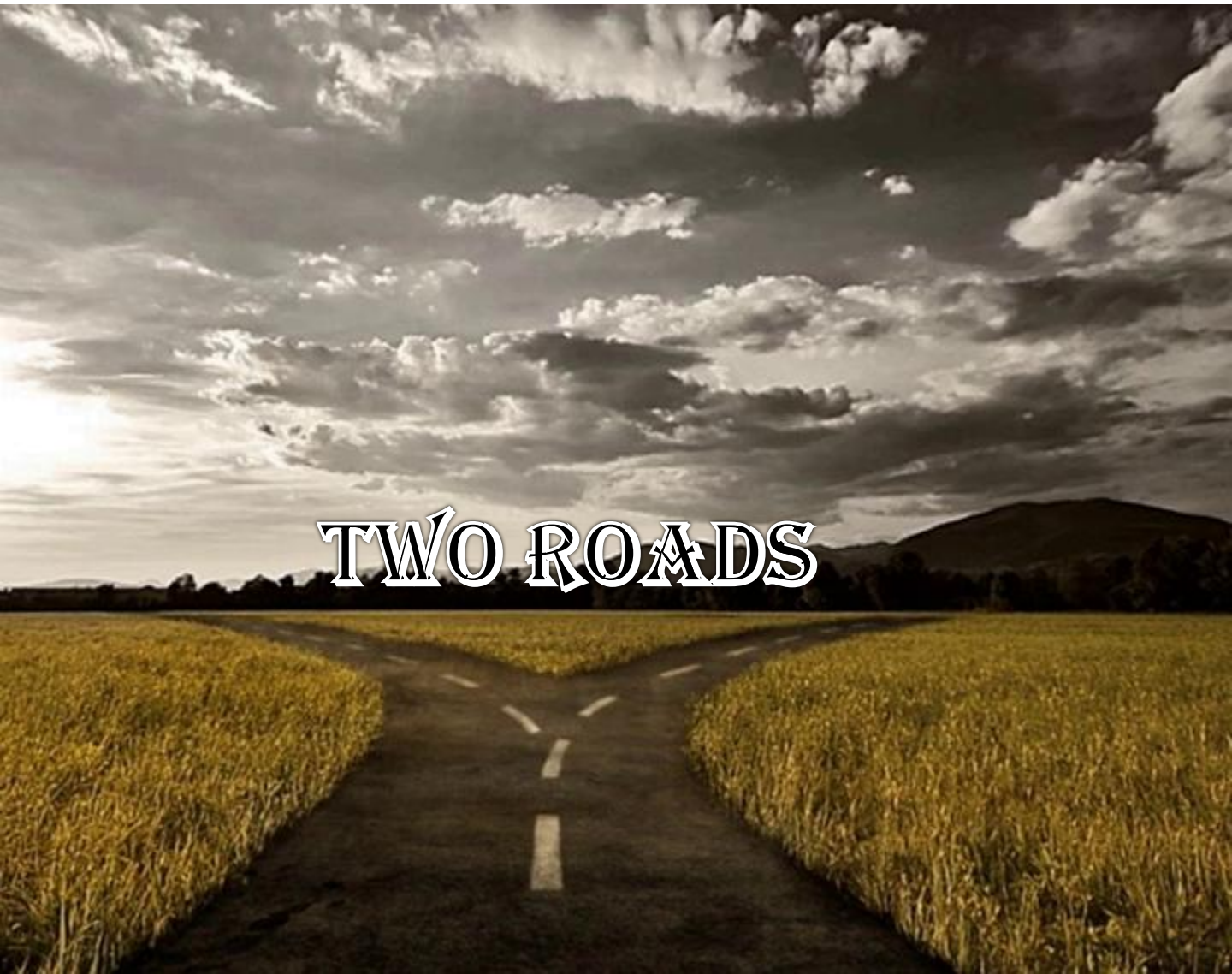


MY CHALLENGE TO FIND THE RIGHT PATH



TWO ROADS

KEWANEE EDITION
VOL. 40

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 into society.

Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

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

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

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

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

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

TWO ROADS

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2. Type in: **idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoads.html**

We encourage you to screenshot this page with
the hashtag:



THEN LIKE AND SHARE THE POST!



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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.

Editors Take



What's good readers, it's brother Yahkhah'yil again. This time I reached out to the Kewanee community to find stories from the brothers here about their challenge to find the right path. During this short time as a journalist, what I have found to be true is, there's peace and release when we have the room and space to tell our stories. This is all new to me, so it is my hope that I have brought life to each and every story that I have read and been apart of. After 30 years of incarceration, having the ability to just be on a computer on a daily basis is a blessing within itself. I encourage all of you to continue to write and know that our team will make sure to allow your voices to be heard as you wrote it or like for it to be heard. If you would like to write a story on what you have found to be a challenge to find the right path, please do so.

Thank you all for your letters and support.

My Challenge

By: Brother Buckley



My Challenge to find the right path was chasing love, and validation in all the wrong things, places, and people. My truth is: when you consume the things of the world and idolize it, the world will eventually consume you! #Manifestation – one on one!!! I quickly became what I watched on TV, what I ate everyday, the music I listen to, and the things that I used to believe to be true. The world's unnoticed power is time and energy. I believe once I was of the world, I didn't respect the 24 hours a day that God gave me on earth. I was using time and energy with wrong intentions which was to impress instead of **IMPACTING**. The pleasure of many women, making money, parties, dressing clean, smelling good, riding slick on my way to different steakhouses throughout the week, was my focus. Those were the things that fed my soul and body, day and night.

I loved handing out my business cards because it made me feel like a boss. Having women compete for my time and attention made me feel validated, unfortunately. The truth is, I let many different spirits in, thinking everybody loves seeing George Buckley winning.



One night ended all of the satisfaction of the world. All Praise be to GOD; I have been incarcerated for 5 years. I announced to my kiddos that daddy is doing time with God. Jail saved my life because it helped me realize how I was using my time, energy, and resources in life. Today as a kingdom man, with a kingdom purpose, for a kingdom agenda; the way of the world is unacceptable. George Buckley is rebirthed and ready to impact by helping to spread the Godly truth, that we don't have to consume or be of the world to feel love or validated. The truth is the God that lives inside our souls and bodies is all we need to feel love and be validated.

