

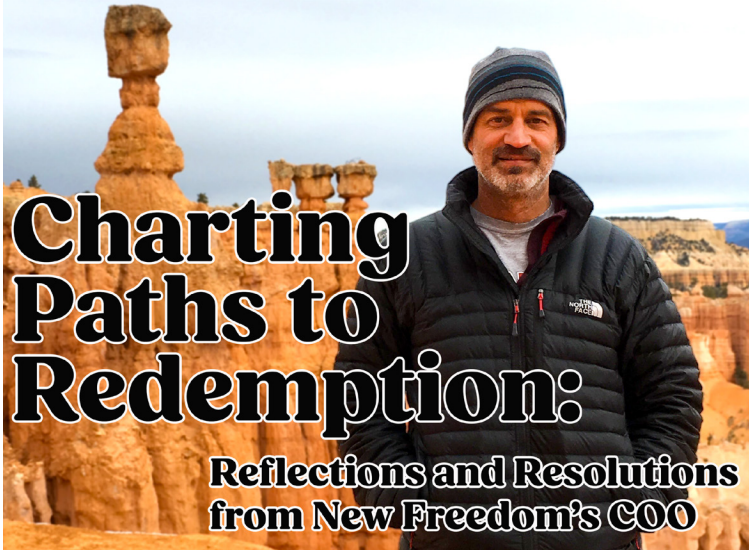
January 2024
Volume 5
Issue 1



New Freedom Project

The Navigator

Hope Illuminated



Charting Paths to Redemption:

Reflections and Resolutions from New Freedom's COO

As we stand at the threshold of a new year, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey that brought me to New Freedom and the transformative impact we've had on the many lives of those seeking a second chance. My name is Mark, and as the Chief Operations Officer, I've spent over three decades immersed in the dynamic world of business operations. Joining New Freedom just over a year ago was a pivotal moment for me, marking a shift towards a purpose-driven mission that has redefined the meaning of my professional journey.

Having navigated the complexities of multiple startups as a Chief Operations Officer, I was immediately captivated by the innovative approach New Freedom takes in serving a community that desperately needs our support. Despite my lack of prior experience with the justice-involved community, I quickly recognized the tremendous potential for positive change within New Freedom. Over the past year, I've had the privilege of working alongside an exceptional team, both within the organization and among our members, gaining valuable insights into the unique challenges faced during the re-entry process. The synergy created by combining diverse perspectives, including those with lived experience, has been the cornerstone of our program's success.

I've been blessed to collaborate with accomplished professionals and peers who share a common goal: empowering second chances. This has undeniably become the most rewarding chapter of my professional life, and I eagerly anticipate each day spent working on behalf of our members.

As we approach the upcoming year, it's essential to acknowledge the adversity we've faced and overcome as a collective. In light of recent challenges, New Freedom is dusting itself off, refocusing, and planning for the future. Our leadership team engages in quarterly discussions to ensure the best approach to fulfill our mission to "inspire successful community re-entry for all members and drive their success through compassionate, introspective, peer-driven support." Additionally, we take the year-end opportunity to assess our progress, recognizing both our accomplishments and areas for improvement.

While reflecting on the past year, consider your own journey. Have you achieved the goals you set? Have you faced setbacks or unexpected challenges? New Freedom, like many of you, can answer "yes" to these questions. Now is the perfect time to contemplate your path forward into 2024. What are your goals and dreams? Have you documented them? Is New Freedom part of your vision? Are you engaged with a mentor?

Interestingly, just as our mentees benefit from New Freedom mentors, the company itself relies on a professional mentor named Marcus. He guides us in strategic thinking, poses insightful questions, introduces new tools, and holds us accountable. His perspective, grounded in vast business experience, offers valuable insights, and ensures we remain on the path toward our mission.

Personally, I look forward to a positive 2024 filled with family connections and the creation of even more effective operational solutions to support our mission.

As we embark on this new year together, I encourage each of you to set your sights on positive change and growth. What does 2024 hold for you? What goals or dreams do you have? Consider the impact New Freedom can have on your journey, and if you haven't already, explore the possibilities of mentorship.

Here's to a year of empowerment, growth, and second chances!



When I was told the theme for January's navigator was centered around new beginnings and outlook for the coming year, I experienced one of those "light bulb moments." My journey in life, like many of you, has been good, bad and ugly at times; I am and will always be a work in progress.

