



Chaplain's Writing Group

ELMWOOD JAIL

Summer **2023**

WE ARE EXCITED TO SHARE WITH YOU

some of the writings from men at Elmwood Correctional Facility who participated in the chaplain's writing group. We are honored to have the privilege of hearing their stories and sharing them with you. All the pieces in this booklet were written by men who gave us permission to publish them. We have used their first initial only in order to protect their privacy.

Writing is one way to help reflect, and process difficult memories, regrets and hopes. We hope that writing will be an effective tool for us all in pursuing healing and in moving forward.

We could not do this without support. Thank you to the team of volunteers from St. Mark's who faithfully attended, including Peter, Lena and Diane. Thank you to St. Mark's for all your support, and for praying for each group member as we met. Thank you to Santa Clara County Jail Programs Division, especially RO Reilly Johnson, for his help coordinating this group. Thank you to the Episcopal Impact Fund for a grant toward making this group a reality.

We celebrate this group of men and their writing, and look forward to opportunities to continue this work.

Chaplain Liz Milner
Executive Director, CIC Ministries
www.cicministries.org

Cover art by E Cruz



Memories

We spent time recalling and writing about memories to bring a sense of understanding, closure and some healing.

I hate to tell you this but maybe this will help you out. Life is going to beat you down. S* is going to be hard. Some of it will be caused by you but most of it will be done to you. Things will get out of control. I don't want to tell you the things that will happen. All I can say is when you get that gut feeling LISTEN TO IT!

Life is going to get easier. You are going to meet someone who knows you and has been looking for you and you for her. Without even knowing her, you'll see yourself in her and she will understand you completely. You don't meet her 'til you're older, but she is your happiness. Just remember she is on her way. Be patient and strong. She is going to change your life. You will love her like the sky loves the stars and the day loves the sun. She is your daughter.

~ A

Dear E,

I wanted to say and thank you from the bottom of my heart for our son we have. Best thing that ever happened in my life.

I'm just so angry and disappointed in myself for not being there for our son this whole time like a father should be. I wish I could rewind the time and turn the bad into good but I know it's never too late to start now doing things better for our son.

~ A

Dear G,

It's been over three years since we last saw each other. I can't believe how fast time flies. I have decided to write you and hopefully this letter will give me closure, and for you, an understanding about where I'm coming from.

I wanted to thank you for all of the joy you gave me over the last several years. You played a huge role regarding the happiness in my life, and I am both angry as well as sad that you are no longer around. I wish I could go back and undo all the BS I caused that drove you away. I forgive you for leaving. Please forgive me for all the headaches I caused.

I'll always love you and cherish the time we had together.

~ Always, E

I let go, I hold on.

I let go of my old way of thinking about life.
But I hold on to all the great things I've obtained.

I let go of thinking "I could've done things different."
I hold on to support from my family and friends.

I let go of self depreciation.
I hold on to the phrase "I can do anything I put my mind to."

I let go of people who wasted my time.
I hold on to my friends who are always there, through my lows and my highs.

I let go of resentment.
But I hold on to forgiving the people I resented.

I let go of selling drugs.
I hold on to my hustle mentality.

I let go of greed.
I hold on to money.

I let go of the past.
I hold on to your hand.

~ K

Can I be a baby again

Maybe

But then change the way

Momma and Daddy raised me

They praised me

But I think they blamed me

Because they were so angry

Every day they struggle

Maybe they hate me

Nah I'm playin'

I knew I was the favorite

The baby

But I would still go back

And change the way they raised me

Maybe I wouldn't have been lazy

I think that's why I'm a little crazy

If I could be a baby again

I hope I could change the way today is

~ C

My moment was the day I enlisted in the Marine Corps. The events that led to this decision I've spoken about before. My mother was drunk most of the time. From 12 years old, I took care of my little brother. By 17 I just wanted to get away.

I remember the day I got in the car with my father to go to the recruiting office. I remember being scared to death and for the first time second-guessing my decision, and thinking about all the people who second-guessed my choice.