As a spiritual fitness coach, I must give you truth, that I will love to share with you!

*“By the mercies of God to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **DO NOT BE***

CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD, but be transformed by the renewal of your **MIND**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
(Romans 12:1-27) AMEN!

YOURS TRULY, COACH B



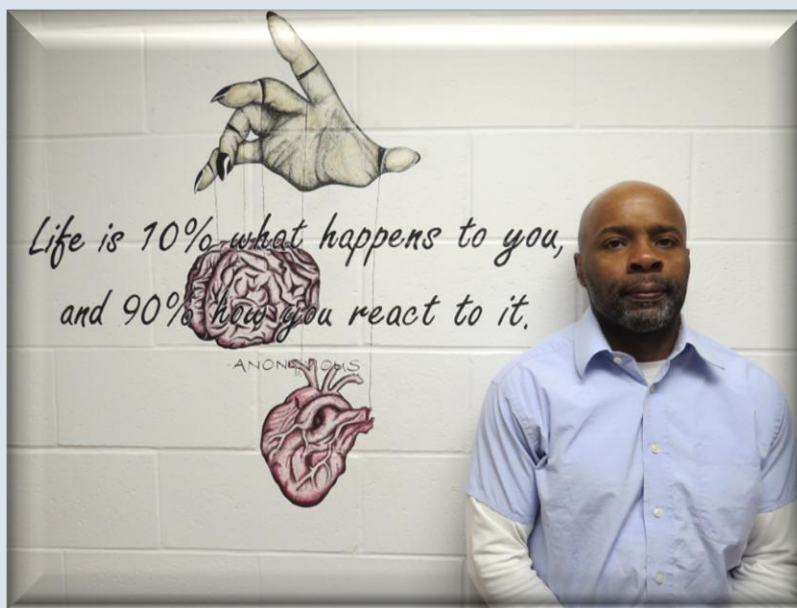
Finding The Right Path

By: Kalik Williams

Honestly speaking, it was hurdles to find the right path for me. They ceased to become obstacles when I started to evaluate my moves and began to do some introspection.



I'm not one to believe in the (P.O.M.E) Product Of My Environment. I've seen many of us thrive and accomplish many things while incarcerated. As well as those who come from Impoverished neighborhoods and single-parent homes and go on to become successful.



Though challenges exist, if you keep going, that's you being resilient. If you don't allow the adversity and at times the adversaries to sideline you; that's you being motivated by your current situation, with emphasis on the current. Because it is only permanent if that's your state of mind.

My challenges to find the right path, was never about anything or anyone. I can't say, think, or name something exterior. I had to extinguish an absolute way of thinking. Adopting a mentality set on growth and seizing all positive opportunities. Also, if they weren't available, I prepared myself for the moment they would be available...

*“When preparation meets opportunity,
Great things happen.”*

My Challenge to find the right path BY: Eric Robles



My journey began in 1993 as a 17-year-old, needless to say I was lost, broken and had been arrested for the crime of murder. First, let me start by saying I have no excuse as there is none, no matter what one goes through in life it does not give one the right to take the life of another.

In 1995 I was convicted of murder and sentenced to natural life, this made things even harder on an already lost/broken teen who had not dealt with his shit. Off to prison I went, still blaming others, not taking anything seriously and surely not having dealt with self. After running around prison for 3½ years being stupid and yep, still lost and broken, (1998) I ended up in seg for 90 days. After having to explain to my family I was in seg and seeing my brother through glass on a visit, I was laying there one night, and I had my "aha" moment. It hit me, I realized that what I had done was not me, not who I was raised to be, and the path I was on was one of further destruction. I did not like myself, so I made a promise to my parents, to all who loved, forgave, and supported me that in spite of what I had done, even serving a natural life sentence, that I would live my life in the best way possible (the way I was raised). Where to start, I was in maximum security with no one willing to help, no programs, the staff who were in a position

to help, tell me, “For what? You're never getting out.” Yeah sad, but I refused to give up, so I started with what was available, GED classes, and I did it. Then came self-reflection, forgiving those from my past who hurt me, becoming aware of the things that put me in a bad mindset; easy right? Not at all. I took steps, sending photos back to friends which was my way of not saying good-bye, but letting go of the past in order to move forward. This was a part of accepting my reality and that was big in being able to grow, mature, and overcome.



In 2000 my case was overturned, and I was sent back for a new trial. During that time I chose to take a plea-deal to avoid putting people through another trial, to avoid a natural life sentence again; it wasn't the best deal, but it gave me a chance. While in the county I was able to take part in a 12-step for life and health class, which focused on the individual. It was eye-opening to say the least. This was my start to true understanding of trauma, healing, forgiveness, and all the things I was needing and wanting to understand in order to help myself. I was figuring things out. Even becoming an instructor in the class, but it came to an end. Yep, back to prison! Still no programs, but now I had tools, yes coping skills, how to deal with my past so I could continue to move forward. I had 3 choices coming back: (1) Stay the same. (2) Get worse. (3) Do better and get back to who I am. I chose number 3. Still not having any programs, my goal was to be involved with all that I could in order to grow, learn, and mature.

I worked jobs and was a part of the correctional industries program, which was big in itself. I even began checking in with mental health professionals. Thank you, Ms. Creason.

