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FROM DRUG DEALER TO HERO

by Taylor Harris

Diane Reyes doesn't want anyone to get the wrong idea about why she started selling drugs at 19. She doesn't blame the neighborhood on the southeast side of Houston, Texas, where she grew up, and only speaks well of her parents.

"My parents have been married 47 years this year," says Diane. "I never really had to do any of that [selling drugs]. I just wished to do it. I wanted to do it. It just gave me a thrill."

After making \$150 from her first sale, Diane progressed to buying expensive purses and shoes and, eventually, her own townhome. Along the way, she also dropped out of community college and lied to her parents, claiming a \$12-per-hour job supported her new lifestyle.

"Money is the root of all evil—definitely," Diane says.

Looking back, Diane sees God's grace everywhere in her 1997 arrest—from the bailiff



Photo by Chad Prince

With the money she made selling drugs, Diane Reyes could buy almost anything she wanted—except peace of mind.

who allowed her to keep her sneakers and make a phone call to the length of her prison stay. But at age 26, minutes after receiving a sentence of 22 years for five kilos of cocaine, she could only think: "I'm gonna turn 30 here."

In Too Deep

In reality, Diane served less than three years in the Dr. Lane Murray Unit of Gatesville, Texas. She returned home and earned an honest paycheck for a few years before she lost her job, and the promise of quick money became too hard to resist. This time, the stakes were much higher.

"It was no longer one pound, two pounds, an ounce. Now it was 100 pounds, 200 pounds, a key of cocaine, another key of cocaine, four keys of cocaine ... Oh, I was making real money," Diane remembers.

In a time when the thirty-something could buy anything she wanted, including a house on five acres, Diane says she felt the world was closing in on her. She filled her new house with security cameras and stashed money in the

oven. She lost friends to drug violence and once had a gun pulled on her.

"Lord, I need some rest," she remembers praying one day.

On New Year's Eve 2006, Diane's world collapsed. After being rear-ended, she fled the scene of the accident. When police found her three hours later in her home, they also found \$283,000 in the oven. She would go on to serve almost eight years in prison for money laundering—but not before finding the rest she'd been seeking.

Healing Through Sisterhood

One night in her cell at Carole Young Medical Facility, Diane lay in bed listening to the only radio station that would come in clearly—a Christian one. The program mentioned a woman who had written in from prison, and it was then that Diane began crying, fell on her knees in the dark, and repented.

A month later, Diane joined about 30 women in the Sisterhood of Ruth, a new Prison Fellowship program designed to help long-term prisoners re-enter society.

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PRISON JOURNALISM ENGAGES MINDS

by Will Mari

For almost as long as there have been modern prisons in America, there have been prison newspapers.

Since the 1800s, they have provided day-to-day news to men and women behind bars and a safe space to address issues important to their daily lives. They have also educated their editors and reporters and allowed them to exercise their talents. Most importantly, they have provided a sense of community and purpose to those who've written for, edited, and read them.

"Ultimately we're trying to train people to deal with freedom ... newspapers are a great training ground for that," said James McGrath Morris, the author of "Jailhouse Journalism," a history of American prison newspapers. Reporting, editing,

taking photos, and designing pages provides a creative outlet for the incarcerated. These skills serve as continuing education, and "the more educated people are the

less likely [they are to get involved in crime]" once out, Morris said.

Prison newspapers have been published in a variety of forms, from simple news-

letters to officially sanctioned broadsheets printed on newspaper.

Transformation on Paper

"Prison newspapers per-

formed exactly the same functions as they did on the outside," said Morris. While imperfect, the reform-minded wardens of the late 19th and early 20th centuries believed that journalism could be transformational. Wardens also relied on prison papers to get information about life in their own prisons. Their writers and editors took pride in their work, and their ranks included editors and reporters who had worked in newsrooms outside of prisons.

But even as the incarcerated population grew dramatically in the late 20th century, prison papers failed to keep pace. They reached a kind of plateau in the 1970s and 1980s, when they faced declining budgets and neglect.

"I went from a current events book to writing a book of history," said Morris, who witnessed the closure of prison newspapers during



Prison journalism has a rich history in the United States, stretching back more than 100 years. While journalism is changing on both sides of the razor wire, prison reporters, editors, photographers, and designers still produce top-notch work and keep their readers informed.

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A MENTAL MAKEOVER

Dear Reader,

By now you may have noticed that Inside Journal has a new look. Starting in summer 2016, we have a fresh design intended to make this paper more attractive and easier to read. We hope you like it!

