

I am an elderly veteran who is serving a natural life sentence for a crime committed in 1981. Being incarcerated at the age of 25, I had to grow up in prison. Though I will never overcome being remorseful for the lives I destroyed, my initial orientation to prison was poor; did not know who I was as a person; did not know where I was, and considered myself a prisoner - feeling sorry for myself - lost without a cause. Negative influences were everywhere I seemed to be encouraging me to consider my natural life sentence as a license to do whatever negative thing I felt like doing. Without going into any examples that type of thinking was a train wreck in progress.

My everyday baggage consisted of being remorseful; remorseful for the lives I had destroyed; remorseful for destroying my own life, and me trying to hide the hurt. Reality began to set in, I was a dead man walking. I needed help, I knew it - but help was nowhere to be found.

Somewhere in Stateville I forget where, there is a sign that read: "Don't let the time do you - you do the time." Though I was just another statistic - in prison for murder condemned to die the slow death of life without parole, that sign caused me to realize I had to help myself. At that point I psyched myself into being determined, not to be just another statistic. I began to get involved with prison programming.

In the mid-80s, I began attending college classes. During the summers, I played football for Stateville and later for Pontiac and Menard until 1996; which led to my current medical condition: spinal cord compression.

Not knowing that one day politics would kill the Pell Grant for prisoners, I left school to become an institutional painter. This kept me busy all day - every day for a couple years. However, something inside would not allow me to get comfortable or believe that all I had to do was keep busy.

Prison at that time was a terrible environment and a constant reminder of my need to do better -make better choices. I was encouraged to join the "New Era Jaycees," a not-for-profit organization within various DOC facilities that sold food and other goods within the prison, then donated those proceeds to local charities. The Jaycees was disbanded in 1996 when the State decided to get tough on prison. M

In 1989 I decided to educate myself, so I re-joined college to earn my Associate of Arts degree from MacMurray College in 1992. Also during that time I earned a paralegal certificate from Lewis University. Here began my journey to rehabilitation through education, religion and helping others on their way to self-improvement.

In 1993 I became a certified academic tutor, which enabled me to legitimately help others with basic reading and math to obtain a GED.

After being transferred to Menard in 1994 I sought education in heating and air conditioning. However the Pell Grant was taken from prisoners and the program discontinued. Fortunately I was hired as a chapel clerk, which lasted until 1996. During the same time I became the secretary for the "African American Cultural Committee," a prison organization which sought to rehabilitate prisoners through cultural and spiritual education.

Later while back at Stateville, from 1998 through 2003, I worked in the law library as a law clerk. From that time until just recently I drafted and prepared numerous petitions for "post-conviction relief; including petitions before the Illinois Supreme Court as well as the Federal District Court in Chicago with some success. From 2003 to 2007 I earned various mental health certificates, from anger management to life skills.

My interest in religion led me to become a student of the Old Testament portion of the Bible and the Hebrew language, which provided the opportunity to become an instructor of Hebrew classes from 2009 through 2013. Additionally I was blessed with a lifeline to further education through religion when introduced to the

“International College of Bible Theology,” a correspondence course that allowed me to earn a bachelor’s degree in Bible Theology in 2020.

From 2018-2020 I again earned various mental health certificates. My opportunity for programming was/is slim to none since the 1994 rescission of the Pell Grant, as inmates with life sentences were not allowed to participate in the few State-funded educational opportunities. However my time spent in mental health classes taught me coping skills - which I’ll use for the rest of my life.

At the age of “67” (over the hill for prison purposes) I don’t get around like I want due to prevailing medical issues. I’ve had four spinal cord surgeries and still struggle to walk using a cane for support. I spend my time learning to draw and counseling the younger guys while continuing to devote myself to Bible studies. I pray for a few things: better health where I’m able to at least work; an out date, and if I ever get released - obtain a commercial driver license so that I may earn a living driving trucks.

Yours truly,

Lorenzo B. Wilson
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Born 10/27/1956
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