

MYLIFEMATTERSTOO

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF MASS INCARCERATION



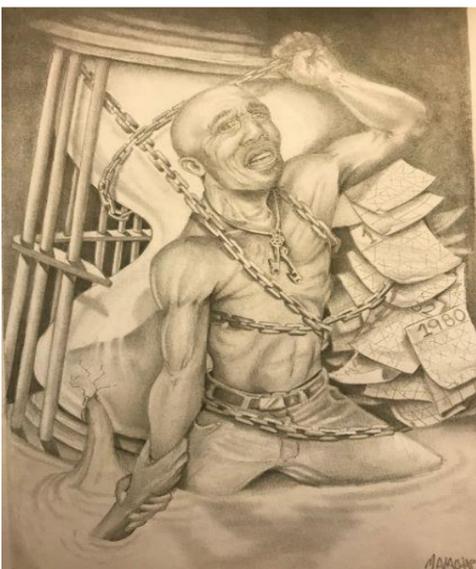
Founder of MLMT – Quentin Jones, Michigan DOC

MORRIS

QUENTIN JONES

(Sunday, November 22nd) I wrote this reflection a little over a year ago. Sadly, Morris Martin died a month after this piece was written. I've witnessed numerous men die after serving three and four decades in prison. All of them had transformed their minds and were no longer a threat to society. If the goal of incarceration is rehabilitation, why are not those who should be afforded a meaningful opportunity to be released after being rehabilitated, still serving time? Death by incarceration is real and it becomes more so by the day, as I fear that it may one day be my fate as well. I'm 40 years old and I have twenty-one years, six months, and twenty-five days in on a sentence of death by incarceration. With the rapid spread of Covid-19 in the Michigan Department of Corrections there will surely be more deaths of elderly men and women who should be free. Where is the justice in that?

(continued on p. 2)



Shirikiana Draper, Michigan Department of Corrections



Bobby James Moore (Moore v Texas) US Supreme Court Ruling



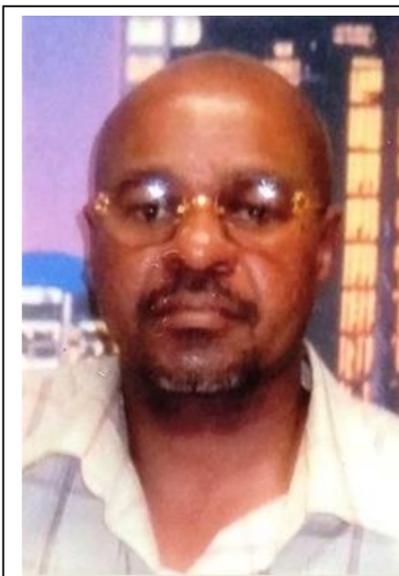
LuAnn Szénay, Michigan Dept of Corrections



Michael Thompson, Michigan Dept. of Corrections



Jim Fussell, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction



Ricardo Ferrell, Michigan Department of Corrections

You will find the stories of these individuals pictured here and many more inside this special issue devoted to those who have spent the greater part of their lives incarcerated in the American Prison System.

A TIME FOR CHANGE

THIS ISSUE:

- MY LAST MEMORIES OF MORRIS
- JIM FUSSELL AND DOMINO DEEDS
- THE STORIES OF THOSE WHO DO LIFE –

- BOBBY JAMES MOORE (MOORE V TEXAS)

- TIME FOR CHANGE
- TIME LAPSE

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Letter from the EditorOur Contribution for the December Issue**Time**

I asked my students to tell me what came to mind after I wrote the word, TIME, on the board. I wish to share with our readers what we came up with in our discussion as we put together this December issue.

Here are a series of questions and sentences we wrote on the board: What's the time? I don't have time right now. I never have time to myself. Do we have enough time? What should I do, can't seem to find anything better to do with my time. Time is going so slow! What is it like for you to do time? How do you do the time? I've told you time and time again, NO!

I remember myself the summer my own father was dying and he asked me, "Daughter, where did the time go?"

The students and I decided to share with our readers *Shakespeare's Sonnet #19*.

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,
And do what'er thou wilt, swift-footed time,
To the wide world and all her fading sweets;
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen.
Him in thy course untainted do allow
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
Yet do thy worst, old Time; despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.

Time has its own life and is its own master. It bows to no one. No money or power can ever change its path which for all of us ends in death. It will continue to live after we are gone. It is eternal. It is what we do with the time given to us that matters. Life can be brutal, nevertheless, it is our choice to get up again and keep on going. No one with any power or money can decide that for us. Only we can. Only time can.

We hope that the stories we have printed here will shed some light on how time is served for those who are incarcerated. We hope the stories here can answer some of the questions you may have.

Working with those on the inside has been an enriching and educational experience that no textbook or worksheet can ever replace. On behalf of the students and myself, it is, as always, our pleasure to work with the incarcerated and to put together the MYLIFEMATTERSTOO newsletter.

**MY LAST MEMORY OF MORRIS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1****QUENTIN JONES**

This morning I woke up from a dream of being free-to the nightmare of being incarcerated. As I went to the community bathroom to take care of my hygiene like every morning, I walked past a man named Morris Martin who has been incarcerated over forty years- forty-four to be exact. I first met him twenty years ago when I came to prison. At the time I was nineteen and didn't really understand the reality of what it meant to have life without the possibility of parole. Morris did, because he had been living it for twenty-four years already. He took a liking to me and started working with me on appealing my case as well as teaching me about surviving in prison. Morris and I have been together at several different facilities over the course of my twenty years, and he is one of the men who has borne witness to my transformation from a boy to a righteous man. While he has seen my transformation, I have witnessed his physical deterioration.

This morning when I walked past Morris I saw the look of a man who is being tortured in the name of so called justice. I see how incarceration is slowly eating away at his soul. A once strong and vibrant man is now a feeble senior citizen. The thing that I love about Morris, he is always in good spirits still fighting for freedom. Not just his, but also the freedom of others.

As I looked at him, tears formed in my eyes because I saw him losing the fight to father time. The worst fear of every prisoner is dying in prison, but in reality most us with life or long indeterminate sentences will do just that-die in prison. The saddest part is, after decades in prison, one is no longer a threat to society like the ones who profit from our enslavement would like you to believe.

Oftentimes I find myself questioning the real motive of this injustice system. At what point does this become torture? The daily dehumanization of incarceration takes a toll on the strongest person's mind, so imagine what it does to those who are not mentally strong. Yes, it breaks them. I see it every day as I walk the yard filled with men on psychotropic medication because the torture of incarceration has robbed them of their sanity. I refuse to let it be me. My body may be locked up, but my mind will forever be free. The days of me being mentally enslaved are over. TAKE THE CHAINS OFF!!! I just hope that one day we can take the chains off the minds of those in society who see death by incarceration as justice. There is no justice in torturing a person to death. To all my brothers and sisters who are trapped on these modern-day slave plantations, I feel your pain. Keep fighting-better days are coming!

The race is not given to swift nor the strong-but the one who can endure to the end. Peace.

The Concrete Wilderness - the Journeys begin on page 3.

FORTY-PLUS-YEAR JOURNEY IN THE CONCRETE WILDERNESS

The stories of Robert Na'ill Partee & James Harris, Michigan DOC

BY RICARDO FERRELL

Half of my life has been spent behind bars. My name is Robert Na'ill Partee, I am 80 years old, and have been in prison since 1979 serving three life sentences. I am divorced, have three daughters, one son and eight grandchildren and I dearly miss them. Prior to coming to prison, I worked as a Journeyman Ironworker with eleven years in the Building Trades Industry with Local 25, International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Ironworkers. My educational background includes: Associates (Honors) Liberal Arts, Associates (Honors) Legal Assistant, Associates Millwright, Bachelors Degrees (Honors) in Business Administration and I am a Certified Brailist (Library of Congress). Now when reading the above, one would probably wonder, "How could someone with this sort of background be in prison?" Well, let me give you a little insight as to why I sit here in prison. When I migrated north from a small town in Tennessee, I first landed in Flint, Michigan, where I found employment in the automobile industry. I held that type of employment for a few years before venturing off into the culture of a street lifestyle. There, as you can imagine, was everything bad that one easily could indulge in. I started hustling hard in the streets and before long I found myself deep in the game. When I moved to Detroit it seemed like the fast pace lifestyle I was living in Flint, somehow became magnified and the lure of easy money became my new ruler. My children needed me for guidance and support but much of the time was consumed by my desire to acquire the so-called finer things in life. The more I got, the more I wanted. They say money is the root of all evil, and so with that comes all sorts of problems; some of which I didn't see coming, but as the universe absorbs your energy, be it negative or positive, that is exactly what it will give you in return. I guess my desire to have riches played a part in the mindset that would eventually cause my downfall. Many so-called friends left me out to dry and really showed their true colors as they didn't really care about me in the first place. During my incarceration I began to see my worth as I became involved in programs, classes and took part

in events meant to help one evolve. Some of that involvement included: The Amir Muslim Community, holding the position of President for the NAACP, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chairman on the Board of Directors – Fathers Behind Bars, Inc., as well as Tutor for Spring Arbor College Alumni Association and Best Actor (lead role) in "Caged by the Wolverine".

