

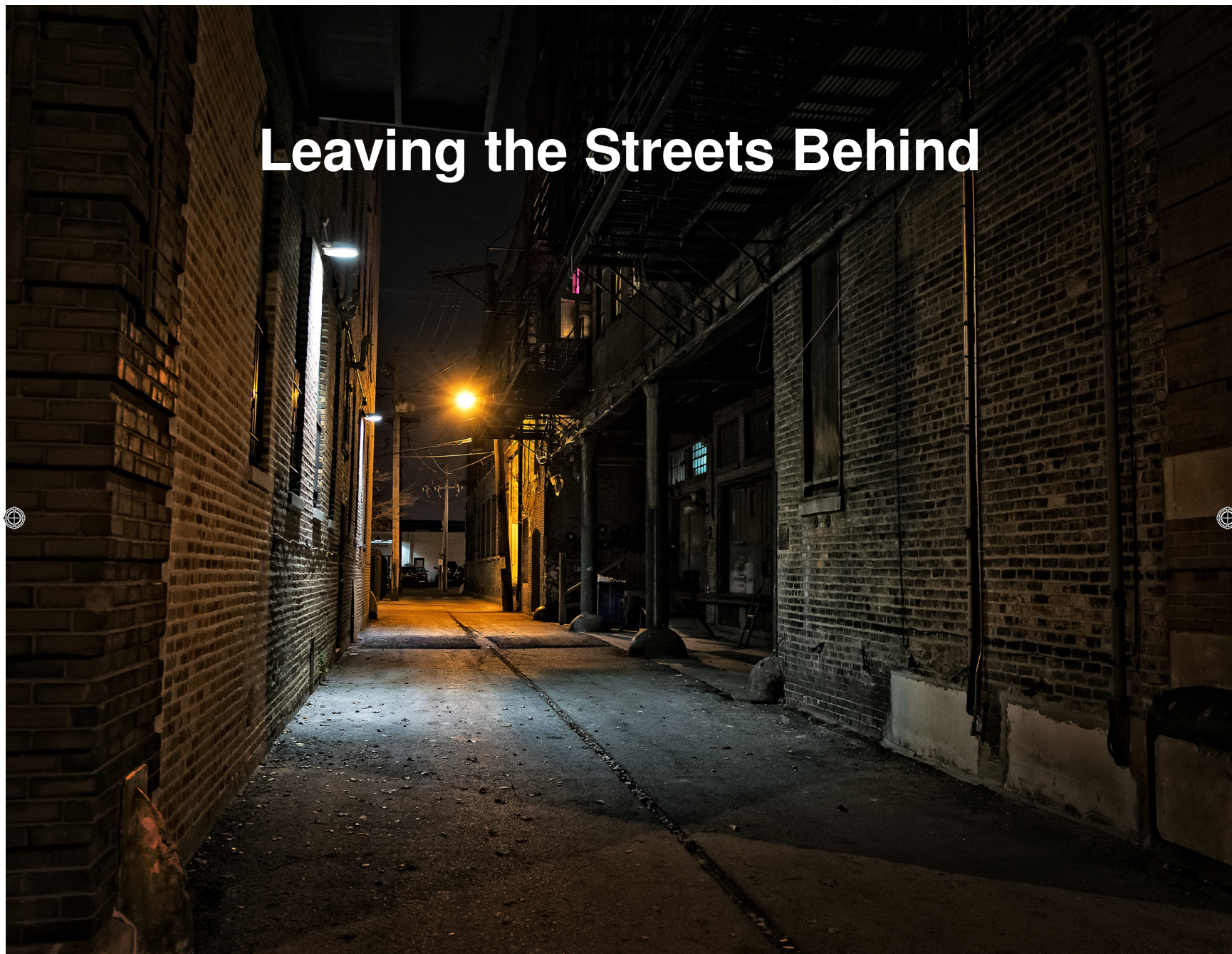


Spotlight On Recovery

Giving a Voice to the Therapeutic Community



Leaving the Streets Behind



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LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY LESTER BROWN

As the younger youth I once was, I chose to live the life of the streets. I was misled by temptation and swindled in by the pressure of peers, people surrounding me, and undermining the not so solid thoughts within my mind for a short spell. I believed in the blind love and care of the streets, until I finally awoke from the devastating dream of all the losses. The shedding of tears, giving respect to those who have went astray, including myself due to the effects of living the street life. In my mind, “I awoke to smell the fresh new aroma of reality which is “Leaving the Streets Behind.”

As the well-experienced young man I am now, I have come to the recollection, and acknowledgement of knowing there’s nothing worthwhile in being amazed at the awful activities occurring in the repetitive cycle of living in the streets. At the risk of one’s life, “Nothing but drugs, death, robberies, and other major misleading directions blocks the focus of the people of the future; our youth.”





TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Inside Cover Article – Leaving the Streets Behind by Lester Brown | 2 |
| Letter from the Publisher..... | 4 |
| End Game by G.Wahid..... | 5 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Michael McKinney..... | 6 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Arcane Element..... | 7 |
| In Our Rearview by Delbert Williams | 9 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Tom Kropp..... | 11 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by George Hopkins..... | 12 |
| Divorcing My First Love by Guillermo Alvarez | 13 |
| Putting the Streets Behind Me by Joseph L. Myers | 15 |
| Gangster Lean by Excellus O. Hyland | 18 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Perry Burrus | 19 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Michael Jenkins..... | 21 |
| Leaving it on the Street by Dennis Mintun..... | 23 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Ceth Hamner | 24 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Alphonso Tanner | 25 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Anthony Tate | 26 |
| Leaving the Streets Behind by Bro. Hernandez Wiley..... | 28 |
| Transformation by Douglas Washington..... | 29 |





LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

SUMMER 2018

Dear Family,

I'd like to think of this issue as a part 2 to our Youth and Crime issue. The Youth and Crime issue discussed the worst possible outcomes to committing crimes. Leaving the Streets Behind is about the choices we make. There are noteworthy lessons in this issue of Spotlight.

Please read this issue and the Youth and Crime issue with your teens and perhaps your pre-teens because they need to know the truth about the darkness of the streets when crime is the choice. They need to know that the friend they think they have could turn on them when things get hot.

No one wants to lose their children to the streets. I raised three young men alone in the projects of Brooklyn, New York and all three have made me proud. They avoided drugs, alcohol, the law and didn't give into peer pressure. It wasn't easy but it can be done through support, love and guidance.



Today's youth need our attention now or they will look elsewhere. There are agencies, and organizations that can offer you solutions and resources to help you keep your child safe. You can Google anything today and find support.

The choice is yours.

“All ambitions are lawful except those which climb upward on the miseries or credulities of mankind.” – Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)

Sincerely,
Robin Graham
Robin Graham





END GAME

BY G. WAHID

God works in mysterious ways, and may not be there when we want, but God is always on time.

I found myself literally gasping for air. I was getting hit from every angle it seemed and wasn't too happy. My finances were shaky, my communication with my family was stagnate, and I was home sick more than ever. I felt myself saddened and even slipping into a depressed state. It had been time for a change, but I just didn't know how to make it. Pushed to exhaustion, that's when God moved and brought me out into a new school of thought. I was 62 months into a 106 month sentence, and I was feeling every bit of it. I was thankful for this station in life because truly it bestowed all that I lacked, lost in my madness. I've seen that wretched part of me exposed. I found that divine source within that sought expression. I looked for ways to get more acquainted with this source, but felt like circumstances were hindering my growth. By the law of attraction the peace that passes all understanding came into my life. It's as if the weight of the world had been lifted off of my shoulders. It's like receiving something that you've been wanting for so long. The initial feeling seems unreal; you know it's yours it just hasn't sunk in yet. Change was inevitable and the feeling was invigorating.

The life of crime is not all what it's hyped up to be. Trust and believe the suffering far outweighs the success to most, and in the end most live with regrets, wishing they would have listened and did things differently.

Unfortunately, some never quite get enough. They feed off of this chaotic life style and suffering becomes a revolving door. They live with the decisions that they make without an outlook of ever getting out.

Now pause! There's always some that have reached that point where enough is more than enough and they are forced to change. Continuing on the same way they have lived for so long has robbed them of so much, that the thought of another day is not an option. These folks reach out for the hand of God and watch as this everlasting source pulls them higher unto places once their imagination could not perceive. Life unfolds right before their eyes and their lives are never the same. Their source begins to send people to confirm his plan for their life. God begins to attract knowledge of all kinds to water that desire for change inside them. God begins to alter their circumstances to speak directly to their souls. God allows their cup to runneth over, sending them blessings they don't have room enough to receive. As they are blessed they bless others around them and they keep the law of abundance in their life through the law of cause and effect.

Their End Game is living a life of charity, giving back to their communities all they can and being of service for the rest of their lives. Doing what is right is their End Game. Making a difference is their End Game. Making their move out into something new is their End Game. Preparing themselves for life to take them into a new direction is their End Game.

Ask yourself this one questions. Are you ready to play your End Game? If so, start NOW!!! Your source has come to set you free.

When is enough, enough?

Where is the End Game?



LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY MICHAEL MCKINNEY

I never liked hanging in the streets, but when I was young, I liked the excitement. To us young fools, who did not know any better, the streets was where all the excitement was.

Doing all the wrong things the street life had to offer us was fun to us. But to me, deep down in my little heart, I did not like the streets. The street life kept getting me locked up time after time. Each time I got locked up meant I had to be away from my family. That hurt me more than anything.

My mother was not able to always be around me because she had to work and provide for three kids on her own. I needed some kind of guidance to help keep me up out of the streets because my young heart was not on the right path.

I wanted to be a family man. I wanted to be a righteous man, and I was not all that smart but I knew the streets were not going to offer that to me. I wanted to get me a pretty good education and the streets were not going to offer that to me.

I have some good friends who lost their young life in the streets. My grandmother on my mother's side also lost her life in the streets in 1979. I was still young when my aunt stabbed my grandmother. That hurt me to my heart when that happened.

The signs to leave the street life behind kept trying to get my attention in so many ways. I just was not able to see that far when I was young. Then after doing some years in prison up in the state of Alabama my father Big Mike got out of prison in 1982 around the end of that year. He came to Florida to see me and my brother Sedrick, January 1, 1983. In February 1983, my father was gunned down in the streets of Tampa, Florida and this made my life in the streets worse.

Every time my mother looked around, I was

getting into trouble in the streets. My young heart was always crying out for that special someone to come into my life because that would had pulled me right up out of the streets. Something I was always wishing for before it was too late.

I have seen so many come up short in the street. But for some reason God always had his hard way of showing me that He was with me and I was forced to leave the streets behind when I was given life in prison at the age of eighteen years old by one of the strictest judges in Tampa, Florida.

Before this happened, I was told that I would not make it to see my eighteenth birthday. Since I was forced to leave the streets, it saved my life. If I would have stayed on the streets I may have not made it this far in life. It was not the best way to leave the streets, but it worked out for the better. I am still living and I am still learning.

My faith has gotten stronger than ever and I got me a pretty good self made education. I am learning more and more about trusting in God for everything.

I have learned to write articles and so on. In the streets, I would have never taken time out to learn something like this. After doing almost thirty years in prison, I would never turn back to the streets, because the streets have never been for me. The streets lead you to two places; prison and the graveyard.

I will never again let the streets rule my life and to all the younger ones and older ones of the world, my advice to you all is to Please LEAVE THE STREETS BEHIND, because there's no future in the streets.





LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY ARCANE ELEMENT

Over the course of the last 10 years, I've taken out quite a lot of time to consider the path I've traveled to reach the point where I currently find myself. As a direct result of that contemplation, I've drawn the conclusion that living the street life was only meant to be a test of sorts for me. Everything that I've ever been through and that I'm still going through today, all of the life and death struggles I've survived has made me stronger.

In many ways, the streets have made me a different man. Better in some ways, worse in others. The thing that people who have never been involved in that life in any aspect fail to realize, however, is that a majority of those of us who have been through it didn't make the initial decision to live that way because we WANTED to. On the contrary, we did it because we often felt that there was no other way out for us.

Growing up watching my mother, a woman who did her best to raise three, often problematic children on her own, struggle to put food on the table, clothes on our backs and pay all of the bills with no help was enough to persuade me to turn to the ways of the block before I even hit junior high school.

Before the age of 12, I had become an affiliated member of a street family, (which I won't name because I have no desire to incriminate myself), to make money to assist my mother any way I could to help ease her burden. Of course, when she found out what I'd began doing, she tried everything in her power to turn me back to the "path of righteousness," but I was determined to not see her struggle. I started selling drugs, and when that money didn't come fast enough for me, I started robbing other people for their money.

In my deluded mental state, I believed that I was doing things the right way. I mean, after all, wasn't I only helping to provide for my family? This is what I told myself for many years in an attempt to justify my

actions and ease my guilty conscience. But after a while of engaging in nefarious activities and contributing more than my fair share to the crime rate no matter where I was, that part of me that had once felt guilty for the crimes I had committed was quickly becoming lost in a drug and alcohol induced haze.

I had brought into this propagandized notion that I had to be "hard" just like everybody else that lived the same way I did in order to be accepted by my peers. Now, I'm not saying that everybody in my neighborhood were thugs, but those who weren't doing the things that the majority of our ghetto population were involved in were quickly and almost always permanently branded "squares," ridiculed, beaten up and just generally socially outcast because they dared to defy our way of life.

I mean, here I was, a skinny kid who often excelled academically when I even bothered to try at school, tormenting others who were truly just like me in many ways. The only difference between them and me being that they had the courage to remain true to themselves in the face of adversity regardless of what life threw their way. Retrospectively, I wish that on some level I had shared the bravery of my counterparts who stared down the taunts that were relentlessly cast at them unwaveringly. I often wonder who or what I would've become and where I would've been today had I chosen to live differently. But as they say, everything is 20/20 in hindsight.

At the age of 16, I caught my first felony charge. After getting expelled for fighting and breaking the "no knives at school" rule, I was placed on juvenile probation and given community service. It was during one of these weekly community service outings that I was charged with a 3rd degree battery charge for jumping on this other kid because of some perceived slight against me. I mean, he wasn't even FROM the streets like I was, but I felt that I had to prove some point that I don't even recall now. My actions that day caused me to spend the





next 13 months of my life in several different juvenile facilities where I only had more altercations with staff members and the other kids alike due to my attitude problem.

After doing around 9 months or so in the Labyrinthine Juvenile System, my thought process began to change slightly. I started really trying to get my G.E.D. or earn enough credit to go to high school as a senior when I got out. I wanted to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps, serve in Special Ops and maybe even go to college. I had such big dreams that now I can't decide whether it's funny, sad or both.

Upon my release from training school, my mom took me to the high school campus to enroll me. The principal told us that I would have to go back to the 9th grade and there was the probability that I still wouldn't walk out with my diploma. When my mom asked me what I wanted to do, my decision was an easy one. The odds were stacked heavily against me and I felt forced into the position of dropping out of high school. I mean, how would it look for me at 17 going on 18 the same year to be in class with kids who were 15, maybe 16 years old? I couldn't ... no I wouldn't do that to myself. With the arrival of that obstacle, I gave up hope on my educational goals. I turned back to my life of crime because it was what I knew best.

When I caught a robbery case, my uncle, who was already a Marine, tried to recruit me and help get the charge expunged from my record. But by that time, I was again addicted to the street life and everything that came along with it.

I was back smoking, drinking, and being generally caught up in the criminal element of the streets. In addition to the Marine Corps, I had plenty of opportunities involving my music to present themselves to me. But me being the world class procrastinator that I am, I failed to follow up and take advantage of them. Maybe on some level I had a fear of either failure, success or both. It's hard to say with accuracy now, but I have my suspicions. The reality is most likely the fact that I was not an organized thinker on a level that would put me in a successful position. The fact that I had

multiple women who were admirers of my charm and conversation as a distraction didn't help my case either. It took me several years in prison to realize that for as much ambition as I had and as big as my dreams were, I was ultimately my very own, built in encumbrance.

All the time I thought I was making moves to ensure that my future had a different outcome than what had been expected for me, I was truly on the fast track to self-destruction. In realizing that, I've taken every measure to turn from those ways so that I don't fall back into my old habits upon my release. I have since corrected my train of thought and elevated it to a more positive level. I no longer want to be recognized as a street figure who never learned anything from the ways of my past, but as an advocate for change for others on their terms. To let other people know that it's never cool to betray yourself or lose your sense of self in order to follow someone else's vision of what your life should be like. A person's life is theirs only by the amount of individuality they express on a daily basis. Every minute of every hour of every day should be yours.

When you've been a part of the streets for so long, as I have, close to 20 years in my case, it's never an easy thing to turn away from that lifestyle. It becomes so much a part of your mental state in your everyday life that when you try to change your course, you run into every imaginable obstacle there could possibly be. It's at times like this that you have to refuse to give in to the pressure that envelopes you to the point of suffocation. Stand up and let the world know that you're leaving the streets behind you.





IN OUR REARVIEW

BY DELBERT WILLIAMS

“Change the way you view the world, and the World will change around you.”

Anyone stuck in the streets or any trying situation will probably have a hard time relating to that quote. You are probably thinking, “Yeah, Okay!” You think only a man who has never face hardships, experienced the darkness of life, or struggled to survive on the streets would hold a pie-in-the-sky view like that. But I assure you, I am a product of abject poverty and in many ways I was raised by the streets. Ten years ago I would have had the same reaction. I could never believe that the world would change simply by me changing my view of it. That was preposterous to me. I didn’t accept it until I accepted the fact that I was responsible for the circumstance of my life. I was sowing the seeds.

Physically, I left the streets when I came to prison 14 years ago, but the streets still raged in my spirit. My life was ruined by a ghetto mentality that controlled the way I interacted with the world. I was sabotaging myself and causing my own misery. In my early twenties I had a change of perspective, a paradigm shift, that allowed me to see things as they really are and not as I perceived them. I learned that if we step back from any vexing of annoying situations, before we allow it to irk us or drive us to react out of anger, to take a second to see the situation from another point or view we’ll begin to see the situation differently.

