

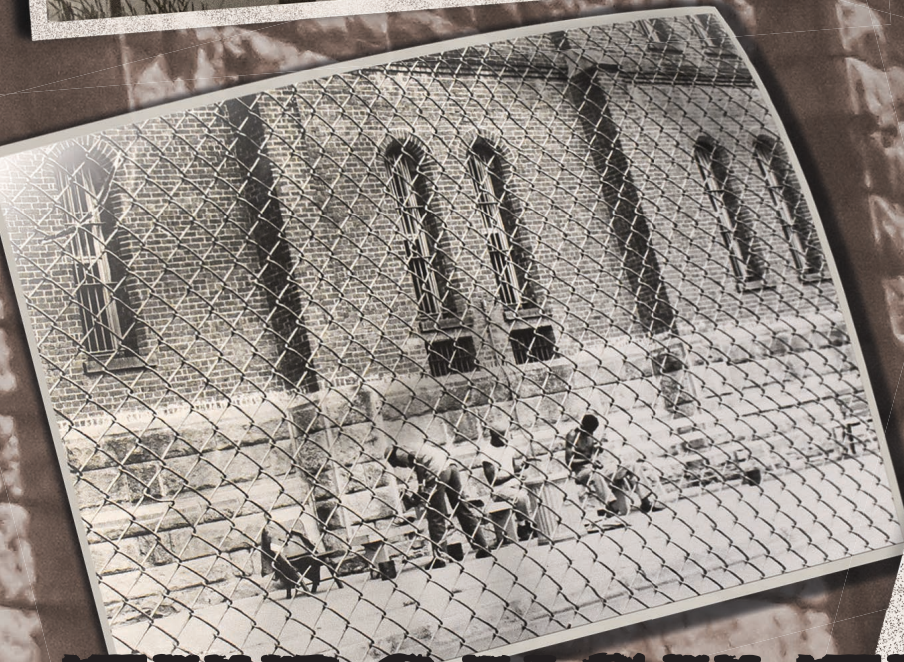
NC

PRISON NEWS

Today

Amplifying the Voices of the Incarcerated Statewide

THE WALL



THROUGH THE YEARS

Created and Written by the Incarcerated, for the Incarcerated

LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF

BY MICHAEL SUTTON

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS. That was my number one rule when I came to prison in 2015. In my opinion, minding my own business would be best accomplished by keeping to myself. I decided I would not seek to make any friends or any enemies. I had enough problems of my own, and I certainly did not care to share in anyone else's problems. I inevitably met a few likeminded individuals during my first several years, but I formed very few close relationships.

In 2022, I was accepted into the North Carolina Field Minister Program and transferred to Nash Correctional Institution. One of the first people I met when I arrived at Nash was Phillip Smith. He stayed at a table by himself in the back of the dorm. And he was always writing. Smith was always writing because he was the editor of *The Nash News* (TNN), and he also submitted articles to several other publications. Writing was his passion and his therapy. In the few instances he was not writing, we talked and became friends. Smith told me that writing was his way of speaking up for himself and for others in prison whose voices would not be heard otherwise.

One day, he told me there was an opening on TNN and asked me to apply. I knew

a few of the guys, so I applied and was voted in.

A few months after I joined, we were approached by Mildred Spearman to start a statewide publication. That publication became *NC Prison News Today* (NCPNT). Writing for both TNN and NCPNT caused our staff to spend more time together and grow closer. Before I knew it, I was making quite a few friends. As we grew closer, we shared our likes, our dislikes, and our vulnerabilities. I learned that many of these men were extremely talented and had a lot to offer both the prison population and society at-large.

As I wrote more articles and met more people, I learned about the talents, struggles, and contributions of many of my peers. More importantly, I discovered that we all have vulnerabilities. In our prison environment, being vulnerable is often viewed as a weakness, but vulnerability is a large part of what makes us human. The more I saw a person's vulnerabilities, the more I saw beyond whatever façade they presented or whatever stereotype I initially assigned to them.

I look at all my new friends in a different light now that I have taken time to get to know them. I try to see beyond my initial

impression of others, because I realize there is much more to a person than what is apparent at surface level. We are a population of sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, singers, dancers, poets, businessmen, athletes—the list goes on and on. I cannot possibly meet everyone in prison, but when I read your stories—your likes and dislikes, your achievements and challenges, and your strengths and weaknesses—I feel closer to you, as well. Your stories emphasize the depth of your humanity.

Several contributors shared their vulnerabilities in this issue. Some may make you laugh. Some may make you cry. And some may make you consider things from a different perspective. Our strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies are what make us unique. As we reveal more of ourselves to the public—providing insight into who we really are and changing the narrative portrayed by the media—we illustrate the humanity of our population.

Please keep sharing your successes, failures, interests, and vulnerabilities with us. By sharing who you really are, you build bridges that reconnect us with the public. We here at NCPNT are honored to read, learn from, and share your stories. *NCPNT*

Your Letters DOING TIME WHILE DOING TIME

BY LANEK THOMPSON

SO, HERE I AM, THE VOICE OF A SEGGER! I know they're going to censor me, because one thing I've learned in life is people hate the truth. It's bigger than race, gender,

or culture. Right now, I'm the voice of the people trapped behind the door, doing time while doing time. This isn't one of those articles you see and maybe pass judgment on be-

cause of who is writing it or what they're saying. This is the truth that many feel but can't articulate properly. Or, they're just scared to speak up.

I think we get so used to adapting to our environment, because it's a way of survival. So I ask, thrown in a cell for 180 days, what are you going to do? *Survive!* But is surviving just changing the way we think? Is it helping us learn from our mistakes? I don't think so. It's simply adding more trauma to our lives, mentally and emotionally.

Let's say someone is addicted to using drugs. Do we throw them in a room and six months later expect them to not want to do drugs anymore? No, we provide them with classes to learn ways to think differently or groups so they can have support. We give them therapy so they can have a one-on-

one to vent, cry, listen, and learn.

I think it's safe to say that "control" status isn't very helpful. We need help with changing our way of thinking. You can move a scammer from the 'hood to the suburb, but they're still going to scam. All you did was change their environment.

So, the truth I speak is: Please, stop throwing us in segregation or on control status without giving us an outlet to learn, grow, and change our way of thinking. Surviving is easy. Changing is hard. So many people do control status more than once because they just adapt. Let's stop adapting to our circumstances and change our circumstances. But we need staff on board. All hands on deck!

Reprinted from Inside The Walls at Anson Correctional Institution.



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How to submit an article

For poetry, recipes, and letters to the editor, use the app on Edovo.

For longer form articles or short stories—between 300-800 words—you may submit your writing to the facility liaison. Articles should be no longer than 800 words.

Also, see “What We Want” and “What We Do Not Want” (Volume 1, Issue 1, page 2) for more guidance on what is or is not acceptable. Any accepted submissions may be edited for content, grammar, or clarity.

Where to Find Us.

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For the incarcerated in North Carolina, *NC Prison News Today* is available on Hope University, and nationwide on Edovo.

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Front cover photos courtesy of NCDAC Archives (top left to right): Central Prison in 1890 in front of the rock quarry used to build The Wall; Two-man cell, 1950; (bottom left to right): Rec yard, 1969; Cell block, 1967; Background: The Wall, 1973

Special Feature



Clockwise from bottom left: Mike Ward, Elrico Fowler, Nathan Bowie, Iziah Barden, Stephon Goode

BY TIMOTHY JOHNSON

I AM NEVER GOING TO BE ABLE TO LEAVE THE Row,” Nathan Bowie said, sitting at a table 50 miles from North Carolina’s Death Row, where he lived for 32 years. He repeated, “I can’t leave The Row. I’m always going to be there with them.”

The “them” he referred to are the men who live on death row at Central Prison (CP). At the table with Bowie sat four other former death row residents: Stephon Goode, Elrico Fowler, Iziah Barden, and Mike Ward.

Bowie, Fowler, and Barden left death row on December 31, 2024, when then-North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper used his last day in office to commute the death sentences of 15 men to life without parole. Ward left death row in 2001 and Goode left in 2009, both resentenced to life following successful appeals.

These five men met while on The Row,

where they became brothers through sharing a life that others can’t understand. They lived under immense pressure, facing the threat of execution and losing brothers to the executioner’s poison.

Every time they see each other, it’s as if they were at a family reunion. They hug with intense force. Their faces glow, their eyes shimmer, and they talk with an eager cadence. Everyone else fades away.

On Wednesday, July 30, 2025, they met to discuss the brotherhood and mission shared by anyone who has lived on death row.

Bowie arrived on The Row in February 1993. Goode joined him later that year. Goode described the kinship as a “shared camaraderie.” He said, “To see somebody that’s been through what you’ve been through and shared what you’ve shared, it’s exhilarating to know that, ‘Okay, here’s my

brother.’”

Fowler arrived in 1997 and lived on death row for 27 years. Coming to prison at just 22 years old, he said he grew up and became a man while on The Row. “To live around men so long, to live through that experience of having the threat of execution over our heads, and having some of our friends, men that we broke bread with, men that we laughed and played cards with, played basketball with, to have these men executed—that’s a loss,” he said. “We spent more time with each other than we spent with our own families. And that creates a kinship. When we meet or run into each other, we have the immediate connection. And it’s a bond that is unbreakable.”

They’ve taken care of each other for decades and know they can depend on each other whenever they need something.

“I just tell them, ‘I got you,’ and they

know I got them, in any way necessary,” Bowie said. “We know that if anything is needed, even if it’s just somebody to talk to, my brothers got me.”

Goode nodded while Bowie was talking, then reaffirmed that perspective. “We’ve been through the fire, so they know I am here. There’s no doubt. These my brothers, man.”

Going through the fire together forged indestructible bonds.

“It’s hard, man, being at a table all those years, or reading, studying, watching TV with brothers, and every so often, it’s like, he’s gone. A month later, he’s gone. All these empty chairs around this table,” Bowie said. “And you’re like, ‘Okay. When is it going to be my number?’”

Fowler sighed, remembering the ones who left empty places. “People that was there with us yesterday, they’re gone tomorrow,” he said.

Bowie said the hardest part of life on The Row were the nights when they lost a brother to execution. They had a

way to say goodbye together. The executions usually happened around 2 a.m. They would hold their mirrors out the window and wait for the sheet-covered body to be wheeled out.

“We could see them pulling the gurney out of the door, taking them out to the ambulance. That was rough, that was rough,” he said, in a heavy voice. “All that night, we would see people [on Western Boulevard] with candles and stuff. People that were praying for us. That was a lot of help for us.”

Unfortunately, the people praying were not the only group gathered on those nights. Bowie described another group there to cheer and jeer. “On the other side, you had what sounded like a lot of college students that was out there shooting off bottle rockets. And they were singing this song,” Bowie paused. “Every time I hear it, it’s like, ‘Man...’”

Goode interjected, “When you were saying it, I am thinking, *Man, I hate that song.*”

Bowie, in a hushed, raspy voice began singing, “Na-na-na-na, Na-na-na-na, Hey, hey, hey...”

Goode looked into Bowie’s eyes as he listened to the haunting refrain, his hands clasped tightly together and resting on the table. Then, Goode and Bowie, in harmony, softly sang the final lyric, “...Goodbye.”

The song they referred to was the 1969 tune by Steam, “Na, Na, Hey, Hey, Kiss Him Goodbye,” which has been used since the 1970s by home-crowd sports fans to mock away teams at the end of a home-team victory. The cold-hearted use of the song to cheer loss of life haunts the men who heard it during the execution of a beloved brother.

“I hate that song,” whispered Goode. “I hate that song.”

“Dealing with that, my brothers helped me out,” Bowie explained. Now, he’s on a mission to give back the help he received by shining in every opportunity, so that his achievements reflect positively on everyone left behind.

Goode described that mission as a thing shared by everyone who lived on The Row.

“Whatever good that we can bring, it’s not just for ourselves, it’s for our brothers. We have to represent them to the best of our abilities. We got a lot of people counting on us.”

“We want to reach back and get our other brothers and bring them, too,” he said. “So, in time, we look forward to seeing other brothers.”

When Fowler said goodbye on the day he left The Row, he promised to dedicate his post-death row life to this mission. “Whatever good that we can bring, it’s not just for ourselves, it’s for our brothers. We have to represent them to the best of our abilities. We got a lot of people counting on us,” he said. “Just because we’re off, I’m not doing this for me, it’s for all of us.”

He believes those who left The Row before him helped earn his opportunity, and he embraces the mantle of this mission, “We expect for each other to come back

and reach in and to try to save at least one life.”

They are dedicated to and united in the mission to save the lives of their death row brothers. They left The Row, but they will never leave the brotherhood.

Barden lived on death row for 25 years, arriving in 1999. Leaving was bittersweet. He was relieved to leave behind the possibility of execution but sad to leave behind his brothers.

He described an abrupt transition to general population, “They were moving kind of fast with us. We all had a short time to say goodbye to a few people. They took that red jumpsuit and gave me some brown clothes.”

Barden and the others moved to a block in another section of Central Prison. He was sad to look around and not see anyone in a red jumpsuit. He said, “You feel a separation.”

The feeling of separation greeted him the next morning when he couldn’t greet the men he had talked to every day for years.

He still feels disoriented by the separation. “So, it was, still is, kinda’ dizzy for me.”

Goode knows intimately that feeling of separation. He left death row twice—once temporarily and once permanently.

The first time occurred in 2005, when he was diagnosed with leukemia and left for treatment, at both the CP hospital and the UNC hospital. He expected to be gone for days or weeks, but the weeks

turned into months. A year later, he was told he probably wouldn’t live through the night. He wanted to go home one last time before he died.

“They said I was never going back,” Goode said. After a long pause, he continued, “And I know this sounds crazy, but it was like they were telling me that I couldn’t go home. All I could think about was, *I want to get back to The Row.* It sounds crazy, but that’s how tight it is.”

He wanted to go home to The Row, because being away from his brothers was the worst part of battling cancer. “Yeah, that was a hard time. But I wanted to go back. Because to be executed with my brothers would have meant more to me than to die



All I could think about was, *I want to get back to The Row*. It sounds crazy, but that's how tight it is.

from cancer. That was a real hard time.”

The years 2005 and 2006 were a really hard time for everyone on The Row, because executions were happening at an unprecedented rate.

“In that time, I remember, they executed a lot of people,” Goode said. “A lot of people. That’s when they were executing guys, like two a week. I remember it was Mr. Elias, Steve...”

Bowie joined in the listing of names. “Fat Boy Frank, Flip, Shorty Brown.”

“I mean they were executing people like it was nothing, and I wasn’t there,” Goode said, staring into the space between Bowie and Fowler. “And you all know how close me and Steve was. I didn’t get to say ’bye to him. That hurt, that really hurt.”

Goode described his permanent exit from The Row in the same distressed voice. “I was walking by the [CP] chow hall, and my brothers were in the chow hall. And I could feel the separation.”

Ward helped Goode during that time. Ward lived on death row for only three years, from 1998-2001, then stayed at CP for 10 years. He said, “I watched a lot of guys get off The Row, and I was on the yard to help them.” He helped them get anything they needed or listened if they needed to talk. Most importantly, Ward gave them a connection to the death row brotherhood.

Bowie said an illustration that hung on the wall near The Row’s canteen during the late-90s motivates him and depicts the determination he and his brothers have. Accompanied by the message, “Don’t Ever Give Up,” the illustration featured a crane with a frog in its mouth. The frog has its webbed front feet wrapped around the crane’s throat, refusing to go down without a fight.

Like the frog, these men lived with resilience, refusing to be swallowed by despair when facing execution and losing brothers. Now, that resilience ensures they will nev-

er give up in their mission to rescue their death row brothers from the looming threat of execution.

Their rescue mission has been made urgent by House Bill 307, also known as Iryna’s Law, which Governor Josh Stein signed into law on October 3, 2025. One of the objectives of this law is to restart executions in North Carolina, which have been on moratorium since 2006.

That mission is why Bowie said he can never leave The Row. He thumped the table four times with his closed hand, his intense gaze pulling in the eyes of the four men sitting with him. “Too many brothers are still there. So, whatever I do, I got to make sure that I do it right. I got to do everything I can just to show, ‘Look, give them a chance, that’s all they need.’”

Bowie and the other four have received their chance at life beyond The Row. Now, they’re using their lives to earn that chance for their brothers. **NCPNT**

PUSHING THE PEN FROM DEATH ROW

By ELRICO FOWLER



IN 2012, MICHAEL BRAXTON, ALSO KNOWN as Alim, asked a group of Muslims on North Carolina's Death Row if we'd like to write some articles about our knowledge, understanding, and experience with the beliefs and practices of Al-Islam in prison.

I agreed to contribute. I've always been eager to not just learn Al-Islam, but to teach what I've learned. I believe this desire is a natural phenomenon for anyone who is passionate about their faith, no matter the degree of their knowledge. When we find the light of faith, even if it's just a tiny bit, we must run and tell others.

Braxton is an accomplished writer and artist, and he's one of my best friends. I asked him what he wanted me to write. He told me anything that came to mind about Al-Islam. That was the kicker. We could write essays, poetry, short stories, memoir pieces, or contribute anything that inspired us, such as a Qur'an selection, *ahadith* (sayings or actions from the Prophet Muhammad), or other sayings.

