



TWO
ROADS

Volume 25

Viewpoints



IDOC's Social Justice Program

Part 2

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

Volume 25

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**R.I.P.
Cassidy "Cash" Winston
(1968-2023)
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TWO ROADS
THE VIEWPOINTS ISSUE
Part 2 of 3

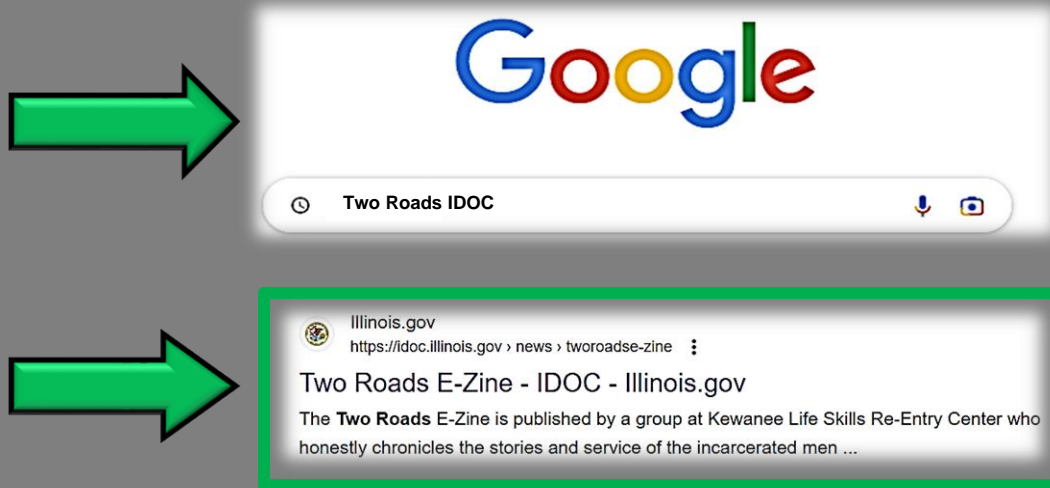
TWO ROADS

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TWO ROADS

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WELCOME TO THE FAMILY!

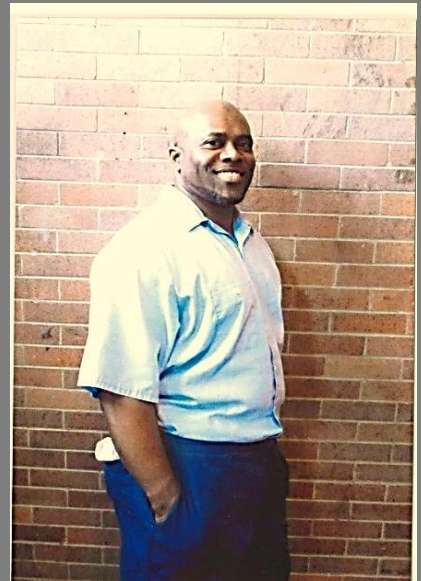
Dedicated To Our Cause

In The Name of Allah, The Merciful, The Mercy Giving

I appreciate the invitation extended for me to become a member of the TWO ROADS team. Anyone who knows me knows that I've always been an advocate of building a better you, me...us. It's never mattered to me that we find ourselves incarcerated. Life is life, and every day we're given, we're given an opportunity to better ourselves. I've found it's of the utmost importance to practice two things in order for us to polish our character: (1) have a firm spiritual foundation; and (2) have a circle of people (friends/confidants) who you build trust with.

These are two elements in which my Daddy impressed upon his children. Here in prison, I've found the value in his rearing. Having faith or a spiritual foundation grounds us in the idea that our actions, thoughts & desires are rooted & connected to something. This foundation creates a self-awareness and self-imposed boundaries.

As I've stated, I've always advocated being better. I've practiced Al-Islam for over three decades, and



Hafis HAAQ

New Senior Editor
TWO ROADS

I've kept men with good character in my circle for the same amount of time. I recently left Dixon C.C., but not long before I transferred here, one of my closest confidants (Lane), CHECKED me in the rawest form because from his point of view, I acted as a bully towards someone else. He didn't support my actions because we were friends (brothers). He stood on the front line of what was right & correct. He didn't wait for us to be alone to tell me that I was in the wrong. He told me in front of everyone.

After we discussed it in private and he learned what the whole picture was, we laughed, but that situation informed me that I'd made the correct step by sharing circles with him. If your "friends" can't or aren't willing to correct you in the moment, or you can't/won't listen to them when you're in the wrong, then you have no failsafe.

I was invited to join the TWO ROADS team by one of the editors who's been here and is well established within the Kewanee community, Mr. Delaney – a man I've known for close to a quarter century. I can't even tell you how long it's been since we've been together, but he knew about me what I knew about him, although we're much older, we have both maintained the characters which bonded us in the first place.

I make note of these men in an attempt to show the importance of those we view as being worthy of our time & space. We have and will make misjudgments in people. We'll also make mistakes and be imperfect, but, when the multitude of those in our circle have authentic characters and are willing to stand for what is most right, we cannot fail to be anything less than whole & sound.

A Walk in Her Shoes

Melvin King - Kewanee

Domestic Violence – The infliction of injury by one family or household member on another.

When someone close to you strikes out at you or makes you feel afraid or uncomfortable; when someone hits, punches, slaps, kicks, shoves, or bites you; when someone threatens to hurt you, throw things at you, destroys personal property or sentimental items; or when someone forces another to have sex against their will...that is domestic violence. Unfortunately, this is something that's plagued our society for far too long, with no end in sight.

Most domestic violence victims are women. In fact, intimate partner homicides made up 40-50% of all murders of women in the United States in 2013. Fast forward to today, I'm sure that number has increased significantly. Why does this happen among people who supposedly care about each other? Unfortunately, there's no easy answer to this question.

