs at 14, the reward of having money to buy new Nikes and name brand clothes motivated me to continue forward. The feeling of fitting in thrilled me, and it felt great for a while. Soon though, I was hit with the reality that I was different and didn't feel I fit in anywhere. I discovered a broken world which needed fixing.

When nothing made me happy when I found myself appeasing to others, I became regretful and resentful and full of shame and guilt. This sent me into depression. The only thing giving me reprieve was an escape through drugs and alcohol which only intensified my vision of this broken world and its broken people. This became a part of who I was and it took many years and a lot of hurt to see the reality of it.

We should be aware of our own need for approval as well as the need of approval that our peers, our family members, and especially our children seek from us. It's okay to seek acceptance and approval from others. It's human nature. The problem is when it reaches the point that we sacrifice mental well-being, morals, values or self-identity. We can help our fellow man, woman, and child by being accepting of them—building and lifting them up with sincere compliments and loving affection. Be supporting of others and don't judge or ridicule.

Teach our youth to love and appreciate themselves and others. Teach them the difference between acceptance and tolerance. If you have experienced the negative effects of folding to peer pressure, then share your story with others so they understand the consequences of pressuring or folding under pressure. We're all unique and beautiful, love yourself and love your neighbor. Be confident, not cocky. Lead others with good examples of kindness, caring, and generosity. Finally, be an absolute authentic version of yourself don't sacrifice your self-worth or integrity to please anyone. Thank you and As-Salamu-Alaikum, (May the Peace of Allah be With You).

A portrait of Nicholas Crayton, a middle-aged Black man with glasses and a light blue button-down shirt, smiling. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a path.

"Lil Bro"

Nicholas Crayton
Former Editor-In-Chief
TWO ROADS

I'm writing this to all of the incarcerated younger brothers who are of the generations that follow after my own. **Forgive me.** I failed you. My generation failed you. It's partly our fault you ended up in this condition. We created the black hole that swallowed you up and created the hell you've found yourself in.

The news parades you as monsters, yet you only do what you were taught. We herald you as hopeless, yet we left you those weapons as children with no instructions. And when you scream out in pain, we ignore your cries as noise and erratic music.

I'm guilty of this and I'm asking your forgiveness. Big homie lied to you. Lil Durk said it true. "It wasn't the white man that taught me to sell drugs nor to shoot, it was big homie." Some of the big homies did more than just lie, they misled you, and your bro died.

That bonded you all because you realized big homie didn't care about you or bro. This made you distrust all big homies. Now, you've become the big homies and that distrust is what has kept you safe.

We must be better if we're expecting you to be better. We must understand you're our brothers, sons, and nephews whom we've abandoned. We created the chaos you found yourself in and we must be the ones who can help get you out of it. But first we must earn your respect and your trust. When you had nothing, you had each other. When people died, you found comfort in bro. We must first acknowledge we betrayed you by leaving you and your mothers in a world which treated you as if you didn't belong. As your fathers, uncles, and big homies, we're duty-bound to stop allowing others to demonize you without knowing you and attack you without caring to understand your pain.

I've met many of you and can say I'm thoroughly impressed by those who've applied themselves to learning new things. You're all not dumb. Many of you, when encouraged, find you have a knack for things that had never been uncovered. All generations are different. We're different from our parents just as you're different from us, but that doesn't mean we're neither connected nor relatable. Our struggles are still the same.

The era of time may be different, but poverty has not diminished within our neighborhoods nor is the plight any less real. I'm asking you to give some of us a chance to show you that big bro can come through. That we have more in common than not, and we can save that which many people believe is lost...**Always be productive, not busy!**



wttw 

FIRSTHAND
Life After Prison

You can see Nicholas's story from prison to the free world
on www.wttw.com/firsthand

Ask the QUESTIONS before you react

WHAT

- What (exactly) do I want to achieve?
- What are the facts?
- What would happen if no decision was made or solution found?
- What do I need in order to find a solution?

WHY

- Why do I want to achieve a solution?
- Why did the problem or opportunity arise?
- Why do I need to find a solution or way forward at all?
- Ask 5 Whys

HOW

- How will the situation be different?
- How relevant is the information I am gathering?
- How can I find out more?
- How can I involve relevant people?

WHERE

- Where did the issue arise?
- Where does it impact?
- Is the "where" important?
- If so, why?

WHO

- Who am I trying to please?
- Who cares about this situation? Who is affected?
- Who is involved (information, help, action)?
- Who needs to be informed?

WHEN

- When did the issue arise?
- When do we need to act?
- By when must it be resolved?





"Pressure"

Akeel Hodge Big Muddy River

I've been a bad person for as long as I can remember, and the day finally came which made me want to change. I started thinking about why I did most of the things I did. What I realized, was everyone I looked up to didn't love me.

I idolized big homies, and they used the power and influence I gave them to pressure and weaponize me through my loyalty to them in all the worst ways. A few nights before my arrest, someone whom I was devoted to, told me to "*slide and bring 'that' with me.*" (meaning to get to him and to bring a weapon).