Some of the changes made since my incarceration reflect my new way of thinking such as learning that what makes one successful is not the procurement of material wealth at the expense of spiritual and moral values. In addition, my ignorance resulted in a vulnerability to the machinations of amoral associates. How I will spend my time when freed, would be to do as much as I can to rekindle my relationship with my children and grandchildren. I've missed not having the chance to be a real father to my children as I would've liked. I long for the day when we all can enjoy life together. Also, I would work very closely with Families of Prisoners United, Inc. (FOPU) striving to return something back to the community.

When I am free, if it's the Lord's Will, then all of the years of prayer and personal reflection come to fruition. Prison life has been an educational experience for me in preparation for a divine work and destiny. I have been truly blessed by my personal relationship with the Lord who has brought me through all these years of incarceration. I am prepared to face adversity. I am prepared to accept all of my obligations and responsibilities, regardless of the obstacles and stigmatization of being an ex-offender. I welcome the challenge of competing for prosperity, asking occasionally for equal opportunities and then creating opportunities for others through the skills and education I have earned. I will forever put my trust in God and ask for forgiveness for all of my past sins, and to grant me success from His bounty in all that I will do of good. I harbor no ill feelings toward anyone. I am an old man confined to a wheelchair with debilitating health issues, however, I still do my best to brighten up someone's day 😊

MY NAME IS JAMES HARRIS and I am the second oldest of nine children, the oldest of four still living.

I am a convicted murderer, not a title I relish. I would much rather say my name is James and I a doctor or a lawyer, anything but murderer. But I am what I am. I will forever be known by the crime I committed. I am in prison for life. I am known here in the Michigan Department of Corrections as #126149.

I entered the MDOC on June 25, 1970, as a young teenager from a dysfunctional and tumultuous family. At that time the prospect of incarceration didn't phase me. I fit right in. The thought of years of imprisonment was an alien concept and did not resonate with me. I continued to do the same things I'd always done, albeit, on a smaller scale. After the first twenty-plus years of stumbling around prisons throughout the state, I was caught up in the cycle, trapped in the hustle, with several failed escape attempts before I came to learn that my life has purpose – and that purpose is to serve others without an expectation of something in return.

Getting to this place in my life has been a process, a long journey. Parts of it I do not yet understand. I know that I had to grow up and admit the truth of what I had done before I could move on with my life. Each step that I've taken has helped me to find my way forward and it's also taught me that the most difficult person to forgive is yourself. Our judgement of self is more severe than anyone else's. Our need to be forgiven feeds our capacity to forgive and our capacity to forgive derives from our need to be forgiven. When we talk about forgiveness, we usually focus on one side or the other, granting forgiveness or seeking it. But as I see it, each of these is a door into the same house. Forgiveness is an interactive process. When I need forgiveness for myself, I need someone or something outside of myself to interact with to make it possible.

I have been incarcerated for fifty years and I think about my purpose and what I can contribute. Oftentimes we don't look outside ourselves because we fear that others may scorn us as much as we scorn ourselves. Isn't it time to remove the cross? We who continue to hate ourselves need to learn that we have suffered enough, and that future self-torture only keeps us from doing good in the world. In the last twenty-plus years, I've put down my cross and look forward to being of service to others.
PEACE

FORTY-PLUS-YEAR JOURNEY IN THE CONCRETE WILDERNESS - THE STORY OF RICARDO FERRELL

BY RICARDO FERRELL, SENIOR WRITER

I recall stepping foot in Marquette Branch Prison, an old prison built in 1885 which has a resemblance to Alcatraz. It sits some 100 yards away from Lake Superior. I was seventeen years old and the youngest prisoner in the general population at the time and the reality of being in a real penitentiary was cemented by what I saw around me. Prison guards would form what they called goon squads and would rush into a 6 x 8 cell and commence to beating prisoners mercilessly, just because they may have made too much noise. The atmosphere and environment on the yard was always tense back in the early and mid-70's especially at the only three prisons at the time, i.e. Marquette, Jackson State Prison (which is the World's Largest Walled Prison), and the Michigan Reformatory, known simply as "gladiator school". These three prisons were very dangerous and on any given day there would be

viscous, volatile instances of brutal violence. The weak had no chance of surviving; everyone was tested regardless of their reputation at that time on the streets.

I had transferred from Marquette to Ionia (the Reformatory) and immediately got into trouble and went to the hole (segregation). While serving my detention time down in the old dungeon, an area where the guards would only come to make rounds every hour, one night a young white man, only eighteen or nineteen, set himself on fire. We were all banging on the bars and yelling trying to get him some help but the guards ignored our calls. Well, I don't know if you've ever smelled human flesh burning before, as that is a smell that I will never forget. The guy committed suicide by burning himself to death. It seemed like he was burning a long time before the guards finally came, almost an hour later. By then he was dead.

There was another time I went to segregation for a serious assault on a fellow prisoner, and while down in the dungeon we were all protesting the horrible living conditions. We only had a wooden bench that was maybe three feet wide to sleep on with a blanket. So the guards came back there and got the big water hose and sprayed each prisoner, approx. twenty of us no matter if we were voicing a complaint or not. Then to make matters worse, they opened every window along the cellblock walls and this was in the middle of a Michigan winter. We were treated inhumanely and with little or no regard for our well-being. We were subjected to the most despicable racism imaginable, the N word was used as a weapon, a form of humiliation and degradation.

At Michigan's Supermax Prison, there were many instances of sleep deprivation, usually by guards purposely making sure they shined bright flashlights
(continued on page 4)

The Ricardo Ferrell Story continued

in our faces and kicked on the cell doors under the guise that they were checking to make sure we were still breathing, an orchestrated ploy to try covering up their well-designed mental torture. The Supermax was eliminated and converted over to a regular maximum security. However, some of the same tactics and worse still exist. Still, today, there are many times that prisoners experience unjustified and unlawful conduct by overzealous prison guards, such as the inappropriate misuse of tasers. There's at least one reported case where a guard shot a prisoner's eye out. The abuse inflicted from these instruments by guards has caused two verifiable deaths of prisoners.

Now some 46 years later, the treatment of those incarcerated is more of a mental oppression, as opposed to the blatant physical abuse that was once so openly demonstrated. Those who suffer from severe mental illness are often punished instead of receiving adequate treatment from a qualified mental health professional. Serving hard time has now become more of a mental challenge, as it appears to be beyond wrestling with flesh and blood to being more of spiritual wickedness and righteousness in high places. It seems that a Corrections Department should be more inclined to provide prisoners with the necessary tools for them to work toward rehabilitation and be in a position to experience offender success upon reentry. However, it appears that roadblocks are designed for prisoners to fail, thus perpetuating the continuation and causation of recidivistic trends and creating a seemingly revolving door type of outcome.

