
Stories of Change & Forgiveness

“Children who commit crimes lack the moral and psychological underpinnings of adults, but they’re also more resilient, so it is very possible to change. And it is only through rehabilitating such children and youth that we are able to learn how to prevent a similar situation from happening to others.”

- Raphael Johnson: Community-Reintegration
Coordinator
Former Juvenile Offender

“As long as it’s a young mind, they’re salvageable. At those tender ages, the mind is still pliable and can be shaped. It’s not too late.”

- Charles Dutton: Actor, Director, Writer
Former Juvenile Offender

“The community cannot afford to lose another child. It is imperative that we give people, especially children, a second chance and the opportunity to redeem themselves.”

- Aqeela Sherrills
Father of Terrell Sherrills

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Forgiving Her Son's Killer: 'Not An Easy Thing'

Link to Listen: <http://www.npr.org/2011/05/20/136463363/forgiving-her-sons-killer-not-an-easy-thing>

May 20, 2011

Audio produced for Morning Edition by Jasmyn Belcher

Photo Source: NPR StoryCorps



It would be easy — expected, even — for Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel to be enemies. After all, he killed Johnson's only son, in 1993. He went to prison for that — and toward the end of his sentence, he and Johnson made peace.

As a teenager in Minneapolis, Israel was involved with gangs and drugs. One night at a party, he got into a fight with Laramiun Byrd, 20, and shot and killed him. Oshea is now 34; he finished serving his prison sentence for murder about a year and a half ago.

Israel recently visited StoryCorps with Johnson, to discuss their relationship — and the forgiveness it is built upon. As Johnson recalls, their first face-to-face conversation took place at Stillwater Prison, when Israel agreed to her repeated requests to see him. "I wanted to know if you were in the same mindset of what I remembered from court, where I wanted to go over and hurt you," Johnson tells Israel. "But you were not that 16-year-old. You were a grown man. I shared with you about my son."

"And he became human to me," Israel says.

At the end of their meeting at the prison, Johnson was overcome by emotion. "The initial thing to do was just try and hold you up as best I can," Israel says, "just hug you like I would my own mother."

Johnson says, "After you left the room, I began to say, 'I just hugged the man that murdered my son.'

"And I instantly knew that all that anger and the animosity, all the stuff I had in my heart for 12 years for you — I knew it was over, that I had totally forgiven you."

Johnson founded From Death To Life: Two Mothers Coming Together for Healing, support group for mothers who have lost their children to violence.

And for Israel, Johnson's forgiveness has brought both changes and challenges to his life.

"Sometimes I still don't know how to take it," he says, "because I haven't totally forgiven myself yet. It's something that I'm learning from you. I won't say that I have learned yet, because it's still a process that I'm going through."

"I treat you as I would treat my son," Johnson says. "And our relationship is beyond belief."

In fact, the two live right next door to one another in Minneapolis.

"So you can see what I'm doing — you know firsthand," Israel says.

And if he falls out of touch, Israel is sure to hear about it from Johnson — who calls out to him, he says, "'Boy, how come you ain't called over here to check on me in a couple of days? You ain't even asked me if I need my garbage to go out!'" "

"Uh-huh," Johnson says with a laugh.

"I find those things funny, because it's a relationship with a mother for real," Israel says.

"Well, my natural son is no longer here. I didn't see him graduate. Now you're going to college. I'll have the opportunity to see you graduate," Johnson says. "I didn't see him getting married. Hopefully one day, I'll be able to experience that with you."

Hearing her say those things, Israel says, gives him a reason to reach his goals.

"It motivates me to make sure that I stay on the right path," he says. "You still believe in me. And the fact that you can do it, despite how much pain I caused you — it's amazing."

But Israel is not the only one who's impressed.

"I know it's not an easy thing, you know, to be able to share our story together," Johnson says. "Even with us sitting here looking at each other right now, I know it's not an easy thing. So I admire that you can do this."

"I love you, lady."

"I love you too, son."

HUFFINGTON POST

Homeboy Industries: Turning Lives Around, One Gang Member At A Time

By Marcus Baram
January 6, 2012

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/06/homeboy-industries_n_1189946.html

Soon after his father was murdered, 10-year-old Wilfredo Lopez started hanging out with neighborhood gangs. When he was 15, he was busted for selling drugs and spent the next decade in and out of jail. But last year, he made a fateful decision while sitting in his cell and reflecting on his six-month-old daughter.

"I was tired of doing the same thing over and over again," Lopez tells The Huffington Post. "My result was always four walls. I made a commitment that I wouldn't be like my father, that I was going to be present in my daughter's life."

To help him succeed on his future path of redemption, Lopez sought out a neighborhood priest from his past. Back when he was 12, he attended a mass performed by Father Greg Boyle, who gave the boy his card, telling Lopez, "Come see me when you're ready."



After years of strife, Lopez was ready. And the pastor had become a legend in California as the founder of Homeboy Industries, the largest gang-intervention program in the country. After Lopez reunited with Boyle, he worked a number of jobs at Homeboy, from maintenance worker to mental health assistant. He is now interested in getting a job as a domestic violence group facilitator. "I want to give back to the community that I helped destroy."

Homeboy Industries, a nonprofit with a \$14 million budget, is one of the most prominent examples of private initiatives around the country that are performing essential functions long ago abandoned by the government.

Father Greg Boyle
Source: Homeboy Industries

Over a thousand gang members are served every day by Homeboy, which has expanded over the last two decades into a social-service behemoth that includes a charter high school, job training facilities, tattoo removal and mental health services. It employs former gang members in its own bakery, cafe and diner.

Gang-related homicides in Los Angeles county are way down over the last two decades and Homeboy has won both praise and funding from government officials -- last June, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa helped launch the opening of a Homeboy Diner at City Hall. And the organization has inspired similar initiatives in San Francisco, Boston and Missouri.

It all started back in the late 1980s when Father Boyle got tired of performing funeral rites every few days. He was pastor of Dolores Mission in LA's Boyle Heights neighborhood, where gangs ran rampant and gunshots were background noise.

"There were eight gangs at war with each other on two public housing blocks. And I started burying kids in 1988," he recalls. "It began with starting a school. That brought gang members to the church and they said, 'If only we had jobs.' We tried to find felony-friendly employers and it was difficult so we took action, started a business -- a bakery -- and then a tortilla factory a month later."

Boyle added more services when he saw the need for them. "In 1990, a guy came in my office with a big 'Fuck the World' tattoo on his forehead and complaining that he couldn't find a job. I said, 'Where can I send you looking like that?' So he bagged bread in the bakery and I found a doctor who gave me one hour a month to help remove his tattoo. Pretty soon, I had a waiting list of 3,000 gang members and we opened a clinic with three laser machines. No place on the planet removes more tattoos than we do."