Out of blind loyalty, I did as he asked without hesitation. It wasn't unusual to me, and I didn't question him once because in my mind, "this is what I am supposed to do." I stand on business and "complete missions." So I pull up and go in his crib; he informs me

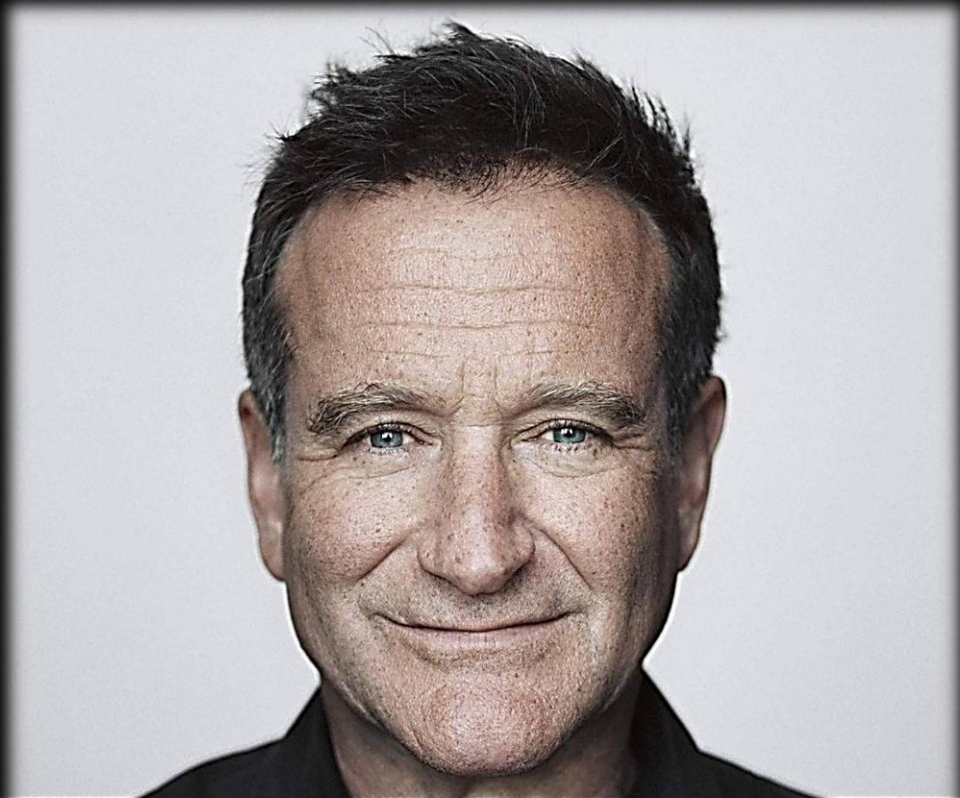
he had static with someone and there might be some smoke behind it (altercation and/or retaliation). He then states “*We about to slide on dude crib and see what’s to ‘em.*” I didn’t say anything and then we went to my whip (vehicle).

I'd been through this scenario many times to know when you're slidin'. You gotta be prepared for any outcome possible and I was groomed to *be prepared!* As we drove towards the person's crib, my homie spotted him and told me, “Roll down the window.” Right before something tragic was about to happen, he then tells me, “*Hey, that’s not him.*” It was someone with the exact same vehicle.

Long story short....we never caught dude he was seeking. I've played this situation a thousand times in my head. We were slidin', but my “homie” never asked me for *that* personally. “Homie” never bothered to fully explain why we were slidin'. He was willing to allow me to do the job and if things went wrong, for me to deal with the consequences.

In part, it was my fault due to peer pressure for trying to fit in into something I had no idea about. It was my blind loyalty and false sense of responsibility for someone who didn't love me, but he was willing to use me. It's this type of “unseen” pressure from the people around you that makes you blind to the negative influences which disturb you.

Stay focused and pay attention to what people do, not what people say. Especially when the “homie” says *he loves you*...love is an “action” word. Make them show you, not just tell you. I hope my story reaches you and helps you on your journey.



“If you need booze and drugs to enjoy life your life to the fullest, then you’re doing it wrong.”

- Robin Williams

"Good Peers vs. Bad Peers"

In the beginning of my incarceration, very close to 5 decades ago, I was among 14 others in the state of Illinois who carried a sentence of 500 years or more. Unfortunately, mine is MORE.

Being a very young offender, many elderly “peers” tried to instill within me not to care. To stay in the mindset of a savage and have no regard for human life. To stay on the offense (assaultive) as my best defense.

I witnessed many young men bite on that serpent’s food of hate and anger. Wherefore, they ended spending their years chained up and as the language, we hear – catch a new case. I took a different approach to this term “catch a case”, which was a badge of honor back then. You don’t catch a case; you get legal ramifications for doing things against the law.

The dilemma was “how to create a discipline that became strength where I would not adhere to the “BAD PEERS” around me who wanted to continue in violence and not care?” the scripture says:



Ronnie Carrasquillo

Senior Associate Editor
TWO ROADS

“not to meddle in other people’s business or lie grabbing a dog by the ears.” I didn’t know this scripture back then, but, as I was learning self-discipline through my self-leadership, I sure did meddle.

I could've kept up the negative influence and seen more loss of life or loss of freedom...or I could become a “POSITIVE PEER.” I cannot count the number of times I would meddle (step in) and stop people (BAD PEERS) from sending people off; knowing it would further incarcerate, doing worse for their lives than better.

No action was worth not being able to get back to family and I saw early on that the only objective should be walking through the front doors as soon as possible. That meant making the best decisions to keep me from losing time.

I was that kind of peer, unbeknownst to me back then was a day would come when masses would come back decades later. “Teams” of people participated in quest of my freedom and their story was that I helped them in some fashion or another, may it be spiritual or mental, but that the negative peers weren't able to influence them where they (BAD PEERS) ended up being a statistic of those who caught more cases.



