Building Bridges
A Workbook for Children with an Incarcerated Parent

A Publication of Helping Our Prisoners Elevate, Inc.
Illustrations by Wayne K. Curtis
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Thank you to all the brothas who contributed to this project.
A special thanks to Shaka Senghor who wrote and edited much of this workbook.
This project would not have been possible without you!

This book is dedicated to our children’s children.
Pumoja Tutashinda! (Together, We Will Win!)
A Note from the Publishers

We know it isn’t easy having an incarcerated parent. You may be experiencing a flood of emotions. Sadness. Anger. Shame. Guilt. Confusion. All of these feelings are natural, but it is up to you how you deal with them. You can hold your feelings in and become bitter toward your parent, or you can share your feelings with your family and friends and learn how to deal with your parent’s incarceration more positively.

The purpose of this workbook is to help you sort out your feelings, and take the first steps toward building a healthy relationship with your parent. It was written with love by fathers who were once in prison themselves and some who are still incarcerated. Through their own experience bridging the gap between them and their children while in prison, they understand what you are feeling. Learn from their wisdom.

We wish you the best!
Some reports estimate that one out of every 14 children in the Black community has a parent in prison. For those children, life can be very hard growing up with a parent in prison. There are countless days of sadness and loneliness.

Each day brings a new challenge. There are those small everyday things, like wanting a father there to help you fix a flat tire on your bike or having your mother there to help you with your homework, that can be hard on any child. Then there are those significant life experiences that every child wants to share with both parents like birthdays, graduations and getting your driver's license.

For children with an incarcerated parent, life presents a whole host of challenges. Most children with a parent in prison suffer from low self-esteem, and feelings of abandonment. Some reports say that close to 70% of these children end up following in their parent's footsteps, finding themselves living their lives behind prison walls. But it doesn't have to be this way. Together, incarcerated parents and their children can put an end to this troubling trend and destroy the vicious cycle.

With this workbook, we will provide you with the tools to understand your parent's incarceration, and to gain an understanding of your feelings and thoughts in response to seeing your parent in prison. Having a parent in prison can be a
very negative experience. But in every negative experience there is a lesson to be learned. Sometimes you have to look very hard to find it, but trust us, there is a lesson in everything.

The greatest lesson we hope to share is that you create your own reality. You can choose to be bitter and angry about your parent’s incarceration and blame them for everything that isn’t right in your life, or you can become determined to make it in life and avoid the same poor decisions that your parent made. It’s up to you. You are not responsible for your parent being in prison. And more importantly, their incarceration is not a reflection of who you are or who you will become in life. Just because your parent made one or two bad decisions in life doesn’t make them a bad person, and it doesn’t make you a bad child. Take your destiny into your own hands!

As you read and do the exercises in this workbook, you will learn a lot about yourself and what you feel about your parent being incarcerated. Just remember that you can build a great relationship with your parent despite their incarceration and you can develop the tools you need to succeed in life in the process.
Exercise 1

How do I feel about my parent being incarcerated?

Write down how you feel about your parent’s incarceration. What emotions have you experienced? Sometimes writing down your feelings helps to let go of the hurt.

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How do you think your parent feels about being in prison?

As hard as it is on you as a child growing up without your parent being there, it is also hard on your parent. No mother or father feels good about leaving behind his or her children to be cared for by someone else. Put yourself in your parent’s shoes for a moment. How do you think they feel about being in prison?

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From A Daughter’s Point of View

Fifty percent of African-American youth are born either not knowing their fathers or their fathers chose not to be in their lives. Twenty-five percent of African-American youth are born with a father who’s incarcerated, and is therefore unable to be in their child’s life. Unfortunately, I was among the 25% who were born with an incarcerated father. Although my father was incarcerated, it didn’t stop him from seeing me develop into a young lady.

I went to visit my father every time I got a chance; from when I was born to the day he was released from prison. As I got older, I started to understand the reason my father was incarcerated. A lot of people think that it is difficult to have a loved one away from you for over six years, but to me it felt no different from having a loved one who lives in a different house than you.

My first trip to visit my father at the prison was very scary; I was afraid to walk in. I had never been to a place so big and with a lot of police officers watching everybody who was in the room. After my first time going to visit my father, I discovered it wasn’t really anything to be afraid of, and I started to like going to visit him every month. After awhile, I decided to start writing him letters weekly to keep him company when I wasn’t there. My letters consisted of things that I accomplished and things that
I did in that week. Then one day, I got a letter from my father saying that he was coming home soon, and that he was going to come and see me as soon as he got home.

From A Father’s Point of View

Coming home was a new beginning for my daughter and me. Like many parents who were incarcerated prior to their child being born, I was lost. I had to learn her likes and dislikes, and at the same time she had to accept this new person coming into her life. We talked about why I was not around, and what led to my imprisonment. We also talked about how I would make good decisions so that I wouldn’t be taken away from her and my family again.

I was so happy to see that my daughter didn’t look down on me for the mistakes that I had made in the past. We developed our relationship by going to the movies, shopping, and me participating in her school activities. Of all the things that we did, I think just spending time and being a part of her life was what she enjoyed the most.
We understand that you may be upset with your parent for leaving you or confused about why they are in prison. That’s natural. But you may not know how to deal with what you are feeling. There may be times when you don’t want to talk to anyone. Or times when you might act out in school. We all deal with our feelings differently. Fill in the blanks below, describing how you respond when you have a particular feeling related to your parent’s incarceration.

When I’m sad, I _____________________________________________________________.

When I’m angry, I _____________________________________________________________.

When I’m ____________________________ , I _________________________________.
(name a feeling)

When I’m ____________________________ , I _________________________________.
(name a feeling)

When I’m ____________________________ , I _________________________________.
(name a feeling)

What can you do differently the next time you feel sad or angry? What would make you feel better?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

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_____________________________________________________________________
Is my parent a bad person?

This is a question that every child who has a parent in prison has to ask themselves at some point in their life. On television and in movies, prisoners are often portrayed as being the worst of the worst. But the reality is that there are all kind of people who end up in prison. Some are very bad, and others have only made bad decisions. Like many people who are in prison, your parent’s incarceration may be the result of poor judgment.
Sometimes we spend too much time thinking about all the bad things in our life. This usually ends up making us sadder. Why not look at the bright side? Try to find the good in your life and focus on those things. Even though your parent is in prison, they aren’t a bad person; they just made some bad choices. Write down some of the things that you like or admire about your parent. Do they make you laugh? Do they give good advice? Fill in the sentences below with your thoughts.

I like it when my parent ________________________________.

My parent is ______________________________________.

(Some examples: funny, strong, beautiful, handsome, smart)

I love my parent because ____________________________________.

I remember when my parent ____________________________________.

My parent’s favorite saying is “______________________________.”

What do you admire about your parent?

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
DeAngelo got up earlier than he normally did on this cold February morning. It was the day his grandmamma was going to finally tell him where his daddy was. He had always pondered the question “Where is my daddy?” and had asked his family members this question all the time. But they would always avoid it. It was not until DeAngelo came running into the house with tears running down his face like rain in a summer storm that his grandmamma realized that it was time to tell him where his father was. That day in school, all the students were talking about their fathers. He listened to all of his friends tell their story of their fathers. One boy’s father was a police officer; another was a fireman; still another, a mailman; and some were even soldiers in the war. When it was DeAngelo’s turn, he didn’t know what to say.

“What’s wrong with you boy?” his grandmamma Ava Jo asked him as he ran in the house crying.

“Today in school, all the kids were talking about their fathers, and I didn’t know what to say when it came to my turn. I couldn’t even get myself to lie grandmamma because words wouldn’t come out,” DeAngelo replied.

