

TWO ROADS

VIEWPOINTS II

Written by the Women and Men of IDOC by
allowing your thoughts and voices to be heard



**NEW
FORMAT!!**

**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 e-zine 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 Administrative 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.

Do You want your Family and Friends to see your Article??

Tell them in 2 EASY STEPS:



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TWO ROADS

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From the desk of TWO ROADS


At TWO ROADS we understand the need for change, the ability to create content that will give all the chance to contribute. Our main focus is to allow you the opportunity to speak your mind and to give the people a perspective about who we are as women, men and others in the prison system, regardless of gender, race, religion and choice. We have come a very long way from our humble beginnings in 2018 to where we are today.

With that, we would like to announce that TWO ROADS will offer the individual a chance to speak their minds to a variety of topics; to display their work in the field of art (painting, drawing, poetry, cutting hair, meditation, rap, etc.) and culture, as well as having monthly topics. We don't want to alienate the women and men in the facilities, we want to hear from you, give you the voice you have and for it to be spread around the community! So please send us your artwork, your thoughts about the current affairs of the system, your self-improvements, your poetry and if you have an opinion in the current topic, please submit that.

We look forward to your articles and thoughts surrounding the current state of affairs, and we hope that this is a change that is welcome to our readers.

Sincerely,

THE TWO ROADS FAMILY



OPINIONS

LR

CORRECTING THE TREND

Kenji Haley
Editor-In-Chief
TWO ROADS

Aside from me being the editor in chief of TWO ROADS, I am also a peer educator from a class that I call “Stock Talk”, based on the current events of the stock market and to give a way for those who are interested in stocks after their time in prison.

There is a thing that we use in our class that helps guys understand the charts when they repeat. The saying is “the trend is your friend”, and typically it works. But I want to talk about a trend that has occurred in many men’s lives and that trend is seeing or watching your son become a prisoner.

You see, when I was 2 years into my bit, I received news that my child was being locked up for a carjacking. In disbelief, I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I would say “my child is too innocent to do something like

that.” “How could he possibly react like that?” From my view, I thought that I taught my kids in the way that they should be.

Always ask before you take, say “please” and “thank you”, address your elders with “sir” and “ma’am”, and NEVER TALK BACK! These were the ways of my father and mother as they were doing their best for my sister and me.

My son’s mother and I never saw eye to eye, as we were our own worst enemy. She would speak badly of me in the beginning, when he didn’t understand, and continued when he could. He would be with her during the week and with me on the weekends. There was a time when she dropped him off at my job and told me “I’ll be back in a week.” It was a month! Although I did these things for my son at an early age - it wasn’t enough. Was there more that I could do? Were there things I could have taught him? What was missing???

Well, the answer was ME!! I realize, so many years later, that I did not spend enough time with him. I didn't take him to enough games. I didn't support the park district games and keep him in my embracing arms. I did what I could, but I know it wasn't enough. Was I spending too much time in the club? Yes. Was I at the gym, trying to get my body in order? Yes. Was I over-focused on my love life and not my own child..? Yes!!

Although I was there for my child, doing the things that were right, I can only imagine if my son would even think that it was enough...and if it was, he surely decided to follow this trend of finding himself in a life-changing situation.

There are a lot of us who believe that we are doing the job of making sure that our children are good on clothing, a pair of Jordans, trips to the amusement park or the local ballgame, but these are nothing more than concepts of grandeur; a way of spoiling them into thinking that this is how you are supposed to be raised. What I should have done was to be more active in his reading, make sure that his grades

were stellar and to ask him "are you okay?" Just the simple things.



For the life of me, I couldn't understand that once he was released, he would ever be put in that position again. He moved to the South where he had family. He got a job and worked hard. In fact, he worked a few jobs to keep money in his pocket. Interesting enough, he met an ol' girl that was highly intelligent, a good job and affection for my son.

Thanksgiving 2019, I was quite surprised that my child and his now wife came to visit me. This was the first time that I had physically seen my child since he was 13 years-old.

We had a wonderful time. We ate, shared stories, and I was told that I was becoming a granddad, which I felt splendid about. I committed from that point to make sure that I stayed connected to him and that I would give him more than what I thought I did in the beginning. I wasn't trying to make up for the lost time, but I was trying to improve on what had already been done.

In the years that followed, I learned that all that I didn't give him in the beginning was rearing its ugly face, and I couldn't do much, as he was a full-fledged adult, doing the exact same thing that I was doing when he was a child. Why? My dumb ass set the wrong precedence. As the years went on, I saw his life spiraling. Issues in the house, issues with his immediate family, lack of time with his now 2 kids in the marriage, which led to the

dissolution of their marriage. He had a small stint of homelessness, eventually being arrested for what they called breaking and entering, but it was truly squatting and looking for shelter.

I cannot say that I will ever return when I am released, but I hope to take the keys that my father has given me throughout the years, especially throughout the bit. He has been overly supportive for me and my son and gives no-nonsense approaches to life. By the time this is given to the TWO ROADS family, my son will be twenty-eight years old, released from his second bit, and he will be received with open arms. He has found faith in the Islamic community, which has given him peace. In addition, I pray that he will be receptive to my teachings of financial literacy.

I would like to say that we all fall short and that even though we do, there is still a chance for making our wrongs our rights. All it takes is for us to step in and step up. Correct the trend and let's stop watching our babies from the cell be put in a cell.

A large purple ribbon graphic that forms a stylized 'D' shape on the left and a 'V' shape on the right, framing the central text.

DON'T
TURN YOUR BACK ON
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
AND PREVENTION
OCTOBER 2024

A purple ribbon graphic that forms a bow on the left and then continues as a wavy line across the bottom of the section.

SUBMIT NOW

MY FATHER'S FATHER

Kelly (K.B) Bennett
Senior Editor
TWO ROADS

I was raised by two great men in my life, granted they were not present every day of this life of mine. However, the seeds of wisdom they planted during those memorable moments have lasted an entire lifetime. On this occasion I would like to salute my namesake and uncle, Mr. Kelly Wesley Bennett, and also his father, Mr. James Wesley Bennett, Sr., my grandfather. These two men gave me all the love, support & encouragement a young black man growing up on the west side of Chicago could ever have. You can say I had the very best of both worlds; you see, my grandfather owned his home in the neighborhood of Englewood, a stone's throw from the high school. I had the pleasure of spending most of my weekends with my grandfather where I was known for my basketball skills showcased at Walter Reed

schoolyard and at Antioch Church gym. I must give it to the many fellows that were a huge part of those days; they were special, and to those who were a part of that and are reading this, much love and respect – in those days I was known as Kelly Mac.

Anyone who knows the city of Chicago can attest to the difference of growing up on the Westside and the Southside. This is why I can say whole-heartedly, that I had the best of best of both worlds, also being in the midst of an old wise man like my grandfather, who was very no-nonsense kind of man who spoke matter of factual. Then there was my uncle Kelly a lady's man who traveled the world, and his youngest nephew was his pride, and joy, and he found great honor sharing his knowledge of women and life with me as often as he could. These two men were very hard workers and providers, never seeking any handouts, creators of good habits of daily living, which they

bestowed on my brother and me. It is somewhat funny, yet also sad, that all those seeds of wisdom were planted so freely and that it took all these trials, tribulations, and time for them to truly come to fruition. I guess we can always say better late than never, or maybe hindsight is 20/20, I can honestly say, I now remember all the things they gave me as a young man growing up.

I salute them and will forever honor the memory of these two great men in my life on father's day. I do challenge all our readers to take a minute out of your day and, draw on the many jewels that were given to us – in those moments we had no time to give them the attention they deserved. It is my intention to bring back those memories of the old school solid men of our past who stood for all things that were right in the attempts to preserve the black man and his place in society. I do openly admit I, myself, have left many people disappointed in me; also, my actions every day I awaken present me an opportunity to do something to make them

proud of me once again. Trust and believe it does not have to be something grand; those opportunities do not come that often from here.



It can be as simple as helping the next man find his way It begins by being mindful of your intentions – are they honorable? My grandfather is one of two men who gave me this advice: “Always be mindful of the legacy you leave.”

Your name and legacy you leave
with people; if good will live
forever in the heart and
memories of those you may touch
knowingly or unknowingly. This
is why today I salute & honor,
Mr. Kelly W. Bennett, and also
his father, my grandfather, Mr.

James W. Bennett for being the
men they were They both will live
forever in me and through me.
May they both always rest in
peace.

Thank you for your time.