Be a real peer! Redirect the minds around you that the objective is still the same – the front door and getting back to provide for your family and the community. AMEN!

"Under Pressure"

Franklin Heindricks

Kewanee

We've all fell to pressure
From those around us
Enticing us
Fame and bright lights
Calling us
Money and drugs
Stressing us
Little did we know
That the same Hollywood fame
that entices us
Entices those around us too.
We are all moths caught in the flame
Ready to burn up
All for what??
A quick buck off tha re-up
Yeah, we came up
Only to get caught up and locked up
Said we did it for the fam'
So why we all alike?
Strugglin' to take care of us

We cave under pressure
Chasing treasure
Went from moving weight
To lifting weights...on the yard
So unless we change how we handle
stress of this pressure
We'll always cave under pressure
and stay locked up in a cell block
or a pine box!



CRIME

DRUGS

PILLS

ADDICTION

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.

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

Please send your submission and scanned photo to doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"ATTN: TWO ROADS Addiction"

Mail submissions to:

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center
Attn: **TWO ROADS EDITOR**
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

Deadline is Friday, September 8th

ALCOHOL SEX GAMBLING



"Let Go and Let Live"

**Leo Cardez
Dixon**

My new cellmate, Grump Smurf, lived up to every bit of his moniker. If he wasn't mean-muggin' the guards, he was stomping around the cell like he was killing roaches. It was the last thing I needed. I was a recent born-again optimist, who was desperately trying to avoid falling any deeper into the well.

At first, we barely spoke. He was a generation older and from a street culture I didn't understand. The few times we did try talking, the conversation inevitably led to his troubles with his wife or how the system screwed him. These weren't unique complaints in our shadow world; what could I say?

I get it, me too buddy! It was no use...he couldn't hear anyone past his own anger. I worried how long we might be stuck together when an idea struck me. It's something my mom did when I was a kid...hell, it was worth a shot.

On his birthday, I offered him a piece of hard candy, but with the caveat that I couldn't pry it out of his closed fist. I pretended to try opening his hand and then went into my box and offered him a whole, *Mrs. Freshleys' Honey Bun* (his fav), in exchange for the piece of candy he was clenching in his fist.

He looked at me skeptically, but the deal was too good to pass up. I opened my own honey bun, and we joked as we ate them. I told him a story of when I was a kid and struggling to fit in at school. We had just moved into a new town where I didn't know anyone. I was a skinny, lanky, big-eared kid with a mouth full of metal (braces). I hated my life. I was angry at the world and took things out on my family and anyone else who stood in my way.

My mother had done the candy trick like I did to my celly, I also traded up. She told me I was holding on to my anger so tightly, I wasn't giving any space for anything new or good to come into my life. I needed to open myself up to new joy.



“You can’t hold on to the past if you want a better future.” she said. *“Let go of the pain, frustrations and rancor and you’ll start to see a whole new world of possibilities. The truth is, we can’t change what has already happened, but we can choose how we live today, which will direct our tomorrow.”* “I see what you’re saying and I appreciate it.” he responded softly.

We talked all night. He vented all his frustrations; I patiently listened. I told him my own struggles with forgiveness and how my faith helped forgive others and myself and my new found happiness. We discussed a quote I posted to my bunk, it read:

“When you forgive others – you take their power over you away.”

We came up with this radical idea. He'd write down the names of all those he felt had wronged him, we'd pray over them, forgive them and then flush them down the toilet.

He looked at me and in a peaceful whisper, he simply mouthed *“It’s over.”* I got chills. I’m not saying there was something supernatural at work that night, but I’m not saying there wasn’t. I said *“You’re back in control of your life, enjoy it.”* he nodded his head and went to bed.

Shortly after, I was moved to another building, but occasionally I’d see him walking to chow or at the library.

He always went out of his way to greet me with a smile and asked if I needed anything. People stopped calling him Grumpy Smurf, he was simply Brian now. I learned he reconnected with his estranged family and was working a good job in the industry and even volunteered at the prison hospice. Years passed and we ended on the same deck again. He was unrecognizable. He looked younger and more energetic. New, younger inmates looked up to him and sought him out as a mentor. I'd hear him talking to one of his young mentees in the dayroom, *“Okay, now hold this candy, don't let me get it out of your hand.”*



TWO ROADS E-ZINE is now ONLINE

- 1) Go to "IDOC HOME PAGE"
- 2) Click "ABOUT"
- 3) Click "NEWS"
- 4) Select "TWO ROADS E-ZINE"

Or go to:

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Although your insightful analysis, strong feelings and creative policy suggestions are real and deserve to be considered, this humble opportunity is limited to relating your story to other human beings, so that they may make courageous decisions with our humanity in mind.



The Life and Times of MCDOUGAL

My first thought is to stop this before it even begins, but the writer in me won't allow me to hide in a cage that I built, in case of my fear of being me rears its ugly head. The origin of what I became has little to do with wanting to be a thug and everything to do with wanting a father. See, when you live in America's poverty-stricken neighborhoods, you have to have a particular set of characteristics:

1) Being thick-skinned. Without it, you'll become a target for the clever-talking individuals, who have a skill that allows them to go seemingly unnoticed attack you. 2) The ability to protect yourself if you are labeled as prey you can only do two things (a) get with someone that can protect themselves and you, or (b) become a victim.

Another thing, you have to be able to go above and beyond your counterparts. Meaning the things you know most of the guys you surround yourself with won't do the thing that will put you in danger, but that's exactly what you need to do.