“Well, granny knew this day would come, and I have been preparing myself everyday for it. You’re not a little boy anymore; you’re a ‘man-child.’ You have been through so much in your
young life that we all have been trying to protect you. Now, I see we are doing you more harm than good to not tell you the truth about your father. After your mother died when you were two, we all thought it would be best not to tell you about your father ‘til you was old enough to understand.”

The night before, lying in the bed, all DeAngelo thought about was his father being in another city or state doing something important. Maybe he was a police officer like Lil’ Hannibal’s father, a fireman like Shaka’s father or even in college educating himself. At this point, it did not matter to DeAngelo what his father did as long as he was alive and he could see him and talk to him. That’s what mattered to him most.

“DeAngelo, come here,” his grandmamma yelled out to him.

“Yes, grandmamma,” he answered.

“Get that box out of my closet. It’s up under those clothes.”

“You talking about this black box?” DeAngelo asked.

“Yes. Come sit on my bed so granny can talk to you,” she began.

“Your daddy is my only son. He is my oldest child. And boy he loves you to death. Here in this box is pictures and letters from your daddy. He knew this day would come, and he actually prepared me for it. Your daddy was a smart boy, but he had a desire to run them streets though. For the life of me, I couldn’t understand it. He would become part of a gang called ‘Zone 8.’ Every time I would look up, the police would be knocking on
my door for him and his friends. And then one day, they came knocking for something he did not do, and he would not return home. My life was turned upside down from the day he was sentenced 5 to 15 years in prison for a crime he didn’t do. Yes, your daddy is in prison. I wanted to tell you he was out of town or something, but your daddy wouldn’t have none of that. He wanted you to know the truth because the truth is better than a lie. While in prison, your daddy has changed his life around. He no longer goes by the name Joseph Ruffin that I named him, but Yusef Shakur. It bothered me at first but if this change is going to keep him out of trouble, then I am all for it.”

“So, when is he coming home grandmamma?” DeAngelo asked.

“Well, I wish I could answer that because he has done his five years and they keep denying him a parole,” she replied.

“How was he and my mother?”

“Well, your daddy had just turned 19 when they sent him away, and your mother had just turned fifteen. So, they both was young when they were together. Your daddy did not find out that your mother was pregnant ‘til the month before you was born, and I didn’t find out ‘til after you was born. Your grandmamma Ann had kept your mother in the house the whole time. So, once you was born, to me it was like God had given me my son back. This box is yours. It’s full of letters and pictures from your daddy that I have been keeping for you for this day. Today is his birthday and he plan on calling you tonight.”

As DeAngelo left his grandmamma’s room, he had a lot to
ponder about. He had planned on going to “hoop-the-scoop” with his friends, but decided to stay home. He went immediately into his room and opened the box his grandmamma had given him. For the first time he saw pictures of his father with long locks, well-built and full of tattoos. DeAngelo was the spitting image of his father. He opened one of the letters and began to read it.
Dear son,

You’re the greatest gift God has blessed me with. I love you more than I love myself. You’re my first born so you’re special to me. It saddens my heart that your mama is not here with you to give you the motherly affection you need. But you will be alright my little souljah. I’m a see to it, even if it kills me. I know you miss the heck out of your mother. Believe me son, if I could have made a way for you and her to be together, I would have. Never look upon her passing as something bad, but as an inspiration to you. The memories that you have of her will be like a song to you that will bring a smile on your face in your darkest days. You can only get strong from this.

You come from a long line of souljahz. As you get older, I will help you understand your calling, and to reach your potential as a righteous souljah. I know there’s going to come a time when you’re going to have a lot of questions for me to answer, and I will hold nothing back.

You’re not only my son, but my best friend, lil’ brotha and comrad. I will teach you all my father has taught me since we have been together here in prison. Yes, your granddaddy sends his love as well. ‘Til next time, know that I love you a whole lot and expect great thangs from you.

Love U,
Yusef Shakur

Before DeAngelo could finish going through his box, his grandmamma called for him. “Yes, grandmamma,” he shouted.

“Somebody on the phone for you,” she shouted back.
“Tell them here I come,” he responded.
“Hello, this is DeAngelo.”
“Hey, how you doing. This is your father Yusef,” the voice on the other end replied.
“I was just going through the pictures and letters you had sent to me over the years.”

“Well, I don’t have that long on the phone. Your grandmamma say you be asking a lot of questions about me. So, hopefully my letters can answer them for you, and I can do the rest through more letters. Me and my mama been talking about her bringing you up here to see me. Would you like that?” DeAngelo’s father asked.

“Yes, I would daddy. I love you daddy, and happy birthday,” DeAngelo said smiling.

“Thanks son, and I love you too,” DeAngelo’s father replied, quietly smiling.

“In one of your letters, you said you was in there with my granddaddy.”

“Yes, me and my father met here in prison. I knew of him as a man before coming here, but I met him face-to-face here. We are not together at the same prison right now, but a couple of years ago, we were. Being there with him helped me change my life around. It was right after you was born, so I was still trying to figure out who I was. So, being around him showed me what a strong Black man can be, because I had never seen that in my life. And from that point on, I worked on being a strong and intelligent Black man,” he explained.

“Well, just know I’m going to be a strong Black man just like y’all,” DeAngelo said proudly.

Before they could finish their conversation, they were disconnected. They were only allowed 15 minutes on the
phone according to prison rules. DeAngelo felt much better after talking to his father and learning that he had a grandfather who loved him as well. He felt more proud about himself, and couldn't wait to visit his father.

**Prison Isn’t Cool**

Rap music sometimes glorifies prison life. Rappers and others are seen as cool if they have spent time in prison. But there is nothing cool about losing your freedom and being taken away from your family and friends. And there is nothing cool about not being able to come and go whenever you want to. In prison, the food is bad and the sleeping arrangements are worse. Despite what is shown on television and in the movies, prison is not a fun place to be and nothing to be proud of. Don’t believe the hype!
Communication is key in building healthy relationships. It is the “bridge” that connects us to those we love and care for. Knowing that you have someone you can talk to, laugh with, and cry with is very important. As a child, you want to know that you can go to your parents for guidance and wisdom. You also want to know that you can be open and honest with your parents. For most parents, it is just as important for them to know that their children are comfortable sharing with them.

When you have a parent in prison, it can be very difficult to communicate with them. Being away from each other for long periods of time can make you unsure of what to say. Your parent may also feel nervous about reaching out to you. Some parents find it hard to write to their children. Sometimes they don’t know what to say or how to say it. Then there is the guilt that most parents feel as a result of having left their children when they were sent to prison.

If you hope to bridge the gap, you and your parent must find ways to communicate and to stay connected to each other. We will share some ideas that will help you get to know your parent, and allow your parent to get to know you. Everyone’s situation is different and the responses to these exercises will vary. However,
with a little bit of patience, you will see some positive results that will last a lifetime.

Getting to know your parent can be an exciting and fun experience. It can also be a very scary experience. Chances are you have heard countless stories about your parent. Some of these stories are very good and some not so good. Some may make you smile, like when someone says you look just like your father or dance just like your mother used to. Other stories may make you sad. The truth is these are just snapshots of your parent, and every photographer has their own unique lens. If you truly want to get to know your parent, it is up to you to become a photographer so that you will have a better picture of who they really are.

One of the greatest ways to get to know someone is to ask them questions about themselves and about life. The questions you ask your parent can be as simple as what their favorite food is to a harder question like what they are in prison for. The important thing for you to remember when you begin asking them questions is that they may not open up as easily as you would like in the beginning. They may feel that you may judge them so be a little patient with them.