I wish I could have had someone with me who 100 percent agreed with what I was doing.

It changed me by making me grow up fast and accept my new circumstances. I was scared to death and in fact cried to myself the first few nights, but it didn't take long before these men became my family and people I could trust to be there for me. What I want to say to myself in that moment is that you lived through a lot of bad things you had to justify. Overall those nine years gave your life meaning and I wouldn't change a thing. The time I spent made me a better man, husband and father. It gave me the tools to cope with life.

~ L

I paroled from prison and started electrical school. I went to work all day and school all night for just over five years. I had never completed anything in life up to that point. It was a crazy experience. I didn't even really have intentions of completing it. It just happened. It came easy to me. I could see it and it made sense to me. I was a second year apprentice running \$2 million ground up electrical jobs. It was the greatest feeling of accomplishment I ever felt. It was also the beginning of my next downfall, but at the time I thought nothing feels better than this. I will always have my trade to fall back on and hope it becomes part of my life again.

~ B

I was 33 years old when my daughter was born. I never wanted to be a father because I never had one growing up to model myself after. So I was scared of the responsibility and of having to grow up. But when I held her for the first time, I knew that everything was going to be alright. It came very natural to me. I just gave her everything I didn't have growing up.

This is the longest I've been away from her since she was born. It's really hard. I know when I get out of here we're going to be alright. I'm going to take care of her sober.

~ K

To M,

I'm writing this letter to express myself and let you know how much you changed me for the better. I thank God every day that he let us cross paths. I still remember the day we met when you came in and sat across from me. The first thing I thought was how beautiful you were. We went out that night and you looked stunning like a queen. After a month, we started to bond. I remember being nervous because I didn't think I was good enough for you. But you gave me a chance and that's all I needed. We had different opinions about things but we always talked it out. We went through a hard patch in our friendship but we didn't let that stop us. We grew together by going to church and breakfast after.

I want to express how much love and care I have for you in this letter. Once I get out of this place, we will live happy lives together. You are a wonderful person, and even though my daughter does not have her mother here no more, you're willing to step in and be there for both of us. Not many people would do that. I love you to the ends of the earth and will be with you soon. Until then, stay strong and don't give up, cause I know it's not in your blood.

~ Love your husband, R

Nineteen years ago, my life was extremely different than my life today. It was different in every way and headed for greatness. With lots of hard work, dedication, and an immense amount of raw talent, I was well on my way to living the life I dreamed of since I was seven. All of the hard work, talent and dreams came to an abrupt end in the time it took to get from first to second base.

At the time I was playing baseball for my university. A week before the game when my decision to run from 1st to 3rd base ended just past second base with me on the ground clinging to my knee, I was in my coach's office discussing my future. My coach told me that several major league teams inquired about whether I was going to declare myself draft eligible or play another collegiate year. He said me that if I did declare for the draft, he was almost certain I'd be selected in the early second round, possibly the late first round. I left that meeting excited, nervous and emotional.

Up to that point, my life was hard. My mom died when I was six, my dad was in prison until I was 27. I had been through hell in foster care. Yet here I was, a small town kid from the Santa Cruz mountains, about to have my life changed forever.

Unfortunately that change didn't happen. The decision to round to second base and go for third would turn out to be the worst decision of my life. Instead of dreams being fulfilled and a bank account with millions of dollars, I had crutches, an end to my baseball career, and a bottle full of OxyContin. A once well-known athlete from a small town became depressed, alone, and addicted to drugs. I quickly became a criminal. In 24 months, I went from playing a sport I loved in packed stadiums and on TV to watching that same sport on TV in Susanville State penitentiary.

Cherry on top — after watching the video, I would have been out at third by a mile, safe to say. Bad choice.

~ C

I hate to be having to write this letter like this, but I know you are in a better place. Thank you so much for all the happiness you brought me. You treated me like I was a king. I need to tell you that I am so f***ing sorry for the role that I played in your addiction. I hope that you can understand that I was too lost and deep in my own addiction to see what was going on. I pray for you every day and want you to know that I am clean and sober now. I do it for you, for our friends, and for myself as well.