Carlos D. McDougal
HOUSE POET
TWO ROADS

That leads me to this one thing everybody can't do even if they say or act like they can. *You have to have the ability to turn your heart off*, because living this life you have to be able to not care for anyone.

The first thing people do in the world I lived in is try to find your weakness; which is why you have to become a monster. When I was little, I didn't set out to become a thug, but due to unforeseen circumstances, life dealt me a hand which required me to go down a path we as young black men so foolishly take in an attempt to prove that we're "down" or "gangsta".

The fact is most of us were scared s***less, and even more afraid of someone finding out that tidbit of information; the opinion of the guy who has no heart or is only tough when he's with his guy's which we so often do because of the help you know you're going to get. I don't even want to think of the pressure I put on my son by being who I am and having done the things I've done trying to live up to the hype of my father.

I never wanted this life, but the void my father left and the constant praise I got just for being his son was so intoxicating, I just couldn't resist. Until next time this has been my thoughts...



"Peer Pressure"

Adam M. Moss
Southwestern

The person I think is me needs to be accepted. When friends and family don't agree with that projection, I begin to feel alone and neglected, and nobody wants to feel lonely. Underneath the ego, I can see I didn't even truly know me, who others wanted me to become.

My sense of self exists only when I participate in the collective ideals of what is and isn't fun. In my innocence and ignorance, I'm the target of negative influence, pushed into rushed decisions, that I alone must suffer the consequences, just to have friends and to feel as if I fit in. But, when the sh!t hits the fan, they're all gone with the wind.

In the end, I wonder where they've gone?? This type of suffering isn't legitimate, but a serious problem which needs to be dealt with. Some struggles in life are necessary for positive growth and evolution. Learning and teaching to make better decisions for ourselves instead of good listeners, is a healthy solution.

Check Your...

SWAAG

When dealing with Peer Pressure, apply these methods:

S

Stop and say No

Take a deep breath and firmly say "no". Get comfortable with saying no. You have the right to make your own decisions.

W

Wait

It's okay to think things through. Never feel you have to be pressured into doing something. Sometimes, waiting things out works better for you in the long run.

A

Avoid the situation and offer alternatives

Avoid circumstances where you may be tempted to use drugs or other things. Instead, suggest alternative activities like reading or exercising.

G

Get Out

Trust your gut! If you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or your guys don't respect your decision, leave the situation immediately. Leaving keeps you from further issues.

"Checkmate"

Earl Milton, Jr.

Centralia

Checkmate, tryna play again
In life, checkmate means **THE**
END
Life is not a game, so get your
moves tight,
Before you get in play,
When you step out the front door,
make sure you know your way.
Have an aim for your steps, a
destination for your trip,
So you can make it back home safe.
Move with purpose, that you fully
know,
Don't wanna end up in a cage or a
box
You can regroup, but in a box, it's
time to meet your maker
Life is no game...don't play with
yours
You could lose many years from
one bad move, or

You could lose your freedom for
life.
Think before you act, give thought
to your ways,
Because at **THE END** of the day,
that is what it pays.
Move with precision, on every
decision,
Protect all your pieces, not tryna
lose a single one
I told myself the lesson that I'm
meant to learn,
When you make any move, know
what you are doing
Because if you don't, you're just
running from a checkmate
Wait, get your mind straight, then
you'll be great!
If you don't, it's only a matter of
time,
Before it's **CHECKMATE!**

"Squared Away"

Peer pressure affects everyone—influencing us in ways we may not normally act. When watching films or TV shows, I find myself questioning the characters' decisions. "I'd never do that." or "Why'd they choose that path?" are some questions I'd ask. It's easy judging someone's behavior because their peer pressure doesn't affect you. We believe we'll never be placed in similar situations. Think about how many times you've done something abnormal in the past, only to find the current you cringing at your past behavior.

As kids, we made fun of each other every day. We talked about our peers and how they dressed, walked, looked, talked and behaved. We place pressure on ourselves to try fitting in with society's norms. If we're not wearing the fanciest clothes, can't afford the newest tech, or aren't following the latest trend, then we're ostracized by our peers. But, the pressure is more mental than physical. We believe we have to conform to get approval, but if



Marcus Harris
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
TWO ROADS

you have to change yourself in order to fit in, we begin losing our core values and, most importantly, our identity.

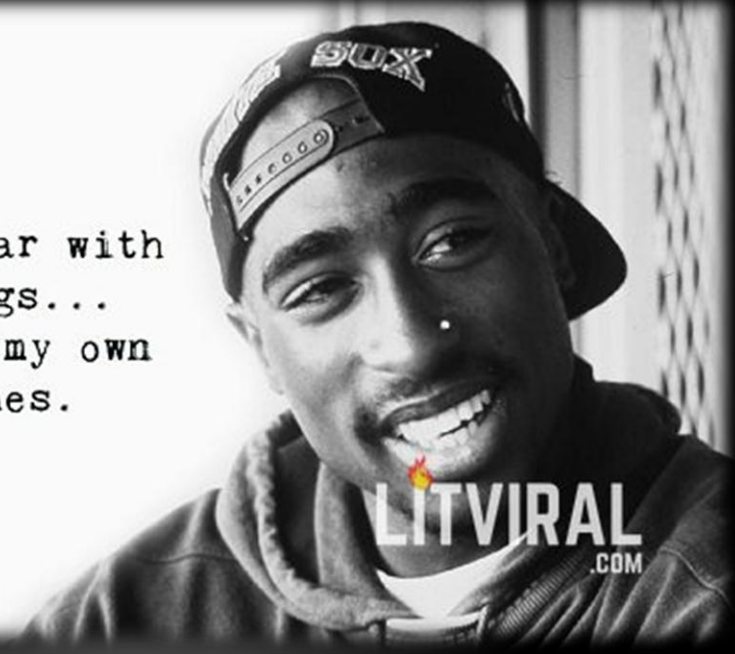
In childhood, I was obese. I was made fun of about my weight because that's the first thing kids noticed. It didn't bother me as much because I knew how to trash talk. It didn't bother me when they called me dumb because I knew it wasn't true.