As with any relationship, you have to be patient and allow things to grow at their natural pace. Some things are meant to be shared early on while others may take a little while longer to talk about. The important thing is for you and your parent to respect each other’s feelings, thoughts and ideas. One of the best ways to do this is to find out the things that both of you enjoy.
Here is a list of 25 questions you can ask your parent. Feel free to come up with your own list or add to this list.

**Getting to Know You**

**25 Questions to Ask Your Parent**

1. Where were you born?
2. What kind of relationship did you have with your parents?
3. What is your favorite color?
4. What kind of food do you like?
5. Who is your favorite musician?
6. What is the best book you have ever read?
7. What makes you smile or laugh?
8. What makes you sad or unhappy?
9. What is your favorite hobby?
10. How do you spend your days?
11. What is the most important thing that has changed about you?
12. What is the greatest lesson you have learned?
13. What's your favorite quote? Why?
14. What are your plans when you get out?
15. If you could travel to anyplace in the world, where would you go?
16. What were you like as a child?
17. What was your favorite toy?
18. What is your favorite sport?
19. What is your favorite movie?
20. What was your favorite subject in school?
21. What kind of talent do you have?
22. Who would you like to meet from history?
23. What is life in prison like?
24. Will you stay out of prison when you get out?
25. What do you value most about family?

*Can you think of some other questions you want to ask your parent?*  
List three other questions.
Here is a list of 25 things you can share with your parent about you.

**This is Who I am**

*25 Things to Share with Your Parent*

1. What it feels like growing up with a parent in prison.
2. Your greatest achievement.
4. Your feelings about your parent coming home.
5. Your favorite musician.
6. Your favorite class.
7. Your favorite food.
8. Your dreams of the future.
9. Things that make you smile and feel good.
10. Things that make you feel sad or unhappy.
11. Your first boyfriend or girlfriend.
12. Your talents and natural gifts.
16. Your favorite television show.
17. A place that you want to go that you never been to.
18. Your expectations of them as a parent.
19. What your family values are.
20. How you will feel if they return to prison.
21. Your biggest disappointment.
22. Personal likes and dislikes.
23. Things you do to have fun.
24. Your views on school.
25. Pictures of you as you grow up.

*What else would you like for your parent to know about you?*

List three other things.
Finding Common Ground

When your parent was a child, they were often told that there was nothing new under the sun. Their parents had done some of the same dances they did coming up; the only difference was the names of the dances. Even some of the clothing styles were the same. Like most children, your parents did not think they looked or acted like their parents when they were your age. But one look at the family photo album says it all; from generation to generation, we are all pretty much the same.

Being able to share your likes and dislikes with your incarcerated parent can help you connect to them in ways that will be amazing. You may be surprised to learn that you share a like for some of the same singers or musicians. It may make you smile when you realize that you and your parent share a love and appreciation for the same sports team or book author. Of course, you will not agree on everything, but even this can be a good thing. The important thing is knowing that you can talk with your parent on a wide range of topics.
List some of your likes and dislikes on the left side of the page, and then ask your parent about some of the things they like and dislike. Write their likes and dislikes on the right side of the page. Do you two share any of the same likes or the same dislikes? Circle the things that you two have in common.

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<th>My Likes and Dislikes</th>
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| **What I dislike**   | **What my parent dislikes** |
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Another good way of connecting is to talk about some experiences that are unique to you and your parent.

**Shared Experiences**

One of the best things about having a relationship with someone is knowing that what you share is unique and special. It can be fun to come up with different ways to build your relationship with your parent. Here is a list of things that you and your parent can do together even though you are miles apart.

1. Select a book or have your parent select a book for both of you to read. When you are done, you can have a discussion based on the book.

2. Write a short story or poem together, taking turns writing a part of the story or poem.

3. Write a rap or song together.

4. Start keeping a journal about your day-to-day life, and ask your parent to do the same. Every three months, you can exchange journals.

5. Start an exercise program together. Keep track of the exercises you do and the days you do them. At the end of each month, you can share your progress.
6. Ask your guardian to get you a small camera so you can take pictures of the things around you. It would mean a lot to your parent for you to share your world with them through photography. It will also help them to get to know you as they watch you growing and maturing through your pictures. In turn, you can ask them to send pictures of themselves when they can.
The thought of your parent returning home can be both exciting and scary. Depending on how long they have been gone, and how old you were when they left, there will be a lot to get used to.

Coming home can also be scary for your parent. A lot may have changed since your parent went to prison and you have gotten older. But you can help make your parent’s transition easier by communicating with them and sharing with them what you think and feel. As parents, we will also do our best to make our coming home easy on you. It is important that you both support each other, and be patient with each other.

When your parent first comes home, there will be demands on their time. They will have a curfew as a condition of their
parole. They may have to attend substance abuse meetings, and of course, they will have to get a job.

In addition to these requirements, they will be working to put their family life back together, which may consist of you, your siblings, a husband/wife or a boyfriend/girlfriend. It is important to understand that the first couple of months may be somewhat stressful. But with patience and time management, everything can be worked out.

Since you and your parent may not be able to spend a whole lot of time together, there are several ways you can make the most of your time with your parent. One way is to talk to them while taking small trips together like to the store or shopping mall. Another way is to share your thoughts about school, their release from prison or your favorite activity while helping out with the household chores.

You may also invite your parent to participate in what we call “Shared Life Experiences.” These are experiences that you will carry with you for the rest of your life. Here is a list of ideas that you may choose to share with your parent. You can also come up with some experiences that are unique to you and your parent, such as:

1. Go to a sporting event.
2. If you are 16, have your parent teach you how to drive at the local park.
3. Go to a museum like the Charles H. Wright Museum of
African American History or the Detroit Institute of Arts.
4. Go roller-skating or ice skating together.
5. Go to see a play at a local theatre.
6. Go to the Detroit Zoo or go horseback riding.
7. Go on a nature walk or hike through the park.
8. Go on a vacation or to an amusement park.
9. Go to a poetry recital or book reading/signing.
10. Go to a concert together.
11. Have a picnic in the park.

Some of these activities may require the approval of your parent’s parole agent. Others may have to wait until your parent is financially stable and in a position to do them, but most are cost effective and can be very fun. Don’t forget you can come up with your own list of ideas and send them to your parent before they come home. If your parent knows what experiences you want to share with them, they can better prepare to make your dream a reality.

What Can I Do To Help?

Children are a great source of inspiration for many parents. In many ways, you motivate and encourage your parent to be the best that they can be. You make him or her want to go that
extra mile to do things right so that you have a positive example to follow, but sometimes as parents, we need help and guidance. Here is how you can help your parent adjust to being home again:

1. *Communicate openly.* It is important for you to be open and honest with your parent about your thoughts and feelings. No matter what you are going through or what you are feeling, you should share it with your parent. It is just as important that your parent opens up to you. Communication is key to having a productive relationship.

2. *Be Respectful.* Even though your parent has been gone for a long period of time, they are still responsible for helping to raise you. Give your parent the room to be a parent. Be accountable for your actions and respect their decisions.

3. *Trust.* Sometimes children will have a hard time trusting a parent who has been gone away for a long time. But if you want to connect with your parent, you have to be willing to trust them. They also have to put forth an effort to earn your trust by following through on promises and showing you that they intend to do what is needed to stay out of prison.