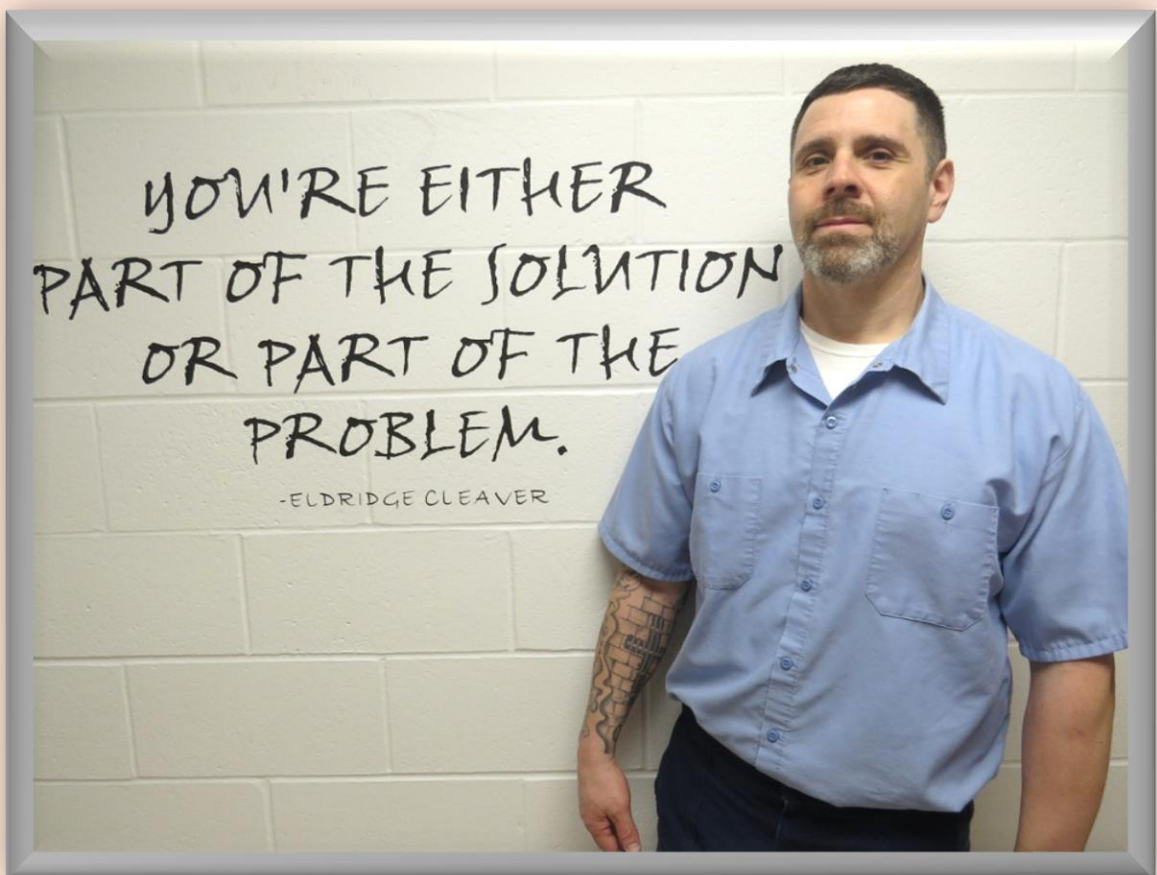
Not having programs did not stop me from seeking them out. I learned about correspondence courses (self-help) such as the Lion Heart Foundation, Emotional Literacy, Criminon Illinois and their seven courses. After maximum security it was college courses and while at another medium security, I was back in another correctional Industry program, so more opportunities were offered to me, so now I am DOC certified as a machinist and cabinet maker, forklift certified, and CAT Simulator certified. I also took part in the building block program. I was a peer-educator, teaching a class called "Because I said I would," plus circle training, both thanks to Ms. Erin Fuson.



And now, I was learning, teaching, leading, growing and becoming centered. However, it didn't seem like I was getting to where I wanted to be. Something was lacking and I had known it for a while. Then it hit me, for all that I had learned, the level of growth and self awareness I had attained, the things I was engaged in, I couldn't appreciate any of it. I couldn't truly progress, because I did not have **self-forgiveness**—and all along I knew it. I knew I had not forgiven myself. That was the key to unlocking what I was after, **the love of self**. It took me well over twenty years to

forgive myself, and allow my true self to truly shine, and to know that there is no longer anything or anyone that can hold me back, including myself. Allowing my true self to truly shine and to know that there is no limit to what I can accomplish in life. Within self there is no longer anything or anyone that can hold me back including myself. YES, I too had my challenges and struggles, but I have overcome all the odds, and I am now on the right path to succeed in life.

Please note my journey has been long and not at all easy, even dark at times. The truth is, for all that I have learned, how I have grown and matured, if it were not for the love of understanding, of support, and forgiveness of my family; where I am and who I am today truly would not have been possible, my outcome may have been different.



