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# Billy Kidd Takes His Last Shot

by A.R. Quinn

**W**illiam “Billy” Kidd used to live up to his outlaw name. According to his then-parole officer, Mark Goricki, he showed up at a parole appointment in the early 1990s in a black Grand Prix, wearing a black cowboy hat and a black duster down to his ankles. He liked playing the part.

Growing up in Michigan, Billy was an altar boy from a well-to-do suburban family. However, he doesn’t remember learning much from the Latin masses at the Roman Catholic church, and there was trouble at home. His father, a successful executive, traveled a lot. His mother, struggling with depression, self-medicated with alcohol.

Embarrassed by the situation at home, Billy, who was often teased about sharing a name with a legendary Wild West gunfighter, started getting into



Photo by Glenn Triest

Billy Kidd once lived up to his outlaw name. When he ended up in segregation behind bars, he realized he needed one last shot at life—and he found one.

all the trouble he could find. He bounced in and out of juvenile detention and youth camp. The troubled boy unraveled even more after his mom died of a massive heart attack.

At 17, Billy caught his first adult felony charges. He wound up on a cell block with men he calls “the worst of the worst.” He remembers, “They became my mentors in crime.”

Prison became a place of belonging. “Everyone I knew was [behind bars],” he says. “I would come out to the free world to wreak havoc, run deals, and get sent back.”

Once or twice in the early days of his incarceration, Billy heard people talk about Jesus, but any “jailhouse religion” crumbled as soon as he was out. The streets, promising money and women, were too powerful a temptation.

**From Dead-End to Deliverance**

After years spent revolving in and out of the Michigan Department of Corrections, Billy had a body’s worth of

tattoos and a rap sheet long enough to wallpaper a room. He also had a daughter that he had never met.

In November 1998, he found himself in segregation for his leadership role in a race-based prison gang. There, he says, God got his attention.

With a Bible for a companion, Billy began to read. The words made sense to him in a way they never had before. He started to reflect on the way he was living and the collateral damage of all his bad choices.

“I recognized the evil in my life,” he says. “I thought, *If I died right now, people would be happy.*”

Billy felt like God was giving him one more chance to get his life right. He begged for forgiveness and decided to make the most of his last shot.

When Billy got out of segregation, he stayed true to his commitment. With good behavior, he got down from Level V to Level II. He got involved in the prison church,

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# Cancer Unites Women in Texas Prison

by Zoe Erlor

**W**hen Lorie Longoria was diagnosed with stage-II breast cancer

while serving time in the Texas prison system, her first thought was, “Am I still being punished?” An even harder thought quickly followed: “I don’t want to die in prison.”

She faced a double mastectomy, then chemo, then losing all of her hair, and then reconstructive surgery.

“During my struggles, I was very alone,” she admits. “I had a terrible time getting my hair cut when it was falling out. I had so many questions that I didn’t know if I was asking the right questions.”

Though she felt all alone during her ordeal, Longoria, who was incarcerated at the Carole Young Medical Facility, was actually surrounded by other women who were also dealing with difficult diagno-

ses, including cancer. One day, she had an epiphany.

*Why not start a support group so others don’t have to*

*walk this journey alone?* she wondered.

She approached Bill Loyd, field director for Prison Fel-

lowship in southeast Texas, to see if he might be able to help her start such a group. Not long afterward, the Texas De-

partment of Criminal Justice granted permission.

**Together in the Hard Times**

On January 16, 2015, the Sisters of Love, Life, and Strength (SOLLS) had their first meeting.

In a place like prison, where self-preservation, privacy, and outward strength are prized, this group is making a statement: that doing it alone isn’t better than doing it together. And that vulnerability and community can make prison time not only more bearable, but actually something beautiful.

Tapped by Loyd to lead the group, former banker and breast cancer survivor Nadine Eidman had never dreamed of visiting a prison, much less volunteering in one. But when Loyd asked if she would be willing to help, her own experience with the disease pushed her to say “yes.”

“When you hear the word ‘cancer,’ it’s heavy. I had the

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Yuri\_Arcurs/Stock

Nobody wants to hear the word “cancer.” For women behind bars in Texas, the struggle with cancer became an opportunity to lean on each other and find a beautiful hope.

# YOUR OWN BEST ADVOCATE

## Guest Column: Dan Kingery

When you are in the system, it can seem hopeless. You have few choices, little input, and a lot of people telling you what to do. It's tempting to shut off your brain and just do time.

However, we are each created with unique gifts. It's unhealthy—and against our design—to numb out and let time slip by. It might seem easiest in the short run, but forcing yourself to “do time” wastes the gift of each day, promotes hopelessness, and sets you up for failure upon release.

