

# TWO ROADS



## PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

WHO YOU WERE THEN AND WHO YOU  
ARE NOW

**IDOC's Social Justice Program**

**Volume 23**

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.

**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.

# DISCLAIMER

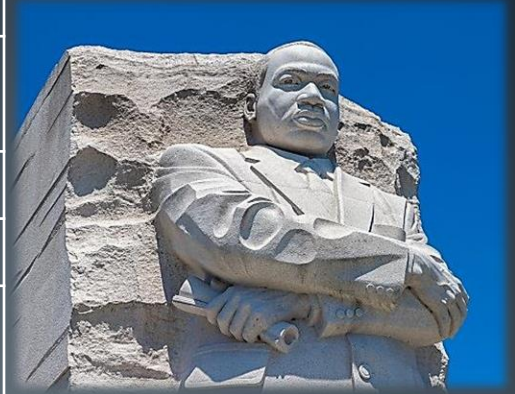
TWO ROADS is built for bringing integrity and honesty about the people who are submitting their stories. There are times where the editors are required to make changes due to spelling errors or grammatical structure. Please know that **we will never take away your voice**, however, understand that we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

Thank you.



# Volume 23

<b>Editors Take – Kenji Haley</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Guest Contributor – Warden James Carothers</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>"Farewell and God Speed"</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>"Overcoming the Odds" – Deandre Davis</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>"Experiences Through My Lens" – Jesse J. Myers</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>"The Brighter Side of Things" – Jermaine Brown</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>"Am I Really Ready?" – Carlos Mcdougal</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>"How My Educational Journey Transformed My Life For The Better" – John R. Ruffin</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>"The Journey Continues" – Kelly 'KB' Bennett</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>"Work in Progress" – Jeff Kennedy</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>"Pad Your Portfolio" – Nick 'Irish' Ogden</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>"Becoming Me" – Keith 'Aquil' Talley</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>"Personal Transformation" – Sam Wells</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>"Choices" – Mitchell Barnes</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>"Trauma Resilience" – Shondell Walker</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>"Self-Discipline Weight Loss Journey" – Marcus Harris</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>"Who Are You" – Vincent Davis</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>"Challenge Yourself" – Donevin Quick</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>"Anyway" – Demario R. Brooms</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>"My Transformation" – Quinton Johnson</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>FINAL WORDS Jubilee Transformation</b>	<b>67</b>



# TR

## TWO ROADS

THE PERSONAL  
TRANSFORMATION ISSUE

# 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.”

## TWO ROADS EDITORIAL TEAM

<b>Founders</b>	<b>Jim Estes</b>
	<b>Ricky Hamilton</b>
	<b>Jennifer Parrack</b>
<b>Publisher</b>	Penny Rowan
<b>Editor-In-Chief</b>	Kenji Haley
<b>Faculty Advisor and Content Editor</b>	T. Wilson
<b>Senior Editors</b>	Keith "Aquil" Talley
	Tyrone Delaney
	Ronnie Carrasquillo
<b>Associate Editors</b>	Jesse Myers
	Marcus Harris
	Kelly 'KB' Bennett
<b>House Poets</b>	John Williams
	Carlos D. McDougal

# 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"

We encourage you to screenshot this page with the hashtag:

# #TWORoadS



Then **LIKE** and **SHARE** the post!

*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.*

[idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoadse-zine.html](http://idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoadse-zine.html)

# Editor's Take

## THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE

People generally attribute success to intelligence. The general public thinks you must be very smart or have “God given” talents to achieve true success, especially in the case of obtaining overwhelming success. I disagree. I think the number one thing someone needs to become successful is perseverance.

Webster defines *Perseverance* as “to persist in a state, enterprise or undertaking, **in spite of** counterinfluences, opposition and discouragement.”

It means when setting goals, you never let them go, no matter the obstacle...you never give up! When you're faced with adversity, someone who has perseverance knows with absolute certainty that this too shall pass, and in the end, you'll be triumphant as long as you keep trying.

There are those who believe perseverance is impossible to accomplish and that you're born with it or have already possessed it. I know I wasn't born with this trait, yet somehow over the years it became ingrained in my personality. I have an utter, unflappable, never-ending confidence in myself, and in my ability to achieve my goals. How did this happen? Well, it was not easy, and it took practice.

Volume 23

Just recently, I was faced with adversity (lost a loved one to stage IV pancreatic cancer) and, like everyone else, I wanted to go home... just leave right now, but I spoke with an educator, and she told me “just go and do something else for half an hour and come back and tackle your day.” *Thank you, Mrs. Allison Trigg.* I had to regain focus and be who I had learned to be and persevere.

I had to say “I’ve overcome more than this. I know I’ll be okay, and, in the end, this too shall pass.” I always pictured myself as what I wanted to be: successful in the finance market, buying and selling on the Wall Street trading floor. But to get to this point, I had to read the books, not make the phone calls, or sit in the phone line to understand the lingo and logic. I was watching COUNTLESS hours of CBNC and FOX Business. It made zero sense of telling others who are in my position to become financially literate. I focused on the things I wanted and not the problems of the minute (and this is very tricky!).

I remember one of my biggest challenges was when I first got to NRC – Stateville—sitting there for over fifty days and not having any essentials because it wasn't my destination. No PIN to use the phone, no shower shoes, none of the things to help you function. So, I didn't dread the day I arrived at my destination, I celebrated it.

Why? Time was moving. I was able to shop and get the essentials one needs. They had a gym and a yard, and I was able to exercise and clear my mind. I could've been easily depressed and dejected. I'd be here for the foreseeable future.



Instead, I told myself this was so much better than the places I'd been. The county jail. The detention centers. The unknown outcomes. Now, I had a date and determination.

Worry and insecurity diminished once I arrived. I was overly focused on persevering and finishing my time, while learning and gaining knowledge to never be put in this situation ever again. This was my personal transformation. My suggestion to those who're reading these articles of change: decide how you want to live your life and, when obstacles arise, know you'll move past them and make those changes. That's how YOU will persevere!!

---

I'd like to introduce a new member to the *TWO ROADS* editorial team: **Mr. Kelly 'KB' Bennett**. Mr. Bennett is new to Kewanee, with over two decades away from society, but has 15 years of experience in the prison community and he will provide in-depth submissions to future *TWO ROADS* issues. He has already been a factor to the *TWO ROADS* community and being active in the community is a requirement. We believe Mr. Bennett will be very instrumental to the process and will continue to give endless understanding to the changes needed in IDOC.

As a reminder, our deadline dates vary due to the mailing system nationwide, so make sure that you send out your piece a week ahead of the deadline. Last but not least, **YOU CAN NOW EMAIL US!!!** Just have a staff member to send it to [doc.tworoads@illinois.gov](mailto:doc.tworoads@illinois.gov). That would be more efficient, and your piece will be featured in the forthcoming issue.

Lastly, we have been tinkering around and at the behest of our Senior Editors, Mr. Ronnie Carrasquillo and Mr. Tyrone Delaney, we would like to have an issue in 2024 dedicated to allow those who have been gone more than 25 years to narrate. It would be called **"TIME: A REFLECTION OF LIFE INSIDE."** This will be to reflect on the many episodes and changes that have happened during these years and the things that have had to be accomplished to live a better life behind the walls.

We believe that this will serve a dual purpose: (a) to share what many don't know and/or understand from someone who has done that much time, and (b) to encourage those around them to make permanent, lasting changes, so that they don't return to prison. What do you think? Please send your thoughts to our address (on the next page) and we will set the guidelines and the submission date in the near future.



Let the transformations begin...

# Guest Contributor



**Warden James Carothers**  
**Kewanee Life Skills**  
**Re-Entry Center**

**Can you tell us a bit about your own personal transformation and how it has benefitted you?**

Like everyone, my induction into “Re-Entry” was for me awkward and seemingly unfamiliar initially. I was like every human being in IDOC, not accustomed to “normal” social exposure/behavior. The journey was slow initially; but daily many individuals (staff and individuals) affected my life in a very positive way. I will say that it was re-finding who I was before IDOC and then later the transformation was the piece that was growth into the “better”/”best” version of me. The story is simple but impacting. My moment was when an individual in custody was willing amongst their peers to stand for me; rather what was the appropriate morale response to negative behavior. Two individuals were walking through the facility, and I happened to be passing. One of the individuals greeted me and as the two passed by the other individual made some disparaging remarks directly referencing me. The individual who greeted me immediately stopped and addressed his colleague. “Do you know him?, Have you had a conversation with him?”. The individual essentially told his peer that it was unacceptable to pass judgment and parted ways. In that moment I knew that treating all people with dignity and respect was of the highest importance. This one simple act solidified my direction and goals for Kewanee; moreover, it let me know that I had truly transformed.

**PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION**

**Volume 23**

**Is it correct that your father was also in this field of work? Do you believe this led you into this field? What was your first career choice?**

My father was a Lieutenant within IDOC. My father is truly the person responsible for setting the groundwork for “treating people right”. His tutelage was always to treat people with respect and to keep your word; especially when on the job. Yes, my father directly affected my choice for this career field. As a younger man I observed all of the things that my father provided for our family because of his job. I wanted the same for my future. I had several entry “jobs” prior to corrections; none that I felt had true longevity.

**Knowing you’re a leader of men in this environment, what are some of the things you changed from becoming an officer to transitioning to Warden? What struggles, if any, did you have in achieving this?**

I personally feel as an officer your responsibilities are important but at a basic level that has obvious limitations. Continuing through the ranks and working in many different positions within those ranks that “responsibility” increased – learning the greater impact if those responsibilities were failed. I can say this: I started this job wanting to help and protect people; I can confidently say now as a Warden that I am fortunate to do so daily. I get to do so now on the largest scale affecting the most people. The struggles along the road are like many folks that have walked this path. Those adversities are now appreciated as they have come to be beneficial. You don’t “do” the job as a Warden; you wake up knowing you “want” the job for all of the responsibilities, the good, the bad, and the challenges associated to the position.

**What are some things IDOC could or should implement to assist in helping individuals becoming better men and women in general as they work towards their release and reentering society?**

Continue to find methods and training for staff and individuals to better assist one another in becoming a “better neighbor” and returned citizen. This is very important to the growth of moving to the best understanding of why effective change needs to occur. It is also living proof for both staff and individuals. Continuing the State ID and Vital Document initiatives. Strive to continue to build relationships within the communities the facilities are in. Continue to build more partnerships with employers that help individuals transition more smoothly to society with secured employment. Grow and enhance Life Skills programming. Very importantly for both men and women; work to retrieve family and loved one relationships – whether that be parental rights/visitation or simply having healthy and positive relationships within the society and individual is returning.

**Many men and women in custody didn't have skills prior to their incarceration, which led to poor choices. What advice do you have for these individuals that could help them succeed in their future ventures for their own personal transformation?**

Be the person they dream to be! Not one person wakes up to constrict themselves, not want positivity, make excuses, or hold themselves from happiness or finding their true self. But we all have dreamed of a version of ourselves that we would like to include a life that is with it as well. So simply, have attainable goals



but make that dreamed version of yourself a reality. I also want to remind all individuals that there have been people to stick with them through their journey; let them continue that when you return. There is no shame in receiving help. For those that may have not or unfortunately may not have this at the end of their journey; then know there are communities and people within them that will help and support.

It simply requires being open and meeting them. The fear associated in doing this will subside through time and reseed as more relationships are built. Lastly, you are all in control of yourselves, your actions, and your words. These are the most powerful facts. If you're not willing to put yourself in an exposed place to continue your journey; you are the lock on the door

**Is there anything else you'd like to share?**

All staff and individuals benefit from better and more effective communicating daily. FACTS! Your choice to be a "better" person and all the things associated in doing so is for **YOU** as an individual! There should be no expectation of return in doing so; the byproduct will be a fortunate positive truth. Everyone can change and we do not need to be defined by any era of our lives. We're built to grow and change. I am sure there will be folks that read this and feel a certain way about this article or even the writer. I have chosen to not be the lock on the door.

Thank you for your time and willingness to share yourself with the men and women of IDOC.



*Warden Carothers hosting a Resource Fair*

# FAREWELL AND GODSPEED

I would like to send a special farewell to a brother, who has spent the last 37 years in prison. Mr. Cassidy Winston went to prison in 1986 (many of you were not born). He was 18 when his time began. During this time, he had to learn to become a man in a society that wasn't made for him. Yet he adjusted. In the years spent, he went from a boy to a man. I'm sure that this wasn't easy for him as well; from the on-going disputes of the prison system, to finding Christ and making himself over and over again. Yet he adjusted.

As I watched him over the last month leading to his release, there was a shine to him. Maybe it was the fact that he was leaving one day earlier than expected. Maybe it was the fact that in that time away, many of people, whom he loved had passed away and that he was going to be able to pay his respects. Or maybe, just maybe, he had made improvements in his personal transformation.

When I saw him on the other side of the fence as his family arrived, I watched him in his blue jeans and Chicago Cubs shirt, silently, and what I saw was something spectacular....he never looked back!



It's easy to look back and wish people farewell, but to look forward and focus on what's in front of you, is miraculous! I pray that each and everyone of you remember to experience the personal transformation of you *facing forward* as this brother did as his future awaits.

**Volume 23**

# Overcoming The Odds

## Deandre Davis – Big Muddy River

My name is Deandre Davis. I've been incarcerated for twenty-three years. I'm currently housed at Big Muddy Correctional Center.

### **I overcame illiteracy.**

Man, I literally kicked its butt! Believe me, I struggled, but I'm only here sharing my journey because I want to motivate those who can relate. I got to this point through sacrifice, hard work, dedication and something called "*believing in me.*"

I grew up in the typical poor urban household. I watched my mother battle with drugs my whole life, while my father was in and out of prison. As for me, and my five siblings, we were raised by our grandmother. This was overwhelming because with us and her kids, she had 21 people living in a 2-bedroom apartment. My grandmother stepped up and took on her daughter's burden and raised us the best way she knew how. I will always love and appreciate her for everything she did.

School was difficult for me because I wanted to learn, but didn't have the structure not literacy tools. I went all through grammar school not knowing how to read or write. You can say that I "slipped



through the cracks” because I had no family structure that was looking out for my best interest. No one at home looked at my report cards or homework. The worst moments for me in school were being called upon to read out loud. I would get teased for not being able to read out loud in class.

So instead of reading out loud, I reverted back to my old ways of buffoonery. Being the class clown was easy for me. From this kind of behavior, the teachers isolated me, by putting my desk in the corner. This really affected me again, feeling like I was *unwanted* and not worth anything. I was in the fifth grade when my teacher held me back. Again this was another embarrassing moment in my life. I was teased so bad that I hated my teacher. In my mind, I was wondering how she would do this to me. Looking back on it now, *she did it for me*.

When I returned to school the following school year, I was held in the same grade. I didn't ask any questions. I continued my usual routine. Through research, I found out that I was a product of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, which is now known as *No Child Left Behind*.

I can honestly say that the Chicago Public School (CPS) system failed me I was never diagnosed with a learning disability nor offered any of the programs that were put in place by the ESEA. Instead, I was passed along until I graduated grammar school while reading and writing at a third grade level. I tried going to high school for about two weeks. I was so far behind at that point that I didn't belong in any normal school setting.

By that time, it was too late; the street had its hooks deep in me. Anyone who grew up in the streets of Chicago knows the only thing that was respected was the life of violence. I swear to you, it was like a light switch went on when I found something that I was good at. I couldn't read a book, but I thrived at being in the street, and I was good at it.

This is what I thought until June 10, 2004, when I was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to 32-years in prison. I spent almost four years in the county jail, doing ABSOLUTELY NOTHING, but gang-banging, and learning how to be a better crook. I was sent to Menard Correctional Center. This was the turning point in my life. I was there, sitting in my cell FOR YEARS, still being affected from not knowing how to read and write.

In Menard, if you couldn't score higher than a 6.0 TABE score, you couldn't get a job. However, this is a maximum facility, where the programs and opportunities were limited, including school. Also, with that TABE score being lower than 6.0, you were pay restricted, so, even if you had a job that paid \$50/month, you got \$15, no ifs, ands or buts! Even though I was mandatory school, this is where I fell in between the cracks again. I was sentenced to so much time, that I was placed in school according to my release date, which was no time soon.

At this time, I had over twenty years left on my sentence, which put me in a long line. I remember this clearly, being housed in North 1-5 gallery. I was in the cell by myself, and you already know what was going in my mind: "I hope that they don't put a bug in here."

Through the grace of God, when I got a celly, he was cool; he actually had just received his GED.

It's funny now, but he grew tired of hearing me complain about the administration not giving me a job assignment because of the policy they had in place. One day, he just called me out and said "what are you gonna do?" the next thing you know, I went and got the GED training book. "I'm willing to help you bring your score up", he said.

We reviewed and studied for months. I struggled, but, he stuck it out with me. I was ALL IN, he encouraged me to take breaks to watch TV, but to keep the caption on, so that I could get familiar with the words.