Running the streets selling and using drugs, robbing, and conning people makes us a cancer in society. We are sapping the innocence, security, and vitality from our communities. In order to function effectively, we create excuses to justify our actions. We don’t realize the negative impacts we have on our individual victims as well as our overall community. We get so caught up “Doing Me,” that we become indifferent to the pain and destruction we leave in our wakes. Our selfishness blinds us. We rationalize the irrational because we’re programmed to believe these

negative behaviors are acceptable.

Too often we hear, “Well, they do it to me...” as a justification for deplorable behavior. I would love to see this attitude vanquished and replaced with an attitude of empathy. I had to challenge the part of me that attempted to justify mistreating others. I found guidance from the golden rule; “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”

If we want to be treated better, we must start by treating others well. If we want to be treated fairly, we must treat others fairly. If we want our communities to be safe nurturing places for our children then we must lead by example. If we want things to improve in our individual lives and our communities then we have to “be the change (we) wish to see in the world.” – Mahatma Gandhi

It’s easier said than done but every accomplishment, every success requires a struggle. Breaking out of those self-defeating habits was an enormous struggle for me. I had to break free of the attitude that trapped me in a cycle of misery, and spiritual poverty.

Harder still was separating myself from the negative minded people of my past. Many of my close friends and associates have great qualities. They could be kind, thoughtful, caring, and selfless. However, they are all addicted to friction with the tendency to seek something for nothing, and an overall negative attitude about the world and the people in it. Those traits drove, and continue to drive, a wedge between us.

As I matured, I became aware of how lost and stagnant I used to be. Once the veil of ignorance was lifted and I adopted a clear mind and positive habits, my old friends became distant. I broke free of the slough and slush while my friends continue to hobble through the muck and mire of street life. They continue



to pursue a hedonistic life style, objectifying women, advocating violence, and using drugs as an escape from their troubles. I was tired of the ephemeral escapes and chose to make lasting changes so I could heal and live a full life.

My old friends are amazed by my transformation. At first, they teased me and thought my change was a façade that wouldn't last long. Now they are proud to see me doing well and they encourage me to keep going. I feel that I'm not only bettering my life, but by leading by example I'm also making a positive contribution to my community and the world.

However, even after we leave the streets and find success on a positive path, it's important to return to those still stuck in desperation and despair and engaged in street life. We can't climb out of the den of snakes without reaching back to lift up our brothers and sisters still trapped in the struggle. What good is success if you don't help others?

I'm part of an organization in Pittsburgh called the Positive Initiative to Reinforce Change (PIRC) movement. There's a famous motto that's used to inspire us and remind us that we control our destinies: "Your thoughts become your words, your words become your actions, your actions become your character, and your character determines your destiny." That's powerful to me and realized that gave me the confidence to walk away from the streets and head toward a fulfilling life.

I've left the streets for good. I'm done with the something for nothing sense of entitlement that plagued me in my younger years. I realize that nothing worth having comes easy and what does come easy will not be enjoyed for long. I'm taking advantage of every opportunity to work and earn an honest living. I'm more settled and at peace now than I had ever been in the streets. Now I can honestly say that the juice is worth the squeeze... Life is good... I'm driving on the road to recovery and The Streets are in My Rearview.

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LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY TOM KROPP

Most prisoners here in Wisconsin can't leave the streets behind. We average a 70% ratio for returning to prison. I speak unfortunately with the voice of experience. Before our release dates, we have all these good intentions and plans to leave the street life behind.

But once we get out there reality pushes us into bad positions. We experience frustration with our parole agents controlling us and low paying jobs that don't pay the bills. Our relationships with family, friends, and loved ones come with pressure and responsibilities that we haven't handled in years. Our defenses get worn down and then one day we encounter the wrong male or female acquaintances that we know we shouldn't hang out with because they're bad news. However, we also know their fun. We tell ourselves that we've been good and deserve the chance to be a little bad and have some fun.

When we get away with it we start doing it more often. Soon we're routinely drinking, using drugs, hanging out with the wrong people from the seedy side of the streets. Suddenly our low paying jobs seem unacceptable when we can make a lot more money instantly by selling drugs or thieving. Soon we have to live a life of crime to support our habits. We get scared to go see our parole agent because we know we'll test dirty for drugs and alcohol and that we've left our low

paying jobs.

So, we skip parole appointments. Once we've skipped parole reporting we know we have a warrant out and we decide we may as well continue down the road we're on, lost in our addictions and lifestyle to support them.

I've lived this same route through six prison terms and I feel such self disgust and regret that words fail me. I couldn't accept that there was a clear line between legit and criminal. I thought everyone functioned in gray areas between legal and criminal. My crippling vices were largely alcohol and some drugs, criminal associations, and dating women like me. Bad girls, girls who had drug and alcohol addictions that ran in my circles.

I loved that gritty side of life on the streets and felt that I needed to be a part of it at least part-time. But it always took control of me. It always became full-time.

Now at age 47, I see there's no way for me to live part-time on the gritty side of the streets. There's no halfway part to it. It's all or nothing. Either I commit to leaving the streets behind full time or I'll be back in prison again.

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LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY GEORGE HOPKINS

Can you imagine disconnecting, severing ties, or leaving someone or something behind that you love, e.g. your mom, children, spouse; or a thing as simple as a hobby or job? In most of these cases it would take a cold blooded person to do so. Because when you love, a bond's formulated that prevents one from separating from the other.

If you agree with this, you should understand why some people (such as myself) are hard-pressed when it comes to "Leaving the Streets Behind." Why? Well an affinity to that which destroys us i.e. the streets become our number one passion, and love, and with that cohesion comes into play. It's as if the very thing we searched for in our family has mysteriously appeared in the streets. Only a madman could conjure a love, for a thing that doesn't love back, and parallel it to his or her family. Of Course, I wasn't sane...However, in my debauchery I missed the warning and surrendered to the essential elements that kept me upright.

Discernment is a real thing, and when it kicks in one has to recollect all their past decisions to determine if this is the life they want to lead. In doing that I stumbled across a verse in the Quran that revealed the insanity, we as a people, are subject to:

2:216, "...But it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you..."

In this, I discovered that it's plausible – though it may be wrong – to love something that is bad, but dislike something that is good. So I analyzed what the streets have given me; trying my best to justify my anomic personality. But nothing added up. There was money, but as the expense of exploiting someone's weakness; women came with that however, misogyny was at the forefront; then there was drama and war with those of the same profession, never really understanding the profound impact it would cause for the children

who witnessed these actions, or the lost of a loved one. It's easy to become desensitized when living that kind of life. The streets take a toll out and a little bit of soul out.

My myopic view was soon to be cleared and insanity was no longer about me, but instead I felt like a person afforded the ability to see the banality in my error amongst the whole human race. The revelation was eye opening. It forced me to divorce the one thing I felt as much love for as my family. Someone once told me, "all relationships don't last – especially those that are toxic to your well-being." I'd be lying if I said it was easy to walk away, but since doing so, people see a change in me that I'm proud of.

Some would argue that, when you walk away don't look back, and with good reason. For it shows an internal stronghold that said thing has on you, but I strongly disagree and recommend – only to those strong enough – to muster a mustard seed of strength and face that which almost destroyed you. I know, who wants to go back in the trenches after narrowly escaping? For that takes courage, however, the reward of altruism is well worth it. The reason for this is to heave, pull, or guide those that you left behind, as Harriet Tubman once said, "I will not be free until all my brothers and sisters are free." This same concept applies here. To be perfectly honest anyone that does contrary to this not only shows a trace of weakness, but also misanthropy.

So now, I have taken the responsibility of reaching back into the not-too-distant past; a place where I thrived to try and influence those I left behind by telling my story; one that would resonate with them. Willfully they'll respond in the right manner under my tutelage. I guess I never truly leave the streets behind when you look at it from my standpoint.





DIVORCING MY FIRST LOVE

BY GUILLERMO ALVAREZ

I am twenty-eight years old and a proud father of four beautiful little girls. I am a life-inmate here at one of the “CDCR-INN’s.” I am from the Central Valley, born and raised, from Bakersfield, California, but I have family up and down the “99” freeway.

My parents split up when I was five years old, so I would travel back and forth to visit my mom from Pixley to Bakersfield and other towns in between. I grew up learning the ropes from these various towns and became so attracted and magnetized to that walk of life.

At first, I began to seek acceptance from the kids on the blocks. I played sports and did stunts/tricks on my bicycle. The older kids then started pumping me up to egg a house, or “moon” a cop, or throw stuff at passing cars; even pick fights with other kids, which I did. Eager to make those guys proud and have them accept me as I grew older, I caught on to their tactics, and ventured off on my own. By the time I was eleven, I had earned a reputation that I was down for whatever with whoever. The neighborhood boys and girls started calling me crazy and I embraced it. My family made me feel like I was of no worth at all, so why attempt to please them?