Our group was one-of-a-kind and you'll always be on my mind. I wish I was where I am now back then so I could've pulled you out. Now you are the one watching over and helping me. I love you baby girl. You are a beacon of bright light in this dark world. I'm sorry we didn't have the time. Until we meet again.

~ With all love, your boy, D



Forgiveness

*We spent some time reflecting on what it means, and doesn't mean,
to forgive... others, and ourselves.*

Dear brother,

You've been gone seven years now, but I still miss you.

I wanted to thank you for always being there, and always tolerating me even though you were nine years older. I thank you for the patience to let me tag along with you and your friends. I thank you for the loving relationship we had as we grew older.

I'm angry for you cutting me out of your life because I chose not to drink anymore. I thought we had so much more. I'm angry for you basically taking your own life. You used a bottle, but it may as well have been a gun.

I'm sad because you wouldn't let me be there for you and with you. I wish we could have had more of the special times we had together.

I forgive you for taking your life, but I can't imagine the pain you must have been going through. Forgive me for not being there when you passed. I didn't receive the phone call until it was too late.

I love you but I need to let you go. I know you're in a much better place. It's funny, all I tend to remember are the good times.

~ Love, your brother L

So much hurt in my heart trying so hard not to shed any tears.

Crying in the shower with the fear of serving years.

I hope you stay strong while I'm gone.

Don't give into those who might take advantage of you.

They might say they're my friend but keep those snakes off you.

I've been down this road before.

Had faith in those who said they loved me but left me all alone.

Why does love have to hurt like this?

Why do we have to be torn apart to find out that our love for each other is so strong that it hurts?

Just the thought of you crying for me being alone makes me feel as if I failed us.

I broke your trust and lied when I said I would never leave you.

Know that my heart cries every day cause my heart needs you.

I can promise you this

I will do what it takes as a man to change my life so that this never happens again.

I feel like I've been searching my life and hope I finally found you.

Two bodies one soul and my heart can't live without you.

You're my soulmate

~ A

Forgiving at first was very hard and very hard to understand. In the beginning I wondered why it was so important to forgive. What is done is done—all the bad I've done and all the bad that was done to me. I learned how to put all those thoughts on the back burner. But in reality they were still there, tearing me up from the inside.

I thought I was cool. But I wasn't. I'm so glad that I met my pastor and he taught me about forgiveness. How to forgive myself and how to forgive others. It was so hard at first because I did not know how. But in time, it came to me and I fell on my knees and started to let go. All these feelings inside me just poured out and for the very first time I felt so alive. It felt like a big weight just lifted off my chest and I started to see things different.

I feel so better now. I'm not perfect, but I feel so blessed. To the readers of this letter, anything is possible through Christ Jesus.

~ M

To put on paper my self forgiveness.
 For those things I have missed or messed up in my family.
 For the wrongs that I have committed against others.
 For the broken promises I have made.
 For the man I said I was but fell short of.
 From this point forward I choose to commit myself to progress, positive progress.
 I choose to keep myself living life and not trying to hurry the future.
 I make peace where I can and as I go.
 I am a better man overall because I choose to forgive myself and start living right.

~ M

I've made terrible, terrible mistakes in my past. But what I've learned in this time in jail is that I was high every time I had made one of those really bad decisions and every time bad s*** happened. Drugs overpowered my mind, and today I can say that I am not under the thrall of dope. I have removed the talons from my mind that were controlling me. As of right now, I am not that person who did those things. Those things do not define who I am today, unless I start using again.

When I was on drugs I didn't know stability or happiness. All I knew was chaos. Now that I have this chance to change my life, I'm going to — to prove to myself and others that those actions don't define me.

~ D

Dear Dad,

I'm sad that you never even tried to make time for me. I understand how it feels to want to shut the world out because you couldn't fix something but that's not a good reason to stop trying to be in my life. I was a kid without a father for the longest time. I thought there was something wrong with me. Now that I am a father myself, I see now there was something wrong with you, because the time I spend away from my kids is the hardest thing on both of us.

