One Foot in Front of the Other

by E. Greene and S.L. Ray

Monroe Jennings Jr. spent most of his youth fighting, stealing, using, and selling drugs, and having run-ins with law enforcement. “I came from a good, middle-class family,” Monroe says, “but I enjoyed the action of the streets.”

Eventually, he met and married a young woman named Francine, but despite his deep love for her, he wouldn’t give up his rebellious lifestyle.

He spent his weekends off the army base, robbing stores and stealing from drug dealers.

Francine recalls those early years of their marriage. She says he was “drinking and partying, staying out late—staying out two or three days at a time.” Even becoming a father couldn’t motivate him to stay out of trouble.

Looking for more discipline in his life, Monroe joined the army. Stationed at Fort Polk in Louisiana, he hoped to be a better husband and father, but he returned to his old habits.

He spent his weekends off the army base, robbing stores and stealing from drug dealers. “[Even] the Army couldn’t keep me strong,” recalls Monroe, now in his 60s. He needed more than military structure to keep him out of trouble; he needed change from within.

Monroe’s choices eventually caught up with him. Francine filed for divorce, and around the same time, Monroe was arrested for three armed robberies and an attempted murder.

He was sentenced to 40 years. He would end up serving a total of 14.

A firm foundation

While in prison, Monroe met a man who was serving 99 years for armed robbery. This fellow prisoner, who had changed his thinking through a relationship with God, inspired Monroe to do an about-face; he surrendered his life to Jesus and decided to follow Him.

During his incarceration, Monroe wanted to learn even more about living life God’s way. He attended Prison Fellowship® seminars and classes and discovered valuable principles for living.

He also participated in Angel Tree®, where his children received gifts from volunteers in Monroe’s name.

“Angel Tree® helped my children realize that I could still reach out to them and care for them,” he says, “and show them some type of love, even though I was behind bars.”

After he left prison for the second time in 1993, Monroe found a job working in prosthetics and orthotics. Monroe once couldn’t find a strong footing, but now he’s standing on the firm foundation of God’s Word and helps others to walk—both literally and figuratively.

“I’m helping people get their lives back by designing braces, fabricating braces for their legs, and helping with prosthetics,” Monroe says. He has also gone back into prison, encouraging men to prepare for a productive life on the outside. He shares his story with the men, he says, “so that they can walk in the Word of God when they get out.”

Monroe’s manager at the

Continued on page 2

A Prisoner’s Cookbook: Tasty Treats Behind Bars

by S.L. Ray

What flavors from the outside do you miss the most?

The juicy cheeseburger from your favorite diner? Your grandma’s homemade apple pie? Whatever you’re craving, there are ways to reproduce some of the tastes of home with limited ingredients and a little creativity.

Angelina, a prisoner in Minnesota Correctional Facility–Shakopee, has put together a recipe book of tasty treats and eats made from commissary items. From buffalo chicken to gooey brownies, Angelina explains that her cookbook is made of recipes from many different people and that the items have been successfully tested.

“They [are] tried-and-true recipes,” she says. “I hope you can enjoy them as much as we all have.”

If you have the right ingredients, these can be easy to make.

“I never thought in a million years that you could make so many things in the microwave,” she adds.

We’re featuring a few of our favorites from Angelina’s many recipes. If you try any of these and want to tell us how they turned out, or if you have other recipe ideas of your own, feel free to write to us at: Inside Journal, ATTN: Recipes, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

Happy cooking!

NOTE: Some of these ingredients may not be available or allowed in all facilities, and restrictions on cooking vary. Be sure to comply with your facility’s rules and regulations.

Continued on page 2
Dear Joe: Thank you for your wise words. Keep sharing your story with others, as you’re sure to be an inspiration to many.

**Subscription Info**
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**One Foot**
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by orthopedics company, Darryl Cox, adds, “It was the Lord that led me to him, led him to us.”

**Walking in freedom**
For Monroe, all of this is possible because of God. “I truly enjoy my relationship with the Lord,” he says. He sometimes thinks about how fortunate he is to be still alive and not have been killed in any of the armed robberies. “I’m blessed—I’m blessed with a good wife, good family, good children,” he says.

“Sometimes I wake up, and I just look at the freedom I walk in, and I thank God.”

Along with his steady job as a prosthethist, Monroe is also a hardworking member of his community and the pastor of a Louisiana church. He’s making the most of all his second chances. One of the second chances he’s most grateful for is his relationship with Francine.

She and Monroe reconnected 18 years after their divorce, and after she saw his profound transformation, she opened her heart a second time. They remarried in 2013 and now enjoy spending time together with their grandkids.

“This life has totally changed; he’s a different man now,” Francine says of Monroe. “I’m more in love with him than ever.”