What we do know is that physical abuse—among family and friends—rarely starts out as severe violence, but unless someone takes action to stop it from its inception, it'll probably get worse and happen more often. I started taking part in Domestic Violence Awareness back in 2013, when I was in Pinckneyville C.C. I was part of a hot topic session titled *Domestic Violence*. We had people there who committed the act of domestic violence as well as people who were victims of it.

We talked about what domestic violence is, the different types, and its effects on family members, mainly children. During my time in Pontiac C.C., I continued taking part in programs that brought awareness to domestic violence like “A Walk in Her Shoes”. This program was put together by the women of *Safe Journey Domestic Violence Shelter for Women and Children*.

This program gave individuals in custody the opportunity to walk in the shoes of those who were abused with the hope that the outcome would be positive. Most of the time we learned they ended up in the hospital or the morgue. In the end, we all had the chance to donate to the women and children of the shelter.

I felt good being able to help out. Our society usually ignores physical abuse (or even glorifies it) until it causes severe injury, but if people would deal with it BEFORE it gets serious, we could prevent many violent crimes. We need to reject the idea that physical abuse is okay!



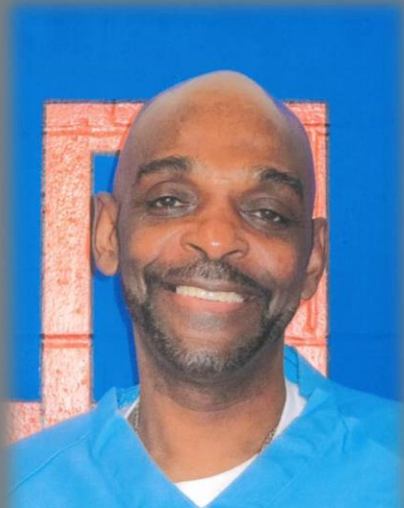
My Viewpoint

In this life I've come to believe each day is a blessing and that the day is truly what I make of it. However, in all things, I must allow the will of God to be done in my life and in all my actions and interactions. You see in this life of ups & downs I had my fair share of life altering experiences, which left me with a certain joy that comes with each day I awake healthy, humble also happy to be a part of another day.

In this day I'm presented with many opportunities to do God's will which may be just sharing the good news of today. You see, in each encounter, you're presented with an opportunity to share parts of yourself or some needed advice that will no doubt make the next person's day or even week.

Who really can say what the next person you meet may be going through or dealing with and what affect you may have on them and their situation. So, that's when you share your blessing, your advice, or just your presence and it never costs you anything.

However, under every action lies the intentions of those you interact with while being mindful of them, and their actions can be and will forever be tricky if not sometimes disappointing.



Kelly "KB" Bennett

New Associate Editor
TWO ROADS

Now, the question you must ask yourself at this point is, “Do I take their intentions or actions personally?” My answer is no. I cannot, or better yet, I refuse to take another’s actions personally because in his choices lies his intent. So, if there's no physical touch, how do I take his decisions personally when they are his to start with? Please understand it has taken me many years to arrive at this space in my life. In the book, *The 4 Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz, he stresses four fundamentals that ring true in every situation this life has placed before me:

1. Make my words impeccable,
2. Never assume,
3. Never take things personally, and
4. Always do my best.

I found those things to be a great design for living a life somewhat stress free. However, life tends to happen. Equipped with other tools acquired over time, I can handle any problem placed before me properly; hence my viewpoint is and remains.

The day is exactly what I make of it. I have no control over what the next person does or says. I have no control over a lot of things I encounter in the course of the day I'm blessed to be a part of; however, I do have control of my actions when I do face these encounters, whatever they may be. The first thing is to recognize my feelings, accept them for what they are and then react accordingly.

I can honestly admit this isn't how I handled things in my past and this I do regret because my actions caused a lot of pain and suffering for a lot of

undeserving people. For that, I do humbly apologize. For the family of my victim, their loss will forever be a driving force in my transformation and my efforts to be a far better man and citizen in this society. You see though I do view each and every day as a blessing, I also view each and every day of my life as a day undeserved for many of reasons.

The number one reason is through my actions. I caused a family great pain and a loss some may never recover from. This is the reason, from my viewpoint, I'll never be deserving of the Blessings I received. However, through his good grace, I'm forgiven so each day is another opportunity to spread the very same Blessings I so humbly receive. Most of the time it's spread joyously. Thank you for your time this is only my viewpoint! I do pray I have the opportunity to give to you which is so graciously given to me in passing.

Now I'd like to share with you my viewpoint on communication in relationships. I believe all relationships are grounded in the art of communication. To communicate properly, you must first understand the fact the words we use everyday are powerful and often misused by those who don't understand their power. To truly understand my point of view, I'd like to use the way my lovely wife and I grew into each other as an example. You see here is a woman who, through failed relationships, grew to accept the physical, emotional and verbally abusive nature of relationships as normal.

She armed herself against most words spoken because they were often used as weapons towards her. To combat that, I often spoke to her using a soft tone—never raising my voice—to explain my intentions. However, I did

Addressing and preventing one form of violence may have an impact on preventing other forms of violence.



Teach safe and healthy relationship skills

- Social-emotional learning programs for youth
- Healthy relationship programs for couples



Engage Influential adults and peers

- Men and boys as allies in prevention
- Bystander empowerment and education
- Family-based programs



Disrupt the developmental pathways toward partner violence

- Early childhood home visitation
- Preschool enrichment with family engagement
- Parenting skill and family relationship programs
- Treatment for at-risk children, youth, and families



Create protective environments

- Improve school climate and safety
- Improve organizational policies and workplace climate
- Modify the physical and social environments of neighborhoods



Strengthen economic supports for families

- Strengthen household financial security
- Strengthen work-family supports



Support survivors to increase safety and lessen harms

- Victim-centered services
- Housing programs
- First responder and civil legal protections
- Patient-centered approaches
- Treatment and support for survivors of IPV, including teen dating violence

Congratulations ME!

Robert McCullough - Danville

I have finally did it, I got my associates degree and I am not going to lie it has been very difficult achieving this goal. Because I was sentenced to 100% and that makes it hard to get into any programs when you are serving that much time, and do not receive any good time.