JUST BE

Lakisha Woodard
Senior Editor
TWO ROADS

comfortable within your skin, so
never let anyone else's opinions
bring you to an end.

Who looks like me? You, her,
him, they. Who wears uniforms?
Her, she him. Who said we couldn't
be who we wanted to be. "Them."
Society says a lot of things. Let's
keep that noise out. Listen to our
own voice. Never give up on
yourself; be who you want to be. Be
beautiful and fierce; be different
and unapologetic; be you. Be that
part of society you want to share
with the world. Be human; have no
fear. No matter how it might
appear, some may love you, some
may not but it's okay – you have
what they don't. You are



ENVIRONMENT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT

Edward Yahkhah'yil

Willingham

Associate Editor

TWO ROADS

Truth of the matter is, I have been on this journey to change and being my greater self for quite some time now. Now in my 29th year, I have just become mindful of how important environment is. I am now on my third institution, "My Chosen Word," because I am one that believes, it will be to you what you call it. (Words matter!)

Upon arriving here at KLSRC I was told and encouraged to breathe by its welcoming committee. Honestly, I thought it to be a bit corny, but okay I'm with trying new things, so I took a fake small breath. Unbeknownst to me, it was not some corny saying or thing to do when entering this environment; it became my reality. So, after

my first week of walking around this environment and taking KLSRC in, I was on my way back to 5 house passing the yard. I open my lungs and took the biggest breath that I could and then exhaled. In that moment I realized that I just exhaled it all, and mostly every weight that I had been carrying these 29 years.



Breathing in and exhaling out became a daily task, my thing to do, but I will get back to that in one moment.

Menard is where I would say that I found myself and became a man. My thinking became different, which means my actions became different – again I became a MAN! However, the reality of my environment was true; I was still in the pit, still the trenches, so my growth was different and very much limited. I found the true essence of my “who are you” while at Hill and was introduced to cognitive behavioral therapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy aligned with what I know to be true.

“So as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Keeping as real as I possibly can, it’s hard to think and be positive while in the trenches, but many of have done

just that. In good conscience, the environment at Hill was still only going to allow me to go to a certain point, there was still a ceiling. Therefore, when I exhaled that day, it allowed me to notice the importance of the environment.

My walk is lighter because my environment is conducive to the changes made and those that will be made as I move forward. I leave you all with this.. Be “MINDFUL” of the environment when considering change. I encourage you all to continue to work on self until your environment aligns with your change. Trust me; you will be better because of it. I close with this true: IF NOTHING CHANGE, NOTHING CHANGES!

GIRL/BOY DAD

Evelyn “Qimayah Jackson
Senior Editor
TWO ROADS

Being the only girl with 4 brothers and 2 stepbrothers, I was around many men/boys my entire life. They set the bar for my life in experiences with men. I have a lot of respect for girl dads. It's hard for single men to raise girls. As well as it's hard for single women to raise boys.

This is for all of the girl dads out there. As her father you are more valuable in her life than you know or realize. You are the example of the choices of men/partners she will choose to be with.



Whether it's negative or positive, she will make her own choice on what you show her and how you treat her as well. For example: my dad treated me like a princess, so anyone that I'm with has to do the same...or better.

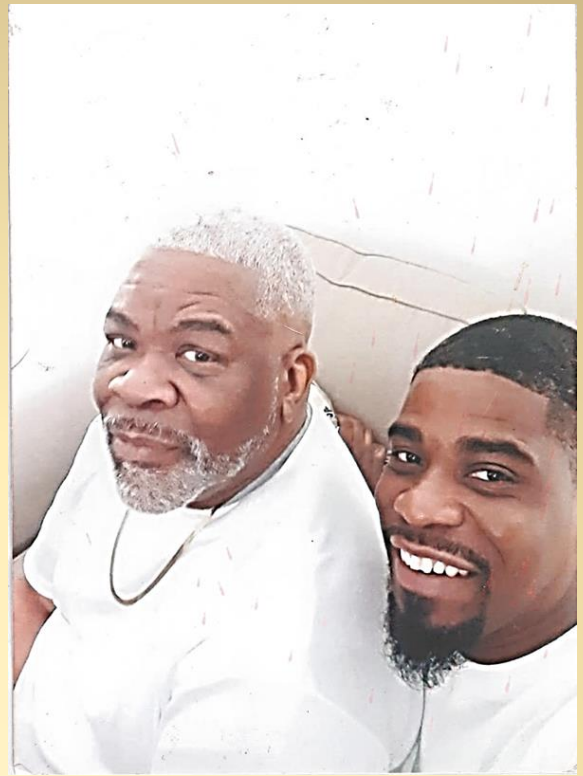
Your daughters need your guidance and without it, she may develop “daddy issues.” She will be damaged from it; accept any attention she gets, and her confidence will be low as well as her self-esteem. She won't feel good enough nor worthy of someone to treat her well and will over-compensate to feel loved. Don't allow the next man to guide your daughter. He will take advantage of her and damage her.

This is for all my boy dads. YES!! The greatest feeling ever...my dad said that it was his dream to have a boy and name him after him. He knew he needed to mold his sons. In the process of molding your child, you need to teach him how to be a man.

Mother's/women can only teach him so much. Our young men need their father/male role model to teach them how to treat a woman; how to navigate in life as a man (especially a man of color).

Show him how to stand strong on his own. Teach him how to work hard for what he wants (legally). Encourage our men for who they want to be and not what society says he is. Never allow ANYONE to belittle them. Show them how to father their future children. Keep them away from the street life. Give them other opportunities.

Many men teach their sons to "show no emotion." It's okay to cry or to feel some type of way about things. You are a human and not a robot. All of those emotions will end up coming out negatively. To all fathers, being present in your children's lives is needed in society today. We don't have a manual on how to be a parent. We do the best we can and pray to Allah that they become the best they can be. Don't beat yourself up if your children are not doing their best; just guide them as much as you can now.



With or without our fathers, it's up to us what we do with these experiences and examples. We all have a choice in life. Don't allow your past choices to dictate your future decisions. It's never too late to be better today than you were yesterday. Do your best today with what you have today because tomorrow is not promised. All fathers be present as much as possible because your sons need that love and attention. Enjoy your day, FATHER'S!!

Happy Father's Day
Evelyn "Qimayah" Jackson
Senior Editor

TWO ROADS



The Inspiration Issue

What inspires you? Is it education? Working out? Religion? Two Roads is now taking submissions for your words of encouragement on your inspiration. There is no minimal length - just express yourself. **TWO ROADS wants you to use your voice.** Please have your submission turned in as soon as you can because this community is built on what we bring to this table.

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
"INSPIRE"

IF THERE IS NOTHING TO REACH FOR, WHY REACH??

Andrew Maxwell

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

That is a real question amongst individuals in custody; “If there is nothing to reach for, why reach?” Some of us are organically motivated, while others may need incentives, to do better and be better. If the process is truly about correcting oneself, why not focus diligently and primarily on motivating. The blueprint example is, KEWANEE LIFE SKILLS RE-ENTRY CENTER. It gave all of us something to reach for prior to coming here; therefore, we reached. Being here is a prime example that our efforts paid off. KEWANEE is vaguely imitated, hardly duplicated. For what Kewanee has done for me and to me, I owe this place grace. However, it is sad that there is no KEWANEE for those in maximum facilities who may never fit Kewanee’s criteria because many of them who are not organically

motivated feel like, “If there is nothing to reach for, why reach?” The last two facilities I resided in prior to Kewanee were (Western and Danville). Prior to them were Menard (death row), Pontiac (death row), and then Stateville. When I arrived at Western Correctional Center from Stateville, this transfer was a discombobulating step down that slowly but surely became maximum-security norms.

Sadly, I felt like I was in my natural habitat. After spending almost six years there, I was transferred to Danville Correctional Center, which was supposed to be a step down, but seemed more like deja-vu? What those two places were on paper were the opposite of our reality. Then once I finally hit Kewanee’s criteria acceptance, I threw caution to the wind and put in with no assurances or faith that I would be accepted; however, after over a year went by, I wrote Kewanee off.....

Then I took it off my bucket list. Nevertheless, when I was finally on my way to KEWANEE (8/16/23), I was numb. I did not know how to feel. The main reason why I did not possess the “if there is nothing to reach for, why reach?” mentality was because of my daughter who was still in her mom’s belly when I was arrested in 1986, but also my two grandsons. They all were and are a major incentive for me. Take them out the equation, and I would not have been any different from my maximum-security facility counterparts with the mindset of,



“If there’s nothing to reach for, why reach?” However, thanks to the culture of KEWANEE, I am being stripped of years of trauma that I never knew I garnered. Now that I am healing from that trauma, I have realized that if I had been released from DANVILLE and sent back out into society, a bad product would have been pushed out.