There were many times I thought my life had been wasted. This is especially true, considering I served almost 26 years on a 25 to life sentence. Preparing to get out, I knew it would be an uphill battle. I had seen so many people come and go on the yards, too many returning multiple times. I'd heard the stories about unfair parole officers, the police are out to get you and that as a felon and a "lifer", no one is going to hire "someone like you." Despite all of this I remained laser focused, with a "not going to take no for an answer" attitude, determined to create a useful, productive and happy life.

I had gone in at 23 and released at 49 to a whole new world, starting over from scratch, dead set on not asking anyone for a single dollar in the process. Those first few years being out were challenging and very rewarding because I worked my tail off at multiple jobs, being reliable and dependable, fulfilling commitments, proving myself, grinding everyday, and creating a new identity while discovering who I was as a free person.

Then, just over two years free, working two jobs and building a life for myself, I was introduced to New Freedom. Almost instantly, it stopped being so much about me, and started being about helping others. I was part of a mission greater than myself. With the passion to serve this community and offering others the opportunities I had been running myself in the ground to create for me, came months of long hours and relentless dedication. I poured myself into New Freedom, the mission, the process and the members. I dove into writing letters by the dozens to hundreds of incarcerated mentees. I spent about sixty + hours a week for almost three years attempting to uplift, encourage and empower men and women through letters and in person. This brought me to new heights, in a selfless and peer driven manner, from a servant heart, that far surpassed anything I previously felt in life...Passion with purpose.

Now, almost 6 years out of prison, the work I do is the same. I have the same dedication and passion I've always had but now I finally have the opportunity to do things for myself. During those first five years until recently, even though I had received absolute discharge from my lifetime parole, I had not taken time to travel and experience some of the things I felt I had missed while incarcerated. If I was speaking with one of my mentees, I would encourage them to travel, to see this beautiful country and have experiences, sober, happy and loving life. Why wouldn't I give myself the same advice? Heck, I even write letters to my mentees on the

plane every time I fly. After taking multiple trips out of state throughout this year, I realized that sharing that experience is uplifting to others.

With the recent temporary suspension, I had become overly stressed due to some of my mentees being pushed to release somewhere other than New Freedom and their reentry not going so well. I felt hopeless, frustrated and a bit angry. I decided to go to Flagstaff for the weekend to disconnect. For three days I did whatever I wanted whenever I wanted with no schedule and did not have a single phone conversation...For 3 days! I have not gone 3 days without a phone call since I was released. I recently started going back to the gym 5 days a week. I am traveling more and improving my daily existence in intentional, productive ways. New Freedom has again proven itself to be above reproach and I am excited to continue to serve this community in ways that no other program does. I say all of this to validate that life is a process. We all have good and bad days, go through situations and circumstances and keep pressing forward to be the best versions of ourselves. We are the same, some of us are just a little bit ahead of the game in this thing we call reentry.

I share this story as a simple example of the life you can also look forward to. You are worth it, and even in those dark days when life seems impossible you know that there is hope in a beautiful life on the other side.

Passion With Purpose



By Matt Barrick

Prison Changed My Life



By Caitlin Matekel

Happy New Year to you all! It is truly my pleasure to communicate with every single one of you who receives the NF Newsletter and share a piece of my story.

Prison changed my life, but I have never slept there overnight. In 2015, I was approaching my senior year of college, feeling overwhelmed by the idea of going out into the “real world” with absolutely no direction. I was a Criminal Justice/Criminology and Psychology major, and I grew up in and around recovery. I spent my Friday nights as a little girl going from Girl Scouts to AA meetings with my parents who both have over 40 years clean this month. I watched people I love live and die in their addiction and I battled my own genetic predisposition every day.

I had recently turned 21 and partying just became easier. I was on the brink of losing myself and desperate to find something to give me purpose. After some searching, I found an internship opportunity at East Unit in Florence, AZ. In a matter of 6 days I went from Florence, Italy as a study abroad student to Florence, AZ as a prison intern. One Florence is more beautiful than the other, but I will let you guess which one.

I showed up for my tour in Michael Kors slacks and velvet loafers. I was overdressed for the part and entirely unsure of what I was walking into. Little did I know my life would change that day, for the better in every way.

I had always known I wanted to work in the field of “people”. My grandmother was a therapist, and I was always drawn to those who needed extra support, as I am one of those people.