However, with patience perseverance and persistence, I've managed to do so many positive things on this 16-year journey. Nothing has been given to me. I have earned everything. In order to be a good leader you have to be a good follower also. The main reason why I enjoy being a Peer Educator is because I get to help people rebuild misguided dreams. I owe it to myself and to my community to try and make the world a better place. I found purpose in life and it's to help people. "Use this Time Wisely!"

I'm a Barber, Hospice care taker, Author, Screenplay Writer, Rapper, Poet, Mentor...I am whatever I want to be. I am not bragging but it is good to pat yourself on the back sometimes especially when you come from nothing and you were headed for self-destruction so congratulations to me and for those who continue to strive from success and to those that do not believe try to change that attitude.

I Changed My Mindset

Clifford 'Yank' Baker - Pinckneyville

Hello my brothers and sisters. My name is Yank. I'd like to share my story with you. I've been locked up since I was 15 years old for first degree murder. I'm now 28 years old. I was given a sentence of life without parole when I was 15. I've been fighting for a second chance ever since.

On an appeal, I gave back my life sentence for another Defacto life sentence for a life sentence of 85 years at 100%. I've made some mistakes I admit that. My upbringing wasn't perfect. I grew up in a little country town with no mother in my life. My dad was gone most of the time and drunk the rest of the time. He raised me with violence and made me numb to pain and emotion. I fought in school all the time and was a violent youth with no sense of direction. I was 11 years old when my Grandma died, and her death broke me. I started drinking and smoking weed for the first time. From that point on, I was depressed and suicidal. After getting into a fight with my dad, I shot myself with a .22 trying to take my life. About one month before this case, I was placed in a psych ward.



Once all of this happened, it was like a light switch changed me. I'm not going to say it was easy to change. I had to fight a little when I first got locked up. **The difference was, my mindset stopped being destructive and I wanted to do better for myself.** I started caring about my education more. At seventeen years old I graduated High School as Valedictorian at Kewanee (when it was still DOJJ).

Once I turned 18, I was sent to adult IDOC. And, yes I was scared. I was an 18 year old with a baby face in Menard Correctional—the most violent prison in Illinois. **Fortunately, I had many people who looked after me and made sure I didn't stray on to the wrong path.** I held down jobs for the majority of my bit. At this time, IDOC won't allow me to attend any more school because I have too much time. So, I attended the Blackstone Paralegal program and graduated in 2021 with honors.

I took it upon myself to change my mindset before it got me hurt or locked in here forever. I learned many skills to keep me on the right track once I return home. I'm a talented artist, painter and a paralegal. I know how to cook and cut hair. I know how to take care of myself in order to survive. And all of this I learned in prison.

I'm not proud of what I 've done in my past. But, I'm proud of who I've become. Yes, I slip up and go into my destructive mindsets at times, but it's never too late to change and be the best version of yourself you can be. Keep moving forward and never give up. Thanks for listening and I hope to share more with you in the future.

A Lot of Small Things

Chris Jensen - Menard

A lot of small things in life motivate all of us for instant gratification. I came to realize that I'm driven by making amends, making myself proud of what I'm doing in life and my future. I'm motivated to make myself a better person—someone I can be proud of. I'm inspired to help people and show kindness. Maybe, just maybe, someone will see that kindness and want to show some their self.

It's all in the small choices we make in life that makes us who we really are. By trying to focus on these small choices, I'm learning to be better. I can only be me; you can only be you. We can't change how another person acts toward us, but you can't let it change how you act towards them. I won't let it change the kindness or help I'll try and offer. I found peace and comfort in the Lord, and he's helping show me a better way. Now you don't have to be religious to choose giving a helping hand. For me though, I'm at peace knowing I am forgiven and accepted no matter what I've done, and I have done a lot of messed up things in my life as I'm sure we all have.

We've been given the opportunity to reflect on those things, and this isn't the person I wanted to be. I looked for acceptance and, no matter what I did well or bad, the streets accepted me. Sometimes the grimier, more brutal the action was the more I was accepted. I became something, somebody I

wasn't, and I didn't want to be that person anymore. I tried thinking back at what made me happy. Making other people happy, whether it was helping in some way where it was needed, giving them gifts, or looking out for somebody. Their happiness and joy was infectious. I don't know what the future holds. I do know this isn't it—not it for none of us.

Music

Jason Whitfield - Menard

Music is my life, music is my soul,
My spirit is unbreakable as the sound of my music goes
Music is what drives me, inspire me
To make music to inspire someone, to help someone
Get through some rough times in life
Break ups, deaths to create life, to save life
Music is what drives me; music is my form of communication
Music is my teacher my form of education
My heart beats to the beat of its own drum out of dedication
Can you hear it? I been hearing it for 37 years
Sentenced to 45 years at 19 but music took away my fears
Music is my voice, music chose me I ain't have a choice
Music drives me without music it's not me
I might be incarcerated but music makes me free
So on this highway of life with my top down music drives me.

Who Am I?

Joy Denton - Logan

Who Am I?

I'll give you a hint,

I've come into your life and made you feel like I was heaven sent.

Then we'll get into a small argument (nothing major) and will call you out of your name. Even though I will apologize – it's just the beginning of a vicious game.

A couple of days later...maybe even a week, something YOU DID will provoke me and I'll say everything that you've confided in me that **hurts you, breaks you down, humiliates you, and will tear you down**...I will use it against you. Is this the end? Of course not! Because I am going to apologize again and do what I need to do to make it right—and you're going to believe me because you honestly believe in your heart that this love we have is true.

The sad part is things may escalate, and this time I WILL HIT YOU and MAKE YOU CRY.

If you are one of the lucky ones, you won't die. But 3 things will happen: You will continue to follow the same vicious cycle with the same person or with another; You will break up with the person and realize that you're broken to no repair and believe it's your fault; or You will FINALLY defend yourself and end up in jail or even worse...a prison cell.

Have you figured out WHO AM I?

Well, let me introduce myself...my name is Domestic Violence.

