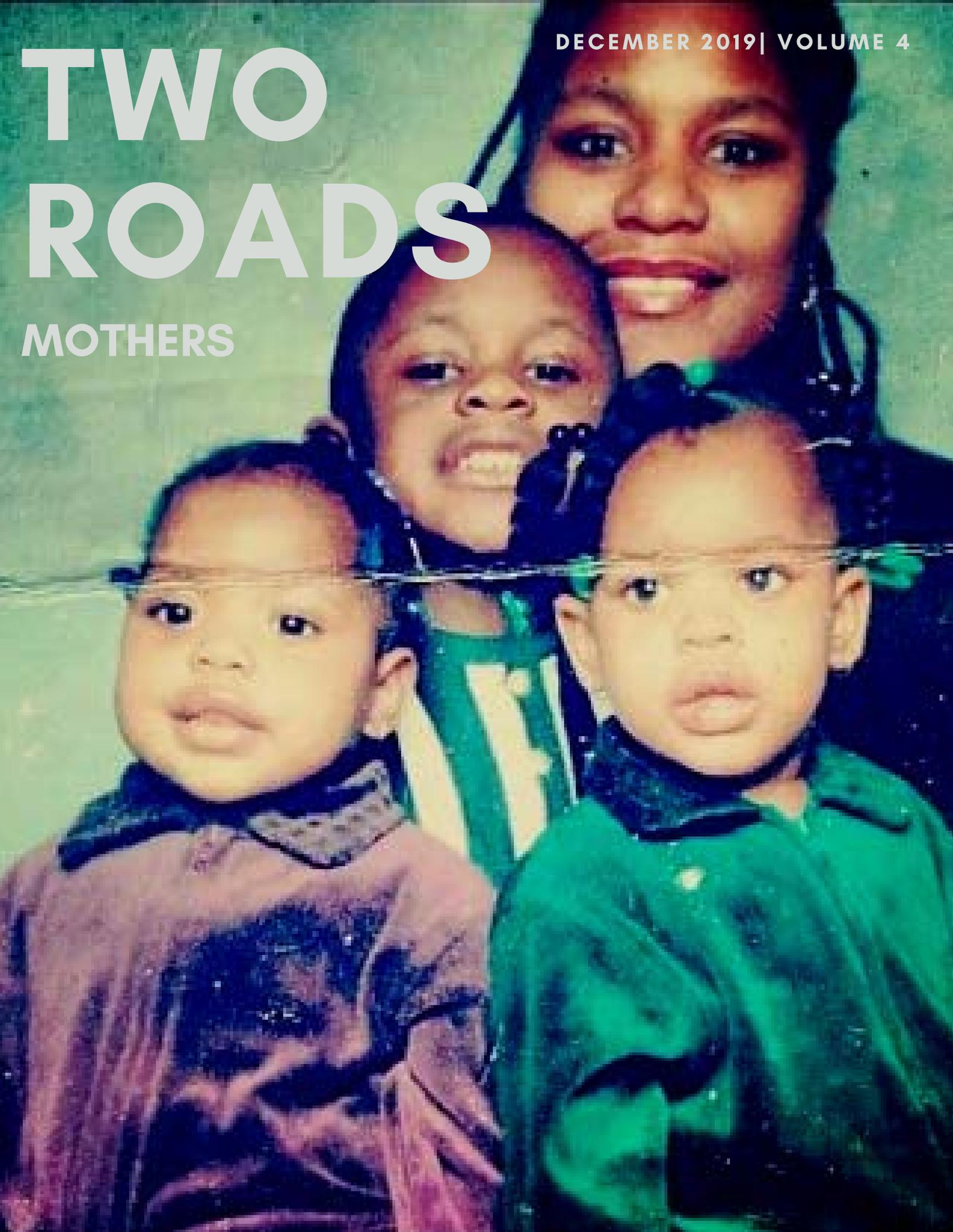


DECEMBER 2019 | VOLUME 4

TWO ROADS

MOTHERS





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Created by and for the incarcerated men and women of the Illinois
Department of Corrections

Publisher's Letter

JIM ESTES

Our Two Roads team proposed we focus on Mothers for our Winter/Holiday Issue.