The one thing which truly bothered me and pressured me to change and conform was when they'd call me a "square." "Marcus, yo ass a square." "You talk like a white boy." and "Bro, you sure you Black. You ain't mixed with nothin'?" are statements I heard my entire life. I've been a square all my life, but I didn't want it to be true because I wanted to fit in with my people. How was I being questioned about being Black? Was I acting strange? Talking too proper? Walking goofy? I didn't know. What I did know was I got tired of people calling me Braxton from Jamie Foxx, and a square. So, I caved to the peer pressure.

I sagged my pants because I thought it was cool. I acted stupid because apparently, it's more acceptable to act like a complete idiot than to showcase one's intellectual brilliance. I even managed to become a class clown at times. I was so fed up being called a square and I wanted to change my image so bad, I decided to play

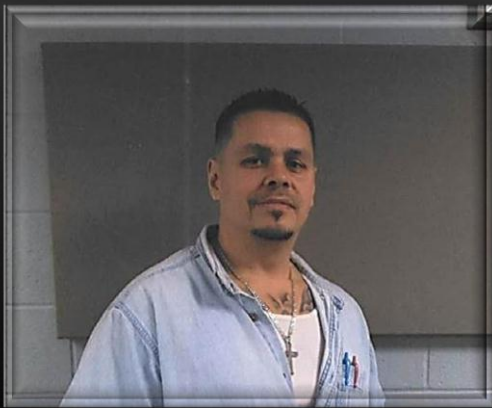
with guns. I wanted people to see me as a thug, not a suburban square. I wanted to prove myself to “my friends” that I was down for whatever. Several armed robberies later, I received 28 years in prison.

No one forced me to commit crime. I did it on my own due to the peer pressure I created for myself. I wanted to change my image—losing myself in the process. Never again will I allow how others view me determine my behavior. I’ve accepted who I am. My name is Marcus Harris and I’m a square.



Everybody's at war with
different things...
I'm at war with my own
heart sometimes.

LITVIRAL
COM



"There has to be a Better Way"

**Brian Lehnert
Kewanee**

There has to be a better way. There's a whole world out there. Many of us have been stuck in the mindset that what we know is all there is, but that's far from the truth. I've given thirty years to the false game I thought was true. It took a real situation, which landed me back in prison, to open my eyes to the illusion that brotherhood is not everything. I've always been loyal; did it by the book; kept my mouth shut; and looked out for who I could; but it took this to realize, there has to be a better way!

After all the changes I made in my life during my fourteen years of incarceration on my first bid, I paroled and got involved partying and drinking at bars with the guys. Eventually, I had my daughter which made me fall back in a way. I was dedicated to working, learning and focusing on my painting career. I became great—eventually learning all I could about how to start my own company. That's what gave me hope that there's a better way, because the last thing I wanted to do was return to prison. So, I worked every day and partied in the evenings—hanging with the guys, drinking at bars and snorting lots of coke. I had a bad problem.

I was a coke head because it was everywhere. Essentially, I had one foot in and one foot out the game, and that was a big mistake. Everyone needs to realize; this isn't an option. It leads to hesitation, and weighing consequences, while not really caring at certain times, even as we get older.

Six years ago, it was Friday the 13th, and I was out with the guys like normal, but this night felt different. We usually visit the bar, but we decided to get a hotel room to party. We chilled, but there were some dudes there from another neighborhood I didn't know. Everything was tranquil. We drank and got along well. After a few drinks, an argument ensued and one of the individuals I didn't know called me a b****. We all know this isn't a word people use lightly, therefore, I reacted.

Then, his boy got involved and we began to fight until it was broken up. Words were exchanged as we exited the hotel which led to another brawl—this time in the snow. I left the party and went to a bar. While traveling to the bar, vulgar messages were exchanged between the groups from the hotel and me via social media. Emotions were still high, so the group called in reinforcements. Three of them entered the bar to provoke me. They demanded I come outside to squash the beef. While discussing the situation in the parking lot with the 3 individuals, more approached. I was sucker punched from the rear and then jumped.

While being stomped out, I saw an opening, stood on my feet, pulled my weapon and fired. I shot two of them, but accidentally hit a bystander once in the leg who came running out of the bar to watch the commotion. In this situation, what would you do? Are you gonna let someone, or a group, do you like that? No, I doubt that.

Due to my criminal history, everything came down on me. Several bystanders wrote statements. Reading these statements from my “so-called” friends opened my eyes but returning to jail because of the guys was another eye opener. Many details I can’t and won’t disclose, but moral of the story is, **DON'T BE INVOLVED WITH KNUCKLEHEADS**. You got one foot in and one foot out the game, you’ll likely return to prison. You think you can trust everyone until it’s too late. There has to be a better way.