4. *Work together.* Work with your parent to help them achieve their goals. Help them look for a job or a training program. If you know how to use the computer, go to the library and help them learn how to use a computer.
A Message to the Youth

There are countless stories of young men and women caught up in the system, spending their lives locked up in a cold, dark prison cell. Their stories are cautionary tales about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse; the high price you pay when you sell drugs; and the untold consequences of life in the streets. Though their voices have been silenced, there is much we can learn from their stories. In the pages that follow, thirteen brave men share their story, through letters and poems, in hopes that it will help put an end to the senseless violence in our community, and keep hundreds of our youth out of prison. Some of these men have written a special message to their children, but their message is universal. In telling their story, these men share some of the great lessons they’ve learned on their journey through prison. They do so with a great sense of responsibility to save our children from a life in prison, sharing words of wisdom that most wish someone would have shared with them when they were growing up. They have written from their heart and soul about their lives, the mistakes they’ve made, and the hope they see in children like you. There is a message in their story. Listen. Learn from their experience. You do not have to make the same mistakes. Your destiny is in your hands!
Whose Choice Is It?
By Kamau

Whose choice is it?
To seek wise instruction from loved ones.
Whose choice is it?
To go from right to wrong or from good to bad.
Whose choice is it?
To live a good life, make clean money and excel.
Whose choice is it?
To accept negativity and spend time in jail.
Whose choice is it?
To become someone admired and respected.
Whose choice is it?
To be counted among the hated, foolish and rejected.

It is your choice!
To let wisdom from good people help guide your steps.
It is your choice!
To do what is wrong, going from right to left.
It is your choice!
To live a life of upward mobility for your family and the common good.
It is your choice!
To exist in a cell reminiscing about the hood.
It is your choice!
To practice law, become a teacher, produce products or much more.
It is your choice!
It is your choice!
It is your choice!
Choose the right door.

Kamau's Story

My name is Kamau. My birth name is Quintin D. Huff. I was always taught right from wrong. My parents, especially my mother, expected the best from me. They expected me to treat people with respect and to demand respect from others.
At the age of 27, I was shot in the head and side by some guys trying to rob me. I recovered from the physical wounds, but didn’t recognize the psychological impact of the incident. From the time I healed from the physical wounds, I never left home without a gun. My motto became, “Never hesitate to put a nigga on his back.”

On July 3, 1992, I went to see an old girlfriend who was separated from her husband at the time. To make a long story short, the husband came home and he was in a rage about me being there. As he reached for what I thought was a gun in his back, I reached for my gun and shot him once in the chest. He died.

I was arrested on January 17, 1993 and convicted of second degree murder. I have been in prison ever since. I was 29 when I came to prison, and I am now 43 years old. At first, I blamed everybody, including society, for my imprisonment. I was mad at the world. It was only when I accepted my responsibility that I truly began to grow as a person. Society has its impact on our lives and decision-making, no doubt, but as intelligent beings, we make choices. We know right from wrong. There are positive messages being sent our way all the time, and there are negative messages (such as my old motto) being sent our way as well. We must choose well.

I have studied history, psychology, business and law. The best study is to study self. Learn yourself and you will learn to do what is best. I have earned college credits and a few new job skills while in prison, but most of all, I have gained a healthy respect for myself and other people.

Little Rascal
By Andrew Lambert, Jr.

My name is Andrew. I turned thirty years old on August 13th and I am currently in prison for the crime of first degree murder, assault with intent to murder, and felony firearm. I was 18 years old when I was charged, and convicted on all counts when I was nineteen. I was sentenced to natural life in prison without a possibility of parole, which means I will spend the rest of my life in prison. Since I have been in prison, I have obtained a G.E.D., several certificates for participating in group therapy classes like Life Skills 101, Strategies for Thinking Productively, Culinary Arts, Relapse Prevention, and Conflict Resolution. I have learned about God, and I work on my relationship with Him daily. I am also studying law.
I was born in Highland Park, Michigan and raised on the eastside of Detroit. I was the third oldest of what was then eight children. I attended Detroit Public Schools and dropped out in the eleventh grade. As a teen, I worked for several places like Farmer Jack’s, McDonald’s, Little Caesar’s Pizza, Billy Style Center (a hair salon), and Shopper’s World. I also ran the streets selling drugs for pushers, calling myself “being responsible and making a better living for me and my family.”

Around that time, pushers would take young children (males and females) and lock us in drug houses where we were whipped and beaten if we didn’t sell their drugs. Some young teens make choices to indulge in such activity while others are compelled by brute strength from their pushers. I was forced at times, and I made some unconscious decisions on my own. I say unconscious because had I truly understood the consequences of my choices, I would have never made them. Some teens have excellent role models who are living examples that guide them to make better decisions. Then there are some teens who have negative role models who say, “Do as I say and not as I do,” which indirectly promotes a negative lifestyle. That mentality is destructive, and a constant problem in our community.

Anyway, I was never an aggressive person while growing up, and I rarely had fights. I was often unsure whether to take my mother’s “city advice” to “never let anyone put their hands on you” or my father’s “southern hospitality” approach of “report it to the authorities.” I grew up pretty much like the typical child wanting to be like the “Little Rascals” to actually being a little rascal. I used to deliver newspapers, sell lemonade, and build go-karts and clubhouses. As I got older, there was always someone trying to challenge me, which caused a lot of fights. I was constantly finding myself in a defensive state of mind.

I got saved and gave my life over to God in 1994. I did not know how to build a relationship with Him back then, and continued to live like I was living before I met Him. In the midst of all the chaos and mayhem that was going on around me, he saved me. I have a son who I haven’t seen since he was four months old. His name is Ferard Asim Thomas, and he was born on May 31, 1995 to Sabrina E. Thomas.

Though I do not know where my son is, I feel that all children are my sons and daughters, and I am responsible for my part in seeing to it that they don’t grow up like I did.
Instructions from a N*gger
By Kojo Ellis

Note: If, for any reason, you desire to be a prisoner, loser, bad parent, drug addict or dead by the age of 21, I suggest that you follow these instructions very carefully! By following these instructions correctly, I will guarantee you that you will be a product of the Department of Corrections!

The first thing you need to do is to be a little bad, rebellious child. It’s good to start off young so that you can master your bad behavior. If you have a parent who’s a loser, more than likely you will follow in their footsteps. If they abuse drugs and alcohol, make sure that you join right in with them so that you can be the youngest drug and alcohol abuser ever.

When you get a little older and graduate from elementary school, slack off from your studies. By doing that, you will flunk at least 3 times before even making it to high school. Try to stay away from all Black History books because books will turn you into a nerd, and your loser friends wouldn’t like that.

Your fighting skills should be all the way on point now because you will be the oldest guy in junior high. When it’s time for you to go to high school, you should drop out immediately because now it’s time for you to get your money on the streets. You have to start off small and then work your way up so you can always say, “I’m a Jack of All Trades.” You start off by stealing money from your parents and then you move up to shoplifting. After you’re done with that, you have to step your game up to stealing big wheels, bikes, mopeds, and then cars. The car game is fun because now you’re stealing them just to joyride and race. This is the time when you get caught and sent up to Juvenile. Being that you’re very rebellious, more than likely you’re going to spend a lot of time in Juvenile. Try not to pay any attention to the programs they have there because that would be going against everything you stand for in the ‘hood. After escaping three or four times, you’re going to have to be able to trick those people and make them believe that you’re a changed person.

Now you’re back on the streets. Now you have to step your game up a little more and play catch-up. The stick-up game is beautiful because now you have a chance to catch up in one good score. You need to know that the stick up game is very addictive, so if you get away with it the first time, you should continue to do it. Love what you do, especially if you’re good at it!

The stick-up game is now boring you so therefore the next big thing to do is sell drugs. There is nothing like destroying the whole Black community. Drug users will do
almost anything for their drugs, and one of the things they'll do is probably stick you up. You can't let that happen because your reputation would be ruined. Before it's all over with, you will have probably shot, assaulted, beat up, raped and killed at least 30 people. In order to be a successful drug dealer, you must get shot at least once so that you can show off your bullet wounds to your friends.

