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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 days 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



Photo by Chad Prince

Despite coming from a loving middle-class family, Monroe wanted the action of the streets—until it cost him his marriage and fatherhood.

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 helping 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



pamela_d_mcadams/GettyImages

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

Letters to the Editor

Yasin, Pennsylvania

I wanted to say I really enjoyed reading your paper. I have been incarcerated since 3/26/16, but I know I'm not going to be in here forever. I try to stay positive, though sometimes I stress, but reading about how to turn a negative into a positive gives me hope. The main story in your paper that really spoke to me was "How to Calm a Raging Ocean" by E.G. Andrews. Maybe because I'm in here for letting my anger get the best of me also. I'm just trying to stay focused and do whatever I need to so I can get on with my life. Jesus takes us as we are and makes us what we should be.

Dear Yasin: So glad you found inspiration in Ocean's story. Keep focused on moving forward and following Jesus' example. We'll keep you in prayer.

Jason, Missouri

I saw your ad in the Inside Journal Volume 27, Number 2 about finding a closer relationship with God through a Bible study course. It said you can get a Bible also. I do not need a Bible. I have a good King James Study Bible that I've had for the last 10-plus years. I'm ashamed to say that it hasn't seen much use over the years. I hope to change that with this letter. I humbly ask you to point me in the right direction. Thank you for your time.

Dear Jason: Spring is a time of growth and renewal—what better time to dust off your study Bible! Try carving out



Gen Neal/Photo/Stock

10 minutes a day to read and pray. You can also check out resources on Scripture at the library or through your chaplain. If you don't know where to even begin, one suggestion is to begin with the Gospels (Mark is a good starter), and then move to Ephesians and Philippians. God bless your studies.

Joe, Colorado

Prison began for me around the age of 5. Sometime around then, I accepted the idea that if I acted good, I would be loved, but if I acted badly, I would be shunned or punished. That is when I began to wear my mask and costume and thus commenced the show of my life. This show has run me ragged and enslaved me. Coming to prison, the physical place, was the death knell for all that and the beginning of a new life in Christ. I had studied about God, but really knew nothing of Him. I have only just begun to allow myself to experience what it means to be adopted by God in Christ. Thank God He has begun to wean me of my addictions to pride, self-reliance, hardness of heart, and narcissism. He is patient; He helps us change.

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

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.

One Foot

Continued from page 1

orthotics 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 still be 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 prosthetist, 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.

"His 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." ■



Photo by Chad Prince

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. bottle)
- 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 ramen
- 3 pkgs. sugar
- Half a bag of corn chips
- 1 summer sausage
- Squeeze cheese
- 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 rice 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. pkgs.) chicken, cooked
- 4 individual serving pouches (approx. 2 oz. each) ranch dressing
- Tapatio hot sauce

In medium bowl, combine hot sauce and chicken. Warm 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 and stir together. 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 separate bowl, add a little water, and stir; then 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 oatmeal
- 1/2 pkg. vanilla wafers
- 6 sugar packets
- 1/2 cup French vanilla creamer
- 1 bag M&Ms
- Cereal of your choice

In large bowl, crunch up vanilla wafers. Add dry oatmeal. Stir in creamer and peanut butter. Then stir in cereal, M&Ms, and honey. Mix it all together. In separate bowl, microwave the caramels (about 30 seconds at a time until melted); add melted caramels to the mixture. Pat the mixture into bars. ■

Rewriting Your Recipe for Success

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 longer you chase it, the more likely it is to turn on you. In an instant, everything you've worked for can be gone.

I know, because prior to my arrest, I fed and chased that beast for the better part of my adult life, only to spend two long years of incarceration reflecting on the high cost of my ambition. Before prison, I had seriously invested myself in a career path that, after prison, was now closed to me, probably forever.

With a criminal record, my college degree wouldn't help me much when it was time to apply for a job after prison, and I

leaves you unfulfilled? There behind bars, I finally realized it was time to stop chasing the beast. Time to re-evaluate my idea of success.

In the Bible, Jesus warns His followers not to strive for fame, riches, and other worldly markers of success. He says that it's possible for someone to "gain the whole world" (Matthew 16:26)—to have everything the world says we should ever want or need—yet feel utterly unfulfilled, like there's still something missing that only God can supply. Jesus

also tells His followers a story about a rich man in Luke 12:16–21. At the end of that story, Jesus says, "A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

God doesn't measure His people by impressive job titles, fancy college degrees, and high salaries—things society often equates with success. In fact, seeking those things can often lead to pride and greed.

The Bible talks about success as a recipe of love, compassion, generosity, and humility. God's Word says that "God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth" (Matthew 5:5).

didn't exactly have a Plan B for my life. I felt like my chances for "success," at least how I had always defined that term, were gone. That terrified me.

Sitting there in my prison whites, I had to face the fact that there was still a part of me that was desperately sick. If I looked deep inside, I could sense a void that would never be satisfied, even with a good job, a great education, and friends in high places. What good is success if it only



QUIT THE RAT RACE!

Are you chasing after unfulfilling goals? If you don't surrender yourself to God, all the money and power on the planet will mean nothing in the end. Romans 12:2 says, "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."

If you don't know how to find success God's way, start with this simple prayer:

"Lord, help me to see that You are the only path to true success. Show me how to stop seeking the things that don't matter to You. Humble me to seek You above all else. Amen."

To discover how God can show you a more fulfilling life than you ever dreamed, sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through one of our trusted partner organizations by writing to "Recipe for Success," c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. To request a large-print Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible in English or Spanish, see the ad on this page.

