

TWO ROADS



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

Volume 26

To All Readers

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

Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

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

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

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

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

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

Our Mission Statement

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



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TWO ROADS

PARENTING FROM PRISON

Volume 26

DISCLAIMER

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

Thank you.



TWO ROADS

Editorial Team

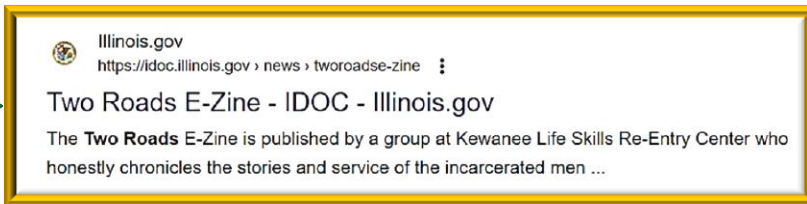
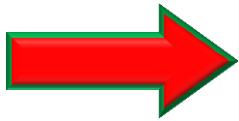


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EDITOR'S TAKE

I get it. The Parenting From Prison issue is where we talk about the ups and downs of being a parent while your child (or grandchild) grows up from a distance without you. But, what if I told you about a different set of parents? Parents that accepted you and embraced you when you were down? Parents who come to you to give you advice and a perspective on how you came be better than you once were?

Cliff and Sue Parrish are the architects behind Freedom From Within, a program dedicated to implementing practices that produce life skills, and that give individuals a space to learn and an opportunity to build and grow. They have been ministering inside the prison system for more than ten years now, investing thousands of hours in individuals in custody, prison staff, and prison leadership, identifying issues, and creating programs to empower those behind bars.

It started when their travels landed them in the Philippines, were they stayed months on in. In doing this, and they found themselves focused on change in one of the poorest communities in the world. Cliff chance encounter cam when he would visit the prisons to speak on God, and his translator was there to aid and assist to the best of his abilities. Years later when he returned, his translator was there as always and by chance, Cliff asked him a question: “why haven’t you went home?”



His answer floored him: "I can't pay my fine." The fine was \$500 (American). One of the kindest men, who were willing to help a person in peril, gave the prison the fine payment to set him free. Two people, two different continents and one goal...create change. (Add passages from bible and Qur'an) and that is what he did.

This act of kindness ignited the transformational rhythms, which sparked a new and invigorating program, made for system-impacted individuals, meant to give reflection and enlightenment. It was then they realized that freedom is more than living outside of prison walls - it's freedom from the prison created inside each prisoner. It was then they realized that freedom is more than living outside of prison walls - it's freedom from the prison created inside each prisoner. This led to the creation of Freedom From Within men to become leaders and vastly grounded in what life is and the principals behind it.

Kind of like a parent giving their kids a great education. But this education is not based solely on learning, but a way to heal, build, grow

and thrive. The first place they implemented Freedom From Within was at the Dixon Correctional Center. There they met two men: Ronnie Carrasquillo and Paul Bosanko. Ronnie had served 47 years in IDOC (yes, Jimmy Carter was President) and Paul had served 35 years (when George H.W. Bush beat Michael Dukakis). They enrolled in the program and they learn so many valuable things that lead them to be good stewards to Cliff and Sue.

"The most important legacy that parentages can leave their loved ones is *character and integrity*. "

They were able to elevate many This led to many other places of growth and it has graduated hundreds of individuals. Parents are meant to nurture, give instruction and remain resolute. Parents don't have the choice of being apathetic to the concerns of the kids in their lives. Someone said, "***The choice to be a parent is a choice to have your heart walking around the outside of your body as long as you live.***"

Although Cliff and Sue don't mean the word kid in the wrong light, but he feels that we all are his kids and that he is proud of those who learn and grow from the program. Ronnie was released in October and his first posted video was to the Freedom From Within community, encouraging the men to continue to strive and learn from what has been provided.

If you have ever met a Cliff or Sue Parrish during your time away, take the time to appreciate all of the love and admiration that they have given you and all the lessons that you have received. Many men and women have never their parents or have lost their parents during their time away. The most important legacy that parentages can leave their loved ones is *character* and *integrity*. Cliff and Sue have worked tremendously to give each and every person that they have encountered these things. Thank you.

TWO ROADS was interviewed by the *Quad City Times* for their Holiday Edition last month. We take pride in getting our message out to the masses and this was very instrumental. We would like to thank the following: Ms. Gretchen Teske (journalist), Roy Dabner (photographer), Director Latoya Hughes, TWO ROADS Co-Founder Chief Jennifer Parrack, Naomi Puzzello, James Estes (Founder of TWO ROADS), Warden Carothers and Warden Jones, Penny Rowan and all those that we forgot, thank you for your support! (A shirt is on the way!!!)



Pictured: Gretchen Teske, Carlos McDougal, Hafis Haqq, Roy Dabner and Kenji Haley

We are in the works of reimagining our Podcast "Inside Out". Our goal is to get it up and running by spring (fingers crossed). We believe that this will be an extension of our e-zine, with interviews with individuals, staff and members on the outside, hence the name.

We have already had a few interviews and we will dig into our three principles: **Rehabilitation, Restoration and Re-Entry**. Be on the lookout for this on your GTL Tablets. I would like to thank Warden Carothers and Ms. Puzzello for working with us and giving us the platform to inspire

those who read our e-zines, inside and out our community.

Finally, I would also like to thank all of you who were willing to contribute to this issue. It's difficult for people to share their shortcomings when it come to their kids (no ifs', ands', or buts'), but what many of you will see is that you can relate to these stories, shed a tear from the passages and truly make changes from the words that are presented. Have a wonderful Christmas, Kwanzaa, and a Happy New Year!

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Editors Correction: we would like to note that in Viewpoints, part 3, TWO ROADS mistakenly labeled the location on **Mr. Chris Childs** facility as Menard. He is currently in Western (Mt. Sterling). Sorry for the misprint.

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

My incarceration has been akin to living in the matrix, and everyday I choose to take the **red** pill. TWO ROADS has been a platform for people to jack in and awaken the many others who also desire the red pill as opposed to the **blue**. The stories and information are real, the people are real, and the impact is real.

TWO ROADS promotes stories and information centered on restorative justice and redemption. TWO ROADS offers a platform for the voiceless to be heard. TWO ROADS publishes substantive articles. All these things I can get jiggy with. It's a privilege to be a part of an e-zine whose values are in alignment with my own. I think it's paramount I align my character with my gifts. I'm an aspiring author and have participated in many writing workshops and English courses offered through the University of Illinois, via EJP (Education Justice

Project), and Eastern Illinois University. Through personal experience, I understand the power of writing and having a vehicle to express oneself. As a new associate editor for TWO ROADS I look forward to being more involved in facilitating all you sisters and brothers' voices getting heard, but more importantly, preserving the integrity of your messages. Also, thank you Kenji Haley for believing in me and offering me the **red** pill. You are my Kewanee Morpheus!



William Jenkins
TWO ROADS
Newest Associate Editor

FRANK AQUINO GALESBURG

Thank you to Two Roads for providing a platform to discuss a topic of such importance and impactful to almost every single one of us in one way or another. I hope that collectively our thoughts, ideas, hopes, and concerns can help to create a positive change for parents in prison.

I am 21 years into a life sentence. I got married to the single most amazing woman I've ever known in July of 2021. Our marriage afforded me the opportunity to become a proud parent of six. Our children are: Destiny, Yvette (Rest in Heaven, she passed away from S.I.D.s in 2001), Faith and Frank Jr. (twins) are 20 years old, Maria is 17, June is 7 and our baby Celianna is about to be 6 on October 25th. Faith and Frank are my biological children; I was arrested three months before they were born.

Destiny passed away before I could be a father to her but I am her parent because I protect and promote her memory in my wife's heart and mind. Maria is a part of the family and I am her parent. She is strong willed and independent and maintains an active and positive relationship with her father. The babies may not have my DNA, but my love for them and their love for me transcends they are my babies through

and through. In many ways I have been a part of their lives more than I was ever able to be in Faith and Frank's.

I come from a very chaotic childhood; I'm sure most of us prisoners share that same dynamic. My home was hostile and cold, yet my father tried to instill family values and traditions. He was an alcoholic and a drug addict irresponsible in every way and violent. My mother was the breadwinner. She consumed herself with work as a form of escapism. She was physically and emotionally unavailable more often than not. Drugs and or alcohol have killed three fifths of my immediate family. I grew up bitter and resentful. I filled that void with the streets, which manifested in a life sentence.



My twins both used to tell me how they wished I could have seen them play sports in high school. I missed every game and every meaningful ceremony. Kids can be cruel and I know there were kids who made comments about their father never being there. I've had video visits cut short because my babies tried to show me drawings they made for me or school work they were working on. Parenting shouldn't be restricted to day room times and or access to the phone.

My 7 year old son recently had an injury at school, that required surgery, and I wasn't able to find out what was going on or provide him or my wife. When my daughter went to college, I went so far as to write the President of the university. He actually wrote back and told me it was the most impactful letter he had ever received. Writing is powerful and it shows that we are willing to invest time to try and be a parent who asks questions and offers insight. I have written multiple letters to multiple governors, IDOC Directors, and Wardens. I even wrote a letter to the Warden here at Hill C.C. when I first arrived. Sadly it was to no effect.

I wrote about parenting programs, for my kids (and others) could bring school work to the visiting room, so we could

learn together. Or math work books, any work books for that matter, to do something other than eat and or play games. While I was in Menard, I wrote the Warden and asked if I could video visit or face time as my twins received their high school diplomas. Could you imagine what that would have meant to them? With my babies, I would love to face time parent teacher conferences. The technology is there and available to allow us to earn that blessing for our kids benefit comforting words and strength until the next day. Having access to the phone or our tablets and being able to talk when we are actually needed would make a quantifiable difference. Not just for our kids but it would give many of us a reason to change our behaviors and invest more in children's future and ourselves as parents.