Note: The prison system is searching for young Black men and women in the inner cities. They believe that they can control you better in prison. They feed you 3 meals a day and allow you to shower at least once a day. They don't provide you with the opposite sex but they will provide you with an impersonator, meaning a man pretending to be a woman or a woman pretending to be a man! They give you all the opportunities in the world to get AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. So if you want to try out for this prison system program, I suggest that you follow all the instructions above. Before you do so, you need to ask yourself a serious question: “What would I rather have, FREEDOM or DEATH?”

Hope for the Future
By Will Morgan

I write you today as a man who was broken and blind, living a life of hatred for my own people. Today, I am now aware of who I am and what I can accomplish. I want every young reader to know that there is life beyond being poor, and the road that leads you to that life is education. Don't think that selling drugs is cool, because it will only lead to this form of death.

There is no getting around it. If you do the crime, you will eventually do the time (or maybe the rest of your life). Young ladies, see yourselves as more than a sex object. There is a brain in your head that can produce a wisdom far more beautiful than all of the video vixens on this planet put together. Young men, love yourselves. Don't see your fellow man as your enemy, but see him as your brother because the same blood that flows through your veins flows through his.

The Prison Industrial Complex is a multi-billion dollar business. In order for prisons to continue operating, they must be filled. You have been factored into these plans by those who are in power and control. If you aspire to be a drug dealer with big rims, platinum chains and watches or you aspire to steal, lie and cheat, you are falling right into these plans.

Young ladies, if you are chasing young men more than you are chasing those books,
then you are also traveling the wrong road. I beg you, the youth of today/future of tomorrow, to live a life of good habits. A life of education and hard work will help you navigate around correctional facilities and cemeteries, but a life of negative habits will lead you smack dead into a life of misery and death.

I, and many men like me, grew up too fast, trying to be adults when we had no idea of what being an adult was all about, practicing unprotected sex, which created children who are growing up in single parent households. I beg you children to avoid guns and drugs. I beg you teens not to have unprotected sex. We need you in order to secure our future! You are our hope! Without you, there is no us!

It took me coming to prison to see that men and women all over the world have had their voices silenced due to being incarcerated. Many of you are confused and hurt due to us not being there to help raise you!

You can end this cycle of pain and confusion within our neighborhoods and communities by living a life that will allow you to be free and beneficial to your families and community. I believe in you, “the youth,” to be the generation of saviors. The generation that will show all those thereafter that we were told lies about how being a gangster was cool. The truth is, going to school is what is really cool!

I believe in you to be much more than me. I look forward to seeing what you’ll become, and I don’t have a doubt in my mind that you will be a generation of great men and women.

Count these words to be of truth, and from the heart.

My name is Mubarakat El-Shabazz and I was born in Detroit, Michigan on June 22, 1978. I am the only child, and I was raised by my mother who is a single parent.

Being in prison has been hard for me because I have to face the fact that my mother is suffering from seeing her only child in prison. At the age of 17, I was arrested for felony murder, armed robbery, assault with intent to rob, kidnapping and felony firearm. Even though I was acquitted of felony murder, I was still sentenced to serve 36 to 52 years in prison. I have been incarcerated now for 10 years. The greatest struggle has been thinking about the sound of my mother crying when I was in court. It is a feeling that I will never forget. I felt helpless at that point, and I felt like my life was over.

Being incarcerated has taught me a lot about the value of life. I have lost so much over the last ten years. Getting letters from home saying my father has died or calling
home to hear my mother crying because my grandmother just died is hard. This was not how I imagined my life would turn out, but I continue to stay strong.

Through reading, I understand life is what we make it out to be. I knew I had no other choice but to get my head on straight. I was tired of seeing my family hurting because of the conditions I created in my life. It’s important for our children to understand that whatever they do in life will not only affect them, but everyone who loves them, including their mother and father. Our biggest problem is our selfishness. We do not think about others until we are in need. We must break that cycle by teaching our children how to be responsible men and women.

My experience in life has been minimal, and it is very painful knowing I have grown up in prison. This struggle has molded and shaped me into the person I am today. There was a time in my life when I didn’t want to read or listen to brothers who had wisdom. As time started to pass me by and I saw I was digging a deeper hole for myself, I knew I had to make a change within myself. I started reading any and every book I could get my hands on. Reading has helped me to understand life and how important it is for us to rise to our highest potential. We are some beautiful people and I appreciate the sacrifices that our foreparents made for us. I feel I owe them so much. So it is imperative that I strive for the betterment of our people so the children under me can have a structure to fight for and call their own.

When I was growing up, I didn’t have any positive influences around me. I was not being taught about Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz), Harriet Tubman or Nat Turner. What I was taught was how to cook and sell drugs or rob someone. As I read these books about different brothers and sisters, I couldn’t help but feel like I had been robbed of who I am. I believe life would have been different if I would have been taught these things at an early age.

Sometimes I wonder if this was designed for me to go through so I could get in tune with my culture and learn who I truly am. I no longer have any excuses for not doing what is right because I have been taught my true essence. To do the opposite would be like a slap in the face.

Little brothers and sisters, I am deeply sorry for the destructive seeds I planted in our community. I didn’t know any better at the time. My heart grieves everyday because I know I contributed to the filthiness of this world. I am blessed that I do not have any children because I would not have been a good father. When I was growing up, I hated my father because he was not there for me like I wanted him to be.

We have to stop letting outside forces influence who we are, and start acting like our original selves, which is to be upright, independent men and women who are loving and caring.
This road is not the way to go. It’s easy to get caught up and thrown in prison, but very hard to get out. We talk about the luxury of living life in the fast lane, but we very seldom talk about the price we have to pay in the end. The price you have to pay is not worth a piece of jewelry, a car or article of clothing that your brothers and sisters are being killed and enslaved for.

In closing, I want you to always remember: Great men and women strive hard, and weak people fall short. Fight for the cultivation of Afrikan children and the Afrikan community, and victory is sure to come.

Power to the People!

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**Food on the Table**  
**By Daniel Alexander**

My name is Daniel Alexander. I entered prison at the age of 16, however I’d been in various juvenile facilities since I was 11 years old. The times that I was not incarcerated have been few and short.

The main reason that I turned to a life of crime was for food and clothing. I had a large family with no father, and assumed the role of breadwinner at the age of eight. I would steal the items on my mother's store list and return her money to her a few days later, telling her that I had earned the money cutting grass or raking leaves, depending on the season. Eventually, I graduated from petty thefts to automobiles, and later breaking and entering, the crime that I am now in prison for. Upon exiting the driveway of the home I had broken into, a white truck driver blocked my car in and tried to make a citizen's arrest. We engaged in a struggle and he sustained a head injury that led to his death, and that landed me in prison on this life sentence.

Once I arrived in prison, I began to immediately recognize how I had followed a scripted plot and this was the plan for the Black youth of this nation. I understood this even more so than the many older prisoners who were housed around me. I began reading at a feverish pace from all the major Black authors. I also read all of the social scientists, philosophers, and psychoanalysts of all races.

I attended the various gatherings of the different religious groups but never joined because I felt that the majority of those who attended were there because it was fashionable or advantageous, but really didn’t feel it was their responsibility to make some meaningful contributions worthy of their membership. They joined and that was the extent of their contribution. They seemed to think that training and waiting for an altercation with some other Black men was their sole purpose.
I often spoke to the congregations but never from a religious perspective. I tried to emphasize that our duties as sons, fathers and brothers didn’t stop because we came to prison; but should take on a whole new significance. I also told them to never measure their self worth by the length of their prison sentence. The judge in the courtroom pales in comparison to the judge who lives in the chambers of our own soul. The world can think you inadequate, but as long as you don’t agree, everything is going to be alright.