Well, I said, "No, let's wait until Mother's Day."

But Editor in Chief Ricky Hamilton argued, "That's why focusing on Mothers now means more. We are not obligated because of a holiday. We just want to honor them because we want to honor them."

I like Mom's too, of course, and his logic made great sense, so our fourth issue of Two Roads E-Zine focuses on Mothers, and wow! They were right. This is beautiful and it works for our Holiday Season.

The men and women of the IDOC worship many different faiths. We respect them all, but if we celebrate one we lose meaning for the others. If we celebrate all our effort seems diffuse and intentionally correct. We all want to find meaning in the yearly rhythms we've chosen to define us.

Perce Bysshe Shelley said, "Our histories are cyclic poems written by time upon the memories of man."

He's right, and I think, by focusing on Mothers at this time, in this place, we honor the one "no matter-what" person who serves as the sun in our cyclic poem.

I came across a study on our language recently that stayed with me.

The British Council asked 40,000 non-English speaking people from 102 countries to listen to our language and choose 70 words with the greatest sonic beauty.

They had no knowledge of the meaning of the words, just the sounds. And yet, they chose words with both sonic and real beauty.

Their words...1. Mother 2. Passion
3. Smile 4. Love 5. Eternity...



Editor's Letter

RICKY HAMILTON

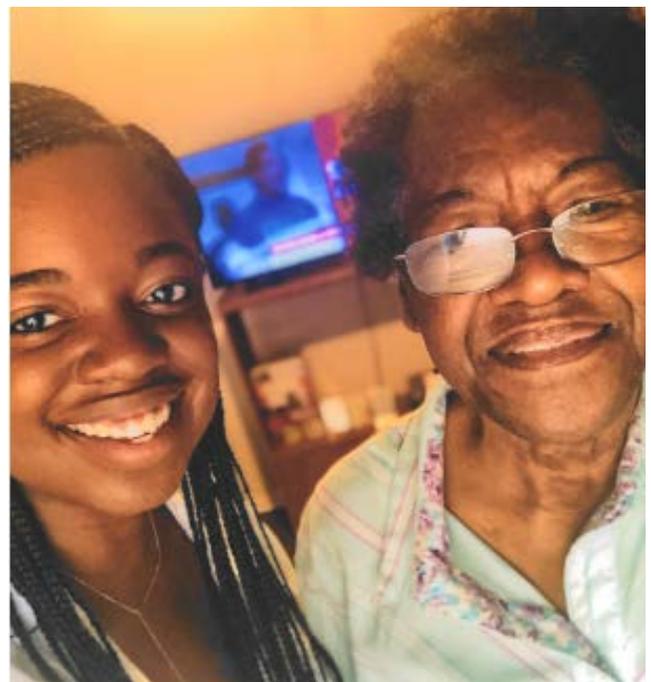
Two Roads dedicates this issue of our E-Zine to all the mother's out there. Mothers deserve their own issue because they are the most important, if not the biggest reason our e-zine exists. I've come to realize that for the many other Two Roads members and myself our mothers are the single greatest motivation we engage in positive endeavors. I have reasoned this is so because at this point in our restoration we realize we have committed the great sin of letting our mothers down to a great degree. None of our mothers raised us to be felons or prisoners. They envisioned us in institutions of higher learning and not institutions of correction.

Personally I feel an immense amount of regret for I know how no one in this world realizes more clearly than my mother the immense amount of potential I wasted by coming to prison.

"That's what's so great about mothers, even if we don't know how great we can be in life, they do."

Yet it's sad that all too often we fall short. All too often it's never because of what they taught or instilled in us at an early age, but rather because we let go of what they tried so hard to instill in us.

My mother introduced me to a world of word puzzles and games like Scrabble and Boggle which allowed me to excel in school work at an early age while many of my peers struggled, (not the girls of course, they were always smarter ☺). My mother taught me to be respectful and this allowed me to gain



the benefit of the doubt with most teachers when I was being a little rambunctious. Overall I was set up for success in the world because of what my mother instilled in me. Unfortunately I became who I wanted to be and the kid I believed my homies wanted me to be, the kid the streets wanted me to be, rather than the person my mother raised me to be. In my opinion this is where most of us went wrong, We got off the road to life our mother wanted for us, and now years later, here we are.