I’m the only one of my friends who landed in prison. Everyone involved that day are living good lives. I’m the only dummy who lost everything. Maybe the word “b****” doesn’t carry the same weight it used to. Should I have taken a loss and crawled home licking my wounds, or did I do the right thing? Perhaps, if I wasn’t with people who truly didn’t care about me, I would’ve been in a better position today. In the end, I won the battle on that day, but definitely lost the war. Who suffered the most? My family. They are the ones really there for you when these situations occur. **FAMILY?** Is there anything else that really matters? I should’ve realized that a long time ago.

"Outstanding In Custody"

Janet 'The Prophet' Richmond

Logan

No way of entirely ignoring the low maintenance, the lack of determination on part of some staff/individuals in custody, nor the hindrances, which limit self-development. Oh how these concrete walls and iron gates possess the power to strengthen or weaken our nature.

No escaping the foolishness; laugh along, join in or do your best to step away. With your every move under scrutiny, cleanliness and dignity are the most effective artillery. As you wake up to face each day "time and faith" are the only guarantee; change and disorder we have no control over.

Know that progression and grasping life's lessons in spite of the turmoil, there's the embodiment of "outstanding". Problems and conflict are inevitable, don't be impulsive, strategize your way through. At times, you'll drop the ball, but remind yourself you're only human and then pick it up and keep it moving.

In custody that's our lot for now, residents whether we like or not. Consider it a compliment when mocked for being poised (in uncomfortable situations), intelligent and logical. You choose to be *outstanding in custody*. Consider yourself victorious when "despised" or "lessened", for your willingness to be outstanding in an environment, which must put a cap on flourishing.

I'm Outstanding and in custody because no matter how long, how hard, we **must** endure. We know that our journey does not end here.

- The Prophet



***From: Peer Pressure = TEAM – Keith 'Aquil' Talley,
Page 69***

Sometimes

Sometimes, we tend to lose ourselves
Attempting to do what's right,
Looking through a broken lens
Trying to see the light

Sometimes, we walk a different path
Sometimes, we stand alone,
Sometimes, we seem to abandon our dreams
For those, that's not our own,

Sometimes we search, for all those things
Others may idolize,
Unable to see, the reality
Unable to focus our eyes,

Sometimes, our minds, don't think so clear
Sometimes, they don't work at all,
Taking a chance, on other's plans
The reason we sometimes fall,

Sometimes, we tend to lose ourselves
Sometimes, we make mistakes,
Sometimes, we just don't trust ourselves



John R. Williams

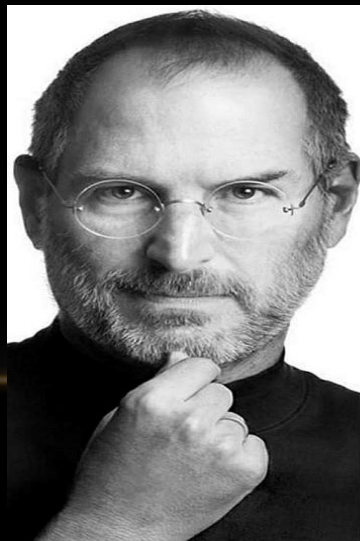
House Poet
TWO ROADS

Sometimes, we tend to lose ourselves
So, we never receive any brakes,

Sometimes, we take the wrong advice
Sometimes, we're afraid to speak,
Sometimes, it seems, the important things
Are not the things we seek,

Sometimes, our friends, are not our friends
Sometimes, we're the last to know,
Sometimes, we hold on a little too long
To that, which we should've let go,

Sometimes, we second guess ourselves
Sometimes, we just can't see
Sometimes, the things we choose to fear,
Are the things, that set's us free.

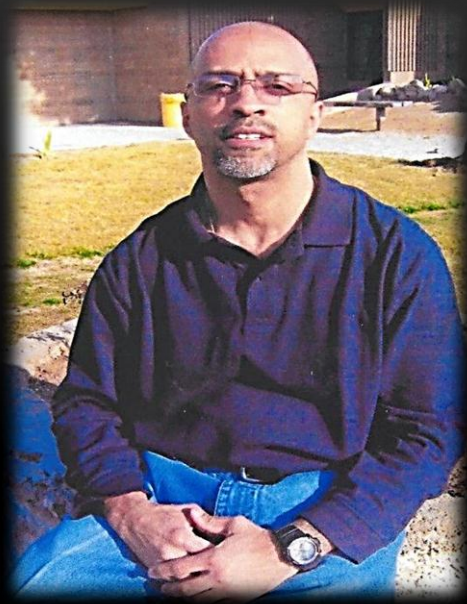


“

Start small, think big.
Don't worry **about** too
many **things** at once. Take
a handful of **simple** things
to **begin** with, and then
progress to more **complex**
ones. **Think** about not just
tomorrow, but the **future**.
Put a **ding** in the universe.

STEVE JOBS
Co-Founder of Apple

NOUVEAU TYCOON



"Peer Pressure Introspective"

Peter 'Rome' Saunders
Big Muddy River

Greetings to all within IDOC; along with our friends, family, and fellow supporters beyond the wall. My name is Peter and I'm in my 37th year of a Juvenile Natural Life sentence. Over the decades, I've seen a lot, I've done a lot, and thankfully, I've changed a lot. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to write about Peer Pressure because I've fallen for it, and it has a direct correlation to my passion, the young offender sentenced to adult corrections.

I recently wrote a piece for a prompt on *bravery* (relating to my incarceration), where I described it as an interwoven thread on the fabric of prison life. In the same context, Peer Pressure is one of the cross threads in that tapestry which usually gets tangled up or knotted. Together, they represent the tension of judgment behind prison walls.

