

Stories, Poems, and Reflections



from

U-Turn Permitted



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PATRICK SUTTON

Moment of Change It was a moment of change for me when I called home and my daughter answered. “Hello, daddy.” “Hey Baby.” “Daddy, please come home. We miss you.” Then a pause on the line followed by shrieks of pain and sniffing. The phone crashes or drops to the floor. I can hear the pain in her cries. I hear her footsteps running away from the phone and I hear yelling. “Why daddy say he can’t come home no time soon?” Now a voice back on the other end of the phone, soft and shaky, almost quivering. I can feel the pain in her words. “Baby, we miss you. We need you here.”

That was the moment of change for me.



A Place I'd Like to Be I would like to be at home with my children, playing games and watching movies, sitting on the couch with my little girls, reading them stories and eating popcorn or playing Madden with my son. Or visiting my mother while she cooks up a delicious meal for me and her grandkids. Or maybe sitting in the park with my woman laughing and joking, looking up at stars, enjoying life.

NATHANIEL BROWN

Things I Regret and Don't Regret As I look back on my life there are a lot of things that I regret. I regret the choices I made in life like, hanging with the wrong crowd, selling drugs and gang banging. But as I got older, I got wiser. At the same time, I'm kind of glad I went through the things I've done. If I had never gone through them I would have never learned. That's why I want to better myself so I can better my son and he won't have to go through the same mistakes in life that I've been through.

There are a couple of things in life that I don't regret: my son, my family and U-turn. I'm very happy to be in a program that fits me and is willing to look past my background and help me. U-turn is always helping me and I only been here a week. So I know if the staff here can help me, they can help anyone succeed.



U-Turn U-turn has changed my way of thinking far as controlling my temper and changing the way I look at employment. I always had that attitude that they will not hire me anyway, so I was not applying for the job. But since I've been in U-turn, it's taught me how to face those challenges and no matter what never give up because there are jobs where they will hire me.

Also everyone in the classroom is positive. I've never been around this many positive people at once. But sometimes I think to myself, when this program is over for me, what am I going to do then? Then I say to myself, when times get rough just think about all the things I learned in U-turn and stay focused.

PHAEDRION COLLINS

A Person I Admire My sister Doris is a very strong women. She is 5'7", has short hair, weighs about 105 pounds. She has a great sense of humor, loves to try new things, loves to cook and joke. She is a very honest and tells you what is real about yourself and why it's that way.

My sister put herself through medical school, had four children -- so many obstacles in her life. Now being an RN and still going to school to go further in her life is amazing to me.



Change I ask myself questions about when I get out. I know that it's not going to be easy for me but I'm hoping that this program will help me get started in the right direction of making a life time change -- being more productive in my life and in my child's life. Coming from the South Side played a big part in the drug selling and gang activity.

Now I know that I have to change in order to be successful in this life. The moment I knew I had to change was when I was locked up for the fourth time. Then I knew I didn't want this life. When it came to me that my child would be 11 years old when I get out, that was when my way of life and my thinking changed. Now I know that I must work 9 to 5.

ERIC TAYLOR



U-Turn My experience at U-Turn has been great. It has given me a sense of motivation to succeed. I feel by coming to U-Turn I took a step toward making my life better today than I was yesterday. I have learned to look at things in an open-minded way instead of a close-minded state. I also learned in order to change you have to be able to think differently and not worry about how some old friends may view your change.

We have gotten some very good teaching from Derrick who taught us about maladaptive thinking and about thought processes, which I believe is the key to making that U-turn in life. And Jose is all that and some. I heard a lot about him through other alumni and he speaks on topics with confidence and assurance. I heard so much pertaining to the workforce that's out there. Hose has taught us new language to add to resumes and skills to add to what you received while incarcerated. Andrew has shown me about how to explain ourselves in the mock-interview process, and he showed me how to do a resume.

So U-turn is a program that gives many people like me (felons) the opportunity to learn ways to succeed in life in general.

CHRISTOPHER

Chicago A place where I don't want to be is Chicago. The reason why is because of the corrupt neighborhoods and police. I feel I'm surrounded by negative people with envious minds and thoughts. There are gangs and drugs on every corner, even if you don't visually see them.

I don't want to live in an area where I have to look over my shoulder and have correct change in my pocket when I go to the store. I also think about the well being of my child playing in front of the house or in the park and being a victim to a stray bullet meant for someone else.



KENNETH LEMON

An Ongoing Project The process of destroying your life is an ongoing project. When an individual decides to stop destroying their life and to repair and rebuild, that's also an ongoing project.