Now I was ready to re-take the TABE test. So I wrote to the education department....but they never responded back. Again, my celly encouraged me to write the Warden as well as the Deputy Director. I finally got a response, telling me I was on the list to be called over to take the TABE test.

When I retook the TABE test, I score a 10.6. This was a very proud moment for me. Seeing the results of my hard work and my celly's encouragement was a different feeling. The administration also noticed and they placed me in the GED class. This time I was ready, and within 5 months, I finished my GED.

After successfully obtaining my GED, I started taking college classes and also scored well enough to be put on the Dean's List several times. I am

currently a few credits away from obtaining my Associate's Degree. I completed many Mental Health programs. I am hospice trained and certified. I have taken all the classes that were required and also trained to work with hazardous material.

Big Muddy C.C. is the third Health Care Unit I've worked in. I enjoy doing this work because I'm able to show these individual's the same compassion that was given to me. I would like to thank the Warden (Morganthaler) and the Health Care Unit Administrator for giving me this opportunity.

My failures and learning experience as a broken child, along with being inside a harsh prison environment have helped me develop qualities that I've instilled inside myself and which have led me to my success in rehabilitation. I continue to strive daily to develop and grow. I've become more of a critical thinker and have learned how to analyze situations before rushing to judgment. So my hope is that I may have, somehow, inspired you to do something with yourself.



**SO, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?**

# 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](mailto: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: September 8, 2023**



# ALCOHOL SEX GAMBLING

# Experiences Through My Lens

The writing you are about to read includes accounts of a personal experience with transformation through faith. I wish to make it clear that this is in no way an attack on any other faith or belief system; everyone who knows me can tell you that I have the utmost respect for each and every individual's belief system and faith. Though we journey with others our salvation is personal, and is a duty for us to discover through a never-ending search for truth. We experience transformations every day just as a flower blooms, then comes to seed, and sheds its petals.

The flower will never be the same ever growing, wilting and sometimes re-sprouting the next year; it is never at any moment of its existence the same. Like the transformation of the flower, a human's personal transformation is the same – an ever changing, ongoing life-long process. Personally, I have been through many great transformations throughout the years. One of the greatest and most fulfilling happened through the change in my faith.

A transformation brings on other transformations, and thus if one thing changes, everything else must also in order to conform. Growing up I was told and taught that I was a Christian. I tried to tell myself that I believed the teachings of the Christian faith, but the truth is that I was not willing to follow the tenants or teachings of this faith. I was what many would call a hypocrite.



*Jesse J. Myers*  
Associate Editor  
TWO ROADS

I discovered that along with other things my unwillingness to follow these teachings was because I did not believe in them. There are a lot of other underlying factors but one truth I do know is that one will never fully follow something they do not fully believe. So I went through most of my life saying that which I did not do, and telling myself that I believed. Again and again I told myself I believed but what I could not bring myself to admit to myself and those around me is that I only believed part of it; for me something was never right.

Many people know that in 2015 through a series of events I picked up a Qu'ran and discovered the teachings of Islam. I went from a man that was on a mission to ridicule any Muslim in my path, to a man intrigued. I had found a lot of answers yet I had many more questions. I got to work and dove deep into studies. As I dove deeper more and more truth was exposed. As I learned more I found that any piece of faith or belief I had was confirmed through Islam, and the parts that I could not bring myself to believe were explained in detail. The gaps had been filled and I found what I had been missing.

As I allowed my bias and all other preconceived notions to disappear I became able to see Islamic truths which were not mythical, but backed through science and historical facts and accuracy. As Allah (God) continued to guide me I was able to transition my focus from outward appearance to an inward spiritual development. As I began to search within, things started to change. I began to care about myself in a way that was not consumed by selfish motives. I was driven to change so as to be useful to others for the sake of Allah.

Thus I started to care about others in a way that was not just driven by the way they perceived me. Whereas before I pretended to care so as to keep up with my image and to battle the fear of what others might think of me if they knew all the bad choices I had made and lies I had lived with.

Change and transformation as we all know is no overnight process. We are all creatures of habit. Naturally as change took place I struggled to let go of my old self. Bad habits do die hard. I came to this point in my life holding on to lifetime of lies, shame and guilt. I had hurt people and the worst of it was that I had been hurtful to women, and left my child without a father. I grew up seeing abuse and swearing not to live in anger or ever be wrathful towards others especially women. Yet Here I was everything I had once despised, which was hard to live with. Anytime I hurt, I coped through drugs and alcohol trying to bury it. Most times I became an abusive drunk or I made other bad choices.

As I sobered up I became ashamed, the only way I could deal with the shame was to try and block it out with more drugs and alcohol. I was stuck in a vicious cycle of insidious insanity. The only thing that could ever halt it was jail. Each time I found myself in jail the only tool I had found was self-pity, surely the wrong tool for the job. As I discovered more about Islam and people started to notice change and passion in me I was asked to speak with others. I spent a few years sharing my experience with others and even gave many Kutbahs (Islamic sermons).

But something was still missing I kept coming across this verse in the Qu'ran. O you who believe be steadfast maintainers of



justice, witnesses for God, though it be against yourselves, or your parents or your kinsfolk, and whether it be someone rich or poor, for god is nearer unto both. So follow not your caprice so that you may act justly. If you distort or turn away, truly God is aware of whatsoever you do.

Qu'ran Chapter 4 verse 135. This kept speaking to me and I thought how could I be of use to my creator while I continued to lie, this is why I lived in the shadow of shame and guilt I had become my own jailor. I understood what James Allen meant when he wrote, "man is manacled by himself, he is the jailor of his own fate."

I understood why I was being blocked from full relationships with my peers, with my mother, with my daughter why I had felt so good yet still so incomplete. What I understood most is that I was being blocked off from a full relationship with my creator and until I could have that, nothing else would ever be complete. You see I had found truth and with that I must also be true. God has many rights over us as humans but most of all he calls upon us to be truthful then all other good principles fall in line with the truth.

Ruzbihan al-Baqli said it best: "The spirit of oneness will not find root in a person's heart, so long as God has a claim upon him that he has not fulfilled. Through coming out of a life of lies, and always being honest about my past and in the present for the glory of God and not for self, I have been able to experience true humility. I have been allowed to continually recognize my own shortcomings and ask God to remove them."

While putting in the work to change the way I think, consciously seeking to be a better man and to truthfully treat others with love and kindness. I am also able to accept truth from others in a way that will allow me to grow spiritually. I have opened my mind to trying things in a different way some of those things have propelled me farther forward then I ever thought possible. My relationships are growing and taking on meaningful transformations of their own. And I have been given great opportunities to be of use to others.

The spark of my personal transformation started before I was even in my mother's womb and it shall continue throughout eternity. The one thing that has changed most is that I now willingly and humbly allow my creator to direct me. I realize what I can and cannot control in life and seek his help in guiding me. In order that I may have the courage to change the things within self that will allow him to make me useful to others as he sees fit. Transformation will happen it is inevitable but you get to choose how it happens within yourself so choose whatever part of your inner self you feed will be the part that grows the most.

NOTE: Jesse Myers is now known as "*Murid Abdullah Khabir*"

# The Brighter Side of Things

## Jermaine Brown - Robinson

On June 1, 2021, I transferred to Robinson, after Springfield decided to reclassify all individuals in custody. This was the first time in my 20 years of incarceration that I was transferred to a prison, I didn't put in for. Many of the individuals that transferred with me were unhappy and frustrated but I wasn't.

I had been paying close attention to the direction that I noticed IDOC had been going and I was very optimistic at the near future, I looked at the transfer in a positive light, knowing I would use everything I learned to turn Robinson into my personal stepping-stone.

I arrived at Robinson and within the first 3 months, I was placed in the kitchen. A couple of months later, I worked in the Health Care Unit as an ADA, a position I took to heart. This job allowed me to care for those individuals that couldn't care for themselves, and it increased my compassion for others who were getting older.

Shortly after, I was able to work a second job, thus making my days go by fast. It showed me that my work ethic was being seen by staff and the respect they had for me. When Clinical Services needed Peer Educators, I was at the ready, doing Webex meetings with the *Cook County State's Attorney Resentencing Initiative* and the *Civic Education for Re-Entering Citizens*.

Today, I am busier than ever, enrolled in Custodial Maintenance, Civics Peer Educator, working LTS, working out, writing music and overseeing business opportunities for my future. For years, I have complained about being a good for nothing while serving time under the Truth-In-Sentencing act and not being rewarded for the work that I have done.

