

# TWO ROADS

Volume 25



IDOC's Social Justice Program

Part 3

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

# To All Readers

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

***Rehabilitation*** involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

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

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

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

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

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

# *Our Mission Statement*

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

## 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.

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**TR**

**TWO ROADS**  
**THE VIEWPOINTS ISSUE**  
 Part 3 of 3



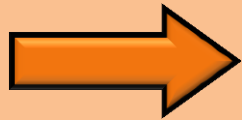
# TWO ROADS

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# Want your Family and Friends to see your Article??

Tell them in 2 EASY STEPS:



1. Go to Google and type in  
“Two Roads”

or

2. Type in:

[idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoads.html](https://idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoads.html)

# TWO ROADS

Click the “Two Roads E-Zine”

# Editors Take DEUX

First off, I would like to thank each and every one of you that view our e-zine! This is the third edition of the Viewpoints and the reviews have been amazing! None of this would be possible if it was not for your tuning in or finding us on the web (either on IDOC Website or Google). It goes without saying that these times feel different because I feel like my thoughts matter. The difference lies in our IDOC administration's embrace of the Restorative Justice approach. We are seen as interested parties, people to be partnered with in order to reach a solution to a problem, rather than throw-away criminals.

Knowing the Department is embracing a culture based around Restorative Justice Principles is encouraging, especially if it is getting you closer to your loved ones than what the original date was. For me, I'm inching closer to my release, and, even though I'll be able to put this phase of life behind me, I'll also be leaving many good men that I've come to know as brothers. There are so many good men and women (shout out to Logan and Decatur!) who I don't know, that travel my same road. If what I've seen thus far continues to grow, if our administration continues to embrace a more reasonable system of corrections, I'll rest easy.





So, as we all go through our time in the Department of Corrections, just remember that making the most of what you've got, is the best part of becoming who you want to be. Because of this, we are in a different time. Peace. I would like to thank Gretchen and Roy from the QC Times for interviewing TWO ROADS (we are on our way, y'all"! ) and a special thanks to Naomi Puzzello (CIO of IDOC) for coming and supporting our Media team (both TWO ROADS and Kewanee Horizons).

Finally, TWO ROADS would like to thank all of the contributors who are submitting pieces, and we love them all, but understand that there are still parameters that we must abide by. With that said, please don't become discouraged if your article is not published. Just remember, we want to CONTINUE publishing your articles, but there has to be a line in the sand. Thanx.

**Parenting From Prison**  
**NEW DEADLINE!!**  
**DECEMBER 8, 2023**

**TR**



# WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

## Welcome to the Family

### Bismil-la hi-Rahman Nir-Rahim

(In The Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful)

All praises due to Allah for giving me the strength to share my stories. Thank you for allowing me to share with all that has read my articles. Thank you for inviting me onto the editorial board. This is the most humbling experience. I never thought my words would bring me to this point. My mother encouraged me to share my stories.

All that I've done thus far has been in honor of the most important people in my life. I will take this opportunity to merge us together. Again, I'm honored to be a part of something positive. I look forward to the challenge, as well as sharing more of my life experiences.



Evelyn 'Qiyamah'  
Jackson

TWO ROADS Newest Associate  
Editor

Thank You,

# Options

## Katie Manning - Decatur

I was 16 weeks pregnant and facing a significant amount of time for the case I'm currently incarcerated on. After exhausting all family possibilities for my daughter, it left me feeling hopeless not knowing where she was going to go. Honestly, I wasn't sure who to discuss my issues with.

Looking back, after the fog of being on drugs and getting off drugs has lifted, the Doctors office would have been a good place to start. When I was around 30 weeks, my sister had a visit from a DCFS case worker. Before the case worker left, she told her about my predicament and that I was looking for a family to adopt my daughter. The case worker said she would see what she could do.

I was surprised when her case worker came back two weeks later with a photo, a phone number and the background information of a family that was looking to adopt. They couldn't have kids on their own and had 1 child already that they had already adopted. They are an amazing family and they have been legally my daughter's parents for almost 2 years.



I don't know how or why I was blessed with this family, but not everyone is lucky. I've asked some of my peers, "If you were in jail and pregnant and choosing adoption, how would you find a family?" Most had no idea without the use of the *internet*.

This is what drives me, because I don't want any other woman going through this. I want pregnant women that are in county jails to know they have options.

# If Only we Could Fly

Jeanine Elam - Logan

An unwanted  
failure to launch  
gravity reversed  
into a form changing plunge  
of nothingness  
Created to caress,  
cleanse & communicate  
notes of love  
through building & protecting.  
These mis-convicted limbs  
will continue to snap  
the wings of all they  
encounter.

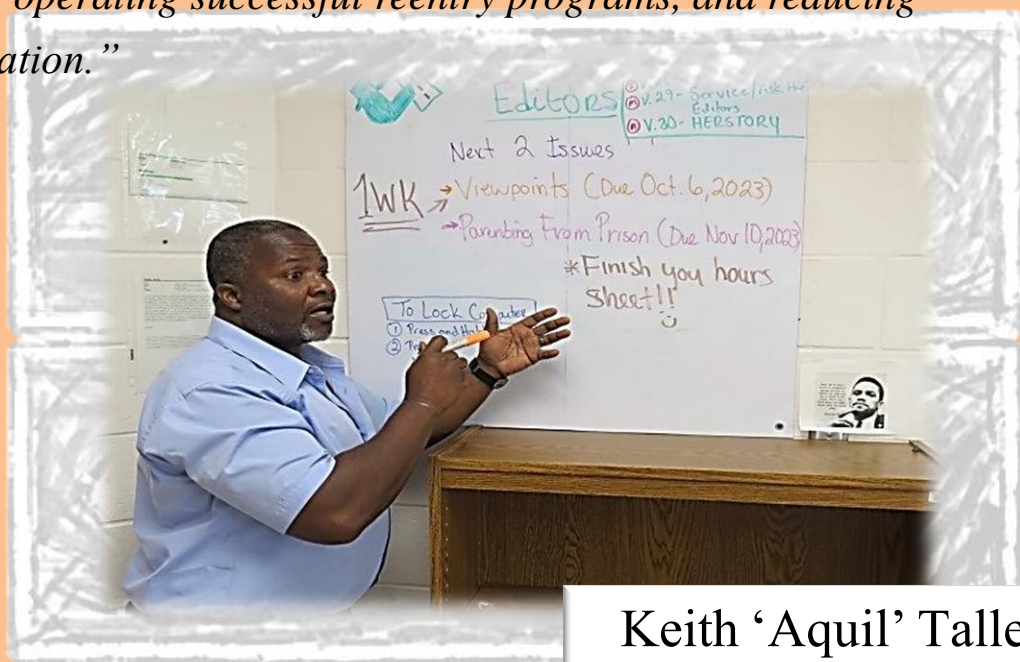




# Just the Bath Water... NOT THE BABY!

Though there is plenty of meat on the bone when it comes to IDOC and the entire American carceral apparatus, my “Viewpoint” with involving IDOC is a narrow one. Our Mission Statement is:

*“to increase public safety by promoting positive change for those in custody, operating successful reentry programs, and reducing victimization.”*



**Keith 'Aquil' Talley**

TWO ROADS Senior Editor

The issue of review is the outdated policies of forbidding those who are currently confined from communicating (in any form) with the recently released/paroled individuals, despite that communication being surveilled and having to be pre-approved. This is archaic and quiet frankly, sad.



The historical circumstances that understandably prompted this policy derive from a time when street organizations were extremely and strategic in their actions. Prison, being the institutional axis for the various socio-criminal entities, served as a switchboard for communication that directed coordinated and mobilized their members in the execution of organizational interest. **FACTS!**

However, today's organizational landscape is the polar opposite from that of the past, and subsequently no longer poses the perceived threat that warranted such policy. Although the same socio-criminal entities still exist, they no longer have centralized leadership and its members are motivated by personal interest. "A cliché of stray arrows" would best describe today's state of affairs if you will.

When you have policies that provide out of touch solutions for obsolete problems, invariably you cause harm. The forced severing of communication ties from among the confined and the released leaves both groups abruptly and traumatically alienated from their established and proven support system, a support system comprised of positive relationships, nurtured through years – sometimes decades – of shared, lived experiences such as family deaths, births, divorces, graduations, family reunifications, educational pursuits, religious/spiritual fellowships, appeals, denials, work assignments, career planning, peer programming, mental health episodes, sharing of dreams and talking off ledges.



For many, these relationships, forged in a crucible of struggle, are more endearing to a person than their own blood relatives. The failure to recognize, encourage, and support this existential human need to healthily belong is inhumane.

This cruelty further borders on sadistic when you factor in that **IDOC recognizes** the powerful potential of positive peer engagement, for they have leaned heavily into peer programming at every turn. But still, somehow, a positive, nurturing and empowering relationship on Monday becomes a security threat on Tuesday, and the only thing that has transpired overnight is that one person has crossed the threshold into freedom.

Continued engagement between the confined and the released would indeed go a long way in facilitating a successful re-entry for both. The confined could help keep the newly released supported, grounded and centered as they navigate an unfamiliar world and unproven relationships. And when it's the confinee's time to re-enter society, they could benefit from the guidance, network and support of their fellow re-entered citizen.

It's an unfortunate decision, as who is more likely to support individuals in custody than those who recently wore their same shoes? If the communications become problematic, IDOC could simply cut off that particular parolee – not the majority who are helpful and positive.



*TWO ROADS would like to thank Mr. Talley for his contributions over the last year. We also hope that he will be safe in his journey in life!*

# Where I Belong

## Arnold Joyner – Dixon

Where I belong, I belong at home, teaching and managing my family on how to preserve our bloodline and throne.

I belong to Jesus and with those of the bible in the book of Solomon songs. Like chapter one, verse five—I AM BLACK (dark and lovely) in my skin tone.

I belong to humanity, and I should be shown that I've sincerely matured and atoned.

Today I'm very capable of standing on my own.

Please accept my sincerest apology for all my wrongs. I was weak in my drug addiction, and now I have overcome it, and I am strong.

I'm almost 61 years old, with bad health, but I'm not gone. Hopefully for my daughter and granddaughters, I'll live long.

I still have some to explaining to do with them for my neglect and wrongs. Absolutely every moment in prison, I say in my mind and heart, Arnold this isn't where I belong.

Yet, I don't want to question God's will, because with the grace of God I have been allowed to continue on.

I appreciate the multitude and their sharing with this dog an invaluable bone. Surely, in the beginning of this journey, I thought I'd never make it back home.



Actually, my behavior, I sometimes thought this is exactly where I belong. In April 2006, I heard the voice of God loud and strong. He said, “Why don’t you trust me”.

Then in May 2006, he said, “I know the thoughts I think of you, Thoughts of good and not evil”.

Said he would bring me to an expected end Jeremiah 29: 11-14. This is where I belong, in the presence of God, his bloodline, kingdom and throne!

# Thoughts in a Cell

Kelly Ragsdale - Centralia

In the dayroom, you can’t get your mind focused on positive things because you’re surrounded by men who are always talking and boasting about things outside that would bring you back inside this place. So, at night when I enter my cell, my mind often wonders, and dwell in things that can have your freedom taken.

So, I tell myself, when the day comes and I return to freedom, to channel my mind on the right and positive things. To learn from this or you will end up having thoughts in your cell again.



# People MATTER!!

## Matthew McCain - Centralia

My name is Matthew McCain, and I'd like not to be a loser. I apologize ahead of time if it sounds like this is a sob story. I've been locked up since I was 17, and I've never be able to accomplish much real substance from this life of mine. I'm responsible for untold pain. No matter how much I want to change that, I'll never be able to fix my worst mistake; it's a life-consuming regret! I'm responsible for two children losing their mother.

It's in the darkness of my life; I've somehow learned how to push through the pain; the physical resistance or circumstances. In jail, we're expected by other inmates, to act and view things in a certain way. Staff members aren't all that caring either. I do believe that prison is a very lonely place for someone who wants to be more than the scoundrel that gets in trouble.

I've literally invested real time into trying to figure out why some people would just throw away a *second chance* at life, and to the best of my ability, it seems like it's a matter of personal choice. People are likely influenced by a person's views and biases on life in general. There are some that are sincerely negative/criminal-minded individuals in prison, who unfortunately seem to be *more popular*, better received by the masses, go figure, huh.

You put a bunch of law breakers in cages and *“iron sharpens iron”*. It’s almost impossible for me to reach people of color, younger inmates. They don’t relate to any of my experiences, and okay, so maybe I’m not the right guy to talk to some of these guys, that doesn’t mean I can’t try!