Let's Talk

Children

- Children who are exposed to domestic violence, typically against their mothers, are more than likely to be perpetrators or victims themselves....for a child, domestic violence lasts a LIFETIME.

Relationships

- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men experience intimate partner violence.

Domestic Violence is not simply human nature, it is a learned behavior. People who choose to abuse have learned from that violence is an appropriate way to control others from:

- Family Experiences
- Media and
- Societal Acceptance



Brought to you by:

and the

FREEDOM
 **HOUSE**

Change

Ja'von Boyd - Logan

From the time I can remember, I was angry and confused. From the time I could remember, I was physically and emotionally abused. My Anger turned to cold rage. Every day I was in a daze... running away from home, smoking weed & drinking alcohol. I felt so alone. For me becoming a product of my environment. Hearing voices in my head on a daily. Not wanting to live. Yet, I still struggle with finding True Love.

Change

Real change came about when I submitted to God. First, I had to surrender my rage. Second, I had to forgive. Third, I had to change the way I was thinking. I have to say, Glory to God. I'm a new creature in Christ. I love myself. I know who I am and what I am. I know that I Love & Serve God. I'm no longer mad at my mother or myself. I have forgiven & learned. Every day is a lesson.

I'm grateful & very thankful I am who I am today. Open and true. Oh, who knew what God could do! Striving for my goals. I now know what God has created for me. To serve and comfort. To share my story. One day at a time. Trusting in God even in the bad times. Now I know Love, thanks to God! 22-years in the wilderness of IDOC. Listening, watching, learning, but most importantly, GROWING... Change. It's lasting when you change the way you think.

Jamie, aka, Ja'von Boyd

Opening Up

Jojo Griffin - Centralia

Hello my mane is Joseph Griffin, but everybody calls me JoJo. I'd like to talk about opening up. When I first started my bid, I was lost and helpless and didn't know where to turn. I kept people at a distance; I didn't want to speak to anybody for a short time after starting my bid. Some people who know me now will say I'm lying because the person I am today isn't the person I was at the beginning of my time. You ask how do I open up in a place like this?

Well, it didn't happen overnight; I really started trusting people again. Some people say you can't make friends in jail and that isn't true. I met some great people who I do love and consider my friend and sometimes I consider them my BFF's. These people helped me to open more about myself. See, you have to find people who kinda live the same lives you do or understand what you may be going through.

I'm a transgender woman who loves her life and I love the people who help me open up about how I feel, what I want out of life and stuff like that. Those people I still keep in touch with on a day-to-day basis (You know who you are!). These same people showed me how to become a better person for myself and not for anybody else. You **HAVE** to want to change to open up. So, if you look at me now, you'll see a beautiful and smart woman.

If I may, I'd like to say to my sisters and brothers in IDOC who are afraid of opening up or trusting people again: Give it a try! Know that you're not alone. You are very much loved by so many people. Don't surround yourself with the people who don't understand what you may be going through. I'm always here for anybody who needs it. Thank you for letting me share my story.

I hope next time I'll have more to say. Love you all...keep your heads up.

Love Always Jo Jo

NOTE: TWO ROADS would like to thank Ms. Griffin, Mr. Boyd, and all of those in the 2SLGBTQAI+ community that are willing to share their stories. It's important for those to be comfortable and respected from their Viewpoint. Thank you.



Motivation

Many things in life, both internal and external, motivate me to lead a more productive life. I spent most of my life making poor choices and then trying to run from the results. There came a time in my life when I finally said, "I have had enough. I need to try something different." The willingness to change for me was to take the first step in the right direction. I don't know when that exact moment was, but I do remember many small and large instances leading to my desire to change. One of those was my path to accepting Islam as my way of life. I shared this in our past article on Personal Transformations.

Another major milestone was in 2018 when I heard from my daughter for the first time in five years. In my cell during mail call, I got the letter. I was so excited to hear from her. I opened the letter and read it. I didn't know what to expect when I opened it, but what I read was not it.

She laid into me, she was angry and disgusted with my behavior and actions, but what was most was hurt, was I left her and wasn't there to protect nor guide her. I couldn't listen to her and had no clue who she was, what type of music she liked, her new favorite movies, her first love, her favorite food, etc. All I knew was the little girl I left without her daddy. I closed my door because I didn't want anybody to see my tears.



Jesse J. Myers

Associate Editor
TWO ROADS

That old adage the truth hurts never rung so true. I was crushed. How did I get here to this moment in my life? My old way of thinking set it and I sat down and wrote. I had to set the record straight. There were some facts she didn't have right and I needed to let her know the truth.

I went through the next year doing the same old things; being the old self-destructive Jesse everyone knew me to be. I buried myself in shame and hid behind my lies like a coward. What I failed to see was I was still being selfish thinking about my truth and not hers. I really wasn't concerned about those things that were actually truth.

What I was afraid of was the truth which I hid behind lies may be exposed and then who I really was would come out. What I started learning was I had to change my way of thinking and be willing to try something different. Through Islamic principles, I discovered the importance of truth. Through my position as a Building Blocks mentor, I saw the power of being honest with others. Sharing my absolute truthful self for the first time felt great and seemed to help others share their truth.

When my daughter first spoke again, I had to think about what I was going to do different. And truth was the answer. I have since decided that nothing will change unless I'm absolutely honest about my past. My past isn't who I am; just who I was. I'm only defined by my past if I keep living in it or running from it. My daughter deserves to know the truth about who her dad is. She deserves to know how I got to where I am today. She deserves the best version of me. I deserve to live as the best version of myself.

My external motivation is family: my daughter; my grandson; my mother; my sisters; and other people I love and cherish. My internal motivation is truth. My desire to be the best version of myself. My desire to stop running—to stop hiding, to experience something different, to embrace my past for what it is – a culmination of some good and some bad choices. My past isn't all bad. After all, from me came a beautiful wise young woman who is a great mother. She learned from her father's mistakes, and she refuses to let any circumstance of life define her. My goal is to use the truth and my experience to help others.