The truth is, even when you are behind bars, you do still have some control. Your mindset is the single greatest factor in whether you do time, or whether you manage to use time.

Step One in using your time well is to resist thinking of yourself as the victim of a situation someone else imposed on you. You have the choice to be the best person you can be today and work toward the person you want to be tomorrow. Decide what action you will take to do more than just get by psychologically and physically. Think about what good you can do,

for yourself and others, with the talent and opportunities you do have.

Step Two is to realize that everyone lives in a community. Sometimes we talk as though “the community” only existed outside prison. The fact is, you live in a community right now, and you can be a powerful voice for wellness, safety and growth. From Angola to Zephyrhills, every resident of every prison has an opportunity to be a good citizen today.

Your actions and attitudes shape your in-prison community. When you establish strong, prosocial relationships, it benefits you and your neighbors. When you help solve problems, give respect, and encourage healthy living, you are part of the solution. Whether you signed up to be one or not, you are a role model for the people

around you.

Ninety-five percent of prisoners will be released, and many have a great vision for what they are going to do in the free world. But practicing good citizenship in the prison community now greatly improves your chances of being a good citizen when you get there. Don't deceive yourself: there's nothing magical about passing through the gate. The person you are in prison is the person you'll be on the street.

So start right now. You might not have many freedoms, but you still have what's most important: control over your attitude and aspirations, influence, and a choice about how you will use your time today. Use what you have for good.

*Dan Kingery is the vice president of ministry programs at Prison Fellowship.*

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## Cancer Unites Women

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benefit of my family, people who would come with me to listen to what the doctors were saying. These women don't have anybody. It's them and the doctors and this disease. It's a major challenge.”

Women of all ages and stages of cancer began showing up on Fridays to receive encouragement for their fight, as well as to offer encouragement to others.

At any given group meeting, there are between eight and 25 attendees. About 50 percent have cancer, and the rest have other diagnoses. They ask questions and share answers.

“Some don't really understand the diagnosis,” Eidman explains. “They don't know what to ask and don't know what they've been told. You're in shock.”

Together, they help each other understand what's happening in their bodies during treatment and discuss ways to live healthier even while battling the disease. They pray for each other, read Scripture and other inspirational materials together, and sometimes even tell jokes. And they help each other learn to trust God in the ups and downs.

“We celebrate when people are doing well and come together when people aren't doing well. And we recognize that all of our days are numbered. It's an opportunity to

re-focus,” Eidman says.

One of the hardest moments over the past year and a half was when a key member of the group passed away.

“She was a beacon and a very happy, encouraging resource to the other women,” Eidman says.

“And it's hard. It's really hard,” she adds.

## Something Beautiful

But perhaps more than anything, the group has become a family.

Marcela Roman says that she didn't want to attend when a friend first invited her. “I don't want to cry,” she explained to her friend.

Despite her diagnosis of thyroid cancer, Roman's family wouldn't respond to her letters, and she felt isolated and alone.

Her friend told her she wouldn't have to say anything—just come and listen.

“So we went and I paid attention. I was listening to everybody that was carrying this pain as I'm carrying it too, but they are strong and they encourage each other.”

So she kept coming and now won't miss a Friday.

“They support you as a true family,” Roman says.

According to Longoria, that has always been the goal: “I want people to know that even though we are away from our families during this difficult time, God has provided a beautiful family for the incarcerated women in the community of SOLLS.” ■

## Last Shot

*Continued from page 1*

joined Bible studies, and started counseling other men.

The first time he came up for parole after giving his life to God, he was turned down flat. “The [parole board] just saw who I had been,” Billy remembers. “Stabbings. Extortion. Robbery.” He thanked the parole board for its time and mentally prepared himself to max out. He was even happy about it; prison was still his home, but now he was learning to turn prison culture upside down by following God and leading others in that journey.

But God had other plans for the reformed outlaw.

Not long after Billy was denied parole, a counselor

called Billy to his office and told him to close the door. Billy hesitated; he didn't want to be labeled a snitch. But the counselor insisted, and when Billy sat down, the counselor slid papers across the desk to him. It was a P-61 form, designating Billy for immediate release.

Two weeks later, Billy was on the street.

## Another Chance at Life

“It was scary. I didn't know what to do,” he recalls.

But Billy found a mentor who reminded him of the truth of the Gospel and helped him overcome challenges, like getting his driver's license and filing his taxes for the first time. He found work with a buddy who did roof-



Billy's release from prison meant facing the unknown, but he had a mentor to guide him. With a new attitude, new family, and new purpose, Billy is living a transformed life.

ing. He saved money, found a place to live, and saw his old parole officer, Mark Goricki.