Why do I write about prison and inmates? I can eventually work my way through, because addiction to drugs is closely related to being a prisoner in jail! I could eventually work my way through a prison sentence, but for a drug addict, we could be free in the streets, but held by a drug addiction that influences my every choice in life!

Just like an inmate in jail! All of it is in part a lack of good mental health, but WE have to want to get **healthy**, not simply claim mental illness. Is addiction a disease? Absolutely! And like any disease, we need to seek treatment for it. We have to want to get better! To be better than our physical condition, our physical circumstances.

I still live in jail. I’m still expected to act and look like a prisoner, by other prisoners. Excuse me, but NO! I don’t claim not to have entertained criminal thinking to be safe in prison. I come from real pain. I should have grown up sooner. In short, the inmates today are a little more talkative, and not as committed to the words that they say.

But that sounds like I’m getting down on inmates, and for that I’m sorry. We can be brave enough to be true to ourselves. We don’t have to conform

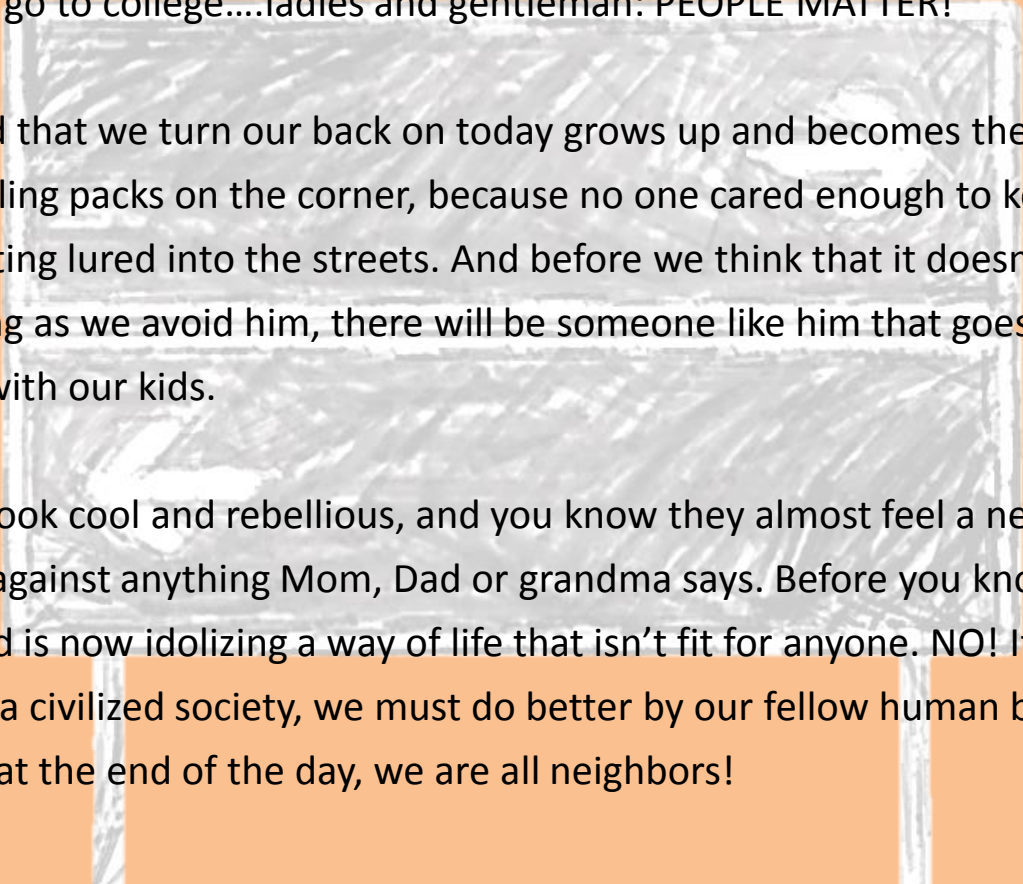


to our circumstances; you decide who you are going to be each day! Whatever you are on the outside, or locked up, no one can tell you what you're worth. You give others the power to tear you down by investing a single shred of "give a f\*\*\* in anyone's opinion of you." STOP DOING IT! This is not a competition. This is not about who's a bigger fish, or the wealthier person.

This is about US making the necessary choices to get ourselves to healthy, more productive places in life. I can still seek a better education, even in jail, it's free even, God Bless America. You are making me the first person in my family to go to college....ladies and gentleman: PEOPLE MATTER!

The kid that we turn our back on today grows up and becomes the street punk, selling packs on the corner, because no one cared enough to keep him from getting lured into the streets. And before we think that it doesn't affect us, as long as we avoid him, there will be someone like him that goes to schools with our kids.

They look cool and rebellious, and you know they almost feel a necessity to rebel against anything Mom, Dad or grandma says. Before you know it, your child is now idolizing a way of life that isn't fit for anyone. NO! If we are truly are a civilized society, we must do better by our fellow human beings, because at the end of the day, we are all neighbors!



# A Tale Called True Wisdom

Yusef Kareem Brown - Pinckneyville

I couldn't keep up, and the Devil kept punching me. Often, I was looked at by society as the sly, slick, and misunderstood. They deemed me wicked. However, wisdom is the best teacher. As a youth I was lacking knowledge. I had NO patience to learn. Life was moving too fast for my young mind. I had NO patience for my parents' guidance, nor did I truly understand the severity of their warnings. Thus, I preferred the illusions of the dressed-up lies of society. I ignored the naked ass truth of my parents' wisdom. It is often in the bellies of the dragons when we see the truth to be. After being burned and consumed by the flames of the system, I developed patience for those words spoken so long ago by my parents. I believe you understand what I'm saying.

Oftentimes it is NOT the fruits that are nourishing to the body, but the words spoken before you consume it. We got to begin to look at the essence of the struggles we face daily. The bond becomes more about a common struggle and desire to liberate ourselves. I know about the destruction of the dressed-up lies of our enemies. This is my reason for writing you so often and sharing my story of the past. Be stable and keep peace within your heart. Be first to listen to great wisdom!!! Cherish wisdom over the Devil. For the Devil is the Master deceiver of lies. Seek wisdom in your daily life. Don't give up on learning. Stay strong and seek true wisdom always!!!