The work is an essential part of the re-entry process into society, explains Boyle. "The job does about 85 percent of what needs to be done. But we also offer a therapeutic community, we engage in what psychologists might call attachment repair, to help these kids re-identify who they are in the world and then they can go out into the world."

At the opening of Homeboy Diner in June 2011, Villaraigosa praised Boyle and the group for offering "second chances for a brighter future." That message of redemption could also apply to the businessman instrumental to launching the diner -- Bruce Karatz, the former chief executive of KB Home, who was convicted in April 2010 of felony charges related to the backdating of stock options.

Soon after reading about the non-profit's cash squeeze last year, Karatz volunteered his services to Homeboy, just a month after his conviction. In addition to the diner, he helped get Homeboy chips and salsa, dips and salad dressings into major supermarkets like Ralph's, recruited a CFO and spearheaded the opening of a bakery and cafe at the American Airlines terminal at Los Angeles International Airport.

"I just wanted to feel that I was doing something meaningful," Karatz says. "It made me feel good."

Homeboy is a community for these young men and women, says Carol Biondi, president of Homeboy. "It becomes a replacement for a gang." Back in the late 1990s, the situation was dire, especially for children and juveniles, she remembers. "There were 4,000 children in [LA County] facilities -- they had these camps where they kept 100 delinquent boys in one big Dickensian dorm," she says. "They were locking these kids in solitary confinement for not eating their vegetables."

In large part through the kind of work performed by Homeboy Industries, those numbers have been cut in half, and LA county's probation division was inspired to open its own re-entry centers for youth. But the government shouldn't depend on such private initiatives, argues Biondi.

"The government cannot just hand over what is unquestionably their responsibility," Biondi said, "the state and county should be doing this work."



Philadelphia Man Goes from Murder to Mentor

Edwin Desamour experienced violence at a young age. He was convicted for a crime that he committed and after serving 8 ½ years in an adult prison while still a teen, Desamour is now giving back to his community.

December 14, 2009

Source: <http://www.prweb.com/releases/Desamour/2009/prweb3256914.htm>

Edwin Desamour grew up idolizing his father who was dealing drugs. He watched family members commit violent acts of crime, and was even given a gun at the age of 12. At 16 he accompanied some friends across town to get revenge for a friend who had been beaten up. "I had been involved with plenty of incidents where violence occurred," said Desamour. "But this time someone got killed." He was sentenced as an adult and served 8 ½ years in adult prison, followed by 11 ½ years of parole. He even spent some time in the same cell as his father.

Desamour was certified as an adult in the police station without a trial process. He was presented with a statement of events and told to sign it. The statement didn't match what happened, and there were inconsistencies with the language used and Desamour's speech patterns. He believes that his refusal to sign the statement is what kept him from receiving a life sentence. All of his co-defendants signed their statements and are now serving life without parole.

While all the other juveniles at the police station got on one bus, Desamour boarded a bus bound for an adult facility. He found himself in an adult jail, where the juveniles awaiting trial were housed separately—next to adult offenders in solitary confinement.

Desamour experienced a defining moment in prison when he looked around and saw inmates who were in their 70's and 80's. "I just refused to let that happen to me," said Desamour.

Desamour beat the odds and successfully returned to his Philadelphia neighborhood once he was paroled. It wasn't easy to return to life on the outside. Desmour had grown up in prison, and learned to survive as an adult within the prison context. Once he earned parole he had to re-learn how to survive. He also faced challenges like not having any credit. "It was like I had never existed," said Desamour of trying to establish himself after his release. He credits his family for keeping him on the right path.

He began working on gang outreach, using his story to reach at-risk youth. Police officers and community members continually told him, "I wish I had a thousand of you." It occurred to Desamour that there were thousands of men like him out there, "but no one was giving them a chance."

Desamour founded Men in Motion in the Community (MIMIC) after hearing local teenagers talking about men who had served time in prison. Desamour recognized the names, and knew that the men had turned their lives around. MIMIC tries to teach teens to mimic men

like Desamour as they are today, not who they used to be.

On the streets, men returning from prison are more respected than those returning from college. Desamour and MIMIC are working to change that attitude and help local youths fulfill their potential. He sees what kids can achieve with their lives, but he also sees that many of them see prison as a natural part of their lives. His goal is to help kids see what they can achieve, but “skip the prison part.”

Desamour urges Congress to make a difference in our communities by reauthorizing the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). This legislation has been around for 35 years and provides protections to juveniles as well as their communities.

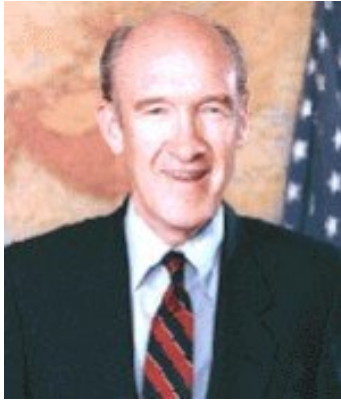
The Washington Post

A Sentence Too Cruel for Children

October 23, 2009

By Alan K. Simpson

Republican U.S. Senator from Wyoming, 1977 to 1996



Rather than serving in the U.S. Senate for almost 20 years, or having so many other wonderful life experiences, I could have served a longer sentence in prison for some of the stupid, reckless things I did as a teenager. I am grateful to have gotten a second chance -- and I believe our society should make a sustained investment in offering second chances to our youth.

When I was a teen, we rode aimlessly around town, shot things up, started fires and generally raised hell. It was only dumb luck that we never really hurt anyone. At 17, I was caught destroying federal property and was put on probation. For two years, my probation officer visited me and my friends at home, in the pool hall, at school and on the basketball court. He was a wonderful guy who listened and really cared. I did pretty well on probation. At 21, though, I got into a fight in a tough part of town and ended up in jail for hitting a police officer.

I spent only one night in jail, but that was enough. I remember thinking, "I don't need too much more of this."

I had a chance to turn my life around, and I took it. This term, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether other young people get that same chance.

On Nov. 9, the court will hold oral argument in *Sullivan v. Florida* and *Graham v. Florida*, two cases that will determine whether it is constitutional to sentence a teenager to life in prison without parole for a crime that did not involve the taking of a life. There is a simple reason the criminal justice system should treat juveniles and adults differently: Kids are a helluva lot dumber than adults. They do stupid things -- as I did -- and some even commit serious crimes, but youths don't really ever think through the consequences. It's for this reason that every state restricts children from such consequential actions as voting, serving on juries, purchasing alcohol or marrying without parental consent.

