

# Walk In Those Shoes

Winter 2024 Newsletter – ISSUE 12

## My, My, My

By Aquilla From Fifth Ward

My, my, my, look at the northern rose still dewed  
by the moisture of night past,  
swayed by life's gentle breeze, warmed by the  
summer sun,  
lost in the moment.

How man finds himself left in awe of all  
love's beauty,  
and what we take for granted, was it destiny  
or chance?

Reckless squeals erupt with a teasing smile,  
dare time to rob me of thoughts or memories,  
the way the warmth of the summer sun  
removes dew from a beloved rose.

I relax in the strength of the day,  
amused by inflections who's bounds are  
youth, curiosity, love and the uncertainty  
of life.

The other day I watched a crow die..

As I looked up from beneath the afternoon sun  
I watched birds fly by,  
my gaze redirected to a crow falling from  
the sky.

I, a prisoner forced to stay between the  
lines, locked eyes with sympathy and remorse  
then silently said goodbye,  
and it died behind prison bars though it was  
free.

It watched me walk by day after day hoping  
for something to eat,  
on days I was unable to give, the next  
man broke bread,  
and in this way bird's family remain fed  
its young continue to grow,  
and the chain remains complete,  
I myself a dying bird, and my family  
prisoner at my feet.



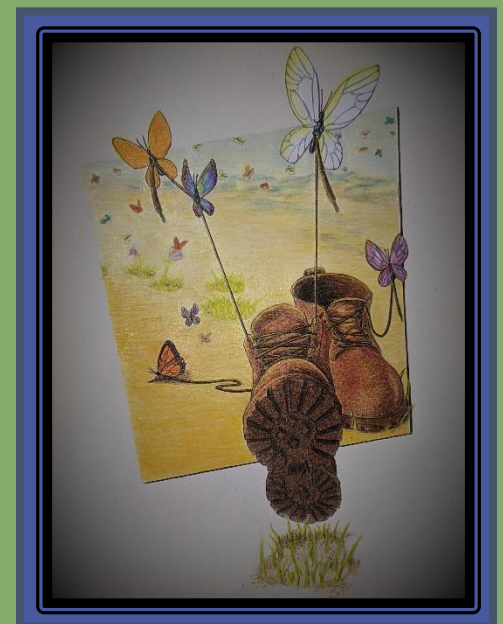
*"We have so much negative from where I'm from, I wanted to show youngsters that its possible."*

**-Cover Writer, Ethell Henry, AKA, Aquilla From Fifth Ward**

If you would like to submit your writing for consideration on our website at [www.walkinthoseshoes.com](http://www.walkinthoseshoes.com) or for inclusion in upcoming newsletters, please submit only unpublished work to:

**Walk In Those Shoes  
P.O. Box 70092  
Henrico, VA 23255**

Writers whose essays are chosen for Page 1 of the monthly newsletter will receive \$25 upon publication.



Artist, Cerron T. Hooks

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*“THIS IS MY TRUTH AND WHERE MY  
HEART IS TODAY”*

– Terry Brown

To hear Terry Brown’s TEDx Talk,  
*Victimizer to Victim*, go to  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fZ81A-GOQU>

Throughout my incarceration I have had time to grow from a misguided young male into a more understanding and empathetic grown man. I’ve had to take full responsibility for my actions which led to someone’s life being taken over something as foolish and minute as drugs and money. I’ve begun to take the necessary steps toward my rehabilitation. Firstly, by holding myself accountable for my decisions and allowing remorse to enter my heart rather than only living with regret because of the consequences of my decisions.

I earned my GED almost 20 years ago, but programming has been an uphill battle. Like most of us are aware, the majority of programs are geared toward reentry offenders. ‘Lifers’, such as myself, are waitlisted for years, praying a spot becomes available, so I stopped waiting and took some initiative. I sacrificed commissary and had my family purchase courses from places like ACCI Lifeskills. So far, I have earned 15 certifications for program completion. I also completed a fatherhood.org based program called InsideOut Dad.

I am currently housed at a work facility where we are bussed to an off-site workshop every morning and we manufacture license plates for the DMV. My rehabilitation hasn’t been incentive based. I am not under the 65% sentence credit nor am I parole eligible. My rehabilitation is based solely on wanting to be a better version of myself and be better for the people who love and support me. I know I have some way to go, but I have come very far from that 21-year-old that committed a terrible act that destroyed two families.