I started my destruction or delay of growth in my youthful years. At the age of 12 or 13 alcohol came into my life. From alcohol to weed to hard drugs. By the time I was about 35, I had tried just about every drug on the planet. I started out just socializing, but it changed into habits. Never wanting to admit anything was wrong, I continued on for several more years until the behavior had become maladaptive. I felt it was normal behavior until I found myself on my back to prison for the fourth time. What's wrong with me? What was I thinking? Am I crazy or something? No, just addicted.



Now being sober is the greatest feeling, besides my joy in Christ. I finally understand that there is something different I am meant to do. Change hasn't been easy at all, but it has been very necessary.

A Feeling of Release These writing exercises help me release and express what's in my subconscious mind. The thoughts that were once mine alone now belong also to those who hear them. Who knows, maybe my thoughts will magnify thoughts in someone else's subconscious and help set a thought or two free.

It's a good feeling to release my thoughts, and rare that I have such a good group of listeners. So when I share a thought or two I hope it not only helps me, but I hope it may also help you.

REGINA JOHNSON



El-Shaddia (*This is for someone who helped change my life and influence a better perspective on my life.*) For the third time around I sat on a cold cot in a cold room with cold tiles and a cold heart to match. I wanted my freedom. “Dear God, get me at this jam. I promise I’ll do good this time,” I said to him day after day. But I got no response. Maybe He was tired of my old broken promises.

Finally I began to contemplate on how and why I had gotten locked up to begin with. I thought to myself, “Why do I keep coming back. I’d get out and say I’m for real. This time I’m not going back.” But after time I would return to my old ways.

So finally I sat and thought what must I do differently? What must change about myself? (Obviously my thinking patterns were off.) I know I needed to change and I tried but it was always the same results. Who can help me? Ma and Daddy gave encouraging words, but even their love was not powerful enough to change me. God, can you help me?

Then it hit me. A voice inside of me said, “You’re begging for physical freedom but you never ask for spiritual freedom. You’re always looking to change through your own self will. But you never sought a Higher Power.” And from that day on, I began to talk to the Lord. Instead of planning on what I was going to do and wear once I got out, I began to allow God to cleanse my Heart and renew my thoughts. He gave me the motivation and unconditional Love. When something is out of place, He used his word to correct me. I stayed under the influence and smoking squares for a while. But He even took away the desires for all of those substances. (And I haven’t touched one since I’ve been home.)

In the streets they called me Lil Ma. But when I gave my Life to Christ, that part of me died. In fact she got drowned in the Baptismal Waters. So I used this to give my God Glory. Because only his love was powerful enough to change me.

Who Are You? And just who do you think you are? I’ve seen you at your worst, you’ve seen me at mine. So who are you to talk? In my face you said, “You can get it together. Go ahead and do it girl.” Now you see my book bag strapped on, enrolled in class. I pass I see you still doing the same old you. But you look at me like “Who does she think she is. She’s still such and such. She’ll be back on the block, messing up her life.”

But see that’s the difference between you and me. You curse me, I pray for you. I wish you nothing but blessing and hope that positivity arises within you. So I ask you this question, “Who do you think you are to talk about me?” It’s only right that I answer this question myself. Naw, ma, I don’t think I’m all that. I don’t think I’m on the top of the world. I know I’m not where I should be. But thank God I’m not where I used to be. Can I have pride in my step? Can I hold my head high because I’m highly motivated and blessed? I wish you’d allow me to encourage you, before you criticize take a look at yourself. Who are you?

MAURICE BROWN

Experience from U-Turn

The experience from U-Turn has become helpful to me. Every day I learn something new. For example, the first week anger management showed me different ways to look at things, different ways to think and the maladaptive thinking patterns that I followed on a day-to-day basis.

But this program is not about just finding a job. It's also about bettering yourself, seeing life in a way that others have been seeing for years -- positively, with love, and picking yourself up after making a mistake that you now regret.



Turning my life around!

Part 1 The moment Lawrenceville Correctional Center release me from their prison, I knew at that point in time that I would never return. Every day "since" has been a blessing. I united back with my friends and family, and I am looking forward to getting a job. But there are goals in my life that I need to reach. And my first goal is to go see my grandmother. I have not seen my grandmother since 2005 and it's already 2011. We had some miscommunications and they never got resolved. But she has been by my side during the time I was locked up. But I'm still holding the madness that made all this happen. So when the right time and moment come I will show up at her doorstep with open arms.

Part 2 Well, this weekend I completed my first goal. The goal was to go see my grandmother and that's what I did. I was very excited and nervous at the same time, 'cause it has been five and a half years since we last seen each other. But she didn't recognize me at the door because my face now has a beard.