At first, I was just getting the lay of the land. For weeks, I walked the yard, shadowed officers during count and chow, responded to ICS’s and everything in between. But then, I sat with a CO III who was teaching a parenting class and I met men on the yard who had committed their time to programs, faith, art, music, and never returning to prison.

My entire vision of prison, formed by television, movies, criminal justice classes, and the personal experiences of friends and family, was completely shattered. It was not all violence and lock downs; it was a place filled with undeniable hope and endless commitment to making the most of the unwanted experience and doing everything to never have it again. I met men who may never see the other side of those fences give their lives to changing the prison culture and helping the younger generations find their way.

The energy was infectious and every time I sat in a class I became more convinced I was right where I was supposed to be. I could feel it running through my veins, my entire life’s purpose lay behind that razor wire. I began teaching my own classes. Becoming part of groups and think tanks. Leading art shows. Doing research. I became as involved as I possibly could to give every ounce of myself to those who so genuinely wanted the tools and support to be the best version of themselves.

After that first year, I graduated and went on to graduate school. I stopped receiving college credit, but I could not stop what I had started. I took on a volunteer role and kept teaching. And I just kept going. I met men and women who helped me become the best version of myself. I learned more from every single person I have met in prison than they have ever learned from me. Among the thousands of insightful stories and one-liners, a woman told me to “do it scared” and I have been charging forward in life ever since.

I took a massive leap of faith 8 years ago, truly scared and unsure, and have never looked back. Many people were stunned by my career choice, one of my old friends who did some time told me I was “too small to work in prison” but I knew this was it. The few who believed in me gave me all the courage I needed. So, if no one else has told you, I believe in you.

You probably guessed Italy was more beautiful and at first, it was, visually so, but the life changing experience I had on that prison yard in that tiny town was more breathtaking than any Italian view could ever be.

In 2024, my team and I will be bringing treatment and the New Freedom mission onto the yards. I hope to meet many of you and hear your stories.

I dedicate my story to Joey Keating, my unbiological brother and a true embodiment of love, perseverance, and hope. I will love and miss him for the rest of my life and will always continue my work in his honor. RIP, 1983-2023.

Leave The Lie Behind



By Varrone White

**Do not be
deceived:
“Evil
company
corrupts
good habits.”**

**1 Corinthians
15:33**

If I could take an honest look at how my life began, I would have to say that I honestly came from a good family. Both my parents used the military as a means to relocate and start new lives. My father was able to escape a poverty-stricken, violence-filled ghetto in Mobile, Alabama, while my mother left behind the slums of Jersey City. The Lord brought them together and they birthed two sons in a loving two-parent family home.

Unfortunately, from the moment I hit daycare, I was biting every teacher and hitting every other kid, either boy or girl. In the First Grade, they labeled me ADHD and all kinds of other things. My parents were constantly dealing with suspensions and special parent-teacher conferences. You can just say I was very well acquainted with every school counselor in every school I went to.

As far as friends go, they would all

turn on me. They all saw me as the crazy kid who would growl, throw his desk, and hit his teachers and classmates. Girlfriends? Oh no. I used to hit a lot of girls too so most of them hated me as well.

My parents had no clue how to deal with my issues, so they turned to abuse. Physical and verbal. Verbal abuse actually hurts more than the physical. My loving mother would get frustrated and tell me I wasn't normal and that something was wrong with me. She told me that she and my father would get in big fights over me. When they divorced when I was nine years old, I thought it was because of me just like everything else always was. Then I attempted suicide and was hospitalized in a mental institution.

After being kicked out of all public schools by the fifth grade, I was sent to what they called a school for the "emotionally handicapped" which further chipped away at my self-esteem. There were only like 4 girls in the entire school thus I didn't know how to communicate with girls. All I did was fight and started getting in trouble with the law.

When I was twelve, "the homies" saw my bad temper and loved it. I was just so happy to finally have some type of acceptance from people. As I was actually growing out of the impulsiveness that I had my whole life, I started to manufacture a bad temper because of the positive reinforcement I received from it. I was willing to fight anyone, rob anyone, and unfortunately kill anyone to prove that I was "down" or a "reptable", and all that old foolishness.

Many offenders are incarcerated because of an addiction of some kind. I was never into drugs. The hood I rolled with would kill you if they found out you were doing anything outside of weed

or sherm. My addiction was a lifestyle. I was addicted to Crippin', but even more embarrassing, I was addicted to the approval of men. I wanted cats to know I was "that dude". I wanted females to know I was "Him". What a lie.