The collection's name was *Al-Qalam*, which is Arabic for "The Pen." It comes from the Qur'an, Chapter 68 verse 1, which states, "Nūn. By the pen and what they write." In *Understanding the Great Qur'an*, scholar M. Frank Zein writes, "The chapter mentions the pen as a symbol of the art of writing and scribing records, hence pointing to the virtue of accumulative knowledge. It points to the unique capability of man to transfer know-how and thought by the pen."

This statement accurately explains the mission of *Al-Qalam* as a platform for the voices of incarcerated Muslims.

Al-Qalam began in 2012 as a couple of stapled pages. It evolved into a publication of ten or more pages, and the subject matter

became more intense. I recognized progress after some of us participated in a creative writing class from 2013-17. Some of the pieces we wrote in class were included in the publication.

Braxton passed the torch to Jamie Smith (Rasheed), who became the editor. He was assisted by Jimmy Lawrence (Jamil), who collected the works and did the rewrite, which was painstaking because every word was transcribed by hand. Artwork was added to the cover, which gave Muslims who were artists but not writers an opportunity to contribute.

In a short span, with some imagination and networking, Smith expanded *Al-Qalam* from the walls of North Carolina's Death Row to include writings from Muslim brothers and sisters in other states.

Smith also used friendly intimidation to get someone to write an article. He'd walk up to you, flexing his muscles while extending his hand for a shake, and say, "*Assalama Alaykum!*" Then, he would look you in the face, wearing his green hat like a drill sergeant, and say, "Um, you owe me an article don't ya?" He didn't have to pressure me into writing; I did my work on time.

In 2016, Smith shared a copy of *Al-Qalam* with Brother Hajj Abdul-Malik, may Allah have mercy on him. Brother Hajj was a volunteer from the Islamic Association of Raleigh who came inside for *Ta'alim*, a teaching class, and *Salatul-Jumu'ah*, a Friday prayer service. He was a jovial, boisterous older man who had a stentorian voice. When he delivered the sermon for *Jumu'ah*, his voice made it difficult for someone to get bored or fall asleep. He often said comical things that caused us to chuckle, then told us, "That's not funny!" causing us to clam up.

From 2016-2017, Brother Hajj took a direct interest in the project. He recruited Abdul-Mateen, an outside volunteer, to develop a digital format to organize the submitted articles and add graphics. Brother Hajj invested his own money to have about a hundred copies printed. When he brought some of the glossy editions to us during a *Ta'alim*, we were awed to hold the finished product that we brought to fruition. It fueled our desire to create.

Just because we were Muslims on death row didn't mean our voices and actions had to be dead. Faith and hard work were all it took to demonstrate that we could accomplish anything.

During a hiatus caused by financial issues, we continued to write with the hope the project would clear the hurdles. Plus, we'd be ahead on content for future issues.

In 2023, we revived *Al-Qalam*. Brother Hajj had passed away some years earlier, but another volunteer from the Islamic Association, Musa Muhammad, took up the task. Like Brother Hajj, he knew the importance of getting our voices free of the walls. He believed that the Muslim brothers on death row had a lot to teach.

When my death sentence was commuted to life by then-Governor Cooper on December 31, 2024, we were still working on getting *Al-Qalam* printed and distributed. Through our writing, we can show the world our change and change the world with the pen. **NCPNT**

Other authors who contributed to Al-Qalam: Jason Mu'min Hurst, Nasir Saddiq, William Raheem Bowie, Russell Ali Tucker, Stacy Sabur Tyler, Ricky Abdush-Shaheed Cagle, Jathiyiah al-Bayyanih, Jamie Abdus-Salaam Watts, Malcolm Bro. Umar Geddie—may Allah have mercy on him.



CENTRAL PRISON THROUGH THE YEARS

The Wall, 1973

BY BARRY MINTZ

LATE AT NIGHT ON AUGUST 17, 2006, after a two-and-a-half-hour ride from Wilmington, I sat alone in the back of a transport van that wove through a maze of security gates leading to the prison's intake center. When the van rolled to a stop, I looked through the windshield and saw only darkness.

Then, a 20-foot-tall vertical beam of light split the darkness as two huge electrical doors opened like a monster's maw hungrily parting to devour its prey. A moment later, the van sat in the receiving bay of Raleigh's Central Prison (CP).

At 1 a.m., after spending hours in intake, I finally made it to my cell in the processing unit. The next morning, I awoke to cell doors screeching open on their tracks. I jumped out of my bunk, backed against the wall, and readied myself for violence. It never came. Instead, a guy poked his head around the corner, offered me a cigarette, then asked me if I played chess.

Later that day, a veteran officer walked several of us to diagnostics for processing.

He told us to consider ourselves lucky to be in the new CP. I've never considered myself lucky to be in any prison, but taking the bait, I asked, "What was the old CP like?"

The officer said the old prison looked like a castle surrounded by a stone wall like the one in *Shawshank Redemption*. This wall was so impressive that the prison became known as "The Wall." This image is very different from the modern prison walled off by rows of razor-wire topped fences.

While at CP, I could see a section of the original stone wall from unit two's recreation yard. Standing there, I often wondered which side of the wall I would have been on if I had stood in the same spot 50 years before.

Recently, memories of that haunting section of the old stone wall compelled me to learn more about the institution where I lived for over three years. To do this, I turned to a book about CP's history and to a man, Richard Dowless, who personally experienced being behind "The Wall."

According to Gregory S. Taylor's book,

Central Prison: A History of North Carolina's State Penitentiary, lawmakers attempted eight times to build a state penitentiary between 1791 and 1846. While the 1840s saw a rise in public support for a state prison, supporters of a state penitentiary system did not get their much-needed boon until the Reconstruction era following the Civil War.

After the Civil War, federal Reconstruction guidelines forced southern states to write new constitutions. In 1868, North Carolina's new constitution abolished slavery (unless incarcerated), swore allegiance to the US Constitution, and mandated the establishment of a permanent state penitentiary.

With a state constitutional mandate, policymakers purchased 22 acres of land a few blocks away from the state capitol in Raleigh, and construction began in 1870. On December 1, 1884, prison officials declared CP ready for use.

According to state records, one official said the prison looked like an "imposing

castle-like structure which in all probability was the most modern prison in the United States.”

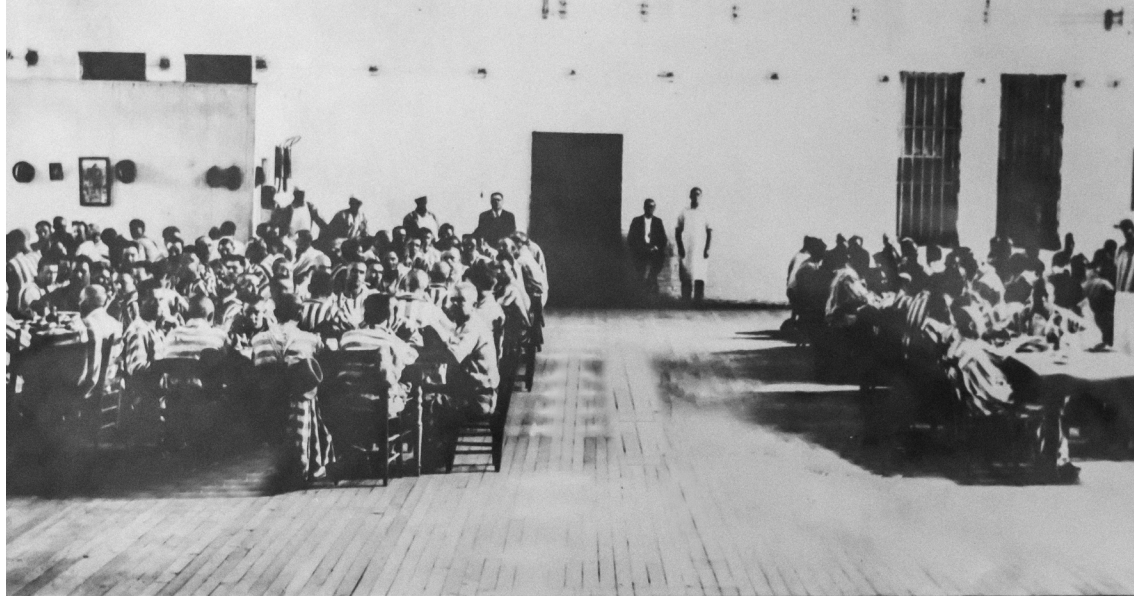
The formidable wall, built with stones cut from a nearby quarry, stood 20 feet tall with a four-foot wide walkway on top. The gothic five-story main structure spread out across the front of the prison. Divided into two wings separated by an administrative section, the east and west cell blocks were able to house 640 men. The eight-by-six-foot cells contained nothing but an iron bunk. Showers were on the bottom tier of each block.

A long corridor extended south from the middle of this complex where the kitchen, bakery, dining hall, and the prison’s power plant were located. A separate four-story structure, known as the “female building,” stood south of this corridor, housing 64 women.

With the penitentiary built, staffed, and filled, prison administrators set out to become financially self-sufficient by finding work for the incarcerated. Taylor writes that “by 1888, the prison employed inmates on various state work projects with prisoners laboring on the North Carolina Supreme Court building and on capitol grounds.” They also manufactured 750,000 bricks for North Carolina State University’s original buildings.

In the late 1880s, business leaders opposed the state’s use of cheap prison labor in industry, complaining it created “unfair competition.” So, prison officials bought land for farming near the Roanoke and Cape Fear rivers. By 1898, according to Taylor, prison labor farmed more than 15,000 acres from Halifax County to New Hanover County. When officials built facilities on each farm to house the residents, the statewide prison system was born. These farm camps, as they became known, housed approximately 1,200 of the 1,400 people assigned to CP.

The early 1900s brought the state penitentiary a weighty responsibility. In 1909, legislators determined that CP would carry out the executions of those convicted of capital crimes. Taylor provides two reasons for the centralization of executions: removing the spectacle of hanging the condemned in the public square and finding a more humane and less painful method of



Central Prison’s chow hall, early 1900s

execution. The answer to this brutality was the installation of an electric chair.

In 1926, the General Assembly gave prison officials the permission to build on-site industrial plants. These plants produced goods for use in the prisons and for sale to state institutions to save the state money. These industries included a print shop, dairy, and license plate manufacturing plant.

The success of the on-site industries tapered with the Depression era from 1929 to 1939. As the world’s economy faced a major decline in business activity and an increase in unemployment, North Carolina’s prison industry declined, as well. The rise in unemployment caused a spike in criminal convictions, as desperate people turned to crime to feed their families. As a result, CP’s population doubled between

1929 and 1932.

Prison officials made two major decisions to deal with overcrowding and lack of revenue. First, in 1933, they consolidated the prison system with the Highway and Public Works Commission. This move provided funding for the prison system and a cheap source of labor to build and maintain the state’s highways. Second, in 1935, prison officials decided to build a “Depression-proof” manufacturing plant. Since sales of tobacco products did not decline during the Depression, the prison began processing cigarettes and chewing tobacco.

When the Depression ended in 1939, legislators gave prison officials money to improve the conditions at CP. They upgraded each cell with electric lighting, hot and cold running water, and better air circulation. Then, in 1940, they added an industrial

A view of Central Prison’s yard from The Wall, 1969





Tower demolition, 1982

building for the license plate plant, print shop, and paint shop. These improvements and additions moved CP into the rebellious times of the 1950s and 60s.

State documents record many instances of violence at CP, with one of its most violent events being the riot of April 16, 1968. It started at 12:30 p.m. when 529 men refused to return to work, demanding changes to the conditions of their confinement. At 2 a.m. the next morning, CP's guards issued a last chance for surrender, but the men on the yard refused. The guards, Raleigh police officers, and highway patrolmen stormed the yard and fired rifles into the rioters from

the wall.

By 3 a.m., the riot was over. After this event, the *Raleigh News and Observer* quoted state prison system commissioner, Vernon Bounds, saying that "never again will [prisoners] be permitted to congregate 200 and 300 at the time like they did before."

In the early 1970s, violence continued to be a problem as CP double-bunked the cells to deal with overcrowding. These security issues, plus the failing conditions of the nearly 100-year-old structure, caused officials to call for a new prison. Efforts to replace the old CP received support in 1977 when then-Governor Jim Hunt approved the funding. Deconstruction of unstable portions of the old prison began in 1978. Two years later, construction of the new prison began.

When Richard Dowless arrived at CP in 1981, the entire brick façade of the east wing was missing. "Toilets and sinks hung in the air by pipes where cells had once been," said Dowless. After he processed, Dowless moved to a cell

on the fourth tier in F-block. He said there was a constant roar in the cell blocks—radios blaring and men talking back and forth through the bars.

In 1983, the new prison was complete. The six four-story housing units provided 576 cells, spread out across the front of the prison. The new cell blocks, built separately from the existing structures, were accessed by a corridor, now called "The Tunnel," cutting through the center of the prison. Dowless was among the first men to move into the modern prison.

"The day we moved, the roar was extra loud," he said. "I remember being the

third person in line going across the west yard through the tunnel to the new prison." When he got to his new single-cell, the officer in the control booth locked Dowless inside.

"My new cell was clean, and it was a world of difference being alone and so quiet," he said. "The cell block had 16 cells with cinder block walls and a solid door. We were under 100 percent controlled movement. Before, we went everywhere on our own. This kept us isolated from guys in the other blocks."

When I arrived 23 years later, much had changed. We were able to move without an escort from the unit five Workers Residence Building, known as "WRB," to our jobs or the gym in unit two. The industrial building that once thrived with production lay dormant with broken windows and a thick layer of dust covering the walls and floors. In 2008, however, construction began on a new hospital to replace the original hospital built in the 1950s.

The new 315,000 square foot Regional Medical Center and Mental Health Facility came on-line in 2013. This fully functioning hospital within the confines of a maximum-security prison serves the entire prison system. It contains an emergency room, operating room, and pre- and post-op rooms. It provides dialysis, radiation, and chemotherapy treatment. Today, the hospital seems to be the main feature of CP. In the past, its industries took center stage.

Many people have passed through the gates of CP since it opened in 1884. Most of these people processed there then transferred to other prisons around the state. But for those who stayed to work in the penitentiary, we share part of that storied history.

Over the last 142 years, this prison has faced political opposition, financial depression, and rebellion, yet it continues to move forward and adapt to the changing times.

As incarcerated men and women, there is a lesson here for us.

We need to dismantle the failing structures of our thinking that drive the need for prisons like CP. We need to build secure structures and systems in our inner beings to better deal with life's challenges without resorting to drugs, violence, or crime. When we do, we will never again enter the prison monster's maw. **NCPNT**

FIELD MINISTER GETS COMMUTATION AND WORK RELEASE JOB

By MICHAEL SUTTON

THE TEXT MESSAGE READ, “CALL ME now.” The cryptic message came to Kirston Angell from his attorney. Messages like this trigger an indescribable mix of anxiety and excitement that sets deep into the pit of the stomach. The throat constricts. Swallowing becomes difficult.

Angell was lying on his bunk in the close custody unit at Foothills Correctional Institution when he received this text on November 13, 2024. He didn't know just how much the conversation he and his lawyer were about to have would completely change his future. Angell was in the eighteenth year of a 31- to 41-year sentence, and he had spent several years praying for a favorable answer to his juvenile review board petition.

Angell had taken many steps to demonstrate to the board members that he was committed to change. He stayed out of trouble. In 2021, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in pastoral ministry through the North Carolina Field Minister Program. Over the next three years, while serving as a field minister, he counseled and encouraged countless other men to commit to changing their lives and helped them take steps to find their own identity and purpose. Angell also meticulously researched minimum custody, because he did not want any surprises when he got there in 2032. He was dedicated to preparing for his next steps.

The text message filled him with anticipation, so Angell rushed to call his attorney right away.

As soon as the automated ViaPath prompt concluded, his attorney said, “Your sentence was commuted by Governor Cooper, and you will become parole eligible on January 1, 2027.” They discussed what this meant, then Angell called his wife. He and his wife cried with joy about the possibility that he might be released 10 years early. Angell spent the next couple of days in disbelief that he was one of only six individuals granted what he called “such unmerited grace.” As a result of this grace, instead of having to wait seven more years before he was eligible for minimum custody, he be-

came eligible immediately.

Despite receiving early eligibility, Angell was ready because he had already researched minimum custody for years. He advises men eligible for minimum custody to do their own research and not choose a facility just because it is close to their hometown. Angell strongly encourages others to not rely on “inmate.com,” or hearsay. “Research the DAC Policy Manual on your tablet to see what you can qualify for, or be banned from participating in, based on your crime or sentence.” He recommends paying par-



Kirston Angell at Freedom Life Ministries

ticular attention to the following sections: Offender Custody Classification (Chapter C .0100), Work-Release Conditions of Eligibility (E .0700), Home Leaves (E .3300), and CV (Community Visit) Passes (E .3400).

Three years as a field minister on the close custody unit at Foothills left Angell unprepared for the commotion of the open dorms in Foothill's minimum custody unit. The constant noise and incessant activity shocked his senses. Angell did, however, love being able to go outside for up to four hours a day in the winter and six hours a

day in the summer.