However, my outlook on things is changing, and I look forward to all the improvements within both IDOC and myself. For those of you that don't know it, it's the benefits to looking at *The Brighter Side of Things*.



# Am I Really Ready?

What is personal transformation? How can we truly know if there really has been a transformation if the people who knew us in the lives we lived before our incarceration have not seen us in the light we stand in today? I do not want to sound like people cannot change but while we are here it can be easy to stay away from the bulls\*\*t because we have a goal in mind when things do not go are way. I say this because we must not let the fact that in this controlled environment the chance of someone squandering the chance to go home early is slight there are some variables that can hinder someone, but once we hit the streets, there are variables we cannot account for.

The reason for my point of view is quite simple, if we do not ask ourselves the hard questions, how are we going to deal with the harsh reality of the world outside these prisons walls and gates? I can say that I have changed, but did I really? The things that triggered me before my incarceration haven't been during my time in prison. So who am I to say what I'll do or how I'll react to those actions.

I don't have to tell you how we as men are scrutinize especially as a black man in this country we have to be on pins and needles our entire life



*Carlos Medougal*  
Associate Editor  
TWO ROADS

even if we haven't ever been incarcerated. The purpose for incarceration is to answer for the crimes you have committed and in the process rehabilitate. The tools we need to do that have not been readily obtainable, so we take it upon ourselves to rehabilitate and to become someone better not for those who we have hurt in our quest of self-discovery.

I don't have to tell you how we as men are securitize, especially being a black man in this country. We are on pins and needles our entire lives, even if we haven't ever been incarcerated. The purpose for incarceration is to answer for the crimes you have committed and in the process of that, become rehabilitated. The tools we need to do that haven't been obtainable, so we take it upon ourselves to rehabilitate and to become someone better, not for those who we've hurt in our quest of self-discovery. However, for us in the walls of the many prisons throughout Illinois, we've form the ability to overcome the pain of yesterday while fighting to become a better version of the person we are today.

The thought of coming back to prison keeps me in the state of serenity that I am in, in order for me to stay on the side of the fence that allows me to be free. My personal transformation is not complete until I'm face-to-face with the horror that haunted me before all this, and I'm able to walk away without destroying my life again. The journey that I have been on since my incarceration has been a tumultuous one, and though I've made strides in some areas, there are still things I need to work on that could potentially hinder me and the progress I have work so hard to make.

The truth is I'm afraid of the next phase of my life outside these walls. The pain that I've endured while locked down has been under wraps because of my ultimate goal, which is to be free of the self-inflicted wound I have been dealing with for the past twenty years. The door to my freedom is approaching quickly and I'm unsure if the fear of being an adult in a world I don't know among people I don't know has me a bit apprehensive.

What can you do but jump out of the frying pan and into the fire, right? How do you go from a fearless teenager to a timid adult? I've lived inside a prison since I was nineteen years old and growing up in this environment doesn't help you conduct yourself as a human being. From the start of this journey, I've to be different from who I was in order to survive. The monster that I had to be when I was a boy has transformed when I grew into a man. How do you know you've had a transformation if you have been self-taught? Just something I've been thinking about since I arrived here in Kewanee, though I'm considered a grown man have I really grown mentally, emotionally or spiritually.



# How My Educational Journey Transformed My Life for the Better

John R. Ruffin - Pinckneyville



“A man with knowledge is unfit to be a slave.”

Frederick Douglass

The pressure of prison life forced me to choose between remaining in a destructive behavior pattern or get an education to free myself from the prison industrial complex itself. Doing time, I've received two types of educations; one about life and the other, academic.

I've taken advantage of the educational opportunities the prison has to offer and fighting to enroll in a Bachelor's Degree program. In addition, I've completed correspondence courses. Education had transformed my life for the better.

Twenty-three years ago, I'd entered prison as a young, ignorant traumatized man, filled with anger and resentment. Faced with my own preconceived notion about prison, I'd utilized my anger to cope with my anxiety. However, my anger led me to some irrational decisions, which landed me in some serious disciplinary trouble. As a direct consequence, I was transferred to the notorious maximum-security prison...Menard.



Menard has a *Shawshank* vibe to it. I was placed in disciplinary segregation for two years. The noises the prisoners were making were mind numbing; the banging on the steel doors and bars, the yelling and screaming. Sleep came rarely. I was in the prison for three weeks when a prisoner killed his cellmate; not long after that, there were rumblings of other things going on, which put me in an uncomfortable position.

Watching my fellow brothers mutilating themselves; committing suicide or totally losing their sanity and humanity was heartbreaking. This was a wakeup call and I made the decision that I will not allow prison to eat me alive!

An old-school prisoner once told me *“Although you’re in the pen, don’t let the pen get inside of you.”* I took his sage advice to heart. My educational journey began with self-examination and a spiritual awareness made me cognizant of all the negativity I’ve contributed that impacted my community.

Holding myself accountable for my actions became a high priority. Dealing with my untreated trauma was necessary to move forward in a positive direction. My family was instrumental in my rehabilitation. During their visits and phone calls, my family often advised me to take advantage of every educational program the prison had to offer and continue to fight for my freedom.

I have taken my family’s advice to heart and created an action plan. First, I surrounded myself around positive peer mentors,

who were smarter than I was and are on the same positive path. They've served as an example with effort, dedication, hard work and generosity of spirit; great things can happen for us.

These peer mentors taught me how to do time and not let time do me. Their lessons helped me avoid pitfalls that the prison possesses. They would educate me on the law and how to challenge complicated situations.

I am always doing something constructive with my time. I've attended college and attained my Associate's Degree from Lakeland College. I also completed my correspondence courses and earned a paralegal certificate from Blackstone Career Institute. I took the initiative to educate myself on subjects not taught at the facility. Others and me started Peer-led programs, such as real estate development, how to start a music career; how to write computer apps and more.

I still have inspiration to obtain a Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, but this is a work in progress. Being at Pinckneyville, the programs like these are not available, but as I work my way down, I will have the opportunity to attend Lewis University in Sheridan, East Moline, or do studies at Stateville or Kewanee.

In conclusion, to all the readers who have read this, continue to be inspired, to transform your life and know that "men move stones, before they move mountains."

# The Journey Continues

First and foremost, thank you all for the warm welcome you have extended to me here at Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center and also the TWO ROADS family. I pray that these few lines on my transformation serve as an introduction. However, I am sure that many of TWO ROADS dedicated readers are familiar with me, as a friend, brother, and mentor.

My name is Kelly Bennett 'K.B.', and as I speak on my transformation, I was taken aback because as we speak, this process in my life is not yet complete and as a man on the road to recovery, it will never be entirely complete. According to the Webster's dictionary, the following definition has been stated for transformation: *an act, process on being transformed and/or changed to outward appearance, a metamorphosis, transformation.*



*Kelly "KB" Bennett*

New Associate Editor  
TWO ROADS

Now with all that in mind, I personally view this life I have lived as stages of growth and as we grow through these junctures of life, we in a sense "transform." However, if the growth needed to transform is not met, the process is repeated "over and over" and sadly, that had occurred to me. Not fully being aware of how untreated trauma, grief, and mental health issues, all played huge roles in one's decision-making process,

especially if they go unnoticed. Growing up in the streets of Chicago, coupled with other urban city destinations, surviving the best way I knew how, left me with some very bad habits of daily living and with several diseases like alcoholism and addiction. Now, after a lot of soul-searching and self-examination, I found that I could no longer live this way and the transformation had begun.

At first the process was frightening, because I had to truly be honest with self and the hard truth of this was difficult. Let's be honest, who wants to deal with their life's mistakes? You see, the habits of survival, coupled with the distorted thinking were not only detrimental to me, but also to any and every one that became a part of my life.

The true transformation began when I had lost everything and became a source of "gained pain" towards my loved ones and the loved ones of my victim. For this, I will be forever apologetic and filled with remorse and regret. Having acquired the knowledge through several courses at Hill Correctional Center, I recognized that "hurt people, hurt people" and at some point, you hurt enough to want change.

So, through some poor choices and bad decisions, I found myself in the middle of both scenarios. The five stages of change were met and here are mine:

- **Pre-Contemplation** (become aware of the issue)
- **Contemplation** (the desire to change behavior)
- **Preparation** (the intention to take action)
- **Action** (practice the desired behavior), and
- **Maintenance** (work to sustain the behavior change)

Please keep in mind that at any given moment I could have returned back to the old habits, of which were a huge part of my life that doesn't go away so easily. You must stay mindful!