I was born again when I was 15 but had no idea who I was in Christ. The Father revealed to me that he wanted me to preach His Word to this young gang-related generation when I was 17 but I ran away like Jonah.

I was in the Church with a young godly woman at the time, but I would verbally abuse her like how my mother did me, and I wouldn't stop cheating. When she finally left me, I jumped right back into the deep end of the hood life, literally going on a killing spree.

All the while, the Father was trying to get my attention in every way possible. He spoke to me in dreams, through random old ladies, through the TV, you name it.

On August 3rd, 2001, when being faced with the death penalty for 1st Degree Murder and two counts of Aggravated Assault, He still didn't have my attention. Until a couple of days later after going through the horseshoe of Madison Street Jail.

In a dark cell around 3 in the morning, like the old T-Mobile commercial used to say, He asked, "Can you hear me now?" I said "yes Lord, I hear you". Then He asked, "Who are you?" I said I had no idea.

When Jacob wrestled with God, he was asked who he was and he replied with the name he was called his whole life which meant supplanter, or trickster. God then gave him a new name.

I had been living a lie since I was 12 years old. God began to show me who I really was when I told Him I was ready to learn. After being blessed with only 21 years in prison for what should've

gotten me so much more, I noticed that almost everyone else in prison was living some kind of version of the same lie I was living.

While incarcerated, I read a book by Joyce Meyer called, Approval Addiction: Overcoming Your Desire to Please Other People. In the book she says that the reason people want to make a name for themselves or be known as something to other people is because they don't have God's approval. God's approval is the only approval that can make us whole. We will keep looking for it everywhere and will do whatever it takes to get it just like a drug addict. If I was a billionaire, I would pay every convict in Arizona a million dollars to read this book.

“When I truly surrendered to Christ, the Father showed me that I now had His approval and didn't need to look anywhere else for it ever again. No more trying to prove things, even to

people who are long gone.”

I am now complete in Christ, and free from the opinions of people. Since my release, I've been blessed with a wonderful Church family, a career I love, a car for free, and a beautiful woman of God who is truly the answer to every prayer I've ever prayed for a woman while I was locked up.

Now I'm free to live out the Gospel in this second chance of life I've been given that I absolutely didn't deserve. If you're reading this, leave the lie behind. Surrender your life to God and let Him show you who you really are in Him. Let Him free you from the lie and begin your life with a New Freedom you've never known before. If He can change this former screw up, He can change anyone.

God Bless



The two best things I ever did? Renounced gang life and gave my life to God. I remember seeing Navigator Newsletters and New Freedom envelopes all over the yard but I never knew what God was trying to tell me... Thank you to all the people that get these stories on the yard.

It starts in 2019, I was going through a time where I was considering whether I wanted to live a gang lifestyle. I was on the last stretch of my sentence and I felt empty and broken. I even spoke about it with other members of my crew, it told them how I felt but they dismissed me as if I were just grumpy, getting old, or irritated. I contemplated leaving many times before but being that there are severe ramifications, you didn't speak on it and you especially didn't act on it. I never had the courage either way, which is probably how I ended up in gangs to begin with. This time, I asked for God's strength from the bottom of my heart to let me do His will and alleviate this heavy burden.