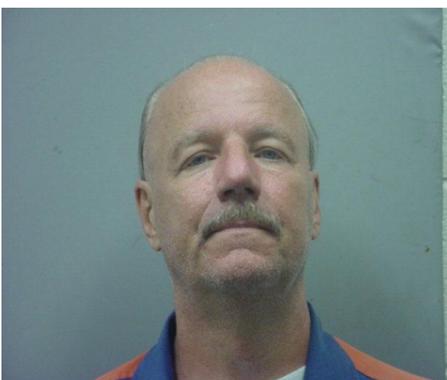
In order for prison officials, lawmakers, advocates and stakeholders to begin having a substantial conversation regarding prison and criminal justice reforms, they must be willing to include crime survivors and current and formerly incarcerated individuals who are impacted the most. This outlook can be rooted in a restorative justice approach where everyone can have input on how things will look before, during and after incarceration. If the United States wishes to rid itself of the prison systems of antiquated measures and the notion of doing hard time, it can take a page from places like Switzerland, Germany and Norway to see how successful they are in rehabilitative, redemptive and transformative programming, that not only places the offender in the best light possible to succeed after release, but also helps to reduce the crime rates and make communities more inhabitable and safer as a result.



The Scott Dohn Story

By Ricardo Ferrell

I was only 20 years old when I committed my crime. I'm 65 now and have been locked up 45 years in the Michigan Department of Corrections. I haven't completely lost all hope that I will be given another chance at life among my family and friends, but it's getting much harder every day to wake up and put myself back into the world of prison.



I plead guilty to having been responsible for the violent death of my girlfriend's grandfather and have questioned my doing that for more than 45 years. I had an idealistic outlook on life back then and realized too late that the "state" has no soul... no forgiveness. Pleading guilty and being remorseful for the tragic death of another human being is devastating enough, but it is far removed from actually killing someone. The mindset, the psyche that it takes to physically kill another person is very different from believing that you are responsible for the violent death of that person.

Many people believe that I "split hairs" when I try and explain the difference between the two realities, on the one hand being responsible for, and participating in a crime where a person is brutally murdered, and on the other hand not being the sole perpetrator of the brutality which killed the person. The law takes into account such a difference in one's personal "culpability" in this difference, if, that is, you have the right legal advocate, the right judge, and the right jury. Otherwise, you end up like I ended up... serving a life sentence in prison, and very likely dying at some point therein.

The girl I was dating in 1975, and her family, asked me to go with them to a wedding out of town for the entire weekend... and because I didn't want this girl or her family to get the wrong idea about how much I was willing to get involved with her, I said no. A few days after saying no I had the bright idea to break into their home when they left for the wedding, steal their "stuff" to finance my moving back to California. I had spent the last three years in the Navy in California, and some of my friends who

were in the Navy with me were getting out in a few months. I wanted to leave Michigan... and believed my girlfriend's family could afford to help me get there.

So, I found someone who could help me sell the stolen items I knew to be available to me from their home, having been there many times over the last six months or so, and we planned to take a taxi out to their home, steal whatever we could fit into the car that I knew to be in their garage, and on the night they were leaving, waited until no one answered their phone for an hour or so, and took a taxi to their front door.

I broke in and let my partner in through the front door, and we split up to gather what we could, as quickly as we could. I had been making trips from the basement to the garage door in the kitchen for twenty minutes or so, when out of the blue, from very close behind me I heard a loud voice, "What Are You Doing In My House?" I spun around, picking up a plastic bottle of 7-Up from an end table as I turned, and hit the person with it. I happened to hit him in the forehead with the nearly full liter bottle and knocked my girlfriend's grandfather, Frank, to the ground. My partner was upstairs at the time, and I screamed to him to come quick... as I watched in horror as Frank tried to get to his feet.

My partner ran down the stairs and immediately he and I began beating Frank, until he was unconscious. The next twenty minutes to an hour are not clear to me, but at some point before we left with a full car load of stolen items, Frank was beaten very badly, and the cause of death was three distinct blows to the back of his head with a cast iron fireplace poker. Now, did I administer these blows... I can't say for certain. The clothes I wore, the boots I wore, did not have any of Frank's blood on them when I turned myself in two days after this, to the City Police in Lansing, Michigan. The car I drove away from their home that night did not have any of Frank's blood in it. I can state truthfully that I did not "clean up" after the incident... I dropped my partner off at his sister's place, loaded all the stolen property from the car, and I left the car in an alley far from my Mom's house and walked there, drinking myself into a stupor, sleeping for more than forty-eight hours before getting up and going to the police station downtown. While I was in the County Jail awaiting my trial, Frank's son and his wife came to visit me. We cried together, and they forgave me for what happened, telling me that they know I didn't mean or intend for Frank to die that way. This act of kindness and understanding by them is the main reason I have remained hopeful all these years, why I have made such an attempt to grow as a person, maintain some semblance of dignity and character under what has been easily the hardest place to do so on earth... at least from my perspective.

I can't blame drugs, a bad childhood, or anything but my own weakness and immaturity as a twenty-year old for why I'm in prison. I can and do blame a very broken system for my still being in prison 45 years after what I did. In spite of this, I am not consumed with bitterness or blame. I just hope that before I die in here I am given a chance to live a part of my life closer to what family and friends I have who want me as much as I want them in my life.

My partner left the state immediately after he sold enough stolen items to give him the cash to do so. I never "ratted" him out, though come to find out the police had known who he was from very early in the investigation of the crime. He managed to remain on the run for over a year, getting extradited back to Michigan just after I had plead guilty to the larceny, where Frank was killed... enough for a first-degree murder conviction.

My partner was found guilty by a jury of second-degree murder, and after 13 years on a second-degree life sentence he was granted a parole. It's difficult to determine who is responsible as it was my idea to go to my girlfriend's house and steal their property. However, as to the actual blows which ended Frank's life is questionable and here is where I feel that sentencing has not been fair.

JIM FUSSELL, FOUNDER OF DOMINO DEEDS

MY NAME IS JIM FUSSELL and I want to thank you for taking a second look at what takes place in my small part of the world. Pretty much everything about my life is, or can be, located on the numerous sites associated with Domino Deeds. I am pretty much an open book. I have been at this movement for several decades now. It brings me a lot of joy to help folks on the outside with my so-so pieces of what I refer to as ART. You can read more about me and Domino Deeds on page 5.

Jim Fussell and Domino Deeds

I was convicted in 1978 to two consecutive prison terms of twenty years to life and am currently incarcerated in Ohio serving at this point forty-two years. I am sixty-three years old. I am the first to admit my artistic talents are limited, but I work with what I have mentally and that is all that I can do. Fortunately, my art can be found in several countries. I have not confined myself to a tiny part of the world. My art travels, in essence a piece of me travels as well. Two pieces in the Vatican, somewhere. Maybe they will be used to start the fire when a new Pope is selected. Or stay in an old, abandoned basement to be found centuries from now. Any scenario is fascinating to me. A piece of art hangs in the restroom of an art gallery. Most artists would be offended, I am overjoyed. Everyone goes to a restroom and where else do you have the time to really examine the art 😊

When I tackle parole board issues and try to connect with Senators, State Representatives, Congress People, I often mail a painting along with my correspondence. The gesture usually nudges them to reply or to say, "Thank you." Sadly, the female legislators never say thank you, it is always the males, which I find odd. But a gift such as art opens dialogue, and far too often people simply do not communicate. We stumble upon situations where desperation and panic have consumed people and pride keeps them from asking for assistance. At Domino Deeds we pay attention to our surroundings and we try to be mindful of others' feelings and find a way to reach out and help.

There are instances where corporations and businesses fail to help a cause, but when a prisoner reaches out and donates a ton of paintings to be auctioned off, to help that cause, THEN corporations or businesses step up to the plate. Maybe they are embarrassed or maybe they finally find empathy or compassion.

There are so many lost opportunities daily that we as humans miss. Sometimes it is easier to go through life with blinders on or pretend we do not see the needs of others. In doing what I do, it is often frustrating but somehow I keep going. I'm nearing 10 000 paintings and see no end in sight. There is never any support from prison officials, no break in costs. I buy my own supplies, pay my own postage, it is a struggle but worth it when I see the results, goals met, especially in the rare occasion when I see a smile.

There are so many stories that touch my heart. I have no favorites because each stands out and each is equally important.

Domino Deeds seems to be a memorable act of kindness that people remember. It has touched other prisons in other states and other countries as well. The snowball effect has been heartwarming since its beginnings in 2009.

To find out more about the mission and work of Domino Deeds, please visit the website or go to the social media site. Please take time to read my blog.