Parenting classes that provide real time parenting, it's right there in front of administrators and those with the ability to make change. IDOC should facilitate the ability to be proactive as parents from here. My actions got me here and my absence from my children's daily lives is something I own. I carry that guilt every day and I struggle more as I get older. The twins are old enough to express what they've felt having to grow up with me in here.



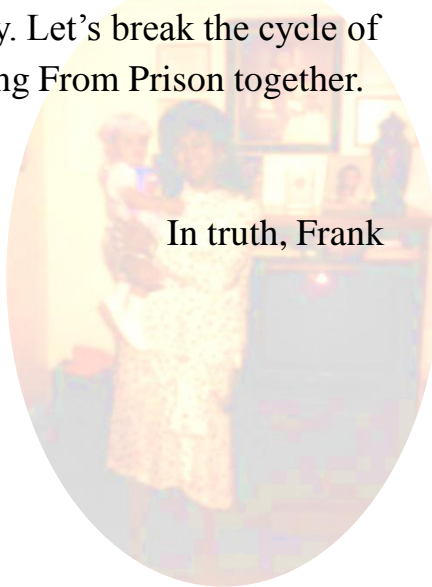
I began my bid explosively. I came into prison at 23 and spent almost thirteen years consecutively in confinement of one form or another. With my selfish choices and inability to mitigate the negative impact—short term and long term, this would have on my kids—kept me stuck in a destructive cycle. I lost so many years of meaningful contact with my twins. The person who gave birth to the twins is a self-absorbed individual and my mother took custody and raised them.

“Writing is powerful and it shows that we are willing to invest time to try and be a parent who asks questions and offers insight.”

In these years of darkness, I’ve tried to be the best father I could, given my circumstances and limitations. Here are the things I tried to do during those years. From kindergarten – 9th Grade, I wrote the twins teachers and school administrators. I tried to express to them an understanding of what they were dealing with at home and give a context of behaviors if, for whatever reason, they misbehaved. I also just wanted to say, “Yes, I am here but I am more than willing to be involved in what’s going on.”

My babies love me and I do my best to invest in them. I try to give them what I was too self-absorbed to give the twins and my wife is there every step encouraging our growth as a family unit.

Until I can find my freedom, I would like to be the best father/parent I can be to all of my children. IDOC, state wide and on an institutional level has the ability to facilitate that for myself and all parents who wish to better parents. This is my story and my experience after two decades of imprisonment. I hope my success stories are worthy of consideration and that my actions provide something useful to one and all who find themselves “parenting from prison.” Thank you again Two Roads for this opportunity. Let’s break the cycle of broken Parenting From Prison together.



In truth, Frank



C/O MOMMAS

C/O L. JACKSON, KEWANEE



For me, I was a single mom looking for job security, financial stability and to gain self-fulfillment. My ultimate goal was to obtain a degree in law or to become a state trooper. However, after giving birth to my daughter, plans definitely changed.

So, when I met with personnel to talk about the job and its benefits, I discovered this was a great opportunity to take care of my daughter. Truthfully, I wasn't sure, because I had chickened out on test three times prior!

One night while studying to become a beautician (why? I don't know), my dad says, "*Hey Linda, did you see this?*" It was an article in the local newspaper about a potential job working in the prison. My reply to him was, "*Okay, what does that have to do with me?*"

He explained the position fit my college education and it wouldn't hurt to at least see if they would hire me. I was a few months from finishing beauty school when my father's words replayed in my mind and I said "*It wouldn't hurt to check it out.*"

"Mommy, that's okay. I know you're tired from working all night with the Bad Boys."



I got hired and there was much to learn. I was a new mother. I left my daughter with my parents and I was filled with emotions. I thought, “*What if my mom doesn’t put her to bed like I do?*” or “*What if she wakes up and I’m not there and cries all night?*”

Although I knew she was in good hands, I still sit here 22 years later and that still plays in my mind. That baby girl I left way back when is 25 years old. She’s survived being a daughter of a correctional officer. Yes, things were different for her growing up, as I made that decision to provide the best I knew for her back in 2001. But, don’t get it confused, because we had rough times.

I had to work second shift for over 9 years! Funny how the daughters (and sons) of c/o’s quickly learn the lingo of the work schedule. Whenever she had an event on the holidays, like Thanksgiving or Christmas, I can still hear that little voice say “*Take a personal day mommy.*”

Her days were very hard, as she’d never go to sleep until she saw my face when I arrived at home at 10pm. I’d always assure her by saying “*Now go*

to bed before mommy get off so you’re not tired in the morning.” But she NEVER did!

Even as a child, I knew she was worried about my safety and only wanted to make sure I made it home safely. The other side of those rough times for my daughter was mommy’s lack of patience after dealing with juveniles for 8 hours daily. The hard exterior that was being built made me a mess and I had to remind myself many times that *my daughter was not my work.*

When I look back at the things I endured, mainly the vocabulary, that became the norm as a Juvenile Justice Specialist makes me cringe. At this time, my daughter was self-sufficient and independent as most nights after work. Mommy was finding ways to deal with the pressure of the previous work day and wasn’t in the right mindset for my daughter.

My lovely daughter would say “*Mommy, that’s okay. I know you’re tired from working all night with the Bad Boys.*”

At this point, I must mention, that as a single mommy, working in corrections, there's no way I would've made it without a good support system.

God truly blessed me with the most amazing parents, family and friends a C/O mom could ever ask for. The numerous holidays, ball games, and weekends I missed, they were always there stepping up and helping.

When I mention family, I'm not talking about blood, but my work family. Like the time a couple of my co-workers picked up my daughter after school because they lived near my parents and I was working later than usual. Or the time a certain lieutenant was there when the sitter didn't show up to watch my daughter and he'd just worked 3rd shift, and took her to a different sitter.

Yes, that 25 year old girl has grown into the most amazing woman! She's mentioned (jokingly) she might apply to work with me because she got a little bit of that rough exterior, but I said "*I don't think so honey.*" I honestly feel she hesitates to show emotion as she endured one of the most difficult and

trying times in my life.

The main thing that saved us both is our *faith* in God. I'm a firm believer that God places us in certain situations, and he truly knows our story long before we do! I'm now the proud mommy of three beautiful girls. Yes, I had two more during my career. My middle daughter was born in 2013 and I wasn't a single mother and it did make a little bit of difference. My youngest was born in 2017 (when *IYC Kewanee* became *Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center*) and what a world of difference! The atmosphere alone was such a difference because I was able to work my 8 hours and go home to my girls and have a positive attitude. Yes, I was older and when I say older, that is an understatement. I'll tell you I would've never been able to endure the situations I had throughout my life; not only as a mother, but as a woman.

I salute all the C/O momma's! And all the working moms (single or not). You're truly amazing individuals...but these mommas behind the gate are a different breed!



PRESENTS

RE-ENTRY FEARS

As 2024 approaches, many of the women and men in custody are preparing to take that next step: **Work Release** or **HOME**. SUBMISSIONS ARE BEING ACCEPTED for “*Re-Entry Fears – a look at the true reality of leaving prison.*” Many of us have gained, while others have had losses, here is your opportunity to shed light on returning to a new world.

Without staff support:
Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

“I’m returning to a completely different family...when I left in January of ’93.”

- Hafis HAQQ
Senior Editor



Outsiders, Staff and Individuals-

In-Custody

(WITH Staff Support)

Please send your submission and scanned photo to
doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"ATTN: RE-ENTRY FEARS"

Deadline is January 22, 2024

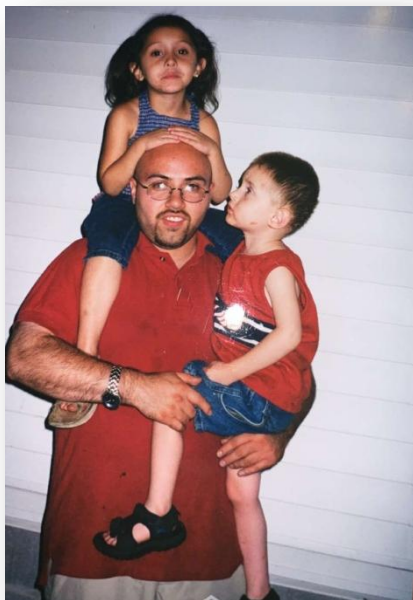
MESSAGE FROM THE OUTSIDE



PRISCILLA BAHENA

My dad has been incarcerated for going on 16 years. In the time he's been locked up, I've lived with at least 5 different family members and 2 non relatives. In that time, I graduated high school, had three kids, graduated college with an Associate's Degree and so much more. I am 27. My dad was 30 when he got locked up. In fifteen years I have lived more of my life than my Papi did when he got locked up. I have DONE more with my life in fifteen years than he did with his life out of prison.

All the same, we share a lot of common lived experiences. I had three kids before thirty. I'm a semi-young parent. I've been in abusive relationships. One the best things we have in common are our desire to be better parents than our parents were. My dad showed up to all my softball games. He encouraged me to write poetry. He let me cry when I had big feelings sometimes. He took us to almost every six flags in the United States. When I think of the good in my childhood he is there somewhere.



William with his kids

“...he went in when he was thirty and is approaching *dinosaur age* quickly, no matter how young he may look, and old dinosaurs don't (can't) always learn new tricks.”

If not in the picture of a memory, then he was the one behind the camera making the memory happen. We both tried to break generational trauma. It's up to me now.