The Supreme Court recognized the differences between teenagers and adults when it held a few years ago, in *Roper v. Simmons*, that it was unconstitutional to impose the death penalty on defendants younger than 18. Locking up a youth for the rest of his life, with no hope for parole, is surely unconstitutional for the same reasons. The person you are at 13 or 17 is not the person you are at 30, 40 or 50. Everyone old enough to look back on his or her teenage years knows this.

Peer pressure is a huge part of youth behavior, whether one grows up in Washington, D.C., or Cody, Wyo. The guys will say, "Go get the gun. We'll pick up just enough money for tonight." And almost unthinkingly, you'll do it. There is simply no way to know at the time of sentencing

whether a young person will turn out "good" or "bad." The only option is to bring him or her before a parole board -- after some number of years -- and give the person the chance to declare, "I'm a different person today" -- and then prove it.

Parole boards can examine how youth offenders spent their time in prison. Did they read books or work in the library? Did they make furniture? Get a college degree? Those are critical questions for review.

If at that review a parole board finds out that a miscreant hasn't changed, then keep him or her in prison. But some juvenile offenders make real efforts while they are in jail, and we should make honest adjustments for them.

We all know youths who have changed for the better. When I was a lawyer in Cody, the court sometimes appointed me to represent juvenile offenders, and parents who knew of my history often asked for help with their children. I once handled the case of an 18-year-old who stole a car and drove it to Seattle. I later hired him as chief of staff for my Senate office, and he turned out to be one of the most able of the people I put in that job.

I was lucky that the bullets I stole from a hardware store as a teenager and fired from my .22-caliber rifle never struck anyone. I was fortunate that the fires I set never hurt anyone. I heard my wake-up call and listened -- and I went on to have many opportunities to serve my country and my community.

When a young person is sent "up the river," we need to remember that all rivers can change course.



Second Chances

October 26, 2009

By Raphael Johnson

Founder of Detroit youth outreach program The 180 PROGRAM and recipient of numerous awards, including the 2008 national Steve Harvey's Best Community Leader Award

At 17 I was captain of my high-school football team and on my way to college. But in November 1992 I went to a birthday party with friends. We were tussling around, and the chaperones threw us out. One of them knocked me to the ground, and I felt ashamed and angry. My friend had a gun in his car. I got it, came back, and fired three shots, killing one of the chaperones. I was convicted of murder and given 10 to 25 years in prison.

I grew up in an area known for gun violence and drugs. Like a lot of boys, I looked up to tough men who could fight and had been in prison. My first arrest came when I was 12: I stole my grandmother's gun and took it to school. At 14 I was sent to a boys' home. I studied hard and won a full scholarship to attend the University of Detroit high school. I excelled there, but my thinking was twisted. I didn't know how to manage my anger. As a result, a man lost his life the night of that party.

On the day I was to begin Marygrove College, I started a prison term instead. I was 18 and had hope: I could be paroled when I was still a relatively young man. I spent six of my 12 years in prison in solitary confinement. I promised myself I would read 1,000 books. I read 1,300. I became certified as a carpenter, plumber, electrician, and paralegal.

I was released from prison in 2004 after my third parole hearing. I received bachelor's and master's degrees from University of Detroit Mercy. I started a motivational-speaking and fitness-training company. As a community-reintegration coordinator, I help other ex-offenders start anew. I'm proof that people, especially teens, can't be judged by the worst thing they ever did.

There are countless examples of former juvenile offenders like myself who, given the opportunity to be contributing members of society, have done great things. Former senator Alan Simpson committed a serious federal offense as a juvenile (destroying government property) but became a GOP leader. Terry Ray was a violent repeat offender but became an assistant U.S. attorney. Charles Dutton was convicted of manslaughter at 17 but became a respected actor and director. Dozens of studies show that overwhelming majorities of juvenile offenders mature out of committing crimes.

Next month the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in *Sullivan v. Florida* and *Graham v. Florida*, two cases that will decide if it's constitutional to sentence teens to life in prison without parole. The court should give people like me a reason to keep improving themselves. Individuals who have committed crimes as teens should be allowed to have their sentences reviewed. Teenagers change. Adolescents, even more than adults, have enormous capacity for redemption. I know.

Baltimore Sun

Don't give up on the kids Supreme Court should reject life without parole for juveniles, says one who knows the system

By R. Dwayne Betts

Author of "A Question of Freedom" and Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University

November 1, 2009

A life sentence begins with Rashid's name.

I can't walk away from the first time I looked into his 15-year-old eyes, the eyes of someone close to my age, and knew he was sentenced to die in prison. When I met Rashid, his voice still carried the cracks and high notes that signaled adolescence, and his smooth face had never felt a razor. The same signs that belied my youth belied his. We were at the Southampton Receiving Center in Virginia, waiting on a bus to take us to prison.

No fewer than a dozen of us were Rashid's age, all with peers at home waiting on driver's licenses, graduations and proms - while we waited for the morning that would lead us to a prison cell. Rashid's time was legend: three life sentences with no chance for parole. It meant he awoke each morning knowing he would one day flatline within arm's reach of a cell.

I looked at him, and the judge's voice echoed in my head: "Are you aware your charges carry a life sentence?" Rashid wasn't old enough to drive, vote or serve on a jury of his peers - but he was old enough to walk out of a courtroom with a sentence that ends in a casket. After I met Rashid, my nine-year sentence for carjacking seemed like a gift.

Five years after my own release from prison - and months after delivering a commencement speech at the University of Maryland's graduation, speaking moments before CIA Director Leon Panetta - I found myself on an American Bar Association panel with lawyers and psychologists. A woman in the audience asked me what I thought should be done to a child who commits the kinds of crimes that end with life without the possibility of parole; I misheard her question and kept thinking that she had asked what I would do or say if the victim had been my family member.

As I began to answer her question, I thought about Rashid, and about how I couldn't escape the nightmare of being in a closed cell. I thought about my relatives, and how in my family tree there were both victims of violence and perpetrators. I thought about the judge reminding me of the life sentence I faced. And then I asked myself: What would I want if the victim were my daughter, or my sister? In my head there were two horrors, and I realized that the horror of life in prison and everything it means doesn't make right the horror of crimes I can't begin to imagine.