Finding the right path

By: Calvin L. Harris

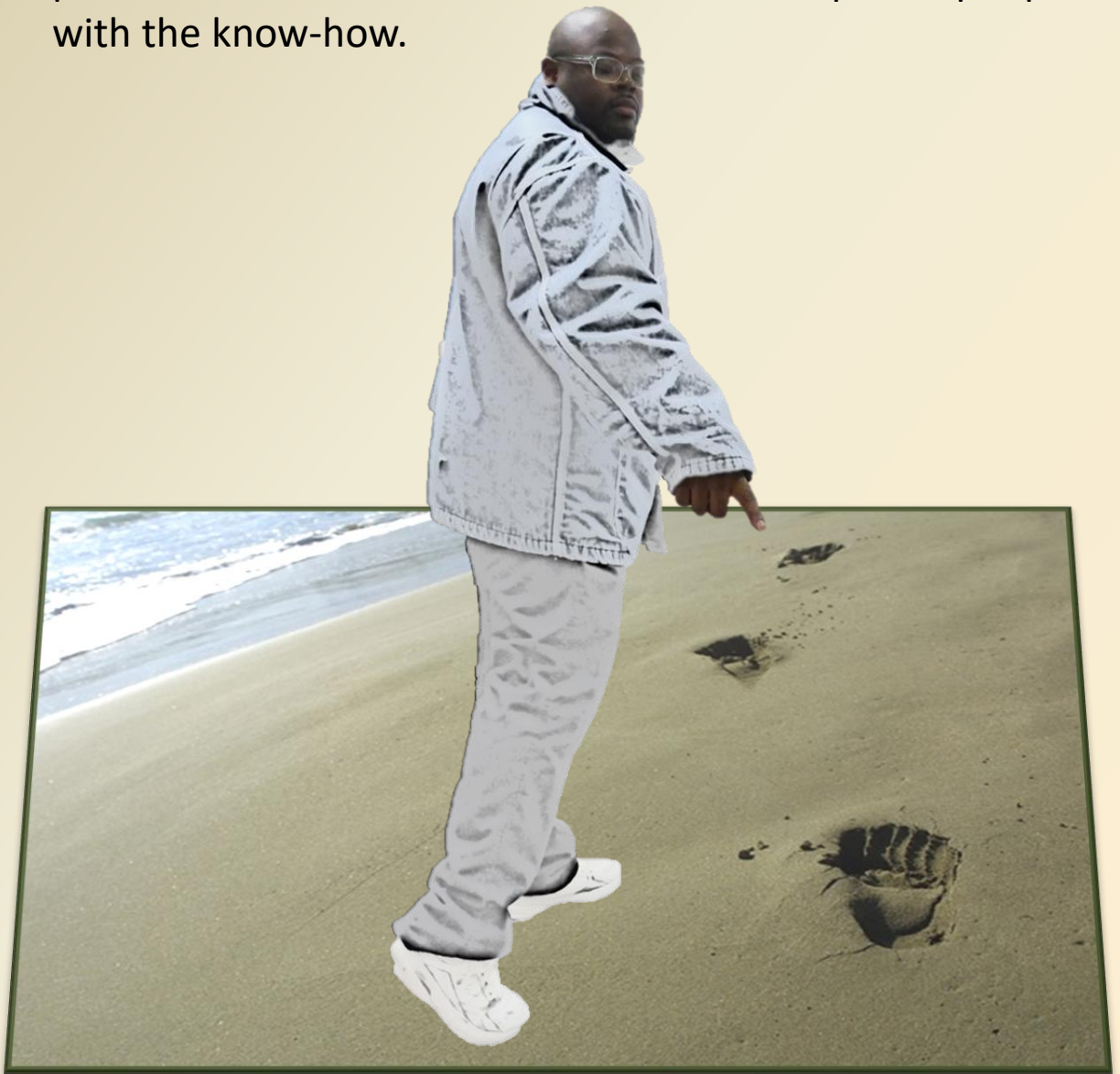


Hey Guys! My name is Calvin L. Harris, and I was asked the question, “What were some challenges I had to overcome to get on the right path?” I must admit this question made me dig deep and really take a serious look at my past. Now I can tell you that “I was raised in a community where **Generational, Cultural, Toxic Masculinity** was instilled into young men more than trying to seek an education,” and I would be right. I can say “it was my mother being on drugs, my father's addiction to the streets and prison or being forced to grow up in foster care,” all this being facts.



But the truth is my biggest challenge in getting on the right path was “**Myself!**” Not my circumstances or other people. It’s been my own *choices, habits, and mindset*. Recognizing that is what’s allowed me to start changing it. I’ve realized that I’ve been my own biggest obstacle. I didn’t always trust myself, stayed in patterns that were familiar instead of healthy, ignored my relationship with my Higher Power, and delayed taking any responsibility for my actions. Owning all of that has truly been a turning point for my life, and the path I head down today shows just that.

In our lifetime we will all experience death, heartache,
pain, loss, disappointments and wins. What matters most is
how we pivot during those difficult times. We are all blessed
with angels on earth by way of our family, friends, and even
strangers. My goal is not only to inspire others to trust the
process but also allow God to use me to empower people
with the know-how.



The greater the promise, the greater the problem! If God gave you a million-dollar promise, He also gave you a million-dollar problem. See, people want the million-dollar promise with a ten-dollar problem. I'm sorry to say, "it just don't work like that." ***Don't be pushed by your problems, be led by your promise!***



“To whom much is given,
much is expected.”

“My Challenge to Find The Right Path”

By: Jeremy Yates



My path to being a better person has always been a challenge. I have always been the person in the way of that path. It took me many years, and many lessons learned to realize that. I have always considered myself a good person, I know there is always room for bettering the person I am, I try to do that everyday. Yes, there are difficult times and many times when I feel like, why even try? That is the challenge for me, when a problem presents itself and I use the lessons and difficulties I have picked up along my journey of learning how to be a better person. So yeah, it has been difficult, but I wouldn't have it any other way.



There have been many setbacks during my time away. There were times that things were going good, and I could feel and see things bettering for me, reality as usual would set me back. For example, building my relationships back with my kids or my family members just to have things come crashing down.

Now that my time has gotten shorter and I have put myself in the situation I am in, being here in Kewanee and always thinking about the bigger picture for me and my future has helped so much with the comeback to all of the setbacks over the years.

When I first got my time and began this sentence, yes it was difficult to even think about a right path or consider doing the right thing. It was a challenge to even keep faith or have that positive mindset that I have developed over the years. I have always been up for a challenge but when I first left, this was a challenge I didn't think I could overcome. Truly, I am blessed with the path that I have taken and the brothers that I have been around over all of these years has helped me in ways that I am very grateful for. I feel like challenge and life go together hand and hand, because what part of life isn't a challenge from birth 'til death. The one thing for sure we will all deal with is challenge, *some more than others, some easier than others.*



My life has always been a challenge and one thing I have never done is turn away. I will accept life's challenges and keep it moving. I truly know that because of these challenges, I am on the right path today and moving forward to the future. Knowing how to deal with certain challenges is always going to be an obstacle; that is life!

*The challenge to find
the right path!*

By: Melvin King



Coming into prison at a young age was a challenge in itself, not knowing what I was walking into was scary, but I did hear stories about the place I ended up doing 8 ½ years at, (Stateville) and everything I heard was true. There was so much temptation around me, however I did my best not to be tempted. It was almost like being in the world, you had drugs, alcohol, and violence all around you. I knew from the start that I did not want anything to do with my past life, so I did what I needed to do to keep myself under the radar, that was a challenge in itself because there was absolutely nothing to do there. You are in the cell 23 hours out of the day looking at T.V. or for something to do, and that something was in my face every day. Stateville was a hard place to try and stay on the right track but I sort of managed to do it, there was no school for me, there were no jobs for me, I went 8 ½ years with only 1 job that lasted 3 months. That was back in 2005. Now, mind you, I went the rest of my time without a job or anything to do with myself which was 4 years. I had to keep myself in check

so that I wouldn't fall off into the dark side of prison, but there was one thing I knew I had to do. I knew I had to get out of there and I did just that when I reached the 20-year mark. Stay on it; there are going to be distractions up and down your path, it's up to you to stay focused and not let anything get in your way.