The process began with the death of the old, selfish, self-seeking individual in my mind. I re-dedicated myself to serve first as a mentor to many young men who were entering the system, in search of themselves and a purpose, so that *man-to-man mentorship* was a driving force in my transformation

Now the dedicated staff of the Clinical Services department at Hill C.C. saw something in me and allowed me to give in the form of my experience, strength, and hope as I gave freely, pieces of myself with only the hopes to reach one (person). Yes, I had given my life for the betterment of whoever is placed in my presence. I gave small pieces of myself in every encounter and there are a host of readers of TWO ROADS who can attest to this.

I have been in the system for over two decades and those I have encountered, mentored, assisted or introduced to, will forever be left with a favorable opinion of me. Remember, always leave a favorable opinion

of yourself and that may be just as simple as a smile. Hence, a part of the transformation: to encourage and challenge yourself. As I said, I have started my transformation, but it is far from over and with that as my foundation, only God knows where this transformation ends and how truly it can be.

*"...true giving is a joyous thing to do. We experience happiness when we form the intention to give, in the actual act of giving and the recollection of the fact we have given. Generosity is a celebration"*

- Sharon Salzberg



**SUCCESS AT ANYTHING WILL  
ALWAYS COME DOWN TO THIS:  
FOCUS & EFFORT.  
AND WE CONTROL BOTH.**

- DWAYNE 'THE ROCK' JOHNSON

# Work in Progress

## Jeff Kennedy - Kewanee

“I’m a work in progress.” I hear those words a lot at Kewanee. Many of us are trying hard to transform the meaning of our lives. Many are wanting and willing to change and some are not. I surround myself with positive influences that make the “Kewanee Experience” beneficial. I utilize the programs/groups that directly affect my way of thinking (i.e. Anger Management, Depression, Grief & Loss and Celebrate Recovery). The tools I have at my disposal are of paramount importance to becoming a better, more successful person.

I still have so much pain and remorse from my past that I need to unload. That’s baggage I can’t afford to drag back into society with me. Society deserves better, and actually, so do I. Classes such as Criminal & Addictive Thinking, Relapse Prevention, and Preparing for Release have helped transform my mindset. I’ve been collecting every day of “good time”

I can earn, and with the upcoming implementation of *HB 3026*, my release date is fast approaching. I still have tons of work to do in a very short time. Does the transformation have to be perfect? Absolutely not! I just need to be a much better version of myself. It’s called “progress” rather than “perfection” for a reason. I truly consider myself a work in progress, and I hope you are too. With that, I wish you all peace, happiness and prosperity.



# TWO ROADS

presents

Everyone is driven by something. **TWO ROADS** would like to share this opportunity for you to speak on what you would like to talk about. What inspires you? What motivates you? What drives you in life? It will be your story. It can be spoken word. It can be about the happiness you have had, or the sheer honesty of prison life. We want to hear from you!

There is no topic for this, just your point of view! We know that this will vary in different Degrees of intensity, but we would love to hear from you. Submissions are due **October 6, 2023.**

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

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

**Mail submissions to:**

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



# Pad Your Portfolio

## Nick 'Irish' Ogden – East Moline

I have been incarcerated since 1998 and I have seen ups and downs of IDOC. For a long time, all I could do was work. No school, no programs, just work.

Then, I was transferred to Mount Sterling (Western C.C.) and I was able to attend college, take clinical programs like Anger Management, all while working. I didn't get any good time back then, but the education I received opened my eyes to so much more. I didn't know about myself, or the world around more.

I came to realize that I had so much more in me that I didn't know. When I was able to utilize it, doors opened that weren't there previously. Time passed and I transferred again and when I arrived at the next place, I was told that I could do school or programs unless I had less than 2 years. So I worked and I didn't give up!

Then the laws changed and I got good time. That good time allowed me to get in those classes and programs. Now, I was getting certificates and I got an industry job. So many other people also had opportunities for good time and programs that weren't eligible before. Guys with 75% 85% - 100% have now been able to do things that they only thought were impossible.

I am currently taking horticulture class and working toward completing my Associate's Degree upon completion. I want to tell these younger guys to "Pad Your Portfolio." Take all the programs and education you can. Although there is no incentive now, you will be able to learn things about you, life and the world around you like I did. It is important to have an active mind while you are in here. "An idle mind is the devil's playground" and if you know like I do, it's easy to fall into mess.

The laws could change and you doing all that work will allow you to get the good time that you got coming to you as well as get you early release. That portfolio reflects who you are as a person and the steps you took to get where you are, even though you may not get good time.

So, as you are attending programs and school, change your mindset and new things will open up to you and the possibilities will be endless. Being an older guy and watching IDOC change for the better (as well as the changes in me) was due in part to me getting the education and the programs.

I speak of hope and a better future. Hope for new out dates and going home to family and friends; not as the same person, but as a person worthy of a second chance, a person that has changed, with the help of education and programs, of course. YOU are the one that has to start this process.

Don't sit on that bunk! Apply yourself for any and all programs and education at your facility Pad that portfolio and let the changes begin...

# Becoming Me

**Keith 'Aquil' Talley**

**Heraclitus asserted, “There is nothing constant but change.”** Indeed, a mere casual view of the past would reveal the truth of his observation. Whether in areas of science/technology to the broad advancements of human civilization, it is clear that our yesterday is different than our today. Equally, if we were to reflect on the signs(lessons) so generously offered up to us by our natural world, it would also be made manifest to us that in nature there exists a constant cycle of change and transformation. Actually, those things in the natural world that fail to change and transform, ultimately fail to fulfill their purpose – fail to grow – fail to adjust and adapt; inevitably, they succeed in dying!

My personal and continued journey of transformation towards “Becoming” began with a realization that I was not separate from the whole. I became painfully aware that I was not exempt from the universal laws that governed everything else in creation. Thus, if I failed to change, then I too would cease to **Be**. To that point I lived with no passion or purpose. My thinking and life were destructive, unproductive, and



*Keith 'Aquil' Talley*

Senior Editor  
TWO ROADS

**Volume 23**

stagnant. Unable to competently adjust to the demands of life, I grew resentful about my past – angry in the midst of my present – and fearfully anxious concerning my future.

My journey is not your journey, so I will mercifully spare you the details of my daily, personal journey towards Becoming Me. However, I am compelled to share one nugget of wisdom that my experience with personal change has graciously afforded me; Insha'Allah (GOD-willing), you will find it a value-added to your fruitful journey towards personal transformation.

Heraclitus's quote, though wise, is incomplete. You see, there is something that is more constant than change . . . TRUTH. **Indeed, nothing is constant but TRUTH!** A truth that I discovered during my journey is that I was not created prone to evil, deficient and incapable, but instead, I was created in the best of molds. I am by nature beautiful, capable, loving, thoughtful, strong and wise. My lived experience of pain, anger and self-centered driven harm was more a result of a host of trauma producing experiences and unconstructive socialization influences, rather than a part of my true nature.

Consequently, my challenge was not to change and transform into some entirely new person, but more specifically, my test was to muster the honesty to identify and the courage to rid myself of all those things within me that were blocking me from the light of the Spirit and from actualizing the real ME. Until i took this searching and fearless inventory and house cleaning, no matter what good, empowering things I tried to add to my life, they only had a superficial, temporary, fleeting impact on my life.

Additionally, my experience revealed to me to I needed some POWER to execute my commitment to genuine and lasting transformation. Like a dusty unplugged television, I needed to be plugged into the power source for me to awaken and realize my created purpose, features and capabilities. Once the connection was made with the All-Powerful, I was graciously given hope. My resentment turned to acceptance – my anger changed to love – and my fear was converted to faith. Renewed and transformed, I was then able to become . . . Me.

As-Salaamu Alaikum



*“The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – their future – was doomed. With their loss of belief in the future, they also lost their spiritual hold; they let themselves decline and become subject to mental and moral decay.”*

*Victor Frankl*

*Holocaust Survivor, Author*

**Volume 23**

# Personal Transformation

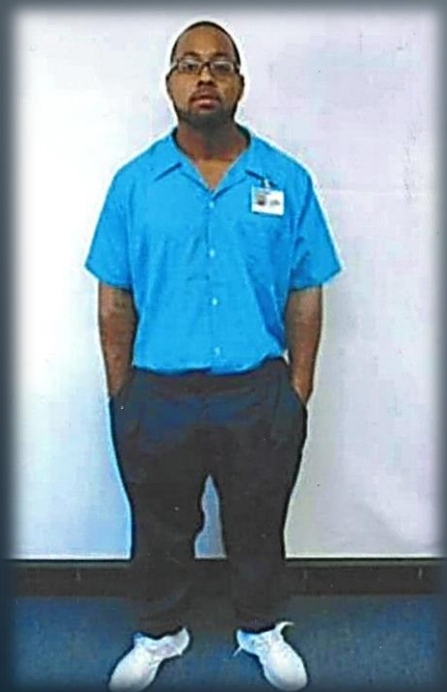
## Sam Wells – Illinois River

I was born and raised in survival mode. Everything was extreme and emotions/vulnerability was abominations. This led me to prison where survival mode was shifted into overdrive. I heard how dangerous, violent, and sadistic prisons are, so in my mind, I had to be one worse than the others.