I told the woman that the justice system was not created to respond the way a family member would. We ask our justice system to do more than just act on impulse. We ask it to stand for more than vengeance. A system that didn't believe in the rehabilitation of young people would have left Alan K. Simpson a statistic and not given him room to mature to the point where he could

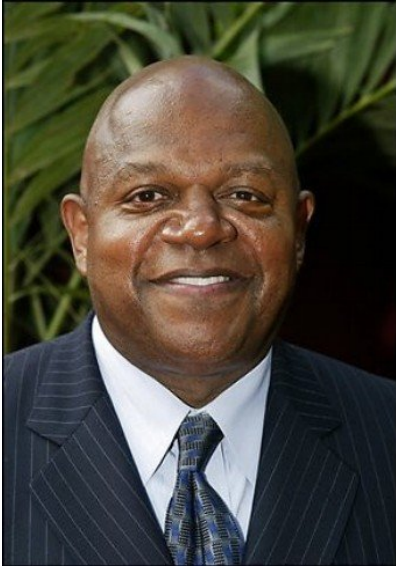
become a United States senator. Charles S. Dutton wouldn't be a renowned actor. Many nameless men and women who are productive members of our society would still be in prison cells.

On Nov. 9, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in *Sullivan v. Florida* and *Graham v. Florida*, cases in which juveniles were sentenced to life without parole for non-homicide offenses. The court will decide whether such sentences are constitutional. I, along with a number of former juvenile offenders - including Mr. Simpson and Mr. Dutton - filed a friend-of-the-court brief urging the justices to give young offenders the opportunity to have their sentences reviewed later.

Sixteen years doesn't prepare you for much. Fifteen years prepares you for even less, and I remember what Rashid's eyes looked like the day he walked to my cell door asking who he should or shouldn't let be a friend to him. He was a boy in a jungle and I, only a year older, was playing at being a man. Fifteen years doesn't prepare you for prison, and it doesn't prepare you to understand just how lasting scars can be.

As teenagers, our lives were impulse and reaction. Our lives were filled with uncertainties and the insanity around us, and all we ever wanted people to know, after we'd walked out of a courtroom, was that we could be more than our crimes, one day - that rehabilitation is real. All we wanted was to believe that our lives could be more than a series of cell doors.

Charles Dutton



Charles S. Dutton is one of the nation's most respected actors and directors. He has received two Tony Award nominations for his performances on the Broadway stage and has been honored with Emmy Awards for his acting and directing on television.

Yet his path to success did not begin at the Yale School of Drama, from which he earned his Masters of Fine Arts degree, but years earlier, during his third and final stint in Maryland State Prison.

Dutton grew up in the Latrobe Homes housing projects in Baltimore. His childhood bedroom overlooked the Maryland Penitentiary, an imposing and dark gothic structure built in the early 1800s. Dutton saw that prison every day and night from birth. "We all expected to end up there," he says, "because all the older guys we knew were there. It was as if I was born for it."

Dutton was first sent to a juvenile reform school when he was thirteen, and he bounced around the juvenile system for several years. When he was seventeen, Dutton was involved in a street fight that escalated into a knife fight. He and his assailant stabbed each other. Only Dutton survived. He was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to five years imprisonment.

Dutton was out on parole for only a few months when he returned to prison for possession of a deadly weapon (a handgun). When a prison riot broke out, Dutton participated and punched a guard. He was sentenced to an additional eight years imprisonment.

In 1974, during his last prison stint, Dutton's life changed when he was put in the "hole" – solitary confinement – for refusing to clean toilets. "The only thing you were allowed to bring with you into the hole was one book. I brought in an anthology of plays that my girlfriend sent me from the outside. I had meant to grab a different book, actually, but took the plays by mistake," he says. "By the light that shone through the two inches between the door and the floor, I lay flat on my stomach and read for days."

One play in the anthology was "A Day of Absence" by the famous African-American playwright Douglas Turner Ward. "Reading that play sparked me in a way that allowed me to rediscover my own humanity," Dutton recalls.

When Dutton left “the hole,” he convinced the warden and a prison teacher, who was also a local actress, to start a prison drama program. Preparing for the group’s weekly meetings and rehearsals gave him purpose. While in prison, he received his G.E.D. and then an Associate’s Degree in theater.

After his release, he earned a Bachelor’s Degree in theater from Towson State University and acted for two years in Baltimore. He applied and was accepted to Yale University’s School of Drama – one of the top drama schools in the country.

Dutton made his Broadway debut in 1984 in August Wilson’s “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” a performance that earned him a Theater World award and the first of his two Tony nominations. In 1991, Towson State University bestowed him with an honorary doctorate degree. Dutton has co-starred in several major motion pictures, and from 1991-1994 starred in the television series “Roc.” In 2000, Dutton earned an Emmy Award for directing the acclaimed HBO mini-series “The Corner.” Dutton emphasizes that his redemption is not unusual. “I have buddies who are plumbers and brick masons and carpenters who’ve been out as long as I’ve been out and been as productive with their lives,” he says.

He firmly believes the chance for a productive life is at its height with juvenile offenders. “I just can’t fathom sentencing juveniles to life without parole,” Dutton says. “I just talked in Florida to some kids with that sentence. It was just dawning on them after ten or twelve years that their lives were over. They were kids and now they’re finished. There’s a heart-wrenching sadness on their faces, and you can see the fight is out of them. If they were given a second chance, they’d be changed human beings.”

“As long as it’s a young mind,” he says, “they’re salvageable. At those tender ages, the mind is still pliable and can be shaped. It’s not too late.”

G. Ishmael Beah



Ishmael Beah is a highly accomplished individual who is making the world a better place and has devoted his adult life to advocating rehabilitation for children who have committed brutal acts. In a foreign country, as a child soldier in a militia army, Beah engaged in the atrocities of murder and torture. His story illustrates the amazing capacity of youth to grow and change.

Beah grew up in Sierra Leone, and his home region was engulfed in warfare in his early teenage years. After the death of his family, he tried to flee to safety until he was forced to join the government army, as this became the only way to ensure his survival. He was initially reluctant to be a soldier, but rapidly became accustomed to the extreme violence that surrounded him. At age thirteen, he learned to fire a gun, to handle a bayonet, and to find motivation by focusing on his hatred for the rebel army, which had killed his family.

In the years after he enlisted, Beah aspired to be a fierce and deadly soldier, modeling himself after the “Rambo” movies. He practiced beheading rebels with a bayonet; he shot prisoners in their feet and kept them living for hours in excruciating pain before finally killing them; he led small bands of soldiers in massacring entire villages. When Beah was fifteen, UNICEF workers managed to get him out of the army – entirely against his will – and into a refugee camp. As the UNICEF workers struggled to bring the boys back to some semblance of normalcy, the boys ripped apart furniture, walls, windows, and anything else they could find, so inured had they become to a lifestyle of violence and ruin.