This could have made an innocent bystander, another victim of this bad product. However, KEWANEE stepped up and saved you from me, and me from myself; in addition, it’s changing my entire trajectory and narrative. The bad product I speak of prior to arriving here was unbeknownst to me. If one is open to receiving this type of culture, it will open dormant trauma. Those other facilities never had the space for this; the chaotic environments I lived in prior to KEWANEE became my norm. There are gross numbers of bad product in those maximum facilities and others who may or may not enter back into society. There are bad products.

That is also unbeknownst to them. Yes, there are anomalies, but the bad products grossly outweigh the latter. In addition, if you are pushing out bad product, what do you really expect the result to be? However, if there is nothing to reach for, then why reach? Some of us have something or someone to reach for. We need to be concerned about those who don't,

and just maybe, we may spare someone at being at their mercy. All praises due to Allah, I had/have more to reach for. And in about a month and a half I will be able to touch it and be out of work release in six months. BUT, IF THERE'S NOTHING FOR THE REST OF US TO REACH FOR, THEN WHY REACH????

VIEWPOINT ON RESTORATION

**Keith “KJ” Terrell
Galesburg C.C.**

What does rehabilitation, restoration, and re-entry look like to me? Well, I am not sure what it looks like now since I have been incarcerated since 2013. However, I can and will share with you how I would like to see it. Let us start with the definitions of these words: according to the Oxford Dictionary, Rehabilitate means, “to restore to effectiveness, or normal life by training etc.,” especially after imprisonment or illness. However,

here is the issue with this if you sentenced to letters (LIFE) or de facto Life (40 years or more), their plan of action will hinder rehabilitation because you have too much time. Their processes only help those individuals in custody, with short time and or who have to do 50% of their sentence because they receive earned good time credit. If you have to serve 85-100 percent of your sentence, then their process of action delays you receiving that which you are seeking by law.

Now, let us look at the definition of restoration. According to the Oxford dictionary restoration means “restoring or being restored.” I think we all, as individuals impacted by justice, have the capacity to be restored and become productive members of society. If only their plan of action extended it’s earned good time credit to all of those sentenced and not just the few that fit certain guidelines. If you are reading this article and feel as I do, self-rehabilitate.

Even though you cannot receive any earned good time credit, still sign-up for all programs your facility has to offer. Work a job assignment and avoid all nonsense. You are full of hope and stay optimistic that one day some laws will change and all the earned good time you have accumulated will be awarded to you. Next thing you know you are going home. I do imagine the Officials giving us all at least a second chance to become productive members of society.

I do believe there are some people who need to stay a bit longer; the



lesson is not yet learned, but if he or she meets the criteria of a time cut, then they should receive it.

We, as individuals in custody impacted by the justice system, are often judged by our past actions, whether committed intentionally or unintentionally, as bad/evil people. I do believe true justice weighs a person’s character, conduct, and disciplinary report after time spent behind these walls confined away from all our loved ones. Just because we all wear the same colors does not mean we all are the same men. Thank you for taking the time to read my viewpoint. I leave as I came...Peaceful.

THE SUBCONSCIOUS LESSON

Taji K. Marshall
Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

Prison presents a plethora of lessons for the individual in custody to learn. Most of these happen out in the open, with no mystery and little or no nuance. However, there are lessons taught in prison that happen on a subconscious level. These can potentially cause the previously incarcerated great harm if not recognized and addressed.

Almost all of the lessons start at the county jail, but some are exclusive to each, the County or the joint. What they both share though is varying degrees of the same subconscious lesson, “might makes right”. In my twenty-four years of incarceration, “might makes right” is the most pervasive of the subconscious lessons. As I mentioned earlier, most lessons start at the county level, and that is especially true for this one.

Life in Cook County Jail was a whirlwind of misery from start to finish and on all sides. There are lessons taught to and by fellow detainees and staff alike, and no one is exempt from learning, nor can they afford to be. Most things learned in the County are life and death and ignoring them can easily lead to a person’s demise. Something as simple as not being able to accurately count the breakfast milk and juice can end in death.

This, like most lessons from the county, is conscious, there for everyone to see and learn from. The conscious lesson is important; however, its brother, the unconscious, teaches something that may live with us forever. If not addressed, it may ultimately lead to our own destruction. Hurt people hurt people. Mental Health Professionals teach this truth in prisons, shelters, and various other institutions.

“Might makes right” is a form of trauma that has a lasting impact on the previously incarcerated. If it is not properly addressed, it can lead to the hurt hurting others. How often does the previously incarcerated encounter a situation where they can impose upon another that which was frequently visited on them? As a form of unaddressed trauma, “might makes right” can show itself at the most unsuspecting times.

Imagine a husband or boyfriend coming home, to find his significant other has prepared a meal not to his liking. A mother discovers her child has made a mess of epic proportions.

Returning to the real world presents a very real set of obstacles to the previously incarcerated all on its own, but when unresolved mental health issues are added, it can become a scary and unsafe experience for everyone involved. And make no mistake, the trauma

created by “might makes right” is an unresolved mental health issue. If not addressed, in some instances, small things can and will turn into big things. As a society, we need to start addressing the trauma of “might make right”, because it is affecting more of us than we know.

Please do not let pride or ignorance prevent you from seeking the help we all need. Talk to a mental health professional, to help you and those you love.

CLOTHES DRUGS PILLS ALCOHOL
GAMBLING FOOD CRIME GAMING
PILLS EXERCISE SEX SHOPPING

CRIME DRUGS PILLS ALCOHOL

ADDICTION

Let's End This!

PILLS WEED FOOD GAMBLING

CRIME DRUGS PILLS INTERNET
SEX SHOPPING FOOD DRUGS

SUBMIT NOW!!

HAFIS TRANSFORMATION

Hafis HAQQ
Former Senior Editor,
TWO ROADS

As I sit here inside of Kewanee Life-Skills Re-Entry Center intending to peel off some of the trauma & grief I've carried throughout the three decades of my incarceration, I'd like to share some moments & experiences of how my personal transformation came about and continues...

On Dec. 23, 1993, I stepped into my first prison cell inside of Pontiac Correctional Center. As I unwrapped my bundle (2 sheets, a pillowcase, face & bath towel, a bar of lye-based soap, some cheap deodorant & toothpaste, and two packs of prison tobacco), I thought of the drastic change my life had taken in less than a 12-month span.

In December of '92, I became a father and was expecting another child with my girlfriend. I was making really good money as a mechanic and was able to afford both my needs & wants. A few

years before that, I moved into a nice home in suburbs—45 minutes outside of Chicago. From the looks of things, I was becoming the poster child of success for the people I'd grown up with, but underneath those visuals was a young man who was angry, confused, and unbalanced. Some of the residue from those elements would be unleashed on the evening of January 14, 1993—the day I left home to purchase a vehicle from Chicago's Western Avenue, known as "Auto Row". I test drove several cars, SUV's & a van from 9am until I spotted a candy apple red "short body" Oldsmobile.

That morning, I left home doing my best impression as a drug dealer, dressed in a light brown Damage outfit, white & gold Air Force One's and a bright purple & gold (yellow) LSU Starter coat, with \$7,500 cash in my pockets. As I negotiated with the salesman & owner of the car lot, trying to talk them down from the \$6,000 sticker price to only the \$5,000 I wanted to pay, they

asked if “me or one of my guys” had gotten a Chevy from them the week before. I lied and said “yeah”. That lie was the start of the situation I still find myself in over 30-years later.

After paying \$5,200, the owner filled out all of the required paperwork—Bill of Sale, Title Transfer document, and Temporary Registration form, but before he gave me the Bill of Sale to sign, they asked me to finish paying for the “Blazer”. You see, I didn’t know that claiming “one of my guys” had gotten a Chevy from them, I falsely admitted to being someone who “owed” them. Upon refusing to give them the rest of my money, the salesman pulled a pistol from a desk.

Having been car jacked & shot exactly three years to the date before that, I wasn’t willing to be anyone else’s victim. A tussle ensued before I got the weapon and shot both men, which resulted in me being charged and going to trial facing Capital Murder (Death Penalty). My book, *Residue* details those events, which I’ll forgo within this writing.