“He came out with a whole new attitude,” Mark remembers. “I didn't believe it at first, but it turned out to be the real thing. He met curfew, got involved in no relationships, and said, ‘I'm concentrating on me this time.’”

These days, Mark and Billy consider each other friends. They visit criminal justice

classes and jails to give their perspective on the criminal justice system, sharing how even men like Billy, whom Mark calls “the worst guy on my caseload in 39 years,” can start over.

Released at age 42, Billy has made the most of his second chance. He is married and a family man. He gained custody of his daughter and raised her for several years. He enjoys his steady job.

In addition to the presentations he gives with Mark, he is also a volunteer who works with Prison Fellowship's area director in Michigan, Denise Harris.

Billy Kidd's name is still an ice-breaker, says Denise. But now, instead of being part of his criminal persona, his name is a powerful reminder of just how far God can take a person who believes in Him. “When I think of Billy,” she says, “I think of transformation.” ■

“EVERYONE I KNEW WAS [BEHIND BARS]. I WOULD COME OUT TO THE FREE WORLD TO WREAK HAVOC, RUN DEALS, AND GET SENT BACK.”

# Don't Do Your Time Alone

by Emily Andrews

In April 2016, Sgt. Joseph Serna faced a night behind bars. But the retired Special Forces Green Beret was not a stranger to dark places.

Over the course of three tours in Afghanistan, Serna survived several traumatic experiences that could have easily claimed his life. He withstood the dangers of a roadside bomb and a suicide bomber. He survived another close call in an overturned truck, which landed upside down in a canal.

Only Sgt. Serna would make it out of the vehicle alive.

While these incidents earned Serna military decorations, they also left him with his fair share of emotional baggage. Like many of his fellow soldiers, he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, and a sense of isolation and loneliness.

To cope with the pain, he turned to alcohol. His situation reached a critical point in Fayetteville, North Carolina, when he was arrested and charged for driving under the influence.

Part of Serna's sentence required that he report to Judge Lou Olivera at the Veterans Treatment Court every two weeks. One time, Serna lied about a recent urine test. He later admitted this, and the judge sentenced Serna to one night behind bars.

## Dark Night

After his wartime experiences, Serna already feared being in tight spaces. A night alone in prison sounded like more than the veteran could bear. Olivera could tell that Serna was anxious. He later remembered, "When Joe first came to turn himself in, he was trembling."

Joe Serna knew it would be a long night.

Many of us have experienced a "dark night of the soul." That is the kind of night that Serna faced in that North Carolina jail. He had no way out of the cell. He was tired of dealing with PTSD. It was one more nightmare he just wished he could wake up from. The worst part is that he was facing it all alone.

The Bible tells of Jesus' own experience with loneliness. Jesus, who lived a faultless life,

entered into our darkness in order to bring His light. He showed God's love, healed the sick, and taught those who would listen. Eventually, Jesus would be accused by people who refused to believe in His message. He then faced the darkest time in His life: abandonment, isolation, torture, and ultimately, death on a cross. Knowing what was to come, Jesus spent time alone in a garden and prayed. He was honest about the pain and anxiety. Still, He asked that God's will would be done, even in a night as dark as this one.

## Never Alone

As Serna sat alone in his cell, the silence was broken moments later by an unexpected visitor: Judge Lou Olivera. To Serna's surprise, the judge entered the cell. The door closed behind him. "I got chills when he walked in," the retired sergeant told The Fayetteville Observer.

Serna did not move. Olivera took a seat beside him. It was the only bunk in the cell, and naturally, Serna was confused. He remembered what Olivera had said earlier as they drove to the prison together: "We're

## ARE YOU LONELY?

No matter whether you've been in Ad-Seg for months, or you are packed like a sardine into a noisy dorm with tiers of bunkbeds, prison can be a place of extreme isolation.

The Bible makes it clear that we were never made to be alone. We were made for peaceful, loving relationships with God and other people from the very beginning. We have all messed that up. Even so, God could not bear to let us remain separated from Him. He sent Jesus—also called Immanuel, or "God with us"—to die on a cross and pay the price for our sins. Because of this, we can begin a relationship with God and find new life in Him. If you want to do that today, you can start with this simple prayer.

*God, I have been separated from You, but I don't want to be alone anymore. Thank you for showing me that You want to have a relationship with me. Please help me to turn from my past and to give my brokenness and shame to You. I want to have a fresh start and begin to walk in Your light.*

God has gone to incredible lengths to restore your relationship with Him. You don't have to be alone anymore. If you'd like to learn more about what it means to have a relationship with God through Jesus, Inside Journal wants to help. Just write to "Are You Lonely?", P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

going to turn ourselves in."