Looking back on that time now, Beah recognizes that the violence was a way to keep himself from thinking about what he and his family had suffered. But it was only the opportunity given to him by the UNICEF workers that allowed him to “discover himself” and realize that he could be more than a mindless agent of destruction. Beah began to come to terms with what he had done as a teenager. He moved to the United States in 1998 and finished his last two years of high school at the United Nations International School in New York. In 2004, he graduated from Oberlin College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science. Within a few years, he was speaking at conferences on children’s welfare all around the world. In 2007, he published the memoir *A Long Way Gone*, which has become an international best-seller.

Although the circumstances in America are very different from those in Africa, Beah believes that the forces that push people to criminal activity are fundamentally the same in both places. “Not every child who fights wants to be a child soldier,” he explains. “Many have bad home lives and can fall victim to those who would pull

them into a life of violence as a solution from their abuse or suffering.” Violence or theft “becomes normalized because it becomes the only way to live.” Beah knows that there is no easy solution for juvenile crime, and that different methods are effective for different people. Still, he is certain that a lifetime in prison is not the answer: “There’s more trauma in prison than what I’d been put through. Punitive measures for kids just don’t help.” If Beah had been in an American-style prison, he believes, he would have been left to “push myself into despair, wallowing in the trauma of what happened” instead of getting a chance to discover his own potential and eventually educating the world about African wars and the rehabilitation of child soldiers.

Beah has seen some of the worst things that teenagers can do, if pushed far enough, and he grasps the fundamental similarity between his own life and some of the excruciating histories of juveniles serving life sentences in America. His goal now is to prevent such sentences from being imposed, so that young people like him “can tell others, instead of being locked away.”

“Children who commit crimes lack the moral and psychological underpinnings of adults,” he says, “but they’re also more resilient, so it is very possible to change. And it is only through rehabilitating such children and youth that we are able to learn how to prevent a similar situation from happening to others.” Beah’s own story illustrates that a youth who has committed even the most horrific crimes can, given another chance, build a joyful and meaningful life. Because he was not judged solely on who he was as a fifteen-year-old, he says, “I discovered my own potential and have become a productive member of society.”

Raphael Johnson



Raphael Johnson is a community re-integration advocate and motivational speaker. As a teenager, he committed a senseless crime. Johnson has since dedicated his life to making amends. His story illustrates the power of young people to transform and rehabilitate.

Johnson grew up in a Detroit neighborhood known for gun violence and drug dealing. As a youth, Johnson looked to the streets and to tough men for the male role model he lacked at home. His first arrest came when he stole his grandmother's gun at twelve years old and took it to school. At fourteen, he was sent to a boys home for four years. There, things began to look up. Johnson was given a full scholarship to attend the University of Detroit High School. He excelled in high school and was on the honor roll, captain of the football team, and homecoming king. Yet, Johnson remained an adolescent who could not think clearly before he acted, could not control his anger or walk away from conflict.

When he was 17 years old, he went to a party with his friends. A fight broke out and he was thrown to the ground. One of his friends had a gun in his car. Without thinking, acting out of rage and fear, Johnson grabbed the gun, returned and fired it three times. The bullets hit and killed someone who was not even involved in the scuffle. Johnson was tried as an adult and found guilty. He narrowly escaped life without parole and was sentenced to 10-25 years in prison.

As a youth, Johnson could not comprehend the gravity of what he had done. He says that years passed before he was mature enough to really understand his actions. As the years went by, Johnson grew up inside his prison cell. He began to come to terms with his crime and wrote letters to the victim's family trying to express his apologies and beg for forgiveness. Each letter would be returned with an "address expired" stamp affixed to it.

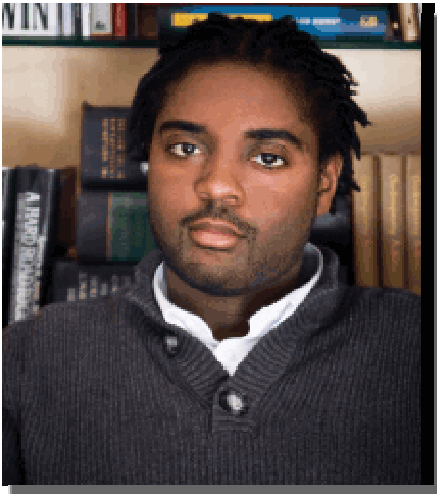
Johnson recognizes that it was because he had the chance of parole that he had hope and the drive to change. He immersed himself in education and vocation, becoming a certified carpenter, plumber, electrician and paralegal.

After he was released from prison, Johnson went to college and received his B.A. and M.A.L.S degrees *summa cum laude* from the University of Detroit Mercy. He then started his own company doing motivational speaking and conflict resolution all around the country. Additionally, he worked with Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit as a Community Re-integration Coordinator, helping ex-offenders successfully re-enter society.

Johnson works as an advocate to teach that for any juvenile offender who commits a crime as horrible and senseless as his, there is still hope. He also works with troubled teens as a national expert for the *Maury Show*. In 2008, Johnson received the Best Community Leader award from Steve Harvey.

As Johnson's transformation shows, no adolescent is beyond hope of redemption and every young person should have the chance to prove that they can change and make a difference.

R. Dwayne Betts



On May 21, 2009, Reginald Dwayne Betts became his family's first college graduate when he received his bachelor's degree in English from the University of Maryland. He had the honor of being chosen to give a commencement address at graduation. Standing before thousands of spectators and his fellow graduates, Betts recalled a day twelve years earlier when he stood as a teenager in a Virginia courtroom and was sentenced to prison. "My journey," Betts said, "began the moment my life became a derailed train headed toward the state penitentiary."

In 1997, sixteen-year-old Betts and a friend took a joyride in a stolen car. They came across a man asleep in his car near a Northern Virginia shopping mall and decided to carjack the man. Betts had a gun. He pointed it at the car window, stole the man's wallet, and drove off with the car. Betts was arrested the next day. Asked later about his motivations, Betts said, "I did it for all kinds of reasons I can't clearly reason out. At that moment I wanted to do it, and I had no idea that it would define me for the rest of my life."

Betts was convicted of carjacking, use of a firearm during a felony, and attempted robbery. Although he had never before been arrested, he was certified as an adult. He faced a possible life sentence but was sentenced to nine years. He recalls the judge saying, "I'm under no illusions that sending you to prison will help you."

Prior to his arrest, Betts had drifted between his school life and his social life. An avid reader, he qualified for his school's gifted program, made the honor roll, and was elected class treasurer. But Betts was restless. Although he remained on the honor roll and excelled in his honors classes, Betts began to get into trouble, using drugs and cutting class.