Yet the great thing is that we can all choose today to correct our course going forward.

"The man or woman our Mothers envisioned us to be at this age still exists, all we have to do is begin to make the choices that will lead us to becoming that person."

Did your mom envision you being a great father or mother when you were young? If so what decision can you make right now to bring you closer to being that person?

Maybe you can take a parenting class offered at your facility or take more time out of your day to write your children and parent them from prison.

Whatever those choices may be is up to you. Just start by making them today and let's see who you become

tomorrow. I'm sure your mother will be proud of you.

Lastly I want to give a shout out all of the incarcerated mothers. Yes, you may have made some mistakes and poor choices in the past but one thing will never change, you will always be some child's mother, so your rehabilitation and restoration is important.

So, know that Two Roads supports you and is here to be your voice and inspiration as well. All of your letters and support are very much appreciated. Until next time we need everyone to go ALL IN on building a better tomorrow and giving our moms a reason to be a lot more proud of us.



Perdona Me

BY DYLAN METZEL

Mother's Day is one of the saddest days of the year for me. It's a difficult time for many other prisoners as well.

Not only are we separated from the person who brought us into the world, but we're also forced to confront the pain we continue to cause the women we love so much. Whether our mothers, our grandmothers, our wives, our daughters, or our sisters; these mothers who mean so much to us continue to suffer. Hopefully you'll remember this the next time you get frustrated about not getting a visit or wanting a few more dollars on your books. Recently, a young man was released from Kewanee and was murdered on the very same day. This tragedy, and his mother's suffering, is what inspired me to write this article. I only knew him for a year and, in truth, I didn't know him very well, but he was kind to me when I first arrived. This man was fighting to change his life in order to do right by his family.

Before that could happen, he was killed in front of his mother's home. His family was there to witness his murder. No one's family should have to face such cruelty. I pray for them, and all the other families suffering similar fates, and I want to cry for all the wasted potential.

"I would be dead right now if I hadn't come to prison."

I was incarcerated for two years as a juvenile, and by the time I was seventeen I was in jail for a gang related murder. I was sentenced to sixty years in prison for my crime. While prison may have saved my life, it couldn't keep me from hurting my mother. Sadly, my choices hurt other mothers as well. My mother did everything in her power to give me the best life she could. In return, I made choice after choice which caused her heartache and pain. I wish I could go back and change it all. For all of the grief and pain I caused- I am so sorry. To those mothers who have been hurt by all of our choices- I sincerely apologize. While we can never make up for our actions, we acknowledge your pain.

Unbreakable Bond

BY PATRICK WOOLDRIDGE

When I was first approached about writing this article, I had a few things go through my mind. You see, when I was 13 years old I was placed into foster-care because of poor choices that my mother made. I'm not going to go into a lot of personal details. Not only because it's irrelevant to the purpose of this article, but because it's also irrelevant to the way I feel now. There was a point in time where I didn't think I would ever be able to say that. I'm going to go somewhere for a second, so please bear with me.

When you think of the Notorious B.I.G. and especially his mother, what do you picture? I think of this sweet little old lady who always wanted the best for her son. I'm sure not a day goes by that she doesn't think of him and prays his killer is brought to justice. Now think about Tupac Shakur for a second, and think about his mom. I automatically go to the song "Dear Mama." In this song he professes that even though this woman wasn't perfect he has an undying love for her. He has looked back on the past and seen mistakes that she made, but maybe more

importantly, he's seen mistakes that he's made. These amazing men came from different backgrounds, but one thing was true for both. Their mothers meant the world to them regardless of what type of women they were.

I believe there was points in all of our lives that we assumed our parents were perfect. This could especially be said about our mothers. In a way we were conditioned for that. If we cried, mom came to see what was wrong. If we were scared we ran to mom. I remember thinking that no matter what the problem was, my mom would be able to solve it. Then life started happening and I started getting older. Not only did I get older, but my mother also started getting older. As I was looking at things through the eyes of a 12 year old boy, she was looking at things through the eyes of a 32 year old woman. The crazy part is, we were both worried about some of the same things. You see, at that point in time, I didn't even look at my mom as being a 32 year old single woman who was worried about her future. Honestly, I don't think I even looked at her as a person. She was just my mom.