Since he's been incarcerated, he has still tried to be a good parent anyway that he could be he was present. There were years he got nonprofits to send me and my siblings Christmas gifts. When I had my oldest child, he sent recordings of himself reading books; and would send the recording and the book to play to my belly (when I was pregnant). He sends my kids, my siblings, and me handmade paintings for every holiday, birthday and milestones. My favorite thing is when he 'whispers' into the ears of family members to advocate for me. That's why my grandfather gave me his car. That's why sometimes a particular person may suddenly become extra helpful to me. My least favorite thing about him being my dad and being incarcerated is a saying that he says often says and acts on, *"You know I'm a BUG. I'll keep calling until you answer!"*

Being the child of an incarcerated parent comes with some red flags. Having a clemency hearing officer tell me I'm in denial and need help if I think my dad deserves clemency. I did his taxes one year so he could get the

Stimulus checks.

I've checked out his "write an inmate" page. I've done some pretty outlandish things that are sometimes uncomfortable. He SAYS some pretty ridiculous stuff to me sometimes. At minimum, it's frustrating. At most, he can be hurtful. In all honesty, that's sometimes why my siblings don't take his call. He doesn't always get it.



William and Priscilla @ the DEFY Graduation

Regardless, I can't imagine not being able to see, hug, or talk to my kids. Even before I had kids, I couldn't imagine not talking to my dad. I get why he can be a bug.



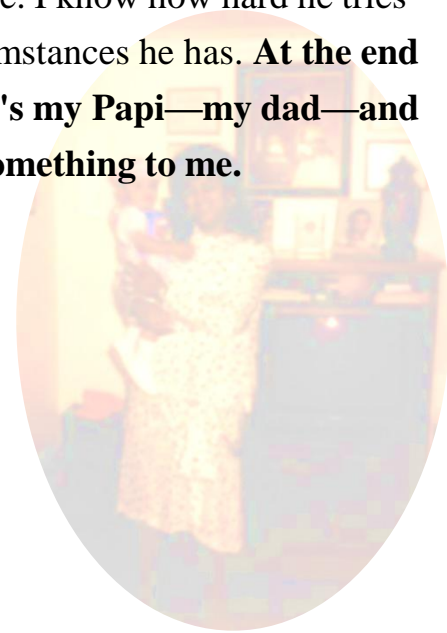


What does become bothersome are the challenges of being on my side...being the child. One thing I've learned in my relationship with my Papi, is that there are things he will know more about than me [than I know about myself]. There are some experiences he has had that I can learn some lessons from him. However, I've likely already learned them from him.

At this point, I think he may have lessons to learn from me. Except that he went in when he was thirty and is approaching *dinosaur age* quickly, no matter how young he may look, and old dinosaurs don't (can't) always learn new tricks. Sometimes, I try to hurt him back by hanging up on him, or yelling at him,

as if I were a teenager rebelling against him. That's not realistic though. In reality, accepting my incarcerated dad into my life is accepting that I may be more of an adult than he [is], and knowing he may never acknowledge it.

My relationship with him is voluntary, selfless, defeating, and angering. Man, does he make me angry. He thinks he knows me but wasn't there for half my life. He still isn't here. He still doesn't always take responsibility for how he hurt me for going away, or how it still hurts my life as an adult. But I remember what he was like before. I know how hard he tries with the circumstances he has. **At the end of the day, he's my Papi—my dad—and that means something to me.**



TOOLS



My mom gave me the tools that I needed for my life 30 years later. She wanted me to live with a focus. She saw the way I was starting to live. I couldn't understand when my mom would say "if you do it, no way out."

The look in her eyes and in her words meant, *don't do it*. My mom always saw my provisions, but I couldn't understand how. It's amazing how our parents know us so well. There was so many times my mom tried to tell me—or warn me—about life. I wouldn't listen. As I continue to go through hardships in my life. I can hear my mom's voice about all the wisdom she was enlighten me with.



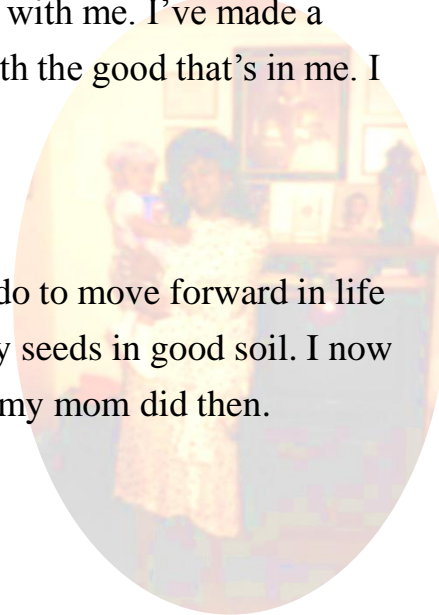
LaKisha Woodard

TWO ROADS
Associate Editor

My mom loved me and wanted the best for me, and she saw what lay within me. She wanted me to live out my purpose and not my wants.

God is doing a new thing in me. I finally caught on Mom; I'm doing good things, walking in a much better way. You always said everything I needed was in **me**. It didn't make since then, but now I know. I'm using the tools you instilled in me. I have gained wisdom as I go through adversities in my life; I hope I'm making your proud. I'm free from that life I was living when you were on Earth with me. I've made a connection with the good that's in me. I like it mom!

What do I do to move forward in life now? Plant my seeds in good soil. I now see myself as my mom did then.



JUSTIN 'JUSTO' ALTHERS SHERIDAN

Greetings everyone reading TWO ROADS edition for Parenting From Prison, I will start by saying this, I have only been locked up since November 29th of 2022, and although I am still new to prison life, I struggle and deal with all the same issues, my biggest fear before being sentenced to prison was how I'm going to still be a father.

How will my son do without me around, how will my wife deal with all of this and the kids while I am incarcerated. In my short time, here at Sheridan Correctional Center, I have learned a few things, when it comes to parenting from within these walls and through 20 minutes phone calls.

Approximately one visit per month with my son, my first experience with parenting is always have your spouse's back when it comes to punishments your kids may get. We know it's going to happen—we have all been kids before—but also be aware of your time with them.

Don't leave the call or visit with anger or disappointment, we are not in prison alone our kids also feel the effect of us doing time. Second support whatever it is they may be doing that is of the positive nature in their lives, school, sports; etc... our kids needs those positive reinforcements from us I always tell my son how proud I am of him even with the small things, we have too as parents, build that father/child or mother/child relationship.

Children strive for consistency and structure so be consistent with them always. Give them all the love and support however; be stern when it is required. Some of the other things I struggle with is being a pushover, when it comes to my boy I let him get away with, more than his step-mom does.

“If I did not have my son in my life, I personally would struggle with my purpose in this world!”



That is where having your spouse's back comes into play, do not be afraid to ask your kid important questions, like how are you feeling with me being away or is there anything you want to know about me that you do not already know.

Joke with your kids know their laughter! For me my son's laughter always make me smile, my son often jokes with me. He recently had a football game and he is playing the position of safety, well the team they faced had a kid 4x's his size and he ran away when he was confronted by this player. Ha Ha...always make time for your kids on the phone, if you can call daily call and talk. That is what I do to try and still be there for them as his father.

We as parents can still reward and punish our children appropriately with the help of our spouse or family members who has our children. Our children still need their parents, regardless of your time your kids absolutely need you as much as you need them. If I did not have my son in my life, I personally would struggle with my purpose in this world!

My son gives me life and motivation to be better not only for him, but for myself also to be a greater father for him. Rise up as a parent and be there for your kids through the good and bad. Peace and love Two Roads.



PARENTING FROM THE INSIDE



KELLY RAGSDALE CENTRAIA

Some of us “meaning Parents behind bars” are placed in a scary and touchy situation that can be difficult to handle and deal with due to the fact as being absent and not being present with our children. We sometimes mentally lose our place in our children lives, when it does not have to be that way.

We can still be parents and don't need to have any guilt, of course we wish we were there and we are missing out on a lot of moments. But we can still be good parents from prison, we can talk to our children ask important questions about their studies and life. We can let them understand our mistakes and let them know that we love them, it is the little thing that count you cannot make no one love you, accept you, or want a relationship with you.

All you can do is reach out and try , because a child always want to know you love them and most of the time they want to have a relationship with

you. If you really tried to always be there then that is all you can do and leave the rest or should I say put the rest in God's hands.

The Light The Time is getting near almost at the end of this road, Cannot wait to get there I learned so much about myself and have a better outlook on life.

I let myself go and that is why I am here in the first place, I did not put my faith and trust in God and now I see how it is important to have him fully in my life. I know I have a lot to work on and need to get a lot done in order for me to become the man I need to be, so the work must start now so when I get out I can be ready for the world that await me.

However, without God as the head of my life, that path to the road becomes difficult.



PARENTING

MR. PYLE, PAROLE AGENT (IDOC)



How long have you worked for Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) ?

28 years

Did you become a parent before or after working for IDOC, and what is the hardest part about being a parent while working for the Department? **After.**

Missing lots of precious moments with them because of work.

How have you been able to maintain/build upon your relationship with your kid(s) while working such a demanding job?

I was not able to while they were young. This job destroys you as a person, destroys families and destroys marriages.

What's the best part about being a parent? **Being called Dad.**

A lot of men and women in custody may have not had the best parenting skills prior to their incarceration, which could

lead to poor choices. What can you tell them that could help them succeed in their future ventures for their own Personal Transformation?

Try every day to be the best you.

Finish this line. . . "The best advice I could give my child is. . ."

Do not work in the Public Safety Field.

