

#EVERYONE'S COLUMN

ISSUE
9B

A JOURNEY OF CHANGE

#Everyone's Column is made up of submissions from inmates, desistors, staff and volunteers. It aims to allow you a space of reflection and promote a sense of community. We hope that you will inspire and be inspired.

FEATURING SUBMISSIONS FROM RCU

RCU, also known as the Resolute Correctional Unit, is a transformative environment that supports and strengthens renounees' prosocial identities and their resolve towards a gang-free lifestyle. Renounees live as a community with a shared purpose and opportunities are provided to further strengthen their prosocial identity through a series of programmes and practices.

RIGHT LIVING

"There is no real excellence in all this world which can be separated from right living" – David Starr Jordan

This is something I never would have realized if not for my admission into the DRC. Before that, I did not live a life of integrity, nor did I lead a principle-centered life grounded in values deeply rooted in my heart and mind. In truth, my life was anything but principle-centered. I cycled endlessly between work-centered, pleasure-centered, and possession-centered living. My loved ones—my family, my girlfriend—were mere afterthoughts, secondary to whatever materialistic pursuit consumed me at the time.

It was only during my time in the DRC that I began to realize what truly lies within us. Empowered by a growing self-awareness of my past wrongdoings and the road ahead, I came to understand that I have the power to decide how things affect me. Between stimulus and response lies the freedom to choose—and I wanted to, no, I needed to put an end to my unhealthy, self-centered behaviors. I had to start embracing a principle-centered life. This renewed vision has enabled me to love the people closest to me and to begin treating them the way they deserve. The biggest change wasn't something external—it was internal. It was a complete shift in my approach to life.

DISCIPLINE



Discipline is what transformed me behind bars. I had many bad habits before, often making excuses by blaming my circumstances and personal weaknesses. But now, I've developed better habits and set daily goals—goals that will support me even after my release. These include reading books, learning and memorizing new words each day, praying for strength and self-confidence, listening to my cellmates' stories to gain perspective, and making the most of my yard time to build physical fitness—something I rarely did outside. Today, I am stronger—mentally, physically, and spiritually. I am ready to serve my family and contribute to my community. Everyone will face their own challenges, but if you stay disciplined and work hard, you can overcome them. This battle can be won.



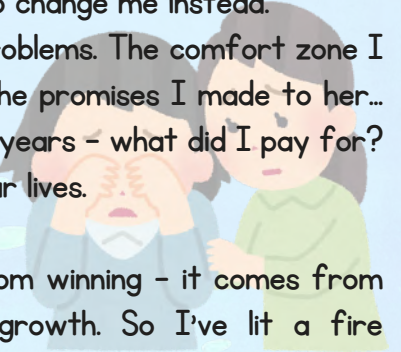
FINDING TRUTHS

My journey of change began when I decided to renounce my old ways. My family was the driving force behind this decision. I could see their dedication through their visits, and they've always been there for me during hard times. While friends disappeared during my struggles, my family remained. That's when I realized: family is everything. The path to change wasn't easy. I faced ridicule and stigma from others. People I once called friends turned their backs on me and cast me aside. Ironically, I'm grateful for those who criticised and rejected me—their actions brought clarity to my path and revealed who my true friends really were.

Through this journey of change, I've found greater happiness and a sense of freedom. I want to tell everyone that change is never easy, especially the journey itself, because that's when you realise life isn't a fairytale. But change is constant, and I encourage everyone to keep going, no matter how tough it gets. In the end, it's worth it. That's when you'll find true happiness. Trust me—you'll feel the difference, and your life will become more beautiful than you ever imagined.

THE HARD TRUTHS

I wanted to do better, to be good enough to start a family. I had plans to wake up early to exercise and lose weight, maybe strengthen my faith. I wanted so much to change myself, but I couldn't. So something more drastic had to happen – the system had to change me instead. I thought I was having fun, but I was just running away from life's problems. The comfort zone I chose led me to disaster: no money, no home, no kids, no future. All the promises I made to her... Now she's old, having worked her youth away. She paid rent for seven years – what did I pay for? I went through life doing the easy things. Shame on me! I've wasted our lives.