For those of you who're parents, don't think you're only a teacher. You're also a student. There are many things we can learn from our children. I'm currently building back my relationship with my daughter Kiley. It's not easy because I broke trust, but the only way for her to trust me is to be sincere and honest and by doing the right things. In addition, I listen and learn from her every time we speak.

What Inspires Me

Angelo Clark - Centralia

What inspires me about this life is knowing the great power I hold which I choose to use for good. For the rest of the days, I walk this beautiful earth, I'm not my past, but I am my future. Which is bright. I have a story to tell, and I'm going to make sure the world knows who I am and how great I am. What I have to say is not very much about this topic. I'm a strong believer that action speaks louder than words. With that being said, just wait and see.

PEACE AND BLESSINGS.

Untitled

Tameka Newson - Logan

Domestic Violence is such a touchy subject, and though it gets talked about, it's never given the full light it deserves. We often sit back and view this worldwide phenomenon in view of partner against partner violence, but it's sooo much broader than that.

To look at me, you'd never see someone who was beaten daily. Not by the hands of a man or just someone I chose to love, but by the very person who love me to love me. I didn't have to look outside of my home to receive my first black eye, bloodied nose, or busted lips. I experienced it all at the hands of my very own mother.

She was supposed to love me and teach me how to love. However, she taught me my word meant nothing. She said I was designed to lie on my back I was never going to amount to anything but compensation for someone else. I wouldn't realize until I was well into my thirties that what I saw as normal was actually gender-based violence, domestic, violence, and sex-trafficking. So, this is an especially sensitive subject for me.

I'm not a victim, I'm a survivor. I'm writing this to bring awareness. After 18 ½ years of continual incarceration, lying to myself, and finally embracing my truth, I'm so thankful to God for all of the healing that's taken place in my life.

I'm able to boldly speak up and speak out. Being able to share has helped others to embrace their past. This isn't to say that domestic violence in my home is the only way I experienced it. This is to say your early experiences shape the path you follow. In intimate relationships, if I didn't experience this violence mentally, physically, emotionally, sexually or financially, I couldn't be happy (although I was continuously miserable).

Now I know who I am and most importantly whose I am—neither one is optional. I actually want all those who've hurt me in the past to know:
I Forgive you,
I don't blame you nor am I holding a grudge, and
It's time for you to forgive you.

If this message isn't for you, maybe it's still meant for you to do - have you? Forgiveness is never for the other person, but for your own healing. You need to heal and grow for you, so you can be whole, happy and healthy.

Domestic violence isn't just one thing, and it truly comes in multiple forms. We don't have to be what others say we are. We all have the final say. Ultimately, our past only builds us into the powerhouses we have yet to become. Remember, we are works in progress, not perfection.

- Phoenixx

TWO ROADS

Presents

The TIME Issue

We will look into the inner workings of the women and men in custody, as they explore the mental and physical anguish of doing time in the Illinois Department of Corrections.

We are asking those who have served more than 25 years for the men and more than 15 years for the women to write and share their stories of hope, change, ambition and progress. We feel it merits understanding, because this idea of a moment in one's life changing one's direction and purpose in life is integral to the rehabilitation process. Who knows, you might change someone's life.

Without staff support:

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Outsiders and Individuals-In-Custody

(WITH Staff Support)

Please send your submission and

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"ATTN: TIME 2024"

NEW Deadline: February 2, 2024

Fight the Good Fight

Daniel Maciewski – Big Muddy River

This isn't just a story of the human spirit. It's a story of faith, perseverance and God's miracles in action. It's not an easy story and, like most real stories, it's not finished because more will be revealed. Most importantly, it's a story about the human condition.

My name is Daniel Maciewski. I've been incarcerated at Big Muddy River C.C. since 2020. Since my arrival, I've had the privilege to meet people from many walks in life. The true blessing is being able to witness and learn from these individuals and adapt what I've learned to my life.

Since being here, I've worked as a dietary cook and health care attendant. In the world I drove trucks and played and recorded music (I've got music on YouTube and Sound cloud). I've been a kidney cancer survivor since 2012. Music is one of my biggest passions in this life. My dad played the accordion when I was a kid. When my kids were little, I played the guitar for them, and they'd dance and have their picture taken with my guitar.

I've played publicly in Iowa, Wisconsin and in Minnesota. I've had the chance to play with the members of Lynyrd Skynyrd,

Molly Hatchett, Head East, Alice in Chains and Maximus. Personally, I'm not a good musician. Music to me is the closest I could ever get to God. In early 2022, I'm blessed to be a part of the music department at B.M.R.C.C, able to take music lessons and be a member of the band. The band has been able perform shows like rock, Christmas and country for individuals in custody and staff.

The real focus of this story is the music teacher in the L.T.S. music department, Andrew Pfeifer. He's one of the most technically talented musicians I know. His approach to music education isn't easy, but it's vital to understanding the importance of music theory and musical expression. Drew not only teaches students, but he also gives them everything they need to understand on how to play music and how to become the best musician they can be. He's been a great role model in many people's lives—not just mine—and this story is to express my gratitude in being blessed to have him in my life.

After getting to know Drew, I discovered we have a lot in common. Besides a love for music, he's also driven trucks and rode motorcycles in his life. And believe it or not, his birthday is one day before my daughter's birthday. In 2022, He was diagnosed with terminal stage four cancer. Since being diagnosed, I've witnessed him fight this battle while never giving up on his passion in life which is playing and teaching music. Even to this day, he plays with soul, spirit and energy as any other time.

Simply, I see and witness to a story about will, survival, perseverance, and inspiration unfold. Even while battling the disease, he teaches and plays with

the same passion as ever before. I'm truly blessed to witness God's creation in action. He's made some progress in the hopes of a recovery and the road is a long one.

His motivation and drive to not just persevere but to succeed in this trial is a testament for anyone who's walked down the path or know anyone who has. I'm so blessed to know and learn from such a person on so many different levels. The prayers of many are with him in his fight and I'm proud to be one of his students and his health care attendant. One of the songs we learned together that brings this letter into perspective is one of my favorite songs. It's a song I used in my own recovery of addiction and battle with cancer. Fight the Good Fight by Triumph; it fits in everything especially here.