I couldn’t believe I was found

guilty! I was angry at the so-called surviving victim for lying in court. I was angry with the so-called victim’s family members who admitted to my father in the halls of the courthouse that they knew the gun was his. I was angry that the attorney I paid tens of thousands of dollars to didn’t even examine the Discovery given to him by the State’s Attorney, which contained all those legal documents I mentioned, proving I legally owned the vehicle claimed to be the reason I so-called went there to steal. I learned those documents were recovered from the so-called crime scene only after I was in prison to serve 70-years.

My attorney’s paralegal visited and handed my entire Discovery over to my father. I carried so much unrelated anger with me the day I caught this case. Anger with my absent mother, with the female who ultimately told me that the child wasn’t mine, to my ex-girlfriend who told me she was aborting our child the day before I caught this case. I entered prison with that anger, with those confused & covered emotions, with a ball of rage! But I had to try and ignore all

of it and turn all of my attention to learning the do's & don'ts of prison life. I was knee deep in one of Illinois' Max Joints. Back then, this state possessed three of this nation's top ten most dangerous prisons, and I was in its "Gladiator School" and immediately received my first test.

I've always worn a smile. That's me, but it had also been the cause of others' negative attraction to me. On one particular afternoon, as I was in the stairwell of the South Upper's cell house on my way to the yard, I ran into three guys on their way upstairs. One questioned, "Why is it is you smiling so much!?" I recognized it for what it was, my first test. I had too much time ahead of me to cower or simply walk away.

Oh well. I swung, connected with the button of his jaw before his head slammed into the bars of the C/O's cage. He wouldn't remember how hard his head hit the concrete floor. I didn't either, scanning the expressions of the other two guys. "Damn, lil tank, I bet'cha he ain't gon' have another problem with you smiling," one stated as the other lightly smacked

their friend.

I fought the urge to run as fast as I could down the stairs. Instead, I did so calmly and later learned how lucky I'd been that day. Had they all been in the same organization, I wouldn't have made it out of that stairwell consciously. Through Convict politics, things were squashed between me & the guy because my reaction was due to his "wolfing" at me, which was something no prisoner was allowed to do without punishment.

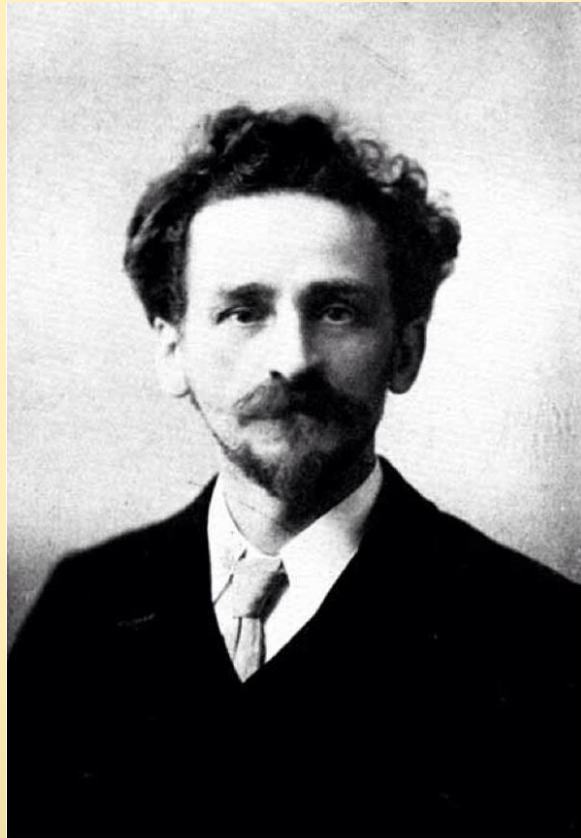
That punch was the first to reveal some of the power I possessed; it was also what led me to a meeting with some of them elders in my community. You see, back then, those "on the new" would have up to three seasoned men assigned to them. Men who were responsible for cultivating particular traits from within them and teaching them all they needed to know about doing time.

My beloved brothers, Aziz, Mustafa Al & Najee called me to the library. That day I was asked a question that was very familiar to me. A question which my Daddy had asked fourteen months before that meeting, "who are you?" Aziz

inquired. "I don't know!" was my response to Daddy. "I'm upright, independent, and fearless. I'm a Muslim!" I proudly and confidently answered those three men without hesitation, as if I knew without a shadow of a doubt. In truth, I still didn't know, but I had a clue of who I wanted to be. Those men, like my Daddy, carried the mantle of manhood without attempting to

hide or cover their imperfections and didn't allow any type of situation to alter their character or integrity. I had no idea of the road I'd have to travel or trials I'd face to reveal, show and/or prove my claim of being upright, independent & fearless, and one who constantly Strives To Submit to The Creator.

This is the story of my journey...



"As he thinks, so he is;
as he continues to
think, so he remains."

~ James Allen

WOMEN'S MASS INCARCERATION THE WHOLE PIE

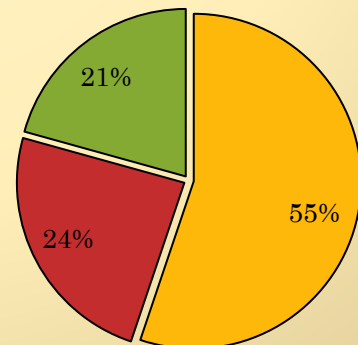
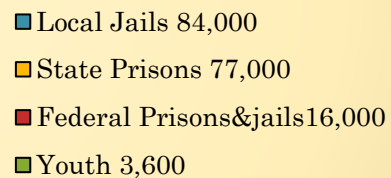
PART I

Women's Mass Incarceration The Whole Pie

This report provides a detailed view of the 190,600 women and girls incarcerated in the United States, and how they fit into the even broader picture of correctional control. We pulled together data from a number of government agencies and broke down the number of women and girls held by each correctional system. By specific offense, in 446 state prisons, 27 federal prisons, 3,116 local jails, 1,323 juvenile correctional facilities, 80 Indian country jails, and immigration detention facilities, as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, and prisons in the U.S territories. We also go beyond the numbers, including rare self-reported data from a national survey of people in prison to offer new insights about incarcerated

women's backgrounds, families, health, and experiences in prison. The report answers the question of why and where women are confined, and much more:

How many women are locked up in the United States



Women's incarceration has grown at twice the rate of the pace of the in the decades and has disproportionately been located in local jails.

First, while stays in jail are generally shorter than the stays in prison, jails can be especially deadly for women; women have a higher mortality rate than men in jails, dying of drug and alcohol intoxication at twice the rate of men. In addition, the number of deaths by suicide among women in jails increased by almost 65% between the periods of 2000-2004 and 2015-2019.

Women are more likely than men to enter jail with a medical problem or a serious mental illness and while incarcerated, women are more likely to suffer from mental health problems and experience psychological distress. Being locked up does not help. Research shows that incarceration can cause lasting damage to mental health. The data needed to explain exactly what happen, when, and do not exist not least because the data on women has long been obscured by the larger scale of men's incarceration. Frustratingly, even as this report is updated using many of the same data sources from year to year, it is not a direct tool for tracking changes in women's incarceration over time because we are forced to rely on

the limited sources available, which are neither updated regularly nor always compatible across years.

Women Disproportionately Stuck In Jails: Causes and Effects

Avoiding pretrial detention is particularly challenging for women. The number of un-convicted women stuck in jail is surely not because courts are considering women to be a flight risk, particularly when they are generally the primary caregivers of children. The far more likely answer is that incarcerated women, who have lower incomes than incarcerated men, have an even harder time affording money for bail.

Compounding the problem is the fact that jails are particularly poorly positioned to provide proper health care. In fact, local jails tend to offer fewer services and programs overall than prisons do. In addition, because most programs are designed for the larger male population, women may not even have access to programming that is available to men in the same jail.

(However, this is certainly not to say that prisons are always better at meeting women's need, as we will discuss further.)

Jails also make it harder to stay in touch with family than prisons do; jail phone calls are often at the least three times as expensive as call from prison, and other forms of communication are more restricted—some jails do not even allow real letters, limiting mail to postcards. Increasingly, both prisons and jails are doing away with real mail altogether and contracting with private companies that scan and then destroy postal mail, delivering shoddy scanned copies to the recipients.

These barriers to authentic communication are especially troubling given 80% of women in the jails are mothers, and most of them are primary caretakers of their children. Thus, children are particularly susceptible to the domino effect of burdens placed on incarcerated women.