After his arrest, Betts escaped into books, as he had done as a child, and began writing essays and poetry as well to pass the time. Betts knew that one day he would be released back into society, and he did not want to have wasted the years he was incarcerated. "I took everything seriously because I knew I had a release date," he says. "I wrote my way out of that world... If I had gotten life without parole, I would never have written those poems and essays."

Betts now has been out of prison for six years. He is making the most of his second chance and has proved he can be a productive member of society. He enrolled at Prince George's Community College, where he served in the student government, was the Phi Theta Kappa honor society president, and edited the college's literary journal. His grades earned him a spot in the school's Honors Academy and a full

tuition scholarship to attend the University of Maryland. Most recently, he was awarded the Radcliffe Fellowship at the Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Studies.

His poetry has been published in several national magazines and journals, and he has won a number of writing contests and scholarships, including the Breadloaf Writer's Conference scholarship and a Holden Fellowship to attend the graduate program at Warren Wilson College. He has published a memoir, *A Question of Freedom*, as well as a book of poetry. He is married and has a child.

Betts also has worked to give back to his community. He started a book club for young boys and also teaches poetry workshops for middle school students in Washington, D.C.

Betts is remorseful for his actions and grateful for the opportunity to prove that he is not a criminal at heart, not a menace to society. "I made one mistake," he says. "It was not the sum total of who I was." He knows how fortunate he is to have this second chance. Knowing that he would have another chance – that he had a release date – is what motivated Betts to work hard to prepare for life after prison. "I always knew I'd have this day, standing on a porch, looking outside," he muses. "Without that, there would just be no reason to think about life beyond a jail cell."

Linda White



“I forgive you, and God will, too.” These were the last words Cathy White uttered before her teenage killers shot her three times in the back of the head. From that moment of tragedy, Cathy’s mourning mother Linda began a journey from anger to forgiveness, together with her daughter’s killer, to honor Cathy’s memory.

Linda never imagined that she would become an ardent critic of the practice of sentencing youth to spend their lives in prison. She simply never confronted the issue until her 26-year-old daughter Cathy was kidnapped, raped, and killed by two teenaged boys. It was that tragic occurrence, on November 18, 1986, that set Linda along an unlikely path that led her to discover that youths who commit even the worst crimes can grow into responsible, mature adults capable of making real, positive impacts in their communities. Linda knows this because she has watched her daughter’s killer, Gary, become just such an adult.

Gary was only fifteen when he met his victim, two months pregnant at the time, at a gas station in Houston, near Cathy’s home. Cathy had been moved by Gary’s and his friend’s plea for a ride out of town to help them escape abusive parents, and she had let the boys into her car. Almost immediately, the boys brandished a gun and forced Cathy to drive them toward Alvin. Before reaching their destination, they demanded Cathy pull over to the side of the road, where they raped her. The boys were high and drunk at the time, and in their compromised state, they fatally shot Cathy.

Linda did not learn of her daughter’s murder for an excruciatingly long five days after Cathy had inexplicably disappeared from her home, during which time Gary and his friend were arrested, confessed to the killing, and led police to Cathy’s body. Gary’s guilty plea and his 54-year prison sentence did little to assuage the deep sadness that Linda and the rest of her family, including Cathy’s five-year-old daughter Ami, felt. Nor did Linda feel that the sentence imposed was advancing the goals of the criminal justice system, notwithstanding the pro-prison rhetoric that she regularly encountered when speaking with others about the fate of Cathy’s killers.

Linda turned to education to cope with her daughter’s loss. She studied to be a grief counselor and, in 1997, she began teaching upper level college courses in prison. Soon thereafter, she became involved in Bridges to Life, a mediation program allowing convicts and crime victims of to open a dialogue, learn, and forgive. Linda came to know many prisoners who yearned for—and, to her mind, deserved—a second chance.

Ironically, the person who had set her along this path was “not on her radar screen” for many years. But in 2000, Gary began exhibiting remorse for his crime and agreed to a meeting with Linda. When Linda and Gary met, she found that he was a different person

from the child who had killed her daughter. Gary was a remorseful grown man who was desperately seeking both forgiveness and a chance to start making up for all the hurt he had inflicted. Linda was willing to grant Gary forgiveness, and he eventually earned a second chance. As of the filing of this brief, Gary has been out of prison on parole for just over one year. In that time, he has immersed himself in a new community; found and held a job; and begun working with drug and alcohol addicts at his church in a role in which his minister says he has made an incredible difference. Gary has kept himself away from any sign of trouble. He is in regular contact with Linda, and the two are planning to begin giving talks together at Texas juvenile facilities. Gary never stops apologizing for the pain that he caused, and he regularly tells Linda that he wants to live a good, impactful life as a memorial to Cathy.

To Linda, Gary exemplifies why life sentences are so unjust, especially for juveniles. From her research and experience, Linda knows that youths are both less able to fully appreciate the consequences of their actions and more likely to change in a relatively short period of time. To her, even the most horrific of crimes, the type to which her daughter fell victim, cannot justify locking a child away forever. Linda strongly believes that some youthful offenders need to be imprisoned for some period of time while they contemplate their actions, grow, and mature. And by no means does she believe that convicts should be set free if they fail to show remorse or demonstrate a desire to make amends. But Linda also believes it is wrong to categorically deny youths the opportunity to someday earn release.

Had Gary been sentenced life in prison without the possibility of parole, he would never have been able to become a living memorial to Cathy. To Linda, keeping children like Gary locked away for their whole lives only compounds the ugliness of crime with the ugliness of a hopeless prison sentence. Linda does not want that, and she knows that Cathy would not have wanted that, either. “Cathy,” she says, “would be gratified to see Gary have a second chance.”

Brief of Victims' Family Members in Support of Petitioners Jackson and Miller, 2012

Bill Pelke



On May 14, 1985, Ruth Pelke, a 78-year-old grandmother fondly known as Nana, was brutally murdered when four teenage girls broke into her home in search of money for the local arcade. Knowing that Ruth gave Bible lessons in her home to children in the neighborhood, the girls arrived at her front door under the pretext of wanting a Bible lesson. As Ruth reached for her Bible teaching materials, one girl hit her over the head with a vase. Paula Cooper, aged 15, then stabbed Ruth to death. The girls took a mere \$10 and the keys to Ruth's old car.

Bill Pelke, Ruth's grandson, was a father of children of similar ages to the assailants. Shocked by this senseless murder, he found it particularly difficult to comprehend how these children could so grievously harm a defenseless older woman. Prosecutors sought the death penalty for Paula and one other girl. In the cloud of shock and confusion, Bill's family didn't question the recommendation. At the time, Bill thought that the death sentence was appropriate because, as long as it was the law, his grandmother deserved that her murderers should receive death. If it could not be used for the perpetrators of his grandmother's violent and unprovoked murder, he could not imagine a situation in which it would ever be appropriate.

