



Spotlight On Recovery

Giving a Voice to the Therapeutic Community



BROTHER, CAN WE TALK?



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LOSING'S NOT AN OPTION

BY ANTHONY BILLINGS

Told all my life there would be rainy days in the dark.
Unprepared for what came next there was no Noah's Ark.
Holes in my big shoes to fill to gain respect from my father,
Not divine in the least when I say I was walking on water.

Abandonment plus solitude equaled out to mass felony charges.
Living like a bat cause all I knew was the darkness.
Proved myself in many ways but waterproof I am not.
Rain and sweat became my clothes in every day that I fought.

Me against the world and it had more friends than I.
But I got up every time I fell like gravity was a lie.
Didn't major in mathematics but I needed solutions.
Hard to win in these conditions but I'll be damned to start losin'.





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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

AUGUST 2019

Dear Brothers raised by single parents or guardians, Can We Talk?

I am very close to the 4 men in my life. They are my sons. Many years ago, my three youngest boys endured a separation from their father for the umpteenth and last time. They suffered the loss of their male figure that would be their bridge to man-hood. I was now that bridge.

I was a single mom determined to raise men the best way I knew how. I wanted them to be strong, independent and good men. I wanted them to respect women, to make their choices and to accept when they were wrong.

Yes, I was taken for granted, yes I had to learn to let go. Yes, we had disagreements, but I was never told by my sons, “you are a woman, what do you know about being a man?”

To the brothers raised by a single mom, dad or grandparent, missing your other parent can be painful, be grateful for the person that hung in there with you. It was not easy. I hope you will be the type of parent that will be there for your child.

Sincerely,

Robin Graham
Robin Graham
Founder/Publisher





BROTHER, CAN WE TALK?

BY ARCANE ELEMENT

Brother, can I borrow something for a while? It's of the utmost importance for both of us. No, I'm not requesting money or anything of that nature, but rather something much more valuable. Lend me your ear, a few moments of your precious time and a couple of thoughts for consideration inside your busy mind. You see, the world around us is continuously changing, so why do we fight so hard to remain the same? I've asked myself this questions a million times and my answers sometimes seem to contradict one another. A part of me says that to change is to live a lie, but another part of me says that to stay the same is to die. After all, are they both not true to some degree?

I've come to the conclusion that if I change my core beliefs, my principles and morals, I would only be lying to myself because I would be attempting to alter who I was born to be. But on the other hand, to remain the same is to live in a state of stagnation. To live in stagnation is a death in and of itself because I have prevented myself from growing which only means that I'm not really living but rather going through the motions of life. So how do I grow, yet remain who I am? Brother, I'm a little confused on this issue, could you help me figure it out?

Brother, how do I deal with these Sistas? This is a questions I've pondered for quite some time now and I'm still not sure I know what to do. I mean, isn't a woman's place only to do whatever she's told by me, the man? Isn't she suppose to be the "ride and die" she takes chances with her freedom to save me because I'm not man enough to deal with the consequences of my actions and take responsibility for myself? Isn't she supposed to take care of me the same way my Mama did even though she's already burdened with taking care of the children I helped create and haven't lifted a finger to help take care of? Or is she supposed to be my partner? The Queen I place the world beside because she was the one I came from and who got me through 400 years of slavery and the next 200 after that by reminding me to

be proud of my heritage and my strength? I think I like that last one best, Brother, so I'll just use that example.

Brother, what does it mean to be a man? Does having a gun in my hand or killing someone else make me one? What about being a thug, slinging and using drugs? Can manhood be derived from that? Or, is truly being a man a state of mind combined with a code of ethics that prompts me to provide for and take care of my family without putting myself in a position to where I could possibly be taken away from them due to either death or incarceration because I know that without me their hope of survival is slim? Does taking care of them mean doing so by ANY means necessary? Or, does it mean doing the best I can the right way?