LAWRENCE CHAMBERS

Here I Stand My name is Lisa Williams. I am 39 years of age. My ethnicity consists of 50% Chippewa Indian and 50% African American. I am 143 lbs. of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual strength. Soft, smooth, blemish-free toffee brown skin covers my entire 5 ft. 6 in. frame. Soft, jet-black shoulder length hair falls from a head that consists of attentive light brown eyes, understanding ears, occasionally flared nostrils, and persuasive full lips that occasionally produce a smile that'll charm a goldfish clean out of the water in its tank.

I am not only a mother of four, I am a mother of most. I am a God-fearing homemaker with the aspirations of being a radiologist/x-ray technician. I have proven ability to love, care, nourish, protect, teach, discipline, encourage, support, applaud, embarrass, understand, laugh, cry, and pray. I am in search of a son who will allow me to provide all of these things and more. A son who I will mean nothing but the universe to. A son who will admire me.

Well, Lisa, my name is Lawrence Chambers and please, look no further because here I stand.



Mrs. Cleo I wish my name was “Mrs. Cleo” – I would’ve seen it coming.

My mother always told me that I had a bad habit of befriending the less fortunate. But I never paid attention to that statement until she said it to me on the opposite side of a thick glass. My bad habit had led me to a six-year bit in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Why couldn’t my name have been “Mrs. Cleo”? I would’ve prevented all of this from happening. My mother’s words continued to pierce through me as I served my sentence, and they still continue to pierce through me even now, as I write this story.

I know this might come off as a bit bizarre, but what if I had already possessed “Mrs. Cleo’s” fortune-telling powers at one point? I mean . . . think about it . . . my mother used to always tell me that I had a bad habit of befriending the less fortunate. So maybe had I seized that habit when I was first notified of it, I could’ve prevented this consequence.

But you know what? Even though my name isn’t “Mrs. Cleo” and never will be, I still possess the power to change the outcome of my future.



SHERMAN BAKER

The Person I Admire Most I admire my mother the most because she's a strong black woman, strong enough to even put up with all the trouble I've caused. She taught me in the simplest way but I still went the other way on her. She pushes me to read the Bible and always puts God first. She motivates me to do better in life because she knows I'm better within my inner self.

I was raised by both parents who had good jobs and still chose the streets. My entire time being incarcerated, from 1997 all the way to 2011, she stood by my side. Yes, I'm the youngest, but she always looked at me as the oldest. I was her chosen and right now today she still in my corner. I'm blessed to have such a wonderful, caring mother and in due time I will show her just how much I really admire her.

BARNARR PATTON

The Person I Admire the Most

Fearless, strong, intelligent, polite, energetic, cheerful, expressive, and humble. Those are the words that I can best describe this person. This person has been through so much adversity that I sometimes wonder how are they still standing. This person has had doors closed in their face, property and possessions taken from them, dumped by people they loved. This person always amazes me by the decisions they have to make. Whether good or bad, they stand firm by each one. This person is always open for suggestions and continues to grow mentally every second, minute, hour, and day. But this person is always trying to improve something about themselves. This person is a God-fearing individual, but lives life on the edge.



Do you know who this person is? This person is you!!

RONNIE BROWN

Change

If I can change my thoughts
I can change my life.
I could change that crooked
Road straight
That thought of hate to love
That one last lie to truth
Thoughts of disappear to hope
That one enemy to a friend
If I can change my thoughts
I can change my life.



A Place

Part 1 A room where the rain blows right through and darkness never leaves. A place where heat is seldom there, depending on the time of year. A place where friends never visit and family never stays. A place I can never call home.

Part 2 This is the place where I would love to be: work from 7 to 3, dinner at 5, chores by 7, and leisure by 9.

Reading

I have a passion for reading. I can take a trip to China while sitting in New York. I can sail the sea and smell the salty breeze. I can fly a plane and never leave the ground. I can hear Alice talk and never see her face. When I read a book it takes me to another place.

SHAWN RICHARDSON



From Dark to Light A place I don't want to be is a dark hole as such as my past. It was cruel, controlling, and physically punishing. I'm not going there anymore. A place I would like to be is where I am at right now: humble, patient, and at ease with myself, because of the steps I'm taking to change my life for me and my family.

And with that, I will reach y short term goal, and that's thinking first and never saying can't. Complete U-turn and work release program. Then move forward to my long term goal which is to enroll in college and build a ladder to a better future for me and my family.

SHAWN JOHNSON

My Positive Friend My mother is my positive friend. She is a God -fearing lady who has my back through thick and thin. My mother was the only person in my corner when I was in prison for nine years. When no one in my family cared, her words were my motivational tools of life.

She taught me to cook, clean, and to live a God-fearing life. She always told me to always keep some kind of job and never ask anyone for anything. And she also taught me a long time ago that a poor wind blows the same. So never waste a day doing nothing.

My mother's love is truly unconditional and also real. She's my one and only true, positive friend.