The differences in infrastructure between minimum and medium custody stood out to Angell. “Medium custody facilities have more space, staff, and opportunities for inmates,” he commented. In minimum custody, Angell noticed the lack of space that limited potential classes, with the chow hall and the education trailer as the only options. The Alcohol and Chemical Dependency Program uses the chow hall when it is available during the day, and religious services are held there at night. The high school equivalency program utilizes the education trailer in the daytime, and Freedom Life Ministries' reentry programs use the trailer at night.

He also commented on how odd it felt seeing people leaving the facility several times a week, and he looked forward to his own excursion outside the fence.

In July of 2025, Angell went to Hope Community Church on his first six-hour (CV) pass. His sponsor, Pastor Jeremy Peeler, Hope Community Church's discipleship pastor, arrived at the facility with a selection of brand-new clothes for Angell to choose from. Angell chose an Under Armor T-shirt and Levi's jeans, and he wore his own black Fila sneakers. He said, “This was the first time in almost 20 years that I actually had a choice in what I could wear.” He also enjoyed the simple freedom of being able to “open and close [his] own car door.”

He recognized many of the people in the church as volunteers from One Day with God events and church services at the Foothills close custody unit. Angell also recalled feeling “extremely honored and accepted” when the various volunteers brought their families to meet him. “All of them knew my name.” They told Angell about specific prayers they offered for him and his former field minister team. He sat down for the service, listened to Pastor Jeremy's sermon, and witnessed a baptism.

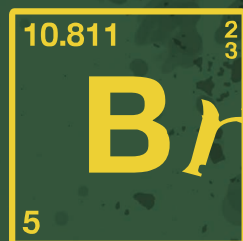
After the service, Angell had lunch with Pastor Jeremy and his family. Angell enjoyed a burger filled with cheese curd and topped

Angell cont'd on Pg 12

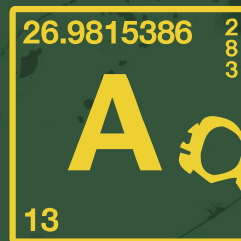
Special Feature

Programs that provide medication for opioid use disorders are expanding to more North Carolina prisons. But help may not be available to all who need it. Many are on their own in the battle of ...

By CRIS GARDNER



Breaking



Addiction

We are well aware the letter A is not listed on the periodic table

PEOPLE LEAVING PRISON ARE DYING at an alarming rate, and drug overdoses are to blame. The formerly incarcerated are 40%-50% more likely to die from an overdose within their first two weeks of release than someone from the general public is.

Drug overdoses are the number one cause of death in the United States for people under 50 years old, the majority of overdose deaths coming from opioids.

"About 76% of folks that come into our care and custody self-admit to having some sort of substance use disorder (SUD)," said Dr. Arthur Campbell, comprehensive health services chief for the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (NCDAC). "That's just a staggering number."

Many people believe that those with an SUD merely lack willpower. They view addiction as a temporary state of mind rather than a chronic disease. Yet, science and mental health providers are debunking these claims.

According to Dr. Campbell, the fine line between disorder and disease is determined by the level of disruption to the patient's life. "There's a spectrum of illicit substance use," he said. While some people use substances and it doesn't affect their lives, others lose control. Research shows that, while many people begin experimenting with drugs willingly, substance abuse leads to changes in the brain that interfere with the ability to fight the compulsion to use.

According to Dr. Campbell, it's a disorder when the use begins affecting the individual's personal, occupational, family, or social life, but "once it has an adverse impact on that then ... it is clearly a disease."

To address the issue, NCDAC partnered with UNC-MAHEC (Mountain Area Health Education Center) in April 2021, to develop a medication assisted treatment (MAT) program called MOUD, medication for opioid use disorder.

NCDAC chose two pilot sites: North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women (NCCIW) and Orange Correctional. In September 2021, NCDAC began educating and training the staff at the camps. In January 2022, the program was put on hold due to COVID-19. The pause lasted until July, when MOUD initiations began at NCCIW. Orange followed in October. In July 2024, NCDAC assumed full control of the program.

Misconceptions about individuals with SUDs exist within the prison system, as well. Many administrators continue to believe that punishment will deter people from seeking the high. However, data proves this method is largely ineffective.

The goal of the MOUD program is to save lives and reduce recidivism. Programs like MOUD are the most effective way to accomplish this. Behind the data and the research are real people with real lives at stake. People like James.*

On an autumn afternoon in 2018, James and his friend Kyle decided to go to the store to buy some things for Kyle's new place. The new trailer was sparsely decorated and needed essentials before it could truly be called a home.

Despite the fact that they were both high on heroin and Xanax, Kyle got behind the wheel of his small, single-cab truck. James sat shotgun.

Years later, James is still not sure what happened. He woke up in the truck. The windshield was shattered. The passenger side door wouldn't open. He needed to get out, so he pushed out the windshield and crawled across the hood. He walked to the driver's side door to check on Kyle.

Just as he assured himself that Kyle was alive, a woman appeared and told James to sit down. He barely made it to the ground before he blacked out. He woke as his pain-racked body was loaded onto a gurney. He blacked out again with the sound of an approaching helicopter echoing in his ears.

When he regained consciousness, he was lying in a hospital bed at Lake Norman Regional Hospital, his newborn son's mother sitting bedside. His lung had collapsed, and a chest tube had been inserted to help him breathe. "Where's Kyle?" he asked. She told him Kyle was at the Charlotte Medical Center. He was on life support, things looked grim. "I thought Kyle would be alright," James said. "It didn't seem real to me."

Two weeks later, Kyle's parents took him

**Name changed to protect privacy*

off life support. He was 18 years old.

The next four years were a blur for James. “I didn’t know Kyle’s death had affected me as much as it did,” he said. “And I don’t want to use it as an excuse, but looking back, it was probably why I started using drugs more heavily.”

James, now 29, sits in prison months shy of his release date after serving almost five years for first degree burglary. He is lean-fleshed, with a condor’s wing span and an impish grin. His youthful face sports a thin mustache and goatee.

He was just 12 years old the first time he got high. It was his mother who gave him the marijuana. By the time he turned 18, he knew he was addicted. At 19, he started smoking heroin.

After Kyle’s death, his drug use worsened. Crack and crystal meth were added to the weed, pills, and heroin that were part of his daily life. He went to a clinic a few times to try to get sober, but it never lasted.

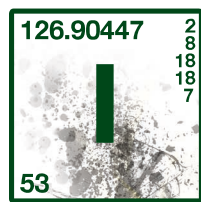
James went to jail for the first time when he was 18. A high school dropout with an infant son, he found himself overwhelmed with the realities of adulthood. As his drug use increased, he found it harder to support himself, his child, and his addiction. He began breaking into houses to pay for it all. “I knew I was going to come to prison or die,” James said. “Coming to prison probably saved my life.”

Prison agreed with James. At Pender Correctional, he got his GED. Later, while at Pamlico Correctional, he got an associate degree in human services technology. He was making all the right choices, giving himself a better chance for success post-release. Well, almost.

Like many people with an SUD, James continued to use while incarcerated. “All of the write-ups I have had since coming to prison are from dirty drug tests,” he admitted. So, when James learned that there was a MAT program, he decided to investigate.

The process to enroll in MOUD begins with a referral from a case manager, mental or primary health care provider, or correctional staff. The referral leads to an assessment which occurs 30-60 days prior to release. Once accepted, the patient is connected with a member of NC FIT (Formerly Incarcerated Transitions), a group of formerly incarcerated people who aid in re-entry. The patient is assigned a community

healthcare worker who works together with NC FIT as a case management team for the patient. They work to connect the patient with federally qualified health centers where the patient can continue treatment upon release. NC FIT communicates with the facility case manager, informing them of the patient’s enrollment in the MOUD program and with the post-release/community release officer. This prevents issues that may hinder the patient’s care pre- and post-release.



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About two weeks before release, the patient begins receiving buprenorphine-naloxone, also known as Suboxone. A week to ten days prior to release, the patient receives a buprenorphine extended release injection, known as Brixadi. This \$1,500 shot bridges the dangerous gap between the patient’s last dose in prison and their first appointment with an outside healthcare provider.

Dr. Campbell said NCDAC chose this expensive route because of the challenges faced by individuals leaving prison. “What the long-acting injectable medication does is allows a buffer for that person. They have a period of three to four weeks after they leave custody to make a connection in the community—we obviously help them with that. But I think that makes them safer. They’ve got protection when they leave, and they don’t have to immediately rush the very next day and try to get in to see a provider.”

James admits he is not sure he is ready to quit using drugs, but he doesn’t want to die. “I don’t trust myself,” he said. “I’m planning

ahead.” He is aware of his addictive nature and how potent the drugs on the street are, mainly because of the prevalence of fentanyl. Three of his friends have died from overdoses since he has been incarcerated. “This is the safest route. It won’t interfere with my post-release, and it’s not lethal.”

For people like James, there are options. But many others are left to struggle on their own.

 Clint* is the product of a house of chaos. His father was an alcoholic who was quiet and angry when sober but loud and angry when drunk. “I never felt secure my entire life because of what I was exposed to.”

To cope with his anxiety, Clint turned to substances. He began drinking at the age of nine. Later, he started getting high with a group of older kids. “I was a full-blown addict by the age of 12,” he said.

Clint had many brushes with the law, but he managed to rebuild his life and was doing well. However, Clint’s girlfriend struggled to deal with his volatile mood swings. One day, she decided to take Clint’s son and go stay with her mother. She left a message on the answering machine. “Clint, don’t freak out,” she pled. But freak out is exactly what he did.

Clint cleaned out their bank account and went on a crack- and alcohol-fueled rampage. A month and a half later, he was in a county lock-up facing the death penalty for two homicides.

Clint began using again while at Pasquotank Correctional. After he reaggrieved an old back injury, someone offered him Suboxone. He didn’t know that accepting it would send him spiraling into 11 years of addiction and suffering. “I was only ever sober twice during that time,” Clint said. “And both of those times it wasn’t because I chose to be sober; I was in the hole and couldn’t get any.”

He knew he was in trouble but felt he had nowhere to turn. He was spending 85%-90% of the money he earned or received from family and friends on his habit. He was using the drug every day to cope with his pain, his life sentence, and what he felt was a hopeless situation. “I needed a piece of dope when I woke, another when I went to work, and another just to get a shave.”

In the fall of 2025, he’d finally had

Did you know...

- With the MOUD program, you can self-refer or be referred by a case manager, mental health or primary care professional, or a member of correctional staff.
- NCDAC proactively scans their records to find anyone who may qualify for the program.
- MOUD treatment costs \$1,800 per person, not including staffing.
- There are currently 1,464 individuals in DAC custody with an opioid use disorder.
- This program is also available at both residential treatment facilities, DART and Black Mountain.

enough. “This was the first time that I quit while I still had dope in my possession,” Clint said. But it came at a price.

Clint was irritable and aggressive. “I felt like I had worms crawling under my skin. I couldn’t stand to have anyone or anything touch me.” There were night sweats, restless leg syndrome, and bouts of insomnia. He constantly fought the urge to find his supplier. “I could’ve walked on the yard at any point, and with the wave of my card, all the pain and suffering would end.” If he was eligible for MOUD, his suffering could be managed, but for lack of money it continues.

Angell cont’d from Pg 9

with jalapeño peppers and bacon. He had buffalo chips with ranch dipping sauce on the side and blueberry dumplings with a scoop of vanilla ice cream for dessert. The group made small talk, then Pastor Jeremy took Angell back to Foothills, where Angell changed back into his green prison clothes and returned to his unit.

Back inside the prison fence, he reflected on how thankful he was for the support of his family and Hope Community Church. Angell shared that because of such a good support network, he has a great home plan.

He is the first field minister to have a work release job in his degree field. An-



gell’s work release employment is with Freedom Life Ministries’ reentry program, helping incarcerated individuals integrate back into society in Avery, McDowell, and Yancey counties. Hope Community Church also offered him a job opportunity with the church when he is released, and he has detailed one-, three-, and five-year plans in place.

Funding is the biggest hurdle to the expansion of MOUD. As of the writing of this story, MOUD is available at 24 of NCDAC’s 55 facilities, with the goal to be at all facilities by year’s end. NCDAC received a grant to start the pilot program, but no further funding has been provided, leaving NCDAC to fund MOUD from its existing coffers. “Our leadership, all the way up to, and including, [Secretary Dismukes], all believe very strongly in the importance of this program,” said Dr. Campbell. “So, we have continued it despite having no funding.”

Through November 2025, NCDAC had spent \$2.7 million on the program and requested an annual recurring budget of \$10.5 million from the General Assembly.

For now, NCDAC offers the program only to those individuals who are reentering the community, or those coming in to prison on existing treatment. “Our goal, once we can get full funding, is to continually expand that,” said Dr. Campbell. “I wish I could tell you how long that would be, but it’s certainly our intent to continually expand this. First, to all of the institutions, and then, secondly, to all the time frames involved and slowly increase that as we have resources and funding.”

Angell realizes parole is not automatic. He said, “I understand that parole isn’t something I am guaranteed just because I was made eligible by Governor Cooper.”

He also shared his remorse for his crime. Angell lamented, “I can never change or even repair the harm my actions produced in the past, but my hope is that maybe I can use my life to keep someone else from

The incarcerated are often told about a “day one” approach to rehabilitation, the idea that the incarcerated should begin working on themselves as soon as they enter prison. Clint readily admits that he may not have been ready on day one to focus on his sobriety, but he’s ready now.

Clint and James are in the same place but have two very different paths ahead of them. The odds of success for James, although significantly higher through the MOUD program, are very much against him. He will be getting out of prison soon, but he will have to face the daunting task of rebuilding his life. He will struggle to find shelter, employment, and transportation, all while fighting the demons of his past—his criminal record and his addiction. But he has taken several important steps to realize his dream of becoming the man and the father his son needs him to be.

Clint, on the other hand, will have to do things the hard way. He will succeed or fail on his own accord. The chances of him leaving prison are remote. So, to some, it makes his choice of getting and staying sober more admirable. He is taking stock of his life as it is, and he is making the best of it that he can. For him, that means living a sober life.

But he lives in a place where stress surrounds him. And stress is something he has never been adept at handling. He is always one bad day, one poor decision, away from spiraling into the abyss. Without help, he stands alone in the battle to break the cycle of addiction. **NCPNT**

going down the same path. I am dedicated to continuing to minister to others whether I am inside or outside of these walls.”

The ominous summons takes many forms—“Call me now” from a lawyer, “We need to talk” from a spouse, or “Come to my office” from a superior. They all induce a certain amount of anxiety and uncertainty. Angell will be able to alleviate this anxiety because he has found his identity and purpose in ministering to and serving others. He has found peace of mind in accepting that he can carry out his mission on either side of the fence. Not only is Angell now opening his own car doors, he is also opening doors of opportunity for all incarcerated individuals—especially field ministers. **NCPNT**

FROM THE DISH PIT TO PIT CREW

BY TYLER BOWMAN

THE SMELL OF HIGH-OCTANE GASOLINE forced old memories to race through Daryl Campbell's mind. Standing in the pit box at the 34th Annual Jim McClure All-Harley Top Fuel World Finals, he thought back on where his life used to be. As former president of a motorcycle club, Legion of Doom, he used to associate the smell of gasoline with hurting people. His old lifestyle led him to breaking laws; his new lifestyle led him to being part of breaking a world record.

Daryl "Superman" Campbell has come a long way since his motorcycle club days. When I first met him in 2018, we worked together in the kitchen at Marion Correctional Institution, where he shared a variety of bizarre stories that I typically chalked up to exaggeration. Though extraordinary, his wild tales of chasing women and making money were more entertaining than most people's stories.

As I came to know him better, I learned that he had an aging mother and teenage daughter, whom he deeply regretted leaving behind. This prison bid was his fourth. As a son, father, and man in his 40s, he knew this had to be his last time away from them, or he risked losing them forever.

He decided to position himself better for his return home, so he could live up to his family's expectations. He signed up to participate in the nine-month gang program at Foothills Correctional. During the program, he participated in a class called Thinking for a Change that focused on cognitive recognition and decision making. Campbell credits this class as the biggest factor in shifting his thought process, spurring him to formulate plans and set goals. This shift in thinking caused him to realize that he alone had the power to control who he allowed around him. By exercising this power, his life began to change.

On April 9, 2022, Campbell walked out the doors of Caldwell Correctional to find his mom, Diane, and teenaged daughter, Elody, waiting for him. Elody only visited twice during this five-year bid, so seeing her standing in front of him nearly grown

shocked him. The reunion felt bittersweet. Although it was wonderful to see her, he couldn't help thinking about the many years of her life he had missed.

The urge to get his life going again overwhelmed him. Doubts about whether he could succeed and stay sober constantly attacked him. Fortunately, he had a loaner vehicle and a job as a directional driller waiting for him, both provided by a formerly incarcerated friend who had successfully reentered society. After a year of installing fiber optic cables underground, Campbell managed to purchase his dream truck, a 2017 Ford F250.