# Soaring

## Earl Milton, Jr. - Centralia



Only time will tell  
If all will go well  
If we succeed or we fail  
It doesn't matter much  
Get up and try again

Or on to the next success  
As long as you gave it your best  
And learned something more

You have scored

Wake up everyday  
Give that day your all  
Day after Day

Put out your best work

And know somehow

Life will work out just fine

Focus your Mind and Shine

And live your life Sublime

And one day before you realize it

You'll be flying!





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

"ATTN: TWO ROADS PARENTING"



**Deadline: December 8, 2023**

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

# Sunny Dayz After the Rain

## Andrew Maxwell - Kewanee

My Kewanee experience was dampened a day after arriving here. the first red flag was the truck—that carries the personal property boxes for every individual transferring to their new location—broke down at East Moline, which caused the truck to be fixed and not follow us as it usually does.

So, the second day after arriving, one of the happiest events takes place; that was being called to property to retrieve my property. But when I opened my boxes, I heard something that I haven't heard in 30-something years...“an echo!” Tons of my property was missing out of my boxes, but in that moment, no one could tell me anything about my missing items, and I got a sense that no one truly believed my account.

My initial call to action was to file a grievance, but our initial “meet and greet” off of the bus to my surprise was a handshake and a congratulatory speech from the Warden (Carothers). One of the statements that was made was “*if we have any problems, please come to me or my staff for a chance to resolve the matter.*”

The reason that statement sound like “hog wash” was it has been mentioned at other facilities, but to no avail. I did what was asked, but it went against my better judgment and experience. Some of the property that was missing was family heirlooms: photos, comic books that were over 20 years old, and





Michael Jordan memorabilia.

In the slimmest chance of ever seeing my property again, I knew it was a remote chance of getting them back. So, I went through the channels that the Warden requested: personal property, counselors, and IA. I *begrudgingly* had patience in this process. The entire ordeal was ruining my experience and tearing me apart. Plus, I didn't believe that they were going to do anything, especially with time being of the essence.

Almost three weeks had gone by. Actually, **three weeks had gone by!** Then one day, while I was sitting in the chow hall, the Warden and Assistant Warden came in the chow hall like *ROCKSTARS*—shaking hands and kissing babies. Another one of the many things out of the norm, because every place I've been, Wardens were not receptive to stopping, let alone listening to you.

So, I stopped them and issued my complaint, and low and behold, a few days later I was called to property. I wasn't told what my movement was about, therefore my attitude was lackadaisical. I walked into personal property, signed in, and then the personal property said, "that box is for you." I ran to open it, looked inside and to my surprise, all of my property was there. I first thought "God, was/is good." oh yeah, the Warden...y'all cool too!! 😊 😊

Truth be told, I cried, but on the inside! So, forget what you heard. My Kewanee experience has finally caught up to the guys I arrived with, then it was truly Sunny Dayz After The Rain. Thanks to Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center for standing by your informal motto: "We actually give a damn." I have 37-years of skepticism and was given damn good reason for it. But Kewanee and company is slowly, but surely dismantling it.

# Why Settle for Just Being in the Sun When You are the Moon as Well

## Pink Ribbon of Life

Toyrianna 'Toyri' Smith - Logan

Breast Cancer deserves a month to awaken, enlighten and give men and women the knowledge and wisdom on one of the most common cancers. I met a woman who I became very fond of after only a year and a few months of knowing her. She went for a normal mammogram only to be told there was cancer in the breast. More test revealed she was in stage one, which was good because it was detected early and able to be treated properly. She was devastated. Her daughter, who's been incarcerated for ten years, was spiraling downhill.

I was determined the end result would turn out fine. I called at least twice a week even if it was just to check on her and ask how she was feeling. She was almost always tired, had low energy and without an appetite. Before her hair was able to completely fall out, she cut it. Her daughter cut it with her to show her they were in it together. I like that even though she did struggle with the unknown, she was determined the fight would be one she'd defeat. Besides being tired, she's still up and running. She's done chemo and completed it, but with that she still

has an assortment of medication. But her drive kept her determined and fighting.

Today, I met two other people—one is the roommate I just got. She's an older woman who, from first look you'd never guess, is battling with the disease. She's full of life, humble, energetic and I feel like she isn't allowing her situation to steal her spirit even with being in the current environment.

The other is a lady I met years ago. She has always gotten into it with people. She acts like the world revolves around her. But, once she became diagnosed, I saw something in her eyes. It was change. She no longer wanted to be someone who was looked at with an attitude. She's somewhat different. She appreciates life now. Her dispositions are no longer negative. Her nose is no longer turned up all day.

The reason why I chose to speak or write on this is because I'm passionate about all kinds of things and Breast Cancer Awareness has become one of my passions. Breast Cancer is the most common cancer in women.





When in its early stages, it can be successfully treated. 1 out of 8 American women will have breast cancer at some point in their life. Being that it's breast, most individuals aren't aware men can attract breast cancer as well. By 20, all women should check their breast monthly and get a mammogram, which detects 90% of cancers even before you feel anything.

To be aware is to be alive right? To get necessary assistance is what can be of health to your life. Many people go around scared to know things regarding their health until its damn near too late. Have you examined your breasts this month? If not, what are you waiting for? Help is only an exam away.

Toyrianna "Toyri" Smith



# A Warped, Frustrated Old Man (Part Deux)

Michael 'Wally' Walls - Pontiac

Recently, I wrote about an issue that I had with an overzealous Food Supervisor. Back in July, we had an Individual that baked some cookies on the Mid-Night Shift one night without permission. The following night, a Food Supervisor (working overtime) took it upon herself to “punish” the entire shift for this “rampant” cookie theft. Long story short... the cookie thief got away, essentially, scot free. Another Individual and I, who attempted to protect ourselves from behavior that we had nothing to do with, were both found guilty of “insolence”. Our crime? We had asked the Kitchen Officer for permission to return to the cell house that night... instead of asking the Food Supervisor.

Ahhh... two months of peace and quiet. Even though the other Individual and I wound up getting found guilty of behavior that never really happened, we managed to move on with our lives. He started the Defy Adventures program and has moved on to another job that better fits with his schedule. As for me, I'm still cranking out breakfast trays on the midnight shift.



We've managed to see the one particular Food Supervisor maybe 6 or 7 times since July. It's almost always in passing with only one instance of her working overtime on our shift. Not a word was spoken. Not even so much as direct eye contact. (Well, my mom always use to say, "if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.)

It's been kinda nice. Peaceful. Quiet. Laid back.

Wham! Wake Up!