The truth is that most of the time, doing the wrong thing can feel like doing the right thing. Especially when we convince ourselves that we are doing them for a noble cause. I know from personal experience that it can certainly be easier. However, that's also a part of our plight. We often look for the easy way out when there is no easy way. We can rationalize our decisions any way we want to in order to make ourselves feel better about the things we do that we know are wrong, but they are still wrong. We just try desperately to salvage our moral compass so that we can continue to feel good about ourselves. But the reality that those of us who live or have lived with that street mentality don't speak about is how much pain is caused due to the consequences of our actions. You feel pain when you see your homies die around you, often because of a petty beef, that could have been avoided. We feel the pain we cause our loved ones to feel when we get incarcerated. Many of us feel the pain of drug addiction or being stabbed or shot and that's only if you live to talk about it. And I won't even begin to detail the traumatic psychological pain we cause our children and family when they see us dragged away in handcuffs.

As difficult as it may seem to be, we must strive



to grow because that is expected of us. Destiny is not what society expects of you, but what you decide it to be. Every single choice you make along the way shapes your destiny. Choose to live up to the highest expectations you can set for yourself. You may give yourself a chance to achieve greatness. Don't blame society, your parents or the circumstances you were born into for not having a chance because that's how losers live. Be a dreamer who dreams big, learns what it will take for you to live your dreams and execute them. There is no such thing as not being smart enough because you are as smart or

as ignorant as you choose to be. And there is no excuse for not having the resources you need. WAKE UP! It's 2019 and you have all the resources you need at your fingertips (literally!), thanks to technology. Utilize those resources that are available to you and prove to yourself that you truly can do anything you put your mind to and figure out a better way. Don't be the loser that I and others like me were or you may find yourself in the loser's box. Be a winner in life! My Brother, I'm glad we could have this talk.

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BROTHER, CAN WE TALK?

BY ANTHONY DAVIS

Rulers of the darkness of this world and its insidious evil have tormented the young black community. There are far too many black males incarcerated, whether in the county jails or State Prisons. Black people have carried the shackles of mental oppression for so long that young black people barely understand when something is after their mind at an all time high.

Most black males in prison are lost in thoughts and have no mental stability as to how to use their time and better themselves for a brighter future. Usually they just do the time by doing drugs, playing games, watch T.V., gang life, and the list goes on.

My point is, a lot of these young brothers don't

even have a diploma or G.E.D., not even some type of skill so they can make an honest living. In prison, there are so many opportunities to better yourself, to become a better father, or brother, or friend and that list goes on.

Why don't we use the time rather than do the time?

Do you think that your time in prison is just going use its self? Well I'm here to warn you that the time you waste in prison or in any other institution where you are forced to do time, you're not going to get that back so you might as well make good usage of your time, because an idle mind is the devil's playground.

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STAYING CLEAR OF FEAR

BY RANDY BIFFANY

“Of all the liars in the world, sometimes the worst are our own fears.” ~ Rudyard Kipling

If I had deciphered the depth of my fears earlier, alcoholism would probably not have hijacked my life and chained me to a bottle for twenty-five years.

I went from graduating college to swapping stories in dank jail cells and over-crowded homeless shelters. On route, I detoured through countless detoxes, treatment programs, sober living homes and AA meetings. I talked with scores of like-minded people suffering from the disease. The glaring commonalty, we invariably shared, was our underlying fear of not being “good enough,” no matter what we did.

Fear stole my identity; robbed me of my joy; dulled my senses; paralyzed my spirit and warped my mind. I ruminated that all my thoughts, words and actions were being scrutinized under some hyper-critical microscope. I was an ego-maniac with an insecurity-complex. My fear distorted my perceptions and processing ability.

Fears typically originate in childhood; instilled by parents, caregivers, environments or experiences. They could have been instilled by direct abuse or a misdirected, inadvertent, dysfunctional upbringing. Many alcoholics and addicts carry those childhood experiences into adulthood leading to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and crippling perfectionism. I was riddled with cognitive distortions so deep it would require a jack-hammer and crowbar to pry them out.

Author Rudyard Kipling said, “Fears are educated into us, and can, if we wish, be educated out.” It was only when I no longer needed the continual approval and admiration from outside myself that I could put down the drink and pick up peace. I could no longer afford to allow others to rent space in my head. I had to drastically alter my inner dialogue.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” I had to stop mind-reading; playing the role of a psychic. My insecurity was so acute that I could be standing on street corner and believed people passing by were judging my clothes and stance. Yet, I had no external evidence to back it up. I catastrophized situations; always predicting the worst possible outcome which of course, never occurred.