Once I got to Pinckneyville I was lost again because I was on the new, I did not know anyone, and I did not want to be there. There was a lot going on there as well, but not like Stateville, you had people trying any and everything they could to get out of Pinckneyville. Even though I did not want to be there I knew I was there for a reason, I did try to transfer every 6 months but that did not work out for me. I got a job within 3 months of being there and with that job everything came to me. I became a Peer Educator, I enrolled in Lake Land College, and I started working on my Associates Degree. I started facilitating classes, I spoke at orientations, parole schools, and civics education. I made my path as easy as possible because I knew there was more for me. I stayed there for 5 years under the radar. I had a few ups and downs there, but I managed to get through them.

I left Pinckneyville and ended up in Pontiac (M.S.U.). The skills I gained in Pinckneyville became useful; as soon as I arrived in Pontiac, I was hired as the Substance Use Instructors Aide. My time at Pontiac was different, because I came in on the path that I wanted to be on, and I never veered off.

Pontiac was pretty much the same as Stateville. It was rough but by me being focused and determined to do the right thing for myself, I did not get distracted. So, my challenge to find the right path was not a matter of finding it, it was a matter of staying on it. I came into prison with the mindset to be a better version of myself, a version that everyone knows me to be, and to do what was right by family and myself. Our path is laid out in front of us; we start walking it the day we understand right from wrong, you start out on the right path and do what you can to stay on it, there are going to be distractions up and down your path, it's up to you to stay focused and not let anything get in your way.



My Journey to find the right path

By: Jerome "Justice" Jones



Who would have known?

Thirty-two years ago, impulsivity landed me in the jaws of the criminal legal system. Countless court proceedings later I arrived at the Pontiac Correctional Center a.k.a the "Thunder Dorm." Entering I.D.O.C, I was an angry and a seemingly hopeless teenager with a substantial amount of time; and so, the story begins. This anger led me to committing serious rule infractions. For my actions I was disciplined and rightfully so. The years I spent in confinement allowed for extensive **reflection** and **analyzation**. As a result of this introspection, I began to **self-correct**, which led to change (**for the better**). In **DARKNESS** my path became clear. I stopped blaming the environment for my situation, placing blame only masked what I saw when I looked in the mirror. I let the world spin too fast for my mind to see the truth within. **Self-reflection** laid the groundwork to peel back the layers of false images I embraced. You see We all want to be in control of our lives, and that starts with **self-control**. Self-control is a learned ability to make decisions, and to maintain self-control we have to be accountable for our actions (hard pill to swallow). **Self-respect**, on the other hand, is about making decisions based on internal values aligned with accountability.

-READ AGAIN!-

Ask yourself, what do you value?

Self-respect is a conscious effort to do what's right. When I began to understand the ramifications of each decision I made, this enabled me to learn from my mistakes, producing true respect for myself and those around me.

(HERE'S SOME INSIGHT)

How you respond to your own reality shapes your perception. My response to my reality always had two sides that contradicted each other. Coming to conclusions while conducting honest assessments of my mental state has not been an easy task; results are not reached overnight. Trials and Tribulations! **Pride** and **Ego** have been the most detrimental ingredients in my life. Kewanee, as I'm sure you've heard or read, has much to offer by way of programs and I've borne witness to this. Everyone will not make it here! For me Kewanee was never the destination; and more importantly it was not my motivation. I never believed coming here was a possibility, at best it was a fleeting thought, but not one that I prioritized. Kewanee recently became an option due to the energy put forth in the universe years ago by way of programming and consistent **right** choices, and the relationships gained in the process. This took breaking down old, destructive thought patterns and rebuilding a mind-set that fosters growth & positive change as a life-long process, and not merely to escape consequences.

Self-improvement is my modus operandi, the ultimate goal being freedom, this comes from a mind-set, not a location. Wherever you reside within the I.D.O.C, start cultivating your future. Begin to ask yourself, what's the big picture and what are you working toward? Time waits for no man, not to mention the timing will never be right. Take advantage of the educational programs and work with the resources available to you. I've been in prisons that prioritized program wait-list by MSR date.



This didn't deter me, I simply sought out programs through the mail. You would be surprised what a write-out and a few words could do towards your betterment. Now you have educational/self-improvement material in the palm of your hands by way of tablets. The doors have been opened. The question is, will you allow yourself to walk through them. In order to “see” change, you have to shift the ingrained negative perceptions and see life from a more holistic & constructive viewpoint. This shift is crucial for making better decisions and creating a foundation for meaningful, lasting change. I no longer subscribe to the same worldview which fueled my unruly behavior. I view life from a different lens.

“NOTHING WORTH HAVING IN LIFE COMES EASY”!



When you walk, first you decide to get up, then you take steps one foot at a time. Understanding how everything affects each other creates a responsibility bigger than yourself. As I conclude this article I am sitting in the media room of the Kewanee Horizons as a newly appointed member of its editorial team.

“Never Limit The Vision That You Have For Your Future Based On Your Current Circumstance”



Finding that Path was a Challenge

By: Matt Doolan



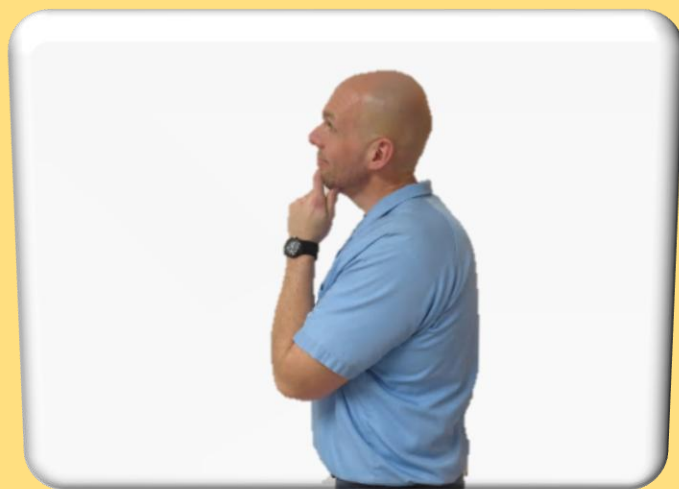
What's up everyone?