Ending mass incarceration requires looking at all offenses and women - The numbers revealed by this report enable a

national conversation about policies that impact women incarcerated by different government agencies and in different types of facilities. These figures also serve as the foundation for reforming the policies that lead to incarcerating women in the first place. Too often, the conversation about criminal justice reform starts and stops with the question of 'non-violent' drug and property offenses. When typical bail amounts to a full year's income for women, it is no wonder that women are stuck in jail awaiting trial. Even women are held once convicted, the system funnels women into jails: 32 % of convicted incarcerated women are held in jails, compared to about 13% of all people incarcerated with conviction. This reflects the different distribution of offense types and criminal histories between convicted men and women. Women are proportionally more likely to be serving a sentence of incarceration for a property or drug offense and less likely to be sentenced to a term in jail, where people typically serve shorter sentences of up to one year.

So, what does it mean that a large numbers of women are held in jails – for them, and for their families? While drug and property offenses make up more than half of the offenses for which women are incarcerated, the pie chart reveals that all offenses-including the violent offenses that account for over a quarter of all women- must be considered in the effort to reduce the number of incarcerated women in this country. This fact underscores the need for reform discussions to focus not must on the easier choices but on policy changes that will have the most impact. Particularly in the light of the fact, that many survivors of domestic and sexual abuse have been incarcerated for violent crimes that occurred in response to gendered violence and abuse, exclusions from the reforms based on entire offense categories make less sense.

Furthermore, even among women, incarceration is not indiscriminate, and reforms should address the disparities related to LGBTQ+ status, race, and ethnicity as well. A 2017 study revealed that one-third of the incarcerated women identify

as lesbian or bisexual, compared to less than 10% of men.

The same study found that lesbian and bisexual women are likely to receive longer sentences than their heterosexual peers, and more likely to be put into solitary confinement.

In addition, although the data do not exist to break down the “Whole Pie” by race or ethnicity, we know that Black and American Indian or Alaska Native women are overrepresented in state and federal prisons: Women in prison are 48% white, 17% Black, 19% Hispanic, 2.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.7% Asian, and 13%” other”. While we are a long way from having data on intersectional impacts of sexuality and race or ethnicity on women’s likelihood of incarceration, it is clear that black and lesbian or bisexual women and girls are disproportionately subject to incarceration.

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IMAGINE

Amber “CoCo” Cannella
Logan C.C.
Editor At-Large

Greetings and salutations my fellow individual in custody and whoever reads this. The question was asked, “*What does rehabilitation, restoration and re-entry look like to you?*” my answer is this...rehabilitation, for one that really wants to change the way they act or re-act to the everyday obstacles we are faced with being locked in, up and forgotten.

We, as women incarcerated here at Logan Correctional Center (which are in negotiations of closing this facility because of inhabitable living condition) only have two programs available that offer rehabilitation: The Helping Paws Program (which has made me the woman, certified dog trainer and peer facilitator I am today) where we trained service dogs for people with mental and physical ailments, and The Wells Drug Rehabilitation Program. We as women don't have

parenting classes; anger management, therapy or counseling services.

Education opportunities, such as mandatory A.B.E. and G.E.D. are a long list that goes longer than Lake Shore Drive and harder for long-timers to get into because the list goes by your outdate; Therefore, re-peat individuals in custody are more likely to get days, come back and get right into classes versus someone who has a 10 year or 20 plus year sentences.



If you are lucky enough to get into their classes, you are placed by your TABE score. If you score under an 8, you are placed in A.B.E. (Adult Basic Education), the pre-G.E.D. class and put on that long list that keeps recycling itself.

You don't qualify for programs, and you are restricted to a minimum pay per month of \$10. Without outside support and no way to raise your score to better paying jobs, you're just waiting. It might sound like I'm complaining about RESTORATION OF OUR LIVES, and I am, but this is why: When you rehab, restore and teach the proper ways to re-enter society, *you are less likely to go through that revolving door*. I've learned in dog training to ALWAYS SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS. That's the key to making it out there and inside of these walls...BUT YOU HAVE TO WANT IT, AND IT HAS TO BE OFFERED TO YOU.

I have heard the stories about the good ol' days in which everyone went to school, had industry jobs,

and did more with their time instead of SITTING IDLE. All we do is marvel and stew on how much opportunity, programming, better pay, better food and education that are offered to the men's facilities (I'm not saying that you all got it sweet at all. I'm just being honest on how the majority of us feel). Last time I checked, we're ALL ARE FIGHTING for our freedom and upon reentry, to remain free, but ask yourself: how do you keep a woman incarcerated for over 10 or 20 years and never give her the tools to succeed on the outside as simple as learning how to read, write, balance a bank account, build credit and offer a financial literacy course?

Given the harsh and outdated man-made laws don't fit the punishment. Restoration looks like—to me—to abolish *Truth-In-Sentencing*, accountability, revamp the entire criminal justice program, especially the sentencing reform. Don't spend \$70 million dollars (taxpayers' money) rebuilding warehouses (I will not call them correctional centers) instead, give us our freedom

and the days in our master files and the ones that do have to continue to do time, to build more facilities like Kewanee Re-Entry Center (shout KH, we see you all....good job) that gives us freedoms and job skills needed to succeed. Make incentives to want to do better – good conduct credit and really give it to those that deserve it, earn it and need it to get home.

Stop dangling days in a master file and giving us false hope that the laws may change...CHANGE THE LAWS. Stop criminalizing survivors, warehousing women and men and not helping them is not going to help anyone, especially the communities that we are going to re-enter. Give us

the tools and second chances we deserve. We all haven't had the best lives growing up that led us to this incarceration in the first place. What about helping us become better physically and mentally. How can we become productive human beings to better the communities if you don't give us the tools or the chance?

There is so much talent behind these walls, so many educated silent voices. Help us use our voices to change the whole system. I imagine everyone, free members of the society to not give me a 21-year sentence and tell me to "figure it out" (even though I did). Educate Illinoisans about the absence of parole and the lack of justice for all.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (WHEN IT'S CONVENIENT)

Michael “Wally” Walls
Pontiac MSU

I have been finding lately that, as more time goes by, I am really beginning to doubt the stated mission of the Illinois Department of Correction. As a particular “training” video from earlier this year states, “The goal of the IDOC is to serve Justice, and to help incarcerated people make positive changes in a fair and safe environment. An important part of creating a safe community is treating each other with respect, fairness, compassion, and dignity.” While this mantra is being propagated as truth, the reality of everyday life for the average incarcerated person in the IDOC is far from it.

I hate to admit it, but things are now more difficult, overall, than when I originally came into the IDOC in 1985. I had a pretty fascinating run of good luck back

in the day. My very first job in the IDOC was as a 19-year-old clerk in the old Data entry shop in Joliet. In the 1980’s and 1990’s, I earned graphic arts, EMT/S, and Literacy tutor certifications; and worked in job assignments ranging from ABE/GED Teacher aide, to Literacy tutor, Library clerk, Personal Property clerk, and Employee Commissary worker. Along the way, I even got to do a weekly segment on an AM/FM radio station when I was in Shawnee in the late 1980’s. Life was good, I learned a lot, and I had a lot of fun.

I came back to the IDOC in 2001...16 day after 9/11. Initially, I had been excluded from having a job assignment solely because I have a life sentence. Once that little problem was solved, I started working in the kitchen. For all intent and purposes, I’ve been there ever since.

Because of my conviction, I can no longer have any of those job assignments that I was trained in and was so successful in for so many years. According to the 21st century IDOC, I can only be a kitchen worker, or a cell house worker....based SOLEY upon the charge of which I was convicted. What really burns me is that I was recently told that I could no longer have a job that I had just worked for 15 months, for no other reason than the charge of which I was convicted.

This past January, a whole category of inmates (of which I was included) was stripped of their job assignments. As a result, I lost a job that I rather enjoyed. After four months of being stuck in the cell on some varying form of lockdown, I went where the jobs were and I figured that I'd be a shoo-in to get my old job back. A couple of days after arriving at the MSU, I received a note in the mail. "Sorry, but people with your criminal conviction aren't allowed to have jobs on the midnight shift anymore." So, I had to "settle" for a

job on the same shift that I had so gladly departed from two years ago. I think that it's a sad situation. I've done everything that I've been asked to do, minded my own, and even had my security level lowered. All to be told that I am no longer good enough to do my former job because of my conviction?!

Have you ever heard of a "Honey Dipper"? It's a slang term for a septic tank cleaner. Think about this...there are those of us in the IDOC that are put down by staff because of our convictions. Told that we can't get into school programs because we have 85% sentences. Or been refused an industry job in a Medium prison because of the length of your sentence. Individuals like us are left feeling like that "Honey Dipper," because all we got to do is catch crap all day.