Daryl Campbell and his daughter, Elody

The first picture I remember getting from Campbell was him standing in front of his truck, wearing black cowboy boots, black jeans, a black button down, all topped off with—you guessed it—a black cowboy hat. When I questioned him about his attire, he explained that while incarcerated he used to watch the awards shows on television and remembered all the beautiful women the country stars were getting. So naturally, when he got out of prison, he updated his

entire wardrobe.

Campbell has been free for over three years. He views himself as a productive member of society and relishes the fact that people can see his change, success, and sobriety. He hates that his change took so long and that he wasted so many years of his life, but he's proud to be a good father now.

His family is proud to have him back and glad to be getting the best version of him. He went from worrying his family—they dreaded another collect call from jail—to them looking forward to receiving his calls or texts. He appreciates his growth, knowing his family enjoys talking to him and that he no longer disappoints them.

Campbell's support system was vital for his reentry success. He will never be able to fully repay the debts he owes to his family and friends. However, one opportunity came that allowed him to repay a friend who once put up bail money for him. The friend owned a garage where he could work off his debt by turning wrenches.

While working there, he discovered that the shop did a lot of work for a nitro-powered Harley drag race team. He wanted in. This opportunity allowed him to further work down his debt, but Campbell felt like he should be the one paying for the experience.

He worked on the pit crew for Mary Dangrow, a 61-year-old female racer nicknamed "Bad Apple Mary," a legend in the sport. At the World Finals, she broke the world record in her class, the Profuel 1/8 mile, with a 4.504-second run.

Like many people in prison, Campbell worried he'd be too old to achieve anything worthwhile once released. To see Dangrow pass the finish line as a world champion was an inspiration for how he should live his life.

He took a deep breath. Ignoring the enticing fumes, he relished the smell of freedom. He doesn't regret that his days in the fast lane are over. The pit crew is better than the pit of prison. All he wants is to savor every day with his daughter. **NCPNT**

THE CHAINS THEY SHARE

By JON ADAMS

EVERYONE LOVES A STRONG, dynamic brotherhood. From the iconic Jackson 5 to Hall of Fame quarterbacks Peyton and Eli Manning to Dale and Brennan in the movie, *Step Brothers*, these famous brothers prove just how resilient a brotherhood can be. (Yes, even when one touches the other's drum set.)

Unfortunately, some brothers end up in prison, and incarceration can devastate relationships. When someone commits a crime, the ensuing consequences often cause insoluble strains on the people they love. Few are fortunate to maintain relationships with their family and friends; some are fortunate to have the support of just one loved one. Many, however, trudge through their incarceration alone, their former bonds broken under bricks of anger, betrayal, and unforgiveness. I understand this truth all too well; my relationship with my older brother has crumbled under the weight of my crime and incarceration.

When brothers go to prison, the damage doubles. Families lose not one but two loved ones—double the cost, double the loss, and double the heartache.

Still, true brothers find a way to overcome the chains they share.

Stephon and William Goode share a smile that doesn't quite match their saga—both have been in prison for 34 years.

The Goode brothers grew up on the southside of Raleigh. During their childhood, they shared a bedroom, but their room wasn't the only thing they shared. Stephon described the mutual love-hate relationship that he and his younger brother experienced, feelings familiar to most siblings.

"I didn't want him hanging around," Stephon said with a laugh, and William looking on mischievously. As kids, the two-year-and-ten-day difference in their age seemed

like a huge gap. But as they grew into young adulthood, the gap disappeared, and their bond strengthened.

One of William's favorite memories from their childhood was when they played baseball together; Stephon was a pitcher, and William covered his back in left field.

The Goode brothers had each other's backs off the baseball diamond, too, especially when their lives took a turn for the worse.

At 22, Stephon was charged with first-degree murder, and William—just 20 years old—was charged with aiding and abetting and robbery as his older brother's co-defendant. Both were found guilty on all charges. Stephon was sentenced to die and sent to death row at Central Prison; William received a life sentence for his role in the crime.

For the first time in their lives, Stephon and William were separated, which unsurprisingly affected their relationship. "We grew apart," Stephon admitted, shaking his head. "I don't know, man, prison changes people."

William was still able to visit his brother

for a few hours at Central Prison every six months. And despite his big brother's death sentence, William remained hopeful. "I always felt like Stephon was coming home," he said.

In 2009, William's hope stepped closer to reality when Stephon's death sentence was reduced to life in prison through appeal.

Stephon and William finally reunited at Franklin Correctional Institution, and unlike their younger days, they loved being together. They were able to spend time with each other and have visits with their mother together.

"I had someone to share history with. There is depth that we have that no one else can understand," Stephon said.

Although Stephon no longer had a death sentence looming over him, a leukemia diagnosis and, later, a brain tumor threatened his life. But his faith in God and his family's support gave him the strength to overcome those obstacles, too.

From their early 20s to their mid-50s, Stephon and William have matured. When asked about watching each other's transformation, William bragged of his older brother



er's growth. "His has been strange," he said through a chuckle of disbelief. "He is a happy dude now. The brother I knew is not the brother I know now. I love him," said William, a proud smile forming across his face.

Stephon commended William's maturity. When Stephon signed up for the North Carolina Field Minister Program, he knew that the program wouldn't suit William. Stephon thought his little brother would sign up anyway just to follow him. But to Stephon's surprise, William turned down the program and decided to focus on his trade working in Correction Enterprises' sign plant. "That was my proudest moment—seeing that my brother was his own man," said Stephon.

Through three decades of incarceration, separation, health scares, loss of family members, and other potential bond-breakers, Stephon and William's brotherhood has thrived. "Prison has brought us closer," William said. And while they both hate that the other is in prison, they make the most of their time together, hoping that one day they'll have something else to share—their freedom.

Loyalty is everything for Joe and Jimmy Smith. The fortitude of their loyalty has proven itself over their 30 years of incarceration. They learned this loyalty not in North Carolina but on the streets of Baltimore, where they grew up.

"Everything was cool until NC," Jimmy joked, to which his older brother responded, "You ain't lyin' about that!"

But the Tarheel State wasn't the first place the brothers ran into trouble. Joe, who is four years older than Jimmy, admitted that he first served time as a juvenile in 1977. Although they were introduced to the justice system early on, Jimmy described their mindset about it, saying, "Going to prison wasn't necessarily a bad thing." Their environment, unfortunately, had desensitized them to the perils of prison.

Once they grew up, Jimmy served in the United States Marine Corps, and Joe made a living as a carpenter and roofer. They eventually settled in North Carolina, living in the same apartment complex in William-



ston.

Life got busy for them, but they still made time for each other. They would drive up to Baltimore and vibe to the Biggie Smalls thumping out of the car stereo. "I loved going back uptown together. Just him and me—no one else," Jimmy said.

The Smith brothers cherished these moments together, but their drives became reveries when they ended up in prison with virtual life sentences.

"I caused the situation," Joe conceded, burdened that his actions caused his little brother to lose his freedom. "I regret it to this day."

But Jimmy sees it differently. "He didn't cause it. When he go, I go. We going together," he said.

Their loyalty to each other wouldn't amount to anything if it crumbled under pressure. The court may have thrown away the key with Joe and Jimmy, but it couldn't throw away their brotherhood.

Throughout their sentence, the Smith brothers have always looked to each other for inspiration, especially as they've grown in character. Joe says when he looks at his younger brother, "I see a good person. People always talking about Jimmy Smith."

Jimmy credits a lot of his growth to Joe. He said, "When I was in my foolishness, Joe was in the church. It's been cool. He loves now. He prays now."

Still, their time in prison has been far from easy. Joe has battled cancer on three different occasions. They've lost family and friends. And when they are separated and living at different prisons, both brothers struggle from the other's absence.

"We don't know the next time we'll see each other," Jimmy said, his voice breaking and tears falling from his eyes. "It bothers me."

Jimmy's fear of the unknown showed just how much he loves his brother, and Joe responded by putting a hand on his shoulder, reassuring him, "You gonna be alright."

Joe and Jimmy love each other deeply, and their incarceration has only cemented their bond. They've learned that family is the most important thing in their lives. Even though they have lost contact with people they care about, Jimmy and Joe value the relationships they do have. "I've learned to forgive people who aren't in my life," Joe said.

They can only focus on who is there, like each other, like their sister, Florence Hunter, and like Joe's son, who was recently incarcerated and met his Uncle Jimmy at Craven Correctional, where Jimmy works as a field minister.

"We all we got," Jimmy said. For the Smith brothers, that's how it's always been and how it'll always be.



Inseparable—this word best describes Tim and Tony Johnson, even after the court vowed they'd never see each other again. After 21 years in prison, they've not only seen each other but have lived at the same camp together six times.

Tim—the older brother by two years—is energetic, bold, and outspoken. Tony is cool, stoic, and reserved. Both are intelligent and quick-witted. Tim is a die-hard NC State fan, and Tony is a devoted UNC fan. Despite these differences, which may have led to a scuffle or two, the Johnson brothers have always been close.

Tim and Tony grew up in Tarboro, a small town in eastern North Carolina known for its high school football dominance. They were always side-by-side, so their family nicknamed them, “The Boys.” Once they reached high school, friends dubbed them, “The Tandem.” “Wherever we went, we went together,” Tim said.

Tim and Tony played just about every sport kids could play during their childhood. “Growing up, my big brother Tim was my hero. If he did something, I had to do it, too. Tim was protective. If I needed him, he'd be there,” Tony said.

After “The Tandem” graduated high school, they lived together in the same apartment during their college years. Tim

was majoring in psychology at NC State, and Tony was enrolled at Wake Technical Community College. But education took a backseat to their partying and drug use, causing their lives to nosedive.

On September 4, 2004, Tim and Tony were tailgating at an NC State football game when their lives changed forever. During the tailgate, an alcohol-induced fight ensued between the Johnson brothers and another group of young men. Tim's protective instincts kicked-in, mixed with impulsivity and recklessness, and he took the lives of two men in the attempt to protect his little brother.

Just 22 at the time of the altercation, Tim received a life without parole sentence, while Tony was sentenced to over 27 years.

“In county jail, the prosecutor told us we would never see each other again. Facing that possibility was harder than facing life in prison,” Tim said.

However, while in prison, the Johnson brothers got baptized together at Foothills, trained dogs together at Pender, and worked on a prison newspaper together at Nash.

“Incarceration has proven that our relationship is unbreakable,” Tony said. “We have had good times together and bad times apart, but just knowing we are in this together has been the only thing keeping

me sane sometimes.”

They've weathered storms together, too. They unexpectedly lost their father in 2022. “Tony and I were blessed to be together during that time,” Tim said. “We leaned on each other to keep from falling down.”

Incarceration is difficult, scary even, but with each other, they believe they can overcome anything prison throws at them.

“The hardest thing about having a brother in prison is knowing he experiences all the terrible things I experience—the cloaking weight of loneliness, the continual heartbreak of regret, and the flogging sense of failure haunt him, too,” Tony shared.

As Tony's 2032 release date approaches, Tim is excited for his little brother, but he also fears how Tony's release will affect their ability to spend time together. “I want so badly for him to get out of prison. I know he's going to do great,” Tim said. “But I know we might never again share a meal or watch a football game together, since I have a life sentence.”

While Tony's release may separate them physically for a time, his top priority is to help his big brother get out of prison one day. Tony is currently enrolled in a college program at Sampson Correctional, following in his older brother's footsteps in achieving a college degree while incarcerated. He believes attaining higher education will best position him to help Tim after his release.

“Tim has grown into an exceptional human being,” Tony said. “He continues to be my hero.”

The Goode, Smith, and Johnson brothers may never make a platinum record, win a Super Bowl, or create a company like Prestige Worldwide, but their brotherhoods are just as special.

Their camaraderie, perseverance, and love are evident to everyone who knows them. Their journeys give hope to people, like me, who have destroyed or lost relationships with loved ones.

Yes, these brothers share chains—but the blood, history, and love they share can never be shackled. **NCPNT**

JIMMY SMITH: THE PC GUY

By TIMOTHY JOHNSON

WHEN JIMMY SMITH INTRODUCED himself to a prison administrator, she said, “I know you. You’re the PC guy.” Smith has a reputation for spending time in PC, or protective custody, the area in a prison where people are placed for their own protection. But he doesn’t stay and rarely leaves alone.

Smith, or “Mr. Jimmy,” as he is known at Craven Correctional Institution, serves as a field minister in the North Carolina Field Minister Program. He has become a specialist at convincing individuals in PC to return to general population. In a two-year span, he persuaded 118 men to return to “the yard.” Before he arrived at Craven, PC stayed full. Now, he keeps it empty.

Smith convinces people to exit PC by helping them navigate the conflict or misinformation that led them to request that placement. He begins by asking them why they are in PC.

One reason people ask to be placed in PC is conflict with others, sometimes over debt. When Smith encounters this situation, he asks, “If I can get that fixed for you, would you come back to the yard?” His football player size and gentle demeanor persuade them he might be the one person who can help. If the person is willing, he mediates between the borrower and lender, helping both sides understand a better way to do time.

Others go directly to PC when entering Craven. Since Craven is a processing facility, 30-80 men per day enter the prison. Many enter with false impressions about what prison is like. While in county jail, they hear horror stories about rapes, robberies, and gang assaults.

Smith eases their worries by assuring them that the horror stories are just stories, then offers to spend time with them, so others will know they’re not alone. When he checks on them a few days after they leave PC, they often tell him, “Mr. Jimmy, you were right. It’s nothing like I thought.”

Smith believes people were created to be communal. “We need somebody to talk to or vent to. I want them to know they’re not alone,” he said. He also provides mental stimulation by delivering crossword puzzles

and word searches, understanding that too much time in isolation diminishes mental functioning.

He also works with individuals who are on self-injurious behavior (SIB) status, where a person is placed because of suicidal ideation or an attempt to self-harm. He has worked with dozens of men to help them leave SIB status. “Most of them are great guys but often have mental health issues,” he said. “Most just want somebody to listen. When nobody listens, they become desperate.”

Smith tells them, “I want to listen to you. I want to spend time with you. But we can’t do it back here. If you tell them you want to come off SIB, we’ll hang out, and we’ll play cards.”

When they return to general population, he follows through on his promises to spend time with them and play cards. If they like to drink coffee, he buys a bag and they share a few cups. And he listens. Listening lets them feel that somebody cares, and that caring makes them believe they’ll be okay.

“I see me in every guy I help. When I see them succeed, I succeed. When I see them do better, I’m better.”

He has compassion for everyone in any form of special management housing, because he understands what it’s like. “I understand what it’s like to be in lockup. I know the depression that can sink in behind the door.”

Also, Smith created a program that teaches manhood through three values: responsible, accountable, and reliable. The three values function as parameters for developing a rehabilitation mindset and the determination to be better people.

In August 2025, he returned to Nash



Correctional for the annual Field Minister Retreat. A young man who completed the manhood program rushed up to him. He told Smith, “Mr. Jimmy, I’m a man. I’m responsible. I’m accountable. I’m reliable. I got my GED, I’m in commercial cleaning, and I’ve signed up for graphic design.”

Another guy who Smith worked with is out of prison. Smith’s influence convinced the former high-ranking gang member to leave the street life. Smith helped him develop a plan for after prison, with 30, 60, 90, and 120-day goals. Smith’s pupil was working on his 120-day goals before reaching 90 days out. He’s working and going to Wake Technical Community College to become a heavy equipment operator.

When someone asks Smith why he spends so much time doing this work, he explains, “I see me in every guy I help. When I see them succeed, I succeed. When I see them do better, I’m better.”

After the retreat, Smith returned to Craven. He expected PC to house at least a dozen men, men who need a friend. Someone should tell them “the PC guy” is on the way to be that friend. *NCPNT*

Special Feature

STOP AND GIVE ME 50 ... WORDS

Living in prison can be challenging on the best of days: You never know when violence can appear, the people around you are probably not living their best lives, and, let's face it, no one wants to be here.

But every once in a while, somebody surprises you by doing something beautiful, compassionate, or kind. We asked our readers to tell us the kindest thing they have witnessed while incarcerated using only 50 words. These random acts are not the ones you'll hear about when watching the nightly news, but we proudly present them to you here.

My 490 for a bottom bunk expired. Despite needing one because I have degenerative bone disease, bad knees, and a bad back, they wouldn't let me keep my bottom bunk status. A 75-year-old man insisted I take his bottom bunk. To this day, he and I are very close friends.

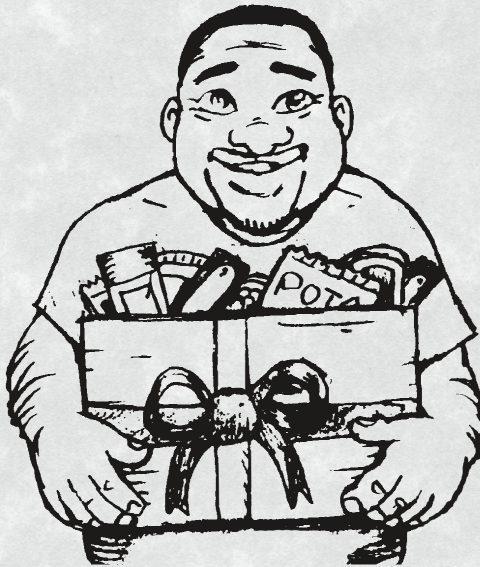
—Jerry Turner

Prison without family is lonely. In 2006, everything changed. The Foothills "Men of Praise" brothers embraced me. One brother, Tony Johnson, said his mom wanted to buy me a Christmas box and shoes. Heart sinking, I replied, "I can't pay you back." Grinning, he said, "I know, that's the point."