This went on for 14 years. Then, one day while sitting in Pontiac admin seg, I realized I'd been *perpetrating* the very culture of toxicity that traumatized me my entire life. I began to invest in psychology books and in cell classes that focused on CBT. When I was release from admin seg, jail no longer made sense to me. I had no idea how to navigate the people who felt jail had to look a certain way. So, I lived on an island.

A couple of months later, I moved to a medium joint and discovered college classes.

This was where it made sense to me and I found my voice. I responded to things I learned in the streets and during that dark period in jail.



I excelled and fell in love with academics. I chased every class centered on Psychology, Sociology Communication and Science.

When I relocated to Danville, I signed up for *Building Blocks* and C.A.V.E. C.A.V.E. changed everything for me; how I think, speak, act, feel and listen. C.A.V.E. taught me to evaluate myself. The "why and how" of my emotions as well as my thoughts. It was no longer what prison I was expected to be in, because, as part of the environment, I held equity in it. This meant I could be the voice and practice healthy living, maintain the right relationships and have good emotional exploration.

Now I've taken pride in helping others heal and find solace in the fact that your healing is my healing. With the concepts of: social learning, social responsibility, open communication, emotional intelligence, shared governance, non-violence, growth, and change (7 principles of C.A.V.E.) I'm able to be the change I want to see in the world, not just in prison.

My life has had tremendous lows and without those losses and pains, this man (the man I am now) wouldn't exist. I'm grateful for my path because nothing got between me and my 32 years. So, if I can interrupt that for someone, I intend to do it!

# Choices

## Mitchell Barnes - Kewanee

Greetings, my name is Mitchell Barnes, aka “Mitch”, and the crazy thing is, in the last 6 years has been the only time in my life where I can say my own name and actually know who I am. With that being said, I want to explain to you the biggest change I have undergone since my incarceration as a teenager to who I am now- as a thirty-one year old man.

I grew up in Barrington Illinois, which is a suburb of northwest of Chicago. Prior to that, I was a ward of the state of Illinois until I was adopted at the age of seven. Even though I went from a ward of the state to a wealthy family, in a good neighborhood, life still had its pitfalls, challenges and obstacles, which ultimately led me to prison as a teenager.

My mind was so distorted, confused that it is still hard for me to understand all of the things I have had to witness and endure from past trauma as a ward of the state and abusive parents who wanted me to be who they wanted me to be. I never had the chance to know who it was that I wanted to be. There came a time during my incarceration where I had no one, no visits, no mail, no financial support, no nothing whatsoever, that it made me really consider the type of person I was for the very first time, and why didn't I have anyone!



Was I that bad of a person that no one wanted to be there for me???

After getting a glimpse at who I was, made me look deeper, and I realized that no matter the pain, the trauma and heartache, I was a angry, irritable and miserable person. I used to see people who I had judged to be worse than me- thriving, which pissed me off. Then something happened.

One night I went to sleep and I had a dream. In this dream the background was completely black and in bright red neon letters was a sentence that transformed my life. It said; “You are so worried about the things you don’t have, that you are blind to the things you do have”. That sentence made me look at things differently. I stopped crying about what I didn’t have and realized nothing was out of reach. I learned my strengths and weaknesses, and that I was the ruler of my own universe and controller of my own destiny.

Everything came down to the choices I made and knowing who I was. Once I found this power, this peace, no one had the power to mold me as they saw fit, for I live with the power of choice as well as the consequences that comes from each. Now, I live in love, the love of self and the love of others, for my past is only a compass towards my future...

# Trauma Resilience

## Shondell Walker - Kewanee

There are many types of traumas many of us deal with on a daily basis...because EVERYONE'S life experiences are vastly different. My traumatic experience stems from the vacuity I've allowed myself to saturate in.

Being in prison isn't a unique or pleasant feeling, because when you've been disconnected from the many people whom cared about you, loved you and wished nothing but the best for you and to abruptly have all of that snatched away from you, leaves you feeling empty inside.

After my judge handed me down a herculean sentence, coupled with an already dysfunctional malady at the inception of my birth, the vacuity ate me from the inside out. Having lost faith in God, because of my wrongful imprisonment, I knew deep down inside He was always there. God puts people in our lives at the right time and allows the cumbersome burden to become no more.



I was able to bounce back, because I allowed myself to become surrounded with love and care from the many people who were placed before me. I had the privilege to be around individuals who were piecing their lives together in a positive manner.

Those were the men I listened to and confided in, trusted and shared my thoughts with. There are, for the most part, a plethora of men and women inside the system, who're so advanced educationally, spiritually and emotionally. These individuals want better for themselves and the world they live in so much that they're more than willing to help. Remember your emptiness isn't the end of it all; instead, you can use it as a call for help to end that not so good feeling.

This was the encouragement I needed to personally transform my life and do for others that they had done for me. Since I've bounced back from my experience, I sought out to understand me and other ways to be better equipped when other traumatic experiences might arrive. Today I'm blessed. Today I'm thankful God never gave up on me even though I gave up on Him. I give him all the glory and praise, especially for sending the right people at the right time my way.



# Self-Discipline Weight Loss Journey

What does self-discipline mean to you? Webster's online definition states, 'self-discipline is training that corrects, molds, and perfects physical ability, mental ability and/or moral character.' I believe self-discipline is committing to setting goals and completing tasks while ignoring all distractions and temptations along the way—continuing doing the right thing even when no one's watching because your patience, determination, and perseverance will be rewarding. I'm sharing my weight-loss story with you and how much self-discipline is needed to achieve one's goals.

I began my incarceration on March 14, 2014, at 340lbs. Spending three weeks in Statesville NRC, my weight decreased due to malnutrition and depression. My mental state was fragile because I was 23 years old and was going to spend the next 14 years in prison. My sentence is 28 years at 50% on my first case with no criminal history.



*Marcus Harris*

Associate Editor  
TWO ROADS

Arriving at Big Muddy River Correctional Center on April 2, 2014, I discovered I lost twenty pounds from stress. Once I accepted my fate and learned the daily prison operations, I created a routine, which I followed religiously for years. I know I.D.O.C. had my body, but I

Volume 23

refused to give them my mind. Apart of this routine was eating large quantities of food in the evening after eating both the lunch and dinner trays during the day. I'd even go all out when preparing special meals for *Toonami* on Saturday night. I exercised when my house had rec, but I still ate too much. I maintained a weight between 315lbs and 330lbs until February 2018. That's when someone enlightened me about health & nutrition.

While working in the gym, Alejandro "Gonzo" Gonzalez (a friend and coworker) asked me what I wanted for myself. I asked for clarification. He asked about my health goals. This was our second time working together and he critiqued my exercise routine. I consider him an authentic friend because he identified my blind spot—giving me an honest assessment on how poorly I was doing on developing my area(s) of weakness in a respectful and assertive manner. He said I was repeating the same routine as before when working in the gym the first time and I wasn't improving my body.

I explained my weight-loss goals and why I needed to take my health seriously. I have several relatives who had (and still have) bad eating habits in their youth who're paying for it now.

Diabetes and high-blood pressure runs in the family as well. Once I disclosed this personal information, this compelled Gonzo to educate me about health and nutrition because he knew I was doing it for reasons bigger than myself. He asked about my eating habits. I told him I ate the

lunch and dinner trays in dietary and a large dip in the evening which consisted of 1/2 noodle, 1/2 bag of white rice, 1/2 bag of spicy refried beans, 1/2 spicy summer sausage, 4 strips of turkey bacon, 1/4 pickle, 1 pack of jalapeño peppers, 1 turkey stick, 12 pepperoni slices, and one wet pack along with several scoops of melted cheese. That's when he introduced me to the 'Gonzo Diet.'

The Gonzo Diet consists of learning how to count calories, not exceeding the daily calorie limit, and balancing one's exercises with cardio and weight-lifting. Rest is extremely important as well. Gonzo gave me a book called *The Ultimate Calorie, Carb, and Fat Gram Counter 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* by **Lea Ann Holmeister, RD, CDE**, which has calorie counts for over eight thousand foods and beverages listed; including many foods served in dietary. We sat at a table one evening during dayroom with a weekly dietary menu and discussed locating food items in the book and how they're portioned.