Who says that a guy with a life sentence shouldn't be allowed to make a good wage if he doesn't have any money coming in from the streets?

Who says that a person with an 85% sentence is somehow less deserving of a GED, or a vocational education?

Who says that a young lady with a college degree and a statutory rape conviction is too inherently dangerous to be a literacy tutor? Has the IDOC gotten into the business of picking and choosing who gets a shot at being successful, and who doesn't?

A long time ago, in the IDOC that I first walked into, everybody had an equal shot. It did not matter what you were convicted of, or what your sentence length was. If you wanted to pursue an opportunity, it was there waiting for you.

In the passing decades, the IDOC has gone from inclusion to exclusion. Doors that were once open to opportunity are now barred shut "in the interest of safety." We have gone from rehabilitation to "warehousing 101."

It's about time that the IDOC review those days of yesteryear

and bring back some long-forgotten policies that actually worked.

In the area of education, work on what would make a person want to continue school after their Mandatory Education goals are met. Eliminate the "last-in-line" concept for people with distant outdates. Eliminate job exclusions based upon criminal convictions or sentence length. Base your hiring upon merit, instead. If you have an individual with the education, the experience, and the temperament to get the job done, why pass that individual by solely because of their conviction or sentence length?

Personally, I could really care less about your criminal conviction. Instead, I want to know two things:

1) Do you have a relatively clear disciplinary history over the past several years?

2) Do you have the ability, the willingness, and the temperament, to perform the tasks to which you are assigned?

When you're dealing with job assignments, and educational opportunities, what people want is to be given a chance to excel. They have already been told, "you can't do this." A whole lot of "you can't" is what led us here in the first place. If an individual demonstrates a willingness to learn, to excel, and to grow, why not turn willingness into opportunity?

The Illinois Department of Corrections states that its mission, in part, is to promote a positive change in an individual's behavior. Well, saying it and doing it are two different things. It is time to quit using excuses and justifications that do nothing more than perpetuate mediocrity. It is time to starting giving people opportunities. It is time to start getting results.

CHANGE YOURSELF

**Abdul Khabir,
Associate Editor
TWO ROADS**

Life gives us signs all the time, each fall leaves fall from the trees and die, the tree is practically void of life. Moreover, each spring the tree receives new life. Continuously things are removed from our lives and new things put in their place. Another thing is how we see our fellows leave here without preparing for what is ahead of them and

within a short time, they are back into the pit of despair and on a bus back to receiving or worse, leaving in their wake all those who placed faith and trust in their false promises. I was that person; I went home for 15 months with every intention to change. The problem was my failure to take any ownership or do any work. The biggest thing I think of is how we watch those around us perish in an instant.

One second, we saw them living and breathing right in front of us then the next moment, they are gone. I recently heard of one of our own; he recently passed from this world from complications with his heart. In addition, a few days ago I called home and found out my beloved aunt Patricia passed from complications with cancer.



Ask yourself, how many reminders have you had in your life that tomorrow is not promised? How many reminders have we had that today just might be the day for us to start trying to straighten-up? Exactly, how many reminders do we need? Have we made any good changes in our life? There is a piece

of flesh in our body that will lead us to change if we use it correctly. I listened to a *Kutbah* (Islamic Sermon) not long ago; it was about changing yourself today for a better tomorrow, and the Imam (A Learned Spiritual Teacher or Leader) Said That the Prophet (May Allah Bless Him) Said there is a piece of flesh that if it is pure and good, then the entire body is pure and good. If it is bad and corrupt, the entire body is bad and corrupt. A good heart = good thoughts and ideas. Bad heart = bad thoughts and ideas. Have you ever been around someone who is super positive even in the face of challenges and hardship? A person with a good heart is positive even in the worst of situations.

These people always see the good qualities in others because that is what they are looking for. People with good hearts have good genuine intentions. For those of us learning and trying to work towards change, sincerity and good intentions are a great place to start. If we have good intentions and are sincere, the things in our lives that we are learning will have a positive impact on our lives. If you change your heart, then the change in your life will be continuous.

Doing good deeds or things like praying are good, but they are just a beginning. Great effort will be required if true change is to come about. In addition, of course we will face test, trials, and tribulation. The more you grow the greater the test. We Muslims believe that as we go through life we are under constant examination by our creator. However, I also believe that we are under constant examination by the world.

Our creator matters most to me of course. I ask myself how I please my creator if I am not pleasant to his creation. I need to pay attention and take care how I treat others as I walk through this world. Another thing I have learned is to appreciate the trials in my life. The Imam said this is what separates the lions from the lion cubs. Even though we are not actual lions, ask yourself, which would you rather be, the lion or the lion cub? What is the point of being on top if not repeatedly challenged? How then do we grow? Is there room for growth? Where do we find strength, if we cannot find it in persevering and overcoming our challenges?

For me, the fact that I am here still, and I have another day to work on getting it right, means that Allah (Praise His Name) has given me his mercy. When we receive any mercy, and we can recognize it as such, a real transformation can take place in our life. We can see mercy as a sign of a chance to change for the better. When real change started to take place in my heart, I realized I would need to do some work. A serious effort on my part would need to take place. This is so for most of us. The analogy the Imam used was something like this: You buy a house and some property. The property is on rough and rocky terrain and surrounded by a large wooded area. There is a nice stream a half mile away. One day you decide you would like to grow a substantial garden to sustain you and your family. What type of effort is required before you plant?

A major effort is required to remove trees, roots, and boulders. You will need to level some land and route water from the stream.

This is just the beginning. You do not just plant your seed and walk away. You must nurture and cultivate the seeds. Farmers know this as the most difficult stage. You must be attentive. Too much water, too little water, change in climate, animals and weeds can all affect your efforts. The land is your body, mind, heart, and soul. The roots, trees, and boulders are your current thoughts, ideas, words, and actions. Rerouting the water is like rerouting or changing your thoughts, ideas, words and actions. You must remove the harmful and negative things from your life so good seeds can grow.

Then you must put in more work. Like a garden, you must maintain your change. Monitor your life, be conscious of how you act and how you are thinking. You must be cautious of who you let in your life, the places you go, and the things you do. Unbelievably, what we read, the television we watch, and music we listen to can all play a part of how we think and feel. The conversations we are having shape our lives as well. The things

we allow into our body. Pour a bottle of liquor or a liter of soda on a plant and see what happens, I would place a bet that it dies unless it is a weed, and it may even kill it. The same thing happens to our mind, body, heart, and soul. They die as we shovel harmful things into them. Yeah, I know we are all dying anyways, but do you honestly wish to speed up the process? Only a selfish, self-centered person will answer yes to that question.

Lastly, my advice: allow your actions to speak for who you are working to be. Be kind, loving, and mindful of others regardless of things such as race, creed, and religion. Be forgiving and merciful. Why you may ask? Because most likely, if you are being truthful, you wish for these things yourself. Do not let yourself fall victim to hypocrisy. As you work towards change look to those who you can see it in. Ask how they have gotten to where they are today. Chances are, they will be willing to share their time with you.

Arts + Culture



THE EXPERIENCE OF ART

Michael Booth

**Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry
Center**

We all have different ways of looking at and defining art. I believe art is what you look for in it. And for me, it's that "looking for" itself that makes it so enjoyable. I experience art as exploration and discovery guided by problem solving. I have an idea for a piece, and figuring out how to best pull it off is the problem to solve. In the process of solving that problem, I explore different ideas and techniques and often discover something I had never noticed or thought of before attempting the work. Even well after I'm finished, coming back to the piece and noticing something I missed before can be rewarding. I can't really enjoy the work or even be particularly proud of it if I don't experience these things. Doing the same thing over and over is its own type of prison. Because of this, I can't really say that I have a specific style, and I'm fine with that. The greatest become the greatest because they focus on learning one thing endlessly.



I don't want to do just one thing. I'd much rather be pretty good at a lot of things than great at one thing. There's just too much to explore, too much to discover.