However, one-and-a-half years after Ruth's death, and three-and-a-half months after Paula was sentenced to death, Bill realized that the death penalty was not the right response to the murder of a woman with a tremendous faith in God. He became convinced that his grandmother would have wanted him to show compassion, even to her murderers. In fact, Bill was so certain of this that he wrote to Paula the next day and immediately began petitioning for a sentence for Paula that he felt his grandmother would approve. After three years of campaigning and gathering the support of two million petitioners, Paula's sentence was reduced to 60 years, with an release possible after 30 years if she had good behavior.

During her time in prison, Bill has had regular contact with Paula – he wrote to her every ten days while she was on Death Row. Although he wanted to visit Paula immediately, he was not permitted to do so until Thanksgiving of 1994 – eight years after Ruth's murder. He described the meeting as “wonderful.” “Wonderful to have been able to face Paula, and not have the hate, anger and desire for revenge that it would have been so easy to have had, but to have the kind of love and compassion that I feel God wants us to have for all of his creation.”

Bill Pelke had not given any thought to the issue of sentencing juveniles to life in prison without parole prior to the death of his grandmother. But his experience with Paula was life-changing. He now knows that life without parole is not the answer for juvenile defendants. He has seen Paula mature over the years; she has received a GED and a

college degree and wants to help others. She has expressed her remorse to Bill in her many letters and in their meetings. Bill knows of Paula's abusive childhood and is still saddened by the fact that neither of her parents was in court on the day she was sentenced.

Because of his experience with Paula, Bill strongly believes that youths can be reformed and should be eligible for a chance at parole. While the parole decision should be on a case-by-case basis, Bill believes sentencing a youth to life without parole denies these children a first chance, let alone a second chance, at life. He feels that the key to forgiveness is compassion – compassion for those people who made mistakes and have the ability to reform. As a result of attaining her GED and college degree, Paula will be eligible for release in July 2013, after having served 28 years – and Bill will be waiting to welcome her back to the world.

Brief of Victims' Family Members in Support of Petitioners Jackson and Miller, 2012

Aqeela Sherrills



January 10, 2012, marked the eighth anniversary of the day Aqeela Sherrills's teenaged son, Terrell, was murdered by another teenager at a party in an upscale Los Angeles neighborhood. April 28, 2012, marks the twentieth anniversary of an historical peace treaty that Aqeela brokered between two rival Los Angeles street gangs. These two anniversaries represent sorrow and hope; they have shaped Aqeela's views against life imprisonment for youths, even for the teenager who ruthlessly murdered his son.

Home for winter break from studying theater arts at Humboldt State University, Terrell was shot in the back by a 17-year-old while speaking to one of his friends at a party. Terrell's killer was quickly identified in the neighborhood but was not arrested. Aqeela later shocked everyone when, in addressing the nation on the "America's Most Wanted" television show, he said he did not want Terrell's teenaged killer to spend the rest of his life in prison. Rather, Aqeela wanted to meet the boy and his parents to understand him, and he wanted to be sure he received appropriate care while serving his sentence. Even as he pleaded for the killer – a 17-year-old gang member – to turn himself in, he reiterated to the police, to family, and to friends that his primary concern was getting him the help he needed to heal.

Coming of age in the Watts neighborhood of south-central Los Angeles, Aqeela began working to end gang conflict as a young man. A one-time gang member himself, Aqeela knew where these violent youth came from. "My friends and I had been living under a set of unwritten rules. Most of us hadn't really understood what we were doing. We were just following them because if we didn't, there would be consequences." These "rules" about loyalty, love, and revenge caused the smallest conflict to lead to the ultimate violence – violence that should have been preventable. Aqeela knew personally that "sexual, physical or psychological abuse," affects a youth's ability to cope because he had experienced all these himself. For Aqeela, the only way to confront adolescent criminal activity is to focus on healing those wounds and changing people's attitudes about adherence to those "rules."

Aqeela knows such change can be accomplished. He was the driving force behind a 1992 peace treaty between the Los Angeles Bloods and Crips street gangs. From this and other similar experiences, Aqeela has seen that youth can redeem themselves.

To Aqeela, a life sentence without the possibility of parole for a child is unjust. Aqeela recognized that his son's killer, while having committed a heinous crime, is still a person who could contribute positively to his community. "The community cannot afford to lose another child. It is imperative that we give people, especially children, a second chance and the opportunity to redeem themselves."

That the killer was a juvenile at the time of Terrell's murder is important to Aqeela's opposing a lifetime prison sentence for him. He knows that youthful offenders have a much greater chance of turning their lives around and breaking their destructive patterns than adults do. Aqeela realizes that youths have something else on their side that adults do not: time. They have time to heal, time to address the root causes of their destructive behavior, and time to alter the patterns that caused them to commit murder.

Aqeela does not feel that he holds these beliefs alone: "Terrell speaks through me against life imprisonment for juveniles." And Terrell's voice has guided Aqeela to becoming the regional director of the Resources for Human Development California ("RHDC"), which focuses on preventing violence by offering classes in life management skills, mentoring, victim services, community re-entry assistance for people leaving prison, and mental and holistic health services.

Brief of Victims' Family Members in Support of Petitioners Jackson and Miller, 2012

Mary Johnson



“Who did he think he was that he could take my child’s life? I hated him, truly hated him.” Mary Johnson recalls her feelings when she first learned that 16-year-old Marlon Green (now known as O’shea Israel) had murdered her only child, 20-year-old Laramiun Byrd, on February 12, 1993, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. O’shea, a member of a teenage gang, got into a fight with Laramiun at a house party and shot and killed him.

Mary attended every court appearance relating to her son’s murder, and wanted nothing less than for O’shea to be “caged up like the animal he was” for the rest of his life. She even recalls O’shea turning to look at her in the court room and smiling as if to say “Yes, I killed your son. What are you going to do about it?” Mary’s anger was

further fueled when the judge lowered O’shea’s first-degree murder charge to second-degree murder.

O’shea was tried as an adult, and sentenced to 25 years. Searching for answers for how to heal, Mary founded “From Death to Life,” an organization dedicated to ending violence through healing and reconciliation between families of victims and perpetrators. Mary counsels parents whose children have been killed, as well as families of murderers. In Mary’s view, the families of the murderers are also victims, because “hurt is hurt, it doesn’t matter what side you are on.” Mary soon realized that her failure to forgive was “like a cancer that eats you from the inside,” and that if she wished to heal, she needed to meet her son’s killer.