TWO ROADS would like to thank Mr. Pyle and all of those who are in the field day in and day out while still working hard as a parent



OPENING NOTE

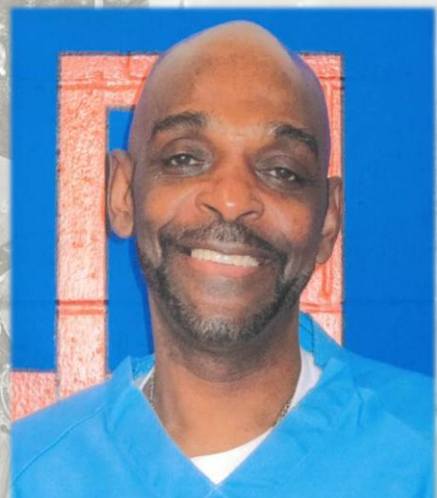
(TO LOVED ONES)

When it comes to being a family member on the outside looking to continue a relationship with someone that is currently incarcerated or facing incarceration, the first thing to understand is the mental change that will occur with the person that is on the inside. Please note that everyone that enters this system will need to adapt, which means that you will have to adapt as well. Depending upon the facility, your loved one will have some difficult choices to make and that means your support is necessary.

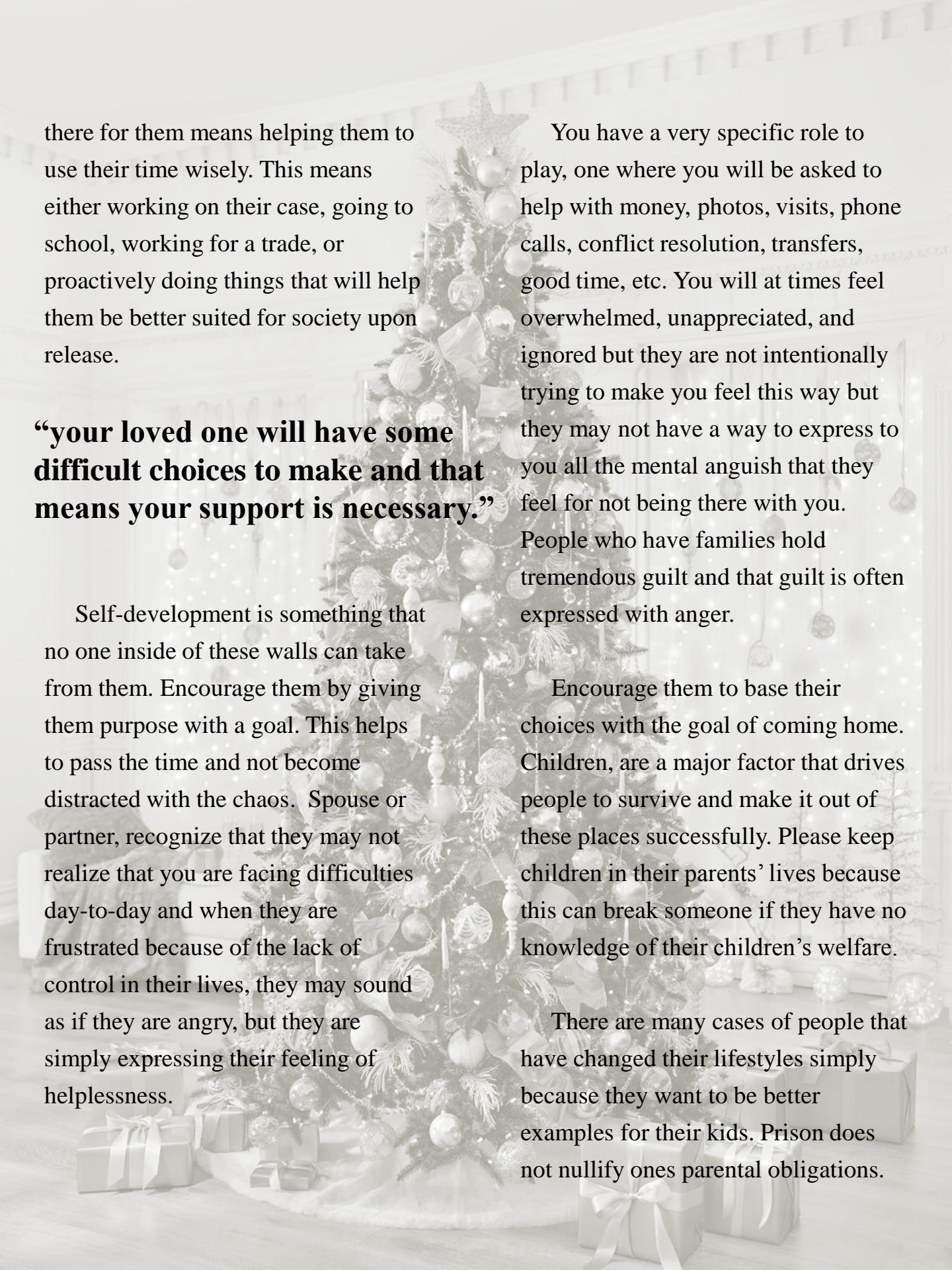
Take into account that some department policies feel demoralizing to the person-in-custody but they are for the security and safety of not just your loved one, but staff as well. Understanding that safety is the top priority for Corrections will assist in understanding the decisions behind some of their actions. For people-in-custody, communication is the most important thing that anyone can receive.

Whether it is of parents, a spouse, children, or friends, this is critical to helping them endure the hardships of these walls. Sadly, most will have to serve time but how they serve the time is important because we, as well as you, don't want them to reoffend.

Parents, know that they're still your children, and they will return to the person that made them feel safe when they were adolescents; you. This will place a tremendous responsibility back into your life, because you love your child and want to help them, but being



Kelly 'KB' Bennett
TWO ROADS
Associate Editor



there for them means helping them to use their time wisely. This means either working on their case, going to school, working for a trade, or proactively doing things that will help them be better suited for society upon release.

“your loved one will have some difficult choices to make and that means your support is necessary.”

Self-development is something that no one inside of these walls can take from them. Encourage them by giving them purpose with a goal. This helps to pass the time and not become distracted with the chaos. Spouse or partner, recognize that they may not realize that you are facing difficulties day-to-day and when they are frustrated because of the lack of control in their lives, they may sound as if they are angry, but they are simply expressing their feeling of helplessness.

You have a very specific role to play, one where you will be asked to help with money, photos, visits, phone calls, conflict resolution, transfers, good time, etc. You will at times feel overwhelmed, unappreciated, and ignored but they are not intentionally trying to make you feel this way but they may not have a way to express to you all the mental anguish that they feel for not being there with you. People who have families hold tremendous guilt and that guilt is often expressed with anger.

Encourage them to base their choices with the goal of coming home. Children, are a major factor that drives people to survive and make it out of these places successfully. Please keep children in their parents' lives because this can break someone if they have no knowledge of their children's welfare.

There are many cases of people that have changed their lifestyles simply because they want to be better examples for their kids. Prison does not nullify ones parental obligations.

Parenting From Prison



Siblings, you are a reminder of shared memories of happier times. When persons-in-custody speak about their siblings, who are in their lives, they speak with pride as to say, "My sister (or brother) is always there for me!" You are another person that helps to keep them focused when they have those days when they feel as though that they cannot take anymore. You are the one that they trust to be there when parents may not be alive or available.

Frustration is a big thing that people in prison experience and their venting avenues are limited. No one will escape this and it is amplified that much more because they are trapped. Many will go through depression stages and they may not even realize it or are afraid to share this with anyone. You must recognize these events and learn how to diffuse them before they turn toxic. Remember, in prison, the one thing that a person has is time to think. The problem is that if they are not distracted with the right thing then they will fester on the wrong thing. You are truly one of the avenues that allow them to escape the reality

that they are facing. Sometimes in these places situations are misrepresented because of uncertainty, misinformation, or impatience. There is a process for everything within the Department of Corrections and like the court system, they are not always quick.

Your loved one is experiencing something that they may not be used to—vulnerability. They're exposed because they must seek help when they may have been in charge all of their life. No one likes change—especially sudden, forced change—but in order for them to come home without incident, they will need you.



Parenting From Prison



Your loved one is facing their own process right now and you must prep for yours. This journey is mostly psychological and they may not say it, but they really do need your help to maintain their sensibilities.

This is my manual to assist you with the tools that you need that go hand-in-hand with your loved one to achieve the result that they are looking for. Yelling, shouting, cursing, and threatening staff

on the phone are things that do not help. Consider this, the Department of Corrections has many departments and communication is not always a top priority; so you must use avenues that are at your disposal to protect your family.

We appreciate your patience and interest in helping us to help your loved one. This will make for a more effective tool that will assist all of us to become better neighbors.

THE 'MARI' PLAN TOYRIANNA 'TOYRI' SMITH

From a child of an incarcerated mother to a mother incarcerated. Let's be clear, my mom went to prison when I was 7 years old. Prior to, I never lived with her, being the oldest my grandma raised me all the way, till' she died. 3 months later, my mom went to jail. My mother didn't come home until I was 15 years old. Being that prior to her

being locked up I didn't share a relationship with her I began to detach mentally, emotionally, and physically. I was withdrawn. Always down, always depressed, abandoned... I didn't share the same biological father with my 4 siblings so I wasn't motherless I was parentless.



Parenting From Prison



During my incarceration I realized a lot of similarities to me and my daughter which furthers my insight on generational curses. I'm the oldest of five, I'm the oldest grandchild. My Father and I never had a relationship. My daughter is the oldest child, the oldest grandchild, and when she began to establish a relationship, he shortly died (March 2023). My daughter in so many ways was dealt the cards I was, with exceptions. She and I often speak about her breaking imprisonment, teen pregnancy, halted education, curses placed in/on my family. I wasn't given a parenting handbook/ manual when I got pregnant or locked up.

“From a child of an incarcerated mother to a mother incarcerated.”

a lot of what I teach my daughter comes from what I'd wish someone taught me or was able to learn. Marianna and I share a beautiful bond. She's by far my best friend. I learned honesty, openness, and trust is ingredients to continuing to build. She was 2 years 4

months and 6 days old when I went to the county jail. Prior to jail, I can count on my hand (10 fingers) how many times we weren't next to one another when I slept. When I realized I was being changed with the death of my son who was 3 months when he suffocated. Once again I'm back to detaching etc.

