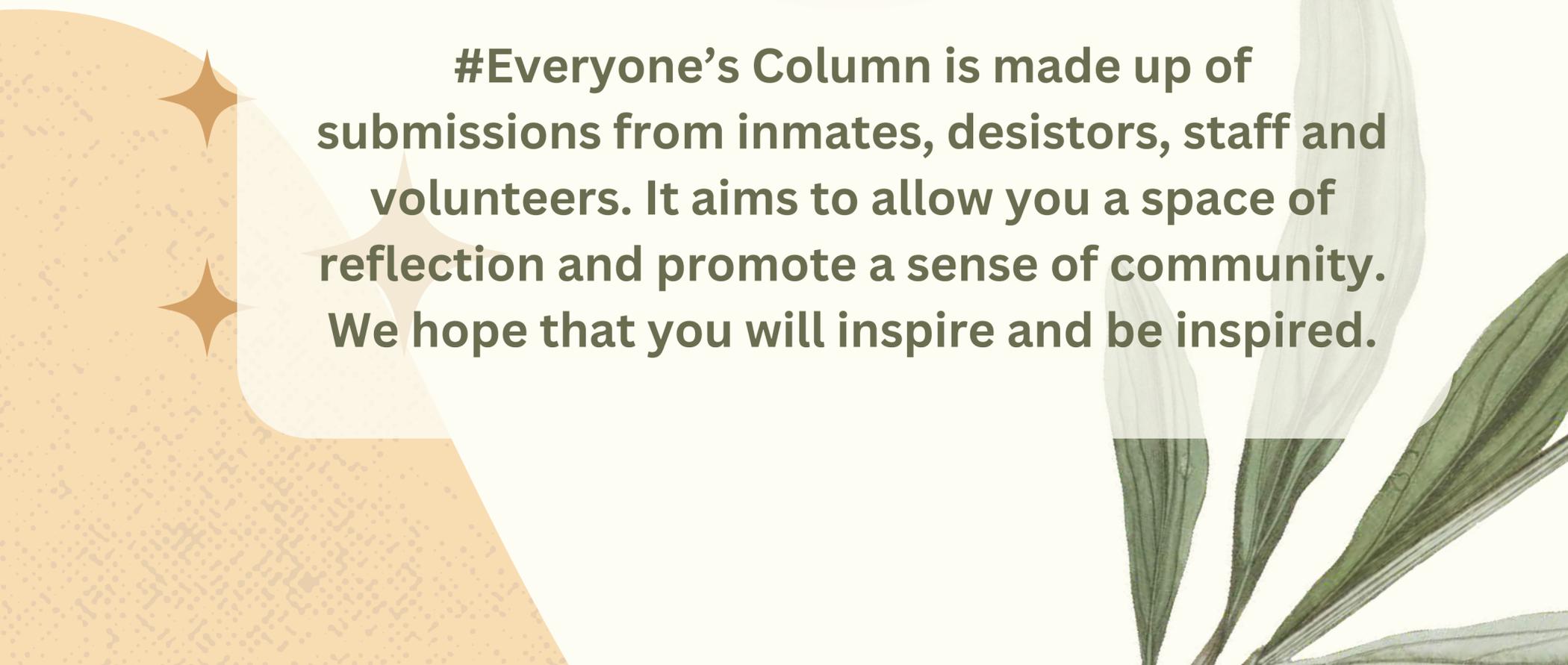


#Everyone's Column

Issue 5



#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.

Rebuilding Trusting Relationships



A circus performer was practicing his walk on a tight rope at a height. There were a few kids who managed to sneak into the area and watched in awe as the performer walked with a balancing pole from one end to another countless times without falling.

A wheelbarrow was then passed to the performer and a total of 20+ successful runs was completed on the rope from end to end, except one time.

The single unsuccessful attempt saw the wheelbarrow plummeting to the ground resulting in its body badly damaged. The performer did not fall and continued his practice knowing the next practice routine. A bystander who stood near the kids asked them if the performer would be able to push the wheelbarrow with a person sitting on it, from end to end. All the kids nodded their heads after having watched the countless successful wheelbarrow runs. But when the bystander asked if any of them would volunteer to be on the wheelbarrow, 3 of the 4 kids turned away in unison while one of them nodded.

When probed further, the kid nonchalantly responded, “He is my daddy!”, and hopped away to join her father in the practice.



The anecdote tells us an important element about trust. Where there is love, there is trust. And to any unrelated person, such trust would be difficult to earn even after only a single significant mistake has been experienced. As a father who had repeatedly let my family down, including my two school-going children, because of my struggle with vices, any non-family member would have chosen not to believe in me. This was never so for my parents, my siblings, my partner, and my kids, all of whom not only continued to support me through my incarceration with lots of encouragement during regular visits and e-letters, but also forgave me unconditionally while trusting that I would keep my commitment never to repeat the same mistake.

On my part, I would need to reciprocate the love and trust by not only tangibly showing my genuine affection for them, but more importantly, to not let them down again upon my release. Deep down within each of us, if we truly love someone and care for their wellbeing, the “love” will underpin all of our choices and actions in life such that we avoid any direct or indirect harm to these people. And with more love, allows for deeper trust to be built.