It's not just newspapers that need to get refreshed from time to time. Whether it's a new haircut, a new exercise routine, or something more drastic, a little change can do just about anybody good.

Some of the most important changes happen where they can't be seen—in your mind. If you want your life to look different, you have to act differently. And if you want to act differently, first you have to think differently. But how?

In his letter to the Christians who lived in Rome, a place where a lot of people were chasing power and wealth, Paul wrote, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2, NLT).

There are two steps here. The first one is to stop paying attention to negative voices that reinforce old ways of thinking—no matter how loud they are. Don't let yourself



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get squeezed into the same mold as everybody else.

The second is to open up your mind. Look at life from new angles. Turn off the T.V. and open a good book. Take every opportunity to further your education. Invest in your mind—one of your greatest resources—and watch a new outlook change your life.

Doing time doesn't have to mean turning off your brain. Many people in the criminal

justice system are finding ways to stay engaged mentally and make important contributions to their communities, whether those communities are in the free world or behind bars. We've told some of their stories in this edition. We hope you get inspired!

A.R. Quinn
Editor

Subscription Info

At Inside Journal® (IJ), we receive many letters each week from prisoners asking for subscriptions to our newspaper. We are grateful for the interest and support of our readers—however, because of limitations on our staff and budget, IJ is only available in bulk shipments to your chaplain, programming coordinator, or a volunteer who visits your facility. Chaplains, to set up these shipments for free, please contact our editorial staff at P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790 or insidejournal@pfm.org.

Prison Journalism Continued from page 1

his research.

By the 1990s, "most prison newspapers were gone" in the dozens of overlapping prison systems across the country, said Shon Hopwood, a teaching fellow at the Georgetown University Law Center's Appellate Litigation Program. (Another prisoner who applied his mind in prison, Hopwood served time in federal prison for his involvement in five bank robberies; but he studied on his own time, wrote legal briefs for fellow prisoners, and then later attended and graduated from the University of Washington School of Law.)

A Tradition of Excellence

Despite setbacks, the legacy of prison papers continues.

Some of the better-known papers that survive into the present include the San Quentin News (published on and off since the 1920s), The Angolite (published in the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana) and The Prison Mirror. The latter is published at the Minnesota Stillwater Correctional Facility and was founded in 1887 by a former member of the James-Younger gang. The Angolite has earned praise for its features on the lives of those in prison and ways their lives can be improved. Not to be outdone, the staff of the San Quentin News has

done a particularly good job working with the administration there, winning a James Madison Freedom of Information Award in 2014 for its reporting on prison life.

While paper as a delivery mechanism has faded, there's more news than ever that could be shared about and within prisons, even as access to information from the outside world has increased, said Morris. Prisoners and prison administrators could work together to form internal news sites that cover their prisons much as older prison papers used to, he said.

While journalistic work can be challenging in these spaces, prison reporters and editors have brought awareness to endemic issues like sexual violence. Sometimes simply bringing attention to issues faced within prisons is the first step to making them better for everyone.

As a tool for gaining vocational and life skills, prison journalism remains a "therapeutic training ground" for life. Eventually, most of the people in prison will leave and re-enter society. Telling stories about their lives while there is a good start.

"It is a particularly good craft no matter what you do," Morris said. "It's a healthy and a vitally important thing." ■

Will Mari is an assistant professor of communication at Northwest University in Kirkland, Washington.

Hero

Continued from page 1

"It's positive intervention, it's life skills, it's all of that wrapped with Jesus," explains Diane, who says she threw herself full-force into the program.

The women lived together and attended church and class together for several hours each week. They completed Beth Moore Bible studies and a twelve-step recovery program that centered on Jesus as their higher power. They shared their stories and cried and prayed together.

"Nothing like it had ever

been done before," recalls Bill Loyd, a Prison Fellowship field director who started the Sisterhood. "The hope was that over two years, they'd change from the inside out."

Bill certainly saw that change in Diane. "Diane is one who just enveloped the Holy Spirit," he recalls.

Never Give Up

Now, three years after being released from prison, Diane returns voluntarily to mentor women in the Sisterhood. "I go back for me and for them and for God," she explains. "I go back because there's too much hurt." Often she tells the women not to



Photo by Chad Prince

In a community of women who wanted the same thing, Diane discovered new ways of thinking. Now she's out of prison, and she just got her degree—an important step toward a whole new future.