In school, I would fight to prove my point or just to bully others. I developed this I D.G.A.F. attitude towards the world and by the age of thirteen, I quit worrying about my pops beating me. The acceptance from the streets was far more precious to me. The most respected people I knew were from gangs, so I picked up a flag and started chunking up the letter “C” thinking I was Snoop Dogg!

The way people looked at me, made me feel like I finally mattered. I started to flunk in school, just to fit the bill even more. My grade point average plummeted from 4.0 to 2.0, and I dropped out of sports, even gave up on writing and literature. I was “The Man” now, living my life, being tough. Nobody could tell me a

damn thing, and when my homies died, I became grandiose, thinking I was invincible and even immortal. I was truly in love with the streets!

When I would visit my mom, I was known as the “crazy kid from Bakersfield.” Which in itself became an entire new love; like fame away from fame. The infamy overwhelmed me but fueled that passion to be all that I could be, “A Ghetto Marine.”

The criminal romance with the streets climaxed when I went to prison with a life-sentence. Instantly, I went from being a “G” to being a street legend and that’s when I woke up. The cold reality set in that I was not invincible, nor was I immortal. Everything I thought I had accomplished before prison meant zero here.

Now I was at a crossroad, contemplating at twenty-two years old: Do I keep digging this hole, or do I try to pull my head out of my behind? So, I started attending church, joined the choir, and even joined a music band that got to perform during the visits.

I enrolled in the Mental Health program to help me try and work on my broken mind. I even signed up for all the self-help groups that the prison had to offer us.

I got back into literature, and rekindled my love of writing. Dr. Vargas boosted my self-esteem when she let me co-facilitate her anger management group. After that, I started earning chronos/certificates, one after the other, even from correspondence courses. Of course, I still bumped my head because old ways die slow, but my commitment to change was stronger than the addiction.

It was the furthest thing from easy, especially when you ostracize yourself in here for doing good. However, I pushed on because I wanted to make my





daughters proud of me, and my growth made me feel amazing about myself.

I signed up for “Office Services” (a vocation) and I graduated from the Substance Abuse Program. I even enrolled in college (two of them), and I’m twenty units shy of earning two degrees. Currently, I have earned over 50 certificates and chronos, but the number grows with my success.

I am now a peer mentor in the S.U.D.T. program, working alongside the counselors in facilitating groups. I also facilitate the Lifer’s Group here. Not to toot my own horn (Toot-Toot), but I turned my life around completely, by the grace of the Most High! Yes, I still

struggle, and I am still a Life Inmate, but that doesn’t define me as a human, nor does it bind me to a criminal lifestyle.

I’m going to see the parole board shortly, confident that I’ll earn my freedom. If it gets delayed, I will still continue to push myself towards being the best me that I possibly can be, day in and day out.

No matter where we find ourselves in life, change is possible. If I can do it, on an active line in the California prison system, nobody can make excuses. Y(our) future is only what you make it. It’s up to you to fall and sink, or to rise up and be better than you were yesterday.

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PUTTING THE STREETS BEHIND ME

ADDICTION, THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ADDICT

BY JOSEPH L. MYERS

I was born in Warren, Ohio on August 25, 1987, a nice size town 20 minutes outside of Youngstown, Ohio. I have two older brothers, a mother and a father. When I was three years old, I burned our family home to the ground. My father rebuilt the house and four years later, I would set fire to our home once again.

By 1994, I was 7 years old and living in a house with no electricity, water, or gas. My father became an abusive alcoholic, and my mother became depressed. She started abusing anxiety medication. It was like they both forgot they had children and a responsibility to raise young boys.

By 1995, I was a 8 years old and my life would change for the worst. Crack cocaine would be introduced to my now abandon home and would turn into a crack house overnight. I went from watching cartoons and playing with the neighborhood kids to smoking crack cocaine right next to my mother and father, as if I was like one of their friends and not their 8 year old child. My childhood would stop right then, and there. I would find out what being addicted felt like. I would soon start an addiction of my own.

By the age of 9, I was robbing houses, stealing cars, carrying guns and selling drugs. I had to find a way to support my drug addiction and to make sure there was food in the house and kerosene for the kerosene heaters in the house. It was like become the man of the house or go without. I was out in the streets getting money any and every way I could. My oldest brother, Jeremy moved out and went to live with our grandmother. My brother Dave was in and out of (JJC), the Juvenile Justice Center and I would soon follow right behind him.

I did my first 30 days in JJC for arson. A guy paid me \$50.00 to burn down a garage. I got out of JJC

and went and stayed with my aunt. I went back in the streets doing whatever I wanted and she had me put into Foster Care for the summer.

My mother had left my father and was getting her life together. She had her own place so I could get out of Foster Care. It was me, my mother and my brother Dave living in this apartment. My father was still living in the house I burned down. It wasn't long until my mother started getting high again, having street walkers and drug dealers running in and out of the house.

I started getting high again and I robbed one of the biggest drug dealers in Warren for \$6,000 worth of drugs and money. This guy was not happy with me, he shot up the house, came back with his boys and kicked in the door. They beat up all three of us. We packed up and moved back in with my father for about 3 weeks. Then the four of us moved to Fairmont, West Virginia into this homeless shelter. We were trying to get a fresh start on life, putting the streets behind us.

By 1998, I was 11 years old, living in Fairmont, West Virginia. The four of us was living in a homeless shelter with 60 other people. Living in a homeless shelter is not fun and going to school from there was even harder. Kids were making fun of me for the way I talked, because I was from a city and didn't talk like them. They also made fun of me because I lived in a homeless shelter. I started getting into fights at school and got put in a boys home for two years in Pittsburgh, PA.

My father was kicked out of the homeless shelter for drinking right after I got sent off to the boy's home. My father and mother realized they were not going to save our family, and they split up and my father moved back to Ohio with my older brother. They both lived at my grandmother's house.



My mother met a guy from Erie, PA, a truck driver. This guy seemed to be a really good dude. He seemed to care about my mother a lot. My mother finished nursing school and moved to Erie with her new boyfriend. By 2000, my mother's boyfriend had helped her get me out of the boy's home. I moved in with them and started going to school. I was starting my new life, putting the street life behind me. My mother had a good nursing job. Her boyfriend drove his truck all week long and would come home on the weekends. I finished the school year and met a lot of kids. I was hanging out, finally being a kid doing young teen things.

I started going on the road with my mother's boyfriend, so I can see different States and see the world. I would also help unload the truck and make money. Then things got strange. I'll never forget this incident. We were at this place called South of the Boarder right on the North Carolina and South Carolina line. I was getting ready to go to bed in the back of the truck when my mother's boyfriend tried paying me so he could sexually assault me. He would force himself on me and make me watch sex videos with him. I never went to the cops because I didn't want to hurt my mother.

By 2001, I was in another boy's home in Albion, PA. It was a real nice place only 5 boys, the family was church people. I wanted to stay at this boys home until I turned 18 but my mom wouldn't sign her rights over. So I got out in 2002 and moved back to Ohio. My mom and her boyfriend moved to Ohio too. My mother got him smoking crack cocaine and they were going downhill fast.

I started running the streets and joined a street gang. I was back to taking care of myself so I did what I knew best, robbed houses, cars, stores and people and sold drugs. I was in and out of Juvenile Detention Centers in three different states. Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. I was out of control. There was no stopping me. I got out of my last Juvenile Detention Center when I was 19 years old. I was in West Virginia at the time. I got on a bus and went back to Ohio.

I got right back into my old ways. I came home to nothing so I had to go out and get it. I came face

to face with death one night. I had a gun stuck in my mouth over a lot of drugs and money. Somehow, I made it out alive.

I went and got my brother Dave and we moved out of Ohio and back to Pennsylvania. We moved to a small town called Warren, PA. I was ready to really start over and make a life for myself. I knew it was going to be hard and I would fall along the way, but I was tired of living in them streets. I was tired of robbing, stealing and selling drugs. I was tired of hurting myself, and everyone around me.

I met this beautiful girl name Lacey and we ended up getting married two years later. Me, Lacey and my brother Dave would get a place together. Things were a lot better. I thought I was doing good because I was married to the girl of my dreams. She was smart and came from a good family, and would give me anything I wanted. I had a job, a car I was paying for, but before I knew it my demons would catch up to me and drag me backwards. I started using cocaine again. My wife and I eventually split up in 2010 and I would turn two years of probation into 12 years in prison. My max is 6/22/2022.

I'm incarcerated now and up for parole soon. Since I've been incarcerated, I've gotten my G.E.D. and got a few trades in the field of Construction, Carpentry and Plumbing. I hate to say it but prison saved my life and opened my eyes to a future. A lot of the old timers taught me morals, respect and how to go about life in a different way. They taught me how to put the streets behind me for good.

To leave the streets behind you, means everyone in those streets got to go. I know my family is a big down fall for me and they aren't ready to change their lives so I had to cut all ties with them. I had to make the choice of bettering my life, and letting them live their own lives. I love them to death but I have to love them from a distance.

I will not walk out of these doors and turn to those streets, not again. I have too much respect for myself and for the ones that have not given up on me.