I began my incarceration in 1986, in a much different and more dangerous era. As one might expect, there's a lot of negativity in prison, which more people tend to gravitate towards. There's also positive things happening that are much less attractive and appealing to the masses. Coming to prison at such a young age, I chose the negative lifestyle like so many people I know.

The 90's were a tumultuous decade. Not only did I witness Peer Pressure all around me. I fell for it time and again. After reaching the lows I deeply regret, I literally and figuratively fell into a deep hole. My actions had cataclysmic repercussions before the wake-up call I desperately needed. I faced a stark introspection while sitting in the hole for years, which led to a complete self-destruction.

Deep down I found the moral principles and core values my mother instilled in me as a little kid, and they would prove to be vital in my life-changing reconstruction. As I was stripped bare, my sense of judgment was heightened, giving me the key to acknowledge and reject Peer Pressure. The most difficult thing to do in prison is to change and become a better person. The vast majority of prisons are not conducive for it, and the status quo sees it as a weakness. I, on the other hand, found it both empowering and liberating.

To overcome Peer Pressure, one has to understand it. It's not just a young person thing, or a gang thing or a prison thing, it's a *life thing*.

We've all heard "to be aware is to be alive" and this is why education is so important. Despite being denied education and all but one program over the last 25 years, I've found ways to feed my mind, body, and soul. First, I took advantage of all the *faith-based programs* that didn't require administrative approval.

The next step, which was most important, was finding new circles. Gone was the negativity and Peer Pressure, and I welcomed the uplifting support. COVID-19 turned into a blessing in disguise, giving me a break I needed to focus on my passion. I believe the re-entry process *should begin on day one* for the First Time Offender. These young people need an opportunistic development at the onset of their incarceration. In NO way do they need to be tainted by negativity and Peer Pressure that awaits them in adult corrections. Together with outside supporters, my proposal was presented to the former Director, Rob Jeffreys, and while there has yet to be movement, I have faith.

"1's and 0's"

Anthony Olivieri

Danville

Inspired in part by the article titled “Meh” written by the mysterious author “Contributor” (in the *Passions* issue, Volume 16) and an old celly I had for 6 years named “Danville”, I decided to write a piece on my own about the choices we make in life. Some are consequential, others, not so much...

Here's the thing. I know who this *Contributor* is, so let's call him “Meh”. I knew who Meh was three lines into the read. Meh doesn't know this, but he played an indirect road in my decision-making process. He helped me learn how to write computer code in prison-no easy task considering I'm losing my memory.

He decided to help me, I'm guessing because he saw I was genuinely interested in the topic and dare I say, passionate about learning code. The correct word here is actually *determined*. I wanted it, I put forth the effort and with no previous experience, I also learned to code in prison.

Here are Danville Correctional Center there's a program called the Education Justice Program (EJC). EJP offers four credit upper division collegiate courses to qualified individuals in custody who want to further their education beyond an Associate's Degree. One of which is a seemingly perpetual Python Computer Programming Group. Upon acceptance into the EJP project, I immediately joined.

In the computer programming world, at its base or binary level, 1 means 'on' and 0 means 'off'. True/False. Make a decision to do something; 'one', or not to do, 'zero'. Well, what about the yellow light at the intersection? The warning, the signal that whispers in your brain, "Hey you, what are you going to do?" last year, I was faced with one of those ones or zeroes consequential decisions that will probably affect the rest of my life.

If you are fortunate enough to be able to remember things, you will recall at the beginning of the article, I said I was inspired to write it by two people...here's the part about "Danville". As I said, we were cellies for six years. When you live with someone for that long, in close quarters, you become family. If I couldn't remember a word I was looking for in my brain, he could finish the thought—zero, zero, nine. "That ain't nuthin' but a zero with one leg in it!"

One day he came to the cell and said, "The state made changes to the criteria at the re-entry center, but you need to get off of your butt and

apply!” I’m paraphrasing here, but you get the gist of it. We had the pros and cons of getting accepted and transferring. The next day, I went to the counselor’s office and obtained an application. Upon returning to my cell, I turned on the radio, sat on his bunk; kicked my feet up on the stupid mushroom stool and proceeded to read the said document.

Then I had a conversation with myself. I questioned as to what I “do got”; EJP, Python Programming Group, Building Block... Then I asked myself what the re-entry center had for me? I couldn’t fill that information in. It was full of 1’s and 0’s. I put the application on the desk with a note saying, “here’s the application you asked for” and I went to class.

You see, Danville still had seven years to go, he was already checked out. That was him in ‘*The Adventures Of J-Dawg*’ going through the B of I with an orange grounds shirt on. Decision made.

I read the e-zines on the tablet, and I know many of the contributing articles to our little project that has so much potential. I admire Meh, Danville J-Dawg’s ability to uproot themselves from a good situation to a better situation, without knowing any of the variables. I made my choice to stay, based on what I “do got” 1’s and 0’s.

I genuinely love coding. I actually became the go-to guy for all the newcomers and enjoy paying it forward. I'd like to thank the visionaries who dared to start a computer-programming group from behind these walls. I encourage all the newcomers to *keep asking questions* because sometimes the elegant solution is the least efficient!

As for all my peers who've influenced my decision-making process, whether it be directly or indirectly, I've made my choice, I'm staying here where I know I "do got." Good luck to all of you!

"Just a Little Patience"

Michael 'Wally' Walls Pontiac

Ahh, kindergarten. The place where the teacher spent a whole day extolling the virtue, being patient. I'm pretty sure I was absent that day...