So, I have to thank you and forgive you at the same time. I forgive you for not being there. And thank you for showing me how to be a great father, because I will always make an effort to be in her life.

~ K

I let go of the past, because the past is the past.
 I hold onto all the good times even though some were bad.
 I let go of my failure to be a father, a brother, a son and a friend.
 I hold onto all the people that have not given up on me.
 I let go of my future tripping for those days are not yet here.
 I hold on to this day because today I am here and living in this moment.
 And I can make each minute count.
 I let go and let God.

~ M

I need to forgive myself for being an absolute tornado to my family, coming into their lives and wreaking havoc and destruction onto them and for putting my disease first and not them. It was a deadly spiral of drinking and drugs and bad decisions to end up in here. And to be away from them is hard for me. I just need to do a lot of forgiving and apologizing. I need to show it now (that I can be different). Sober is the only way. I've done it my way for this long and it hasn't been working. Time I try something new.

~ K

Hey,

I want to tell you I miss you. I always find myself thinking of the memories of when we used to get high. But I don't need you in my life to fill up the space in my soul I lost long ago. I'm so mad I can't stand looking at the mirror because I see you in myself. And the fact that you took me away and put me in so many positions, like the one I'm now, being away from people I love so much but can't even see. All I have are photos.

It's f*ed up because I love you so much. You gave me your all. You taught me how to deal with the pain. You gave me a reason to fight back, the strength to keep going when I wanted to quit and give up. Even if a lot was the wrong way to do things, I appreciate you because now I know what not to do.

Even though I know you will always be there if I were ever to call or seek you, the hardest thing I will ever have to do is say goodbye to me because I am you.

~ Bye, A



Gratitude

*We listened to music and poetry about gratitude,
and expressed gratitude for people in our lives.*

Dear J,

It's me E. I wanted to take a few moments out of my day to let you know how much you meant to me. How much of a mentor and a positive influence that you were not only in my life, but in my wife's as well.

From the first time we were introduced to the present day, you have always graciously welcomed me, treated me as your equal, respected me, were open to my suggestions, and had a smile to boot. Your openness to allowing me to make repairs to your home, not doubting my ability to replace the fence, gate, miscellaneous repairs to your home, and your vehicles.

At my young age, it instilled the confidence that I certainly utilized in making me the strong man, husband, father, friend, that I am today. As you already know, I enjoyed spending the holidays with you all. You always wanted me at the head of the table, carving the turkey or ham. Thank you for such an honor.

And thank you for being such a great grandmother to your first and second granddaughters, my two daughters. You were always receptive to them and wanted to spend your precious time with them, as well as spoiling them. See you in a few days.

~ Look forward to seeing you, J.

I don't call you son because you're mine.
I call you son because you shine.

Being your father is hard but I'm trying.
I never wanted to raise you in a broken home,
Even worse now you're all alone.

One look in your eyes and I can feel your pain.
It hurts to know things will never be the same.

I'm working on myself to be a better man.
Hoping that one day you'll understand.

~ Love, Dad, R

Dear Mom,

It's your son. I want to say I now understand how hard it is to raise kids and I appreciate what you have done for me and my siblings.

I know I made wrong choices in life, but no matter what you always had my back. I just want to say thank you for being my mom and dad because he left us both behind and forgot us. I was a troubled little kid growing up and you were a crack addict, but with even that there is nothing I wouldn't do for you.

I miss just hearing your voice and seeing your face. I remember when we used to dance at the flea market and I can still picture you and my kids dancing together like it was yesterday.

I also recall the day you put yourself in hospice and I had just got out and was still on probation. To me I didn't care if they took me back. I was not going to leave your side just as you didn't leave mine.

I want to say thank you very much for everything you did for me. If it wasn't for you, I would not be the man I am today. I love you and miss you every day you are gone.