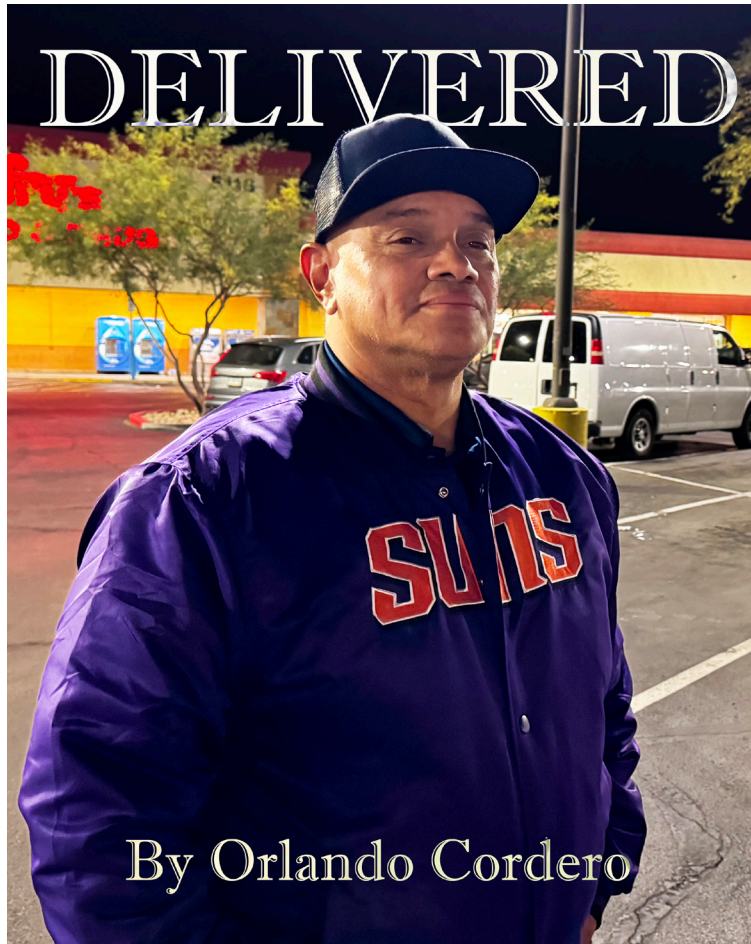
I was a barber on the yard and would cut hair anytime we had rec. On this day I grabbed the barber box to check it back in and I happened to see a CO I knew from back in the day, he was part of the gang task force. He knew where I came from and who I was. I told him right there, "Get me off of this yard. I don't wanna talk to anybody, I don't wanna give any information but I am renouncing today".

All said, I did about 23 years in the state of Arizona's prison system over two sentences. I chose not to look at the harm that I caused other people and their families with some of my activities. DOC kept score through a point system which kept me on high custody yards. When I renounced, I gave my life to God. I had a deep understanding that it was tapping into a higher power that allowed me to do what I considered impossible, leaving the life.

When I was delivered by God, it was just the beginning. I devoted my time and life to learning His word and meeting His people. It was new territory for me, but it felt good to finally have a sense of freedom, because more than anything else, I've learned true prison is in the mind not your physical location. I was beginning to experience Freedom.

My celly would get these letters from New Freedom on a regular basis. The Co would slide them under the door and I would hand it off, never thinking much of it. Neither did he because they would often end up in the trash. One day, he was reading one of the Navigator Newsletters and he said to me, "Aren't you into the Bible? They talk about God in these, do you want to read one?" I looked at it for a second, but I didn't understand what it was I was looking at. I discarded the newsletter. Then, I started seeing them everywhere! It was crazy. I didn't know that was God giving me a message.

Time went by smoothly until a came to the door and gave me a letter stating that my custody level dropped to medium. I laughed at him. There just was no way. He came back later and told me not only was I going to a 3 yard but I was getting



approved for a Senate Bill. It turned out a COIV I knew from a long time ago found out I renounced, was programming, and doing good. They put in for an override and the Senate Bills without my knowledge. With my release now pending, they asked for an address. I lost my house, my car, my family everything that I loved in Glendale. I told him, "You pick a place, I'll go". His response was, "Have you heard of New Freedom?"

I began writing my mentor Adam and participating in the lessons through New Freedom mentorship. I eventually did a phone interview and was approved to come to the program. The day they picked me up and brought me through those doors, changed my life forever. When I finally took the time to reflect, I realized God had been showing me signs all along that I was coming to NF.

I graduated from the NF program in October 2023 with a peer support certificate and a heart to help others. Every morning, I get on a bus and go to one of the most hardened parts of Phoenix, Arizona as a case manager desperately trying to help people at CASS. It's not an easy job and there are parts that are very difficult to accept but when I am helping someone, anyone, it feels right in my soul.

I wish everyone on the yard a Happy New Year. This has been one of the best years of my life because I am gaining more and more freedom from myself so that I can serve more. My goal for 2024 is to work for New Freedom, helping some of you.

As a facilitator at New Freedom, I hope to meet many of you reading this article. Out of all the mistakes I have made – and there are many – what makes every struggle and every piece of my story worth it is when I get to see the lights come on for people reentering the community.

My story starts young, not with youthful innocence, but with the allure of a criminal lifestyle I saw mirrored in the men around me. My father, uncle, their world of guns and defiance seemed glamorous, a path I craved. When I turned 16, even though my father had chosen a different path, I, in a conscious choice, embraced the "cool" life of a drug dealer, dropping out of school to chase fast money and the Miami Vice fantasy I used to watch on TV.