"It was no longer one pound, two pounds, an ounce. Now it was 100 pounds, 200 pounds, a key of cocaine, another key of cocaine, four keys of cocaine ... Oh, I was making real money."

give up—on themselves or on Jesus. "You have to turn around and trust God," she tells them. "You don't have to clean up first."

And Diane hasn't given up on using her talent in sales for good. In May, she graduated from San Jacinto College with plans to start her own HVAC company one day. She

works as a dispatcher for a gas company now and jokes about making \$16 per hour and not driving a Mercedes. But on the days when she truly does feel tempted or challenged by her past, she still calls Bill.

"Talk to me," she tells him. "I need to be grounded."

The encouragement, it seems, goes both ways.

"I just really love her," says Bill. "She's just amazing. People like her that come from backgrounds where they should have been dead, all the way now to caring and giving back and working with other women after spending time in prison—they're my heroes." ■

FREEDOM AT FIRST SIGHT

by E.G. Andrews

“Stay in college ... stay there until you are through,” boxing icon Muhammad Ali once said. “If they can make penicillin out of moldy bread, they can sure make something of you.” Ali never attended college, but he recognized the value of a good education. It’s something that many—especially those with easy access to it—take for granted.

“Never Felt So Free”

Knowing the worth of a good education, Eric Anthamatten, a writer and university instructor, has done his part to make it accessible in unlikely places. He spent eight years teaching college-level philosophy courses behind bars. In an article for *The Atlantic*, he talks about a memorable student named Roy.

Roy, who had once worked as a truck driver in Texas, is now spending the rest of his days behind bars. But after going through one of Anthamatten’s classes, the lifer noted, “I’ve never felt so free as when I’m in this class.”

College courses didn’t just give Roy something to do; they gave him the chance to expand his mind, even from a place as restricted as prison. He would read, write, and discuss topics that made him think differently, freely, and critically. Every day, his teacher was inviting him to see the world through new eyes.

Roy’s experience is much like those of many other prisoners as a result of in-prison education. Behaviors improve. Leaders are born. A prison culture can begin to change. Even lifers like Roy can use their time in a meaningful way, using their capacity to learn, think, and imagine, all for the pure joy of it.

Christopher Shapard, a prisoner in New York, observed in an interview with *The Post Star*, “Education is absolutely necessary for someone to be able to go out there and realize how they’re living their life is not the only way. It changes them.”

Education changes things. It doesn’t just make you feel better about yourself. It can sharpen your mind and increase your abilities. For those re-entering society, it can provide something new to share with the world beyond the gates. An education can be the first step to better jobs and other new opportunities.

Seeing with New Eyes

Because education often improves our lives, many people think education is the ultimate answer to our problems—like the secret ingredient to the happiest, fullest life. But while education can bring good things, its benefits only go so far and only last for so long.

The Bible looks deeper—not just at the way we store knowledge, but also at the way we really see ourselves, others, and the world around us. In the book of Matthew, Jesus talks about a new way of “seeing.” It’s a view, or a mindset, that we all can have. It’s beyond what an earthly education can give us. Education can improve your life here and now, but renewing your mindset spiritually benefits you now and forever.

To explain this, Jesus talked about “the lamp of the body.” Like a lamp, our mindset, or what He called our “eyes,” is where light comes through—the filter through which we see everything. If we have

TIME FOR A VISION CHECK

Even when prisons offer education, it’s not always easy to access. Some programs involve a competitive application process. Sometimes no programs are offered at all.

But God’s grace is a free gift, available to all who call on Him. Because Jesus died on the cross and rose again, He has paid the price for our sins. We can have forgiveness and a new life in Him. If you will let Him, He will renew your mind, heart, and soul. You can start with a prayer like this:

God, I have been seeing this world through my own eyes. But without You, it’s like I’m blind. Please come into my life and help me to see You more clearly. Thank You that Your grace covers everything I’ve done.

Just like Paul, we are transformed when we let Jesus into our lives. His power and grace make us whole. That is a hope that changes things—both now and forever. If you’d like to find out more about a relationship with God through Jesus, *Inside Journal* wants to help. Write to “Vision Check,” c/o *Inside Journal*, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. We’ll help you get signed up for a free correspondence Bible study offered by one of our partner organizations.

good eyes, we see the world as it truly is. But a bad mindset distorts everything.

A man named Saul was living with a distorted view before he encountered Jesus. Saul was a leader, he was educated, and he had great power. The teachings of Jesus upset him so much that he made it his mission to harass and even kill people who claimed to follow Jesus. But as he was traveling one day, a great light appeared, and Jesus spoke from heaven: “Why do you persecute me?” That great light caused Saul to go blind.