~ Your baby son, R

Dear Mom,

I want to thank you for always pushing me in the right direction, even when I was being hardheaded, just like you. Sorry.

~ K

Pastor R,

It's me, Brother M. I want to thank you for all you've done for me, showing me how to live a different life.

I love that you never gave up on me or judged me for all my wrongdoings. I remember when you taught me about forgiveness and the life of Christ Jesus, how he died for our sins. I didn't believe a sinner like me would ever have a chance to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, for I have done so much wrong in my life.

I am so thankful that you showed me a different way of thinking and living. I wasn't perfect and still not perfect. But I know now that I can repent for all my sins. I thank God for this moment and the opportunity that each day brings. I know each day is special, and I am empowered with unlimited potential.

And I got to thank you, Pastor R, for planting that seed in my heart.

~ Thank you and God bless, M

Dear father,

Thank you for the life you have given me. I'm sorry for all the hate in my heart. I was lost, very fu**** lost. But with this time of incarceration, I've been able to slow things down, and really start concentrating.

I want to say thank you for the patience you had with me while I was strung out and that I'm sorry for the way that I treated you, both when I was in my addiction and when you were in yours. I was too young to grasp what was really going on.

I hope you know how much I love and appreciate you and how proud I am to have you as a father.

~ From one thug to another. I love you, pops. D

Mind in a Beautiful Flower

You may get played in these games of life
That I may save you from.
Making a name for us
But you have no choice
In the name of which I come
to save you with.

I chose to write about my little sibling, K, because she has always been there, near or far. She left me a birthday present, stating "Near or far I am with you." I love my little sister.

Every time you'll say your life is done
With what weapon has life been made—
Or has running persisted on with your savior.

—To save you from turmoil. She has... And, in all—you—
fall back to me, please. She cries.
“Will you see that I have been there!”
Near or far, I have saved life for you.

Far and wide you have gone.
And, for what reason have you
staggered yours’—

This game of life
with angst, anger and turmoil.
And if no respawn, then what
is left, but, her holding onto a memory of
I, to save others with a—
somber story of defeat

~ K

Dear Dad,

Just wanted to thank you even though we are going through this whole ordeal. We are in this together. What I love about you is that you're willing to never give up on me and stay by my side no matter what. I remember that road trip we took camping down the coast and the fun we had in Maui. It was the time of my life. Remember when I was in the pinewood derby? My car wasn't perfect, but I made finals. You made me the man I am. Everything you taught me stays with me. I want you to know I'm getting better as well. I won't ever give up because you didn't.

~ I love you, J



What it's like

We considered what it is like to be in jail, what keeps us sane, and even the unique smells that come with jail.

Smell is one of my favorite senses, if not my favorite, so having to be subjected to such vile odors in the jail and prison system is very depressing to me.

From the time of being placed in the cop car to the holding tank to the clothes and everything else, there is no mistaking those smells, there is nothing like it. You know that your freedom has been taken when you smell any number of these things and it triggers past trauma, and a sense of uneasiness that I wish to forget, but can't. I don't even like to walk past the main jail on Hedding Street in San Jose because you can smell the scent of the clothes being washed and dried, coming out of the vent into the air on the street. Try it for yourself one day.

That to me is the definition of the way jail smells, and that's the furthest from Bath and Bodyworks as you can get!

To be honest, that smell encapsulates the whole justice system to me. Maybe with different methods and new ideas we can change these things, but for the time being, it is what it is and if nothing changes, then nothing changes.

Only, I have the freedom to choose to stop and smell the roses that life has to offer, that lie beyond these walls, that stretch into a green flower-filled meadow that is waiting for me after this. As far as the eye can see, there's always a light at the end of the tunnel.

~ J

The smell of jail is the smell of hell. The smell of dirty bodies and the s* talk that volleys. You can try to be positive and have a good day but I look around and it will wash away.

I can't say that I like any smell in jail because I think jail must be constructed from the idea of hell. Take away your bail, throw you in a cell, all because you have a problem with your inner self. Drug addiction is the cards that I have been dealt and all the while I try to stay clean and thrive, the judge says, stay a while.