This path, fueled by my hunger for power, led me to prison for 25 years. It was there, amidst the bars and routines, that a different kind of light came on. Watching my son grow through visits, never being there for his milestones, was a painful wake-up call. It was time I would never get back, but I knew I could turn it into a positive somehow. Books, self-reflection, and challenging my distorted perspectives became my tools for transformation. I wasn't born anew, but the change was undeniable.

Facing parole in 2016, I had no external support system. But I refused to be condemned by that. After being denied, I

wrote to the board, arguing that true support often lies within. My past may not have offered ideal family ties, but I was ready to be the support for my family, for myself. This conviction must have touched their hearts, and they granted me parole.

My prison years weren't wasted. They were boot camp, preparing me for reintegration. No dominoes, no chess, and no idle time – I built mental armor, rehearsing scenarios, and anticipating real-world challenges. So, when I stepped out, the "adjustment" everyone warned me about never came. I hit the ground running, landing jobs within days, climbing the ladder at Amazon, buying cars, and achieving my version of success. I had 25 years of this experience and introspective training.

It wasn't magic; it was preparation. But success isn't just about jobs. It's about conscious choices, made not in the heat of the moment, but in the quiet of self-reflection. Those stolen glances, quick money schemes, the temptation to hang with the "old crew" – these are the tentacles I severed before re-entering society. Nobody comes out here wanting to rob banks, but it starts with little things like selling food stamps or purchasing stolen goods. I decided that I would conduct myself ethically and morally in all aspects of my life.

And here's the truth: you don't control your destiny, you control your habits. Wanting wealth isn't enough; sleeping till noon won't get you there. Every goal is a ladder of smaller choices, and staying out of prison has its own steps: what do you think those steps are?

I went back before the parole board regarding earning an absolute discharge. They asked me if I felt I deserved to be released from parole. I told them I did not. I stated I would never deserve absolute discharge, nor did I deserve to be released from prison considering what I did. I explained to them that I put stricter stipulations on myself than parole could ever put on me. I also explained that my desire for wanting to be removed from parole is just a part of my natural progression in becoming a law-abiding citizen. They unanimously granted me absolute discharge, and just as when they allowed me off house arrest, I didn't change or start behaving differently. If anything, I have grown more diligent with my recovery, support system, and lifestyle.

After all of this, I wanted to help others, and I began a career in behavioral health. I worked at several IOPs and then found New Freedom. New Freedom was different from anything I had ever seen. They were taking all the tools I gathered through years and years of reading and disciplining myself and put it into a 90-day program. It's a place where the staff sees and believes in its members, knowing that their potential is a reflection of their own.

My story isn't a fairy tale, it's a hard-won redemption. It's a testament to the power of self-awareness, deliberate choices, and the unwavering belief that even in the darkest corners, second chances are earned. This is my truth, and I share it with the hope that it may inspire others to choose a different path, one that leads not to destruction, but to a life truly lived.



A Safe Place



By Rafe Barbour

I used to tell everyone coming to New Freedom, "Treat this program like a lick. You wouldn't leave the jewels in the jewelry box... Why would you leave any opportunity behind at New Freedom when they are giving it away for free." I did my best to heed my advice while I was a member. I graduated on a Wednesday and was back here teaching in the framing class that Saturday. New Freedom became my home, a sanctuary if you will, a safe place for me. With New Freedom able to welcome home new people from the yard, this will be the chance many people have been waiting for. A chance at life.

Always have a safe place. I grew up with a chip on my shoulder. My biological father left when I was two months old, leaving me and my mom for a life of cooking and shooting dope. That is the only explanation I gather from the information I have. With that in mind, I found release in violence. I loved to fight, I was a scrappy Irishman always getting in trouble. That, along with drinking and drugs, landed me in and out of jail. At first, there were problems with the law I could buy my way out of with a good lawyer but then even my lawyer didn't want to help me anymore because I wouldn't listen to anyone or anything.