To eradicate my fear-driven, irrational thoughts I had to understand them. I looked up cognitive distortions online and discovered I had all of them to some degree. I had to get those distorted thoughts down on paper along with examples of how they manifest in my life.

Underneath each cognitive distortion I wrote a rationale, empowering statement to replace it. I did this objectively; from the standpoint of a rational person. I enlisted a friend to verify I was on the right track.

I incorporated profound verses and passages from devotional books in my new thoughts. I memorized them; rehearsed them. And, when real life situations popped up, I bit my lip, took a deep breath and responded with my new thoughts. The goal being that it becomes second nature.

All around me, I saw people brimming with confidence. But the truth is, everyone struggles with fears. As I began to be vulnerable, honest and open about mine, with another (facilitated by AA and treatment programs,) I found the empathy, acceptance, and affirmation I was seeking.

Buddha said, “Your purpose in life is to find your purpose and give your whole heart and soul to it.” I decided to resurrect my childhood, live life anew and return to my childhood passions and interests. I can remember strumming my guitar and singing songs in my home’s unfinished basement. The acoustics were great. I remembered finding a book about the

presidents and started drawing portraits of them for no reason at all. I adored the poems of Shel Silverstein and was transfixed by anything Disney or Dr. Seuss. I was a creative soul and needed inspiration. So, I joined a poetry club, the art league, and guitar group. I emerged from the shadows of isolation and sought like-minded, inspiring, and supportive people.

Pierre Teilhard Chardin said, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." AA suggested I find a higher power of my own understanding. I believed in a divine creator but had to tweak my perception of it to trust and rely on it. I read that "silence is the song of the soul." I engaged in silent meditation and simple prayers for wisdom and guidance. The Bible lists the fruits of the spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. My studies also revealed that in order to acquire these characteristics I

had to "act as if" I already possessed them. My mind would believe I must already have these characteristics, or I wouldn't be able to give them to others. If I wanted to be happy, I need to make another happy. As Jesus Christ said, "Do unto others as you would have done to you."

Victor E. Frankl said, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In that space lies our growth and freedom." "It's where our spirit or soul resides."

I try to remain in that space and be mindful, observant and non-judgmental. I let go and let my higher power run the show. I'm free to pursue the greatest vision and grandest version of myself and, help others do the same. I faced my fears and found my purpose. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "All we have to fear is fear itself."

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BROTHER, CAN WE TALK?

BY CETH HAMNER

How many times have you found yourself burdened by your heavy heart at the end of the day? If only you had someone to share your problems and concerns with, it would make your life manageable. Everyone needs somebody at sometime and it doesn't matter who you are, this is true for all of us in the human race. We all face trials and tribulations and often need someone to talk to and share our problems with.

Have you any idea how many of our very own friends and relatives wouldn't have taken their lives in vain and would still be here alive and well today enjoying life with us, had only we given them a few minutes of our undivided attention to hear them out and ease their troubled hearts and minds? All they needed was to talk to us and we should have wanted to listen. Now, it's too late and we continuously wish over and over we would have. When they were ready to talk we weren't ready to listen so, it got unbearable for them and they took the next step.

Now that it's all over with, we're left with the finger of blame pointing in our faces. We can't change the past or bring back all of our long gone loved ones, but we can prepare for the future by learning from the mistakes we made in our past. There should never come a time when the question, "Brother, Can We Talk?" is left weighing on our shoulders especially from anyone we're closely associated with or related to. We should know by or through their actions it is time for us to have a discussion. However, it doesn't always happen that way because life has its own peculiar way of distracting us and then things tend to go unnoticed, and we can only hope we haven't waited too long.

Since most of us aren't equipped with the talent to read minds, at some point in time we must be approached by our friend or loved one about their need to communicate with us then make ourselves readily available. It's not the things we say to them that matter most, but the things we hear them say. It could be as

simple as how their day has been or as complicated as them being physically abused or addicted to drugs. No matter what it is, we need to be willing and ready to help and listen.