“Don't Get Discouraged, Don't Be Afraid....you can make it through another day....

Hang in there my brother; Fight the Good Fight – God has you on this.

Thank You.

Daniel

My Viewpoint

Glen Schoffner - Shawnee

What drives or motivates me? When I first read this, something in me triggered to respond. As I thought about it, nothing came to me right away. This made me feel bad because everything that's alive is motivated by something. I know the old me would've said money, cars and women. I still like those things, but that isn't the reason I wake up and persevere through another day. In the Bible Heb. 11:1 says "*Now faith is being sure we'll get what we hope for. It is being sure of what we cannot see.*"

One thing I think about every day is a life outside of these IDOC walls. So, my faith motivates me to keep up the good fight. Isaiah 51:14 says, "*The one in chains will soon be set free and will not die in prison. And he will always have enough bread.*" This is only one of the promises God gave to his children. Gal. 3:6 shows it was the same with Abraham. He put his trust in God. This made Abraham right with God. Gal. 3:13-14 says "*Christ bought us with his blood and made us free from the law.*" In that way the law could not punish us. Christ did this by carrying the load and by being the one punished instead of us. It's written, anyone who hangs on a cross is hated and punished.

Because of the price Christ Jesus paid, the good things that came to Abraham might come to the people. And by putting our trust in

Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit he has promised. I have existed longer in prison than I have in the free world.

Rom. 8:28: *We know that God makes all things work for the good of those who love him and are chosen to be a part of his plan.*

I've learned a lot while being locked up. I wouldn't be the man I am today if I hadn't been for my past. Psalms 139:16 says *"Your eyes saw me before I was put together, and all the days of my life were written in your book before any of them came to be."* So, God knew what I would have to go through before I could be the man he'd want me to be. I say this because I don't think God has brought me this far in life to die in a cell. Being in prison all these years, it doesn't take much to make me happy.

I should've said I appreciate the small things in life now. Like sunsets and sunrises and using the toilet alone in the room. About being happy, I'd like to say that happiness is a decision. People, places and things shouldn't dictate one's happiness. Gal. 5:22, one of the fruits that comes from having the Holy Spirit in our lives is Joy. Phil. 4:12-13 I know how to get along with little and how to live when I have much. I learned the secret of being happy at all times. If I'm full of food and have all I need I'm happy.

If I'm hungry and need more, I'm happy. I can do all things because Christ gives me strength. I'd like to share my wisdom with some of the

younger kids where I'm from. If you don't know, you can't do. When I was growing up, I only had guys trying to teach me how to do wrong the right way. I often wondered what might've become of me if I had someone to show me a better way? I might not have all the answers, but I'm sure I know what not to do. Today I know where to find the answers to all life's questions. In the word of God, so I'd like to conclude. My faith in the life and death and the resurrection of Christ Jesus is what drives me. II Tim. 3:15-17 states you have known the holy writings since you were a child.

They were able to give you wisdom that leads to being saved from the punishment of the sin by putting your trust in Christ Jesus. All the Holy writings are God-given and are made alive by him. Man is helped when he is taught God's word. It shows what's wrong. It changes one's life. It shows us how to be right with God. It gives the children who belong to God everything they need to work well with him.

(Amen)



By All Means... 'GET UP'

Chris Childs – Menard

**“If I knock you down, that’s on me,
But if I come back a week later and you’re
Still on the ground that’s on you, because
Even though I might be responsible for knocking you
Down, you’re responsible for getting back up.”**

Author Unknown-

This quote makes me uncomfortable, perhaps because it’s true. We’ve all been knocked down by someone or something. Can you remember your first time? For me, it was my father’s absence from my life. I blamed every situation that didn’t go my way on his desertion. When I didn’t make the basketball team, the conversation with myself started something like this-“If only Dad had been around to teach me how to dribble with my left hand.” When there wasn’t enough food in the house, I lost an afternoon fistfight, or started running the streets, my inner conversations began, “If only my father...”

Blaming became a habit. It was an easy way of explaining my behavior. However, as I get older, I've found additional ways to cope with rejection.

I rebelled and followed my urges. Let's call that urge by its government name, PEER PRESSURE!

Especially since most of these urges originated as ideas in somebody else's mind. Nevertheless, my mentality produced behaviors that caused harm to others and hindered me from exploring my full potential. The eventual outcome was prison.

When I arrived at Menard C.C., I interacted with individuals who'd been incarcerated for 20-30 years. Despite the age differences, I related to them because their stories began similarly to mine. More importantly, some of these men had advanced into spaces undefined by whatever had brought them to prison. This struck me as odd because I'm used to seeing people stuck in the same place they originally caused pain. In this instance, although the presence of drugs, gang activity, and hopelessness were overwhelming, these men seemed to ignore those circumstances.

They didn't huddle in secrecy to gossip about someone not there to defend themselves. Nor did they form alliances of convenience. Instead, they focused their energy on positivity. They not only hoped, but they hoped relentlessly with a sober mind and as their own man. I wanted some of that kind of audacity. So, it was with that ambition that my Personal Transformation began.

This initiative didn't happen overnight, but through study, observation, and trial & error, I found my lane. I discovered I'd been sabotaging myself.

I didn't know my own inherent value. More importantly, my behavior failed to serve me because I didn't have a personal vision. So, I wrote one and mapped out where I wanted to be in 20 years from that moment, and the proactive steps needed to take me there.

As a result, for the first time, I knew I was exactly where I was in my life because of the choices I made. My thinking had been the source of my negative behaviors—not drugs, alcohol, my environment or anyone else. My thinking produced my incarceration. By owning this truth, I gave myself permission to *GET UP*.