My name is Matt Doolan, but a lot of people know me as Fat Guy. I was interested in this article because I am proud of the man I became. At the same time, it is unfortunate, because the reason I am here is that some one lost their life. I cannot change the past – only learn and build from it. We all share similar setbacks, no programs, too much time to get in classes, or maybe we ended up in a situation that escalated and set us back.



For me coming to prison was a major set back. In the beginning I wanted to give up on everything. I was quick to blame the world and everyone in it before I would admit my own faults. So, I remember the first time I said to myself, I've got to change. This guy was at the time like 50 or 55 yrs. old and was still gang banging and was acting like that was the only thing that he could do or be, and I noticed all these young kids who had no role models looked up to him. I asked myself, "Do I want to be that guy?" Does he not realize there is no future or pension plan with gang banging.

So, I distanced myself from “the guys” and started to work on myself. I couldn’t believe how many people shunned me out. "I can't live like no square," they said. "Well, the squares are free and keeping our girls company." Eventually it all played out, I met some like-minded people, got lucky, and got into college. I transferred before I could finish, and now I’ve got too much time for school. Instead of hating the world and drowning in self pity, I got jobs, signed up for correspondence classes, and started all over, but kept pushing. I’ve lost friends, family, and have had my heart broken. I refuse to let any of that knock me down. I push myself for my family, so I am not just the son in prison. I’ve overcome obesity – lost over 150lbs, got away from gang ties, not worrying about what others think or feel, fought through the feeling of abandonment, and now have a stronger bond with guys I’ve met in prison than the guys that I knew my whole life. It’s crazy to say, I had to come to prison to become the man I am today. A proud man who at one point thought his life was over and lost everything, to now understanding how to be a man, putting family first and recognizing self care and self love is a foundation. You ever hear, “***The world within us is what we see without.***” If I stay positive, overcome obstacles, and treat all people with the respect they deserve, it makes life much easier and less angry.



So how many of us after 10, 15, 20, or 30yrs of prison can look in the mirror and say I am proud of the man I am today? It took some soul searching, and a lot of loss for me to see the big picture. I still have room to grow, I am far from perfect, but I am not afraid to challenge myself for improvement. There are so many good people I've met since I've been locked up. People I now consider family. It's crazy to say, they are the same type of people who if I had run into them before prison the outcome would've been bad. I guess what I'm trying to say is, don't give up on yourself. If you still got time, try to educate yourself and never give up on the courts, keep fighting. Be the bigger man, show love and forgiveness. We all know how to hate or hurt, now let's flip the script. Take your anger and use it as fuel for the future, because there's no better revenge than success.



Your mind knows only some things. Your inner voice, your instinct, knows everything. If you listen to what you know instinctively, it will always lead you down the right path.

My Journey

By: Maurice C. Williams

By definition, journey means – a going from one place to another.

When people talk about journey you think about **TWO ROADS** or you could see the Good and Evil in the road taken.



Growing up in a single parent household I was allowed to think for myself and live with decisions I made.

Evil was the easy choice because I found fun, I found encouragement, I found praise, I could be selfish, and no one said anything. What I didn't know was I was knocking on the door of the penitentiary. Once I got to the end of the road, I found myself alone with my memories and a whole lot of what ifs.

I listened to so much trauma in other's voices that I wanted to know why, and the best way was for me to educate myself, furthering my education to the point where I now have a degree. I've peer led for three years; listening, helping, doing for others, and feeling good about the road we share. But now look at me, on the road to freedom, giving praises to Allah everyday for showing me the direction to the other road and the start of a new journey.



Thank You!

Maurice C. Williams

The most important thing is that we are on the right path, and we will not deviate from it, even in the face of strong temptation to choose temporary gains over long-term benefits.

Yemi Osinbajo

My Biggest Challenge Getting on The Right Path

By: Chuc Fondren

God, Me, Family, Loyalty Ova Luxury

Pain + Passion = Purpose. Past + Present = Promise



The biggest challenge for me getting on the right path, I believe was myself. It was a Me vs. Me thing, truth be told, most of the time you are the only thing in your way from accomplishing anything you put your mind to.

We tend to blame others, and everyone else for our mistakes, bad decisions, and misfortune. I believe, once we wholeheartedly take full accountability, even if someone did have a part in it, we take power back over our lives. Throughout my journey, I have given too much power to others. I gave too much credit and energy to entities that didn't deserve it. My biggest challenge in life was being at war with myself. Instead of being my ally or accomplice, I was my own adversary and enemy.

I became a prisoner in my own mind, bound by chains that I unconsciously created. Overwhelmed by circumstances and situations that I put myself in. I believe once I stopped blaming everyone else for my foolishness, I realized that the true power comes from the God within me. "Our old self was crucified with him, so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." **Romans 6:6**



"I'm more like I am now than I ever was before."

We are becoming more ourselves, that is our true calling. If we grow wiser and stronger with life experience, we learn to know ourselves, and we find the confidence and courage to fulfill our best self. We all walk a path that is sometimes very difficult and complicated, weighing the choices before us. Also being raised and brought up in critical harsh environments, such as violence, drug infested areas, organized crime, poor economically and poor, ineffective educational systems. My biggest challenge was choosing and knowing who my friends were.

Jeopardizing my life for what we call a street code, loyalty, or **REAL**. Only to find yourself in a cell, alone with no one to call and no one to show you the same loyalty. I've seen so many result to playing the **"Victim Role"** the why Me's? But we all heard it before, ask yourself **"Why Not Me?!"** It was meant for me to go through tragedies, losses, pain, and betrayal; so, I can value the wins and true love. I'm thankful for my past and my present, because it gives me promise. I'm grateful for my pain and passion, because it gives my purpose. Everyday is a challenge, a challenge to be a better version of me than I was yesterday. To be a better son, brother, father, husband, I have to be a better me. *I'm a kingdom man, with a kingdom agenda, with a kingdom purpose.*

Don't allow anyone or even yourself to stop you from achieving your goals, dreams, and assignment.



Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord, your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

"To anyone going through any challenges or obstacles, God Bless you, and know every storm doesn't last forever."