I'm ready to start a family and watch my kids grow up. I gave those streets 20 years, I don't have any more in me. I have to focus on what has worked (or is working), rather than on what hasn't worked (or isn't). I had to change people, places, and things and really want better

for myself.

I wasn't only addicted to the drugs. I was also addicted to the streets and the fast life. Addiction is the key to this story, overcoming it is my biggest goal.





GANGSTER LEANING

BY EXCELLUS O. HYLAND

I remember the song “Gangster Lean,” by Dirty Rotten Scoundrels when I was growing up. A hypnotic, soulful ballad about the ending of men’s lives to the streets, and ironically, I wanted to be a gangster as a result. To be able to be a part of such a classical hit of the outcomes of street living was my everything.

This was crazy within itself because the outcomes were death or imprisonment. Nevertheless, I still took to the streets. Delving into crime, I was living that Gangster Lean and loved it, then I was arrested.

My arrest was in 1997. I was fifteen years old at the time. I’m now thirty-six years old and still incarcerated in that Gangster Lean. During my incarceration, I have reflected on the song “Gangster Lean.” The life of a gangster is death or prison, sometimes both in the process. This left me solemn in spirit with an additional self-loathing. Why did I set myself up for failure like this, has been a recurring question that I asked myself for over two decades now.

All I wanted was the glory of the streets, the celebratory reception as reflected in the “Gangster Lean” video; people pouring out liquor in honor, coming out with their tricked out cars with their exotic interior to represent my life on the streets. Foolish me, because I couldn’t drink none of the liquor in my cell, nor if I was in the grave. And my riding days were in a tricked out bus with customized cages as its interior, so any dreams of riding in a tricked out car were only dreams. Basically, I assume that living the street life would give me popularity and fame. Popularity and fame in the

streets were to me the equivalent of love. But from my current incarceration, I have come to the realization that the streets don’t have any love.

My memory is a statistic. My accomplishments are ridiculous. My memory is waste and I haven’t accomplished anything in that gangster lean but being in prison. And it sure wasn’t worth it. None of it. The crimes. The drugs. The tragedies thereof. I could do without it all. I have a few more calendars to go before my release from prison, and I plan on getting back out there doing what I suppose to do. Leaving the streets behind me. I plan to lean on to life when I get free. Too legit to quit!

There’s a part in the “Gangster Lean” song that singer pleads to God to pass on a message for him to his dead homey. With that in mind, I now ask God to pass on a message for me to those who are living that gangster lean.

I ask God, ... “COULD YOU TELL THEM TO START BETTER MEMORIES, TO LIVE LIFE ABUNDANTLY. STOP THE DRUG USE, PUT DOWN THE GUNS. LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY FOR PEACE.” “AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, LEAVE THOSE STREETS...”

I hope the message is heeded and the “Gangster Lean” song remains a classic but not a way of life for anybody because the streets don’t love nobody, anybody, to be proper. I plan to leave it behind since the streets sure don’t mind leaving whomever roams them behind.





LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY PERRY BURRIS

Leaving the streets behind - that's a tough pill to swallow. Especially for those of us that are doing time with them significant letters (L.I.F.E.), and the ones that have them significant numbers, (20 to 40, 30 to 60, 40 to 80,) etcetera. Then you have some of us who have nothing more than a 1 to 2 year sentence or even a 2 ½ to 5 year sentence, and what's crazy about that is, up here in these prisons, the ones with the lesser time seems to be the so called gangsters. They are always getting into trouble. Why can't they leave the streets behind? That's a good question. I am doing a 30 to 60 year sentence for a crime that did not occur yet, here I am. That's another topic. Now, back to leaving the streets behind.

I know I've been coming in and out of prison since I was 11 years old and that is something that I am not proud of. I've left behind a beautiful woman and two beautiful daughters, time and time again. I feel so small. But what I am trying to do is become accustomed to success, something I never had a chance at in society because I was too busy ripping and running the streets. You here that? I was on the streets and couldn't leave the streets behind. However, what I can tell you is that when I did leave the streets behind, I stayed out of trouble.

Furthermore, it is hard for some convicts to leave the streets behind. What people in society do not know is that everyday life in prison and what goes on within the walls, gates, bars, and cages is synonymous to what goes on in the streets. People get caught up and catch drug charges, weapons charges, assaults and even rapes. These are the actions that occur in the streets, their unjustifiable and without conviction. We did not have any elders to lead us and show us what is right from what is wrong. It seems as though we cannot leave the streets behind for our own selfish and personal reasons.

However, that is not to say that we cannot change, and make a difference while we are in prison. We can change to lifestyles that was quite the contrary

to the lifestyles we once lived. We may not be out in society with our loved ones physically, but we can be there for them mentally, morally and spiritually, by way of conversing with them through letters, especially with our children. A letter can go a long way with our children if we are firm in our convictions and stern with the lessons in which we need to convey to them. If we have a lot of time to do, we should leave the streets behind by getting more involved with our children's lives and grandchildren, for those of us who do have grandchildren. We have to keep them on the positive side of the track. Positive! What does this world mean? It means: clearly expressed, decisive; confident; that which may be affirmed.

How hard is it for us to not only teach this to our children through our correspondence? We need to tell them to exit the clubs and enter the classrooms, leave the bars alone and enter libraries in search of their volumes and volumes of knowledge.

Also, some of us finds it hard to leave the streets behind because some of us are actually innocent and the only thing we know is the streets and people in the streets that could help us attain our freedom. I want to leave the streets behind but I can't and that is because I have too many people out there that I hurt and that I need to communicate my sincere apologies to, and reimburse them with joy instead of pain. (Mother), Love instead of heartbreak, (Najah & Nijera, my daughters), Happiness instead of sorrow, (Jeanette, their mother), companionship instead of dysfunction and non-association, (My siblings). I guess, I can't leave the streets behind.

What about those of us in prison that have many opportunities lying in wake and we just look past them. Such as, all the vocational programs, Business Management, Electric and Basic Electricity, HVAC, Masonry, Plumbing etc. Some of us, with a lot of time partake in if not one but all of the programs,



even though we do not have the chance at using any of the skills on the streets because there is no future date of release for us. Or, by the time we are released we are too old to get hired by the employers offering these positions. We only do these programs to educate ourselves, and because we have no choice but to leave the streets behind. We embark on a journey into these programs to get better paying jobs not because we are going home, but for means of survival. I mean, there is no nexus in relation to us going back to the streets so my introspection on this is to try and find a way to make enough money to help and aid our loved ones on the streets and that is as far as it goes for us pertaining to the streets. Yes! We can leave the streets behind but not our loved ones.

In conclusion, I would like to say to the brothers with a little bit of time: "Leave the streets behind and educate yourselves so that when you return to society, you can help build a better household, a better community, a better State, a better Nation for

your children and their children to come. Leaving the streets behind is a hard pill to swallow looking at the ends and outs, the ups and downs and the storm with it's thunder. Some of us have to, but most of us cannot.

Note: I end this missive by saying time is changing for the worse in the streets, and off the streets, in all aspects of life. Therefore, it is best to wake up now and try to become a solution to the problems that is on the horizon. Peace!

P.S. If anyone has any constructive criticism, please feel free to respond to the address below:

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LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY MICHAEL JENKINS

Leaving the streets behind is something I thought I would never be able to do, but thanks to prison, the struggle of life, and years of incarceration, I was able to do so. It may sound crazy, and maybe it is but that's what it took for me. I fell in love with everything the streets consisted of; money, drugs, and homeboys. I didn't want anything else! I lived for the hype. All was good until I went to jail for something someone I thought was a homeboy did. That's when everything started to unfold, when I caught this prison term, all the ones I considered friends were really foes. Homeboys turned to strangers, and that's when I found all doors were closed on me. It took time for reality to set in, but the truth was very clear. As days turned to months, and months turned to years, my life started to reshape.

My family turned out to be my only friends, and the real ones who cared about me. When I was in the streets, I thought I had it all, but truth be told, I had nothing at all. I went from a boy to a man in prison, and the streets had nothing to do with that.

As time passed, I grew more and more. I lost a lot of people I loved while in prison, due to the mistakes I made while running the streets. A mother I can never tell I love you again, or Happy Birthday, and I'm sorry for all the pain I caused you. A grandmother I can never hug, or talk to again. This is a pain I can never live down, or get rid of! Each and every day I'm reminded of why I'm leaving the streets behind.

The streets were my downfall, and what almost ended my life. But thanks to the mercy of God, I was given another chance. One I probably don't deserve, but I have and will take advantage of. There use to be a time in my life when leaving the streets was unheard of, but now I can't see it no other way. When I left the streets, I had three daughters, one was seven, one, and my youngest was still in her mother's stomach. Now my oldest will be 23 this year, my middle daughter 17,

and my youngest 15. I had to be in my daughter's lives through bars and walls because I chose the streets. My youngest daughter didn't really know me like she should or wanted to because I've been in prison her whole life.

I was so selfish because I wanted the streets instead of my family. The streets over my responsibilities, Right? Wrong! Do you know how it feels to have your child come up to you and ask "are you my daddy?" That crushed my world, and I knew it was all my fault. So leaving the streets behind is a must for me.