I'm a certified firefighter II. I was trained in what my fire chief called "immediacy." In the fire service, our guys are all about response time. The longer it takes our guys to respond to ascend, the likelihood someone could be in grave danger increases. Chief Rossell didn't want to wait on anything. He wanted to get it down as quickly as possible, and he preaches it to us as well.

"Immediacy" is something many individuals in custody have as well. Let's face it peeps, most of us have **zero** patience—when we want something done, we want it done NOW!

Your hot water won't stop running quick, "get the plumber on speed dial!"

You just got to the commissary five minutes ago? "Whaddya mean you ain't got my stuff boxed up yet?"

Eight people are ahead of you on nurse/sick call? “I’m a (kitchen) worker. They shoulda called me first!” There’s probably someone reading this right now saying “Why, I’d never act in such a manner.” Nevertheless, the same individual was probably at your door at 8pm one night last week asking, “I need it before we lock up tonight.”

Okay, I admit it. I’m an *adrenaline junkie* fueled by caffeine (‘scuse me while I set my coffee cup down). There’s nothing in my life I’ve loved more than being right in the center of the action. I had my first gig and won my first election (4-H group chairperson) when I was 9-years old. I had my first job when I was 12, and I had my own key to City Hall when I was 15. Yeah, I was a bit high strung.

Some people would say I was wound up *tighter than a Timex*. I had a foot on the accelerator, and I didn’t slow down for over 40 years. Then 2019 happen...

On May 9, 2019, I was working at my kitchen job, when I blew out my mitral valve in my heart. I was so oblivious to it though, that I kept right on working until I was on the verge of collapse. After I was rushed to the outside hospital, the attending doctor at OSF St. James asked me, “Why aren’t you dead?” it was one of the few times in my life where I was stuck for an answer!

I was transferred out to OSF Cardiac Institute in Peoria. While I was there, there was a day shift nurse named Anna who talked to me every day. The day before my surgery, Anna could tell I was nervous. She spent most of her shift essentially calming me down. It was her “Friday”, so she was getting ready for her weekend and at the end of her shift, she came in to shake my hand and wish me luck.

About a half-hour after she left, the gravity of the situation began to hit me. In about 18 hours, a surgeon was going to open me up like a sardine can, and work on my heart. To be honest, I've never been more scared in my life. At that point, you hear about people thinking they could make deals with God. “Lord, if you get me through this one, I promise I’ll...”

Well, I wasn't into making deals, but I did start praying. “Lord”, I'm just not ready to leave yet. I know you have a purpose for me here...” it has now been a little over four years since my open-heart surgery. The first couple years were tough. I had the healing process to go through, about a year and a half of COVID lockdowns, and finally getting back to work again. I'm so pale right now that I look like a character from one of the “Twilight” movies!

What that whole experience taught me is to simply *slow down*. I don't have to be in a hurry. I don't have to be the center of attention. The only thing I'm required to be is ME. Think about where you are in your life right now. What's going to hurt you if you slow it down a bit? You don't have to be first in line at commissary. Your job is **STILL** going to be there after nurse/sick call.

There are more things out there. Things like family, friends, and wonders of the world around you. Moreover, if you're lucky, you just might be able to find a few people who inspire you...like Anna inspired me.

I'm reminded of the chorus from an old Guns & Roses song "...all we need is just a little patience." Give it a try. You might enjoy the life you've been missing.

Peer Pressure = TEAM

Peer pressure is a game-changer and an unavoidable dynamic of the human, social condition. Of the many inherent needs of the human being, the need to 'Belong' is an undeniable motivation in all of our lives, from the cradle to the grave. To deny my need to experience a sense of belonging would be to deny my very humanity.

Sadly, I've spent the vast majority of my life denying my need to belong, denying . . . my humanity. This worldview didn't happen overnight. For starters, I was socialized in a country whose founding ethos was rooted in the value and merit of **rugged individualism** over that of community. To add insult to injury, I was raised in a traumatized, less than trusting community. A community that was reeling from the impact of historical abuses and neglect, where being needy for anything, let alone other people, was viewed as a weakness. Consequently, I like so many of my peers, developed the attitude and worldview that I didn't need anyone. Though my actual life choices said otherwise, I sincerely believed my thoughts, decisions, and actions were originally mine and not influenced by anyone or anything.



Keith 'Aquil' Talley

Editor Emeritus
TWO ROADS

Of course, I had deluded myself because almost nothing I thought, believed, or did was original.

Peer pressure is nothing more than being influenced by your environment. As I critically review my lived experience, it is painfully clear I was socialized to fail. And yes, there were more constructive and healthier influences in my life; nevertheless, I gravitated toward the loudest, shiniest, and more exciting option—the streets. From that fateful time when I first ‘jump off the porch,’ to the particular street (dis)organization I pledged my allegiance to, down to the resulting tragedy of living my life as a human pincushion, enslaved to substances, I **passively** adopted and sometimes defended the social influences the I was exposed to.

Today, I realize being part of the whole and being influenced is part of my humanity. Therefore, instead of being passive about the inevitable, I'm **intentional, proactive, and strategic** about what and whom I allow to influence me. There's one constant amongst all people of consequence, they have a team! They have people in their lives who add value and influence/pressure/move them towards their desired goal. I'm spiritually guided to believe I'm on the path and will suffer the fate of those with whom I take as my companions; therefore, I humbly offer to you, what I remind myself daily:

“I am responsible for determining my team, and my team will determine my future.”

TWO ROADS

IDOC's Social Justice Program

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Volume 23

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