None of us are perfect individuals and don't always know what we want but we are all required to know about our needs. A lot of the time our biggest need involves having someone to talk to, someone who cares enough to listen. Just a few minutes of listening saves lives and it's a proven fact.

Life is a very valuable asset and every minute God has given us to live it is very precious. What we need to do as individuals is figure out a positive way to communicate more effectively with each other. A way to share our physical, mental, and emotional needs with one another in a productive manner, so we can succeed together. It is so much easier facing the world and all the challenges it throws at us, together.

God made sure He made someone for everyone, because he knew we all needed someone to turn to and share our problems with. Wouldn't the world be a much safer and better place to live in if we all learned how to just open our mouths and talk about the things troubling us before lashing out with acts of violence towards one another. There is no excuse for aggression.

As a nation, it's time we step up and join hands together to talk about all the things that matters most to us individually, so we can put an end to all the violence. What we can't accomplish individually, we certainly can together. United we stand, divided we fall. So, my questions to the world is, "BROTHER CAN WE TALK?"





BROTHER, CAN WE TALK?

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

BY MATTHEW FEENEY

Restorative Justice is an age-old philosophy which is more recently being applied to the Criminal Justice System. Based on traditional of the Original Peoples, Restorative Justice is the belief that harm was done, so healing must happen in order to restore things closer to where they were. Restorative Justice also takes into account that there is always more than one person affected by a single crime. Friends, families and people in the community are all affected and need to be involved in the healing process. One of the amazing components of Restorative Justice involves a “Healing Circle.”

In today’s Criminal Justice System, the victim is often re-victimized by not being given a voice or any input into their perpetrator’s case. Once a victim has given a statement, the State takes control and rolls over anyone and everything that may stand in the way of its gaining a win tally. Their persistent mantras of “win at all costs” and “the end justifies the means,” echoes throughout stone Courthouses across the country. The state falls into automation mode, in the most efficient manner possible, the system reduces people with emotions and feelings to cold, hard numbers and statistics. “Just the facts, ma’am.” I have seen victims who never wanted to bring charges torn apart by the subsequent devastation they feel they have caused, all in the name of “justice.” I have seen cases that could have been resolved by utilization of a Conflict Resolution Circle instead end up with years of therapy for the victim and years of prison for the perpetrator. In addition, community members are never involved in any legal courtroom resolution.

Most problems start with communication issues. People don’t feel heard or understood. People

feel bullied. Someone assumes someone else feels the same as they do. Someone feels insulted or disrespected by an action. People feel triggered by key words or tones of voice. We often stuff our true feelings and don’t communicate how we really feel because we’re afraid of hurting or offending the other person. But communication starts small. Being able to say “I’d prefer you not turn the light on while I’m trying to sleep” seems simple and it is. But sometimes simple things are the most difficult to do. We blame ourselves, thing we’ll get over it, or it’s no big deal... So we stuff it and let things build up. And emotions under pressure are like a pressure cooker – eventually they’ll need to be let out.

So despite communication being a key to resolution of issues, the first thing that happens once a person has reported a crime to the authorities is that both sides are prohibited from talking to each other to prevent appearances of “witness tampering,” “harassment,” or “intimidation.” Once again, the goal of the Judicial System is to “win” the case against the defendant – there is no glory or money in having them communicate and resolve this issue themselves.

But communication, REAL communication, takes time, energy and effort. Anyone who has participated in a Restorative Justice Circle know that it is not a slap on the wrist nor is it easier than jail. Oftentimes Circle participants will drop out of the program, opting for their suspended jail time, rather than to continue into the scary realm of authentic communication.

In Circles, everyone is given an equal voice. People of the community are involved and are able to



state how they were affected. Victims, are given their voice back and allowed to speak openly of their hurts and fears. Even the perpetrators are given a voice; not to minimize and reduce their accountability, but to attempt to explain some of the factors that may have contributed to their committing their crime. Please don't confuse this with the 1-sided "victim impact statement" that is sometimes read at a sentencing. This is two-way communication, with all participants being able to respond authentically and in the moment to what they hear. These circles may occur weekly for up to a year. That requires commitment to a real solution. This involves real challenges and vulnerability. The Circle facilitator is trained to help run things smoothly, and the end result is a true healing of all parties involved. Forgiveness may or may not be involved – it most certainly happens, but is not a requirement or even a goal of Restorative Justice Circles.