There is so much that goes into leaving the streets behind that cannot go overlooked. Can a person's mistakes be forgiven, even if not forgotten? Can a person who has fallen rebuild, restructure, and restore his or her life so that they can move forward? It takes great strength to learn and grow from your wrong doings so you don't repeat those actions.

- A) Surrounding ourselves with people who are trying to do the same things
- B) Changing our environments as well as the people we use to hang around.

These are some of the most important things I believe it takes to put the streets behind us. Prisons are a very hard and unbreakable teacher, but it helped me become the person I am today. It also showed me the old person I never want to become again.

Leaving the streets behind isn't something that can be accomplished overnight. It's a never ending job that's going to take hard work, and dedication. I know now what I want, what I love, and what's important. My family!

I've learned to care about myself and the choices I make. I'm sick of being tired, and hurting the only people who cared about me. When all the time was given, all the judges were gone, there were no friends of





mine to be found. The homeboys who said they loved me never sent me one dime, never wrote one word. I'm no longer deaf, dumb, or blind! Everyone doesn't get a second chance, so after weighing out my options it was very clear to see what choice I was making.

I no longer care about the streets, or anything the streets consist of, so each day I'm blessed to see, I think back so I'll never forget I'm leaving the streets behind!

A Message from the author: These are real words, real situations from a real person. I hope they reach you!

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LEAVING IT ON THE STREET

BY DENNIS MINTUN

When I think about the subject of “Leaving it on the Street,” a lot of different things come to mind. In some ways, leaving it on the street could be a good thing. However, in others it wouldn’t be.

For example, because I am a prison inmate, there are a lot of things I “left on the street” that I miss terribly. I had a thriving business that I was in the process of incorporating. I’d just purchased a lot of state of the art equipment, and had hired some new employees. After I was arrested, everything was sold at an auction for pennies on the dollar. Over \$50,000 worth of inventory and equipment was sold for \$4,000.00!

However, the loss of my business is nothing next to what I really left on the street... my family. It was bad enough that I would not see them again for at least 25 years. What was worse was that my arrest and conviction caused a family split. While some of my family took my side, and supported me through everything, most of my family completely disowned me. Many of them won’t even let the few who stayed in contact tell me anything about those other family members. To me – leaving people I love “on the street” is far worse punishment than my lengthy prison sentence.

When you are in prison, reference to “the streets” means everything outside of the fences or walls of the prison. Besides the big things...things that we tend to take for granted, like Big Macs or Kentucky Fried Chicken; going for a Sunday drive or a baseball game; being able to close the door when you use the restroom; or the ability to choose what clothes I wear each day.

Then there’s the other side of “leaving it on the street.” That’s leaving behind those things that have been harmful to yourself and to others. On that side of the coin, there are a lot of things I’ve left behind that I am truly grateful for. Yes, there’s the usual things... drugs, alcohol, gambling, and a myriad of other bad

habits – including smoking. Every now and then, I still feel like I would love to light up. But, when I was “on the street,” I was smoking 2-3 packs a day. Though that was 15 years ago, I have to use an asthma inhaler every so often because of that habit.

One thing that many people don’t think about is the endless “treadmill of life” we often find ourselves on. When I was on the street, I was stuck on that treadmill. Sure, I was successful... on paper. In reality, my life was going nowhere. It actually took me going to prison, and then going through a number of traumatic experiences, to finally wake me up to what “leaving it on the street” is really about.

Leaving it on the street is about letting go. Letting go of your bad habits. Letting go of your past. Letting go of remorse and regret. It is about living in the now, which includes looking towards the future.

No matter what we’ve done in the past – no matter how bad, or “evil” we’ve been, if we truly “leave it on the street,” and realize who we can be; what we can accomplish, we can make the world a better place, for ourselves and for others.

Even those streets that we’ve left it all on can fill us with hope and drive. After all, that’s what streets are for: to drive on, rather than to park on.



LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY CETH HAMNER

One of the hardest things I have ever done in the entirety of my life is leave my home and all the material things and people I love behind. I had managed to break the rules of society and was forced to pay for my criminal recklessness by coming to prison and serving out a sentence the prosecution was gladly waiting to give me.

Leaving the streets behind causes a real emotional hardship on a prisoner and that individual's friends and family as well. Everyone who cares anything about the prisoner gets punished, because they feel obligated to stand by their loved one. That is the primary reason why it is so important to always keep in mind, before you go to breaking any type of law that you are not just taking a chance of only getting yourself punished, but all of those who love you. Whether you intentionally mean to do it or not, whenever you leave the streets behind you don't only walk out and away from all the people who hold you dear, but you lose many of your constitutional rights becoming a prisoner along with your freedom as well.

It is very important to always keep in mind that there is definitely no future or benefits in becoming a convict. It is strictly a lose all and no win situation. Depending upon what crime you have committed and how much time you will be required to serve to satisfy the state or federal government for your debt to society and your victim, you stand to possibly lose any amount of money and material possession you have acquired up that point in your life. What is so sad about it all is the majority of criminals never even have that concept before committing a crime. It is almost as if criminals are paying for a crime with credit because they act and then pay for their actions dearly later down the road.

I can honestly tell you that living the life of a prisoner is living a life without a purpose or meaning that has no future rewards. You no longer have the chance of eating what you want when you want. There

is no such thing as going out on a date with a gorgeous man or beautiful woman, whichever your preference to have dinner and a movie with. The going and doing as you want or please is restricted and over. There is no cable television or bubble baths and it is the furthest thing from a vacation resort you could possibly even imagine.

To put it to you plainly, it is a miserable lifestyle that is filled with violence, and hate that you can't just walk or run away from whenever you choose. You are forced to deal with the circumstances until you are released back out onto the streets. It is a vicious world that lies inside the world you are familiar with. The only thing that separates the two is a lot of concrete, steel, and razor wire fences. In the end whenever everything is said and done what you must understand is that the bottom line is this right here, "there is no such thing as luxury or comfort inside any prison system." It is simply a place designed for warehousing humans. Prison is a revolving door and as long as you are here you are filling bed space so the Government can collect all the hardworking taxpayer's money.

The biggest things that I have learned throughout the many years I have served in prison is you never take anything for granted and crime don't pay. There is never a day that goes by that I don't miss being at home with my friends and family and look forward to the day I can be again.

The biggest mistakes I have ever made in my life is no comparison to leaving the streets behind because everything I value and hold dear is out there.

The greatest advice I can give anyone is to never take your life or freedom for granted, and enjoy it to the very fullest and stay away from criminal activity because crime don't pay. Don't ever take the chance of leaving the streets because if you ever do you will live to regret it.





LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY ALPHONSO T. TANNER

Opportunities blasting in my eardrums, but I'm too high to listen to them. My next high is so close but too far away to even pay attention. Like being stuck between a rock and hard spot.

Respectfully time does not stand still, but I do because the streets ahead of me is full of licks that I must accomplish to flip my money, or make my next sale, or my next trick. These opportunities lie ahead in the streets for me. I know my son needs diapers and milk. My mom needs gas money too. I could go to work with my uncle and do landscaping for today. But that's only fifty or sixty dollars. I could make that in one sale or lick in five minutes. So why waste all day cutting grass? Picking weeds?

My spouse is constantly tripping. So I stay away. Who needs drama? It blows my high. Just one of those powerful spenders and I'll go in. Okay, yeah, this one looks familiar.

As a yellow Toyota truck pulls up to the curve, I dub stub out my black and mild and pull out my Garcia Vega tube full of crack rocks. "What's up buddy? I hope your spending big today." I got them fat jugulars so if you ain't spending five hundred you wasting your time."

The dude in the truck pulled out seven one hundred dollar bills and said "man, hook a brother up!" The fifteen slugs I dumped in his hands caused his eyebrows to rise.

I received the money and walked off down tenth street. As I placed the money in my pocket of my black t-shirt I could hear the four barrels of a car approaching. I turned about to see a bunch of masked clad men in all black t-shirts that had Orange County Sheriff on front was jumping out and running at me. They were pointing glock nines and tasers with red beams screaming Freeze don't move! I kneeled down with my hands up and my head down.

As the officer placed the bracelets on my skin the cold from the steel sets in and I look up to see my son Nigel staring at me out the window of my mom's van and the van comes to a stop. My baby momma, "Tina" comes around the van and curses the police out saying, "Y'all always messing with my man!"

The officer said "yeah! He's always selling dope in these Apopka Streets!" She said, "well he got a bond?" The police said yeah! Seven hundred and fifty!"

As they picked me up and walked me to the van, they searched me for the money and dope, and came up empty handed. I looked at my baby momma and she was spitting out sunflower seeds and smiling. I looked down by the fire hydrant and saw my bag of sunflower seeds were gone. I had folded the money and put it and the rest of my rocks in the sunflower seed bag and dropped it by the sidewalk.

Tanner! Tanner! Alphonso Tanner! Pack it up, you have been bonded out!

I was in a deep sleep. I wiped my mouth with my towel and splashed water on my face and examined the look of my sunken eyes. After all these years I've spent more time trying to stay out of trouble and staying in the streets. I grabbed my picture of my son, my mother and my baby momma that they let me sneak and keep out of my wallet.