And jail just beats me down to the point that I cry. Away from my family, away from my friends. I pray to God that this nightmare will end, and I will be free once again.

~ D

The smell of Elmwood clothes reminds me of clothes sitting in a closed-up room with no ventilation going in or out.

It brings up thoughts of rats walking over them, as there are a lot of rats here.

Makes me think of what was going on in my life right then, missing my family and real friends and my kids.

Having old clothes sitting in a room for a long time... brings up a lot of bad vibes and negative feelings.

~ F

What keeps me sane is not thinking about things in the future, and not dwelling on the past. I try very hard not to worry about the things I can't control.

What keeps me sane is having a plan each and every day and trying to follow it.

I keep my sanity by my belief in God, knowing he's there with me every moment.

I keep sane by thinking and talking to my family.

I keep my sanity by taking time for myself. Deep breathing, meditation and quiet time.

I keep my sanity by listening to other men and their problems and providing any assistance that I can. Always keep in mind that I am not alone in this journey. I explain to them to live for today because there will come a tomorrow when you're free.

~ L

The smells that I deal with almost every day

The first is the smell of other men, with or without good hygiene.

The second smell is that of hot coffee in the morning.

The next is the damp, musty smell of a wet, freshly mopped floor.

Next would be the smell of the outdoors. This is usually not good. It's the smell of animals and what they leave behind.

The last would be the smell of the food we get. Very seldom is this a good smell.

Seldom good, good or bad they let you know that you are still alive.

~ L

15 Minutes Phone Call

The joy it brings when I hear your voice

takes me to a better place

The love I receive you give by choice

I hope to see your beautiful face

I feel my heart pound in my chest

as I wait on the line for this collect call to connect

You say hi and it brings a smile to my face

oh how I wait all day for this time of day

This is my 15 minutes with you that takes me out of this place

It's amazing what 15 minutes out of 24 hours day can do

I'm glad that I get this 15 minutes with you

~ A

Poppin Xannies i'm just tryna take the pain away
Ever since they took you I've been searching for the brighter days
Been on the road to heaven going the wrong way
Keep asking how your love brought me so much pain

I really need to drop the pills,
Need to find a different way to find a thrill
I've been searching...
Nothing seems to be working...

Asking God, why do I be hurting?...
Tryna to block the pain with the Perkys...
Throw away my days, throw away my nights
Every day I try but I ain't livin right
Cause I just wanna feel how I felt that night
Want to make it work, but it's a constant fight
And I just wanna

Wanna be on the stage with the light shows
Remember serving all them dubs out the back door
You wouldn't understand where I come from
Got tired of hearing you on this damn phone

~ B

I wish I could be in a safe place
But instead I waste time in jail, oh what a waste

I wish I could see my children's smiling face
But instead I lay in a depressed place

I wish I could take back a bad decision
But instead I pay for my fault with patience and precision

I wish I could enjoy a good bite to eat
But instead I have a hot tray that's vegan not real meat

I wish I could travel the world with a place to go
But instead I go to jail time diligently with a blow

~ AP



Goals

We considered goals for moving forward, and why we keep going.

My three wishes are to get out of jail, be a better father and reunite with my kids and family. Since I've been In Elmwood, I realize that I'm a smart individual and can do a lot in life being sober. I pray to my higher power that I will continue being sober when I get out of jail. I believe I can be a better father to my kids and a better son to my parents who I love with all my heart.

Some of my goals upon release are to stay sober, get a good job and start saving money to help my family in any way needed. In order to do this, I need to stay busy with myself and let a lot of my old friends go.

~ F

When I first got here I had a choice: to let the system drag me down into something I'm not, or pull myself up and do things that will give me a better chance when I get out.

One option was to get my GED and also do the work in RCP to better myself. So I chose to work on myself so I can be a better person when the time comes. I now have tools to go out and continue my growth and help others on that journey. I would like to thank RCP and also my higher power, God, for this chance to be a better man.