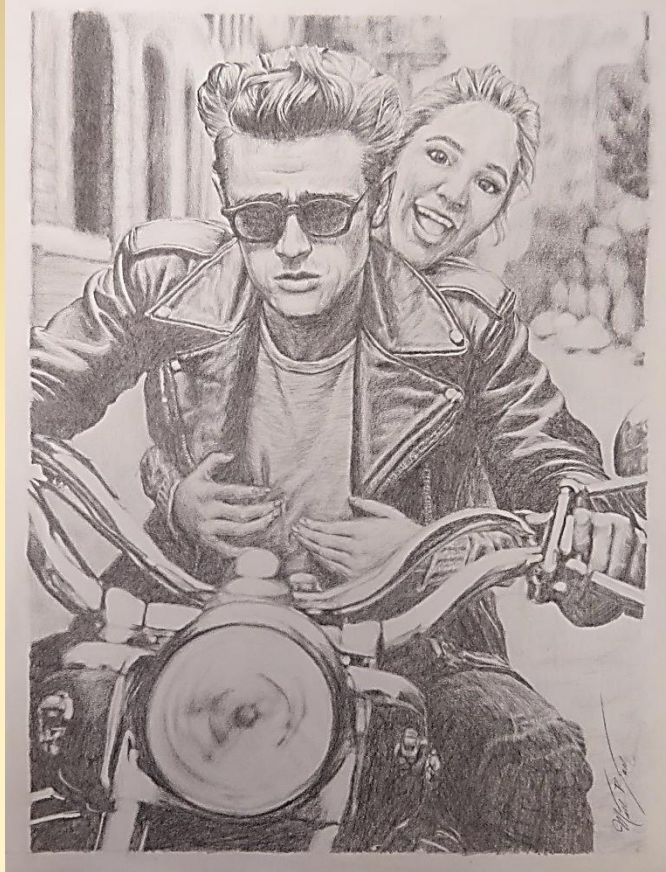
With that, I'd like talk a bit about some of the pieces I've been working on lately. Given what I've said so far, I'm going to focus on the exploration and discovery that I experienced in making these pieces. My background is in music, and so my most artistically adventurous work has been in that field.

In visual art I still feel like I've only just set foot in the water. But that's good; it means there's still a whole ocean to explore!

I'll start by talking about a drawing I did recently. I'm starting with this one because if there's one style of art I can say I'm good at, it's photorealistic drawing. And that's because that's all I ever did for years—since I was a child—before I realized I'd rather be good at a lot of things than great at just one thing. I did this piece for a family member who's had a rough couple of years.

She's always been a big fan of James Dean, and a friend of hers suggested I draw a picture of her and James Dean on a motorcycle to cheer her up, which I was more than happy to do. Photorealism isn't exactly experimental, but it does require you to really look at things at a micro level. You have to see the physical things you don't normally see. When aspiring portraitists ask me for advice, it's often questions like, "How do you draw eyes? How do you draw hair? What about hands?" And the answer is always the same: don't just draw an eye, draw *that* eye.

Our brains categorize things into patterns, so we often think of things in generalizations.



Eyes have pupils, irises, eyelids, eyelashes, tear ducts, and so forth. But every instance of an eye has its own version of those attributes. If you start to resort to patterns, you blind yourself to what's actually there, and you'll just end up drawing a generalization. No two eyes are exactly the same, so you have to look at each one as a unique entity and draw it as an individual. So, focus on the contours, shapes, light, shadow, textures, etc., themselves, and the object they form will come together on its own.

The main goal is to put these together, so it looks like a real event that she experienced. The challenge

then becomes unifying everything so it doesn't look like a collage. Now I have a problem to solve.

In black and white, this usually means making everything appear as though it has the same light source, which is not nearly as easy as it sounds. You can't simply draw what you see anymore; you have to adjust the highlights and shadows so they don't contradict each other.

Doing this effectively means not only seeing what's there, but also inferring what would be there under different lighting conditions. It also means learning about how light works itself, how it diffuses and reflects where it creates the darkest shadows and the hardest edges, and predicting what it would do to the subject, so there is some research involved. It even means just observing light around you and in nature in a way that you might not normally do. I spent more time on this drawing than I typically do. But it's important that when she sees this that it feels real to her, that it looks like a memory rendered from a photo. And the extra intensity fueled by that goal lead to a fulfilling experience.

Next is a painting I did in acrylic of

two macaque monkeys in kimonos performing on a stage. I came across a photo of this while flipping through a National Geographic magazine, and it initially struck me as darkly humorous. The one taking off the mask reminded me of depictions of washed-up actors trying to keep their careers alive by trudging through performances they don't believe in in front of crowds that don't appreciate them, a sort of sad clown vibe. But then I saw the chain around the other one's neck, and all the humor went away.

When I first started this, I really only meant it as a practice piece. I thought I might come back and do a more serious version later. But with this attempt I was allowing myself to fail because it was just supposed to be practice. There's no pressure when you know it's not meant to be displayed. I'm trying to step out of my photorealistic extremism and loosen up, so I just wanted to paint it without worrying about getting bogged down in details. If the proportions weren't just right, fine. If the colors didn't quite match, all the better.



Let the “mistakes” be and work them into the painting. I was just trying to get a feel for painting that way. I wanted to explore what that was like and try to find the balance of accurately depicting a scene without being beholden to accuracy itself. Plus, it’s always fun trying different ways to create the illusion of fur. As often happens, it quickly came together into something more complete and stopped being merely a practice piece. The mistakes became happy accidents. The distorted proportions of the figures and the uneven perspective in the floor added to the surreal quality already in the subject. The colors on their skin, particularly the one in the back, add to the expression on their faces. And

the mask somehow looks much creepier than the original. Now, if I do decide to do a “serious” version of this, I’ll likely focus on enhancing these distortions.

Finally, this last piece was done for a charity called “Jammin’ 4 Justin”, a benefit concert raising money toward the fight against childhood diabetes. Justin was a drummer, and as a musician myself I felt drawn to the idea of creating a sort of positive memorial that highlighted his musicianship. Unlike the other two pieces I talked about, there was no photo to start from, which meant coming up with the idea from scratch. I personally think the initial idea is harder than anything else, but once you get that first spark everything else ignites. Trying to come up with some inspiration, I suddenly remembered a painting I saw at the Art Institute of Chicago by El Greco in which the painting was divided into an earthly realm at the bottom and heavenly realm dominating the top portion. I don’t remember the details exactly, but the people at the bottom in muted earth colors were involved in some religious ceremony related to those floating in heaven above them in bold, bright colors.

And I thought, what if I started with that format, but instead of a religious ceremony it was a concert? And that was the spark.

Whenever I have to create the whole idea from scratch I do as much prep work as I can before I even begin to put paint on canvas. I want to anticipate and solve problems before I run into them, especially when there is a deadline. Having a small venue fill up a wide base didn't make sense. So, I tilted the canvas so that it was a diamond shape to give it a narrower base and made new sketches.

There were a handful of problems that I had to work through to get this one done. I didn't actually have a picture of Justin to work with, so I added the lightning bolt to bathe him in so much light that you wouldn't be able to see the details anyway; it also added an energetic element to the scene. There originally wasn't a sunset, but the composition was just looking too symmetrical, so adding the sun and its light on the clouds at the left helped break that. I was concerned about the fact that the references I had for the rock stars all had different light sources, but being that we all know there are lots of lights at concerts I think we just accept it in this setting.

But with as much detail as I was able to convey with the individual

musicians (and given that they're well recognized, I had to get them right), I can't begin to tell you how much I struggled with something as seemingly simple as clouds. I didn't want them to be perfectly realistic to begin with—it's the afterlife after all, so a dreamy fantasy quality makes sense—but, man, I just couldn't get them to look like what was in my head. I spent more time on those clouds than anything else. But I like that, because this is how practicing art makes you realize what you don't see. We all think the sky is beautiful, but you don't know just how beautiful it is until you try to replicate it. I don't know if Kewanee has the most amazing clouds in the state or if it's only because I'm looking at them differently now, but I do know that I'm looking at them differently and that is amazing. That is what I mean when I say the "looking for" is what makes art so enjoyable. I didn't go into this expecting to look at the sky in a whole new way. I've been looking *at* the sky my whole life. But since I've been looking *for* something in the sky, I see so much more of it.

STARTING OVER

Ja'von Boyd

Logan C.C.

At times, I get mad at myself because I care too much. I will focus on me from now on. Support or no support I will be thankful with whatever Allah will provide me. Lie's truth who knows which one, well you see, I do. I can spot a lie from a mile away. I can see the truth within a day. I am going to be the man Allah made me to be. Strong caring gentle like the summers breeze. Deep like the Blue Ocean, just watch you will see. I am not who I used to be. I no longer care what others think, I do what makes me Ja'von happy. No need to break a woman down, no need to lie and run around, no longer bound but free. A grown man that is found inner true peace. No matter of the lies and games people play, I no longer take part of that game. My freedom is at stake, so there is nothing in me that's fake. Starting over is the plan, so we will see what Allah has in his plan. Stay true, if you think this isn't true.