Okay, so the Dietary Department has a warped sense of humor. Someone has apparently gotten the idea that the Midnight IK either has it too easy or is an uncontrolled den of thieves. So, to shake things up a bit, they sent that one particular Food Supervisor back to Midnights with us. Oh, thrilling!

Sure, I would rather have elective root canal surgery than be around this person. But if I allow this person's behavior to negatively affect me, then I would not be the professional Individual that I purport myself to be. With both an Executive Clemency decision and a transfer on the line, I have to keep my focus. In the past, I've written about how I had to have my heart repaired a few years ago. Well, I guess I'm gonna get to see how good that rebuild actually is. See? I told ya that I wasn't done yet...

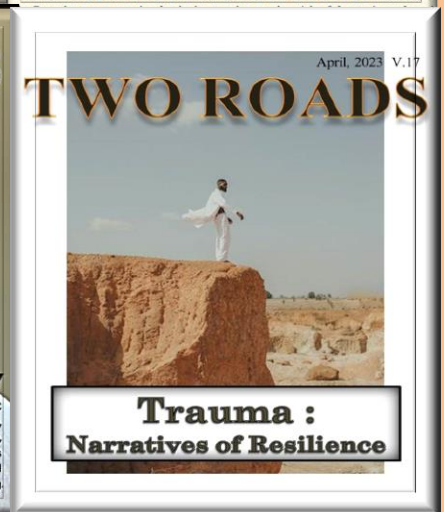
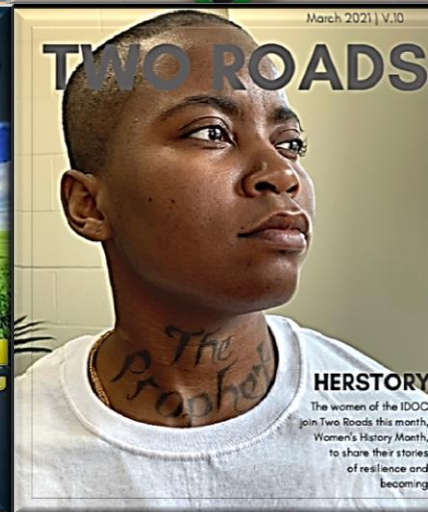
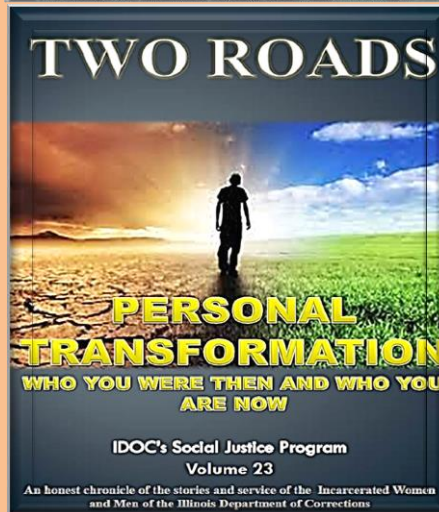
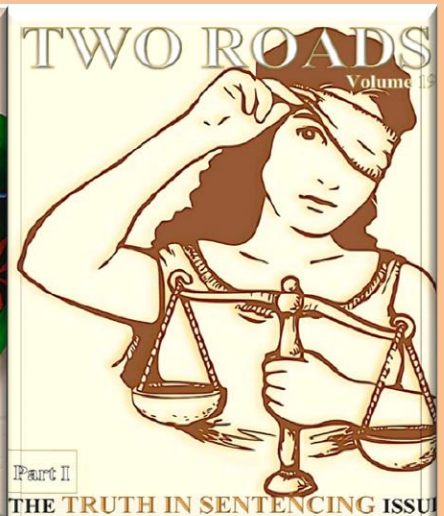
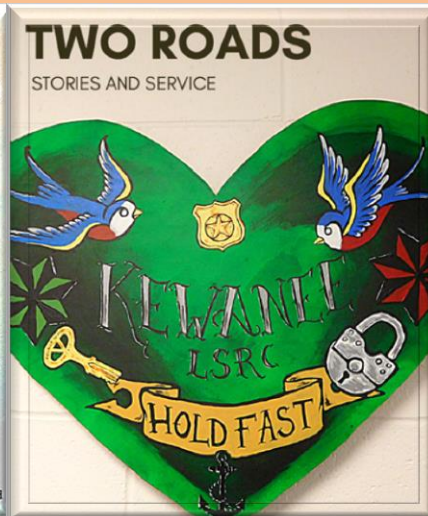
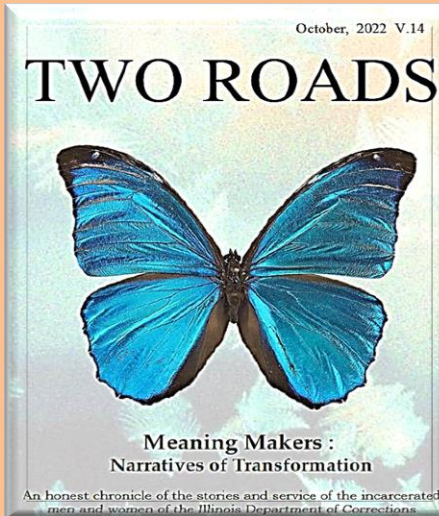
Wally





PSST...

SPREAD THE WORD



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

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

EMAIL YOUR STORY!:: [doc.tworoads@illinois.gov](mailto:doc.tworoads@illinois.gov)

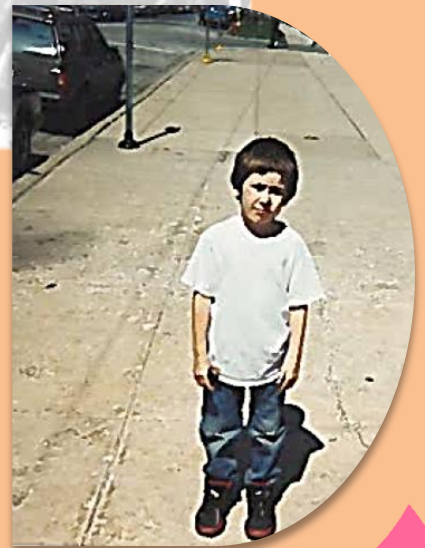
# It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

Robert 'Lucky' Schultz - Danville

It takes a village to raise a child, but if this village is corrupt does it raise a corrupt child? I was asked this question by my co-worker; it forced me to reflect on the philosophical implications of the wisdom that I agreed with. Did I come from a corrupt village? What does corrupt mean to me, and is that different from everybody else? How would this child who was raised in a corrupt village even know they were corrupt, and how much is this child to blame for being a criminal?