I hope this gives you a little better insight and if I can assist in any way, please contact me on jpay.

Jim Fussell, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

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<https://www.dominodeeds.org/>

<https://www.dominodeeds.org/jim-fussell-blog/>

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A TIME FOR CHANGE - FREE MICHAEL THOMPSON, MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS By Senior Writers, MLMT, Saalih ibn LeRoy Washington and Ricardo Ferrell

THE UGLINESS OF INJUSTICES, in the United States of America, are being unveiled. A call to action for change is sweeping the nation. There hasn't been a larger spotlight on institutional, social and systemic injustices, since the Civil Right's Movement of the 60s.

The killing and shooting of unarmed black men and women have caused protest and uprisings across our nation and around the globe. Black, white and brown American citizens are galvanizing and demanding change in our legal system. This change is trickling down to criminal justice reforms as well.

In this article, we highlight the sad story of a seventy-year old man, Michael Thompson, who has been directly affected by the dated laws of a Draconian unjust criminal justice system.

In the mid-90s Thompson sold roughly three pounds of marijuana to an undercover police informant. An arrest led to the search of his home, where officers found several antique guns and guns registered to his wife, in a locked gun safe. Because of prior convictions, the judge sentenced Thompson to 42-60 years for drug and weapon-related charges. His earliest possible release date is 2038.

Thompson's attorney, Kimberly Corral, has filed a petition for clemency. Thousands of advocates are on Thompson's side and have called for an earlier release including: Chelsea Handler, Shaun King, Ava DuVernay and Kim Kardashian, who wrote letters in support of a commutation.

New laws, public pressure and new administrations have earned Thompson the support of Michigan's Attorney General, Dana Nessel, and the Chief Prosecutor of Genesee County, David Leyton, where he was convicted. "The sentence imposed on Mr. Thompson is the product of a different time in Michigan's legal history," Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel wrote in an August 5th letter to the governor. "And it is a time that has passed."

Genesee County Chief Prosecutor, David Leyton, joined the petition and said, "42-60 years is too harsh, even for a second-degree murder."

However, the state's parole board still has jurisdiction and must make a recommendation before the request can go to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's office, for a final decision. A previous petition was denied by then - Gov. Rick Snyder, in 2018. The same year recreational marijuana was legalized in Michigan.

Unfortunately, we were unable to interview Michael. We later learned he had contracted COVID-19 and was transferred to a medical facility. He has since returned to a housing unit where he's thankfully recovering.

This case represents everything that's wrong with our criminal justice system. We have a Black American who has been sentenced to an absolutely ridiculous sentence, a disproportionate sentence, for selling marijuana. A drug that has, now, become legal in the state of Michigan. Despite the fact, everyone agrees that this is an egregious atrocity and travesty of justice, Michigan's top lawmakers can't expedite the process to make right this wrong. This is a problem in and of itself with our criminal justice system. When you have wronged an individual, step up to the plate and make right... whatever it takes! It's that simple!

Our prayers are with Michael Thompson for a speedy recovery and we are hopeful he'll be back with his family soon.

Stand-up against systemic, institutional, and social injustice. Our lives and future depend on it!



THE SUNSHINE STORY OF BOBBY JAMES MOORE WHO SERVED FORTY YEARS ON DEATHROW WAS RELEASED ON AUGUST 6TH OF THIS YEAR AS A RESULT OF THE U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING, (MOORE V. TEXAS). READ ABOUT BOBBY ON PAGE 6.

Bobby James Moore U.S. Supreme Court Ruling (Moore v Texas)

BY MARIANNE TERESA RUUD, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER MLMT

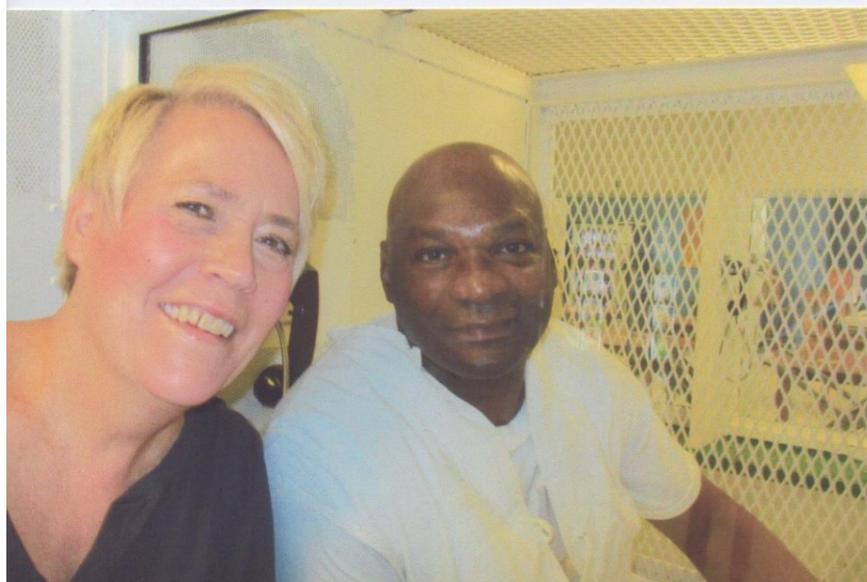
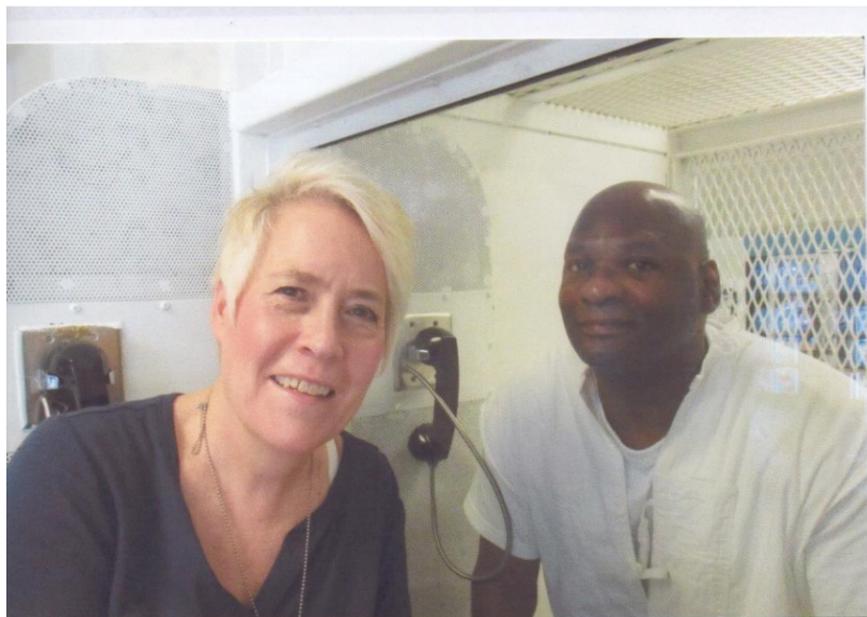
My high school students and I have for the past six years been working with those on the inside in the American prison system, all young people when they were sentenced and serving life, life without parole and our special connection to Bobby James Moore who was sentenced to death in 1980 at the age of twenty.

We have had numerous collaborative school projects with over fifty individuals across the country, among others: book projects, letter writing, art, prison food culture, research, essay writing and we even produced an album of music from their poetry. We are putting together a webpage of our work and it has taken some time to complete, however, it will be available in 2021.

I personally made the trip from Norway to the United States the end of September 2018 to meet firstly, Quentin Jones, who is the founder of MYLIFEMATTERSTOO. We had started our work with him in the Spring of 2018. My second visit on this trip was to Texas to meet Bobby. I remember taking with me into the facility a zip lock plastic bag filled with thirty dollars in quarters to use in the vending machines he had told me about in his letter, see excerpt to the right. I never have experienced the joy that I saw when I bought Bobby a chicken sandwich. He told me he had heard of them from the others who had visitors but had never tasted one himself. I was deeply moved to see how a can of Dr. Pepper, a candy bar and a cupcake would bring happiness to a grown man. He stuffed himself enjoying every minute. It is our belief that

*Sincerely
Bobby*

those we work with as well as the millions more we haven't encountered, are worth salvaging, are worth a second chance and that the art of healing and forgiving are gifts we can bestow on one another.