I now understand the need for public safety and why it was necessary that I be removed from society. The same decision I made has come back to my family full circle. Both of my sons are victims of homicide, so I fully understand the ramifications of my actions and the destruction it did to the family of my victim. I want to invoke change and convey a message of remorse and accountability in hopes it will deter another 21-year-old from taking someone’s life. For as long as I can remember, I justified my actions by saying they impacted other people in the streets and not regular people. That way of thinking didn’t make sense when the tables turned.

We are all regular people. We’re all someone’s father, son, brother, or friend. As ol’ heads from those low-income communities, we must change the narrative, we must show ‘nephew’ and ‘lil bruh’ that it’s OK to have self-worth and to know that their world is bigger than the ‘jects’. More importantly, their story doesn’t have to end with them either being murdered in the street or serving 93 years in prison. Contrary to popular belief, coming to prison or dying before your time doesn’t make you *official*. We all have to stay focused and continue pushing forward towards self-betterment.

# WINTER WRITING PROMPT

SHARE AN EXPERIENCE, IN PRISON  
OR OUT, THAT HELPED YOU GROW  
AS A PERSON.

An Engstrom and Van Ginneken (2022) review of existing literature found that views of nature are linked to heart rate reductions and restoration, and exposure to daylight impacts psychological well-being. Their findings also indicate that lack of darkness during sleep can have a negative impact on behavior (Engstrom and Van Ginneken, 2022).

Engstrom, K. V., & van Ginneken, E. F. J. C. (2022). Ethical prison architecture: A systematic literature review of prison design features related to wellbeing. *Space and Culture*, 25(3), 479–503.

To improve outcomes, all aspects of incarceration should be taken into consideration, including possible benefits of improving the physical attributes and architecture of incarceration.

## Did You Know? Lighting Considerations

Jacobs and Mullany (2014) conducted a study at a jail in Maricopa County, Arizona, hoping to determine if low vitamin D levels were linked to lack of exposure to ultraviolet rays. Results indicated that there was a significant vitamin D deficiency among the sample (Jacobs & Mullany, 2014). The particular facility where this study was conducted was designed with no outdoor recreation areas, limiting exposure to natural light (Jacobs & Mullany, 2014). Overall, the study concluded that individuals who resided in the prison had a greater Vitamin D deficiency than unincarcerated adults living in Arizona (Jacobs & Mullany, 2014).

Jaech (2022), in a review of Court Opinions on whether twenty-four-hour lighting was cruel and unusual punishment, noted that lighting that caused loss of sleep has been associated with depression and anxiety in detained children. The researcher also linked sleep deprivation to suicidal behavior (Jaech, 2022), and another study in the same review found a link between disturbed sleep and increased severity of PTSD symptoms and anxiety related disorders (Jaech, 2022). In one of the cases studied, a psychiatrist testified regarding the link between 24-hour lighting and psychotic symptoms as well as an aggravation of already existing disorders (Jaech, 2022).

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Jacobs, E. T., & Mullany, C. J. (2015). Vitamin D deficiency and inadequacy in a correctional population. *Nutrition (Burbank, Los Angeles County, Calif.)*, 31(5), 659–663.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nut.2014.10.010>

Jaech, L. (2022). Obstacles to proving 24-hour lighting is cruel and unusual under eighth amendment jurisprudence. *Washington Law Review*, 97(4), 1087–1118