The people I grew up around actively participated in the criminal culture, many of my personal decisions were based off a need to preserve their core beliefs. Society has come to recognize this distorted thinking and has attempted to ease the consequences that this child faces, acknowledging the cultural influences on decisions that he or she made. My question is, what is the level of culpability that we offer a child who has been raised in a corrupt village?

Criminal culture was a part of the environment, there was evidence of drug abuse and gang violence everywhere.





The gangs were the only desirable role models; many families were on public assistance and had various ways to make money.

Maintaining a hustle was one of the values that were admirable, and the Criminal behavior was acceptable within a degree when rent was due. Both my parents have criminal records because of violent behavior, growing up family and friends were active gang members, dealing drugs, seeing illegal guns and neighborhood shootings were common. Even now I can recall the corner stores that exchanged food stamps for cash, My community was structured around “what was known don’t got to be explained” philosophy.

Much of what I did and did not do was heavily influenced by this culture; I would search for different ways to represent myself within this community. One reputation was to be the person with the good weed or someone to be feared, all the women wanted the men who were strong or had money. I wanted that and it all began with having the things my family could not provide, I stole bikes and sold them to buy drugs. Drug dealers got robbed and I needed a way to protect myself, I could either buy a gun or ask the gang members to provide one in order to do that I had to prove I would use it.

Eventually my Mom found \$300 and a quarter pound of weed in the basement, her only problem with that was it was being sold out of her house. She never questioned the clothes or the touch screen phone she would see every day, the lesson I learned was that I was doing fine, so long as it did not come home with me.



Society attempted to recognize the unfair consequences children face when they are caught for breaking the law. This began with the establishment of the first children's court of law in Chicago in 1889 and has since evolved into what it is today. As written on Encyclopedia Britannica, "juvenile courts normally have not been concerned with determining guilt or innocence so much as making a finding of fact- that the juvenile is, for one reason or another , legally subject to the jurisdiction of the court. This is an effort to look at the factors, that were present in the juvenile's life at the time of the crime. The issue is that certain laws allowed our state to impose an automatic transfer to bypass the review process. This allowed them to be subjected to all other tough on crime laws that affect their adult counterparts. Therefore, they are held accountable for their actions without ever seeing the juvenile court.

Criminal culture has an influential effect on the child who grows up around it. According to Anna Damm and Christian Dustman, studies show the share of convicted criminals in the area affects later crime conviction probabilities, As well as the number of crimes for which the young men are convicted, (24) . This is not new information to many, but the data that proves it is profound, it implies that criminal culture is a social learning experience. The more people a person meets with who openly have committed crimes gives them the impression that it is acceptable behavior. This is similar to teaching kids to share in kindergarten or having cake and ice cream associated with birthday parties.

The opposing argument can be made that what if the original criminal was not caught for the crime, would that inspire the child to commit the crime with the same efficiency causing all the data to go undetected. Logically that sword swings both ways, the amount of those who were convicted would require more individuals perpetuating the crime. In fact, it is the lack of economic resources and opportunities, which breed the environment. Which inspires one to attempt to gain a piece of this pie, even though they will develop diabetes?

Adverse childhood experiences should not be viewed as just a way of life; there are many factors that contribute to the risk of a child participating in criminal culture. Clearly, whom they grew up around is a major factor.

To make the argument that in the end it all comes down to the decisions of the individual, is to take the question out of context. All decisions morally, good or bad are based on the lens that the individual views them through. If the child is corrupt because of the village, why do we continuously punish the child so harshly for their ignorance of lawful behavior?

As one of these kids who has fallen victim to the safe neighborhood act, which began the implementation of certain tough on crime laws that were in response to the high crime rates in the 90's







# For What??

Dmitry Smirnov – Joliet

Hi,

My name is Dmitry Smirnov. I am a Russian-born Canadian citizen, incarcerated in the US with a life-sentence. My main concern isn't so much the question of immigration, but that of aspirations. I see lots of hustle and bustle with regard to the 'how', as if everybody already knows the 'why'. 'Why'-as in 'for what?' Everybody knows what they want to be free from, but who can tell me what they want to be free for? Hah! As if any of us are exceedingly eager to share our truest, innermost aspirations!

Pleasure? For what?

Money? For what?

Power? For what?

Many people had much pleasure... and money... and power... now they are all gone. And now many who lack pleasure, or the money, or power, are in their place. It seems to me that the question of value, of aspirations, has not yet been really answered. Now, there are many who believe they have found their answer in God. But one has to be vain to think that he/she knows anything about God, and countless clerics have s\*\*\*for brains about what God is, and what answers have we obtained by now..."

I see only one aspiration present in life—life itself, and more and more life. Everything you look, you see life, either growing or in decline. (assuming of course, you're standing on this planet). And to the extent that one seeks anything outside of life, he/she neglects life itself.

Many people come to believe that life is unbearable at face value. But it is only they themselves that they cannot bear...

Had they been healthier, happier, free from addictions and illusions, life would feel very differently to them. Some have to fabricate and falsify to accept life, and of that is their condition for life, let us help them fabricate only such things as are wholesome and beneficial to life, not wasteful or degrading towards life. I, myself, am just such an unfortunate. Failing to fit in civilized society. I ended up committing a f\*\*\*\*ing crime at 20 years old, and now I am in prison in a foreign country with a life-without-parole sentence. Why? Because I had neither the knowledge of my own or my ancestors' future. And that is my insight-without those two things, one might as well be nothing.

Now, one must be strong enough and honest enough to discover, learn, and accept one's own and his/her ancestors' past. Many are those who pick and choose bits & pieces of the history of their ancestors to run narration they deem appealing or advantageous to them (as with my people's tendency to emphasize the strong aspects of our history; as with the Armenian's tendency to emphasize their Christian origins; as with the African-Americans' tendency



to emphasize the history of slavery and struggle of their history-as if they had no history prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century...”. But that is like a chess player analyzing only a few moves and variations and overlooking the rest-it invites mistakes, eve of judgment, miscalculations in present strategy & tactics, and thus failures in general. One must know one’s entire history, one’s entire line of decent-the entire chain that leads up to who he/she is, now. Only then can one even begin to think of aspirations.