Jan 1, 2018
Dear Marianne,
Greetings from Texas death row, the how
As you, I hope and pray that all is well with you when this letter
reaches you and that you're enjoying your holidays...

I love to see the changes colors of the trees, the fallen leaves.
Rusty colored leaves reminds me of those good old days -
Those beautiful outside days as a kid and that it's the season
holiday with Christmas day approaching!

Chicken sandwich, Cheese burger, Turkey sandwich, Salad, Tuna-
fish sandwich and others. I do not eat pork, also they have cakes,
Fruits and drinks, visitors are allowed to bring in 30 dollars

dear friend, Marianne, moment such as this is truly rare; to
be able to see, feel, as well as understand the love and care of
having a true friend care enough about me that you're planning fly
across the many oceans to travel and visit me here on Texas death
row is a wonderful feeling and blessing to me and I am grateful to

myself. Perhaps you may can imagine how so over the
moon and thrilled and exciting I am to have my freedom
after all of these years being on death row, it's a great
and wonderful feeling to have and hand for me to get into
words just I truly feel, but I know there is nothing
greater than having your life and freedom for sure?
I just taking one day at a time to enjoy myself as
I move forward with the rest of my life. LOVE,



This is Bobby "Back in Black". After 40 years on death row, he was finally released on August 6th of this year. I remember him telling me how much he would love to have his own garden. I bought him books on gardening when he was on death row. Now he can make one of his own. Bless you, Bobby. "P.S. Marianne, do you like gardening, I really appreciate *The Flower Gardener's Bible* book."

MEET LUANN SZÉNAV

“There was a movie out in the early 1980s, I believe, starring Farrah Fawcett titled The Burning Bed. This was a true story of a domestic violence case that occurred in Michigan around 1978. It was about a young mother of three children who had an abusive husband who kept her from bettering herself by getting away from him. Eventually, she set the house on fire as she and the children drove away. He died in that fire and she was prosecuted for that crime. She was found not guilty of first-degree murder and the lawmakers of Michigan said they would never again become the laughing stock of the country to let women like this get away with murder and they closed up every pathway any other women could ever use from that day forward to get out of prison.” LuAnn Szénay



This is LuAnn Szénay in 1991 shortly after she was incarcerated. The Michigan DOC psychologist thought she was a staff member the first time he met with her. Today she is 63 years old and you can find a recent picture of her on the front cover of this newsletter.

Incidentally, another woman from that same county also killed her husband and was taken to jail within only minutes of this first case. This lady's name was Violet Allen and she took a plea bargain and the prosecutors lowered her charge to second-degree murder. I believe Violet served about twenty years here in Ypsilanti at the Women's Huron Facility with me.

There was a newspaper article regarding my conviction in the Detroit Free Press on December 20, 2018, which highlighted not only myself but four other women. At that time, the governor was Rick Snyder and through the Michigan's Women's Justice and Clemency Project <http://umich.edu/~clemency/index.html> we were portrayed in this news article. Of the five women, Melissa Chapman was released on parole in the Spring of this year, Susan Farrell died this year of COVID-19 while Delores Kapuscinski and Nancy Seaman are still here with me.

In your court trial, Michigan refuses to allow any mention of domestic violence into one's trial. They feel that women continually lie about what happened to them. When I was obviously beaten the police told me things like, "Lady, how do we know you didn't do that to yourself?" or, "The only way I can help you is if he beats you while I am standing here and I see it." So, my rebuttal to this is, "Why is domestic violence the ONLY crime that the standard is different for?" If I rob a bank on the corner and no police see it, even if the cameras were disconnected -- I am still going to prison for robbing a bank! Any crime can be pieced together by the totality of the evidence. If you set a home on fire the police can take your clothing and look for flammable substances. The police as a matter of policy deny the existence because in Michigan as in much of America, white men rule. Organizers of the clemency project note that it was not until 1992 that Michigan courts allowed expert testimony on "battered women's syndrome" to be presented at trial.

I was the chairperson for the National Lifer's of America (Chapter 1014) as I was the head of the domestic violence group. We put in two bills to change the law as many, many women are here for defending their own lives and the lives of their children. Domestic violence is a terrible problem in America, and especially Michigan; the police ignore batterers which only emboldens them to do even more harm to their families. Still, there has been no change in the law. In the 1980s and 1990s, women usually received "life" without any chance for parole... because they used a weapon. Men who are most often the batterers who kill, usually use their bare hands and thus only receive a sentence of ten years.

My National Lifer's group is an advocacy group for the incarcerated and there are many prisons across America where individuals there are involved. We used to have Michigan state senators come in and we would explain how people fell through the cracks of the judicial system and suggest ways to eliminate this. In my group we even re-wrote a law for domestic violence but it did not do any good. The senators refused to give it much attention. Even the civil liberties group, ACLU, refused to help us. It felt like the entire country was against us.

I have always had jobs here in prison. Staying busy activates your mind and keeps away depression. In 2000, I became the main building's gardener and I decided to just "flower up" the entire grounds. I convinced the prisoners to put in several thousands of dollars to make the place look like Disney Land and recruited many girls to plant flowers. As a result, I technically worked for the maintenance department. Two years later I was picked up to be an electrician's helper and worked that for five years, sometimes also doing plumbing and anything else necessary. We work a normal workday and I usually volunteered for overtime. The pay for such work is up to \$1.60 per day while the gardener job was only \$1.14 per day.

I worked this until 2009 when they closed the prison and my job just ended. I signed up for the building trades vocational class which is basically construction and worked my way up to be a tutor. In the beginning I was fearful of the large tools but today I call myself the "Queen of the Table Saw". I love it so much and dream of "flipping houses", even at age 63. Our teacher retired in late 2019 and then Covid hit so I have been out of class all this time.

I have been diagnosed with lupus, psoriatic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis and am often unable to do basic tasks. My exhaustion is difficult. This makes it difficult to function in a prison setting because parts of me do not always cooperate. After many years of complaining the prison finally put me on auto-immune suppressants but drug after drug was no help. The symptoms are varied and change from time to time. My family has spoken to a specialist who states that I have another disease and not auto-immune problems but the treatment they offer is surgery. The prison refuses to pay for the surgery, however, they are willing to allow my family to pay for it. One doctor (not from the DOC) said my condition was like a ticking time bomb and I know the prison is aware of this also; they just prefer to be in denial.

Overall, I make a concerted effort to be the number one optimist of the entire prison. I always have. Walking around everyday saying, "Things will change... soon!" You can walk around and live in gloom and a doomed world or you can live in the world that SHOULD be... the beautiful fantasy that things will be better tomorrow and everyone will see the error of their ways and choose to change. This is the world I live in. There are those who say I am crazy or in denial of where exactly I am but I choose cheerfulness over depression, just as I did for the eleven years I was married to an abuser. It was the only way I could get through then and it is the only way I want to live now. After all, with so much going against you, death from Covid among other things lurking around every corner, one would consider suicide as an option... but that is not going to happen, not ever.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8.....

LuAnn Szenay continued...

Once you are in prison for 30 years one's family is not able or not willing to pay for anything. They have gone on with their lives. Last month, when my co-defendant was given a date to go home, my youngest sister said, "I never thought this day would come." (He had "life" but it was life with the possibility of parole.) Had she believed this all along she may have been a little nicer to me. People have a way of disregarding your closeness when they believe you will never get out. It's a shame as for many years I put a high value on our relationship. This is one of the worst things prison does to people, destroys the family bonds they did have.

The women here in prison are mostly here due to the man in their life. I would guess about 25% said they committed the crime the boyfriend/lover actually committed. Why? Most often they say that he had already done one or two prisoner stays and this one would increase his sentence to an excessive number of years and he told her she would just get parole. You'd be surprised how many of these girls are here for ten years.

Often the men threaten the women if they don't do what they say, that harm will come to the woman or her children/family. Since the law does not really protect women, she is far more vulnerable. This leaves her open to greater harm later on.