Then the charade crumbled. I couldn't keep up a full-time job while managing my addiction any longer. I became a full-time addict, selling drugs to support my habit. Mixed with my violence, this became volatile, and society no longer accepted me. Facing serious time, my mom, who always understood my

mentality, suggested reading "The Four Agreements." She had been telling me that since I was 15 but now, cornered and fresh out of rehab, I gave it a try. Broken, unsure, new to recovery, and unsure of my freedom; I told her it was trash (funny now how naive I was!), Still, these principles stuck with me and I used those agreements as a framework to become a better person every day. That's what recovery was for me – losing the need for everything at once, just being better than the day before. I started to find peace.

Facing my case in court, I came with character references, sobriety, clean UAs and the mental capacity to be a productive member of society. The judge showed leniency, a shorter sentence that reinforced I was on the right track. I didn't falter in prison I expanded my experiences spiritually and mentally. Upon release, I had one week with my mom and my kid before I needed to be somewhere to start a new life. AHCCCS fraud cases were rampant and housing was scarce. I called an old friend seeking help and he suggested New Freedom. An old friend of mine was there as a member and I knew a bit about their program from being in recovery before prison. I called myself, and after initial hurdles, connected with Trina. I did several interviews, jumped through hoops, hours on the phone changing my AHCCCS plan, and finally, we were able to plan my entry. I needed the help so bad, It was a miracle I got in.

The first 30 days were awkward. "Welcome Homes" and hugs initially felt fake, so I watched. Were these people sincere? Did they live by their principles? After 30 days, I saw the sincerity firsthand. This was my one chance, a chance I could easily waste. By day 60, I was in multiple vocational programs, setting up POA, Recovery Church events, folding for The Navigator and welcoming new members to the program. My life was beginning to have a real purpose and direction. I was beginning to be a dad to my son again.

Remember what I said in the beginning about treating New Freedom like a lick? Those 90 days fly by. Waste any time, and you miss something crucial. I'm privileged to share my experience with others now. I teach framing which is a valuable skill but more than that I share the experience, knowledge, and wisdom I have received. Today, I'm in school full-time, earning a counseling degree. I work full-time, attend 5 meetings a week, and I am here every Saturday and Thursday, running our robust framing program so people can leave New Freedom with a career. The biggest accomplishment? Letting my son know he's the most important thing in my world, a gift I never had but I can give to him.

In 2024, my goal is to keep the wolves at bay. My son lives with my mom, who's turning 70. It's my turn to take care of her. I want to get my own place where I can give my son what he needs from his dad. No matter what happens, I can only control my actions and thoughts. I can be better tomorrow than I am today.

Never Take Life For Granted

By Royana Contreras

In the early chapters of my life, the script was written in the ink of adversity. At 11 months old, health concerns manifested as congestive heart failure, casting a shadow over my journey. In that pivotal moment, the medical team grappled with a mysterious ailment, their efforts exhausting in pursuit of a solution. A harrowing 30 minutes saw me flat line, a clinical pronouncement of my demise echoing in the room. Grief-stricken, my parents bid what they believed were final farewells. Yet, astonishingly, my heart rekindled its rhythm, defying the odds. The following 13 days unfolded in a coma, where medical professionals delivered a grim prognosis: I wouldn't survive to witness my first birthday. Fast forward to the present—I recently celebrated my 34th birthday.

Emerging from the crucible of health challenges forged an unyielding resolve within me to grasp life's opportunities. Despite encountering multiple setbacks in high school, I navigated the educational landscape, ultimately earning an associate degree in criminal justice. At 25, the narrative took an unexpected turn as I decided to embark on a new chapter, relocating to an unfamiliar town devoid of familial connections. The prospect of this fresh start, though daunting, was also exhilarating.

Simultaneously, a personal resurgence unfurled. Reigniting my academic pursuits, I embarked on the path to attaining a bachelor's degree in psychology. The decision to set long-term goals became my compass, guiding me towards a future shaped by intention and purpose.

My narrative, once shrouded in uncertainty and fragility, has metamorphosed into a testament of resilience and tenacity. Each twist and turn in my journey has fortified my commitment to living life unabashedly. As I tread the path towards a psychology degree, I find solace in the realization that every challenge encountered has been a stepping stone toward the fulfillment of my aspirations. With each milestone, I continue to script a story of triumph over adversity, embodying the spirit of a life lived to the fullest.

The heartbeat of my existence echoes not only with the rhythm of survival but also with the pulsating energy of seizing opportunities. In the tapestry of my life, the threads of adversity have woven a vibrant pattern, painting a portrait of strength and perseverance. It is a reminder that, against all odds, life can bloom in the most unexpected ways.