Now let's quickly compare this to the current Judicial System solution. The perpetrator is incarcerated for a pre-determined period of time and is then released back into society and expected to now know better. They may or may not receive some obligatory classes such as Anger Management, Alcohol-Chemical Dependency or Sex Offender treatment. They have to deal with finding a job with the stigma of a criminal record. They have

to try to reintegrate with their friends and family, often not knowing how to deal with their toxic shame and guilt.

The victim may have read a prepared "victim impact" statement in the public courtroom, often in front of media cameras. After that, they are ignored and forgotten. The excitement and attention is over and they're still hurting. They may or may not ask for therapy to help resolve any issues, but their life goes on. School, work, family issues, all those normal issues are still there...but they never really got to truly communicate freely with the perpetrator, or their own friends and family. There is not official process to allow the Court System to follow-up to check-in on how they're doing.

A supervised Restorative Justice Circle by a trained facilitator could have been used at the beginning to help divert the case from Criminal Court. But even for cases that go all the way through a Criminal Court, a Restorative Justice Circle can still be utilized afterwards, to help open communication, develop empathy and restore the community to where it was before the crime. Whether used in conjunction with or in lieu of traditional incarceration, Restorative Justice Practices are the way of the future.

This issue of Spotlight on Recovery has been designed by:





BROTHER, CAN WE TALK?

BY DURRELLE YARBOUGH

It's been a while since we last seen each other, since I last written to you and our last conversation. I battle with myself everyday thinking what I could have done differently that night, how could I've persuaded you.

I gave my all to keep you away from the streets, to distance you from negativity. But what I failed to realize was even though I'm your big brother and I'm suppose to protect you, to guide you, you have your own mind, your own view of life.

I've given advice, encouraged you to go back to college for the fact that I knew you've never ran the streets. What you thought about the streets could never equal the experience. I wanted better for you not only because you're my little brother, but because I've seen the potential in you. I believed in you. I believed you would prosper and I still do but now you've made it complicated, stressful even, not only for you but for the family also.

You were supposed to be the golden child, the one that made a difference. You were supposed to be the first of the boys to get married, to finish college, create a business, and buy a house. You were supposed to be the one that made Momma proud. You're the baby boy and as the big brother, my job was to make sure baby boy is alright. To make sure baby boy stayed on the right path, to make sure baby boy continues to smile. But see, being the second youngest out of four boys I did my job, the thing was I needed help. We have two older brothers, but neither saw what I was trying to prevent. When I tried to keep you away from the streets and on the right path, the ones older then us encouraged it and allowed it.

How could I've guided you when you're seeing negativity be embraced. How could I've shown you a better way when the majority of the world is participating and indulging into negativity. How could

you've listened when all you're seeing in front of your eyes is the majority of the world.

I should have know I would be looked at as an outcast. I was outnumbered three to one. The older brothers chose to see through the world's view and encouraged you to continue your ways and in turn you thought you were doing nothing wrong. I should have know I would have to be the one to step up not only for baby boy, but also for our older brothers. I should have known I would be the one with the plan guiding them and correcting their wrongs. I should have known, but I didn't.

At the time there was too much taking place at one time. At the other time little bro, our second to oldest brother and our oldest brother decided to turn their back on me because I wanted better. They couldn't understand why I moved the way I moved, why I said the things I said, they couldn't understand the meaning of it all. Even though I saw a clear path for our family, I didn't know how to get through to them. I didn't know how to tell you I loved you little bro and the reason I'm doing this is because you have a promising future. It's not that I didn't know how to tell you. I didn't know how to get you to listen. I brought you to the water, but you chose not to drink.

By you venturing off and indulging into negativity, I can't say what took place, and yes, I may have it all wrong, but what I do know is you're not home for me to talk to you, to protect you. It's been two and a half years since I last seen you, I miss you little bro. You were sentenced to seventeen and a half to thirty-five years, I don't know the next time I'll be able to see you, but I'll tell you one thing, I'll be strong for you.