Mary reached out to O’shea, who agreed to meet her. By the end of the meeting, she and O’shea hugged. Overwhelmed by emotion, Mary began to fall and it was O’shea who caught her. He then said to her, “Ma’am, I believe you’re gonna be the person to help me to cry.” “Yes,” Mary said, “I will be that person.” Moments later she thought, “I just hugged the man who murdered my son,” and a heavy burden lifted from her body along with all her negative emotions. For Mary, “the anger and bitterness was over. I just knew it. I had reached the point of total forgiveness.”

O’shea was released on March 7, 2009, after serving 16 years in prison. Mary hosted a homecoming celebration for O’shea and his family. And it was Mary who introduced O’shea to her landlord so he could invite O’shea to move in next door to her. Now Mary and O’shea not only share a porch, but a bond so strong that Mary considers O’shea to be her “spiritual son,” and O’shea sees Mary as his second mother.

Even before O’shea was released from prison, the authorities at Stillwater Prison were so intrigued by the relationship between Mary and O’shea that they asked Mary to speak to the inmates at the prison about her experiences and her views on forgiveness. Since his

release from prison, O'shea now joins Mary at these speaking engagements at Stillwater Prison. They also regularly travel around the nation speaking at various functions to a wide range of audiences, including the 2011 Wisconsin Restorative Justice Conference.

It is significant to Mary that, like Laramiun, O'shea was intelligent but fell in with the wrong crowd and was involved in drug dealing. A child of divorced parents, O'shea was torn between the well-disciplined path of his mother and minister step-father, and the urge to rebel to fit in with his father's side of the family. Mary believes this inner struggle continued even when O'shea got to prison. But once he started meeting with Mary, he started the process of accepting responsibility for his actions, and forgiving himself. And, to Mary, that is what justice should focus on – giving the offender the chance to reform. She has come to believe juvenile offenders are "...all children. What does it achieve to lock them all up for their entire lives? If they don't have a chance to reform and heal, and to show others how to learn from their mistakes, there's no hope for anybody."

Today Mary is proud – proud of O'shea for his full time job at a recycling plant by day, and proud of his pursuit of a college degree by night. Forgiving him does not pardon or diminish what he did, but it helps her move forward because she has seen that "people can change."

Brief of Victims' Family Members in Support of Petitioners Jackson and Miller, 2012

Azim Khamisa



Tariq Khamisa was a 20-year-old college student at San Diego State University with a caring family, a beautiful fiancé, a bright future, and a love for life. On the night of January 21, 1995, Tariq was delivering pizzas when he was robbed, shot, and killed by 14-year-old Tony Hicks. Tony, then an eighth grader, killed Tariq on the orders of an older gang leader, simply because the gang was hungry and had no money. Tony pleaded guilty to first-degree murder, and was sentenced to 25 years to life in an adult prison.

Tariq was the only son of Azim Khamisa, a former investment banker who grew up in Kenya, was educated in England and later moved to the United States. After his son's death, Azim was very angry, but his anger was not directed towards his son's killer. In fact, Azim was able to forgive Tony for killing Tariq. "From the onset, I saw victims on both ends of the gun. I will mourn Tariq's death for the rest of my life. Now, however, my grief has been transformed into a powerful commitment to change. Change is urgently needed in a society where children kill children."

Determined to honor his son, and his son's love for life, Azim established the Tariq Khamisa Foundation ("TKF Foundation"), which focuses on crime prevention, stopping youth violence and developing at-risk youth into productive members of the community through education, mentorship, and community service programs. Shortly after the TKF Foundation was established, Azim contacted Ples Felix, Tony's grandfather and guardian, and asked him to work with him at the TKF Foundation. Azim and Ples have served together on the board of the TKF Foundation for the past 15 years.

In addition to the many other youthful offenders that he has met through his work with the TKF Foundation, Azim has been in regular contact with Tony, who has since passed his GED in the 94th percentile and is working toward a degree in Child Psychology. Azim has invited Tony to come and work with him and his grandfather at the TKF Foundation upon his release from prison, to "join in the quest to prevent other kids from going down the same path." Azim believes that his experience with Tony is indicative of the potential in other young offenders, remarking that "all offenders, even the most hardened, have something of value within them. We can turn these kids around."

Tammi Smith



Robert Sellon was the beloved, good humored half-brother of Tammi Smith. When 17-year-old twin brothers David and Michael Samel brutally murdered 18-year-old Robert on October 26, 1981, just four days after Tammi's 15th birthday, she was filled with hatred.

Stoned, drunk, and looking to steal marijuana and cash, David and Michael set out to rob Robert. When Robert put up a fight, the two brothers strangled and beat him to death. At his trial, Michael pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 35 to 55 years in prison. Meanwhile, David's counsel believed that because Michael had pleaded guilty, David would receive a reduced sentence. Instead, he was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Initially, Tammi was enraged by what these boys had done to Robert, and she hoped that David and Michael would be imprisoned for the rest of their lives. She had recurring nightmares about the attack, and prior to David being transferred from pre-trial detention to permanent incarceration, Tammi visited him to express her hatred face-to-face, and to curse him for destroying her family. But this did nothing to provide her closure.

In 2001, Tammi realized that Michael would soon be released from prison, and that there was a key unresolved question that prevented her from achieving closure: What kind of adults had David and Michael become in prison? Tammi reached out to Michael, and began to correspond with both brothers. As Tammi learned more about David and Michael, she saw that they were no longer drug-addicted, naïve teenagers, but mature men who felt extreme remorse over the crime committed in their youth. "David has talked about how childish he was, and he will beat himself up over it," she says. He has even expressed to her "that if he could give his life to bring her half-brother back, he would."

Michael was released in 2009, after serving 27 years, but David remains in prison.

Tammi supports David's release, so that "he could give something back." In prison, David has obtained a degree in horticulture, was studying for a law degree before the program was canceled, and works in the prison hospice system.

Tammi thinks her brother Robert, who got into trouble as a youth himself, would have wanted a second chance for David. Tammi feels society is better served by releasing youthful offenders who have sufficiently demonstrated remorse for their crimes and who have applied themselves during their time in prison. She is inspired by David's commitment to using his time in prison to educate himself. She is gratified to hear David

say that, should he ever be released, he wants to help youths who have been convicted of crimes. But that will wait because, almost 30 years after being convicted for killing Robert, David is still confined to prison and faces the possibility that he will continue to pay for his crime until he dies in prison.

Tammi believes: “It is just not right to put a teenager in prison for the rest of their lives thinking they are never going to change.” David is not the same person now as he was as a teenager, and Tammi believes that he should not continue to be punished for the mistakes of his youth. It is clear to her that David would never commit a similar crime again.

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