After an inner-renovation, I followed my plan and put myself in spaces that aligned with my vision—to develop into the best version of myself while living in my purpose of teaching. Sure, when I strayed from my plan or tried to take short-cuts, I got knocked back down. Just as I did when I lost court appeals or loved ones to death or distance, but I got back up. I tutored G.E.D. students. Then, I became certified as a Peer Educator for HIV/AIDS/STI's and Hepatitis. Afterwards, I trained to become a facilitator in Life Skills and Cognitive Behavior classes. The self-esteem and fulfillment I gained from getting back up was more rewarding than whining 'why me'?

Now-a-days, my self-conversations begin more along these lines: “The only real limitation on what you can accomplish are those you impose on yourself.” As a result, I may not stand in front of a classroom with chalk in my hand, but I'm a teacher. After all, it's never too late to become who you could've been, if you get up again. BY ALL MEANS...”GET UP!”

Love

Carlos McDougal, House Poet

TWO ROADS

If I had the chance to show you how I feel it would save us so much time. the fighting and distrust has plagued us for months and to continue on would only darken our hearts to something we both deserve and that's love. I know that I hurt you and pray that in time you're able to forgive me, Know that it wasn't intentional, I could only give you what I know and knowing that I don't know love I gave you pain. The fact that you were willing to love me is beyond my comprehension, in my world love equals pain so again forgive me. I would ask that you keep your heart open to the possibility of love trust that you are worthy of it and to settle for anything less would be a tragedy. Know that if I had known what love was my heart wouldn't have been closed off to you. I hope that with these words you know that deep down I did feel the same just didn't know how to bring forth the love that poured from my heart even though it was that love that ultimately drove us apart.

Domestic Violence Awareness

Katrina Giles - Logan

Startled from the sound of a loud noise, Anxiety rises as my hands shake from the pitched voice.

Nowhere to hide, nowhere to run I have fallen in love with the damage that has been done.

You hold me tight and kiss me right, then raise your hand and want to fight abused accused and suddenly misused.

But still I bow down and look like the fool, you beat me; mistreat me for all that's beneath me. Then make me lie down your body you feed me.



Brain-washed I fall deep in your trap, for no one I know has my back.

You see that I love you and no one cares, just try to leave me I swear I dare. No one can have you, our death date we will share.

Homicide, suicide by all means necessary, I told you we play by my rules. Loud music is playing now its quiet, until death do us part, turn on the TV and watch the news.



TR

Presents

Parenting From Prison is tough, and those in-person visits, phone calls and video visits only go so far. We are now accepting submissions from the men and women in custody on the struggles as well as the tips and tricks of PARENTING FROM PRISON, Volume 26.

Submissions are also accepted from the outside, due to the impact of having (or not having) that extra parent around. In addition, we'd like to educate our readers about the parenting battles Correctional Officers face daily due to spending 8 to 16 hours away from their kid(s). Let's come together as a community and figure this out!

Without staff support:

Mail submission, photo to:

TWO ROADS EDITOR

2021 Kentville Road

Kewanee IL 61443

Outsiders and Individuals-In-Custody

(WITH Staff Support)

Please send your submission and scanned

photo to doc.tworoads@illinois.gov

'ATTN: TWO ROADS PARENTING''

NEW Deadline: December 8, 2023

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

37 For 43

My original piece had nothing to do with this topic, but I felt this must be heard. Many of us think about the out date, but never think about the things AFTER we do leave. Yes, we plan our first meal, or the first outfit, what we're going to post on Twitter (now known as "X") or Facebook, but do we ever start to navigate the road ahead?

To be quite honest, many of the women and men in custody, who came in as teenagers never had the chance to navigate life in the first place. They were captured and placed in the structure made of cylinder, rebar and steel; forced to listen to the sounds of keys jingling and blaring noises from resent and revenge, all the while living within a small space, 24-hours a day.

Either you are doing your time at St. Charles, the Audie Homes in Chicago or Murphysboro and Duquoin in the south. Next thing you know, you're off to Joliet (the "Castle"), Stateville (the "Ville"), Pontiac (a.k.a. "Gladiator School"/ "Thunder Dome"), Menard or now defunct Tamms ("Super Max"). So, how can you know what you don't know?



People are put in a place where the skill learning is draconian, the skill to rehabilitate and correct is non-existent and you're living for yourself. In other words, “Welcome to the Hunger Games!”

Cassidy Winston started his pilgrimage in 1986, when he was 17 years old. A growing boy from Central Illinois, not yet a man, he lived amongst some of the roughest and toughest individuals in the prisons of Illinois. Stateville, F House, demonstratively known as “The Roundhouse”, was a structure in which was exactly that...round, 360 degrees of vision so guards would be able to see and know the surroundings and many things, never able to help. Imagine your child, forced to become an adult before they were ready and to be left to not only their devices, but the devices of others (I don't need to explain, you figure it out).

What teenager should ever be placed in close quarters, yet so far away that if there was trouble, they couldn't be attended to, or if there was a medical emergency, who would be able to help? This was his life for many years and he (just like many, many others) had to grow up in this environment. *Survive and Adapt.*

Most kids look to grow up gradually, but this man, and many other men and women, didn't have this choice. Conditions in their lives forced them to do things that aren't favorable and create the atmosphere of *fight or flight*. The outcome is simple: you go to the pen, or you die in the street. In the 1980's, things weren't simple and there were many mitigating factors that caused these choices (Reaganomics, Drugs “*just say no*”,



Kenji Haley
TWO ROADS
Editor-In-Chief

unemployment, poverty, police corruption, etc.). If you saw the streets of Chicago and New York City during these times, you'd think it was a war zone.

Many women and men in today's world have too many choices. In addition to the things mentioned above, there's social media, reality TV, scamming, juggling (it's real...look it up) and more that are leading our children to the big house. Yeah, they may act grown, but are they? Do they have the tools to survive the world on their own? My wife told me about how they found a knife on the back of a school bus the other day. What in God's name is a 10-year-old doing with a knife? But I understand...conditions.

I'm sure Mr. Winston had his rough patches while in the streets as well as in custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections; hell, we all do! There are scuffles and struggles, pain, loss of life and mental health concerns and for over 37 years, he glided his way to freedom on August 9, 2023. On September 21st while going to take out the trash, he died. He was 55 and only out for 43 days.