Now, I have a child also physically without me. I utilized my time writing, making things, sending cards, preparing for visits, the years I spent in the county proved hard. No contact visits, high phone calls every court date continued, but worst of all always hearing my daughter cry. I never had a visit where she ain't cry. Now, 2023, 12 years later my baby is 14 years old, a freshman. She respects me as if I been with her everyday physically.

This year has been extremely hard from the moment she got her dad's sickness; she spiraled down a dark path. Her behavior only intensified. She began to run away, act up, and engage in adult behaviors. She completely began to rebel.



Parenting From Prison



She's lived with her aunt the entire time I been away up until 2 ½ months ago. Majority of her newfound rage was directed at her aunt. She's currently staying with my grandfather who's very family-oriented, nurturing, he's hands on and understanding. He also communicates well.

Parenting from here isn't as hard as it may seem. I mean granted, I'd rather parent from home face to face, but the cards I was dealt made it so I have to do where I am with what I have. My entire stay in prison has been dedicated to having a healthy relationship with my daughter continuing to aspire and inspire her to be her best self. Parenting skills come from learning everyday it's something you'll never know everything about. Everyone has a parent inside of them.

Toyrianna Smith



Parenting From Prison

STEVEN FORD



KEWANEE

Being a father from prison has been difficult and challenging. The ill decisions I have made created a void in my son's life.

Becoming a father was all smiles; no words could express the joy and happiness that filled my heart when I saw this little chubby baby. Who had so many of my physical features, reaching his tiny hands out to me for acceptance, safety, and unconditional love? It was a moment that I will never forget; did my father feel the same way when I was born? I could assume so however I will never know because he passed away when I was eight years old. That created a void in my life, so the opportunity to have that conversation was lost.

Anthony was fifteen months old when I was incarcerated, now he is twenty-four years of age WOW! Time does not wait for no one. I must say God has favored me because throughout my time in prison for the most part,

Anthony has stayed with my relatives this has afforded the opportunity to stay engaged and conversing with one another. Anthony is so close, yet so far away made things bitter sweet, it was a constant reminder of what I had given up and who was being affected the most by my absence it was in fact a very painful revelation. I have heard it said that parenting does not come with a handbook, but I wish it did then I would have a road map on how to give advice to a young man that does not really know who I am outside of a twenty-minute phone call or a few hours on a visit every now and again.

I welcome the wisdom of such a handbook that will offer instructions on how to raise a physical, emotionally, also mentally healthy son from prison, along my journey toward physical emotional and mental freedom.



I will meditate on the knowledge of how to deal with the issues of abandonment, individuality, self-worth, etc., that we both experienced because of fatherlessness. What do you do when you give your child the best available advice based on your life experience and he shrugs it off to make a series of bad choices that lead to a similar jail cell? You love him thru them, just as you were loved up too and thru the bad decisions that were made by you. You continue to encourage edify, and strengthen him through honesty and accountability.



The training up a child is the hard part because you do not see the results right away as you are doing the teaching, this can be discouraging to be honest , however if you endure and stay committed to see the process through, you will be rewarded with the mature child that will honor and love you the more.

Proverbs 22:6 states, *“Train up a child in the way they should go and when they are old they will not depart from it.”*

In closing, my grandmother did not get the chance to see the results of her training or teaching in my life, the jewels she planted in me throughout my adolescence are the things that now anchor my life. So thank her for the person that I have grown to be, while I pray fully strive to be better tomorrow I look forward to participating in Anthony’s journey of growth and maturity. There is no such thing as perfect parent or parenting, I am just doing the best I can as a concerned father...

Sincerely Yours...

Steven Ford



Parenting From Prison



MESSAGE FROM THE OUTSIDE

CECELIA STEWART



Marshall Stewart (Stateville) and his family

Engaged from a distance, their Father earns his Masters Degree in Statesville, June 2023. The only federally recognized tribal member showing that "We are still here"! See me!

Thank you, Cecelia Stewart



SETH JOHNSON DIXON

Parenting is a challenge. Parenting from prison is even more of a challenge. Those of us, who have done extended time, know that it is our children who suffer the most due to our incarceration. My daughter Bridgette is now 16, and was almost two when I got arrested. By the grace of God, she still calls me Dad, tells me how much she loves me, and confides in me as if I have been there every day of her life.

My great friend Noe told me many years ago something that has stuck with me. As a father of four girls himself he said, "Always tell your daughter she's beautiful." Me telling her that in letters, phone calls, and visits is so ingrained in her that she tells me she's beautiful. Though we are in prison, we can still be positive role models to our children. Often times we don't see the impact of those cards, letters or short phone calls on our children. Children remember.

Throughout the years, I have heard guys say they love their kids, yet they don't buy that corny card off the gallery or try to call them. **Love is a verb. Meaning there is action behind it.**

Though parenting from prison is a challenge, don't give up. Several times I wanted to throughout the years due to issues between Bridgette's mom and I. Love will always prevail. Trust me, in the long run your kids will love and appreciate you that much more!



Bridgette going to her first homecoming

KATIE MANNING DECATUR

Parenting from prison can be very difficult, but there's many things you can do that can be beneficial. For younger children, you can check out children's from your institution's library and read them to your children at bedtime. Call home when you have time to talk and aren't going to be rushing off the phone. Listen to what your children have to say and ask questions pertaining to what they are talking about-about their day, school, school activities, etc.. **If they have a reading assignment, let them read it to you.**

When my kids were younger, I use to make cards, color them pictures, and write them little letters. Sometimes I wasn't able to speak to them over the phone on a regular basis, but they loved getting things in the mail for me.

My kids are now teenagers and they have their own phones, so I call them every evening to ask about how their

day went. last November I began making a scrapbook for each of them made from simple composition note book that I've decorated. It contains family photos, magazine clippings, comics from newspapers, receipts, any & everything that pertains to their interests and their lives.

On the other pages I wrote things about our family, stories from when they were little details about my life growing up. I also included some things about how I also included some things about the way I got here, and, what it's like here. I sent the journals home to be wrapped as Christmas Gifts from me. I hope this helps someone out there!



*We would like to thank Ms. Manning for
her monthly contributions to TWO
ROADS.*

EVIGAN 'HAPPY' MARCOS KEWANEE

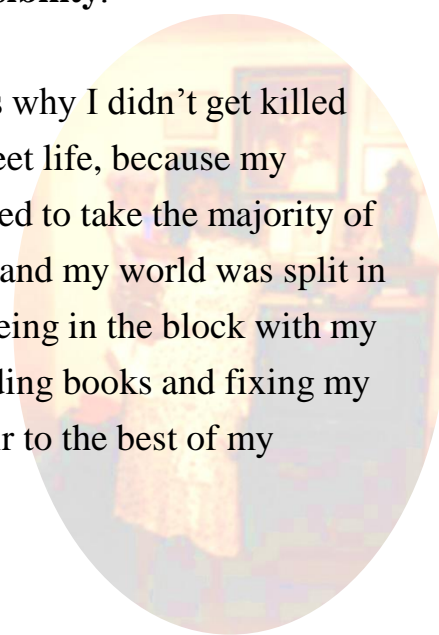


Being a parent ain't easy, let alone being a parent from prison. I open this article with blessings to all. I pray that every parent who lives my reality receives healing in every aspect of their life. This topic wasn't easy for me. It even hurts to write these lines.

I have so many memories that cross my mind. *Being a parent doesn't come with instructions.* We have learned to parent—how believe is the correct way to do so—what we learned from our parents or single mothers/fathers. You see, for me it was hard...very hard. I'm blessed with the responsibility to raise my two children on my own—no baby momma—just me and my two beautiful children age 2 and 4. I had to learn how to change pampers, make formula bottles as well as boil them to the right temperature, give them baths, schedule doctor appointments, nap times, go to the WIC office and everything that every single mother out there does.

I was blessed to be able to see and experience what strong women do, day in and day out. That's why I admire and solute them all, starting with my own mother. My beautiful, strong Latin mother, who helped me become the man I am now—who at the time was tough with me and mentored well enough to raise my own babies. She said "I will teach you all you need to know about caring for my grandchildren and after that they are **your responsibility.**"

Maybe this is why I didn't get killed living the street life, because my children started to take the majority of my attention and my world was split in two—from being in the block with my glock, to reading books and fixing my daughters hair to the best of my knowledge.



Parenting From Prison



While, through the day, I was a stay at home dad, but the nights were filled with the street life, which I won't get into, but you know the vibes. (Let me fast forward because I could spend hours talking about my life and it's getting late for me and I'm listening to this Sony Walkman...yeah, I'm "old skool." lol)

When I left my children's lives and robbed them of their father, it hurt me to the core of my heart. In my ignorance and immaturity—filled with the street life philosophies and living a luxury lifestyle, which came with false illusions and lies.—I was off to the penitentiary living behind my prize possessions and blessings from above. My daughter, now 8, my son, 6 and my newest child, a son, age 2, were now away from me because of my poor choices.

Now, my daughter is 18, Junior is 16 and the youngest is 12 (even though I am not in contact with him, per his mother's wishes (I miss him with my heart, but Lord willing, I will see him one day.) so, to answer the question: How is *parenting*

from prison? Very, very hard. But here is a list of what I believe was the best way for me to Parent from Prison:

1. **Constant Communication:** through letters, greeting cards, pictures of me with some encouraging words for them and conversations through the phone as often as possible.
2. **Active Listening:** to them, letting them talk the majority of the calls I made and the last 5 minutes to let them know that I hear them or understand, and—if old enough—give them advice.
3. **Being Vulnerable:** transparency, I cannot stress this enough, and let them know that they can hold me accountable
4. I always let them know how much **worth and value**. I always let them know how beautiful and handsome they are.
5. I told them the importance of **truth, respect, integrity, responsibility and empathy**, and how much I love them and how proud I was of them.