But God was not yet finished with Saul, whose sight was restored. And for the first time, Saul, who changed his name to Paul, was seeing clearly—not just with

his eyes, but with the right mindset. The man who had been walking in darkness had been transformed by Jesus, the “light of the world” (John 8:12). He now saw Jesus for who He truly was, the one true God who came into the world to save us from our sin. This didn’t just change his behavior; it changed the purpose and perspective of his life.

Paul became a missionary and wrote several books of the Bible. Since rulers of the day often were openly hostile to the spreading of Christianity, Paul did much of his writing from a prison cell. But even behind bars, he held onto hope. He had found it in the God who couldn’t bear to let Paul stay blind.

And that hope set him free. ■



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A good education can take you a long way.
A renewed mindset will take you even farther.

NEWS OF NOTE

Dept. of Education Launches Pell Pilot

Of the 2.2 million Americans behind bars today, a majority do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. The U.S. Department of Education’s Second Chance Pell Program will test new models allowing some men and women to receive Pell grants for postsecondary education behind bars.

The Pell grants may be used to cover tuition, fees, books, and supplies, according to a press release from the U.S. Department of Education. Twelve thousand prisoners will be enrolled at over 100 correctional institutions in the U.S., with dozens of colleges and universities participating in the partnership.

In this program, prisoners are taught with the same curriculum as students in the free world. Attending classes behind bars gives them a head

start as they earn college credits and start building a resume. It gives them hope for a better life post-release.

“Going to college gave me tools,” says Jermaine, a participant through Goucher College in Baltimore. “It’s taught me patience. It’s taught me hard work. It taught me that more things are possible.”

NM Prisoners Help Needy Students

In the spring of 2016, prisoners at the Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility decided to provide some classroom essentials for local schoolchildren.

“It was a team effort,” says unit director Nina Salcido-Marquez, as reported by *Las Cruces Sun-News*. “They wanted to raise money for backpacks, to give to students in August. It’s their way of giving back to the community.”



artiststeer/Stock

By selling food and concessions within the prison, the men raised around \$200. Every cent would go toward the backpacks, as well as supplies to fill them. Pencils, notebooks, glue sticks, water bottles—each backpack was stocked and ready to be distributed at select schools. Prison employees even donated items to the cause.

By distribution day, social workers had identified students who qualified to receive a backpack, based on need. Principal Roberto Lozano of MacArthur Elementary

School says the backpacks helped start the school year on a high note. “They’re excited, especially with backpacks that have some kind of design,” he tells *Las Cruces Sun-News*. “And, obviously, they’re very grateful.”

Summit Trains Prison Leaders

Every year, the Willow Creek Association broadcasts its Global Leadership Summit to audiences across North America, encouraging and equipping participants to become better employers, instructors, and leaders.

Included with the hundreds of churches and organizations who hosted the 2016 simulcast were 43 prisons, where attendees received training to help them become more effective leaders in prison and, for those who are preparing to leave prison, productive members of their communities.

Thirty-six facilities participating in this year’s Summit currently have Prison Fellowship programming. One

of those was the Muskegon Correctional Facility in Muskegon, Michigan.

Jason, a man who participated in the summit at Muskegon, summed up the benefits well, noting, “As an inmate, the Global Leadership Summit was a unique opportunity to be exposed to—and learn from—some of the smartest and most successful leaders in the world. One of the biggest challenges that an inmate faces is overcoming the feeling that your life is a failure, or, even worse, that it simply doesn’t matter. It’s the feeling that your life will forever be defined by the sum total of the mistakes you made that brought you to prison. It’s the feeling that the world—and even God—must be done with you. Most of prison is designed to reinforce this feeling, but there are occasions when the truth of God’s promise in each of our lives breaks through, and the GLS is one of those occasions.” ■

2017 CALENDAR



“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” – Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

JANUARY						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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HOLIDAYS	
January 1 – New Year’s Day	July 4 – Independence Day
January 16 – Martin Luther King Day	August – <i>Don’t forget to submit your Angel Tree prisoner participation form!</i>
February 14 – Valentine’s Day	September 4 – Labor Day
February 20 – Presidents Day	November 10 – Veterans Day
April 16 – Easter	November 23 – Thanksgiving Day
May 14 – Mother’s Day	December 25 – Christmas Day
May 29 – Memorial Day	
June 18 – Father’s Day	

MY IMPORTANT DATES

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