I was scared of failure. Now I realise my strength doesn't come from winning – it comes from challenges, setbacks, and obstacles. These are opportunities for growth. So I've lit a fire underneath myself, embracing the chaos as if I chose it. Like water, I focus under pressure, working with it, not against it, to transform my life.

Now I wake up early to meditate and run like mad during yard. I want to be good enough for my family, so I do the hard things.

LETTING GO THE PAST ME



Getting thrown into the DRC has certainly turned my life upside down. Beyond losing my freedom and leaving jobs unfinished, along with the accompanying misuse, what I regret most is shocking my family out of their wits.

As I look deeper into my inner world, I find the hardest thing to do is admit that I'm weak—that I allowed myself to cling to every possible excuse just to avoid facing reality head-on. And what is that reality? That I'm still holding on to past disappointments, losses, hurts, and pain—afraid to let go for fear that I might begin to forget the people tied to those memories. That I am far from the person I want to be, or could be. In their words, I am my own obstacle to achieving inner peace.

But there was a glimmer of hope—two lines of lyrics kept echoing in my mind, loosely translated from Chinese: **"Set the yesterdays free, so that the tomorrows may come"**. For that to happen, I must set myself free from my past selves—release the baggage, come to terms with who I am, forgive myself, and move forward in life.

THE CARROT

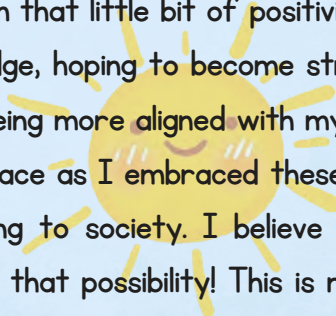
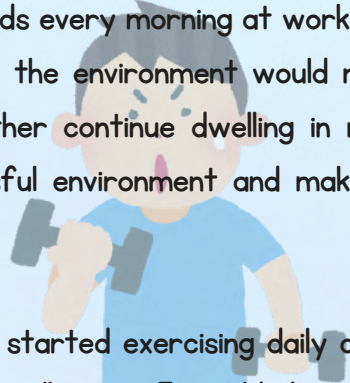
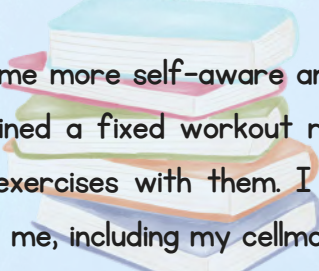


EGG & COFFEE BEAN



When I received the news of my incarceration, chills and worries ran up my spine. I was concerned about my career, income, family, future, and life in DRC. There were countless uncertainties about life both inside and outside as I was handed my kitbox and stepped into this four-walled cell with grilles. I was petrified.

This state of fear lasted for at least a week until I recalled a story my mentor had shared with me when I first joined my company years ago. It was about carrots, eggs, and coffee beans. In their natural state, carrots are hard, eggs are brittle and crack easily, and coffee beans are hard with only a faint aroma that seems insignificant at first. But what happens when you put them in hot water? The once-hard carrots turn soft. The eggs become hard. And the coffee beans? They adapt and transform into the familiar drink most of us hold in our hands every morning at work. It dawned on me that despite how worried, upset, or angry I was, the environment would not change, and I would remain here until my time was up. I could either continue dwelling in my current state or be like the coffee bean - adapting to this stressful environment and making positive changes to both my surroundings and myself.



I became more self-aware and made small changes to my routine. I started exercising daily and maintained a fixed workout regimen. Sometimes, encouraged by my cellmates, I would do even more exercises with them. I made a conscious effort to smile more, knowing that everybody around me, including my cellmates, could benefit from that little bit of positivity. I helped with cell chores and read books to equip myself with knowledge, hoping to become stronger and better. I let go of my previous worries and spent that time being more aligned with myself - something we rarely do in our busy lives outside. I felt more at peace as I embraced these changes and looked forward to starting classes and eventually returning to society. I believe the best version of myself is yet to come, as long as I maintain faith in that possibility! This is never the end of life but possibly the beginning of something we all could look forward to. Keep smiling!



THANK YOU FOR READING THIS ISSUE OF #EVERYONE'S COLUMN!
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