—Dominique Tucker

I had just fell, knew no one, and had a terrible stomach virus. This guy I had only spoken to a few times came to check on me every day. I'll always remember that. His name is Cobey LaKemper.

—Tyler McCurry



I have struggled with addiction and self-esteem issues my whole life. There was a case manager that encouraged me to seek recovery. Even when I stumbled, she still helped me. She has given me a sense of self-worth that I've never had before.

—David Allen

In 2007, Dad's dementia became Alzheimer's disease. Before then, Dad used to send me money and a Christmas box, but now his memory was too far gone to help. The guys on my block put together a Christmas box for me. I was so grateful. May God bless them.

—Chuck Givens

When I was at Bertie, I was diagnosed with Lymphoma, which is a type of blood cancer. Everyone in the unit showed so much love and support. That gave me the strength to fight a difficult battle and become cancer free. This was God sending people to me with encouraging words.

—Rashaan Ali

When I had my surgery, I couldn't bend down to put on my socks and shoes, so guys volunteered to help me every morning and every night.

—Ronald Williams



While at Eastern, I was signing for a write-up. Sgt. T. McMurray looked across her desk and told me, "Hudler, you can continue to play prison, or you can prepare for the rest of your life." She taught me that although I cannot change my past, I can change my future.

—Joshua Hudler



A buddy of mine circulated a get-well card for my mom when they found out she had breast cancer.

—Aaron Holland



When my mother died in 2018, Demetrist Roberts and Jonathan Ussery told me I could share their mother. To this day, they live up to that. Both of their mothers are a big part of my life. I'm so grateful to have friends that are family.

—Samuel McSwain



When you are in prison you often feel like nobody cares. I was lucky enough to find a fellow inmate who took time out of his day every day to check on me and try to keep me drug free. Him showing me he cared helped me with my sobriety.

—Ndvakaku Osuji

At visitation with my family, a man introduced himself to my parents as someone I had helped, explaining, "In a dark place, it was reassuring to know someone very positive like your son. He is a good role model. You should be proud of him." I didn't expect that.

—Douglas Elijah Travis

I was at CP with a fresh life sentence and terrible attitude. After being called into the sergeant's office for the umpteenth time, he sat me down and talked me into thinking about how my actions would look in the future. He made me think long-term.

—Frank Schlaepfer



In the last few months, someone noticed that I needed a pair of shoes, so they gave me a brand new pair of Skechers.

—Albert Morgan

The kindest thing a fellow prisoner has done for me was to call me brother. If more of us thought this way, we wouldn't just change the culture of prisons, we would change the world.

—Nathan Bowie

Now, drop your 50 words and ONLY 50 words. What is the thing you enjoy the most, but are afraid to admit to others? Text your answer using the NCPNT survey on Edovo. We will post the top 15 answers. Please, include "#50 Words Guilty Pleasure," your full legal name, and how many years you have been incarcerated. Remember, keep it clean.



From left to right: Secretary Leslie Dismukes, Raffaelle Hanaeuer, Christopher Shipley, Michael McCoy, Andy Locklear, Alvin Jackson, Campbell University President William M. Downs, Michael Goff, Mark Denning, Sampson Warden Robert Van Gorder, Jeffrey White, Dylan Hulin, David Conard, Joshual Duncan, NCDAC Education Superintendent Dr. Brooke Wheeler, North Carolina First Lady Anna Stein

SECOND CHANCE GRADUATION

By TONY JOHNSON

ON AUGUST 29, 2025, MAURY CORRECTIONAL Institution hosted a commencement ceremony honoring the graduates of Campbell University's Second Chance Initiative. The event marked the program's third biennial graduation for its Sampson Correctional Institution campus.

The ceremony began with the melodic notes of "Pomp and Circumstance" floating through the air as honored guests escorted 11 graduates down an aisle lined with Campbell orange balloons. Four graduates received their bachelor's degree in communication studies with a minor in addiction studies, while seven graduates received an associate in behavioral science.

Special guests and dignitaries honored the graduates and affirmed education's key role in rehabilitation. North Carolina First Lady Anna Stein, North Carolina Department of Adult Correction Secretary Leslie Cooley Dismukes, and Second Chance Initiative program benefactor Bob Barker attended the graduation.

In April, First Lady Stein toured Sampson and visited the soon-to-be graduates. During her commencement address, the first lady shared what stood out to her when she met them. "I saw men who are com-

mitted to making a difference in the lives of other incarcerated men."

She conferred a key title on the graduates, saying, "You are role models for your ability to rise above seemingly impossible odds." Her use of this label is significant because she uses the same label to describe her position before the public in her efforts to end the stigma associated with incarceration and substance use disorders. She wants the public to see her leading from the front by interacting with people who are incarcerated.

As Sampson's warden, Robert Van Gorder oversaw the graduates' time in the program. Speaking to the audience, he attested to the difficulties they overcame. "Many people believe that [the graduates] don't deal with a full college workload, but they deal with far more," he said. This "far more" includes prison shakedowns where an incarcerated person's property is inspected, life in close quarters with 35 roommates, and limited access to technology, including having access to their laptops only during study hall hours five days a week.

Yet, these men faced every obstacle head on and endured to earn their degrees. They overcame the challenges of prison, school,

and even from inside themselves.

Two graduates delivered speeches—Mark Denning, who earned a bachelor's degree, and Alvin Jackson, who earned an associate degree. "The Second Chance Initiative has changed my life," said Denning. "This graduating class is proof that negative stereotypes can be shattered and obstacles overcome."

After the commencement, bachelor's degree recipient Michael Goff agreed with Denning's assessment about the initiative's transformative power. Goff said, "I consider it to have been an honor and a privilege to personally witness the transformation of people into individuals prepared for purposeful lives and meaningful service through the exemplary academic and professional skills gained from this life-changing program."

Their transformation did not happen the moment they enrolled and became students. Instead, this metamorphosis occurred through overcoming the daily obstacles involved in earning a college degree while incarcerated.

The Second Chance Initiative uses a cohort system, an arrangement where a class of students collectively goes to school, at-

tends study hall, and lives in the same dorm throughout the educational process. Denning emphasized this collective mindset in his graduation speech by sharing words from two of his cohort members—Joshual Duncan and Dylan Hulin.

Through Denning, bachelor's degree recipient Duncan shared a quote from Al-Jabaly, which states, "True education will improve a person's knowledge and understanding of his [way of life]. It builds in his heart a strong belief that enables him to distinguish between right and wrong." Not only do these graduates benefit from learning right and wrong, but so does the society the men will return to.

Hulin, who also received a bachelor's degree, reiterated the Second Chance Initiative's value for individuals and society. "Participating in this program has really made us aware that we have a purpose and that we're able to be of service to the community when we are released, instead of just coming back to prison and being a statistic."

This message echoed words spoken many years ago by Campbell University founder J. A. Campbell. "School is the greatest op-

portunity in the world," he said. "Here, students...become educated men and women, become leaders, but most of all, it is their chance to improve themselves, to open the door to a new world."

In his speech, Jackson described how it took courage to unlock the truth from within, "Courage to look past our faults, courage to meet life on its own terms, and courage to pursue a future full of potential beyond prison."

"I encourage you to look beyond as you look within," Jackson advised the freshmen. "To give a helping hand even when you need a hand yourself. To press through times that are bad as well as good. To keep your head to the plow, for when it is raised the field will be finished."

One of those freshmen, Cory Salerno, said, "After being accepted into the Campbell University program, I could feel my hopes growing, but to be able to see and participate in the graduation ceremony has crystallized my drive to succeed."

While witnessing the commencement ceremony, Salerno envisioned himself and his entire cohort receiving their degrees.

"I can't wait to see all 15 of my classmates walk across the stage," he said.

Five of the seven men who received an associate degree will continue their education by pursuing a bachelor's degree, including Andy Locklear. He said, "I feel like these last two years will prepare me for the outside world and provide me with the tools I need to pursue a career." He also looks forward to witnessing the growth of the program's first-year students, who are where Locklear was two years ago—just beginning their first college semester.

Campbell University's Second Chance Initiative provided these incarcerated men with a second chance at life. The graduates completed the journey to earning their degrees, but their journey of positive impact on society is just beginning. Now, their education takes them into a newly created world, which is not only brighter for themselves, but for all society. *NCPNT*

Ed. Note: For more information on the Second Chance Initiative at Sampson Correctional Institution, see NCPNT Vol. 1 Issue 2, Pg. 16

EMBRACING THE CHALLENGES OF REENTRY WITH OPEN ARMZ

BY MICHAEL MCCOY

HOW WE PRESENT OURSELVES TO OTHERS is tantamount to how we will be received. This advice applies not only to our lives while away from our families, but beyond the fence as well.

On October 13, 2025, representatives from Open Armz Reentry Program visited Sampson Correctional Institution to share their experience of hope and real possibilities for reentry. They also delivered a candid report about the challenges many face on the outside. From explaining the benefits of the federal bonding program to presentations of individualized reentry packages, the morning was filled with essential information and inspiration.

Jeron Randall, founder and CEO of Open Armz, led the morning's discussion with a simple phrase: "Show me where you're at." This challenge was interpreted several ways. Where are you mentally and emotionally when it comes to returning to society? And what plans have you made today for tomorrow?

We often hear people on the yard say, "Aw man, those reentry people ain't talking about nothing." Yet, the presentation was specifically for men who are willing to take what is offered and change the narrative of recidivism by embracing the idea that our return to our communities is not a one-man act.

Discussion continued with team member Sherwood Jackson, who is also involved with Community Success Initiative, North Carolina's oldest reentry program. Jackson left attendees with several pieces of advice on how to handle problems that are bound to crop up.

Number one: Establish good communication with reentry resource providers. "Tell them what you really want," Jackson said. This, he pressed, is a much better approach than deceptive practices and burning bridges by remaining with a prison mentality of "getting over."

Number two: Continue to work from inside. Join programs like R-STEP to help form a more positive dialogue and relationship with probation officials. Communication is key. Get the facts for yourself instead of relying on "inmate.com." Everyone's situation is not the same.

Number three: Know that reentry is a process. The resources are available; yet, we must be willing to work with what we get and adapt later, even if it means beginning in a nearby county and transitioning to a more ideal setting at a later time.

Jackson shared the story of a reentry client who went through multiple letdowns after release but stayed true to the path. Within 90 days following release, he learned to accept the open arms of those with his best interests in mind and not the grasp of those pulling him back to his old life. He is a success story today.

Finally: Keep the faith. We can have all the resources, but if our hearts are not conditioned in the fertile soil of faith, old mindsets may crop up like weeds. Nothing kills a dream quicker than a negative thought. Instead of thinking about the ways something can go wrong, we must strive with growth as our overall goal and must live as producers instead of consumers. *NCPNT*

DR. WHEELER BELIEVES IN REHABILITATION THROUGH EDUCATION

BY TIMOTHY JOHNSON

WHEN DR. BROOKE WHEELER WAS IN high school, she said she would never be a teacher or principal. She spent most of her childhood years at the school where her dad was the principal, so she didn't want to spend the rest of her life in a school.

During her sophomore year of college, she changed her mind. "I tried a lot of things but didn't like any of them," she said. "Then, I tried teaching and loved it. There's nothing like it."

Now, Dr. Wheeler devotes her life in two unexpected places: schools and prisons. As senior director of education and programs, she is the superintendent of all schools in the state's correctional facilities, with programs ranging from high school equivalency to vocational to degree.

Dr. Wheeler said she's "responsible for managing education in NCDAC [North Carolina Department of Adult Correction] institutions, managing partnerships with institutions, mainly community colleges, and advocating or intervening to solve problems." She strives "to improve and enhance educational opportunities for everybody incarcerated in North Carolina." Long-term, she dreams of everyone getting to pursue the educational path of their choice.

Before prison education, she worked as a teacher and principal in public schools. Her last position was principal of a middle school, and she said there are some similarities to her current role. "Regardless of what is going on around you, it's important to purposefully look and focus on the good. And that's one of the things I look to do when I go into institutions." She also helps incarcerated students focus on the positive aspects of education and celebrate accomplishments.

She left public school work for a position at a juvenile justice center. When that facility closed in 2014, she became a principal at an adult prison, first at the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women, then at Granville Correctional Institution.

When the Prison Education Services' assistant superintendent position opened, Granville's warden urged her to apply for the position, but she said, "No, thank you," and moved on. She wanted to con-

tinue working closely with incarcerated students.

On the last day to apply, she decided to send her application, simultaneously sending up a prayer, "Please, don't give me this job unless it's Your will, because I don't want it if it's not from You."

She interviewed via video call from the parking lot of a Buffalo Wild Wings while on a family vacation, distracted not just by the setting, but also by her teenaged son banging on the car's window and laughing.

Getting selected as assistant superintendent despite the deadline application and her son's teasing convinced her she was in the right position.

She was promoted to superintendent, after her predecessor, Dr. Julie Jailall, retired.

Dr. Wheeler believes in the power of education to change and save lives, like it did for her father. He overcame growing up in a toxic home to become a principal who served his community for decades. She said, "From the time I could walk, he said education was the reason he made it." He was proud to provide the instrument that helped him.

Likewise, she credits education for her success and impact. "Undeniably, I am who I am and what I am because of education," she said.

Her mantra is "rehabilitation through education." She is proud to provide thousands in North Carolina prisons with education that teaches the tools to transform themselves and their lives. She said, "I am here to help people who truly need help. And it helps me to help others."

Her favorite part of the job is visiting students at prisons across the state. She enjoys talking to them, hearing about their experi-



ences and listening to their needs, then trying to find ways to meet those needs.

She misses being in the prisons with students every day, but she tries to attend every graduation. "Graduations are the culmination of all the hard work," she said.

Her devotion disproves the perception common in prison that administrators don't care. "This agency is full of people who care," she said. "I think about how many people don't ever see my face. But I'm here, every day, caring about [them]. And I think that it is not only me, that there are so many people in the agency today who care."

Thanks to this passion and her leadership, NCDAC is steadily adding educational opportunities. The programs being added include peer support specialist training and associate degrees in business, forestry, and audio and visual broadcasting, with the last involving creation of a podcast and a radio station that will be available on the tablets.

She challenges the state's incarcerated with a question, "Are you ready to take advantage of the opportunities that are coming?" Educational opportunities are only valuable if people are ready to make the most of them.

Superintendent Dr. Brooke Wheeler is dedicated to facilitating rehabilitation through the power of education, because she cares about North Carolina's incarcerated students. She said, "My mission on this planet is to help people through education. This is my passion." *NCPNT*



Left to Right: Lani Clark, Nolan Bennett, Eric Gladden, Derek Helms, Derrick Poke, Roscoe Goins

HARNETT FAB SHOP MEETS K-9 TRUCK CHALLENGE

BY NOLAN BENNETT

NO MATTER WHERE YOU'RE AT, WHAT you're making, or who you're doing it for, a person should always take pride in their craftsmanship. Our welding team at the Harnett Correctional Fabrication Shop does just that. Management, maintenance supervisors, and the skilled people completing the projects expect only the highest quality of work.

Normally, our orders consist of items like security tables, stainless steel restroom partitions, shelves for kitchens, and firearm cabinets. But recently, our fabrication shop was presented with a unique task.

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (NCDAC) K-9 Unit approached Shop Supervisors Justin Moore and Alan Stephenson for a quote on a very large endeavor. After brainstorming ideas and going over material prices, the supervisors submitted their estimate and subsequently landed one of the most high-profile jobs in the shop's history.

On July 25, 2025, NCDAC gave our team a 2024 Ford F-150 XL and instructed us to design and fabricate a built-in, but removable, K-9 transportation unit. The truck would provide the canines with ample room in the back, while providing the

handlers comfort, convenience, storage, and, most importantly, safety for the dogs.

The work began with the removal of the backseats, seatbelts, and door panels. A fresh canvas tested the skills of our fabrication team. Incorporating so many aspects compounded the variables.

Several mockups were created using scraps from around the shop before making the final design, drawing up blueprints, and establishing pattern pieces.

Our design allows the canines plenty of room for comfortable transport, while providing lockable door panels underneath for storage. The front and back panels provide the handlers visibility of the animals and the driver's surroundings. The top panel encloses the cage, while installed struts eliminate reverberations when the vehicle reaches high speeds. The designed also features a center divider for handlers with multiple animals.

The team also built an emergency hatch, so handlers can quickly release the canine if an accident occurs and one of the truck's rear doors are unable to open.

Lastly, window screens were attached to allow drivers to lower the window without risk of the animals exiting. The screens can

be lowered to allow the glass to be cleaned.

After fabrication, the kits are primed, sanded, and coated in high-durability, scratch-resistant black paint, giving the diamond plated kits a sleek, professional finish.

A typical install—including removal of the seats and door panels, tinting of the rear windows and back glass, and insertion of the kit—takes two to three hours. This quick turn-around time allows the handlers to arrive in the morning, stay with their trucks, and leave before lunch.