I got my contact card and gave the booth clerk my jail number and name. I fled down the hallway. I had tears in my eyes cause I knew at any time, I'll be coming back for sure if I keep doing what I'm doing so I decided that it's time that I should be "Leaving the Streets Behind."



LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY ANTHONY TATE

Leaving the Streets Behind is a topic that I can really, really, relate to, there are many reasons why we must leave the streets behind. One is my relationship with my higher power, which I choose to call God. God is my strength and the foundation that I pull my strength from to do all sorts of positive things. God is the source that gives me the strength and mindset to write to you all from behind these walls.

One thing I have learned is that I don't have the strength on my own to leave the streets behind. I have tried many times on will power alone and I always backslide. When we fail in life it can be a positive motivation. Failure will make you successful if you use it in a positive way.

The President of the United States has failed many times but look at him now, (Mr. Donald Trump), POTUS. Anything in life worth having comes with a high price. "Self sacrifices," making them will help you on your journey to leave the streets behind. Alcohol and drugs should not be put first and foremost. Family, kids, husband, life, pets, whatever it may be that you care about enough to want to change should be put first. We have been putting ourselves first for so long that we have pushed these things to the back burner and most of us have pushed them completely out of our life. But don't fear! As long as we have breath in us, we can repair some of the damage that the streets has inflicted on us. The key is: wanting to change.

Ask yourself this question; Do I want to change?

Let me tell you, (change is healthy.) It's normal to get stuck in your ways and fear change that's what we do as a society. You have to find the strength to step out on your faith or forever be stuck in that same rut.

Take an inventory of yourself and your life and make yourself a plan and set some goals. Don't try to do it all at once. We didn't get the way we are overnight.

This is a build up of years and it's going to take years to unwind this ball of thread that is our life.

What matters most to you?

There is always a way out, remember this! Help is out there. Support groups. Spotlight on Recovery Magazine loves you and I know that Ms. Robin will help you if you really want to leave the streets behind. Take me for an example. Ms. Robin is helping me by giving me a platform to write to you. Writing is therapy for me, and by this opportunity, I will have one more tool in my arsenal.

When it comes to leaving the streets behind in life, you have to go out and create your opportunity, show people that you want a better life and some people will help out and some won't. But always use the people that don't help you as a motivation. Never hate others because they won't extend a helping hand out to you. Life doesn't owe you nothing. Life is what you make it.

Excuses will only lead you back to the streets. I'm talking from experience. Been there and done that, and you see where I'm sitting at today. Lying to myself over and over again, not living in reality like I should have been. I was not being a man and facing life's problems head on, instead I was looking for ways to escape my problems through various drugs and alcohol.

No matter how bad my mother, sister, brother, grandma or any of the other people who loved me and wanted me to leave the streets behind, it wasn't happening until I chose to do it. Even though I have come far in my struggle, (I'm still struggling), and will be until the day I leave this beautiful world, leaving the streets behind is like leaving drugs and alcohol behind.

All of it is addictive, and everyday it's calling you, trying to get you back. Telling you that it's okay. No! It's not okay. One is like a thousand, it will take you





under. Keep the taste out of your mouth. The streets are going to be calling us for the rest of our life. The longer we resist, the easier it will get. Give yourself a chance. Haven't the streets taken enough from you? Think about the things that the streets has done to you and some of your loved ones, friends that the streets have taken under. The streets doesn't play nice, my little cousin was only 18 or 19 (R.I.P. Corby) and the streets took him. He was joking with a guy and the guy got mad and shot my cousin and killed him. Too young to die, and for no reason at that, but this is what comes along with the street life.

My cousins death is a legacy to be used to help other teens and adults. His story is my story and I'm forever grateful to him, his mother (Mrs. Melanie Griffin) my lovely aunt. There are so many people out there who have similar stories as mine. It's time to put the streets behind us, make the right changes in our life to be effective.

Start with self!

Anything that you want to change has to start with self. You can change the environment around you, you can move to kingdom come and think that since you have left the streets of a certain state or two that everything is okay. Well! It's not because you have taken the problem with you. You're the problem! Self change self and you won't have to move. We have to learn to stop knocking the top off the problem and learn to dig deep to the root of the problem, the streets are going to stay the same, you can't change them. Therefore, the

only other thing you can change is self and the way you think.

This is a process, one day at a time. Up your awareness and your behavior. Pay close attention to what you don't say. If you get out of the bed on the right side start getting out on the left side. If you always get up at 6:00, start getting up at 5:00. What I am saying to you is small changes add up to big changes. These small changes are helping you get use to change, they might seem insignificant, but they're not. You heard the saying "If you do the same thing you will be the same results." (I'm living proof of this.) What we are looking for is different results from the ones we always get and in order to leave the streets behind we have to change our ways, change our thinking, up our awareness and find the strength from wherever you choose. But most of all, we have to want to change.

Remember, you have to do it for self, not the judge, parole officer, mama, kids, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend, or B.F.F. If you do it for any other reason than for yourself, it's not going to last.

What if you get mad at one of these individuals, uh oh!, back to the streets with that one, so please be smart and most times common sense will get you far. (2018 Anthem) Let's leave the streets behind for good. What good has the streets done for us, ask yourself and if you can come up with 3 good answers, please write me. I want to hear them. I could only come up with one good thing that the streets have done for me, and that is to make me stay the hell out of them.

This issue of Spotlight on Recovery has been designed by:





LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY HERNANDEZ WILEY, AKA TRUTH

To all the loyal subscribers of Spotlight on Recovery, greetings. You are already familiar with my articles and my poetry and know my plight. For all the new subscribers, this is my story on how I left the streets behind.

I grew up in poverty on the deadly streets of Detroit, Michigan in the mid-seventies. Unfortunately, like a lot of African Americans, I never knew my father because of discrimination and oppression. I was not a stranger to God. My beloved mother was a pastor. She loved me and gave me all the love I needed, until she met and married a guy in her congregation that was an undercover dope fiend. He got her addicted to heroin and left her.

My mother eventually stopped preaching and became a thief and a prostitute to support her habit. She started abusing me, and we were evicted and I was homeless on the deadly streets of Detroit, by myself at the tender age of ten. I prayed and asked God to help me, but I do not think God was listening, because my situation did not change and my heart became cold. I started robbing and stealing to support myself. At the age of thirteen, I joined a drug organization. My street name was "Flatline." I had a deadly reputation and people feared me. I sold heroin and became rich.

Some robbers tried to rob me and my partner. He was killed during the attempted robbery. We retaliated, and at the age of seventeen in 1983 I went to prison for twenty years. When I was released in 2003, I didn't leave the streets behind. I was still temporarily insane in 2009, when I was set-up by the police and

the courts. I was wrongly convicted of a crime I did not commit. I was sentenced to thirty-five years, it made me grow up and come to my senses and start acting my age. Now I realize that crime don't pay, it costs you your life, or your freedom. There is nothing smart about being a gangster and if I could do it all over again, I would not break the law. I would stay in school and use my mind, and make something positive out of myself.

Now I know there is nothing clever about serving time, and when I am released from prison this time, I am surely going to leave the streets behind and be a law-abiding citizen and live off the proceeds of my talent.

I am a struggling poet, and song and manuscript writer. My poet name is Truth and I always tell the truth in anything I write, Being a poet is my dreams and aspirations, just in case there is someone out there who is interested in helping me to achieve my dreams. I have written a political poem and song titled "Ain't No Justice, It's Just Us." I hope to have my poem published and become known as a profound poet and novelist like Maya Angelou.

I am also a Civil Rights Activist in this modern day slavery they call prison and I started a movement in bondage titled "Prisoner's Lives Matter." When I am released, I would like to continue my activism in society. I would like to help adults as well as the youth with my poetry and songs and educate them concerning the truth.





TRANSFORMATION

BY DOUGLAS WASHINGTON

As I stroll through my old place of self-destruction I received an epiphany to my transformation.

“Hey, brother, what are you looking for?” a young dude asked.

“I found what I was looking for,” was my reply.

I found my strength and motivation to keep on my path to a more productive life style, and leaving the streets behind. From corner hustling to regular employment to self-employment is my planned route of transformation. Stepping away from the streets requires strength, courage, and a drive to break all barriers. With the odds against you, defy all odds.

The streets are an unspoken, but well-known path to destruction, which is the undertaker for some of the best minds. No matter your street life style or occupation, you have two end roads. It takes some people longer to reach their final destination, which is the prison system or the graveyard. There is so much wasted in life in the streets, loads of youth and beautiful minds going nowhere fast. Destroying self, others, and our communities; all at once for a quick profit or high. We self-destruct adding one more negative role model for the youth to an already very long list.

Coming from the streets myself, which landed me in the prison system, I know first-hand about destruction. The waste of some of the most beautiful and talented minds that have unlimited potential. It’s said that the late Malcolm X once said, “the next best place for a man besides college is prison.” We shouldn’t have to self-destruct to see our unlimited opportunities. I understand his (Malcolm’s) point because he went into the prison system Malcolm Little the street punk. However, he came out Malcolm X, the historical figure and leader. What a beautiful transformation he made by using his incarceration wisely to his benefit.