So options, we all have them and need to take the time to really think which option is better for us. So which option will you choose for yourself?

~ R

Today is bitter and cold.

I don't feel this from the weather but from my soul.

Insecurities and thoughts going through my mind.

The clock stands still but I'm passing through time.

Tomorrow I see a new day and a fresh start.

Can't wait until we're together chest to chest and heart to heart.

Tomorrow I wake with a new perspective on life.

Forever grateful you took the chance and rolled the dice.

My love for you shines brighter than a thousand lights.

Looking forward to the day I call you my wife.

~ I

I'm at the absolute bottom but still

I choose to rise.

Is it the pain or sadness they see that makes them despise?

No matter how hard they try

Still I got up today

I chose to rise.

We have a choice.

It's within us all to make something out of nothing, to turn tragedy into triumphs, to take a setback to prepare for a magnificent comeback.

History has shown us that great leaders have been born from the worst slums and poverty that you can imagine but still, they rose above it all, and chose to rise.

We all have a voice and a soul to do with as you wish.

What's your choice going to be?

Are you going to wallow in self-pity?

Or are you going to stand up for what you believe and take the world by storm?

Because I know I am,

I have been silenced too long.

I will always choose to rise.

~ J

Today is full of anxiety
 Not knowing what tomorrow brings
 But 2morrow I see brighter days
 full of freedom and loved ones

Today is full of isolation,
 because in a place full of other people I still feel alone
 But 2morrow I see a better future,
 full of love and the people most important to me

Today is full of anger
 in myself and the situation I'm in
 Today is full of depression
 because I can't be with my family
 Today is full of stress
 not knowing when I can go home
 Today is full of loss
 but my resilience will push me forward
 and I will replace what's gone and then some

Today is full of acceptance
 of that which I cannot change
 Today is full of choices
 to be a better person in all that I do
 and make better decisions along the way

Today is full of willpower
 to leave old attitudes to the Past
 Today is full of determination
 to work on myself
 in order to be the husband and father
 that my family deserves

Today is full of betterment
 as I continue to grow and learn
 Today is when and where I'm supposed to be
 but 2morrow I know I will be better
 because I will succeed
 and I will leave this place in the past
 and have a future where I appreciate
 what I have because of what I've learned today.

~ E

My goals for physical health: To exercise regularly upon release from Elmwood Correctional Facility. To eat better and pick up healthy recipes to gain healthy nutrients for my body. To go for long walks with my children to incorporate a healthy habit.

My goals for emotional strength: To value my loved ones' support. And to give support to them. To take time to take a moral inventory to keep my emotions in check. to meet successful people and befriend them. To learn their keys to success.

My goals for spiritual strength: To stay in prayer with my higher power. Find a local church with a good community of people to read and practice positive thinking and feedback. One day if I become successful, I would like to give back to the community.

~ A

Hey Mom and Dad,

How are you? Good I hope? As for me, while I wish I could sugarcoat my feelings and tell you everything is alright, the truth is I'm feeling sad and ashamed for the way I behaved. I brought shame to our family. I'm not proud of this. I'm paying a steep price. This place is disgusting, loud, and vile. I don't know how to adapt anymore. You raised me to be strong—They haven't broken my spirit, but they try. The court system is flawed, but I have to trust the process and I believe in a brighter day, soon, when I will get the help I need. I still have a pure soul and my faith is what keeps me moving forward each day.

Recovery has now become my reason for living so that I may become the man you always wished and prayed I'd become. I promise to do my very best and make you proud. I'm a good man. If there is a will there is a way. Tupac taught me that even in the concrete jungle a rose could grow through that same concrete and bring beauty to the harsh gray dreary world. That is all the hope I need.

~ Your loving son, J

Many thanks to:



St. Mark's Episcopal Church | saint-marks.com



cicministries.com



episcopalimpact.org

gailjohnstondesign.com

Santa Clara County Jail Programs Department

We could not do this without you!