The shop has completed 18 K-9 kits for NCDAC at one-fifth the price of a privately-owned fabrication shop.

Not only has our shop saved the state an exceptional amount of money and provided a superior product, it has also shown that not all incarcerated individuals are the same. With proper management, supervision, and a level of trust, we can still reform, give back, and earn second chances.

We are thankful for our bosses Justin Moore, David Sneed, and Alan Stephenson for recognizing our abilities, trusting us with the job, and helping us.

We hope that, in light of our completion of this task, opportunities are created for others down the line. *NCPNT*



Into the Blue—Pastel

THE SELL OF THE ART

By HOWARD ASHLEMAN

JOEY OWENS HAS BEEN A MASTER CRAFTSMAN for a long time. Before prison, he was a master carpenter. He framed houses, built decks, and did cabinetry and trim work. Now, he's a master artist. He paints landscapes, draws portraits, and teaches aspiring artists.

His carpentry skill could have kept him from prison. But his downfall was his side business of selling cocaine. The path of drug dealing reaps money, but it casts a curse of ruin and sorrow.

One day, Owens returned from vacation to find his home had been broken into. "They were looking for drugs and money. They took everything," he recalled. The robbers even cleared his shed of garden tools. Word travels fast in the streets, and he soon learned the identity of the three robbers, people who bought cocaine from him. About a month later, he chanced upon two of them. He gave in to his anger, shooting and fatally wounding them. His hasty actions secured him a prison sentence for two counts of second degree murder.

Owens came to prison in 2011. He had nothing but time to think of the consequences of his negative actions. He knew

he had to make changes. "I had to find a different path," Owens said.

Prison is full of hustlers. Many of these individuals are dope slingers, clothes and shoe washers, people who run sports betting, and those who just run game by taking advantage of others. Whatever the motive, there is no shortage of these individuals.

Owens made up his mind to not get involved with selling drugs in prison. He had to avoid his old ways if he ever wanted to be successful with his rehabilitation. "I've never sold any drugs in prison, but I was tired of sitting around," he shared. He didn't want to be a burden to his family, so instead of asking them for money for canteen and shoes, he learned to do without.

He found a hidden talent in 2016 while he was at Scotland Correctional Institution. "I saw a group of Hispanic guys drawing portraits, and something kept pulling at me," he said. He told them he wanted to learn how to draw, and they graciously let him borrow one of their books on drawing. Owens started working with graphite pencils and quickly tapped into a talent he never knew he had. His peers soon noticed his work and asked him to draw portraits for

them. He eventually explored the possibility of selling his art to people outside prison.

North Carolina General Statute §14-346 prohibits the sale of goods made by incarcerated people, making it a class 2 misdemeanor. However, this same statute allows several exceptions, and one is for items made with the prisoner's own materials during leisure hours. This means if the facility allows someone to purchase various supplies, the supplies can legally be crafted for the purpose of sale as long as they are crafted during hours the person isn't on the work clock. Artwork falls under this exception.

The incarcerated artist who wishes to sell artwork must use a third party (family member, friend, outside organization, etc.) as an intermediary to handle the negotiations, money transactions, and delivery since incarcerated people legally cannot engage in transactions or contracts.

Owens has a person outside to handle the business end of his artwork. "I have a manager, and I use a mediator. The only thing I do is the art itself," he disclosed.

Another thing to be taken into consideration is that even though something may

Art is everything to me. It's my therapeutic outlet and my happiness. It helps keep my mind off of family problems. A lot of people's escape is drugs; mine is art.



be allowed by the law, the facility may not allow the same thing to take place. All facilities are different, so it's best to be familiar with the facility's rules in order to avoid any confusion. The artist who makes a profit must keep in mind that any earned money will go to all unpaid debts and restitution if the mediator applies it to the artist's Trust Fund account. It may be unwise to have all the earned money applied to the account, so a trustworthy friend or family member should manage a savings account for the artist.

Art is much more than a hustle to Owens. "Art is everything to me," he said. "It's my therapeutic outlet and my happiness. It helps keep my mind off of family problems. A lot of people's escape is drugs; mine is art."

He currently teaches the beginner's art class at Nash Correctional. "I'm grateful to be at Nash because it's the mecca of art in the North Carolina prison system," he said. "We have the art program here, and we can obtain a wider variety of materials other camps may not have." Some prisons allow a wide variety of art supplies while others only allow graphite pencils and plain paper.

Owens has a difficult time choosing a favorite medium. He likes acrylic because it's durable, but he also likes pastel due to its

rich pigments that help him achieve hyperrealism. Owens' style of hyperrealism gets him much recognition at Nash's bi-annual art show. "When I want to do a fun piece, I like to do something hyper realistic," he shared. "Even though most modern judges don't favor this style, I know that it takes more knowledge and skill to achieve a hyper realistic quality."

The art hustler who seeks to bring in money from their talent will face a difficult time getting started. Not having a way to advertise and market artwork as an incarcerated person makes beginning difficult. But Owens has proven it's possible.

"It's hard at first. You just have to roll the dice. You have to find a way to put yourself out there," Owens explained. "Send about ten different copies of your work to the *Artist's Market* magazine and find a manager."

Owens advises beginning artists to start out small and buy only nec-

essary items instead of wasting money buying large quantities of unfamiliar supplies.

Thanks to his artwork's revenue, Owens is able to have canteen money and afford other prison expenses, without burdening his family. Occasionally, he's able to help his family by contributing to their financial needs.

He is undecided what his career will be after his release in 15 years, but he plans to, at minimum, use his art as a side hustle.

Owens hopes to accomplish his dream career, making a living doing something he enjoys. "Maybe one day I'll be famous enough to live solely from my art. It's nice to wish." **NCPNT**

Joey Owens at work on "Into the Blue"



ART AS THERAPY

BY JONATHAN RAMIREZ

IN JANUARY 2022, I TRANSFERRED FROM Nash Correctional Institution to Piedmont. The transfer was due to my deployment as a field minister with the North Carolina Field Minister Program. We received four years of education and training that I took with me into the field.

I also took my experiences as a member of the Nash Art Club. My art club experience gave me the idea for what became an art therapy program.

At first, I wanted to create an art club and discussed the idea with Chaplain Hackett. He fully supported the idea but wanted it to be used for ministry and outreach. He

supervised the program, helping us get supplies and facilitating classes. Game Plan for Life, a nonprofit founded by Joe Gibbs, has since stepped in to provide the art supplies.

We began with two teams, one for the art class and one for art therapy. The art class provides a structured program to teach students how to draw, paint, and use pastels. Art therapy provides a place to let guys decompress by coloring, drawing, talking, praying, and listening to music. We help them cope with anxiety, anger, fear, and negative thinking, while also helping them focus on being mindful, productive, and positive.

Jonathan Ramirez using art to help heal others



At each art therapy session, we have praise music playing as the guys enter. We teach them how to make a card and help them cut paper, apply color, and glue everything together.

During the class, we talk about life. We discuss problems and coping strategies. Then, we share our experiences and encouraging words from the

Bible.

One student, Volney Stone, started with no art experience. He learned by persevering through months of practice. He said learning art helped him develop patience.

Billy Walters took the art class, where he learned the basics. Now, he serves the program as a teacher. He is very creative and super helpful.

The staff at Piedmont loves the program. Their support has been instrumental. From the wardens to case managers to officers, we have received maximum support.

I love doing the art class and art therapy program. I get to see people rebuild relationships with their families. When we do our graduation and art gallery, people share their accomplishments and give away paintings to volunteers who serve at the prison. Being a part of these activities blesses and inspires me.

The art therapy program has helped many who are incarcerated at Piedmont learn art, cope with prison, and grow personally. I'm thankful Chaplain Hackett supported my desire to teach art and expanded my vision into not just an art class, but an art therapy program. The impact has been greater than I imagined.

Now, I dream of an art program at every prison in North Carolina. **NCPNT**

Photos Courtesy of NCDAC

A LIFETIME OF ADVOCACY: VENERABLE ROBINA COURTIN

By CRIS GARDNER

I BECAME A BUDDHIST IN 2007, the same year I came to prison. Coming from a Catholic background, it was a big change for me. People often ask me, “Why Buddhism?” My answer invariably begins with, “Well, you see, there was this woman...”

Nineteen years later, the woman has long since moved on, but my Buddhist practice remains.

For most of my time, I have either been in a small collective of four or five Buddhists, which some call a *sangha*, or I have practiced on my own. The beauty of Buddhism is that there are many ways you can practice and many groups on the outside willing to help you find your way along the path.

One important resource for incarcerated Buddhists has been the Liberation Prison Project (LPP). Founded in 1996 by Venerable Robina Courtin, an Australian-born, Catholic-raised, Tibetan Buddhist nun, the LPP serves the needs of practicing incarcerated Buddhists worldwide. What started as a mission to help one young, Mexican American ex-gang member in the well-known Pelican Bay prison in California, has since supported over 20,000 incarcerated men and women in search of spiritual guidance. Venerable Robina continued to lead LPP until 2009.

Were it not for the diminutive-in-stature, yet larger-than-life personality who is Venerable Robina, many incarcerated people would never have learned of Buddhism.

At 82 years old, Venerable Robina is showing no signs of slowing down. She still visits jails and prisons and advocates worldwide. She uses her humorous, straight forward speech to help those serving time love themselves and care for others.

Venerable Robina took time out of her busy schedule to visit Nash Correctional Institution in July of 2025. It was her second visit to Nash, but my first opportunity to meet her.

After her visit, she agreed to answer a few questions for NCPNT. The following are some of her responses, which were edited for space.

NCPNT: When you began the LPP, what goals did you hope to accomplish?

Ven. Robina: The Liberation Prison Project started in 1996 when a young Mexican American in a top security prison in California wrote to *Mandala* magazine after finding our address in a book by Lama Yeshe in the library.

Within a year, LPP had grown by word of mouth, and 40 people were writing.

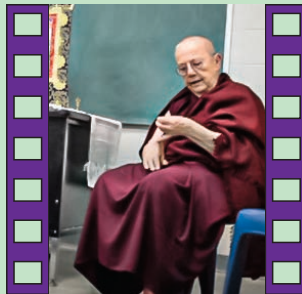
As letters continued to come from people in prison, we decided the most effective way to help was to develop a team of mentors. Because there are so many pris-



Ven. Robina is a black belt in karate who, for a time, served as the Dalai Lama's bodyguard.



She was 12 years old when she decided she wanted to become a nun. Her mom said no.



Ven. Robina is a classically trained singer with an album titled *Devotions*.



She now spends most of her time editing the texts of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, her mentor who passed in 2024.

ons in the United States, visiting people in prison was not practical, so we focused on writing letters and sending books.

We gradually developed similar programs in other countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, and Italy.

Our main goal wasn't so much to get people to be Buddhists as to give them the opportunity to learn and see their own minds and to know that they can change their minds for the better, thus becoming more fulfilled, no matter how difficult the external conditions might be.

We realized that by giving one person even just one book, they could gain so much. And by helping one person at a time, that person could, in turn, help someone else.

NCPNT: What advice do you have for the incarcerated—Buddhist and non-Buddhist—who may be struggling with feelings of despair, self-hatred, or anger?

Ven. Robina: All human beings have these thoughts to one degree or another. They especially arise when external circumstances are difficult, such as living in a prison. But with courage and determination, we can learn to see our positive qualities and to grow them.

Having at least one person we can rely upon to support us can also be very beneficial in helping us deal with our inner struggles.

When we realize we're all struggling with the same feelings, this can open us to have empathy for others.

The main advice is to have confidence in our potential and never give up.

NCPNT: What text(s) would you recommend to our readers that best communicate the principles of Buddhism in the same practical manner that you do?

Ven. Robina: The books of Lama Yeshe, published by Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive and offered for free, are very down-to-earth and encouraging. They show us that we have so much potential and that we can all learn to change for our own sake and the sake of others around us.

Editor's Note: LPP has largely scaled down their correspondence course operations. However, you can now find LPP's "Discovering Buddhism" and Venerable Robina's no nonsense advice, "Something to Think About: Buddhist Thoughts of the Day," on Edovo. NCPNT

APRIL BARBER'S STAR IS STILL RISING

By Kwame Teague

WHEN THE GATES AT ANSON Correctional Institution swung open for April Barber on March 24, 2022, the heavy weight of 31 years' worth of confinement, denials, and isolation were finally lifted. She was able to do something she hadn't done in a very long time: Exhale.

But this isn't a polished redemption story. Barber entered an adult women's prison as a 16-year-old, first-time-offending juvenile. "Scared, scarred, pregnant, and confused," she remembered. Barber gave birth to her son, Colt, in prison. She described the situation as "incorrigible."

"I gave birth shackled and chained, under armed guards who were more concerned with security than my comfort," Barber said. Not long after, she gave her newborn son to a family friend, not knowing if she'd ever see him again.

Once in prison, she learned there wasn't any special protection for juveniles. "I was thrown to the wolves," into a live-by-your-rep type of environment. "Prison is built to set you up for failure," she said.

Barber was convicted of killing her adoptive grandparents, but she refused to give up. She embodied the Maya Angelou poem "Still I Rise" by using the rain of injustice to water the flower she has become. But it wasn't easy.

When she first tried to sign up for college courses, the prison wouldn't allow her to enroll, because she was a "lifer" and they felt it was a waste of taxpayers' money to educate her. Once she was given the chance to get into school, she took every class she could. She earned her GED, cosmetology license, personal care credentials, and her paralegal certificate. She also wrote and published several books, including *Memoirs of Suzie*, *Quote 365*, and *Fenced In: Fighting for Freedom*.

Her relationship with her son also flourished. Through calls, visits, and letters, she and Colt built a good relationship despite the circumstances. "My mom is my best friend," Colt remarked recently.

Barber also found love behind bars. She met her future husband, Tommy, in visitation when he came to see his stepdaughter. They got married 21 years into her life sen-



tence. "Marriage was a game changer, because I no longer had to do this time alone."

Tommy stood by her side through all the rejections and disappointments, while her lawyer, Henderson Hill, along with scores of activists, family, and friends, kept up a campaign for freedom for the better part of her 31 years behind the walls.

Finally, she was granted the commutation she deserved. Then-Governor Roy Cooper called her transformation "extraordinary," a word loaded with political spin after decades of denials for the same achievements for which Barber was now being lauded. Barber's release wasn't the result of a just system finally finding its arc. It's what happens when one woman beats the Kafkaesque bureaucracy of the judicial system and refuses to concede defeat.

Upon release, she didn't see freedom as a privilege. "I saw it as a responsibility," she said. She turned that duty into a mission.

She worked two jobs, while starting her nonprofit, *Fenced In*, which focuses on the recently released individuals who are dealing with housing, employment, and mental health issues. She offers resources, mentorships, and outreach for those trying to rebuild their lives post-incarceration. Barber tours the state, speaking at colleges, prisons, and workshops concerning prison reform.

"I believe storytelling can provide hope for others. I am also raising awareness about the thousands of people struggling through reentry trying to find stability, acceptance, and resources."

She also hosts the *98% Life after Prison* podcast, with fellow activist Judy Van Wyk (available on Edovo). Barber is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and working on another book.

She knows she's been given a tremendous opportunity, one that scores of lifers will never get, and she doesn't take it for granted. "I never forget where I come from, because my past is the path to my future."

Unsurprisingly, not everyone agrees with her being granted a second chance after such a "heinous" crime. She acknowledges that criticism. But Barber has repeatedly stated that she doesn't expect universal acceptance. Instead, she offers her life as a cautionary tale. "You're never the sum of your mistakes."

She takes a one-day, one-step-at-a-time approach to life. When asked if she thinks she's earned the right to be seen differently, Barber responded, "I hope to earn it through my work."

Whether one agrees with her clemency or not, it's hard to say that she is not making the most of her second chance. **NCPNT**

FRANKIE FAULK IS FIGHTING FOR PEOPLE *BEHIND THE WALLS*

BY TYLER BOWMAN

FRANKIE FAULK BATTLES POST-TRAUMATIC stress disorder (PTSD) from seeing her brother William murdered in 2008. Losing him determined her mission in life—providing people leaving prison with the reentry help that could have saved her brother's life.

William wanted to be done with the streets, but his status as a felon kept him from either obtaining jobs or holding a job for long. When doors closed in his face, the need to pay his bills and raise his son led him back to hustling to make money.

A month prior to her brother's death, Faulk quit her job as a correctional officer at Lumberton Correctional Institution, because she felt the environment was dehumanizing. William's death left her unsure of how to channel her anger and guilt. She felt lost.

Returning to work inside prison wasn't an option. Instead, she began working in the community, volunteering as an EMT and at group homes. Her involvement in the community helped combat her PTSD and restored purpose to her life; it also sparked the desire to read books on social issues. *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander reiterated what she discovered as a corrections officer—the prison system is broken.

Faulk wants to help fix the system.

Her advocacy efforts began with creating a petition. Her goal was to prove to legislators there was substantial community support for prison reform. Then, a couple of friends in prison asked her to look up a 2023 house bill that addressed sentencing reform, which could have reduced their sentences. Faulk said, "Advocating for the bill was my way of helping them come home."