You asked me to explain, "How does a woman keep her sanity in here?" Good question. I stay busy. My hobby is making and selling gemstone jewelry. My brain works as though everything in life is a mathematical equation. So, I create hematite bracelets, earrings and necklaces with 80% hematite and 20% gemstones like amethyst or lapis just to name two. I divide the total size of each bracelet down to let's say 180 mm, then divide it by the number of repetitions of each section. In the end if I divide by five, I have a bracelet that looks completely professional. I have been doing it for about six years. I can just about support myself by doing this. Prison is expensive as the system makes money from us by increasing the price of everything we need so they can make money from it. They take a 50% mark-up on all our personal and food needs. They effectively are taking from the poorest segment of the population, those with nearly nothing.

As for my attitude that encompasses my world. I was watching CBS's "60 Minutes" and they were discussing a study of people who live to be 100 and the dementia many live with and their attitude regarding it. I thought to myself, "How would I deal with this?" For me, IF you "ride the wave" rather than fight it, everything will be all right. This is the way I have led my life with an abuser as well as the abusive life I live in America's abusive prisons. Yes, things are really bad here, but if you focus on the good and not the difficult it is far easier to go on. We have had many suicides in prison as there are those who can no longer deal with the constant interference into their daily life. Taxpayers would be shocked to see the abuse of prisoners and how it is covered up, especially when there is a death. When people ask me what it is like in prison I tell them it is just like the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*, except the guards don't carry billy clubs -- they carry tazers. The attitude of the administration and officers is the same, you have the good and not so good officers. You just deal with it because you don't have a choice. In my marriage, most of the abuse I encountered prior to my pregnancy was just mental. I didn't think it was a big deal. I said, "Everyone has bad days," but when most people have bad days, they don't throw a hammer at you as you are running, trying to get away from them. We were married for four years before I became pregnant and halfway through the pregnancy it was as though a switch was turned on and he became physically abusive. Fearing for myself was one thing but the life of my baby was also at stake here. I should have walked out but I had no place to go, no one to help me and no job as we were co-owners of a natural health food store. As the years went on the abuse became worse and he for the first time threatened to kill our daughter when she was only six months old. I eventually filed for divorce, twice, but leaving him was like trying to kick Donald Trump out of the White House. He made my life as miserable by handicapping me, taking everything I had from me, threatening to kill my parents, younger sister and... I always folded. The last time I left I knew he would kill me if I didn't get out right then. Unfortunately, he then focused his abuse on our daughter who was now age seven because he was still on cocaine as well as anabolic steroids and I did not want him taking our daughter for hours or days at a time. He had threatened her and I could not take the chance of him hurting her to hurt me.

He kidnapped her twice and the third time he was unsuccessful and even her school feared for her safety. I felt pressure from all sides.

People always think you can just leave an abuser and the abuse will stop but in the few cases where it will increase -- these women are in a far greater zone of danger. I wasn't afraid to die, I was afraid to leave my child with him. An employee who saw many problems offered to help me by beating him up, which I said absolutely not to, but eventually as his behavior became more and more erratic, it progressed to killing him. When I said "okay" it was the day after the third kidnapping and she was gone. I didn't know if she was alive or not. This employee said, "I'm leaving the state soon and you will be on your own and he is going to kill you or your daughter. Let me take control or two weeks from now it will be too late." He did not convince me of my impending death, I already knew it was only a matter of days or a few weeks. I could just feel it was coming.

I finally gave in after that third kidnapping. He said, "Let me handle it," and all I said was, "Okay," and everyone's life changed. We both went to prison as he took a plea deal for life with parole and I was given life without parole. Part of that deal was implicating me. Michigan granted his parole and he was released on November 25, 2020. I am not bitter in the least. I committed a crime and I am serving my sentence. What angers me is if my husband would have killed me and used his bare hands (he often choked me) his sentence would most likely have been only been ten years, the average for non-weapon domestic killings. Women are physically unable to use only their bare hands and they nearly always receive life. Also, up until then Michigan did not prosecute murderers unless they found a body. So my husband's threats of "they'll never find your body", could have been part of a legitimate plan to make me "disappear".

Covid is back again at our prison. We are now on a partial lock down, meaning we can only associate with those in our housing unit. There are about 100 of us here. Last spring, three ladies died as once you become ill they lock you in a room with only one outfit of clothing and bedding. You do not receive any medication of any kind. You cannot even have the over-the-counter items you previously purchased from the drug store. About 65% of the women in my unit have at least one pre-existing condition that would leave them vulnerable to Covid.



Here is LuAnn with her sisters and their children and her daughter who is now 38 years old and has her own child.

MEET SHIRIKIANA DRAPER (autobiography)

Hello Everyone. My name is Shirikiana Draper. I am commonly known as Shirik. I am a 45-year old divorced mother of two. I have been incarcerated since February of 1995.

The night I opened my emails and discovered the message from Marianne I was stunned. I must have read and re-read the email twenty times (while praising Yahweh for this opportunity). I affirmed my acceptance of the invitation thinking to myself how I've always told my friends not to gift me with journals for I didn't have anything so profound to say. As always Adonai's thoughts about me are higher than my own.

The moment I accepted this humbling opportunity the doubts began flooding my mind. They plagued me until one morning as I stood in the mirror applying mascara, I could see myself. I didn't see my reflection. I could see myself and I liked what I could see staring back.

Instantly the Holy Spirit reminds me of the times where He has already arranged for me to share my testimony (as I know it at that time).

While going through my footlocker looking for my notes, I stumbled upon some poetry I had written years ago. Over the next few days the Holy Spirit helped me devise a plan for writing this piece.

So, let's begin the "Metamorphosis of a Young Girl's Life..."

Anomaly (written 4-30-09)

"Growing up I seldom saw anyone socially who looked like me except my family

Growing up I'm encouraged to apply myself educationally

Growing up I arrived at a place where I decided I was different and different was NOT the thing to be.

You see...

my skin is smooth like toffee: soft & sweet

Yet...

my speech is mathematical: concise & uncompromising

I'm an anomaly! One who has many sides but can find no place that accepts. No place that fits."

The caterpillar years of my life are riddled with painful experiences that erode at my identity. At age 18, I marry my high school sweetheart for many reasons. None of which are love. As a member of the United States Army, I wanted to afford him the opportunity to utilize the benefits given a spouse to assist him in rebuilding his life.

This decision marks the path that will eventually lead to my incarceration. You see my ex-husband married me for love and that created an emotional, mental, and sexually abusive living situation.

By September of 1994, I sought and received a Chapter 8 (pregnancy) Honorable Discharge from the Armed Forces. I am returned to my family and unbeknownst to my husband I also intend to follow through with my desire to divorce him.

On October 18, 1994, I give birth to a beautiful baby boy. My complete love and devotion for my son pushes my husband to the edge of the proverbial cliff.

By February of 1995, at the age of 19, I find myself in jail for the crimes of child abuse and murder. I am officially and utterly LOST.

Two things happen while I am in the County Jail: I meet a Jewish woman who loans me a Tanakh and I have a false positive reading from a TB skin test. Neither of these events seem significant on the surface.

I am ultimately found guilty of Felony Murder and sentenced to spend the rest of my Natural Life within the Michigan Department of Corrections.

Upon my arrival to prison, Yahweh immediately reveals the significance of the false positive TB skin test. I received a chest X-ray in the county jail and those results meant I wasn't required to participate in the 72-hour quarantine all new arrivals face. This is a huge blessing for my extremely frightened 20-year-old self because I am able to remain in contact (by telephone) with my Grams (maternal grandmother).

At the conclusion of my time in Reception, I am moved to grounds (general population). In my early days of incarceration, the old-timers immediately assumed their roles as parents to those of us who were unfortunately imprisoned young. My surrogate Mother, Ava, immediately makes me aware of what behaviors will not be tolerated. Armed with the expectations set before me, I enroll at Montcalm Community College to obtain an Associate's Degree in Business Administration. I am awarded my degree within 18 months. I then quickly enroll at Spring Arbor University. It is my hope that I am able to obtain my Baccalaureate in Behavioral Science before college courses are removed from all Michigan institutions. I was 12 credits from completion when college was indeed pulled.