Parenting From Prison



6. **Encouragement:** Lastly, I told them how much they matter to me and to this world. That they are royalty and could achieve anything they want.

In closing, Parenting from Prison was not easy, and as I come to the end of my time, and being able to reunite with my children, I will continue to do all that I can to show the love and admiration to my kids. I love you mamita, Sakari, papito Evigan Jr. and papito Elizyn.

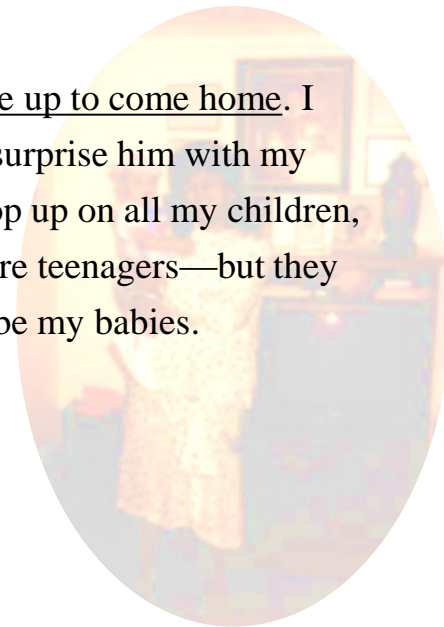
Yall my world! I'm proud of each and every one of you, but most of all, I'm proud of what you are becoming.



DAVID RAY DANVILLE

I have been incarcerated for the last 11-plus years and it's been so hard NOT being able to help raise my kids. I literally had to watch my babies grow up on photos and that hurt. They love their daddy so much and it's crazy because my reach has been limited to them for phone calls that are just not long enough. I plan to make so many new and better memories...one new and great memory with my baby boy is he thinks he's come to visit me for Christmas, but in reality,

he is picking me up to come home. I cannot wait to surprise him with my freedom and pop up on all my children, although they are teenagers—but they will ALWAYS be my babies.





HERstory 2024

Submissions are now being accepted for the HERstory 2024. This is **strictly** for our female population, as well as the professional women in IDOC as well as our society.

This is a time to encourage, reflect and to pay homage to those who have paved the way in our time. HERstory will be issued during Women's History Month (March).

Without staff support:

Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

Outsiders, Staff and Individuals-
In-Custody (WITH Staff Support)

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



**DEADLINE IS
FEBRUARY 23, 2024**

THEY CALL ME “DAD”



What do your child(ren) call you? I hadn't considered this question until about five years ago, and it changed the way I parent completely. My name is William D. Jenkins and I'm a girl-dad of two, Armonie and Ivory, they call me Dad. Five years ago I thought myself to be a good dad if not the best, until I experienced one of the worst things any parent could go through. My youngest daughter, Ivory, referred to me as William, not Dad! Ouch. Initially, I was heated! You should've seen me, blaming her mom, "who told Ivory my name was William anyways? I told you, you got to bring her to see me more!" I was a hot mess smh.

“It was difficult checking my ego, but the results are worth it.”

True, visits, phone calls, and gifts are significant in building and maintaining a healthy relationship with my child(ren) during my incarceration; But, once I cooled down I placed the fault where it belongs.

My oldest daughter, Armonie, was three when I was arrested and we had established an unbreakable bond.

I was there throughout her mom's pregnancy, for her birth, diaper changing, first words, first steps, etc., but Ivory was still in the oven when I was taken away.

Admittedly, I missed crucial moments in my youngest daughter's life. I wasn't there. Parenting from



William Jenkins

TWO ROADS
Newest Associate Editor



prison taught me that my presence in my children's lives is more important to them than money or gifts.

Now, when I talk to my daughters, I'm all ears. I make every conversation about them and ask open-ended questions. Instead of forcing the title of "dad" on my girls because I fathered them, I earn it. I make it clear to them, what my role is in their lives as their father, through my actions. It was difficult checking my ego, but the results are worth it. My daughters know they have a safe space with their Dad and confide in me. Ivory, who takes hosting her friends very serious, will get up and leave the room her friends are in to create privacy for our phone calls. Nevertheless, nothing makes me feel better than hearing her say, "Can y'all please be

quiet I'm on the phone with my Dad."

Parenting from prison hasn't been easy or simple for me. However, for all my incarcerated parents, my advice to you is to *listen* to your child(ren). Show interest in the things they're interested in and *earn* their respect. They'll respect and love you more for it. And if you're parenting girls, try to be *patient*!



Yahwah Shalom (May the Creator's Peace be upon you) and Happy Kwanzaa.



PHONEY MOM

LYDIA MATTISON



Sometimes the only way to be is Phoney. In a “real world” it’s just the only way. Being a single mother of four children, my drug driven life sent me behind the steel doors of incarceration early in my children’s’ lives. The Department of Children Family Services (DCFS) stepped in—starting the separation process—eliminating me; turning me in to the phoniest person I know. I wore the screen out of so many phones, permanently indenting the “Big Green Button” (my sons name for the ‘send’ button).

The separation was devastating and stressful. Custody meetings and visitations were all “phoney.” My children were constantly given broken promises, seeing that I had over five social workers since my case started. I’ve completed plans multiple times and followed the schedules to the “T”. The lack of progression in the case sparked negative behaviors within myself and my children.

I became a repeat, and my children developed their own bad habits, reducing my connection again to the phone. Being phoney made me hopeless, helpless, useless, alone, and neglected the same way I’m sure my children felt. I had a whole new perspective on Phoney, especially when I was told “I DON’T HAVE TO ANSWER” or they just won’t answer. Anger and desperation made me postal. Drawing pictures, writing letters...anything to keep contact.

My letter would be a story with my children as the main character, or simply describing what I ate for chow. The real threat was the response. “Going postal” was just as good as being “Phoney”. I could see their penmanship and vocabulary improving, even their scribbles turned into recognizable words and images.



Now that I can have in-person visits, my two hours is all about them. Being honest builds expectations and avoiding broken promises. I had to understand that my children couldn't

be phoney. They couldn't wait around waiting for mom to call. Being a Phoney Mom has taught me patience, respect, and mindfulness—all traits every parent needs—whether they are phoney or not.

THE PAIN OF LIVING

EARL MILTON, JR.

CENTRALIA

The pain of living, knowing one day you gon' die, sometimes it is so much that you could just cry. How long do we have? Does anyone know the exact date we'll all meet the human's fate? While we are here, what should we do? Are we just living for no reason except to continue our bloodline?

What can we change, affect, or correct? What dots can we connect? We

all have so many tools at our disposal in our modern day world that wasn't around 50 years ago. In fifty more years what will we unveil? What is our goal as a human race? What do we seek to achieve? What's the long game for the race? Is it outer space, when we rarely find anyone who had conquered their own inner space? Is the thrill of the chase?

From the day we are born, we begin to die. So tell me, when do we really live. We are steady searching and finding out what we capture never fulfills. Looking for life after death, are we just spinning our wheels? When does the pain stop? Pain comes in so many forms. Not only Physical, but emotional & mentally, too. We are searching for the lifeline that one day we gonna

flatline. So we search for God for peace of mind until we reach the finish line and get to see what's really behind curtain number two. Do we live again after we die? I kinda wanna hurry up and see, to be free from the big question mark of what's next. Then again, I don't, just in case it's lights out.

Either way, lights out or Bright Light forevermore, we all must walk through that door and see what's in store.

Each person for themselves. We're born alone and we cross over as we came, just us. So the pain of living is great is considered very closely.

But we're here now, with one life to live, one breath at a time. In the meantime, we must embrace all. We must endure the sunshine and the rain, the pleasure and the pain. Because one day could be today, or ten thousand days away more or less. We must pass the greatest test that everyone

who has been laid to rest has had to face. For now, we live the best we know how and do the best we know to do until we're through, left to face a great new beginning or a sad final ending. Only one way to see and to see, we all must until then I walk in the light and in Dear God I do Trust. Deepest Reality Self-Check.





DERRICK GRAHAM KEWANEE

Being a father comes with a lot, but, doing it from prison is hard because you are not there for your kids in a way that you really want to be. For instance, to show your kids how to develop the strength and determination they need here and there. But overall, as a father, I'm here to help them figure out what life is all about.

To be honest, parenting **can** be done from prison because it's not what you do but how you do as a

parent. The truth is I let my kids know that life is an endless journey and leave no room for failure. Lastly, I tell them to keep the vision of opportunity and possibilities alive.



Big Samwell



MELANIE M. GRANT LOGAN



I have always loved babies since I was a baby. I dreamed of being a mom growing up. Though I did not ever plan on being separated from my babies or losing a child at such a young age... it happened. Initially, I could not wrap my mind around my “new norm” and I struggled with walking in forgiveness. I love hard and my children are one of the most important aspects of my life. I had to learn how to live with myself again after my youngest daughter was taken from this earth.

God loved me back to life and health, because I could not see any purpose in that moment in time. As a result of his love he showed me how to express genuine love to those connected to my heart. I began to set goals and boundaries and practice having healthy relationships. I have been blessed to have a good support system that allows me the space and opportunity to “parent from afar.” I am kept in the loop about my

children’s accomplishments, struggles and aspirations daily.

Communication is the biggest key to any relationship. Through letters and cards I am able to clearly explain my expectations and share wisdom with my children. Phone calls are essential for aiding in building my bonds with my babies as well. Video visit and in– person visits are vital in me being able to express love to my babies through hugs, kisses, games pictures and in my son's voice: “ our family tradition of back rides.”

It’s when we get to make the memories that helps sustain us until we are reunited. I would like to take this moment to thank god again for my “main supporter”, Dominique is my younger sister and we have been close since our childhood. She is a blessing in so many ways and even though we don’t always agree, we do take the time to hear each other out.