In search of the right Path

By: Linord Thames



I Navigated a narrow road with good intentions for many years in search of the right path. The thrilling adventures of a bumpy ride brought about trials and tribulations, moving nonstop without any boundaries to live a lifestyle that wasn't meant for me. It was all gas and no breaks.... Consequences didn't exist and a fair shot wasn't always guaranteed, the decisions and choices I made in life created major challenges that were compounded as I got older. All the advice in the world means nothing to a man with a made-up mind going in his own direction.

My challenge to find the right path started on the Westside of Chicago in the North Lawndale Community, but I took a different type of fall that made fight a different type of fight when I landed in prison.



The biggest challenge of my life was watching my mother on a video visit fight her own mortality as she battled cancer. If it is, what it always was, it will never change my path, because it all happened the way it did.

Written by Linord Thames

You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right!

Rosa Parks

My Challenge to Find the Right Path

By: Edwin Neal



I wish I could say I understood the path I was taking, but in all honesty, it was not that easy. It took a lot of self-reflecting and looking in the mirror, but I think I got it. It took me a while to see that some of the greatest qualities that made me, were also some of my biggest flaws, which held me back. I value the bond of family and friendships deeply, and growing up under certain conditions, you understand how friendships can easily make you family. However, I learned the hard lesson that not everyone deserves that same energy. One good quality that I knew about myself was how much I care for my circle. On the other hand, one of my biggest flaws was me not understanding how to keep this circle small. We all have values and the hardest part about having values is to know where to place them. It so crazy to see how many people speak on being **“Real”** but rarely commit their **“Realness”** to the right causes.



It is hard giving a certain level of mindfulness, just to get none of it in return. It starts to feel like you are giving up so much of yourself that eventually you lose identity of who you are. All-purpose ceases to exist and instead of heading down your own road and trying to find your own path, you end up on someone else's. Once I decided that I had to do what was best for the family that was doing their best for me, all things became clearer. There are going to be times where we choose to stand up for a cause or cannot go for a particular situation. Then there are going to be moments where we simply have to ask ourselves, ***"Who is this benefiting?"***

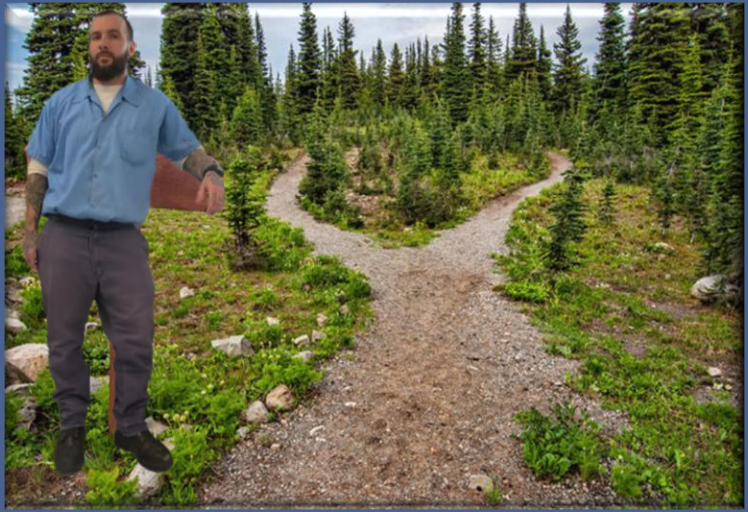


*I realized that I did not have to **"find"** a path because it was already there. We just have to find the focus to stay on the one that is already in front of us and not try to walk anyone else's.*

Written By: Edwin Neal

My challenge to the right Path

By: Tyler "Shorty" Gulli



I truly believe that my greatest asset to finding the right path was prison. I don't know how many people will actually admit it , but I needed prison. I tried many times before getting here to try and get my life together, but time and time again, I'd hit a roadblock. When all things felt as if I had it figured out something or someone – typically being my downfall would lead me right back into a life of addiction and crime.



Not saying that my time incarcerated has been lined with a red carpet because I promise it hasn't. I've had bad years. I've found struggles and drama, but what prison taught me was how to handle those situations as an adult, how to navigate the crazy without losing my cool, and how to adapt to situations to avoid major conflict.

I caught my case at 23 yrs. old and when some would say I was an adult I will admit I was not. One major thing I knew I lacked prior to my incarceration was responsibility and I mean responsibility for anything at all. I never held a job longer than a year. I've never had a bill more than a cell phone; I never had to learn to take care of myself . Prison is the first time I was forced to be **ON MY OWN.**



Since being in prison, I think I've held a job the majority of the time, barely missing a day and always trying to excel at whatever it is I'm doing. Where some have chosen to blow all their money on B.S., I've managed to learn to save and make sure my needs are taken care of far more than the wants. I've learned to manage myself; I know my path is far from over and I know prison is only a microcosm of the world outside, but I'm 10x more confident in my abilities to be successful now than I ever was before. I truly don't know where I'd be today had I not gotten locked up or if I'd even still be at all. So, I thank God for the path He's put me on and even more so the brothers who have walked this path with me and helped mold me into the man I am today.

If I had advice for anyone willing to take it, it would be to take all this a little more seriously. There are lessons learned in every trial we go through, and this one could be the one to change our lives forever. I see so many good brothers squander the ability to learn, because it's not the “cool” thing to do, cool is what got us here. If you take the time to allow this to teach you how to be a man, how to be responsible, and how to take care of you, I can promise life will be a whole lot cooler.

Much love to all the brothers and sisters out there on the right path. I know its hard, and some days you want to quit, but believe me, what's at the end of this path is worth far more than what was at the beginning .

Thank you for your time,

Tyler “Shorty” Gulli



No Path, No Guide, No Jedi

By: Antonio "Jedi" Espino



The first few years of accepting what I had done, as well as how I was at fault were rough. There was a lot of denial, blaming, hate of others and inflation of self image. In my isolation, I took a liking to reading, and James Patterson as well as John Grisham were iconic in my collection. Until **someone whom people called "Yoda"** continued to attempt to get me to read **Star Wars books**. I resisted them for some time until I was on a lockdown in Pinckneyville and ran out of reading materials.

As I've looked back, I wished I had someone to sit me down and give me guidance. I wished I had someone who sat me down and told the impulsive me what direction my actions would take me and teach me how to look ahead in life. I was running blindly, living life in the moment, to the extreme. Life is not a Disney movie; there is no magic blue genie to grant these wishes. I had to learn the hard way.