Once I entered D.C.F.S. custody, all bets were off. I hated her; I hated myself, and unfortunately I hated anybody and everything. I'm one of those guys who were fortunate enough to find a way to deal with all of that hurt and pain. It was called drugs and alcohol. I'm sure most of us know that my "fortunate" comment was cynical. It was the worst thing that ever happened to me. It took me down a road that I never could have imagined.

"When I finally realized I'd never have a normal life unless I stopped using, I also realized I'd never be able to stop using unless I faced my past."

A major part of that was the relationship I had with my mom. I'm not here to convince anybody of anything, but I chose to use the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous to begin the process through examining my past, looking at things from an objective point of view, and trusting that Allah is truly the best all planners, I was able to let go of beliefs that I held for a long time. I realize now that my mom was, and always has been, just another human being. Another human being who maybe didn't always make the

best choices, but tried her best. Another human being who might have gone through periods where she was just as scared, or angry, or depressed as I was... It sounds simple, but it was one of the hardest things I ever had to do. You know what though? As soon as I could do that, all of those feelings of anger, hurt, distrust, and probably even hatred began to disappear. Only one thing remained: The fact that this woman was my mother and I loved her. Nothing else mattered. The past was the past and all I wanted was to repair the damage that came from that.

Like I shared in the beginning, I was surprised when I was approached about this article. Ultimately, I decided to write it for a few different reasons. First of all, I know this isn't the case for all of us, but I'm sure the majority of males reading this article have some type of strained family relationships. I want to share with all of you the hope of how it's possible to forgive and be forgiven. How when we start to work on ourselves, other things just seem to fall into place. I also wanted to write this for the sisters who are reading this article right now.

Just like with the men, this might not be the case for all of you, but some of you may be going through strained relationships.

"Let me tell you right now, no human emotion is stronger than the love a child has for its mother."

As we get older and mature, we start to look at things from a different point of view.

I think when we're still young; we allow the anger and hurt to overrule everything. I know that I did. I stated earlier that I didn't want to get too personal, but my mom allowed things to happen to me that no child should ever have to go through. You know what though? I forgive her, I love her, and I will ALWAYS be her son.

There are still times where something happens and I'm reminded of those "unpleasant" times, but it doesn't change the way I feel about her. All it does is remind me that none of us are perfect and we all deserve second chances. (Maybe sometimes even more than that!) Regardless of what your present circumstances are, always remember: All of the relationships that you are afraid will never be repaired - can be. All you have to do is work on making yourself better

and have faith that in time even though the hurt might not go away, it will be lessened, and the joy of a renewed relationship will replace all of the pain of the past.

"It has been said, 'time heals all wounds,' I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But they are never gone."

Rose Kennedy



“They say it’s a man’s
world but to become a King
you must come from a Queen.
Thank you, Mom, for never giving up on me.
Now I’m able to straighten my crown and
wear it correctly.”
-Donzell Toney





BY COREY BARNES

I love my mother very much. Unfortunately, over the years, our relationship could be described as tumultuous as best. Let's just say, I've given her a lot to deal with. I haven't done much to make the relationship any better or easier than it has been. But, through all my antics, and all our disagreements, she has been the one constant in my life. Even if she wasn't happy with me, she has always picked up the phone, and those of you who have walked in my shoes, know how much that means. Through my entire incarceration she has been there for me and by doing so she has not only told me she loves me, she has shown me she loves me. Thank you Mom. I would like to do whatever I can to give her the recognition she deserves and not only tell her I love her, but show her as well. We've been through some difficult times, but at the end of the day, she's still my Mom, and she still loves me, and I love her, now more than ever. Thanks again Mom.

"Biology is the least
of what makes one a
mother."