DAD IS IMPORTANT

Earl Milton Jr.
Centralia

A dad is an important part of a person's life; a dad has been places that you do not have to visit. The experience of the dad is a lighthouse for his children, many people crash into icebergs, and rocks that dad could have been instrumental in helping his children to dodge, duck, or avoid. A dad can fill a void that other people could not possibly fill, a dad is part of where we came from, and the more we know about where we came from the better; we can navigate as we travel on life's journey.

Dads are many times unaware of the role that they play in the lives of their children; many dads do not even know how they affect the survival or the demise of their

offspring. A dad to me is like a strong mountain, or a sounding board of sorts, a dad can let you know beforehand where the path leads that you are trotting on. A dad is a shield to protect you, as you are being prepared to face the world head-on as an adult, dads are important.

To all the dads out there, find out what your position is and play it well, because you are influencing the future with every move you make or do not make in the lives of your children. Do the best you can, so your children will know that they are worth fighting for, a dad is an important part of this world. So to every dad out there recognize the powerful part that you play in the life of your progeny, Happy Father's Day to all the dads in the world.

MY TEARS, MY FEARS IS A REALITY

Carnell Tyler

Can you feel me family....

Why so many graves shallow, how can you ignore the screams of the ghetto. Why did my dad and Mom have to die before their time, why do I awake in my prison cell crying?

Do you feel the remorse in my heart? Am I wasting my time, dear God? Is this the last song and dance, I pray God grant my life one more chance.

My people were always broke, so I ditched school to sell dope; but money does not make a man, because you cannot carry it with you, when you leave this land. I grieve for all the people that I hurt, God take this blood off my hands before I am buried in the dirt. War is breaking out everywhere and to Gods people this just is not fair. Will Jesus Christ arrive in time to save us from these troublesome times? The poor getting poorer, and the rich getting richer, and crack cocaine is the top selling bitch!

I am from the streets, so I speak

what I know and boy, Heroin is killing America slow, been down this road before this is not my first rodeo.

As a delinquent my life was full of corruption , but as of right now my life is under construction, you see I am trying to build a better me, and be the man that God intended me to be.

I maybe disconnected from the streets forever, but this storm will not last forever...

Because if there is a will there is a way, and I am going to pray to God every day.

My tears, my fears is a reality, this goes out to my family.

Listen up America, if you know someone that is locked up, visit him or her, write him or her, and accept a call from him or her.

Just because we are doing time, do not mean we are wasting time. I know I am educating myself every day; I am reconstructing my mind while I am doing this time.

Thank you

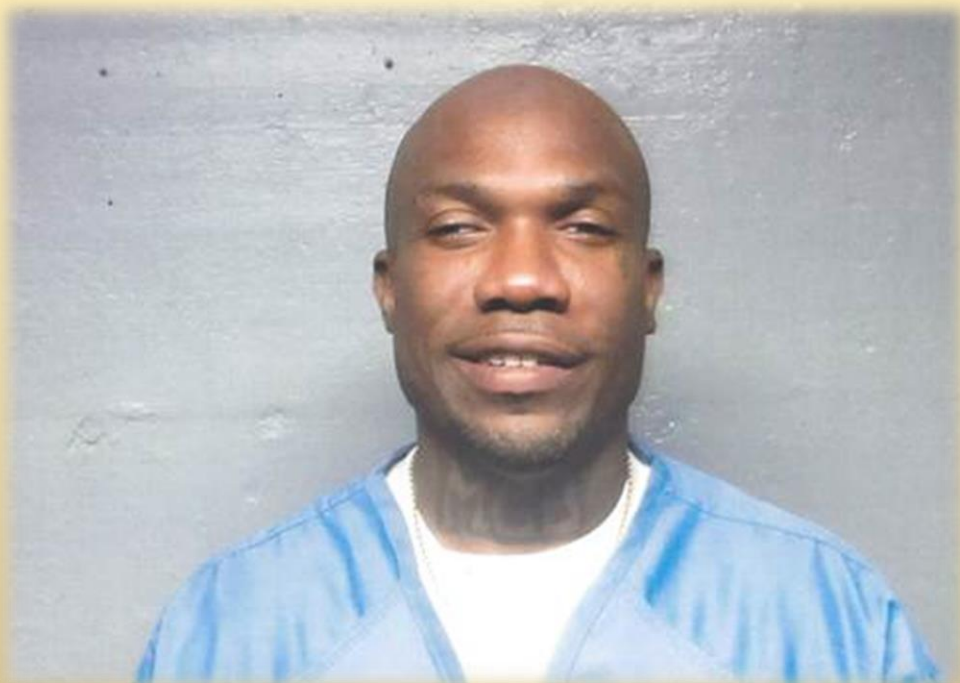
WHAT WE'RE TAUGHT AND WHAT WE TEACH

**Romelle Graham
Menard C.C.**

As a child, I was taught by my mother not to be a tattletale; I would actually receive some sort of discipline for engaging in such an act against my siblings. "No one likes a tattletale." She would say. Moreover, that stuck with me throughout my life. Throughout society, they create this image that we must obey our parents, and what our parents said was law.

Even the teachers in school told us to listen to and respect our parents. So not being a tattletale became embedded in my mind. This is something taught to me by someone who held my best interest at heart.

Never in a million years would I think that something my mother taught me would land me in prison. let alone with a 60-year sentence for someone else's actions. Just because I did exactly what I was taught, not being a tattletale.



I was even more shocked by the actions of the people who did the murder; they were being tattletellers, who are now free. This not only made me question my mother's teachings but also all the teachings from the schools.

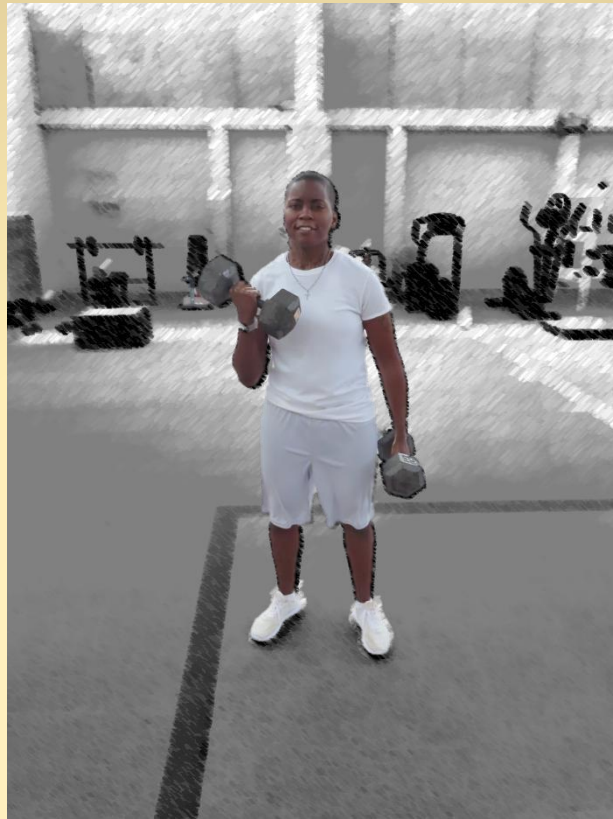
This is where my education began; I began to develop the power of distinguishing between right and wrong. Principles of Conduct became my moral compass. Then I began to study the Laws that Govern our Constitution that is used on our Criminal Justice System.

I then came across the United States Constitution. It stated under the Fifth Amendment that it was my right to be silent and free from self-incrimination. Then I began to wonder, what was the difference

between what I read and what my mother taught me. There was none, her not being fully educated herself taught me the best way she knew how. The things that we are taught and the things we teach will determine the outcome of someone's life. My opinion is when you teach something; make sure the other person understands completely.

Thank you for your time and for considering everyone's story; individuals in custody all around appreciate what you are doing
Thanks.

QUALITY IS A HABIT



Janet 'The Prophet' Richmond

I see you watching, waiting for me to slip...a narrow-mind refusing to believe that such excellence could embody a convicted felon. Well, it's my pleasure to consistently demonstrate dedication! Taking pride in appearance, having integrity in dealings, managing my feelings and taking responsibility for my future.

I can't be categorized, is that the problem? Still, I won't alter my disposition due to your perception of my situation and appearance. With ferocious ambition, I strive to reach new heights, with discriminating tactics, opposition attempts to dim my lights, refusing to believe that such excellence could trod through the Department of Corrections.

I opened my mind to possibilities. Took an unbiased look at reality, assorted my priorities and mentality. Not an act, this is Quality!

"Quality is not an act; it is a habit." - Aristotle