Initially, she created a website to display the human side of incarcerated people by asking them what a second chance looked like and meant from their perspective. She posted the responses to the site and emailed them to state legislators. The written Q&A for her website evolved into recorded phone conversations that she uploaded to YouTube, creating the *Behind the Walls Talk*

podcast.

Faulk decided to further the scope of the podcast by forming it into an organization of the same name focused on advocating for reform and reentry. "The two must work together," she said. "Reform means changing the system as it exists today by pushing for better policies. Reentry is the other half of the work. It's about making sure individuals returning home have the tools and resources they need and that we, as a community, stay informed and educated." Faulk's goal is "to bridge the gaps between prison, reentry, and community in order to reduce recidivism."



The organizational strategy of Behind the Walls Talk is simple: Keep it community. Faulk keeps it community by building strong relationships with other prison advocacy organizations, including Operation Gateway, Second Chance Initiative, Sentenced Too Young, and Community Success Initiative. In September 2025, she signed a contract to become a Juvenile Justice board member.

Faulk is also equipping herself to be a better advocate. She's enrolled in online community health worker classes through Robeson Community College, along with peer support specialist classes provided by Operation Gateway.

She hopes her education prepares her to more effectively help people prepare to get out of prison and avoid the revolving door her brother fell victim to. She organized a reentry simulation held on September 10, 2025, at the Bill Sapp Recreation Center in Lumberton. First Lady Anna Stein attended the event that simulated the real-life pressure of the obstacles people in prison encounter when returning to society.

Faulk uses a proactive approach to combat the obstacles to reform. North Carolina General Assembly's 2025 session was not kind to prison reform legislation, so she is already planning for the 2027 session. Part of her organization's approach during the next session will focus on being more organized and intentional when making trips to the state's capitol, meeting with legislators, and passing out fliers. Better prepared for the 2027 session, she is confident her efforts will be more effective next time, especially as she continues to connect with other organizations, build her résumé, and develop a more methodical approach to advocacy.

Faulk encourages the incarcerated to take advantage of educational and vocational training opportunities to prepare themselves for the real world. She doesn't want to see any more people leave prison and experience the same fate as her brother. She tells them, "To help you, we need you to help yourselves."

Faulk wants formerly incarcerated people to help Behind the Walls Talk to fight for the future of prison reform by doing their part. She said, "People come home wanting to do right, but when the system doesn't meet them with support, it becomes a revolving door. And that cycle makes it harder for us who fight for real reform. We need resources, we need accountability, and we need opportunities, not barriers." *NCPNT*

OLD SCHOOL BANKS IN A FAST-PACED SOCIETY

By JOE MUTTER

LIKE A SPORTS CAR, TODAY'S ECONOMY races at speeds that are hard to keep up with. Without the right bank, you could find yourself watching others zoom past as you sit broken down beside the financial highway. This installment of our financial literacy series highlights banking and how understanding it can help your financial journey.

A common misconception is that all banks are the same. While banks share commonalities, choosing the right bank requires understanding banking practices before you deposit that first dollar.

Choose a bank that is a member of the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation)

The alarm, armed guards, and good-looking tellers are great, but FDIC is most important. The FDIC protects customers from failing banks. Uninsured banks offer perks like higher returns on savings, but if that bank folds—*Poof*—your money is gone.

Minimize fees

You need to proactively ask what fees the banks charge. Many fees are avoidable, and each one you avoid puts money in your pocket. For example, a bank's monthly service fee can be waived if have your paycheck electronically deposited into your account. You avoid the \$10 monthly fee and the check cashing fee, another \$15. That is \$25/mo. or \$300/yr. (That's a new pair of Jordans.)

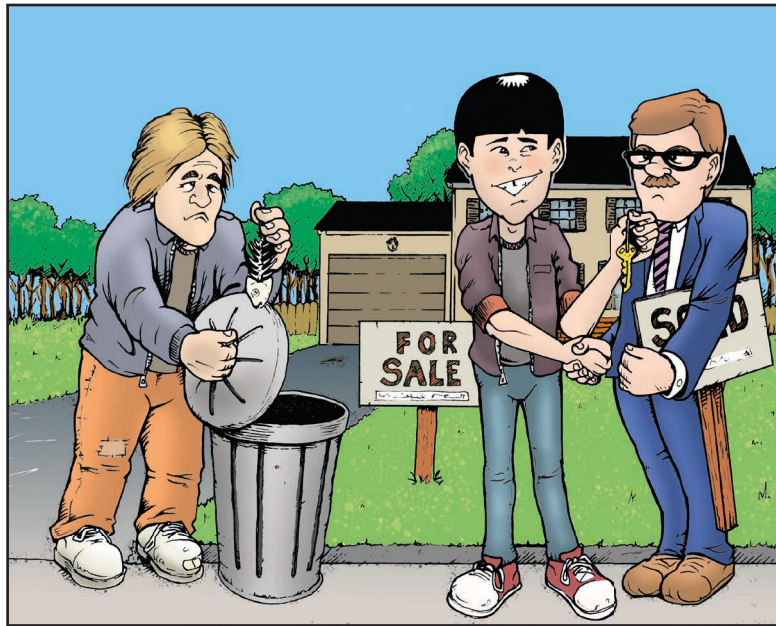
Avoid insufficient funds fees (NSF)

If you write a check and lack the money to cover it, the bank will charge a fee of \$25-\$50. (Those \$300 Jordans, now cost \$350.) Avoid paying NSFs by adding a feature that draws money from your savings to cover your checking.

Investigate ATM fees

When withdrawing funds from an ATM, the fees range from \$1-\$3. That might not seem significant, but going to the ATM a few times a month easily equates to \$100/yr. That is \$100 to access *your* money.

By asking a few questions, you can avoid those fees and save approximately \$450.



Familiarize yourself with checking and savings accounts

You will need both. A checking account is where you deposit income. It offers a quick way to pay bills and protect your money. A savings account is where serious financial planning begins. This account should be slightly challenging to access, which helps you avoid irrational purchases, like buying the latest iPhone.

The main goal of your savings account is to cover unanticipated expenses. This money should only be withdrawn for emergencies—not a fun weekend or treating yourself to a nice meal. Your goal is to protect against car breakdowns, losing your job, or unforeseen medical needs. These emergencies can cripple credit and set you back years. By planning for these pitfalls, you can move forward with little financial impact or stress. Ideally, you want to save 6-12 months of normal living expenses.

Let's apply this with our lovable Harry and Lloyd.

When Harry gets out of prison, he is ignorant of good banking practices. He gets

a job, but without a checking account, he pays a grocery store \$10 to cash his paycheck (\$520/yr.). Harry holds his cash in his wallet and occasionally in a shoebox under his bed. Poor Harry works hard but always runs behind paying bills and never seems to have any cash. He'd like to buy a house or get a car, but he doesn't have the money.

Lloyd learned about good banking practices in prison. So, when he gets out he opens checking and savings accounts at a local FDIC bank. His money is direct deposited. And because he deposits 10% of each paycheck into his savings, his checking account is fee-free. The bank pays him 2% per year, and after five years, Lloyd has over \$16,000 in his savings account. He has established a good banking reputation, and his credit score has skyrocketed. When Lloyd attempts to borrow money to purchase a house, the manager feels confident in loaning him the money, because he has established a good banking history.

The path to financial success is a long journey requiring planning and discipline. Put forth the effort, and you will reap the rewards. Ignore your finances, and you'll find yourself like Harry, watching Lloyd leave his new home and fly by in his new ride, leaving you in the dust with your thumb out looking for a ride. **NCPNT**

Checking	Savings
Typically offers unlimited transactions, transfers, and withdrawals.	Certain transactions, transfers, and withdrawals might be limited in number.
Mostly designed for day-to-day transactions and paying bills.	Often used to save for specific purposes, such as an emergency fund.
The account may or may not pay interest on the balance.	Typically pays an annual percentage yield (APY) on the account balance.

Information provided by Britannica Money

LIGHTS...SOUND...iPHONE?

You might dream of becoming Hollywood's next great filmmaker after you are released. And the key to breaking into the business might be as close as the nearest phone store. *Dutch* author and screenwriter Kwame Teague explains how to get your start.

By KWAME TEAGUE

IN TODAY'S WORLD OF HYPER-SPEEDS AND viral memes, the catch phrase of the moment is, "Content is king." From angry cats to spazzing grandmas, everybody wants their 15 minutes of fame served up in ADHD-sized bytes. The reason for this *infotainment* explosion is the democratizing effects of technology. The equipment to make quality video productions has become so affordable that you actually have a complete movie studio in your pocket. It's called an iPhone.

So, put on your reading glasses and take notes as I give you the game on how to make magic happen.

LET'S BEGIN WITH THE CAMERA

iPhone 17 Pro Max (\$1,200-\$1,500): This is the top of the line, the Ferrari of smart phones. It shoots Pro Res 4k. With this baby, you're shooting with the same capabilities as the \$50,000 Red Komodo camera, one of the go-to cameras in the indie film world.

LENSES

A camera, no matter how high the resolution, is nothing without the proper lens to bring out the depth, clarity, and richness of the perfect shot. What prescription glasses are to the naked eye, a proper lens is to the camera. A good lens enables you to zoom in for close-ups, see far off, and zoom out for panoramic shots; I call it "bifocality." To achieve said ability, you can go with the Shift Cam Cinema Series kit, which will run you about \$2,000 and includes seven lenses and eight filters. It's an all-in-one cinematic buffet.

Or you can go with a packaging of the following:

Apexel 30x telephoto lens with tripod (\$50-\$70): This lens is good for long shots and nature. Think Discovery Channel-type panoramic shots.

Criacr 3-in-1 lens kit (\$25): This one is good for fisheye shots, sort of like

the distorted look of a Beastie Boys video circa 1996. It also does wide angles spectacularly.

Godefia Lens kit with tripod and remote (\$40): This kit has 18X zoom, macros, fisheye, and Woodstock-style kaleidoscope shots.

LIGHTING

Just like a camera is nothing without good lenses, lenses are worthless if the set isn't properly lit. Lighting is the difference between a video of your cousin's wedding and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. There are several dozen lighting apps to choose from, but I'll mention only a few:

Shot Designer (Free): There's a fleshed out pro version at \$19.99 (Take my advice and pay the 20 bucks.)

Drag and Drop camera and lighting set-up planner (Free)

Photo Studio Light set-up (\$29-\$160): This is a set of prebuilt lighting diagrams for different moods. Whether you're shooting the rainy love story-type ending ("We'll always have Paris") or an explosive and vibrant Michael Mannish action scene, these diagrams have you covered.

Luminar 4 (\$159/yr.): This is the big boy. Does it all, including DMX lighting control via your smart phone. I don't know what that means, but the production nerds in my circle all give it the thumbs up.

AUDIO

This aspect of film making is extremely underrated by indie filmmakers. Have you ever watched a movie and the audio sounds like it's coming out of a vacuum? Using the wrong mics, or not positioning the mics correctly, is usually the culprit. There are several types of microphones,

including boom mics, which are overhead mics. (Have you ever seen the mic on the long pole? That's the boom mic.) There are also directional mics like the Shure MU88 (\$149-\$279) or the Rode video mic (\$80-\$269). Again, sound is important, so even if you're filming on a budget, don't skimp on mics.

LASTLY, WE HAVE STABILIZATION KITS

These hold the cameras steady, so your shot doesn't shake.

DJI Osmo Mobile 7P Gimbal 3-axis stabilization (\$99-\$149)

EDITING

Lastly, but by no means least, we have come to post-production. I cannot overemphasize the importance of a good editing process. Movies aren't made through the lens; they are made in the edit room. This is moviemaking 101. Being that movies aren't shot from scene one to the end, it is the editing process that puts together the best shots, angles, and takes. (The reason why you have Director's Cuts is because executive producers and directors rarely agree.)

The best bang for the buck is Luma-fusion (\$29/mo.) or iMovie (\$19/mo.). They're great for beginners.

So, there you have it, a whole movie completed for less than \$5,000. Now, you're ready to upload to your favorite streamer, such as Tubi, Hulu, or Netflix.

Have Fun. **NCPNT**



I'M GOING TO WIN AT LIFE BY THINKING FOR A CHANGE

By JARMON D. HEMPHILL

WORKING AT A PLANT CUTTING AND PACKAGING CHICKEN parts was not my dream job. But that job could have set me up to achieve my dreams. And it would have—if I had not fallen into the familiar traps of bad influences and bad choices.

The House of Raeford chicken plant was my second work release job and third job that involved me going outside the prison each day. Before that, I had two outside-the-fence jobs while housed at the minimum custody section of Scotland Correctional Institution.

First, I worked for the town of Fairmont, fixing underground pipes that had burst. For six months, I worked eight hours a day, five days a week. I earned only \$5 a week, or \$0.12 an hour. However, I became certified to repair sewer pipes, a credential that increased my job prospects.

I was nervous the first time I left the prison to work out in the public. Thinking about how people would treat me was kind of scary. People often complained about inmates working in the city, so I had reason to worry. But others commented that they liked that we were trying to do better.

My first task with the pipe crew was holding a sign on the side of the road that signaled cars to stop or drive slow. I was shocked to be given responsibility for keeping people safe, but I was determined to do the job like my family's safety depended on it.

Next, I worked at Centennial Fence, where we installed all types of fences. I made \$7.50 an hour, which felt substantial after several years in prison where my maximum pay had been \$1 per day. After two months, I transferred from Scotland to Johnston Correctional.

At Johnston, I got the job at the House of Raeford chicken plant, making \$13.75 an hour with the possibility of making \$18 an hour. Everyone with a work release job is required to pay \$109 per week for room and board, plus transportation, which at Johnston costs \$30 per day.

My goal was to save everything I could so I wouldn't have to rely on my family once released. I wanted to have enough for an apartment, car, clothes, and food for six months.

The money was not the only benefit. Another benefit came from not feeling like an inmate while working. Each night, I looked forward to waking up the next morning and going to work. I also anticipated getting released, when my family would see the change in me.

Sadly, I got complacent. I stopped appreciating the opportunity and lost focus on my goals. I returned to the old habit of hanging out with guys who were smoking weed, which inevitably led to me smoking weed. Soon, I got caught.

I messed up a good opportunity to go home with a good work ethic and money saved up. I threw away the chance to be ahead.

After getting demoted to medium custody, I decided to take Thinking for a Change. It was too late to prepare for release by getting ahead financially, but I could still prepare mentally. The class motto is, "Thinking controls behavior." The instructors challenge students to always think through choices and consequences, the risks and rewards. When I smoked weed, the risks were not worth the rewards.

One section of the class is cognitive self-change, which has three steps: pay attention to your thinking, recognize risk, and use new thinking. If I had known and used these steps, I would still be working at the chicken plant.

I have failed at life for 47 years. Now, I have tools for a new way of life, a new way of thinking and behaving. When I walk out the prison gate, I will succeed by thinking—for a change. *NCPNT*

Things You Should Know about Work Release

- You can't have any pending charges, felony or misdemeanor.
- If you have an assault on an officer or staff, you have to get the warden's permission.
- If you're involved in gang activity, you will not be approved for a job.
- If you cause problems, you will not work.
- The opportunity comes with a responsibility, which means staff and officers will hold you to a higher standard than others who don't have work release.
- Anyone on work release is drug tested often.
- Generally, you must work 90 days on a job with the city or town to demonstrate that you're trustworthy.
- Often, you wear regular (street/non-prison) clothes when you go to work.
- On some jobs, you wear an "Inmate" vest, so you need to be respectful to employers, other employees, and the public, or you may take away the opportunity from others.
- From your first paycheck, \$150 will go to set up your account, and you will pay about \$100 for room and board. You can also opt to put \$45 in your Trust Fund account.
- If you get caught bringing in any contraband, you will lose the opportunity, permanently.

FITNESS GURU BUILDS WORKOUT PROGRAM AT NEUSE

By PHILLIP VANCE SMITH, II

BENEATH A BURNING MORNING SUN IN LATE August, about 20 men gather on Neuse Correctional Institution's D2 recreation yard ready to sweat. The D2 yard has been decommissioned for years, so its yard is deserted except for those men, who stand in a circle stretching as they prepare to work out in a fitness class led by Jovan Wash, an incarcerated fitness guru of sorts.

The collection of men—derived from various age, ethnic, and social groups—wouldn't normally interact, but their differences disappear during grueling rounds of jump squats, pushups, and crunches, as they sprint toward better health and a better life.

Neuse began offering the fitness class in late July 2025. Held for an hour on Monday and Wednesday mornings, the class was the brainchild of Linwood Hope, Neuse's new recreation coordinator. The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (NCDAC) created recreation coordinator positions across the state in 2025. When Hope took the position, he immediately began looking for activities to keep the population motivated.

One day, he noticed Wash leading six or seven guys through a workout routine on B yard, something Wash had been doing for the past five years. But that day, Wash's workout held more significance for Hope.

"I figured that we could extend what Wash was doing on B yard to the whole camp," Hope said, as he supervised the fitness class while seated on a cart laden with Styrofoam cups and a cooler of Gatorade. "I thought it would give guys something to do and improve their mental health." Hope gazed out at the men stretching. "Looks like it's working. They keep showing up."