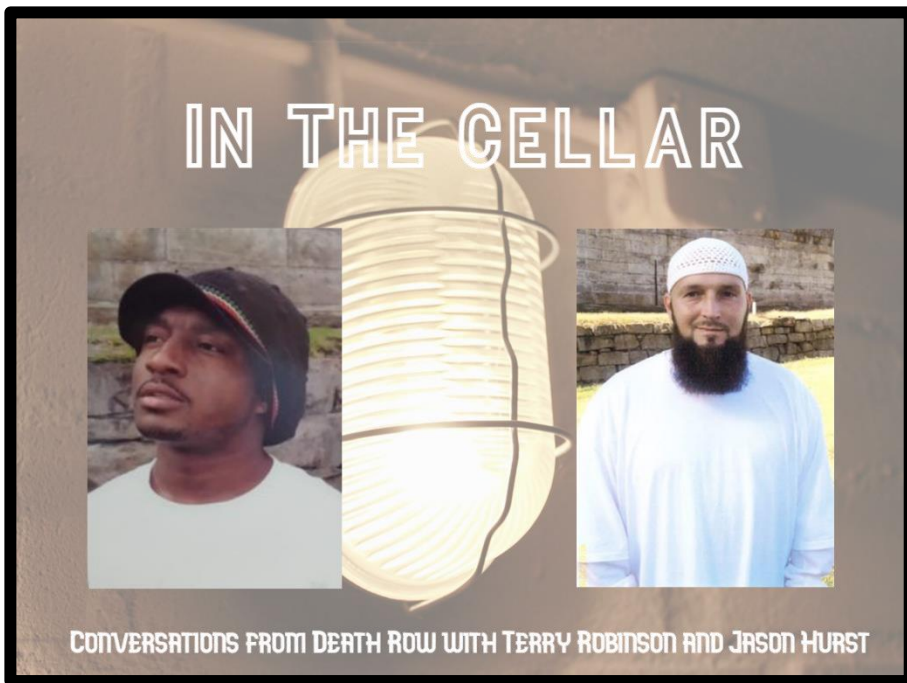
**Mass incarceration has also led to staff shortages within correctional departments across the nation. It makes humanitarian as well as fiscal sense to explore what physical design features within prisons help support the well-being of both residents and staff. There exists a body of research that links well-being with certain prison design features.**

**WITS published its first Newsletter in 2023, eight years after it first began sharing writing and news from inside prisons, and four years after being established as a 501c3 in 2019.**

**We recognize the need to not only keep costs minimal, but also compensate contributors, when possible, through writing contests as well as front page essay fees. Because of that, WITS Newsletters are offered for free download at: <https://walkinthoseshoes.com/newsletter/>**

**We encourage supporters to print and distribute copies, at no cost.**

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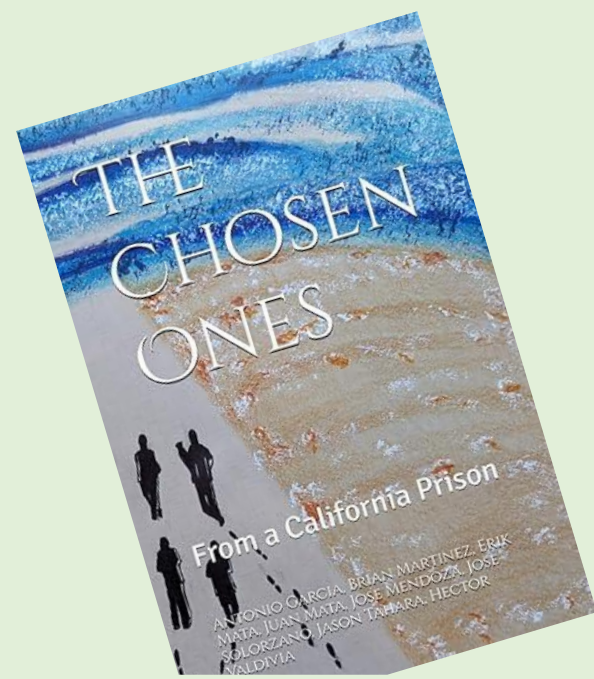
THE FIRST SEASON OF *IN THE CELLAR* IS AVAILABLE ON SPOTIFY.

*IN THE CELLAR* WAS CREATED BY TWO WITS WRITERS, TERRY ROBINSON AND JASON HURST, WHO LIVE ON DEATH ROW AND HOPE TO BRING GREATER INSIGHT INTO PRISON AND ALSO BEING SENTENCED TO DEATH.

[HTTPS://OPEN.SPOTIFY.COM/SHOW/0AJMWNLMWzV1P6PKTM5](https://open.spotify.com/show/0AJMWNLMWzV1P6PKTM5)

On **July 9, 2024**, WITS shared the first episode of *In The Cellar*, featuring weekly table talk sessions from NC Death Row. The hosts explore the challenges, tragedies and triumphs of living with a death sentence. *In The Cellar* is hosted by Jason ‘Mumin’ Hurst and Terry ‘Chanton’ Robinson, two men amongst the many Death Row residents who are pursuing constructive ways to effect change. The podcast strives to remain balanced and bring awareness to those in and outside of prison and also provides insight from the civilian point of view and experience.