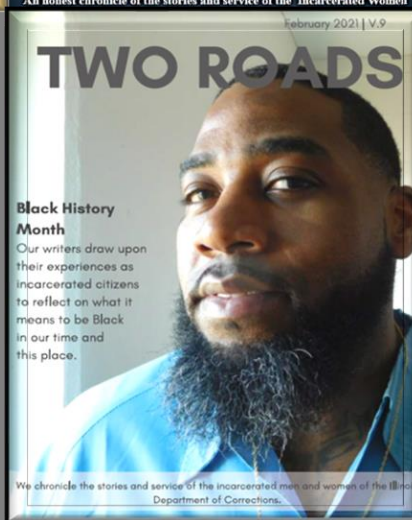
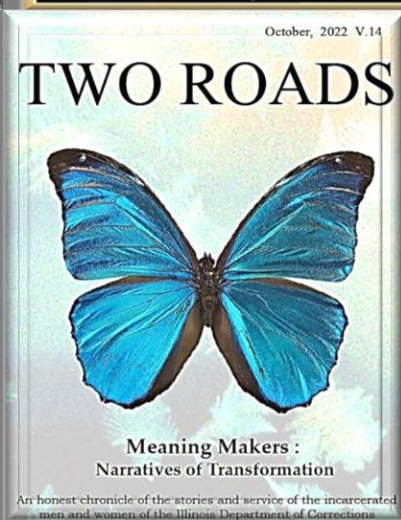
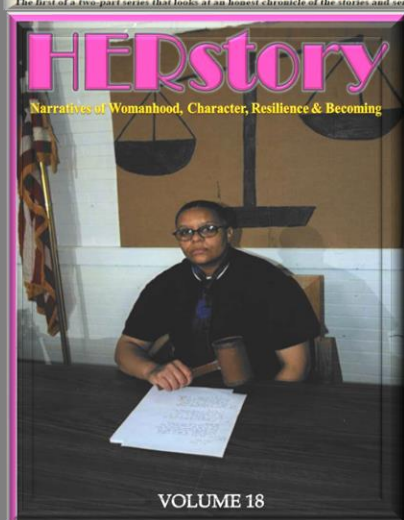
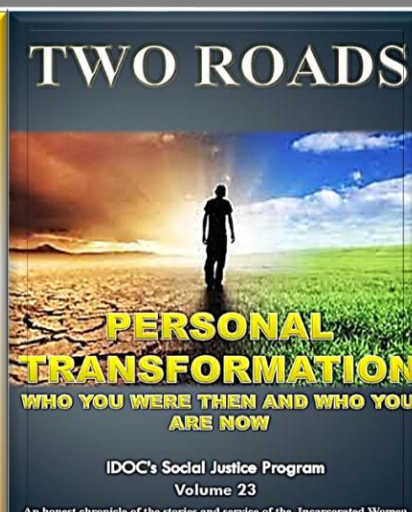
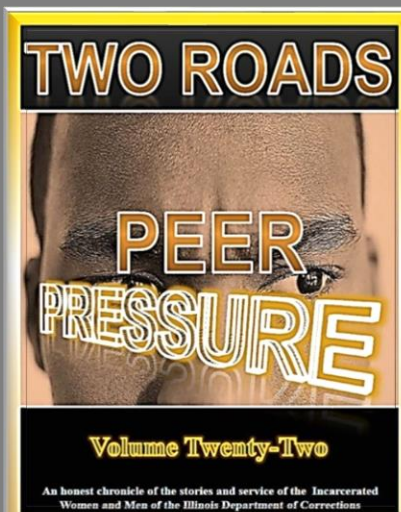
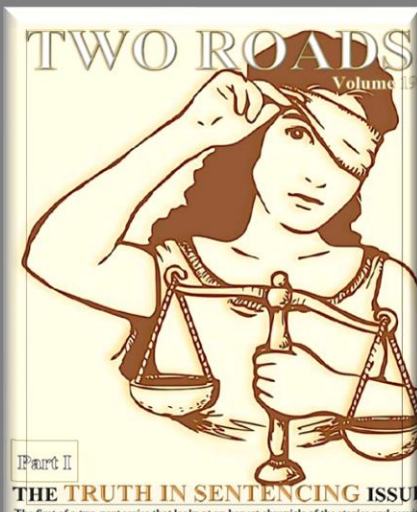
Not one person could have ever imagined this was possible. It's because we think in the moment, we don't take the time to really think one of ours would pass away. No one knows when you're going to be called home. But even with that, I'd like to share something: "You have to make sure **EVERY DAY COUNTS!**" Tell the people who were there for you that you love them and thank them. Tell those who didn't make the whole way (if they're alive), thank you for helping out. Please go to the cemeteries and make peace with the people who departed while you were locked up. Mend the fences. We're always looking to do things for others, but we need to do the things

that are beneficial for ourselves. I had the honor of working with (and living next door to) Winston for a year, and I gravitated to him in the time. We imparted wisdom, expressed dislike of inviting church members to our talent show, and his feistiness when things didn't go his way. I ate dinner with him before he went to physical therapy and made meals with him...which was more of a challenge on who the best cook was. We looked at the (officers' and staff) cars in the early mornings, talked about him getting (and using) a smartphone and watched videos of Google about how to create a Gmail account so he'd be "in the know." As we now see, God had plans for him none of us were aware of and that is what causes us pain.

There are many Mr. Winston's—those who we knew through our time in incarceration, who did their time and then were released to society and never had a chance to "live". This leads to premature death, may it be health-related issues, drugs, alcohol or gun violence. To all the men (and women) that have lost their lives too early, we say "peace to you." Live every day to the fullest and in the meantime, be aware many of us have our outdate, the question now is "what will you do with it?" Rest my brother. You'll be missed.



PSST... SPREAD THE WORD



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

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

EMAIL A STORY!!: doc.tworoads@illinois.gov