We all need to know who we all are. To live properly and in harmony together on this planet, knowing the history of others is necessary to gain a better understanding of what differences we may find. This is rarely done in the year 2023, which may explain why we, as those who currently occupy this earth, are in the condition we’re in.

If no one is doing this, let’s begin. Let’s seek to be better.

Sincerely,  
Dmitry Smirnov





# 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:**

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

"ATTN: TIME 2024"

# **NEW Deadline: February 2, 2024**

# Domestic Violence

## Lakeshia Baker - Logan

My name is Lakeshia Baker I was born and raised in Chicago IL. I came from a well-respected family. I have two older sisters making me the baby of three girl's, at a young age my father wasn't present in my life a lot (shoot) if I'm being honest with myself, he wasn't really in my life at all, so with that missing father figure in my life I started to look for love in the wrong people. All of the relationships and friendships (men and women) that I found myself in; I looked for the missing connection I never got from my father.

Everyone that I came in contact with, spouse or not, out of all the relationship's I found myself in I always came out abused mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and always physically. The first time I was physically abused by someone I thought loved me was my children's father. Sometimes I would be

badly beaten where I needed hospital care, and my feelings would be undeniably hurt. I always made excuses for him no matter what because I thought it was love.

Every time he abused me right after he was done, he would always tell me he loved me and promised that he would never do it again and he always did until I





felt enough was enough. The second time I was in a bad relationship was when I met my co-defendant, at the time he was my boyfriend. He would do the same thing that the first one did; he was just insecure about my relationships with people or who I'd talk to in general.

He beat me twice and the last beating ended with me being injured really bad; he also struck my youngest baby causing his death by injury, as well as causing me to have a miscarriage with his child. Now I'm paying for his actions, he is now free back out on the streets to do the same to the next unsuspecting woman. My fear was that he would reoffend and guess what he did it again. The only difference is I'm here to tell my story in order to help other women not to go down the same path I did.

Anybody that tells you they love you after they beat you doesn't love themselves let alone someone else. They just want to control you; if you let them. I'm not writing this piece for anyone to feel bad for me. My prayer is that nobody else has to suffer this pain; hopefully I have reached at least one person.

L. Baker





# A Tribute to all the Fathers on Lock

## Toola Taylor – Mt. Sterling

My father died when I was 13-years-old. He and my mother divorced when I was two. Later, he remarried and had another family. Because of that, father's day has never had much significance for me. However, as far as I know he was a "good" man. My one memory of him—which is also my oldest memory, is of him arriving at our doorstep, asking to take me somewhere, and my mom's slamming the door in his face.



Of course, I was way too young to *overstand* the dynamics of what was going on between them, and the confusion of it all would cause strife between my mother and I for decades to come— as it never left my mind, or my heart—that he showed up. I would always appreciate having witnessed that simple attempt. I would find out years later that my mom had grown sick— and- tired of him taking penitentiary chances, and choosing others over his family (i.e., Black Panther Party among others).

However, despite all that has happened—to this day it is that memory, and its impact on me that is why I never actually developed any hate towards my father, notwithstanding the fact that he died early, and is the driving force as to why I strive to maintain a relationship, as best I can, and to do everything

That I can for my own son. I do this, in spite of the fact that I am in prison. I do this, in spite of the fact I know that his mother suffers from the pain and resentment of my incarceration and, at times, makes trying to be his dad that much harder. But, as children, we remember the deeds of our fathers. We remember the moments that demonstrate the effort they put in. and, just the same we remember the moments when they don't. For children, whether we accept that, or not— effort translates into love.

If you are a father, incarcerated, yet struggling and striving to make sure that you do everything within your power and ability to still be a parent, and do more than talk— I commend you. You are appreciated. If you are one of us who happily sacrifice miniscule things like commissary to make sure that your kids have the basic necessities such as underwear, shoes, shirts, pants, etc., etc., can attend afterschool or extracurricular activities, can pay for the pad for class, or for the class itself, or help their mom put food on the table— this is especially, for you!

There are way too many of us behind these walls who think that it is somehow offensive to even suggest sending money home— because we are in prison! But it says something about a man who could do such a thing under such circumstances. And not only that— *I promise you*— your children will remember the things that you did and said, while you were/are away from them. The reward for you, in their hearts, will be immeasurable! Even when you may feel that you don't get appreciation from the people that encourage you should— *trust me when I say that, in the end, you will be appreciate by those who matter the most!* Happy Father's day! Commend one another!



# Reality...

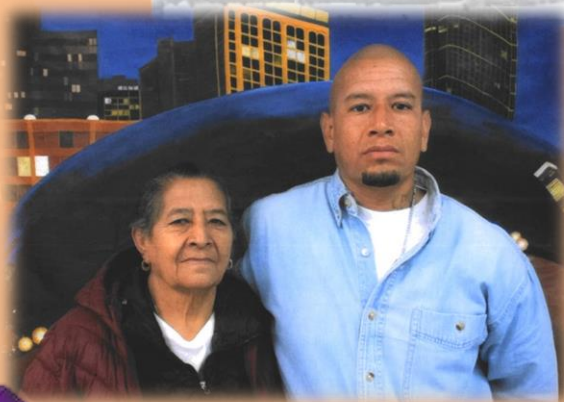
## Ramiro Chavez – Illinois River

As a child I was handed down a mask...

Because of culture, I was told that people don't lie, men don't cry or gossip, that women were the only ones with emotion, and that their place was at home. But, as I was coming of age... I started to see reality with my own two eyes. People do tell lies to get their way in life. And even at some point, they hurt those that they claim to love.

Males do gossip, and real men do cry. Women aren't the only ones with emotions. And about their place at home... All we have to do is look around the world to see that women carry the load. It takes being different to bring about change. And I'm writing this because I refuse to keep living the same old thing. Some people told me that I was different when we shared viewpoints about things... about life. Although they meant it as an insult, it didn't hurt me at all.

Today, as I write this with the ink of a pen, I'm blessed to say that I am different. I am called to be my brothers' & sisters' keepers; it's hard for me to have conversations with brothers in prison from different gangs and realize that culture told me that they were enemies of mine...





because of the color they represented. Some will tell you that I am a coward, but I also know from experience that gangs are full of cutthroat ways, and when you've lived around such culture it doesn't shock you what people do or say. Brothers & sisters who are serving 20 to life can tell you the realities of facing fears of people who we love passing away while we're in prison.