Join Chanton and Mumin as they begin Season 2 on December 17, 2024, and continue to shine the light on one of prison’s darkest reaches and also the practice of murdering murderers in the name of justice. Each episode of *In The Cellar* is shared on [Spotify](https://open.spotify.com/show/0AJMWNLMWzV1P6PKTM5), where you can also find all ten episodes of Season 1 at: <https://walkinthoseshoes.com/category/in-the-cellar/>



Published in July, 2024, *The Chosen Ones* was written by eight men who live in a California prison. These eight men came together to share portions of their journey through trauma and criminality to change for their futures. They wrote to heal and also, to some degree, to reclaim control over their narrative. None of the eight were writers, but all were committed to this project.

*The Chosen Ones* is priced at \$5.99 and can be purchased on Amazon. All proceeds support WITS, a 501(c)3.



# THE LONE JOURNEY: A Spiritual Walk Towards Transformation

By Terry Robinson

Prison can be the loneliest place ever - hard to imagine with all the overcrowding, rambunctiousness, and intensity. We sleep in close proximity, spend hours of insignificant chatter, and form bonds that occasionally outlast our prison stay. Yet even in a place where no one is starving for company, still there is a sense of internal isolation, much like those cold, lonely walls of solitary confinement except this loneliness takes place in our minds.

Some might say the stringent process of self-evaluation is the real prison sentence. We reflect on the lives we've lived and the decisions we've made while trying to keep from crumbling to dust under the weight of the 'what ifs'. We long for our loved ones, tender memories looping in our heads as the passing years threaten to make them strangers. We become our most illogical selves, promising to mend our flaws while determined to finally live right. In those moments, no amount of presence from others can fill the sense of loneliness and we recognize our path through life is a lone journey. But are we ever really alone when we have within us the divine notion that guides us toward our purpose? Can we forever delude ourselves in the grandeur of social companionship, ignoring the only real companion we have? Nope, we are never truly alone in the world because of the moral entity within us, the source of all our reason that encompasses all our good deeds. We are never without the company of our spirit.

Spirituality and prison are virtually wed, their matrimony being positive transformation. Not every prisoner is spiritually inclined, choosing instead to divorce their principles and make prison work for them in the worst way. Spirituality determines the true margin of our success in prison as it effects our wholesome deeds, but let's face it... prisoners don't get to prison for being wholesome. We start out in the world innocent enough, then we grow up to live a life of impurity. Some minor prison sentences are met with a shrug and healthy propensity for violence. Prison then becomes the place to perpetuate poor behavior as the unscrupulous are highly admired. But at some point, we all find ourselves alone on our bunks, buried soulfully in our inner thoughts. We lay perfectly still in the aching realism of our lives while our spirit is entangled in regrets. This is when prison is the loneliest - when we must answer the call from within and the question becomes not whether our spirit will answer back but whether we will truly listen.

For more than 25 years now I have engaged in the conduct of foolery in prison: gambling, TV, meaningless chatter, and hosts of idle nonsense. I was susceptible to the hostility because I believed my reputation was necessary to secure my safety. I violated many a prison policy, a rebel against the rule of law. Over the decades, as I grew older, I began to see myself in a self-disapproving light, one out of touch with my lifelong ambitions, existing without much purpose. I'd been working so long for the acceptance of others that I'd forgotten I was being accompanied all along by my spirit, and it was walking a much more meaningful path.

Today I am more conscious of my spiritual development as it is charting my way to salvation. I'm mindful that the things I say and do can be detrimental to my soul. For instance, I don't always eat healthy, but I eat better in hopes that my body will be equally as equipped as my mind. I exercise patience and consideration in the face of hostility as I contend to keep trouble at bay. All these things and more I do because I'm committed to being a better person, therefore I lean on my spirituality to encourage me to do what I know is right.

My fellow prisoners, I'm calling on you all to change the infrastructure of prison. Let the hostility and nonsense fall to the wayside as we strive for something greater. If we look to our spirit, we'll find that internal goodness that fosters our success in life, but if we fail to stimulate our spirit, we are surrendering our walk towards salvation without taking a single step.

**MORE WRITING BY TERRY ROBINSON, AKA CHANTON, can be found at: <https://walkinthoseshoes.com/author/chanton/>**

**TO HEAR TERRY'S PODCAST *IN THE CELLAR*, CO-HOSTED BY JASON HURST, go to Spotify at: <https://open.spotify.com/show/0ajmnWnlMIWzv1p6pKTtm5>**