Education became my beacon, guiding me through the labyrinth of challenges. Despite setbacks in my formative years, I emerged victorious with an associate degree in criminal justice. The decision to pursue knowledge was a testament to my refusal to be defined by circumstances. At 25, I took a daring leap into the unknown, relocating to a town where familiarity was a stranger.

A decade later, the narrative shifted once again. Venturing into unexplored territories, I embraced a career shift at New Freedom, becoming a guiding force for those whose stories were unfamiliar to me. The challenges were immense, but they became stepping stones to transformative growth. In the act of helping others reintegrate



into society, I found not only a job but a profound sense of purpose.

As my professional journey unfolded, so did a personal renaissance. The embers of academic passion reignited, propelling me towards a bachelor's degree in psychology. Setting long-term goals became the north star guiding me through uncharted waters. Every lesson learned, every hurdle overcome, was a stroke on the canvas of my life, shaping a future imbued with intention and purpose.

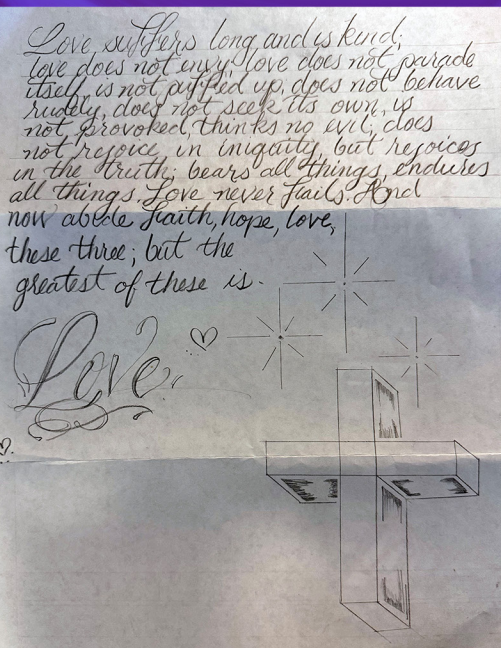
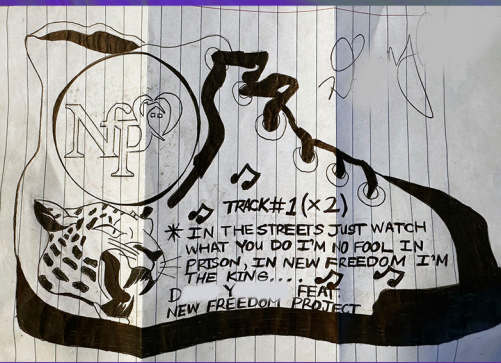
From a narrative veiled in uncertainty and fragility, I emerged as a testament to resilience. Each twist and turn became an opportunity to redefine what was possible. My story is not just one of survival but a celebration of life lived boldly. In the pursuit of a psychology degree, I find solace in the realization that challenges are not roadblocks but pathways to aspirations fulfilled.

With every milestone, my story becomes a symphony of triumph, harmonizing with the melody of life. The crescendo of my journey resounds with the spirit of resilience, tenacity, and an unwavering commitment to embrace the fullness of life. Each chapter, once dominated by adversity, transforms into a testament of human strength, echoing the universal truth that challenges are not barriers but invitations to surpass our limits.

In the grand tapestry of my existence, the threads of adversity are interwoven with the vibrant hues of courage and perseverance. The brushstrokes of my experiences paint a canvas that defies the limitations of a predetermined narrative. My life is a masterpiece, an evolving work of art that speaks to the indomitable human spirit's capacity to rise above circumstances.

As I continue to script my story, I invite the world to witness a narrative that transcends the boundaries of adversity. In the ebb and flow of challenges, I discover the rhythm of resilience, transforming each obstacle into an opportunity for growth. The journey towards a psychology degree is not merely an academic pursuit; it is a manifestation of a life lived with intention, purpose, and an unyielding commitment to seize every opportunity life presents. Happy New Year to all.

ART PAGE



Thank you Lord for blessing me with such a powerful testimony, I give you all the praise and all the glory. I cant wait to get out and share my story. Nothing happens in your world by mistake. A new way of life is the risk I take. I just want to feel content and live in peace, the lifestyle I was living was a lonely street. Thank you for all your strength and guidance. I promise to always keep on fighting. Times get hard and seem so stressful but I hope you can use me as your vessel.
M.P.

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