The feeling is mutual. “I want to thank God for my wife,” echoes Monroe. “He brought her back to me, and I’m thankful.”

Monroe encourages men and women behind bars to keep going, putting one foot in front of the other. Even on days when it’s hard to get up in the morning, Monroe explains, “The Bible says whatever you do, do it heartily as for the Lord—and he emphasizes the importance of that both in and out of prison.”

“We don’t just go to prison and get saved and have a ‘jailhouse religion,’” says Monroe. “We get out, and we live for God. And I’m an example that—by His grace—you can do this.”

**Cookbook**
Continued from page 1

**Popcorn Supreme**
- 1 (8-oz.) bag microwave popcorn
- 2 (8-oz.) bags caramels
- 3 oz. honey (one-fourth of a 12-oz. btl)
- 2 scoops peanut butter

Pop popcorn; set aside. In medium bowl, place caramels and a little water and heat for 30 seconds at a time until melted. Add honey and peanut butter; heat for one minute and stir. Put popcorn on plate or plastic bags and drizzle mixture on popcorn.

**Chili Cheese Pie**
- 1 pkg. (or 15-oz. can) chili with beans
- Seasoning packet from chili-flavored beans
- 3 pkgs. sugar
- Half a bag of corn chips
- 1 summer sausage
- Lawry’s seasoning
- Onion flakes
- 1 (8-oz.) block mozzarella cheese, cut up

Cook chili as directed. Cut up sausage and add to chili mixture. Stir in ramen seasoning, sugar, Lawry’s, and onion flakes. Microwave for 2 minutes. In a medium bowl, crunch up corn chips and spread out to create a base layer. Top with chili mixture. Melt mozzarella in microwave, then pour onto chili mixture. Top with Squeeze Cheese to your liking.

**Orange Chicken**
- 24 oz. (two 12-oz. pkgs.) chicken
- 1 pkg. rice
- Tang
- Soy sauce

Cook nice as directed; set aside. Heat chicken. Add 2 scoops of Tang and soy sauce (to taste) to the chicken. Add a spoonful of hot water and stir together. Microwave for 2 minutes. Pour orange chicken mixture on top of rice.

**Buffalo Chicken Wrap**
- 6 tortilla shells
- 1 (8-oz.) pkg. mozzarella cheese, cubed
- 24 oz. (two 12-oz. pkg.) chicken, cooked
- 4 individual serving pouches (approx. 2 oz. each) ranch dressing
- Totopos hot sauce

In medium bowl, combine hot sauce and chicken. Wrap tortilla shells for 20 seconds. In each tortilla shell, add chicken mixture, cheese, and ranch dressing. Wrap up by rolling into burrito. Makes 6 wraps.

**Strawberry Cake**
- 1 pkg. vanilla wafers
- 2 pkgs. red Kool-Aid
- 1 pkg. strawberry-filled cookies
- 6 oz. (half a 12-oz. bag) French vanilla creamer
- 6 pkgs. sugar

In large bowl, crush up wafers. Add some water, a little at a time, and stir until it’s like cake batter. Add in the Kool-Aid packets and stir together. Separate the outsides of the cookies from their creamy filling, putting the filling in a small bowl. Crush the outsides of the cookies and stir into the batter mix. Microwave for 3 minutes. Take out and set aside to cool. In filling bowl, mix in some creamer. When the cake has cooled, top with the filling mix as frosting.

**Chocolate Brownies**
- 1 bag vanilla wafers
- Chocolate milk
- Water
- Hot cocoa packet

In medium bowl, crush up the vanilla wafers. Add water, a little at a time, and keep stirring until it is like a batter. Stir in a little chocolate milk. Add half the packet of cocoa to the batter and stir. For the “frosting,” pour the other half of the cocoa packet into another bowl, add a little water, and stir; microwave for 30 seconds. Add frosting to brownies and let cool.

**Monster Cookie Bars**
- 1 small jar peanut butter
- 2 (8-oz.) pkgs. caramels
- 1 (12-oz.) jar honey
- 2 pkgs. bananas & cream
- 1 bag vanilla wafers
- 1 pkg. vanilla wafers
- 3 pkgs. sugar
- 6 oz. (half a 12-oz. bag) butterscotch cookie dough

Wrap up by rolling into bars. Cut into small squares.
by Johnathan Kana

I still remember the first time I caught a glimpse of myself in the white uniform Texas prisoners wear. That was when it really sank in: I had become just another face in a sea of hundreds of people reduced to the worst thing they’d ever done.

Dressed in those drab garments, I looked no different from the next prisoner in line. No one who saw me in that moment would ever guess that I was an Eagle Scout, an all-state musician, and the valedictorian of my high school. They’d have no idea that before coming to prison, I graduated college with honors and was working on a master’s degree with a full-tuition fellowship.