Any stress, any pain, any hurt, I'll feel it for you. Your first ever being incarcerated, I've failed you. Even though all the advice I've given you was to protect you and to prevent this from happening. You chose not to



listen, but I still take the blame, that's how much I love you. You will always be my little brother, the baby boy and for that you add strength to my fight.

You are what I strive for, you and the rest of the family and even though I could have, should have and would have isn't going to change a thing, I wish I could have persuaded you to take a different route. I should have kept you by my side to monitor your moves, your choices. I would have made sure at all times you were safe, But see, I wasn't in the right state of mind for that particular situation. I was looking at a much bigger picture, a much bigger vision, a much bigger future for us. I had a vision for us and I needed you for the conclusion. I needed you for the partnership, I needed you for the start of the grand scheme , for that new start.

I've learned in life you have to fight in order to win, you have to be strong in order to make it

through. As men, we stand tall, we salute the fallen and give thanks for the gift of life. We move through the obstacles and absorb the pain. We be strong for the ones that cannot be strong. We be the best we can be if not better. I knew you were a good man, no doubt about it. You were strong, you were getting ready to go back to college, you were doing what you needed to do, at the time. You never stepped foot in a juvenile facility, a county jail or a State Prison. So for you to have to make a choice to that nature a person has to provoke the situation. Someone had to pose a threat toward you.

I still have faith, I still believe you will pull through and make it out of the predicament you're in. You did what you had to do, he left you no choice so I say to you once more, feel no pain. Your burdens are my burdens. Your hurt is my pain. Your tears are my tears. I failed you, I hope you can forgive me.





SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

BY ARTHUR GENOVESE

Have you ever felt completely abandoned, nobody caring about you and isolated? Have you ever turned to ask GOD to be your friend, listen to you? Ask Him for advice? I have. At 19 years old I was sentenced to prison in Florida trying to be a gangster, for 15 yrs, then 10 years probation to follow while incarcerated.

I still continued my ways, trying to be someone, getting into a lot of trouble, dealing in cell phone contraband. After getting kicked out of several prisons, I finally ended up in solitary confinement at Florida State Prison for 5 years. Let me point out in Florida, no air conditioner, no TV in your room, just a wall, and your thoughts. At that point out of sight out of mind, when everyone abandoned me. Only one that remained was my beloved grandfather, who raised me.

In the beginning all you can do is think of is old times, think of people, wonder, after time it's very lonely having nobody to talk to and angry with everyone. I started a relationship with God. I began to ask him questions as if he was in there with me. Asking for guidance and help mentally to survive this and promising to never make this mistake again. In time, I noticed he would answer me, not direct but in subtle ways. Things that I never thought could be done would now happen. I asked God to lead me in the direction of a future career, he did. I'd taken up paralegal studies through law school, approved by the prison administration, further achieving advance in the

criminal law field.

I was scheduled for release from prison on May 8, 2015, while still in solitary confinement. I went through the whole release program and my family was on their way to pick me up. Days prior to my release I was notified of a strange event, the State Attorney's Office decided to violate my probation prior to me being released from prison. I was to start serving it based on all the prison misconduct in my past, making me the very first prisoner in the state of Florida that violated probation while in prison before it started for prison disciplinary in the States history, from a law from 1984 that is never used. Instead of release from prison I was sent to the county jail for an violation of probation hearing, the state was seeking 60 years for this prison misconduct. The judge sent me back with 10 more years.

However, the hurdles that are in front of me I survive nowadays on my relationship with God, a new loyal friend to me. After 15 long years, 5 in solitary confinement and believing the end is near, days from going home, plans with family to sitting in the jail for prison misconduct dated several years back. Facing 60 years will break the strongest down mentally, but without the help of God, no man can endeavor such a pain.

God is the only remedy, the only one that will be there when you need him. For whatever reason this happened surely God has a plan and my faith will remain.



BROTHER, CAN WE TALK?

BY PERRY BURRIS

Brother, Can we talk? I'm asking this questions to every brother out there in society as well as those of us that are locked up that are able to answer this question with a sound mind. I am also asking this because of the old adage: "Cleaning one's own backyard, before asking someone to clean theirs," is very important.