When you ask a person if they are alright, and they tell you that they “can’t call it,” they are in fact calling their lives “worthless” with that comment. They are saying they have been on this earth X number of years, and still can’t put their existence into perspective. Another reply I hear all too often is, “No, I’m not alright but it’s not your fault.” So as far as they are concerned, the color of my skin renders me as ineffective as them. In me, they see a reflection of themselves and so since they feel helpless, they feel that I am helpless also. My reply is, “Whose job is it?” Who has more at stake than us to alleviate the condition of our people? Isn’t it the burden of the most learned of a people to lead that people? If I have the medicine to heal a patient, and refuse to do so, is that not my greatest crime?

I challenge you to read and study and prepare yourself to breathe life into the people in prison and in the community, and stop trying to choke the feeble life they live out of them. Let’s turn this cemetery for the living people into a sanctuary. Wherever we find ourselves can be a haven and laboratory where we can get well ourselves and become the healers we were born to be. We are here on this earth not by just the efforts of our father and mothers, but by the birth of resistance from our parents of past generations.

In the spirit of those who gave so much, so too shall we.

Overcoming the Shame
By Demetric Walls a.k.a. The Black Legacy

I was in prison for over twelve years. I’m 29 years old going on thirty. I was 16 when I went to prison for second degree murder and felony firearm. I was involved in a conflict that started over gossip. The conflict was with a couple of females who were 18 and 19 years of age. They said they were going to call some guys to jump me, and I said I was going to get my sister to fight them. They ended up calling some guys who came over to a friend of mine’s mother’s house looking for me with bats and pipes, so I was told. I wasn’t present when they came to the house. When I did arrive at my friend’s mother’s home, she and her husband informed me about the guys looking for me. The females who called them were there also, and my friend’s mother said she got into an
argument with the females, wondering why they were bringing trouble to her home. The argument led to name-calling, and ended with the two females saying to my friend’s mother that they were going to get someone to fight her, so I was told.

As my friend’s mother is explaining what happened, we hear yelling outside of her home telling me to “come on out.” My friend’s mother looked out the window and said “they’re back.” Me and my friend go out the back door while everyone else went out the front. We expected the guys to be out there, so we were hoping to catch them by surprise by coming around the back. When we got to the front, it was four females and one had “The Club,” a metal device you use to lock a car steering wheel with to prevent it from being stolen. I’m yelling “where them guys at?” because the two females who called the guys are present, making half of the four who came to fight my friend’s mother. They stated that they were going to get me. My friend mother started arguing with the female with “The Club” in her hand. I stepped over and told the female with “The Club” to go home. Then we started arguing along with my friend’s mother. I’m steadily saying you better go home. As I continued to say go home, I started pointing my finger in her face, which continued until I put my finger to the side of her head, and she hit me in the shoulder with “The Club.” Someone was trying to pull me out of the way at the same time that I pulled out a gun. I fired the gun once.

It happened so quickly, as if I missed the process of thinking. I stood there looking dumbfounded, wondering what I had done. People were yelling, and my mind was feeling like I was in a dream. I started to go over to help the female I had shot because after I shot her, she ran backwards a few steps and fell. I was going over to help and my friend’s mother yelled, “Don’t go over there. Run!” So I ran.

I continued to run even when convicted of second degree murder. I was ashamed that I took the life of a female who had only experienced 18 years on this earth. I didn’t know how to deal with such a tragedy at the age of sixteen. I didn’t want to talk about it, and that is part of the reason why I was tried as an adult and sent to prison. When the homicide detectives came to pick me up, I told them I didn’t know anything, hadn’t seen anything and didn’t hear anything. They told me that I was trying to play a big fella role, and that they were going to send me to prison. I wasn’t playing a big fella role; I was just a scared 16-year-old boy ashamed of what I had done. I was just wishing it would go a way.

I felt like I was a protector at that time; but when I became one who took a life, I felt I was the kind of person I always felt I would protect my family from. I was ashamed. I hurt someone’s family, and I didn’t know how to express my remorse due to my upbringing. I was raised in a negative environment where expressing emotions was considered a weakness. The best way for me to handle it was to deal with myself, and
hold it inside until I found out how to deal with it. It can never be dealt with entirely; at least that’s how I feel. So I dedicate my life to seeking a better path and to being an example to the young brothers and sisters. This is what gave me the strength to overcome the shame; to free myself internally and allow my hidden self to manifest physically.

I believe the steps I am taking are important steps the youth of today must take. They must explore the dark side of themselves that has been fueled by their surroundings. If they don’t, they will be taken on a journey and when they get dropped off, they are going to wonder how they got there.

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**God’s Gift**
*By J. Jones*

God’s gift you are to me  
Precious as you want to be  
You are my beautiful baby  
I will give you the world

God’s gift you are  
Though we are so far apart  
You will always be my heart  
Endia thanks for being my angel.

_____________________________________________________________

**The Vicious Cycle**
*By Charles Hayes a.k.a. Charlie Picasso*

Daddy why you in jail? His words hit me like a ton of blocks  
‘Cuz now I have to tell my son why I’m locked  
And it hurts; I can tell how he was shook in the face  
Instead of a gun, I should have put a book in its place  
Now they label me a crook wit a case  
And the time they took from us, I can’t even look to replace  
Thinking how I couldn’t be there, it brought me tears  
The mistakes that I’ve made, it has cost me years  
All your birthdays passed without a father at home  
And the only thing I could do is call on the phone
Wishing you the best, while praying intensely
And hoping by my absence, you won't hold it against me
Bad decision-making is what brought me to prison
But from being incarcerated, a man has risen
Out of the shadows of a boy, now I know what to do
And that’s get home, and prevent this from happening to you

I love you son!

From Dad

You’re a Real Princess
By Dwight Rashad

In order to eliminate whining and moaning from your vocabulary
You need to put an end to the pollution
By consulting your heart for the solution

And if you’re not looking outside of yourself for something to depend on
You won’t go wrong

But if you’re listening to the wrong rap,
You’re going to fall into a trap
Because everything that feels good is not necessarily good for you;
Therefore you should measure your pleasure
Sex or unprotected sex may hemorrhage your image
And there’s nothing else
When you have lost respect for yourself

But when you value correct education, and a good work ethic
You’re going to succeed in life without any strife

Therefore, if you are committed to your goals
You’ll never fold

Because when a real princess is fully aware of her passion
And internal gifts  
There will be no rifts

You’re a Real Princess

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**Your Brother U Never Met**  
*By Titus Banks*

Listen as this story unfolds and my words form;
Witness my message from my Unborn 2 My First Born

Through my struggle and beyond this storm,
Heartache and family ties were torn

Do to my misfortune – that I’m faced with often
Your brother never had a chance due 2 an abortion

Love is so hard 2 escape, thoughts replay
Faced wit decisions I made, in my younger days
From the pain I tried 2 runaway –
Trapped in the struggle, yet I was 2 selfish 2 turn away
Face 2 Face, I watched so many turn away
Due to the problems I create.
My son, my first born, my soul, my love
My child, my smile, my ups and my downs
My pain, my stress, my frown, and my crown.
Please don’t follow my path, walk around my steps
Fulfill the dreamz, 4 your brother U never met!