I took to reading a book called, “I Jedi”, and became entranced. The way they described how the Force felt flowing through them, light/dark, how it drew on thoughts, emotions, memories, feelings, and more. The Jedi were training and meditated on their connections in the Force. From this, I was intrigued by the thought of meditation. I desired to learn how to meditate and a book appeared in front of my cell by Deepak Chopra. I took to studying the teachings of the Jedi in these novels, writing their principles and code into a collection for myself. I then started practicing meditation taught by Deepak Chopra. There were many versions of Chopra’s teachings that matched what I was reading in these fictional Star Wars books. John Grisham and James Patterson drifted away.

After applying meditative techniques I found I was able to face myself within and find things I did not know were buried within. I found parts that were anchored deep below almost as if there was an endless abyss. ***There was this feeling as if I was about to feel something amazing, yet something was holding me back.*** A feeling akin to being on the ledge of a cliff and being afraid to fall forward, body feeling weak, and screaming with nervousness to turn back. I also found that ***this very same feeling*** would come up when I was drawing for a few hours and was immersed in my work. Sometimes the uneasiness felt like boiling water and bubbles were coming from unknown depths. I ran from these feelings a couple of times.



Then, one day, I read about leaning in and allowing it to rise as bubbles in water, and watch them rise to the surface, without attempting to hold onto them. As I did, an immense wave of memories and pain came up alongside the feelings that accompanied them when I first went through them. After they fully played through my mind, body, and spirit, I felt an immense wave of relief and ecstasy. I was filled with clarity and so much peace.

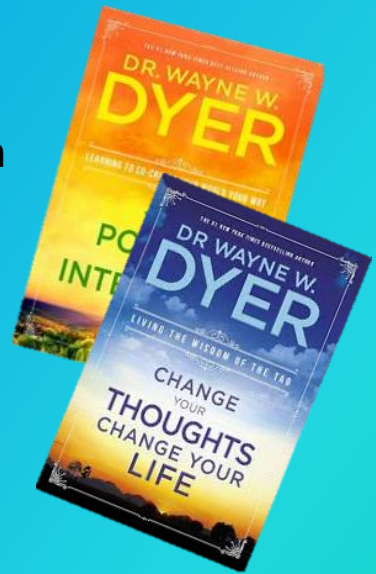


I then opened my eyes and had found that I was crying and my shirt was soaked with tears. I looked over at the time and found to a major shock, I was meditating for four hours! There was a light feeling in my days now. I became infatuated with meditation and art, as well as the Jedi and Sith teachings.

Studying the complexities of the creating life Force became my walk, my path. I then would look into Buddhism, and found so many parallels. As time passed, I became known, much to my chagrin, as Jedi. We had over forty guys who would share these teachings and walk the path.

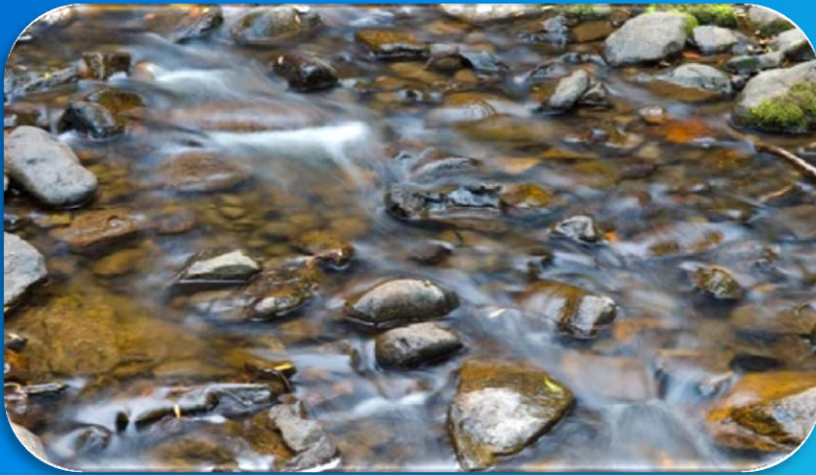


I then came across Dr. Wayne Dyer, & his translation of the ancient sage Lao-Tzu's writings known globally as, "**Tao Te Ching.**" Dr. Wayne Dyer's book, "**Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life,**" I took to reading a verse each day and his dissertation on each verse. As this started my mornings, I wrote on the back of my hand a word to focus on what I had read and to remind myself what to look for, or sense, in the ethereal world around me. Little by little my world began to change dramatically.



Ten years and well over 740 books later, I have been walking a spiritual path and found my path being guided by no one in particular rather by our creating life Force, sometimes noticing. I continue to study Yoga, Mindfulness, and many forms of communicating with the world around us. Dr. Wayne Dyer's book, "**The Power of Intention**" has further developed my walk with insight and conviction.

I do not read just to read, I read to learn from other great successors who precede me and so I may gain and utilize their insights every day. I place into practice the materials and tools.



One struggle of what I face on this blessed path is of others not understanding the depth of my connection with our creating life Force and its echoes in our lives. There are moments where others see me **very** quiet, and assume I am upset, sad, or tired. **Yet, in these moments I am sensing flows of our life Force, and I am in a state of discernment.** Sometimes I feel flows of change, and I am being mindful of the subtle flow like water over stones. I do not fight the current yet find its flow and remain receptive to allow its natural force to guide me.

My Jedi practice is a mindful one of intention, and I have found and cultivated great peace with myself in prison. For this, I am immensely grateful. It has brought me many terrible lessons of pain and challenge and continues to develop me into the essence I am today and onward.



So many doors have opened for me walking this path and so many amazing people have come into my life. I seek to see the divine light in all and invest in others around me as I co-create towards a future I feel I am gently being nudged towards.

*May the light of our creating
life force shine on everyone's
day, path, and spirit.*

Namaste,

Antonie Espino



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- POETRY: SHARE A SHORT POEM (MAX: 200 WORDS) ABOUT YOUR CHALLENGES, SETBACKS, AND TRIUMPHS
- WHO ARE YOU IN YOUR TOUGHEST MOMENT (THE HERO, THE VILLAIN, OR THE VICTIM)?
- HOW HAVE YOU TURNED A NEGATIVE INTO A POSITIVE?

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