Surely the judge could not have been serious. "You are here with me for the night?" Serna asked incredulously.

The judge replied, "Yeah, that's what I'm doing."

From then on, Serna was not the only man in the cell. He was not the only veteran, either. Olivera had served in the Gulf War and endured his fair share of war's horrors. He feared that a night alone would trigger Serna's PTSD. The battlefield is difficult for any soldier to leave behind completely.

Between bites of meatloaf, he and Serna shared their stories. They found common ground in their experiences as U.S. soldiers. Olivera even gave Serna the single bunk in the cell; the judge slept on a mattress on the floor. Literally overnight, their relationship transformed

into something Serna had never imagined. All it took was having someone there—someone who saw him, not for what he did, but for who he was.

"It was more of a father-son conversation ... It was personal," Serna told The Washington Times. With one act of humility and compassion, a dark and lonely cell became much brighter.

Jesus Christ showed even greater humility and compassion when He gave up his life. That sacrifice has paid the debt we owe for our mistakes—a debt we could never satisfy. Now, those who accept Christ's gift of grace can join a new community: fellowship with God. All are invited to have a relationship with God, to be called His sons and daughters, and to experience new life with Him always at our side. Nobody has to do time alone. ■



James Pauls/Stock

A night alone in a cramped jail cell was the worst prescription for Sgt. Joe Serna's PTSD. An unexpected visitor transformed the night in a way he wasn't prepared for.

## Time for a Change

from *Our Daily Bread*



Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

I've discovered that God is in the rehabilitation business—bringing about personal change in people's lives. Christian rehabilitation is unique, for it relies on Christ's power to change people from the inside out.

All of us, without exception, have fallen short of God's standards. We are all addicted to sin and self. Every person needs to be rescued from sin's grip and become a new person in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We enter the Lord's unique life-changing program the day we receive Christ, and that program continues for life—not just

for a few months. The apostle Paul put it this way: "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:6).

Whatever our sin-habits are, we all need the same Savior. And everyone who comes to Him echoes the same testimony: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." Are you letting Jesus Christ change you from the inside out?

—Joanie Yoder

Check with your chaplain about receiving the *Our Daily Bread* devotional on a regular basis.

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# Running Toward Second Chances

by Emily Andrews

Leaving prison, Rob hoped for a better life beyond the gates. He had taken life-skills classes and studied dozens of books. But he also had rent and restitution to pay, as well as a family to support, and his record as an arsonist made it difficult to move forward. Though he was very qualified and performed well in job interviews, hiring managers turned him down cold as soon as his background check came back with a felony conviction. Discouraged, Rob felt like he was stuck in a “second prison,” unable to unlock the door to a completely fresh start.

The Second Prison Project, a campaign of Prison Fellowship, supports opportunities for second chances and real restoration. The campaign seeks to change perceptions about people with a criminal record by showing their God-given potential to lead transformed lives, filled with purpose and positive contributions.

The first step in helping the 65 million Americans with a criminal record to participate more fully in public life is to raise awareness and engage the community. To that end, The Second Prison Project organized two community runs, called Second Chances 5Ks, in May 2016. The events took place at Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota, and America the Beautiful Park in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Jesse Wiese, Prison Fellowship’s director of community engagement and the visionary behind The Second Prison Project, told the Colorado Springs Gazette, “One of the things we’re trying to do is galvanize that momentum, that belief in second chances.” They would need that momentum to effect real change in their communities.

## The Starting Line

If the effort to create more opportunities for returning citizens is like a race, awareness is the first step across the starting line. The Second Chances 5Ks were an important part of helping people in Minnesota and Colorado understand the “second prison.” Hundreds of participants walked, jogged, and ran to support the campaign.

Various prisons also organized

runs to take place within their walls, coinciding with the host-city runs. Whether behind bars or in the free world, the runners were headed toward one finish line: a society that supports second chances and restored futures for people who have paid their debt.

That kind of cultural change doesn’t happen overnight.

“We can have all the sentencing reform we want and have all the prison reform we want, but we still have to reform our culture,” Wiese told the Gazette. He knows from experience how difficult it is to regain the community’s trust. After spending nearly eight years in prison, Wiese had come to know God and decided to turn his life around. He finished a bachelor’s degree from his cell, earned his law degree after release, and passed the Virginia Bar Exam. But his dream of becoming a

judge was cut short. He was denied a license to practice law because of his record.

As a felon, Wiese knew he would have to deal with stigmas. He just didn’t know it would be so hard to overcome them.