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**Brandon’s Song**  
*By Derrick Williams*

This is a plea from a father to his son
I know I messed up but you’re still number one
I remember when you were little and used to wear braids
But now you are a big boy and keep a tight bald fade
I wish I could turn back the hands of time
Or at least be there to ease your mind
I know you love me just because I’m daddy
But I should have done more than left you sadly
You’re my little man and always will be
No matter what, we’re bonded by blood you and me
Always listen to your granny and mother
They will never tell you anything wrong you will soon discover
And watch your mama closely because there’s plenty to be learned
Keep your mind on your books and always go to school
Education is power and your brain is the tool
Read your bible and always ask plenty of questions
If you make a mistake, use it as a learning lesson
You’re very handsome and twice as smart
Plus you’re a roughneck with plenty of heart
Remember what I taught you about shaking hands
Always look a man in his eyes no matter how tall he stands
I know you miss me because I feel it in my soul
But maintain your composure and stay in control
Soon we will be reunited and be together
This time it will be forever

Love, Dad

____________________________________________________________________

What a Man Feels
By Chaka Sanghor

Dear Lakeisha,

Growing up without me being a significant part of your life, I know you have always wondered what I feel about you so I will share the feelings of a man. I can remember the day your mother first told me she was pregnant. It was a steamy, hot summer day. The Detroit air was abuzz with the energy of summer, and I was one month past my eighteenth birthday. In those first moments, I felt a rush of different emotions. I was
unsure, afraid, excited and overjoyed. After your mother told me she was pregnant, I went into the house and sat in a chair in the corner thinking about what it meant to be a father. As your cocoa brown fingers and toes were forming inside of her womb, thoughts of fatherhood were taking shape inside of my young mind. I knew that if nothing else, I would love you with everything I had inside of me, and I still hold on to that thought to this day.

At the time I was living outside the boundaries of the law, and for the first time in four years, I had begun to re-think my lifestyle. If I was to be the father that I knew you would need me to be, I would have to give up the street life. The problem was, I didn’t know how to walk away. It was the life I had known from the time I was fourteen years old. The streets were the one place I felt accepted. Every day and night up until your birth, I wrestled with myself to make the right decision. I even went down to the recruiting office for the Marines, but when it was time for me to enlist, I backed out. I continued to live a life of desperation on the streets as your birth neared.

As each month came and went, the relationship between your mother and I ebbed and flowed. Sometimes we got along and talked about what it was going to be like to share the responsibility of parenthood. At other times, we were at each other’s throats, and it was during this time that paternity was brought into question. As an 18-year-old teen, I wasn’t prepared to handle the emotions I was feeling inside so I withdrew into myself. I never spoke to anyone about how I felt, not even your mother. But today I am telling you so that you will know what a man feels. I knew in the deepest recesses of my heart that you were my baby girl, and nothing your mother or a paternity test could say would change that. You had already claimed a very special place inside of me that you will always occupy. When your mother brought you home and I held you in my arms for the first time, I felt an eternal bond. Your little smile and twinkling eyes rivaled the stars in brightness. Hearing you cry for the first time because you were hungry made me feel protective of you. In that very moment, all I wanted to do was protect you from all of the pain and ugliness that life can sometimes be. But I failed because two months later, I was being hauled off to jail. It was by far the saddest day of my life; not because I had forfeited my freedom, but because I knew that I was leaving you and my unborn son behind with so many unanswered questions, one of which I know you have asked yourself over and over. What does he feel for me? So please allow me to share with you what a man feels.

From the very beginning of my prison sentence, I sought to connect with you. I knew I could not be there as a father physically; but I knew if I was allowed to, I would be there for you mentally and spiritually. Day after day, night after night, I prayed for us to be able to know each other as father and daughter. I asked God in every name I could
think to call him/her to bring me into your life. I wanted to be the one man in your life who you could always count on to be there for you. I wanted to share your first report card and let you know how proud I was of you. I wanted to listen to you tell me stories about your first day in school. I wanted to send crumpled dollar bills to your mother for her to place beneath your pillow like the “Tooth Fairy” when you lost your baby teeth. I wanted to do all of those things that I thought fathers did for their daughters. I wanted to wrap you inside the protective blanket of fatherly love that all daughters need. As the years went by, the pain of not being a part of your life threatened to consume me; but I held on. There was something inside of me that told me to hold on because we would have our time together. It is the one thing that has kept me sane even when my heart was breaking everyday. It kept me strong when I was at the weakest point in my life. It kept me focused on our future even when the future remained unclear. That one special thing I held on to was hope. Every night I hoped that the next day would bring me a letter letting me know that you were okay. Everyday, I hoped that I would be called out for a visit to find your mother standing there with you by her side. I hoped for a picture of you and maybe even a piece of paper with your scribbling on it. Then one day, my hope was answered when I finally received your first letter.

Today I still hope. I hope that you will grow to understand that I love you and want to see you reach the heights of your potential as a woman. I hope you know that I have thought about you everyday and night since I have been in here. I hope that you will allow me to be a part of your life. And most of all, I hope that you forgive me for not being there for the first fifteen years of your life. Yesterday, today and all of our tomorrows, this is what a man feels!

Love, Dad

I Apologize (To Lil Jay)
By Shaka Senghor

I apologize for not being there when you first learned to crawl or walk.
I apologize for not being there to see your first smile or when you first learned to talk.
Even though I wasn’t there in the flesh, I was there in the heart.

I apologize for all of the adversity you will face in life because of my absence.
Son, you have to trust that me leaving you out there wasn’t an act of malice.
With every ounce of love in my heart and soul,
I apologize for leaving you to grow up in the world all alone.

There are some things a father is responsible for, like teaching you how to play ball and how to fight. But the first time I looked into your eyes, I knew you would be alright.

Success in life will not come easy, but you will succeed if you have the courage to take risks. It comes down to you being focused and disciplined enough to handle your business. I apologize for not handling mine; if I could turn back the hands of time, I would. I would have stayed in school and went off to college instead of hanging out in the ‘hood.

If you don't accept my apology, and grow up to be mad at me, I will understand. I know it is a part of your unique journey through life as a young man. But don't use me being here as a crutch, and don't allow your anger to steal your light. If anything, channel that energy into something positive and strive to do what is right.

Son, I apologize for abandoning you and your sister by coming to the joint. I was just a young brother who got caught up in the streets trying to prove a point. Whatever you do, don't try to follow in my footsteps. The price is too high and the pain too deep just to get a rep.

Son, accept this apology for all that it is meant to be and for what it is worth. And when you look at your sister, know that you are two of the most important people to me on this earth.

I apologize.

I apologize.

I apologize.
The following are brief biographies of the courageous men who contributed to this project. The depth of their character and their commitment to change within our community cannot be measured in a few short lines. These brothers, fathers, friends and husbands are much more than the crimes they were convicted of. They are teachers, scholars, leaders, motivational speakers, musicians, authors and scientists. Most went to prison as teenagers and have spent, on average, over a decade in prison. Others were sent to prison as young adults and have spent over thirty years inside the walls and fences of prison. Yet their spirits remain unchained and unbroken, thereby giving them a freedom that can only come with having true knowledge of self. You are welcome to write these brothers to learn more about their stories.

*Quintin Huff* (#234120), known affectionately as brother Kamau, is a 44-year-old activist, poet, and scholar. He is well learned in African history, culture and politics. During his incarceration, he has studied the plight of Africans abroad and has dedicated his life to developing solutions to the problems that plague our community and nation. Brother Kamau is disciplined and principled in his approach to confronting the
issues of the day. In January 1993, he was convicted of second degree murder at the age of 29 and has been in prison ever since. He can be contacted at: Chippewa Correctional Facility, 4269 W M-80, Kincheloe, MI 49784.