True success

Scripture says all of us have rejected God. We are determined to pursue our own vision of the "good life." Yet no matter how hard we try, we always come up short.

God sent His Son Jesus to earth to show us how to truly live the "good life." Because we could never fix our sick hearts on our own, Jesus took all our sins and selfishness to the cross, where He died a criminal's death on our behalf. Anyone willing to turn to Jesus can become a child of God—and know real success.

I still have a picture of me in that white prison uniform. It's a snapshot with my wife in the unit visitation room. Each time I stumble across it, 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. ■

Johnathan Kana is a former prisoner who now serves as a freelance writer and musician. He lives with his family in Texas.

Photo by naruedom/GettyImages

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!

S	C	G	F	I	R	P	U	O
	4			7		5		6
3						8		
			2					9
			7	3		4		5
1		6		2	4			
8					2		7	
	1	2						4
7		9		8			5	

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

[] [] D
 1 6
 [] [] Y [] [] []
 7 2 [] 6 3 8
 [] E [] [] E
 8 4 7 5
 [] [] []
 9 6 8
 [] [] [] E [] [] !
 2 3 4 4 2 2

See Page 4 for answer key.

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- ✓ Your facility name
- ✓ Your facility address for prisoner parcel delivery
- ✓ Whether you want English or Spanish*

*Bibles are available in large-print English or large-print Spanish. Limit one Bible per person.

This Chef Is Serving Up Second Chances

by Grayson Pope

Brandon Chrostowski is the owner and founder of EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute in Cleveland, Ohio. EDWINS is a French fine-dining restaurant staffed entirely by formerly incarcerated men and women. Inside Journal sat down with Brandon to talk about second chances and how to prepare for future job success.

Inside Journal: Where did you get the idea for EDWINS?

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



Photo courtesy of Brandon Chrostowski

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.”

IJ: That “something” became the EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute. What’s the vision behind EDWINS?

BC: The idea behind EDWINS is that every human being, regardless of their past, has a right to a fair and equal future. We wanted to carve out a mission that’s committed to giving people 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 perspective regardless of if they’ve been to prison or Princeton or wherever.

IJ: 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.

IJ: 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’s 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.

IJ: 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.

IJ: 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. ■

News + Notes

FIRST STEP Act Becomes Law

The FIRST STEP Act, federal criminal justice reform legislation supported by both the Democrats and Republicans, was passed in December 2018 by overwhelming majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The bill, which will affect more than 180,000 people in the Bureau of Prisons, was signed into law by President Trump Dec. 21, 2018.

Among other measures, the FIRST STEP Act will: enact modest but important sentencing reforms; increase the good-time credit cap from 47 days per year to 54 days per year; recommend that federal prisoners be eligible for transfer to facilities no more than 500 miles from home; increase eligibility for visits and calls with loved ones; and allow prisoners to get earned-time credits for participating in programs proven to reduce recidivism.

The FIRST STEP Act was supported by many groups,

including the ACLU, Right on Crime, and Prison Fellowship.

Florida Restores Voting Rights

Approximately 70 million American adults—or 1 in 3—have a criminal record, limiting their access to education, jobs, and housing. In some settings, they are not permitted to vote. In November 2018, during the nationwide mid-term elections, Florida voters approved Amendment 4, a measure to restore voting rights for people with a felony conviction (except for homicide or a felony sexual offense) as soon as they fully complete their sentence, including prison, probation, and parole.

The decision, which changed the Florida state constitution, affects more than 1 million people. Previously, Floridians with a felony conviction could only have their voting rights restored by the state’s Executive Clemency Board.

‘We Believe in Second Chances’

Since 2017, Prison Fellowship has led the charge to declare April as Second Chance™ Month. This nationwide effort exists to unlock opportunities for men and women who have paid their debt to society and create awareness of the challenges they face.

For the past two years, the United States Senate passed a resolution to declare April Second Chance Month. In doing so, the Senate joined the White House, governors, state legislatures, and more than 232 organizations to

promote second chances from coast to coast. Community events, such as the Second Chance 5K in Minnesota, have expanded each year.

James J. Ackerman, president and CEO of Prison Fellowship, says, “We are fighting for those Americans ... who wish to regain their dignity and make important contributions to society.”

In the middle of the movement for second chances are returning citizens and currently incarcerated men and women. In 2018, people with a criminal record shared their stories at a community prayer walk event in Washington, D.C.,

while prisoners at facilities in Ohio and Minnesota worked with prison officials to organize Second Chance 5Ks on their yards.

April 2019’s Second Chance Month theme is “We Believe in Second Chances.” There will be more 5Ks—both in prisons and out—prayer walks throughout the country, reentry fairs, and church events raising awareness of the importance of second chances. ■

SUDOKU KEY

S	C	G	F	I	R	P	U	O
2	4	1	9	7	8	5	3	6
3	9	7	6	4	5	8	1	2
6	8	5	2	1	3	7	4	9
9	2	8	7	3	1	4	6	5
4	7	3	5	6	9	1	2	8
1	5	6	8	2	4	3	9	7
8	6	4	1	5	2	9	7	3
5	1	2	3	9	7	6	8	4
7	3	9	4	8	6	2	5	1

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

G O D
1 6

I S Y O U R
7 2 6 3 8

R E C I P E
8 4 7 5

F O R
9 6 8

S U C C E S S !
2 3 4 4 2 2



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