He was challenging me to deconstruct a lifetime of bad eating habits. Every prison menu has portion sizes listed next to the food. Do this for each meal and add the totals up (e.g., 7am Meal = 400 cal., 10am Meal = 412 cal., etc.). Prefer eating commissary food? Counting calories is much easier with commissary items because the nutrition labels are on the packages/boxes.

The Gonzo Diet was created not to exceed over 2,500 calories a day—that means not eating foods like cakes, cookies, ice cream, bread, flour tortillas, chips, fruit crisp, pasta, cheeses, popcorn, crackers, candy and pastries. I only drank water and milk during my diet, but others may enjoy coffee in the morning. I created a hand-written calorie counting spreadsheet like the one below and logged everything I ate.

Daily Calorie Counting Sheet (Gonzo 5 Meal Diet 2,500 cal.) (Marcus 4 Meal Diet 2,000 cal.)								
Date	7am Meal	10am Meal	1pm Meal	4pm Meal	7pm Meal	Total Calories	Wk/Mo Total	Weight
1	400	526	489	536	409	2,360		255lbs
2	400	517	398	578	428	2,321		
3	400	399	594	501	483	2,377		
4	400	503	571	402	436	2,312		
5	400	389	375	357	589	2,110		
6	400	409	387	548	483	2,227		
7	400	487	523	520	476	2,406	16,113	253lbs
31	400	368	620	584	496	2,468	64,452	247lbs

I used self-discipline every meal to not exceed the limit. My only cheat days were visiting days. I'd eat a Cheeseburger and two bags of white cheddar popcorn. There were plenty of healthy options in the visiting room like yogurt and fruit cups. My calorie limit on visiting day is 3,000. Once I learned how to count calories, the Gonzo Diet began.

Since we worked in the gym, I did cardio from 8am-10am—running laps around the gym and completing exercises like jumping jacks, step-ups, sit-ups, crunches, lunges, push-ups, burpees, and pull-ups. I'd return to the gym to lift weights from 12pm-2pm—focusing on one muscle

group a day. I weighed myself every 7-10 days and logged my progression. **DON'T** weigh yourself every day. It's pointless. Some days were rougher than others and more self-discipline was needed at certain times.

After 30 days, I discovered I loss 9lbs. This motivated me to go even harder by tweaking the Gonzo Diet and creating the 'Marcus Diet.' The only difference is I reduced the number of meals from 5 to 4 and the daily calorie limit from 2,500 to 2,000. I ate at 7am, 11am, 3pm, and 7pm. This required even more self-discipline because I had more stomach pain, but I pushed through it by drinking lots of water. In five months, I dropped from 315lbs to 235lbs.

The Marcus Diet became a life-style. I'm healthy, more energetic, and smarter about which foods I eat. My weight increased during the pandemic to 280lbs, but I managed reducing it to 250lbs. My winter goal is 235lbs. It took, and still takes, major self-discipline eating healthy and exercising regularly, because there's always someone, or multiple people, cooking burritos, nachos, pizzas, and large dips everyday who'll offer you some. But, remember to show self-discipline by saying "No thank you" and walk away.

People will try convincing you to break your diet, but trust me, **DON'T**. Once you reach your target weight, those same people who tried convincing you to break your diet will ask you how you did it. I remember thinking one day, "How'd I look being skinny?" I'd been obese my whole life.



I watched the movie Creed starring Michael B. Jordan and said, “I think I’ll look like Creed.” I haven’t quite gotten there. I’m sort of stuck looking like a broke a\*\* Will Smith, but I’m still progressing toward my goal.



I wanted to share this story to encourage those who feel like they can’t accomplish something because of their situation. Yes, the judge may have thrown the book at you, but you have to play the cards you’re dealt. You can accomplish amazing things; you just have to show self-discipline and progress forward no matter what. There’s always going to be obstacles to overcome, but if it were easy, then everyone would be doing what you’re trying to do.



Make a list of things you want to complete while being incarcerated and DO IT. The only thing limiting you is your lack of self-discipline. Don’t think for a moment that since you have a lengthy sentence, all hope is lost. Use your time wisely to effect change in your life and others. You’ll never know who’s rooting for you until you step up and go for it.

Special shout out to Alejandro “Gonzo” Gonzalez for educating me, and with many others, about how important caring for the body during youth plays an important part in your future, and special shout outs to Mark “Football” Hamilton for encouraging me to always show self-discipline, and to L.T.S. Shaun Hudson for allowing me to work in the gym for three total years.

# Who are You?

## Vincent Davis - Danville

At Danville, I was a Peer Educator, the youngest to be exact. I facilitated a group called “W.R.A.P”, which stands for *Wellness Recovery Action Plan*. I also facilitated multiple hot topics groups in the program. I choose to write about this because I’ve noticed that it has been hard for certain individuals to adjust back into their family, friends or their communities.

Being a product of poverty, we sometimes adopted a lifestyle that comes with principles we never questioned. In my community, violence was common and drug use and distribution was ramped to the point that we were desensitized to it. Transitioning back into those very same communities, where we destroyed the parks and playgrounds, the storefronts of these hard-working people, or the yards of neighbors who wanted to show us that it was possible to live a simple life, is difficult, as we were led astray by the actions of our ignorance.

Educating myself on where I came from, who I am and where I am headed, has given me a sense of understanding on all the negativity that I contributed to the destruction of my community. Learning who I am has given me strength to express empathy as I hold myself accountable for the actions and seek forgiveness, as I want to invest in those storefronts; hold events, such as community cleaning, back to school games, summertime cookouts and community activities. I will use my story of transformation to give back to those neighbors in the Grand Cross community where I have taken from.

Years ago, a guy asked me “*who are you?*” I couldn’t answer that question then and still struggle with it now. That question made me start to educate myself on my strengths and weaknesses. I challenged everything about myself which gave me strength and confidence to be the man I am today and not who I thought I was or who I was trying to be. No longer exists that 21 year old who made that fatal decision because of the principles he lived by that changed his life.

If I am not these things, who am I? I am a young, intelligent 29 year old African American male, who is currently working hard to reach his full potential as a brother, uncle, son, husband, and neighbor of his community. I will never compromise who I am for what others want me to be. I am a leader, a friend, a mentor, a giver, who is passionate about growth and always encourages people to measure their growth of *who they were, what they are, and who they are working towards*. I am Vincent Davis from Grand Crossings community in Chicago, Illinois, now tell me... *Who Are You?*

# Challenge Yourself

## Donevin Quick - Kewanee

Many in society believe the keys to success involve “continued education” or “higher learning”. In prison many of us have expressed a desire to learn a skill, trade, or subject not offered by the education department where we’re at. We all have 24 hours in each day, and too many of them are wasted watching mindless TV programs, reading fiction, or playing games in the dayroom.

Before we were incarcerated many of us spent most of our day pursuing the fast life that landed us here. Whether it was drug money, the high of a drug, street clout, or the attention of an attractive companion we put in a lot of time and effort. Why do we all too often get complacent in prison? It’s like we accept the views of the naysayers in society... that we’re lazy, under or uneducated, or trying to live off the system or ill-gotten gains.

I ask you to challenge yourself by finding literature on a subject that has income potential. Be it a skill or trade like construction, home repair, business, real estate, finance, a foreign language, or the likes. Start studying an hour twice a day. Why not two hours once a day? Because most psychologists agree that after an hour of learning a new subject the mind reaches capacity and begins to wander. So, set aside an AM hour and a PM hour. In just 1 month you will have studied for 60 hours.

A couple months down the road add another AM and PM hour to your studies. You are now putting in over 100 hours a month. Experts agree that in just 10,000 hours one will master any subject. This holds true for any skill, trade, art form, or foreign language. While you may not have the hands-on experience associated with the skill or trade you're studying, keep in mind no one does their first day on the job. Just imagine how far ahead you will be when the boss asks if you know how to do a task.

While it's unlikely many of us will get out of prison and achieve financial success as an athlete, musician, or gambler; the world is always in need of construction workers, business owners, accountants, and translators. And, these jobs pay very well with no risk of returning to prison. Rather than let this time do you... do this time! The only shot you're guaranteed to miss is the one you don't take!



*Donevin is a member of the Kewanee LSRC Rotary Community Corps – a program funded by Rotary International*

# Anyway

## Demario R. Brooms - Kewanee

Have you ever paid attention to the fact that as people, whether man or woman, we wear a lot of hats? To remove any confusion, I'll explain what I mean when I say, "we wear a lot of hats." As for myself, these are some of the hats that I wear: Son, brother, dad, granddad, uncle, and nephew. Now that that's been clarified, I'll continue.