*Andrew Lambert Jr.* (#248398) was convicted at the tender age of nineteen for the crimes of first degree murder, assault with intent to murder, and felony firearm. He was sentenced to serve Natural Life in prison without the possibility of parole, 15-30 years, and a consecutive two years. During his incarceration, he has turned his life over to God. Brother Lambert is a living example of perseverance. Despite his lengthy sentence, he has not given up on life nor relinquished hope. He continues to work hard to make a difference in the world. He has a son named Ferard Asim Thomas who he hasn’t seen since 1994. The mother of his child is Ms. Sabrina Thomas. If you know her whereabouts, please put her in contact with Mr. Lambert at the following address: Gus Harrison Correctional Facility, 2727 East Beecher St., Adrian, MI 49221.

*Kojo Ellis* (#200837) is a student and teacher of African history, religion and culture. He has been a part of the penal system for over 22 years yet his spirit remains strong. Despite being in prison for over two decades, he continues to study and teach
in an effort to prevent others from experiencing what he has experienced in his lifetime. He can be contacted by writing to him at: Alger Maximum Correctional Facility, Industrial Park Drive, PO Box 600, Munising, MI 49862.

**Will Morgan** served a two year sentence for felon in possession of a firearm. During his time in prison, he came to understand that he had to change the course of his life, otherwise he could end up serving a lengthy sentence like most of the inmates that were around him. He is working to spread the message of responsibility and change to the youth.

**Levar Perkins** (#252894), also known as Mubarakat El-Shabazz or Big Vern, was sentenced to serve 36 to 52 years in prison at the age of seventeen. During the twelve years he has been incarcerated, he has undergone a considerable change, growing from a bitter young boy into a conscious and motivated young man. Mubarakat spends most of his time reading and studying so that he may teach younger inmates. He takes the time out to speak at events organized by other inmates and always has words of wisdom to share with others. While he continues to fight for his freedom, he also fights to free the minds of those whom he interacts with on a daily basis. He is an inspiration to all who come into contact with him. You can contact him by writing to:
Daniel Alexander (#135169) has spent over thirty years in prison. For over three decades, Brother Al, as he is affectionately known, has taken the time to study and master several fields of knowledge, from African history and culture to philosophy and psychology. He is an orator par excellence in the tradition of ancient African griots. He is legendary for using basketball as a teaching tool for hard to come by life lessons. His most admirable quality is his genuineness when it comes to giving to others. Brother Al embodies what it truly means to love the people, for there will never be a hungry mouth that goes unfed if he can help it. You may contact him by writing to: Carson City Correctional Facility, P.O. Box 5000, Carson City, MI 48811-5000.

Demetric Walls was convicted of second degree murder as a 16 year old youth. He spent over 12 years in prison and is currently on parole. Over the last decade, he has grown from a young, confused boy into a strong, focused young man. He is a very talented artist, and an aspiring rap musician. With deeply moving lyrics, he uses his music to inspire and elevate the thinking of his audience. Upon his release, he plans to continue pursuing a
positive path and work to inspire other at-risk youth.

John Jones (#463529) was motivated to change his life by his daughter. Having been in and out of the penal system from the time he was 14, he knew it was time for him to do something to change his life when his daughter was born. He currently teaches a substance abuse class to his fellow inmates and hopes to one day write a book about his life. You can contact him at: Cooper Street Correctional Facility, 3100 Cooper Street, Jackson, MI 49201.

Charles Hayes is an aspiring artist known on the Detroit Hip Hop scene as Charlie Picasso, and is currently on parole. He has recorded with famed Detroit rap group “Rock Bottom,” and plans to work on his solo album. He served six years for armed robbery. During his time in prison, he took inventory of his life and realized he was wasting his talents and gifts. He has since worked hard to build a relationship with his son, and hone his musical craft.

Dwight Rashad (#167631) is a committed and dedicated souljah of the people. He possesses a humble spirit and a deeply penetrating intellect. He is soft spoken yet his messages ring loudly in the ears and hearts of those who have heard him speak/
teach. Whenever called upon to lend a hand in a worthy cause, he can be counted upon without fail. You may contact him at: Carson City Correctional Facility, P.O. Box 5000, Carson City, MI 48811-5000.

*Titus Banks* (#316657) is a gifted poet and talented writer who may be contacted by writing to: Mound Correctional Facility, 17601 Mound Rd., Detroit, MI 48212.

*Derrick Williams* (#166220) has been in and out of correctional institutions since he turned 14 years old. He is currently serving a seven year sentence for armed robbery. He is an aspiring writer and poet, and he also wants to be a motivational speaker for the youth. He has taken the time to evaluate his life, and wants to share all that he has learned with at-risk youth. He has a 14-year-old son who is also a gifted writer. Derrick’s philosophy is “It’s never over, ‘til it’s over,” and this is a message he wants to pass on to the youth. You may contact him by writing to: Marquette Correctional Facility, 1960 U.S. Hwy 41 South, Marquette, MI 49855.

*James White* (#219184), also known as Shaka Senghor, was sentenced to serve 17 to 40 years for second degree murder, and an additional two to four years for assaulting a staff member while
serving his time. Throughout his incarceration, he has taken the time to study and learn everything he could about African history and culture. He has studied philosophy, religion, behavioral science, political science and philosophy in an effort to gain a better understanding of life. He has used the knowledge he has acquired to inspire change in himself as well as the other inmates he mentors. He is an aspiring author who has written six books to date, and is one of the founding members of H.O.L.D. (Homies On Lock Down), an organization that works with H.O.P.E. to bridge the gap between incarcerated parents and their children. You may contact him at: Parr Highway Correctional Facility, 2727 East Beecher St., Adrian, MI 49221.
Book chronicles H.O.P.E. member’s transformation from a co-founder of a Detroit street gang to a dedicated father and community activist

Released to wide acclaim in March 2008, *The Window 2 My Soul* is a remarkable story, one that chronicles the difficult yet inspirational transformation of Yusef Shakur from a reckless street thug to a son, father, teacher, male development coordinator, prisoner advocacy coordinator, entrepreneur, author, community activist, poet, and revolutionary.

Growing up as a youngster, Yusef became a product of his environment, emulating the deathstyle of the thugs and gangstas that provided him a self-destructive manual on being a Black man in urban America. In prison before he was 20, Shakur met his father behind bars. The dad who had never been there for him was now helping him learn and grow—not into a hardened criminal—but responsible adult.

Released after nine years of arduous self-development and a new focus on life, he now serves his community as one of the few male teachers in the Wayne County Head Start and Detroit Head Start programs—his students call him dad. At home, he is proudly raising two sons of his own.

Dripping from the pages of *The Window 2 My Soul* is complete honesty as the author allows his readers to explore his journey through his eyes, soul and experiences of growing up in one of the most notorious neighborhoods in the City of Detroit and how his relationship with his father behind bars would completely alter his life direction.

By no stretch of the imagination is a “rags to riches” story, *The Window 2 My Soul* is a “rags to liberation” story. It boldly speaks to the great significance of Black fatherhood in shaping, teaching, molding and educating their Black son’s into strong intelligent Black men, who will be responsible to the well being of Black families and Black communities.

“This man is the example and reason why you should never throw anybody away.”
—John Mason, Mason in the Morning on 107.5 FM

“Not only do I recommend you buy this book for yourself, but for somebody else who may need it.”
—Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony, Pres., Detroit Branch NAACP

“This book should be a required reading for all public schools, colleges and universities.”
—Tim Greer-Bey, Michigan Legal Services

Book Now Available!
Can be ordered online at: [www.yusefshakur.com](http://www.yusefshakur.com)
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