In the free world, I had been an overachiever who, by all outward appearances, was going to do big things with his life. But behind bars, staring at myself in that uniform, I felt like the biggest failure in the world.

False sense of success

The kind of success most people pursue, measured by the money in your bank account or the power you wield, is a shifty, dangerous beast. The more you feed it, the hungrier it gets. And the beast. The more you feed it, wield, is a shifty, dangerous account or the power you say you’re going to do big things with that photo was taken, I had decided to trust God for my future instead of trying to blaze my own path.

I no longer chase after the “success beast” of big salaries and impressive job titles. The only title that matters to me now is “child of God.” That’s the most prestigious title I could ever have.

I'm struck by how strangely happy I seem. The uniform is as drab as ever, but neither of us seems to mind. Perhaps that’s because by the time that photo was taken, I had decided to trust God for my future instead of trying to blaze my own path.

I no longer chase after the “success beast” of big salaries and impressive job titles. The only title that matters to me now is “child of God.” That’s the most prestigious title I could ever have.

Sudoku: Find the Key to Success!

Complete the Sudoku puzzle below. Then use the numbers in the top row to fill in corresponding letters on the secret message!

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Use the letters directly above each number to unlock the message below!

E D C B A

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This Chef Is Serving Up Second Chances

by Grayson Pope

Brandon Chrostowski: As a teenager, I faced a 10-year sentence on a drug-related felony charge, but the judge let me off with probation. When I was on probation, I ended up meeting a chef in downtown Detroit who mentored me in the fundamentals of the culinary arts and hospitality. From there I just ran with it. I went to school in New York, then worked in some great restaurants in France. I went back to New York in 2002, and I kept getting these phone calls from back home in Detroit where people would say, “Quentin got murdered,” or a chef I worked with had just been killed. When I heard about the losses, I realized [that] my stars had changed because of others investing in my life and development. That’s really what encouraged me, and I said, “Hey, I’ve got to build something.”

U: That “something” became the EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute, located in the heart of Detroit. What’s the vision behind EDWINS?

Brandon Chrostowski: As a person with a felony conviction—regardless of if they’ve been to prison or Princeton or wherever—Edwins is to empower them to take control of their future and show them what’s possible. On the outside, we offer a six-month program through EDWINS where formerly incarcerated people learn dining room and kitchen skills. We wanted to carve out a space where there’s a social work center that tells the story of EDWINS. Tell us more about the vision.

BC: The idea behind EDWINS is that every human being, regardless of their past, has a right to a fair and equal future. We want to create an environment where we can give someone a second chance and developing their careers and dreams. The overarching vision is to make sure we change the societal perception of former prisoners reentering society. We shouldn’t overlook someone’s potential regardless of if they’ve been to prison or Princeton or wherever.

U: How does the program work?

BC: It starts in prison. We teach men and women basic culinary skills and what it takes to work in hospitality. The goal is to empower them to take control of their future and show them what’s possible. On the outside, we offer a six-month program through EDWINS where formerly incarcerated people learn dining room and kitchen skills. At the end of the program, graduates can either apply for a job with EDWINS or we’ll help them find one elsewhere. Since housing can be such an issue for former prisoners, we have a separate campus with three buildings and houses for current students and graduates. There’s a library, fitness center, and test kitchen. That’s a place where someone can live in a safe environment and study.

U: These programs have garnered a lot of attention, especially because of the Oscar-nominated documentary “Knife Skills” that tells the story of EDWINS. Tell us more about the film.

BC: I knew the message behind EDWINS had to be captured to be able to reach inside the walls and get to people who are losing hope. In 2013, I ended up having dinner with a filmmaker who won an Oscar and was nominated several times. I started talking to him about a film project on EDWINS. The film goes behind the scenes to show audiences what our program’s like. It’s affected a lot of people. When we screen it in prisons, people are very moved by the film.

U: Some of our readers will be released soon. What advice would you give them as far as how or when to talk about their criminal record during a job interview?

BC: Start from a place of honesty and then expand on what you’ve learned and gained. Imagine a formerly incarcerated person saying, “Hey, I’ve been to prison and served time behind bars, but it really taught me this about myself and pointed me in a direction where I want to accomplish something. It wasn’t ideal, but it helped build my character.” If you hear that, you’re moved by something like that.

U: What other advice can you give our readers?

BC: What you’re going through now can give you perspective in a way nothing else really can. Find out who you are and what you’re supposed to be doing here. That can only come through reflection. Start learning a skill now or refine one you already have through any programming you can find. If you’re passionate about what you do, and you’re willing to listen, then the sky’s the limit. If you keep on working hard, and you embrace your perspective, you will succeed in whatever it is that you want to succeed at. It’s not over. It’s just begun.