Each of these hats that we wear causes us to be someone different while being the same person at our core. Quick example: The things that I will and won't allow as a dad aren't the same things that I can and can't allow as an uncle because my nieces and nephews are not my children. Yet, I love my nieces and nephews just as much as I love my daughter. Facts.

Another example is that a person that has multiple children loves all of them unconditionally but each child needs a certain type of attention that the others don't. The parent shows each of them that extra attention needed without alienating the others. In both instances, unconditional love was/is at the core of the person.

If you're wondering where I'm going with this, let me make it plain for you with a quote from Joyce Meyer, "Wherever you go, there you are."

Although this can refer to the physical, it doesn't...it's referencing out inner-selves. We try to hide who we TRULY are in certain instances. Most times it's because we fear that if we let people actually see us, we'll be seen in a certain light that will either make us feel uncomfortable or vulnerable. Who wants to feel that way? No one. For that very reason, we put on faces and pretend to be someone we're not.

Regardless, if we're dumbing ourselves down or propping ourselves up, we are doing it. This is not me judging, it's me letting you know that I understand. Take guys in prison. When you talk to most of them, most have been the roughest, toughest, richest drug-dealer to ever exist. You know who they are because you hear the stories on the galleries, decks, and yards of the facilities you're housed in. Let that sink in for a second then think about this: When was the last time you heard someone talk about the good that they've done? It's been either a very long time ago or never. Why is that? It's because no one wants to be considered nice (syn. sweet, friendly, a saint).

Being nice is seen as a flaw. Everybody wants to keep up with the Joneses regardless of what facet of life it pertains to, not just with material items like it used to be. We're at a point in 2023 that people have gotten where they no longer want to be like or keep up with the Joneses, they *want to be the Joneses!* Hell, they'll even backdoor you to do so. Forget what the world says about who or what you should be and what you should have in order to enjoy life. At the end of the day all anyone can do is be who they are at their core.

People try to hide themselves but they can only do that for so long before their “true-selves” show up. So, if life, friends, family, significant others, or any other person or entity wants you to be anything other than yourself you should remove them/it from your life.

In your transformation, change, or simply being you, you have the ability to inspire and destroy generational curses created by those before you. I ask that after reading this you search your heart for those things and those individuals that make you happy. I can assure you that those individuals are the ones that allow you to be yourself...you want to keep them around. Change for the better has never caused the demise of anyone besides those attempting to straddle the fence.

Remember, just because you change doesn't mean that your former or current affiliates have so in changing yourself you need to change the company you keep. This may also include the place you frequent. It comes down to what you want for yourself and your family.

I'll close with this: In order to be success in life, you have to be your **BEST-SELF**. To reach this point, you have to block out all of the outside noise...laugh anyway, love anyway, share anyway and be who **YOU** are anyway!!!!

**DISCLAIMER:** What I'm asking you to do isn't easy, it will be one of the **HARDEST** things you've ever done in your life. However, if you challenge yourself, the risk is **DEFINITELY** worth the reward. Being “rich” is relative so invest in yourself and I can assure that the ROI (Return On Investment) will yield you a **LIFETIME** of dividends!



# My Transformation

## Quinton Johnson - Kewanee

My name is Quinton Johnson and this is my story.

For my transformation to begin, I first had to accept I wasn't happy with what I became. Have you ever looked at a mirror and wasn't able to recognize who the person looking at you was? You see, in prison, you can be anything you want to be, but why not just be yourself?

Most men feel as though having many women makes actual sense—almost like shoes right, options if you will. For me, I recognized I was masking a fear of being alone. Literally afraid to be by myself. So coming to prison served my fear on a platter. Not only that, but how about all my options left me once I hit NRC. I remember being in Danville Correctional Center broken, lonely and, honestly, afraid. Not in the sense of other individuals, nah, I was afraid of what my future looked like because all things that were familiar now were gone. It's an interesting and uncomfortable feeling knowing full well that change is necessary.

Often times in prison, you feel you have no one to talk to. As men, we see vulnerability as a weakness. Therefore, expressing ourselves also exposes that very weakness. Very often, we put Band-Aids on trauma. How is transformation possible here? Staying stuck seems much cooler right?

You know I begun to see life in a different way, as if I was worthy of being alive. My obligations, my priorities and responsibilities were pushed to the forefront and I accepted the harsh truth that I could not return home that same broken immature person who resembled a man. No, I had to grow up, take responsibility for the mistakes, and begin dealing with how I could become the man I'm called and destined to be.

First, I asked my children to forgive me for not being there. Second, I began going to Mental Health at Vienna Correctional Center. I had to acknowledge that where I was is a result of bad behavior and bad decisions. When I tell you Mrs. Bettis (like Jerome) didn't go light on me. She pushed me in such a way that helped me see I had to change. No excuses; change hurts; and dealing with who you are versus who you thing you are. My transformation has been hard and challenging but ask yourself this question, when I look back over my life, over my greatest accomplishments, were they not hard to accomplish?

In closing, I must give you the actual definition of transformation from the Pocket Oxford American Dictionary & Thesaurus 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition  
**Transformation** – n. *a marked change in nature, form, or appearance.* Real talk, I'm 41 years old and I honestly didn't grow up until I was 38. I'm not ashamed to say that because at the end of that I hope to light a fire in someone's life. Be inspired and motivated.

Peace,  
Quinton Johnson

# Jubilee Restoration Transformation

When I think of transformation, it is like a cue for my mind to think “jubilee”. The bible says “*and you shall hollow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you; and you shall return every man unto his family.*” (Emphasis mine)

The dictionary defines *Jubilee* as:  
*a year of **emancipation** and **restoration** provided by Hebrew law to be kept ever 50 years by the emancipation of Hebrew slaves...*”*restoration of alienated lands to their former owners and the omission of all cultivation of the land.*

Enough is enough...Alright already!

The biblical jubilee represents a set time to give back, not to say life or natural life. Our contribution says to sentence for the offense and to **restore** (give back, return, reinstate) to useful citizenship. Even the constitution had a boundary. (Emphasis mine) where did the spirit come

from to “write on top of” the Godly law of Jubilee, or the Constitutional law that says to “restore”?

Restorative justice would be the search of how to unseat the oppressive spirit that wants to take life against the spirit of jubilee and transformation that want to give life (proclaim liberty) back. It is a heavy load to lift, but it begins in the renewing of the mind; not



*Ronnie Carrasquillo*

Senior Editor  
TWO ROADS

Volume 23

to be conformed to the it is the world that “wrote on top” of the law. The naysayers to a jubilee spirit, a restoration spirit.

There is no manifestation of Jubilee law; there is no lifting of the law on top of the Constitutional restoration law until there is a self-transformation. Education! The beginning of my transformation starts at Romans 12:2 “to be renewed in the mind”; thereafter, I had to interject article 1, section 11, that says:

*Restore [me] to “useful citizenship”*

Which really says, “I was once upon a time not a useful citizen.”

Once this restoration is landed on me, I haven’t looked back that I once was not useful that they can give me life; but, I began training myself and many others; that I am into 47 years and still preaching the word where I find Jesus, the master restorer, the master at giving back and in that post I stay. I’m praying for the movements that will adopt the talk of jubilee – not life that will talk restoration – not natural life. Change is where true restoration lives.

Amen

# TWO ROADS

## IDOC's Social Justice Program

Men and Women in custody, as well as your family members that are involved through your struggle, please come and join the conversation. Through the connecting and the restorative power of sharing personal narratives, your unique voice will no doubt contribute to the healing, motivation, education and inspiration of others, including yourself. Make no mistake, your life and experiences have value, but beyond that, they have **POWER!** These are the topics for the rest of 2023:

### TOPICS

### Submit by:

**ADDICTION AND RECOVERY**

**September 8 , 2023**

**VIEWPOINTS**

**October 6, 2023**

**PARENTING FROM PRISON**

**November 10, 2023**

**RE-ENTRY FEARS**

**December 15, 2023**

We are asking our community to present ideas for the 2024 issues. No idea is bad because we want everyone to be a part of the process.

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

Please send your submission and  
scanned photo

[doc.tworoads@illinois.gov](mailto:doc.tworoads@illinois.gov)

"ATTN: TWO ROADS 2024 Ideas"

### Mail submissions and 2024 issue ideals to:

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

**Attn: TWO ROADS EDITOR**

2021 Kentville Road

Kewanee IL 61443

[idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoadse-zine.html](http://idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoadse-zine.html)