I would like to talk about four (4) things: 1) Young brother, you do not have to max out; 2) Big brother, you can lead and guide little brothers from a distance; 3) Brothers, we all need an education; and 4) Brothers, you can all lean on my shoulder.

First things first, I begin with you, young brother. Can we talk? I want to talk to you about getting your life on track while you are here imprisoned, even though there are many obstacles along your path, you can overcome them all. The first obstacle being you are locked up in a nine foot by twelve foot jail cell, and everything seems to be at a stand-still; life seems to have stopped. But it didn't. Trust me. I know, brother. You see, once we are caught within this system of so-called justice we lose hope and fall into despair, everything we knew about life as we know it has become nothing but a design, a sketch, a diagram of what once was as to what it is now.

It seems as though we are living in an otherworldly dimension. You remember the movie called "The Matrix," which featured Lawrence Fishburne and Keanu Reeves? How Morpheus had to come to Neo's aid and how he had to awaken him to the fact that the life that he was living was fake; a dream-life that was being controlled by machines? Well those of us that are incarcerated are living that same script, our lives are being controlled by the powers that be, (The DOC's Administration) and this is not the life that we truly want to be living. So, in a sense we are living in a matrix, a reality that our lives would become sculpted into a prison cell and our minds would be molded towards having to be subjected to living in a bathroom with a

stranger and being told when to eat, when to go outside, when to stand up and when to lay down.

Brothers, before Neo had come to terms with the fact that he was not living the life that he believed he was living, it took him to go through some serious trials and tribulations before he began to do something about it. I'm here to tell you that you don't have to go through the same as Neo. We can stand up as men right here and now and take advantage of the necessary programs that they have here in prison, not only to educate ourselves but to become better as a people, to become better as a brother, to become better as a man. As for those of us that are still in society, we can take advantage of the trade schools, scholarships, and federal bonds and loans that would enable us to pay for not only the books we'll need but most importantly the education that we'll need to achieve a life-long career.

Secondly, we have brothers in society that are already educated, grounded and believe in that younger brother that wants to educate himself. Can we talk brother? I would like for you to step up to the plate and take the time out of your day and go to a Big Brother foundation. Find a counselor there and see about become a Big Brother figure to that little brother that needs the uplifting of a father figure to help him rise above the darkness he's trapped within and bring him back to the fountain of light that is truly there.

For those of us within these walls, with time-in this system it is time to bring the system inside these walls back to the way things used to be. Whatever happened to the "Think Tanks"? When four or five brothers would get together and begin educating each other on whatever goals the other is trying to reach whether spiritual, educational, or moral. Whatever happened to the profound positive effects we used to have on each other? We lost all sense of love and family values that's what. We can get it all back, we just have to begin praying again, believing again, and knowing



that there is another man out there who's just like me that wants what I want and that is the love of a powerful nation consisting of strong black men, women and children.

Thirdly, although we have family that live all over the U.S., we still can be there for them in their times of need. I have two beautiful daughters that live in South Carolina as well as my beautiful mother. We keep in touch via correspondence and the telephone. So, all of my brothers out there with family members in other States, remember, "God won't change a condition of a people until they change the conditions of themselves." We have to be proactive and take ten minutes out of our day to write a letter to a brother. That letter will go a long way for a brother, especially if he is a problematic convict, that one letter will mean a lot to him and would help him to do a complete 360. However, you can't stop there, you should write a brother once a week. Heck!

Twice a week to give him words of encouragement, words he needed all along, you guided him with a pen from a distance and led him to lead a new and positive life.

Finally, Brother, you all can lean on my shoulder because there are some of us that are still stand up guys, some who care about the next generation's end result and how they will make it in society, and even behind these walls.

It is up to you and me both inside and outside to take that first step, to break the ice between the different eras and let one another know that brother, we can talk. We don't need drugs and alcohol, but we do need one another.

In conclusion, I end this with conforming to my every word and that Brother, can we talk, should be in the minds of all people because not only my people, but human beings period are headed for distinction if we do not begin to show love for each other. No more regression, but more progression is our aim.





CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

RANDY BIFFANY About the Author: Randy Biffany is a freelance writer outside of Chicago. He graduated from Illinois State University with a B.S. in public relations/psychology and battled depression/alcoholism for twenty years. He now enjoys recovery and is finishing his book, "Voices of a Vagabond," a collection of prose, poetry and drawings depicting his journey.



ANTHONY BILLINGS About the Author: Anthony C. Billings was raised in a small town in Northern California called Susanville, where he attended Lassen College to pursue a degree in business. Currently enrolled in courses, he splits his time between his writing, his education and his enjoyment of life in general. He has been writing since he was a young teenager and he has plans to keep writing for many years to come.



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PERRY BURRIS About the author: My name is Perry Durrell Burrus, I was born in New York City's Kings County Hospital on November 9, 1969. I was raised up under 9 other siblings, 4 brothers and five sisters, by my parents. My late father David "Bud" Burris was from Brooklyn, NY and my mother, Ms. Mary Louise Burnside was from Greenville, South Carolina. I am serving a 30 to 60 year sentence, in hopes of some day giving the time back. By the time I was 17 I was tried as an adult and caught my first County bid. It's been a revolving door ever since, me coming and going in and out of prison for the past 30 years. I was a drug and alcohol abuser. I blame no one but myself and I accept full responsibility for each and every time I was sentenced to do time.



I tell my story briefly in hopes of me getting to those whose life's experiences is the same as mines, or was the same as mine in hopes that I can communicate to them, the dire transgressions we not only cause against ourselves, but our loved ones and community as well. I want to help them with their endeavors of ways to dis-communicate themselves away from the above transgressions that I mentioned. If you are young and on that same path of destruction I lived on, please get back to me in hopes of starting a dialogue together where I can share with you where I went wrong and where you can go right. I pray that my words and dialogue will halt you in your tracks and reverse the path you are on. Meeting me at the crossroads before crossing will be imperative, so that I can guide you in the right direction and onto the right path when you cross.

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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

ANTHONY DAVIS About the Author: This is Anthony's first article for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. We hope to hear more from this conscious writer.

ARCANE ELEMENT About the author: Arcane Element is an aspiring writer who is currently working on completing an urban fiction novel and publishing his first poetry chapbook collection. His passion for writing began when he started composing and performing songs at the age of 11. He is a business minded visionary who hopes to leave his mark upon the business world.



Presently serving a 50 year sentence in the Arkansas Department of Corrections, he is working toward receiving a reduction of sentence so that he may have a second chance at life. His contact information can be found on ADC.gov if you wish to communicate with him concerning any topic.

MATTHEW FEENEY About the author: Matthew Feeney is an incarcerated writer. He lives and works at Moose Lake Correctional Facility. He loves working in the prison library. This emerging writer enjoys writing Creative Non-Fiction, Short Stories and Poetry. He is currently working on his first poetry collection entitled "68 Prosaic Prison Poems." In 2017, he won second place for fiction in the 2017 Pen American Prison Writing Contest. You can visit his website at www.matthewfeeney.com

ARTHUR GENOVESE About the author: Arthur Genovese is 38 years old . He is Italian, Sicilian. He is originally from Connecticut, but moved to Florida in 1997. His interests include working out and studying criminal law.

CETH HAMNER About the Author: My name is Ceth Hamner and I'm 40 years old. I'm currently an Arkansas prisoner and I love to read and write. I was born in the natural state in the rice and duck capitol of the world Stuttgart, Arkansas on January 17, 1978 and have lived here every since. I have written a book since being in prison and hope someday to have it published.



DURRELLE YARBOUGH About the author: My name is Durrelle Yarbough, I'm twenty-eight years old. I was born in Philadelphia, but raised all over Pennsylvania. I have seven brothers and sisters, four sisters and three brothers. I don't have any children, but I do look forward to settling down, and committing myself to a relationship ,etc.

P.S. I just hope through these articles I could help or even change the minds of our young adults and also our adults because the adults are the ones who are suppose to set examples for our young people. The power has always been in our hands, we are just so occupied on us, so worried about our next problem that we don't see the yearn or the cry for help from our young people.

Thank you for your time...



COMING SOON

IT'S TIME...