## A Strong Finish

Like Wiese, Dennis Avila, who was one of the runners in Colorado, had found God while in prison and resolved to turn his life around. But even with a change of heart, he struggled to reintegrate into society and build a stable life. He worked difficult jobs, he wasn’t paid much, and he had no retirement plan.

Eventually, Avila started his own business, but the road to his second chance was a long one. “I was the guy who needed a project like this,” he said on ColoradoSprings.com.

For other people with a criminal record, events like

the Second Chances 5Ks could instill a new hope. Avila and others were running together from miles apart, displaying what the campaign is all about: creating opportunities to build and sustain positive community that open doors of opportunity.

That kind of positive community can be formed even before people are released, and running for second chances gave women at MCF-Shakopee a chance to experience it firsthand.

“It was so cool to know that we were not alone,” said one participant, referring to the hundreds of others who ran at different locations. Another participant shared that feeling: “I’ve never felt such unity within the prison walls—all of us cheering for each other.”

One participant described the sense of wholeness that community brings. In a place like prison, where you can be surrounded by people and still feel alone, joining that community of runners was a powerful thing. “For a brief hour I forgot I was in prison and felt fully human again,” she said.

Real community is possible, and it is transformative. The Second Chances 5Ks remind us that there are people behind bars, and outside them, who believe in a future of authentic, healthy, restored community. Some people just need another try. Given a second chance, they might just take it and run with it. ■



Photo by Bill Aggen

Runners who participated in the 5K in the Twin Cities held up two fingers before the start of the race to show their support for second chances.

# Going Against the Grain

by Sam Dye

In the United States, there are about 1,800 state and federal correctional facilities, plus an additional 3,200 local and county jails. If you go into any one of them, the unwritten code that governs life behind bars is more or less the same: *Don’t snitch. Mind your own business. Don’t trust anyone. Be your own person. It’s us versus them.* ...

Adopting the prison culture around you might seem like a simple matter of survival, but it comes at a steep price. You have the best chance of turning your life around when you are in trusting relationships with other people who share your goals. But instead of building up positive relationships, prison culture leaves you isolated and breaks down true community—the very community you’re going to need if

you want to change direction.

For many years, I have talked with men and women behind bars about prison culture. During these conversations, we also discuss the alternative values that build up communities where real transformation happens. In Galatians 5, a chapter of the New Testament, you find a list of the values that should define daily interactions in this new kind of community: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Unfortunately, for many people, those values don’t sound like something to aspire to; they sound too weak, impractical, and naïve for life behind bars, or even back on the streets.

So what’s a person to do? If you want to change, and if you need community to do it, how can you go against the grain of

prison culture to build relationships based on integrity and mutual encouragement?

Here are some tips to get you started, based on what I have seen work in prisons around the country:

**Take the lead.** If you want to change the culture of your prison, you can’t just gripe about what’s wrong and hope it will change. You’ll be waiting a long time. Instead, seek out the other people around you who aren’t just playing the game, but whose lives demonstrate their readiness to live differently. Band together and commit to help one another through positive, intentional relationships.

**Recognize that you need a positive mentor.** When Billy Kidd, the man whose story is on the cover, was 17, he wound up on a cell block with men who became his “mentors in crime.” Perhaps you have

had a similar experience with someone who coached you in a criminal lifestyle. If you want to lead a transformed life, you need to find the opposite—a positive mentor who has walked a ways down the road you want to follow. That may be a volunteer who comes to your facility, or it may be a fellow prisoner who has consistently proven their commitment to life-change over time. Once you find a positive mentor, ask them to help guide you through the decisions you face and the goals you need to set.

**Ask for feedback.** We all have blind spots—difficult truths about ourselves that we cannot see, but which are obvious to people who know us well. The people closest to us rarely tell us about our blind spots, because doing so would cause conflict and might jeopardize the relationship.

That’s why you need to seek out honest feedback. Ask your mentor or a trusted friend to reveal to you what your blind spots might be. It might not be the easiest conversation you’ll ever have, but if you are serious about leading a changed life and building positive community, the information you get will be priceless. ■

*Sam Dye is the senior vice president of field operations at Prison Fellowship.*



**PRISON FELLOWSHIP**

© 2016 by Prison Fellowship  
*INSIDE JOURNAL*® is published four times a year  
by Prison Fellowship,  
P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790,  
[www.prisonfellowship.org](http://www.prisonfellowship.org) • 703.478.0100

Editor, A.R. Quinn; Writers, Emily Andrews  
Sam Dye, Zoe Erler, Dan Kingery, A.R. Quinn;  
Graphic Designer, Sheri Beauchamp

A member of the  
Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability,  
and the American Correctional Association.

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