Being honest and transparent is such an important factor in our relationship because in areas where I cannot physically “hands on,” she has the role of being the one who execute or denies my request. We have had some “hill and valleys” that we have had to navigate together and I am eternally grateful for her. As I enter the “home stretch” I am eager to step up and help physically. But I am well aware that I cannot turn back the hands of time or get a mulligan in life; so I will to continue to approach my relationship with my children one step at a time, open and, honest and supportively as their # 1 fan...



CHAD ‘CARTOON’ COMBS KEWANEE

Parenting from prison is a tough subject. Due to my addictions and bad choices, I have made prison a revolving door for the past 28-years. So as a father of four, ranging from 28 to 7, I will be the first to tell you... I have failed. I must admit, for me to be able to parent from prison, it has taken a team, starting with my wife. My wife keeping me “in the loop”, in the day to day, has helped me be

able to be the best parent I can be from behind this Razor Wire. Let’s face it, being in here, my wife has had two jobs... to be Mother and father to our children. My biggest thing now, is to ask questions, “How was Ava’s day at school? And, “Did she eat well at supper?” I love to ask questions. There isn’t a better way to continue my relationship than to know what she likes.

I can tell you, by not being there is tough. Two of my daughters want to have nothing to do with me. My son knows my potential and wants to see me doing well. And my youngest daughter... she just wants me back home. The difference in the equation is my son and youngest daughter's mother (my wife). She wants me in their lives. I want to be present & actively participating in all their lives. I want to know what day is Spirit Day at school, what did Ava have for lunch at school, etc... to tell each of my children I love them, to not only tell them, but to try to show them.

“I have failed. I must admit, for me to be able to parent from prison, it has taken a team, starting with my wife.”

To send cards. Little things. I know now... it isn't about the big things. Time is the least expensive, but most valuable & important thing I can give to my children. I'm getting better. I'll never be perfect, but I will be present. Again, I couldn't Parent From Prison without the co-parent, so, I'm sending a BIG

SHOUT OUT to my Wife. I wouldn't want to fly with anyone else!

Chad “Cartoon” Combs



PRISON AND EFFECTIVE PARENTING

MAURICE JONES
DANVILLE

Today, we are in the climate where we are losing our children to the street culture, gun violence, drugs, mass incarceration etc. There is many contributors to why our children fall victim to these issues, especially if their coming from dysfunctional backgrounds and single – parent households.

“Though I am an incarcerated father, I could not imagine being a mother incarcerated and losing my child to drugs, mass incarceration, or gun violence.”

Parenting while incarcerated poses many challenges especially while trying to make connections through 20-minute phone calls; when they know you cannot physically discipline them. We are faced with the pressures of serving lengthy sentences along with the risk of losing complete connection with our children, our children are indirectly impacted by policies that solely focus on punishment instead taking into consideration how having a

Incarcerated parent will affect their future. Drawing off my own narrative, my son was years of age when I received a 25 year sentence for the charge of Armed Violence. I had to make a decision to explain to my child that I will not be coming home for a very long time, he immediately began crying on the phone, and it really affected me knowing my choices in life caused physiological trauma that would forever affect him.

Noted when we leave our children in the care of other people they are subjected to whatever treatment that person inflicts upon them, luckily I was fortunate to have family support that instilled values within my child and was blessed that my son (allowed) me to be his father. Children that have incarcerated parents are forced to make decisions that results in them growing up faster, and these are the moments where they need “US” the most.

Parenting From Prison



Our children placed in family dysfunctions, subjected to verbal and physical abuse, and often exposed to things expressed about their incarcerated parent that they should never hear. In prison, we constantly reminded that we have no control over what happens with our children and God forbid if DCFS has to step into the situation. When my son's mother began to do spiteful things or family made the wrong decisions regarding my child those were my most challenging parenting moments.



Like myself and others incarcerated believe, these are the times where policies has actually extended prison sentences were incarcerated parents are not able to get home to their children

sooner. The female population has increased over the years, which mean we are losing mothers, sisters, aunts, etc., and this directly put our children at risk for experiencing incarceration.

Though I am an incarcerated father, I could not imagine being a mother incarcerated and losing my child to drugs, mass incarceration, or gun violence. This is our reality as incarcerated parents especially children that are coming from communities that are concentrated in crime (school to prison pipeline).

Truthfully all of my choices as a young father were immature, impulsive and I never considered the consequences my actions would have on my family. After 11 years of incarceration, I am proud to say that my son respects me as his father , he is on the right path and though parenting is challenging while incarcerated “never give up on your role as a parent no matter what”. What is to come Is always better, than what has been!



GROWING TOGETHER

Being a young mother at 17yrs old was rough. I had no clue as to how to be one. All I knew was that I was going to be different from my own. Be the ONE person my son could confide in. Give him all the attention I could. Basically grow with him. I thought I was already grown, but in reality, I still made childish decisions, which ultimately took me away from my pride & joy. I put me in a position of having to remain a good mother during a very difficult time. I had to make a hard decision as to who would I turn temporary custody of my son to. That decision was solely based on his well-being & upbringing. His paternal Great Grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Love, were the best choice-I'm forever grateful to & for them.

No matter who came to visit me, De'Andre was always with them, which gave me more time to grow with him. Although he was very young when I left, my son loved his mom. The way his little face would light up when he saw me warmed my heart, but my heart broke each time our visits came to an end and De'Andre would cry.

The Day Camp Celebrations my son & I participated in every summer really helped me to learn my child. Through the summer months, I was able to have one on one time with him in a park setting every Saturday. Those days together bonded us in unimaginable ways and strengthened our relationship. De'Andre was able to open up and feel comfortable confiding in me things that he didn't want anyone else to know or overhear.

“I have always been, and will forever remain a proud mother. I speak of him constantly. Everyone who knows me knows De'Andre. He will live on in me forever.”

As a mother it's difficult being away from your children. I felt I let him down. To compensate for my absence, I called him regularly, wrote letters, sent cards & gifts and made sure I was attentive to his needs and attuned with his education. I also allowed him to express & voice his feelings and helped De'Andre to properly process them. I encouraged him to follow through with all he put his mind to.

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LONG LIVE DEANDRE
1/30/99-2/25/16

My son dealt with many of his hurt feelings through sports. He loved to play football and run track. I advised him to put everything on the field and leave it there. He was talented, a good teammate, player, and young man overall. De'Andre was a very humble person and would take on any task he was

many qualities I passed down to him; yet, I can't take full credit for all of my son's good qualities. I pride myself in being the best mother possible under these circumstances with what I had, which is a mother's Love. No matter what the event, his grandparents made sure I was a part of it.

I still remember our first contact visit, De'Andre was then, 2-yrs old. He ran to me, laid his head on my shoulder, and just went to sleep. I also remember our last visit. My son, at 16-years old, picked me up and gave me the tightest hug ever. Three short months after our last visit, he was killed. Although I wasn't physically there for my son, I was completely emotionally engaged in all aspects of De'Andre's life.

That emotional bond was so strong that I actually felt him when he took his last breath. I woke up out of my sleep as if someone was pumping on my chest doing CPR gasping for air. I will forever carry that memory, which keeps me connected to him emotionally

Parenting From Prison



I have always been, and will forever remain a proud mother. I speak of him constantly. Everyone who knows me knows De'Andre. He will live on in me forever .

feelings and they need a safe place to express themselves. BE HONEST about your experience. Don't hide it from them by thinking you're protecting them. Wouldn't you rather they learn your truth from you rather than an outside source? Allow them to trust you in order for them to be honest with you. Honesty will take you a long way; as well as trust.



The more involved you are in your child's life, the less they will resent you for your physical absence. Don't limit yourself by thinking, "Oh, they're just kids, they don't understand". Nor think that you have all the time in the world to make it right with them. Kids have



***Innaa li llahi wa-innaa ilayhi rajiun
"Verily we are Allah's, and to Him
are we bound to return."
Holy Qur'an-(Al-Baqarah, 2:156)***

Evelyn 'Qiyamah'

Jackson

TWO ROADS
Associate Editor



Parenting From Prison



DEVOTED AND DEDICATED (D.A.D.)

ROBERT MCCULLOUGH
DANVILLE

I left when you were 3. I miss hearing you say “DA DA” or “I gotta pee pee”. Now you’re 16 and pregnant. God know it’s a lot of things I regret but having you is not one of them.

It’s been hard raising you (up) through mail, phone call and visits, but, by the grace of God and with family support, you’re turning out to be an amazing young woman. She always reminds me that even though I’m locked up, I still have remained Dedicated And Devoted.

I remember your first heartbreak and you didn’t want to tell me who it was because your uncles would break more than his heart. Even though I made history being a 32-

year old granddad, you’ll always be my baby, no matter how old you get! Do not let being a teen mom stop you from chasing your dreams. You “DA DA” will ALWAYS be here for you.

Love you always,
Your Dad



DO NOT GIVE UP



Parenting from prison feels somewhat like a sore subject. Therefore, writing about it is not easy. A parent, especially a father is supposed to support, teach, guide, provide and protect. I have not done so well at any of these things. I grew up without a father myself, so when my daughter was born in 2001 I promised her, myself, and her mother that I would be the best father in the world; and I would be nothing like my father. I never wanted to leave her she was my world. My every waking thought was of this beautiful little miracle Allah (praise his name) had created.

“The fact she was going to allow me to be a part of his life was liberating, and made doing the right things more appealing.”

Everything she did was the greatest thing in the world. As an 18-year-old boy with no father and mostly bad male role models, I had already made a plethora of bad choices, and I did not much think about the consequences of those choices. Driven by addiction, selfish motive, and selfish actions I constantly hurt myself, and those around me.

From the age of 16 to 27, I spent time in and out of county jails, paid tens of thousands of dollars in fines, and spent hours in courtrooms and probation offices. I spent more energy trying to beat the system than trying to do the right thing.