Wash jumped at the chance to devise a workout plan when Hope offered him the opportunity, but he couldn't run the class alone.

"Everybody has a different fitness level," Wash said. "I've met guys who didn't know how to do a pushup. The challenge was finding a way for everyone to participate at their skill level within the hour we're given."

Wash designed three exercise routines to be conducted simultaneously: beginner,

intermediate, and elite. He asked his core group of workout partners to pitch in.

At the beginning of the workout, everyone spreads out in a huge circle, and Wash takes them all through a series of stretches.

"Everyone stretches together," Wash said. "So, everyone knows we're a team, even when we separate into groups."

Wash instructs the beginners and assigns members of his regular workout group to lead the intermediate and elite groups.

The workouts are based on supersetting, or performing multiple exercises in rapid succession without taking a break. One superset could be 30 pullups, 20 dips, 50 pushups, and 50 body squats. The first workout might be 10 rounds of that superset. Wash designs each workout to build muscle and endurance.

Michael Darby joined the class on day one. At 52 years old, he weighed 336 pounds and had developed diabetes and high blood pressure. He began dieting and walking in February.

"I want to get off my medication," Darby said. "That's my goal. I've been over 300 pounds for 10 or 15 years, but now I'm down to 294, and it feels good."

Darby said he likes working out on the D2 yard because the participants are isolated from spectators. "I'm a big guy," he said. "But out here, nobody is judging or laughing at me. If I can only do one rep, that rep is enough."

The beginners in the fitness class are just embarking on a journey of personal change that Wash made his life philosophy long ago.

"If I'm not working out, it's a problem," Wash said. "In prison we deal with different attitudes—staff and inmates. So much is unknown on a daily basis. We don't know if they'll cancel yard or if we'll be on lockdown. But if I get in a morning workout, I use it

as fuel to deal with the adversity of the day. It has become a necessity."

Twenty-nine-year-old Javonta Ellis has been working out with Wash for about 14 months. He worked out before, but he never saw his body tone like it has on Wash's workout plan. He's even experienced less stress and increased energy. During the camp's fitness class, Ellis helps others when he can.

"The idea is to be an example for others," Ellis said. "If they see me do it, I want them to know that they can, too, if they try."

Wash had group motivation in mind when he designed the class. "We have to be accountable to each other," Wash said. "I'm not forcing you to do what I say. I ask you to do what you can and to progress. If this group creates competition, it's a healthy competition where every man tries to do his best."

Moving forward, Wash hopes the NCDAC will offer classes to help people become certified personal trainers while incarcerated. "In prison, I've learned how important fitness is," Wash said. "But when I get out, I want to take what I know and apply it as a trade. With help, we can learn to do this for real." *NCPNT*

Jovan Wash putting his fitness knowledge to work



2026 WORLD CUP PREVIEW



BY JON ADAMS

THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR SPORTING event has arrived. And, sorry, Americans, it's not the Super Bowl, NBA Finals, or World Series. It's the World Cup! The tournament begins on June 11, 2026, with Canada, Mexico, and the United States hosting. Whether you're an avid "footballer" or cannot fathom why a sport doesn't allow players to use their hands, here are my six predictions on what to expect heading into the tournament.

Question: Can the United States actually win?

American sports fans ask this question every four years. USA's "Golden Generation" is here, but in name only. Under current manager Mauricio Pochettino, the United States Men's National Team (USMNT) has more questions around it than answers. Will they be healthy? Can they win without an established striker? But the essential question remains: Are the Americans skilled enough to win in the knockout stage against world-class giants like Spain, Brazil, or Germany? They received a favorable draw and

can realistically win their group. My fandom says, "maybe." But past that? Reality says, "not a snowball's chance in hell."

Prediction:

USMNT go undefeated in the group stage with stellar play from Christian "Captain America" Pulisic but crash out in the first round of the knockout stage. One-man armies don't win wars, and they don't win World Cups either (unless your name is Maradona or Pelé).

Question: What about Mexico and Canada...do they have a shot?

Mexico and Canada received automatic bids to the tournament since they are co-hosting. *El Tri* would've qualified even without an automatic bid, but Canada? Our northern neighbors have never won a single match at *any* World Cup. (Maybe they should ask their ladies for some pointers.) Mexico is in the same conversation as the USA: good enough to advance to the knockout stage, only to be exposed by a superior squad.

Prediction:

El Tri fails to break the curse and gets bounced in the first round of the knockout stage. The Canadians finally win a game in the group stage but do not advance. Don't despise small beginnings, Canada...Eh!

Question: Is this the last hurrah for Messi and Ronaldo? (Seriously this time?)

The 2022 World Cup was *supposed* to



be Messi's and Ronaldo's farewell from international soccer, a last dance for two of the game's greatest. Going into that tournament, both icons were missing one piece of hardware in their extensive trophy cases: a World Cup. What happened next was nothing short of legendary. Messi led Argentina to the finals, where they triumphed over a star-studded French side featuring the game's heir apparent—Mbappé. Also memorable was CR7 walking off the field in tears in 2022 in what everyone thought was his last shot at winning soccer's biggest trophy.

However, 2026 is upon us, and the legends are still active *and* producing at a high level for club and country. This tournament *will be* their last, so any game they play is must-see. Their teams are formidable and primed to make deep runs.

Prediction:

No team has repeated as World Cup champions since Brazil (1958 & 1962), so the defending champions are virtually guar-





anted to fall short. So, the spotlight is on Ronaldo. Can he snatch the one accolade eluding him? The answer is...no. Portugal falls in the semis and Cristiano Ronaldo becomes the game's greatest player to never win a World Cup.

Question: Has the dreaded "Group of Death" dissolved?

Every World Cup, fans eagerly await the draw to learn who fell into the group of death, a popular phrase that describes the most competitive and difficult group to survive. But this tournament is a little different than previous ones. The field has expanded from 32 to 48 teams. Because of the expansion, the groups are more leveled in 2026. Group I (France, Norway, Senegal, and Iraq) is the deepest group in 2026. *Les Bleus* is a favorite to win the whole thing; they won it in 2018, almost won it in 2022, and have one of the most talented rosters in 2026. But...enter Erling. Erling Haaland has led Norway to its first World Cup qualification since 1998 in marvelous style, scoring 16 goals in 8 games during qualifiers. And Senegal? The West African side can't be underestimated. While this group may not be as deadly as fans had hoped, this group is one to keep an eye on.

Prediction:

Even with the departures of their veterans, the absurdly talented Frenchmen win the group unscathed. Senegal hands Haaland and Co. their second loss and a one-way ticket back to Norway. Sorry Erling, but your talent ensures a return to soccer's

biggest stage in 2030. We'll see you then.

Question: What about the "Redeem Teams"?

Colombia, Belgium, Germany, Brazil—all teams touting immense potential; all teams recently leaving their fan bases frustrated and wanting. Colombia is back after failing to qualify in 2022. That same year, Belgium—FIFA's No. 2 ranked team at the time—wasted its Golden Generation and failed to reach the knockout stage. Germany was eliminated in the group stage, as well; but their excuse was their draw in the group of death. Brazil has been unimpressive for the past decade, or in other words, during the Neymar era, which explains it all. Getting thrashed 7-0 (on their home turf) by Germany in 2014 really stole their joy, and they haven't been the same since.

Prediction:

Colombia is an interesting team with potential, but potential doesn't produce goals. Look for *Die Mannschaft* and Brazil to at least make the quarterfinals. Belgium is a legitimate dark horse to win the whole thing; sure, they went home in humiliating fashion in 2022, but they have one of the best midfielders to ever put on a pair of boots—Kevin De Bruyne. He is an absolute wizard, though a tad bit aged, and has plenty of talent around him. They'll have to get around a Mo Salah-led Egyptian side to get to the knockout stage.

Question: Who hoists The Cup in 2026?

Alright, enough small talk. What everyone wants to know is who's going to win? Will Argentina repeat? If anyone can, it's them, but it's very unlikely. What about France? They appeared in the last two World Cup finals; Mbappé is undeniable, but with Lloris, Varane, Griezmann, and Giroud all retiring, *Les Bleus* loses a lot of irreplaceable experience.

Perhaps Brazil or Germany can return to glory. Maybe Croatia, Morocco, or Portugal can pull it off? Nope, these teams are good but not great; winning the World Cup requires greatness. Netherlands is my favorite

dark horse contender. Memphis Depay is a world-class finisher, Frenkie De Jong is brilliant in the midfield, and Virgil Van Dijk is the most skilled, and most intimidating, defender in soccer.

Then, there's England. *The Three Lions* are submitting one of their most talented and complete rosters in recent memory—Harry Kane, Jude Bellingham, and Cole Palmer. And Jordan Pickford is one of the best goalkeepers in the tournament and a viable Golden Glove candidate. In my observation, teams with strong keepers usually lift the Cup in the end: Argentina's Emiliano Martinez in 2022, France's Hugo Lloris in 2018, Germany's Manuel Neuer in 2014, Spain's Iker Casillas in 2010, Italy's Gianluigi Buffon in 2006...point made.

However, there is one team I haven't mentioned to this point that checks all the boxes.

Prediction:

Give me Spain. When it comes to beauty in soccer, very few teams can replicate in one game what *La Roja* does nearly every game. "Death by a thousand cuts" best describes their style. In times past, it was normal for Spain to top 1,000 passes per game (the average in international soccer is 500-600). Untrained eyes bore quickly watching Spain dissect their opponents through elite ball possession.

It's been 16 years since Spain last won the World Cup, and that team was legendary: Pique, Xavi, and Iniesta. Now, they have a new manager who has retained Spain's traditional style while implementing a more dynamic attack. With teenage sensation Lamine Yamal leading the way, *La Roja* is here to not only win in 2026, but to dominate for the foreseeable future. **NCPNT**



GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY HOSTS HOOPS 4 HOPE AT FOOTHILLS

By KYLE TRIPLETT

WHEN THE GAME IS ON THE LINE, CLUTCH players rise to the occasion. Whether in a basketball game or in life, a person's performance in these defining moments decides their fate. This message was emphasized at the inaugural Hoops 4 Hope (H4H).

On September 20, 2025, the top 20 basketball players at Foothills Correctional Institution were invited to the gym to participate in the event. Foothills Recreation Director Mr. Roseboro coordinated H4H in conjunction with Hope Community Church, Prison Alliance, and the Gardner-Webb University (GWU) basketball team.

At 8:30 a.m., the GWU basketball team and coaching staff walked through the gym doors, greeted by skeptical looks from the 20 participants. Unfazed by the reception, GWU Head Coach Jeremy Luther assembled everyone into a circle at half court. He shared his love for coaching basketball and expressed that his ultimate passion is helping young men develop into their full potential. Luther, like legendary UCLA coach John Wooden, believes, "What you are as a person is far more important than what you are as a basketball player."

The 20 participants were divided into two 10-player teams. Each team received new practice jerseys and shorts. One team sported blue apparel with "FCI" in white script over a net and basketball, while the other team donned red with "The Webb" on the front.

Between the huddle and game time, each team spent an hour and a half practicing

skill-building drills, led by the GWU players and coaches. The drills involved ball handling, passing, lay-ups, and defense.

Then, it was time for the 20 players to showcase their skills in the FCI vs. The Webb matchup. The GWU basketball players coached and managed each team during the game's four eight-minute quarters.

FCI grabbed the tip-off and quickly scored on a layup. The pace stayed feverish, with both teams sprinting up and down the court. Every four minutes, both teams subbed in the next five guys to ensure equal playing time.

FCI built a sizable lead. The Webb played hard, but nothing seemed to be going their way. At halftime, FCI led by eight points. The feverish pace made fatigue a factor for both teams.

After a short break, the second half commenced. FCI got back into a rhythm, taking an 11-point lead. The fourth quarter began with The Webb down by 10. With just eight minutes remaining, clutch time arrived.

Until that point, the game was one-sided. Then, The Webb's Donald Chambers demonstrated his clutch credentials. After chipping away at the lead, he made back-to-back three-point shots, pulling his team to within one point.

With 5.5 seconds left on the clock, FCI's Bentley Ivey was fouled and went to the free-throw line to shoot a one-and-one. Ivey sank the first shot to put his team ahead by two at 48 to 46. When Ivey missed the second shot, Chambers grabbed the rebound,



dribbled barely past half court, and pulled up for the potential game-winning shot. The final buzzer blared as the ball sailed toward the goal. All eyes followed the ball. *Swish*, nothing but net. The whole gym erupted into celebration.

In that instant, everyone experienced a moment of freedom. Chambers expressed, "It was the first time in eight years that I felt I wasn't locked up."

Eminem said it best, "You only get one shot, don't miss your chance to blow, this opportunity only comes once in a lifetime." Disputes of who's the greatest of all time often arise. Is it Mike, LeBron, or Kobe? Chambers might never be in the GOAT discussion, but he took the shot, didn't miss, and is immortalized in Foothills basketball history.

After the game, the men gathered around half court to hear encouraging words from Coach Luther, Prison Alliance's Joey Davidson, and Pastor Jeremy Peeler of Hope Community Church. Pastor Jeremy shared

a message of how to live with hope far beyond the basketball court. Then, everyone chowed down on chicken and steak burritos.

Afterward, Roseboro called the H4H event "life-changing." He added, "One guy used to hold his head down, but now he walks with purpose and his head held high. His whole demeanor and outlook have completely changed." *NCPNT*



Photo Courtesy of NCDAC



A CRASH OF EGOS BRINGS CHANGES AND CONFIDENCE IN *F1*

BY ANDREW HODGE

I'M NOT MUCH OF A SPORTS GUY, LET ALONE a fan of racing. But sports movies—if well-written—shift me into high gear. I had seen commercials for the *F1* movie prior to its release and watched the full trailer OnDemand. I was, admittedly, indifferent about it until it dropped on the Gold Movie App on the tablet. The buzz traveled fast about how good it was, so I hopped in my Indy car and sped down the track with Brad Pitt and Damson Idris.

What a rush! The movie follows Sonny Hayes (Pitt) and his love for racing. He can drive anything with wheels. But something eludes him. He hasn't won an F1 race, and the accident that drove him away from the sport still haunts him. He has steered clear of F1 racing for decades. That is until an old friend, who risks losing his racing team if it doesn't finish in the top ten, shows up asking for Sonny's help.

The task is made more difficult by a young, arrogant driver named Joshua Pearce (Idris) who is already on the team,

and whose ego leaves no room for Sonny.

The two clash, and the team suffers. But once the dust settles, the team realizes that Sonny knows his stuff. Before the final checkered flag waves, they learn to trust his experience.

Sonny is confident in what he does. And the other members on the team see this. At first, they don't know what to make of him. He seems to be constantly changing his mind or stubbornly going against what the coaches tell him to do. But eventually they begin to rally around him. They become more and more of a team as the movie progresses. His presence changes the atmosphere and attitudes of those around him. He is often brash and openly expresses his opinion, but once everyone else—including Pearce—sees that he cares about the sport and his team, they begin to change their minds.

In a prison environment, it's extremely easy to go with the flow and try not to stand out. But like Sonny, we have the ability to

change the atmosphere around us. Some of those who have been in prison for a long time can use their experience and wisdom to be a positive influence on the younger generation. They can bring that wisdom to the new guys who feel like they have something to prove.

Arrogance like Sonny's isn't helpful. But confidence in what one knows can help the new guys see a different and better way of doing time. As a result, the atmosphere can change. And the effect is long-lasting.

With a catchy soundtrack and a story that will inspire you to never give up, the movie is an adrenaline rush that's sure to get your blood pumping. In the starting grid of your must-see movies, *F1* should be in the pole position.

So, hop in, strap up, and enjoy the ride as soon as you can before the other cars blow right past you.

I know we can't drink, but I give this thrill ride 5 champagne bottles out of 5. *NCPNT*

THE POETS' PAGE



PRISON FODDER BY: GEORGE WILKERSON

like a label-less can donated to the food pantry
with BEANS scribbled in black
marker right on the tin, Gary
seemed less than generic

on purpose. he was the prototypical
loner prisoner, sixtyish and gray, pasty
as damp drywall. he faded
into the architecture here, stayed

in his cell reading, mostly,
door open yet closed.
he sink-bathed instead of showering,
ate at a four-way stainless steel table

by himself in the mess hall
for decades, didn't trust the barbers
or any other man
with scissors near his head —

he trimmed his own hair
with fingernail clippers. in the twelve years
I lived on his pod, he never had anyone
come visit or send him money for commissary

except a church at Christmas.
when cancer ate holes into his lungs
he seemed giddy with relief
despite the ache and thinning

air, and his sister called our chaplain
to ask what would happen to Gary's body
when nobody claimed it.
She was told the prison would

cremate him and add his ashes
to a fifty-gallon drum rusting in the basement
which, when stuffed
with gritty remnants,

would be trucked
to the coast, loaded on a boat,
then dumped
into open ocean —

food for plankton;
emptied urn
would be returned to the prison
basement, where the next generation
of dust was already collecting.

Note from the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (NCDAC): When someone dies in prison, state law requires an examination of the body by the North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. If the body remains unclaimed from the medical examiner's office, that office handles disposition of the body. NCDAC does not cremate unclaimed bodies and is not involved in their disposition.