Today, they have to fight to get home to the people they love. Are we really brothers and sisters to someone when we know the outcome of gangs... dying or coming to prison to die? There are brothers in Colorado's prison who may never see the light of day once again; some know that they are not in prison because of what they did. The justice system found ways to put them away.

As long as we keep doing the same old thing, the politicians will keep playing their own game of asking for votes to bring change and stay in office for the money they get paid. Change has always been in our hands. How much money do you think politicians get paid by the N.R.A (National Rifle Association)?...The pain for our families is the same. Someone they love is going away, in a casket or a four-way cage.

When have we, as men, found out that we can cry? We have so many fears. And let's not talk about the sleepless nights wondering when Lady Liberty will knock at our door. How many birthdays have we missed of those we love? What about the holidays y'all share and the moments when we look back to say, "I was there"... call me a clown or a coward, but today, I know who I am.

I want all my brothers & sisters to be at home with the people we love and who love us back.

To my sisters inside of a prison or out in the world, I am sorry for the heavy load y'all live with and carry every day. For years I was afraid to speak on the ways of those who call themselves men, but I am blessed to have a mother and women in action that showed me how powerful y'all really are. One of y'all made me see the power of paper and ink in a pen. Thank you Two Roads & Kewanee for opening an avenue for us to give our *View Points!* Thank y'all and God Bless.

## Today Choose You

Mishunda Davis Brown – Logan

The face of Domestic Violence is anger, control, and harm rage, mental, physical and verbal abuse by an abuser, which I know well, due to being raised in a domestic violent home; and ended up in a domestic violence relationship of my own.

I've seen the dark, bad and ugly of domestic violence, but today I choose to no longer be a victim. I want those who are victims to know that

you no longer have to be a victim today by **CHOOSING YOU!** By choosing me, I have the power to decide who I choose is worthy to be in my presence.

Today, I choose to love me more and put my well-being first, getting rid of any garbage that doesn't benefit my prosperity. Today, I choose to know who I am instead of believing who my abuser said I am. Today, I choose to make healthier choices for myself, and you can too by **CHOOSING YOU.** I encourage you to today and every day choose yourself. You are beautiful, you are loved, and **YOU MATTER!!**





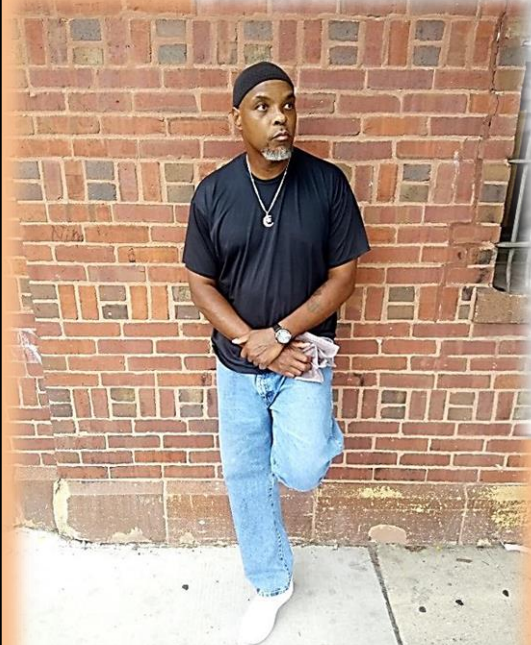
## FINAL WORDS

# A Grateful Goodbye

First off, let me give all praise and thanks to Allah, for truly it was HE and HE alone who already knew all the beauty I have only now begun to see. It was through his infinite wisdom, that each step I took these last 26 years was masterfully planned out to the last detail, that even through some of the darkest of times one could ever experience, I was able to walk when others around me fell in defeat. I thank Allah for giving me strength to change from the individual I once was, into the Man I have become today. I write my last words to Kewanee LSRC, just to say *thank you so very much*.

I doubt you will ever know just how grateful I am to have been able to spend these last 14 months here among such special people. Words alone will never truly say how I feel as I leave this place and re-enter society once more. There was a time where I thought that I would never be free again, a time where I had no hope of a brighter tomorrow.

I had all but given up and considered myself dead. But Allah is surely **the best of planners**. Little did I know that I would have to go through hell in order to experience Heaven.



*John 'Jay-R' Williams*  
Former Associate Editor/House Poet  
TWO ROADS

Traveling through these last 26 years, I went through the max (facilities) and the minimum facilities, and I saw my brothers at their lowest points. I too found myself to become partial to certain mindsets and behaviors, not knowing the true greatness within all of us.

All I know now came to me through “Pressure and Pain”. I’ll be the first to admit that it wasn’t easy. Some of us have to suffer in order for us to truly hear God (that’s who I was). I never saw anything good because I myself wasn’t good. Once I made the effort to do better, it was then that things for me got better. Once I made the effort to do better, and you took a chance and it happened for a “brother from the bottom.”

Coming to Kewanee was what was waiting for me. I was facing the death penalty in 1997 (no time in prison). I had received 60 years at 31 years old. Today, I’m 58. At first, all the doors were closed to me, and it took me 26 years to find the man worthy of being free again. Kewanee helped me find that man; shaped and molded him and gave him the skills that he was lacking. Now that man is ready!

I want to thank Warden James Carothers for everything! For seeing all he saw in me, especially the things I didn’t see in myself. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in the Welcoming Committee as well as being his special host on conducting tours for visitors as they visited Kewanee. I also want to thank Warden Chance Jones, for the opportunities he provided me with. Special thanks to Mrs. Allison Trigg. You are the best. Thank you so much for all you have done, mostly, for believing in me.

Mostly, I want to give a special thanks you to, Lt. Paula Baker. You know more than anyone how deeply grateful I truly am. It was you who always had an ear when I had something to share. Thank you for all you have done and for keeping me in check when I needed it. As I have told you many times before, you are truly appreciated...ALWAYS!

To all the staff, thank you from the bottom of my heart. And to all my brothers in confinement at Kewanee and across the state. Those I had the chance to build with and all those I didn't, please know that, "I am you.", in your highest moment and in your lowest, I carry you with me always! For we all strive for the same happiness in life. Though we have shared the very same pain, know that it is the motivating factor for all our change.

I break this seal and move on to what is next. I hold all you brothers close to my heart, for my every step is for you. For every move I make is paving a way for you to follow. Hold your heads up, stay focused always, and I'll see you on the other side.

Always A Brother,  
John 'Jay-R' Williams