All this time I was doing what I thought was the best at being a good dad. From 2010 until now minus 15 months, I have been in prison. I never stopped loving my little girl, and I have thought about her every single day. She can still melt my heart the exact same way she did 22 years ago.

However, what I realize is the love I have for her I have not done well at showing her. So how could she know her daddy loves her? What I was doing, as a dad was the furthest thing from my best, actually it was pathetic. I missed birthdays, graduations, dances, intimidating her boyfriends. I was not around to teach her how to drive or buy her first car. I could not make her feel safe the way only a father can. Most recently, I missed the birth of my grandson.



Parenting From Prison



For years she would not speak to me, she was angry and most of all hurt. However, I never gave up I wrote on occasion and kept trying and praying. Not long after she finally reached out and gave me some worthy and deserved bitter truth I finally began to take some responsibility for my actions. Along with my faith in Allah (praise his name) my daughter motivated me to begin living the truth, and start doing the right things. I started to be honest with myself and everyone else. I was so humble when she told me she was going to have a baby. The fact she was going to allow me to be a part of his life was liberating, and made doing the right things more appealing.

Today we are building a relationship. I am trying

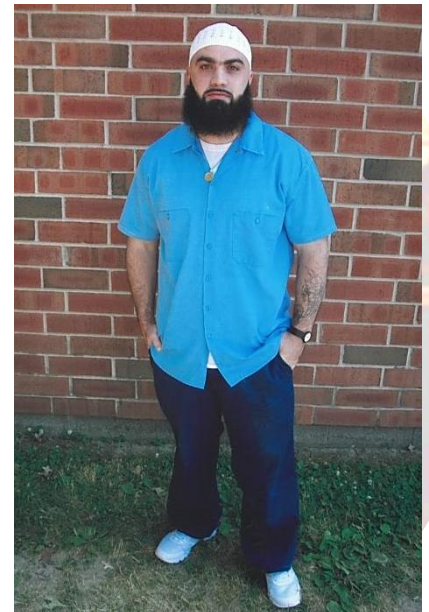
to build back the trust I so badly broke. The only way I can do that is by always being honest, living with Integrity, and trying to be whatever she needs me to be. I get a chance to be a grandfather and I am going to be a positive force in his life.

I still may not be the parent I want to be, but I have learned to accept what my creator places in front of me, and to do my absolute best with what I am given. I feel blessed to have my daughter and her family in my life.

I am also grateful that Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center administration, staff, volunteers, and Macon Construction are helping me to be in the absolute best position I can be in to be successful. To my fellow Individuals in custody or other

struggling parents remember this; being a good parent under any circumstances may seem difficult. DO NOT GIVE UP, BE PERSISTANT, CONSISTANT AND CONSTANT.

Being a good parent entails so much, but it starts with simply being a good person, making righteous decisions, and being a living example to others and our children.



Abdullah Khabir

TWO ROADS
Associate Editor



MOVING ON...FOR THE GOOD

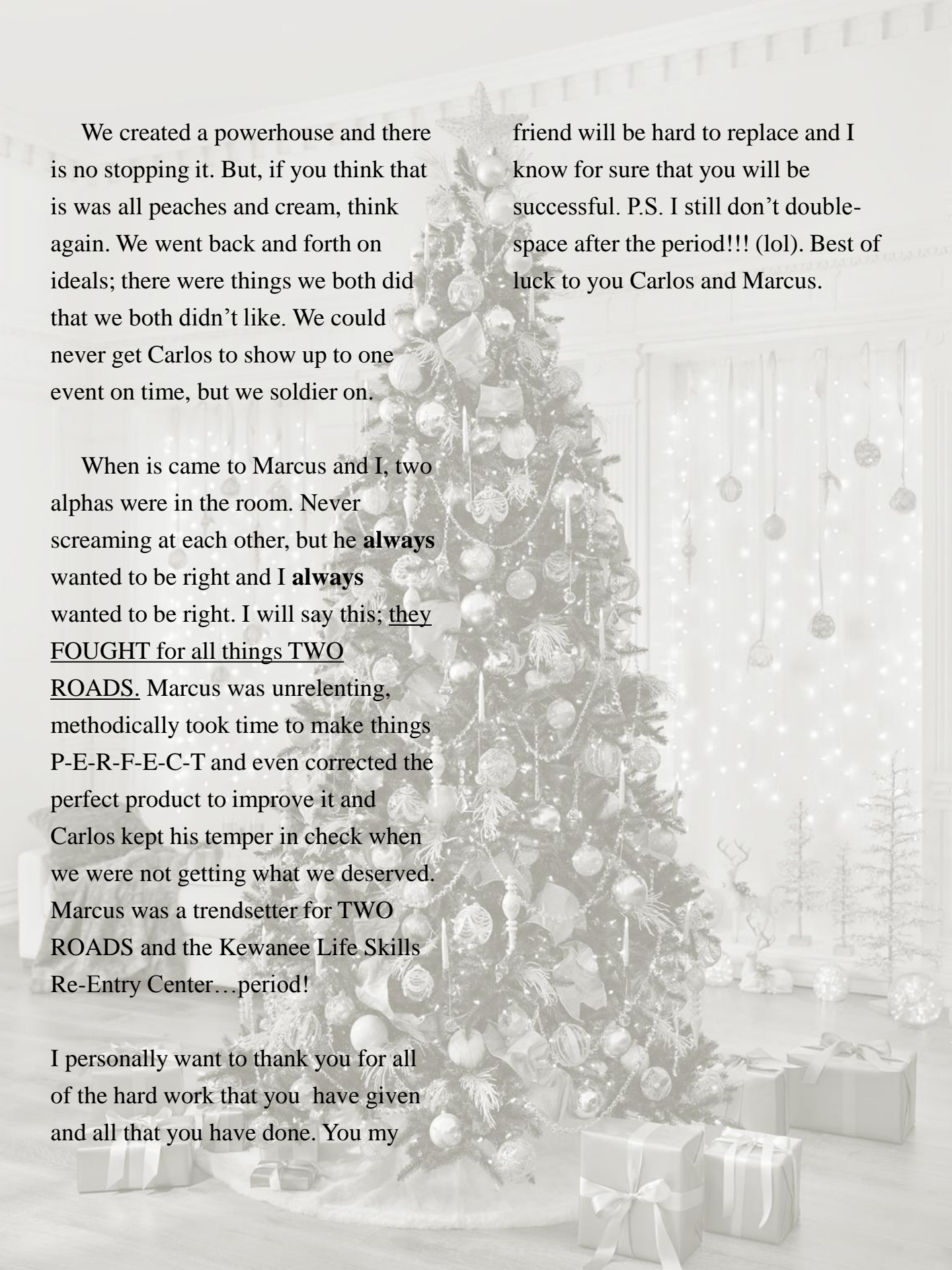
As we are adding one (editor), we are losing two. I have personally known Mr. Marcus Harris and Mr. Carlos McDougal for 10 years and 14 years. I remember Marcus first day off of the bus at Big Muddy River in 2013. It was his first time ever in prison and you could tell that he didn't belong. Remember, bad things happen to good people. One thing that showed within him was 'determination.' He dedicated himself to doing what he needed and to enjoying 'Toonami' on Saturday evenings. (to each his own). Carlos and I met when I was refereeing in intramural sports and he was always trying to show off on the basketball court. He was a kid at heart, and that was good because all of the stress and tribulations of prison, it is good to be able to shake it off.

I remember walking through the West Hall at Kewanee and seeing this guy, tall and slew-footed black male, with an oversize blue jean jacket—one that fit well at a point in time—here, and I knew that we had to have him on the team when the time came. We

linked up from time to time, but it was nothing more than a good time as rec. If you have read any of their articles, they have shone vulnerability and spoke truth to the work that they was writing. Marcus was a “no-nonsense” character, which takes the “bulls by the horns” and doesn't take no for an answer.

If he couldn't get it done with others, he did it himself. Carlos was a “if you didn't remind him, then you must do it the next day.” He was motivated by the moment and when it was time to put it down, he did...As we started developing the format and content for our version of TWO ROADS, his critical thinking and my writing and graphic skills retooled it into what it is today.





We created a powerhouse and there is no stopping it. But, if you think that is was all peaches and cream, think again. We went back and forth on ideals; there were things we both did that we both didn't like. We could never get Carlos to show up to one event on time, but we soldier on.

When is came to Marcus and I, two alphas were in the room. Never screaming at each other, but he **always** wanted to be right and I **always** wanted to be right. I will say this; they FOUGHT for all things TWO ROADS. Marcus was unrelenting, methodically took time to make things P-E-R-F-E-C-T and even corrected the perfect product to improve it and Carlos kept his temper in check when we were not getting what we deserved. Marcus was a trendsetter for TWO ROADS and the Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center...period!

I personally want to thank you for all of the hard work that you have given and all that you have done. You my

friend will be hard to replace and I know for sure that you will be successful. P.S. I still don't double-space after the period!!! (lol). Best of luck to you Carlos and Marcus.

PARTING WAYS: THE NEXT CHAPTER CARLOS DEANDRE MCDOUGAL

The thought of not having to live inside a bathroom is a welcoming thought, but how can I focus on that when I have a nineteen-year-old son seemingly lost right now. The future is not something I have thought about with my freedom attached to it, being a seventeen-year-old kid fighting for my life I could not fore see the road that I have stumbled on too many times to count.



As my time, here at Kewanee comes to an end there is this eerie calm that I

have settled in and it is unsettling if that makes sense? Is it that after all these years I have finally found who I am not just as a man but also as a father, brother, friend? Many things have changed since I left the streets in 2003 and I do not know my siblings even though I still have a relationship with them.

...and Justice for All??



Truth-In-Sentencing
2024

COMING SOON