Why is there a need for incarceration, when all it takes is the drive for righteous betterment. We do not

need incarceration or near death experiences to awaken ourselves. Just a positive mind set and to surround ourselves with people who are experiencing success outside of the streets.

You should be stepping up, and taking control of your life and moving forward to leave the streets behind. You should be motivated, by seeing the results and failures of those who married the streets, which we all bear witness to everyday in some form or another. Therefore, why is it so hard to leave the streets behind? Wait, let me guess. “this is all I know.” No, absolutely not, it’s all you choose to know.

My personal transformation started with my mentality first, and foremost. Once I accepted that my life is the result of my decision-making, not my circumstances, I began to take control of my life, which I lost to the streets. I started wanting better and more out of life than a pine box or a cellmate. I awoken and began to take steps through education, goal setting, self-awareness, and self-discipline.

Once the mental transformation takes place, it’s a physical battle through actions. Every day you wake and proceed to further your plans, goals, and ambitions is a step further. I can tell you from personal experience it’s an uphill battle but one well worth the struggle. It pays to go with, than against the current of society. Where there is so much opportunity to those equipped with the proper knowledge and tools to advance, one could do just that.

You have a path of light, full of life, wealth, love, family, and prosperity. Then you have a path of darkness, full of pain, sickness, hate, death, and prison yards, for the temporary pleasure the streets have to offer. Is it worth the ramifications? In order to leave the streets behind, you must want to change for the better.

Overcoming the appeal of the streets is not a





hard thing. You just have to want better. Life in a cell or better yet an early death is all the motivation one needs. Leaving the streets behind is a continuous battle, because the streets are always calling, trying to pull you back. Strength is the root to your strong hold on a productive path. We all fall, some harder than others, no matter how hard you fall, it's about the getting up stage.

the transformation process. To be able to truly live with the possibility to tap into the unlimited opportunity life in America has to offer.

Leave the streets behind.

It's beautiful to see those who have went through

NOBODY CARES IT'S ALL MY FAULT I CAN'T EVER

WEAK I ALLOWED IT TO HAPPEN NO ONE WILL UNDERSTAND

TELL IT DOESN'T HAPPEN TO MEN I AM FINE NOBODY BELIEVES ME



Hope

Healing

Support

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I DESERVED IT REALLY IT WASN'T THAT BAD I'M





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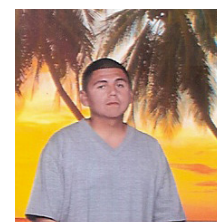
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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

GUILLERMO ALVAREZ About the author: My name is Guillermo Alvarez. I am from Central California, Bakersfield to be exact. I am currently pursuing two A.A.'s in Business and Social Behavioral Sciences. I have four beautiful daughters, and a strong relationship with the Most High via His Son Yahshua. Family is under-rated and laughter is still the best medicine. Let your eardrums dance to your heartbeats, love yourself!



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.

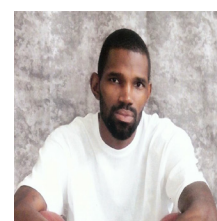


Presently serving a 50 year sentence in the Arkansas Department of Corrections, he is working toward receiving a reduction of sentence so that he may have a second chance at life. His contact information can be found on ADC.gov if you wish to communicate with him concerning any topic.

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 Stuttgart, Arkansas on January 17, 1978 and have not left. Arkansas is also known as the rice and duck capital of the world. In addition to writing for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine I wrote a book which I hope to be published.



GEORGE HOPKINS About the author: He is currently serving a prison sentence and takes full responsibility for his erroneous decisions in the past. However, since being incarcerated George has rehabilitated himself and now looks forward to becoming a positive asset to the community at large and no longer a liability. He is also a published author of 3 books that can be found on Amazon.com.

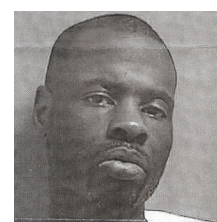


Book Titles: "On Time with Time" by George Hopkins; "Like Petals to a Rose" Volume 1 and 2 by Sahe (Pen name)

To correspond with George, you can write to:

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MICHAEL JENKINS About the author: This is Michael Jenkins' second article for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. His work also appeared in the Spring issue of Spotlight on Recovery Magazine, Youth and Crime.



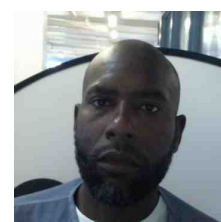


CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

TOM KROPP About the Author: Tom Kropp is a sensei in Kenpo Karate that has won numerous tournament awards. His work has appeared in Muscle and Fitness, Woodworker's Journal, Outdoor Life, Nut House, J Journal and Conceit and Chiron magazine.

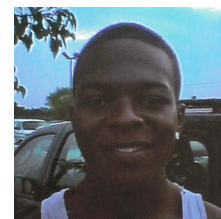


ALPHONSO TANNER My name is Alphonso Tarrod Tanner. I'm 39 years old, 5' 9" tall dark skinned Muslim man who loves to write books and poetry. I am from Apopka, Florida and I am currently writing several books. I'm a proud writer for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine and wish to continue to be on this team. It is refreshing and helps me cope with daily challenges.

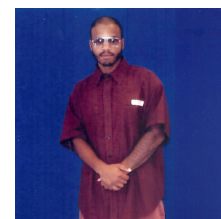


If you want to reach me, you can reach me at
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G. WAHID A message from the author: Peace! I come to you humbly in the name of Glenn Bradley. As a author, I go by the name of G Wahid, which stands for Glenn the unique one. I was born December 7, 1987 in Inkster, Michigan. I am the father of four beautiful children. I've been married once but divorced due to a lengthy prison incarceration. As a man, I would like to describe myself as laid back. I wouldn't say passive, I just carry myself humbly. I'm clean cut and take pride in keeping myself together. I love to travel and spend time with the family. I'm into good food, art, reading, and fashion. I love growth. I am self taught and consider myself well-read. Writing is therapeutic for me because it has given me a voice in this world as well as a sense of belonging.



DELBERT WILLIAMS About the author: Delbert Ray Williams, is a Paralegal, and volunteers as a Yoga and Meditation instructor. He also facilitates Character Development group session where he mentors young men in prison. Mr. Williams is driven by his desire to help others and he works to leave a positive impression on the world around him. Mr. Williams has authored two books. His essays and poems have appeared in various newsletters and magazines including: Spotlight on Recovery, Blue Collar Review, Inside Gentlemen, The Green Line, and The Rumpus Report.



PERRY BURRUS 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" Burrus 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



CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

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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LESTER BROWN About the Author: This is Lester's fourth article for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. He submitted poems for "Rock Bottom" and "Bearing the Cross." I believe in his passion as a writer and in the words he writes. I most certainly look forward to reading more of his articles and poetry.

EXCELLUS O. HYLAND About the author: This is Excellus Hyland's first article for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. I have provided this issue with a strong message about the street life and the downfall. We look forward to hearing more from Mr. Hyland in the near future.

MICHAEL MCKINNEY About the author: Michael McKinney has been a contributing writer for Spotlight on Recovery for several years. Michael has grown as a writer and he continues to grow spiritually. We will welcome Michael as a contributing writer or Spotlight on Recovery Magazine.

DENNIS MINTUN About the Author: Dennis Mintun has been a regular contributor to Spotlight on Recovery Magazine since 2013, under the pen name of "Cougar Newquist." Because he uses the mistakes of his own past to help others overcome theirs – everyone knows who "Cougar" is. Dennis runs a thriving chapel group that focuses on personal empowerment and has published fiction and nonfiction books found at PrisonsFoundation.org.

JOSEPH L. MYERS About the author: Joseph L. Myers was raised in Warren, Ohio. He is 30 years old and in search of a brighter future. He is currently in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and is up for parole. When released from prison, he will reside in Erie, PA and work in Construction. In his free time he wishes to talk with young adolescents about Addiction and the Street Crimes. He is also working on a book (memoir) of his personal experiences with addiction.

Joe would like to correspond with other writers and readers of Spotlight on Recovery. You can write to him at:

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Also, look him up on Facebook – God Bless.





CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

ANTHONY TATE About the Author: Anthony began writing for Spotlight on Recovery last year. We are excited to have this new talent amongst our team of writers. To correspond with Anthony Tate, send all letters to:

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DOUGLAS WASHINGTON About the author: I am the only boy and youngest of six born on June 21, 1990. I am a 6'5", 215 pound African American male. I am a high school grad of the class of 2008 where I played varsity football. My hobbies are working out, reading, writing, listening to music and watching movies. I am single and never been married. I have no kids. I have an ambition to become an entrepreneur and a famous writer.

BRO. HERNANDEZ WILEY About the author: My name is Brother Hernandez Wiley. I am a poet, song, and manuscript writer. My poet name is Truth. I always tell the truth in anything I write. I'd like to receive feedback from Spotlight on Recovery subscribers. Send your correspondence to:

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Raiford, Fl 32083

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