Unable to excel scholastically, I am forced to acknowledge my low self-esteem and lack of self-worth. It is here, in the Cocoon phase of my life, that I find myself drawn to the lesbian lifestyle, despite Ava's dissatisfaction. I just want to belong to someone. In this place the void for family is an ever-present hole yearning to be filled. Even for those of us who have great family support. I crave something to call my own. I develop romantic feelings for my best friend, Kim.

Kim's brokenness speaks to mine and we create an environment where each of us begins to discover something about ourselves. My very first discovery is that I am so much more than my intellect.

I need you to understand that this love for this woman that holds no boundaries presents its own set of troubles. I was raised in a Christian family and I know that this behavior is unacceptable, but the emotional fulfillment clouds my willingness to heed my upbringing. The guilt and shame this secret produces weighs me down and causes me to be emotionally unavailable to her in some damaging ways.

Drowning in the secret, I decide to unceremoniously tell my Aunt and Uncle on a visit. I find acceptance this day, for these two devout Christians, who I have convinced myself are going to turn their backs on me, with all manner of tenderness introduce me to the love that Christ gives. My Aunt holds my hand while my Uncle tells me that this is logical considering all the hurt I've suffered at the hands of a man. Their response opens my heart for the woman God would place in my life to interest me in signing up for several Bible study correspondence courses. *The studies lead me to question what type of:*

Woman to Be (written in 2005)

"What kind of woman do I want to be?

Such a difficult question - kinda like William Shakespeare's 'to be or not to be.'

What kind of woman do I want to be...

Well, allow me to stand up for into the mirror I must see

There I hope to see the woman I want to be but instead I find a reflection of me.

There's nothing superficial about the woman I want to be

so I have decided to bow down on bended knee and ask my Creator to describe myself to me.

The smallest voice inside said to me...

'When you accepted Jesus Christ, my Son, as your Lord and Savior you became who I wanted you to be now what you're destined to become you'll discover on your journey.

A journey designed to draw you closer to ME! To be recreated and/or transformed into the splitting image of my Son you see

But first, my child, you must become intimately acquainted and pursue a personal relationship with me.

Continued on page 10

Shiriki's story continued from page 9.

Search and study the B-I-B-L-E for...
 contained within those pages you'll find the answers you seek as well as love, compassion and comfort to keep
 close to your heart to warm up your soul as the enemy will prowl and want to regain control
 over your heart and mind
 to distract you from receiving your new birthright.
 To be able to look in the mirror and see Jesus Christ
 in word and deed for He's taken the lead of your life.'
 So that's the kinda woman I want to be...
 Spirit-filled and Spirit-led where there's very little left of me
 I'll look like Jesus for that's who I was reborn to be."
 I leave my 10 year relationship intending to become this woman. As my Mother says, "Life is what happens when you're living."

Before I'm able to find myself, tragedy strikes. In May of 2008, I lose my Daddie to a three-week battle with brain cancer that first renders him blind. I am ill-equipped to deal with so permanent a loss. Within days of this loss, my surrogate Mom is moved to another housing unit and my best friend, Anitra, goes to segregation. Now I am all alone.

I cry until my tear ducts are no longer producing and then I experience this all-consuming anger. I am absolutely enraged with everyone, (including myself) especially God. I put my Bible in my footlocker and with a conviction I have never experienced before, declare, "I am done talking to you for we didn't discuss you taking my Daddie."

I re-enter the lesbian lifestyle. I began to date a woman who I will only call the most toxic relationship of my incarcerated life. What little self-esteem I have garnered is being chipped away at daily, for I can't understand how it is possible to love someone so completely who cares nothing for you. What is more disconcerting is why I won't leave her.

When I can no longer stand myself, I swallow my first pill. I continue to swallow pills for the next year. My life is composed only of this relationship and my work as a GED tutor where I am allowed to Co-create a Fasttrack Lab without the direction of a teacher. It is here that I meet the young woman who I still now affectionately refer to as my daughter. Her existence within these walls where she is not afforded the bliss of ignorance afforded those outside evokes a drive for clarity of purpose. That need is driven home when I am forced to cover my blackened eye.

God answers a prayer I don't even realize I have prayed. I am asked to give the fourth day talk at a Keryx retreat. I stand on the stage and I step out of the shadows (like Queen Esther - whose table I sat at a few years prior at my own retreat). I allow Yahweh to speak the following words of truth through me:

"Like so many of you women here in this room, I too have given into the temptation of lesbianism to assuage my feelings of inadequacy & loneliness. I suffered in this life until I heard the Holy Spirit speak this passage to my heart. 'Trust in the LORD (translated Jehovah which means I AM) with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He WILL (not might) WILL direct your paths.' (Proverbs 3:5-6) Ladies, I came to understand that God always introduces Himself in the context of our needs. I need Him as Jehovah, for my past will not allow me to surrender to anyone who can't/won't provide for my every need."

The time has come to reveal myself completely. I told my sister and my Mom (who just happens to be my bestest friend, my confidante, my biggest fan) everything. All the secrets that have been burdening my heart for years. They encourage me to speak to my psychologist who then refers me to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist diagnoses me with Bipolar depression and PTSD.

After conversing with my sister (an RN who has once worked in an institutional setting), I agree to be placed on an anti-depressant/anxiety medication. This is shortly followed by a mood stabilizer.

I leave my tutor job after 11 years because it is time for me to make a firm commitment to ME! This decision ushers in the Butterfly phase of my life.

I have completed every group available to a Lifer by this point. Lifers are barred from most programming due to our time.

Fortunately, I am able to spend the next five years attending groups from Peer Support Specialist through Outpatient Mental Health. These groups teach me to both identify and experience my emotions without the detriment of the maladaptive coping mechanisms developed long ago. I learn to confront my past with compassion toward myself and others.

As my journey toward mental wellness ensues, a friend approaches me in her suffering to talk about her wavering faith. It is during this conversation that I meet Y'shua - the Jewish Jesus. I feel called to finally make a religious declaration. I am a Messianic Jewish woman. The scales were removed from my eyes on May 13, 2017. The Lord reveals the significance of meeting the Jewish woman after all these years.

The Lord then directs me to the Law Library to restart my legal battle for the physical freedom of myself (and prayerfully every woman/man who has also been convicted by the State of Michigan before 2004 for the erroneous application of the Felony Murder rule). I am currently awaiting a decision from the Federal Courts to my "Actual Innocence" claim.

In 2018 thinking of my Daddie, I send a kite (written request) asking to participate in the new Braille program being offered. I pass the written test and after a terrifying interview (my very first) I am chosen to begin training. The difficulties of learning such a unique new language cause me to doubt my intellectual abilities. The one thing I have always been confident about.

You can read more about the Braille Program in this article from the *Detroit News*.

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/05/30/women-join-michigan-prison-braille-transcribers/3> .

The three certified women at that time are featured there.

I thoughtfully consider how such an accomplishment will affect the lives of my children. Despite all my poor choices over the years, there is always that voice that questions if I want them to observe a behavior. I persevere and on September 9, 2019 I am triumphantly awarded my Certification as a Braille Transcriber from the National Library of Congress.

For once in my life all is going well. However, on March 2, 2020, I lose my Grams. The Corona Virus shuts down the State prohibiting my family from visiting. On April 19th I am informed that my ex-husband has contracted Covid-19 and has been rushed to the hospital. This news forces both my son and me to confront our feelings toward him. The very next morning (April 20th) Anitra tells me that Ava has died.

In the face of these trials, I have been afforded enough emotional, mental, and spiritual freedom to know that:

1. I won't survive another series of bad decisions,
2. I will not dishonor the financial freedom afforded me by my Uncle who may not even know he is the answer to my prayer of having a family member with which to fellowship.
3. My family (both inside and outside) has encouraged, supported, and loved me too much for me to choose to fall, and
4. The God I serve is willing and able to carry me. I need only let Him.

I ask my friend (religious volunteer since 2008 when my Daddie passed) to send me a copy of "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. Instead of wallowing in despair and acting out, I yield to the unction of the Holy Spirit.

For Mother's Day this year I honor the commitments made to me by my Mother(s), my Aunt(s), and my Grams by wholly surrendering myself to El Elyon (God Most High).

Today I live Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life for I have been (and will continue to be) transformed from the inside-out. So much so that my psychiatrist has allowed me to discontinue taking medication.