OPRAH WINFREY



Andre Ruddock, with his spiritual mother Sharon

Baby Miracle

BY DONZELL TONEY

Mothers are given one day a year but they deserve the whole calendar. God gave us a gift from our very own rib, thank God for our mothers. They teach us to love, to feel, and teach us the definition of the word woman. They endure the pain and agony for nine months of our development and eighteen years as we transform into adults.

They only want the best for us.

I'm Donzell and I'm currently incarcerated for six years at eighty-five percent for not listening to my mother. She instilled values in my core.

One day while locked in my cell I heard over the news a young lady was killed while sitting in a car with her boyfriend. She was pregnant and I thought to myself, that's a black queen, a mother, a life, a human being; killed over something so senseless by someone who should have been protecting her.

But God has a way of turning tragedy into miracles. She was six months pregnant and, well, that baby lived!

Born one pound and two ounces, I knew there was a struggle ahead for that baby and only her grandmother was left to fend for the little angel named Miracle Beard.

I decided to rally the guys in Cook County Jail to donate some money off their books so we could give to Miracle for medicine or a few toys. So, I'd like for you to remember all our mothers and families. Remember the mothers in jail doing time down in Logan and Decatur too; we send you all our love.

**Editor's note: Mr. Toney's efforts to inspire the men of Cook County Correctional Center to donate to Baby Miracle resulted in a large group donation. Baby Miracle and the Cook Co. Jail inmates' story of love and redemption was shared by CBS News.*

<https://youtu.be/qrixsnnH9TQ>



My Mom, My Rock

BY PATRICK JOHNSON

I was fortunately raised in a home with both parents. My Mom was a CNA and my dad was a Vietnam Vet.

They divorced and it was extremely hard on my Mom as she tried to raise 4 kids. It was hard on me to as I was the eldest son.

Truthfully I ran from my responsibilities. Rather than helping my Mom and siblings I chose to run the streets. My bad decisions led me to 20 years in prison.

My imprisonment is a heavy burden for my lovely Mom.

I thank God for her.

She is my rock.

She is my heart.

She is my baby.

My Mom is my biggest supporter. Her unconditional love and encouragement over the years has kept me strong and able to do my time with faith and sanity intact.

We talk and laugh over the phone all the time.

Her message to me is my circumstances will not define me and she will love and support me to her last breath.

I love my Mom.





"To my Grandmother and Mother who mean the world to me. "They are the greatest force of good in my life. I can't wait to finally show them the good man they raised me to be."
Michael Estrada, his mother Carmen and grand-mother Fe Ramos."



Albert Smith, with his son Danny and his mother Wanda



Paving the Road

-Michael Cannon

As we honor our Mothers, it is befitting that we publish an article about “Big Momma” and spotlight her amazing organization, “JOY CARE CENTER/JOBS PARTNERSHIP”, in Bloomington, Illinois. I had the honor, blessing, and pleasure of interviewing Big Momma, her preferred name, when she came to KLSRC on August 27, 2019, for a re-entry seminar.

Big Momma and her faithful helpers, Ron and Sue opened the seminar with a prayer, like all the Big Mommas we know do! She had a bigger-than-life presence that filled the room, and like all of the Big Mommas we know, has a tender, loving heart on the inside, but a tough no nonsense exterior.

She told us, “Big Momma loves you but will get you! I’m old school and will roll up on you if you aren’t on top of your business!” She then added with a tender tone, “If you're ready to change, JOY CARE is the place for you.”

Big Momma explained that Joy Care has helped over two thousand returning citizens and only 17 have recidivated. JOY CARE became partners with the nationally active “JOBS PARTNERSHIP”, in 1999. However, JOY CARE is a unique program you won’t find anywhere else. Financial support has been mostly from the pockets of their volunteers, and a few donations from churches, agencies, businesses, and concerned individuals. Joy Care’s program lasts anywhere between 6 months to 3 years. JOY CARE has over 70 employers that hire participants. Everyone connected with them is felon-friendly. They help us find good work such as Laborer Union jobs where wages may start as high as 25 an hour. JOY CARE’S re-entry services include: *housing *jobs *food *clothes *transportation *Mentors *Support Groups *Classes & Meetings *Accountability Partners *Positive People and Places

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