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Shiriki's story continued from page 10.

Although I accepted this invitation for my family as a whole, it is my love for my children that gave me the strength to go inside myself and search for answers. They motivate me to become a woman that they can be proud to call Mother/Mom.

I, like so many women, do time in direct correlation to how I feel about myself. We are our worst critics.

It is not, nor will it ever be, easy to serve a life sentence. The concept of it tells an already fragile woman, "There is nothing redeemable about you." It is this belief that if accepted renders us powerless. For me, this statement assisted me in giving chances where none should have been extended. It diminished my willingness to stand up for myself, for I never want to say this in word or deed to another.

In defense of all our poor decision abilities, I leave you with this: HOPE CAN BE A DANGEROUS THING!!!!!! As such we hold on to it in varying degrees.

Shirikiana Draper



Shiriki is pictured here with her mother and her sister



Here is Shiriki pictured with her sister.

DON'T LET HARD PRISON TIME BREAK YOUR SPIRIT.

BY RICARDO FERRELL, SENIOR WRITER, MLMT

In this abnormal environment, one must reach deep within the core of their existence to pull up unflappable strength in order to make it through, yet another passing day. I often think about the horrific and deplorable living conditions I've endured over these past four decades and how myself and others have made unusual adjustments to keep on keeping on in the face of the physical, mental and emotional abuse one deals with, in a system that doesn't display any form of compassion or empathy towards those who are confined within its care. Why not display just a little bit of humanity, aren't we all still human, despite our current circumstances of being incarcerated? Yes, many of us who are responsible for the crimes to which we stand convicted, realize the harm caused and have accepted our punishments, even though we have been hit with some very harsh sentences, and as a result, remain behind bars languishing decade-after-decade, even when prolonged incarceration is no longer required or necessary. Just look at some of my fellow comrades: James Harris, who has been in here 50 years, Leonard Bradford, 46 years, Scot Dohn, 45 years, and Robert Partee, 41 years. Some of us are chronic care patients and have very serious life-threatening illnesses. So, if you want to know what hard time looks like in prison, you don't have to look any further.

Try waking up each morning, not knowing if your debilitating health issue is going to take you out. The enormous stress dealt with on a daily basis is beyond comprehensible. Then factor in a not so caring prison system, which focuses more on a punitive approach to every situation, rather than affording individuals a chance to advance, even folks in here struggling to cope with their severe mental illness, they really receive a raw deal, because as they are trying to figure out whether or not to take the psychotropic medications prescribed by a so-called Qualified Mental Health Professional, they are often being treated like they're less than human. Hard time is more than this notion of a physical abuse one may think of, in an ordinary sense, it's more a mental type of torment, and it can cause even normal people, to go stark raving mad.

The family structure is uprooted due to the incarceration of a parent. The child grows up with a need to be validated and the lack of that validation sometimes creates an empty void in that child's life, and could very well contribute to bad choices and poor decisions which can lead them in taking the same path as the incarcerated parent. So, doing hard time affects more than the person in prison, it alters the lives of many and causes a disharmony among everyone involved. Prison staff, for years, have contributed to the premise of individuals doing hard time by how they have instituted poor policies, enforced bad practices, and maintained ineffective measures, which continue to lead down an irreversible road. If real and meaningful reforms aren't sought after and met, we will likely keep seeing people serving, unnecessarily at that, hard prison time.

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Hard Prison Time continued



If prison administrators wanted to really make things better for people confined, they would seriously begin to look at viable ways to reform its institutions to be more reflective of rehabilitative and transformative programming that can lead offenders on a path towards success. This is how doing hard time can be transformed into that of serving sensible and beneficial incarcerated periods that can be geared toward promise and hope, creating a better tomorrow for men & women behind bars. And, for those who have been called upon to oversee them while they are incarcerated, must be willing to eradicate the practice of having folks serve hard time. To all the incarcerated individuals around the world, keep looking up, and never allow a single day served in here, ever to break your spirit.

*Time Lapse*

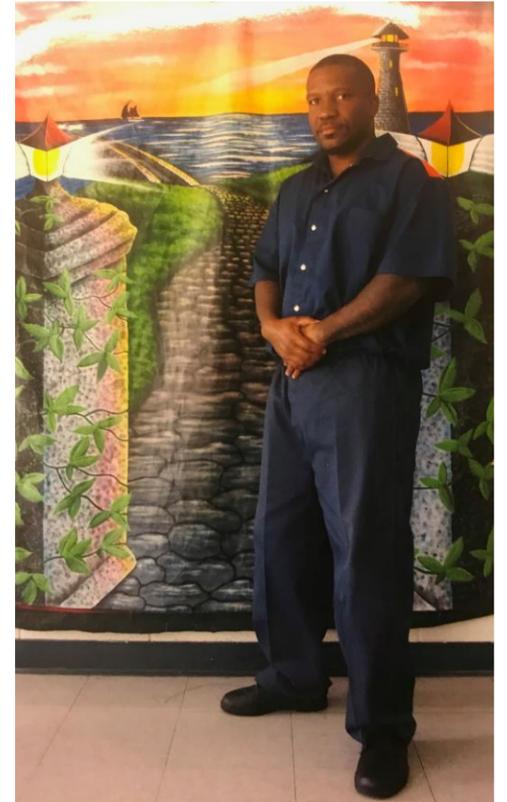
by Kanyon Durham, DC#133843, incarcerated at Columbia Correctional, 216 SE Correctional Way, Lake City FL 32025

I will never retire.
I'll never have children or get married or do any of many things that seem ordinary.
Seventeen years a legal slave, I think they want to dig my grave.
Remembered as a child, I left life when I was 18.
Wave goodbye to hope. R.I.P. to all my late dreams.
Just obey the orders and I sit back as they remember me.
Yeah...they think I'm broken; I'm a danger to their safety.
Lost at sea without a boat,
Without a bottle with a note.

Try again at 35. That is if you can cope.
By then it's too late.
Too late for many things too late.
Too late it always rings.
But I won't fade away and I won't break.
I'll spread my wings, the earth will shake.

I'll stomp my feet, you'll feel the quake.
Your knees will tremble before my wake.

When you ask about my name, they'll
Say he made it through the plane. He
Made it through the storm, stepped out
Of the rain, soaked through and reborn.
A rift in time was rent...was torn but he
Refused to be forsworn.



Quentin Jones is serving life without the possibility of parole incarcerated in Michigan and currently residing at the Gus Harrison Facility in Adrian.

INSTITUTIONALIZED

21 CALENDARS OPPRESSED
INCARCERATION GOT ME STRESSED.
I'M SICK OF JUST SURVIVING
I WANT TO VENTURE BEYOND THE
BARB WIRE FENCES
BEYOND THESE PICNIC BENCHES
WHERE I LISTEN TO WEAK DUDES
TALK ABOUT EVERYBODY ELSE'S
BUSINESS
WHERE I WATCH LOST SOULS
WALKING IN CIRCLES ALL DAY
TALKING CRACK.
MANY ARE SECRETLY PRAYING AND
HOPING FOR A MIRACLE
WHILE THE CONSCIOUS BROTHERS
STRIVE TO ELEVATE THE MENTAL.
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!
TAKE THESE SHACKLES OFF OF MY
HANDS AND FEET
I WANT TO BE FREE!
BUT THE REALITY IS I'M CONFINED
ONLY TO WHAT MY MIND CAN SEE.
I BEEN DOWN SO LONG
I THINK MY MIND IS GONE
EVERYONE OF MY CONVERSATIONS
IS ABOUT THE PLANTATION
OR THE LATEST CELEBRITY HAVING
RELATIONS
WHEN IT SHOULD BE ABOUT THE
HATRED I'M FACED WITH
OR HOW TO NOT SUCCUMB TO "D"
EVILS OPPRESSIVE NATURE.
THE SHACKLES THAT WERE ON MY
HANDS AND FEET
ARE NOW ON MY MIND.
I'M BLIND TO THE REALITY OF MY
EXISTENCE
MY FIGHT FOR FREEDOM HAS BEEN
REPLACED WITH CONTENTMENT
AFTER 21 CALENDARS OPPRESSED I
TOO HAVE BECOME
INSTITUTIONALIZED.