**My grandmother always said that broken trust is like broken porcelain;
No matter how you fix it, it will never be the same.**

**In due time, we may rebuild the original level of trust through constant reassurance
and care. We tend to forget that even broken porcelain, when put back together,
has its own unique value.**

**“Secrets and lies may break bridges,
but faith and patience may heal the world.”**



“If only you knew how much you have hurt your father...”

Those were the exact words my mum used while tears were streaming down her sad face during my first visit after I was caught by CNB officers for the second time. I knew I had broke my parents’ heart, I was back for just 4 months after being released from my first DRC sentence.

However, the way my mum spoke made me realize that the hurt they are going through is entirely different from all the hurt that I have caused them in the past combined. I feel guilty and devastated for breaking their trust, and it occurred to me that I need to regain their trust and repent my ways.

Attending the FRP classes was an eye-opener for me. I began to realize the role that each of my family members played, the sacrifices they made and the level of stress they experienced while building our family. To be honest, in the past I have never given a thought about all these. One critical lesson I learned in the class was that even though we did the crime, the ones that are paying for it is not only us but our loved ones, and sometimes the ones that are hurting is them rather than us.

The day of my open visit, I was anxiously waiting for my parents to tell them what I had learnt and what I had planned to do when I was back, on top of seeking forgiveness from them. But when we were together, I somehow choked as I was crying from guilt for all the trouble I put them through. My parents consoled me and told me “it’s okay, we know what you are trying to express”, and held me tightly. When I asked if there was anything I could do to make things better, my dad simply told me to stop hurting my health by abusing drugs and to learn to love myself.

With my dad’s words as a motivation, I vow to be drug-free and to prioritize my wellbeing instead of harming my body. During the module on the harmfulness of drugs, I became aware of the damage that drugs could do to our health and I finally began to understand what my dad was trying to tell me. My counsellor also presented us with a phrase that stuck in my head:

“If you change nothing, then nothing will change.”

Getting to Know Myself Better

*This is a submission from an RCU inmate (see pg. 5 for description of RCU)

**“Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world.
Today I am wise, so I want to change myself.”**

During this sentence, I have learnt that I tend to empathize with people surrounding me.

In the past few sentences I had served, I tended to struggle as I questioned myself on why certain inmates would behave in certain ways and I wanted them to behave according how I liked them to. But I realized I got it all wrong, now I have learnt that I cannot change them, but I can change the way I think about them. Now, I am at peace with myself. Something I always tell myself is that I have no power over others, but I have the power to change the way I think about things around me.



STRENGTH.

Everyone looks for strengths that are obvious, easily seen. But what about *quiet strength*? Strength that only you can see and witness, the strength of your body's resilience.

Coming into here with a broken and shattered mind is not a good start to talk about resilience, but you tend to forget that the body still pushes through it. The body remembers and will sometimes force you to get up and keep moving – that's what happened to me.

Isolation and being away from my loved ones, it broke me and all I wanted to do was to just lay down and cry. Even then, my body still pushed me to do what I needed to do. It got me to get up, shower, eat, and move. The body remembers it's needs and fights even when you don't want to sometimes. Slowly, you realize that your body is telling you something.

The realization that even when broken, some part of you will always push through. And no matter what's in store, trust that you can rely on either your body, spirit, or mind to push you through. That quiet strength is something that no one can take from you. Believe in yourself even when you have nowhere else to look.

To me, it was like singing the song from Hercules, I can go the distance – asking me to “Find a way. I can go the distance. I will push on through even when I'm not strong. I will make my way, I will push on through. I will go the distance to where I belong.”

My ego, selfishness, and reputation is what I have been holding on to for far too long. It has affected and held me back from reaching my potential as I was growing up all the way to this point. I've been through Probations, Boys' Home, RTC, and now DRC. I have gotten from bad to worse all because I always fail to reflect and think for the future. I always have this perception that I have to be different from others. Maybe it's me trying to be noticed and to show something. I've gotten into trouble with the law several times and not conformed to rules because that's what got me noticed.

However, today, I am all alone. I've finally given myself a chance to reflect and finally, I understand the importance of family and people who truly care about me. My family and I have been badly affected by my actions, and I feel ashamed that all this while my actions were to suit my ego although they were affecting my family. I've gained nothing as I stood and realized all these.

But today I have realized that I have to put a stop to it and make an immediate change to my life, and taking positive steps is my priority moving forward. I also decided not to surround myself with negative people and not try to fit in. My parents were the ones who have stood by me through thick and thin, not my friends.

After I realized and decided on this, I had bursts of courage in my mindset and attitude. I will no longer be drawn to negativity but instead, focus on my personal growth as well as to take care of my family. It's no longer about how people see me and keeping up my reputation, but it's about how I see myself. I want to be the best version of me. The new me will be ready to show the world that people can change for the better.

After my time alone here, I have learnt to reflect more on my past actions and also to lower down my ego. Moving forward, I would like to practice self-care more and to be closer to God.



What is 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.

I am no stranger to the brunt of the law, for I lived most of my life making mistakes after mistakes which led me to be incarcerated for several times. However, I always tried my best to stay away from drugs as I had a friend who committed suicide because he was high on Meth. However, after multiple persuasions from a few friends of mine to just try it out, I finally gave in. That's all it took me to be hooked and got stuck in the vicious cycle till I was caught by CNB officers and was subsequently placed in DRC.



The time in DRC made me reflect on my past actions, I kept asking myself, why? Why did I get into trouble with the law yet again even after I had promised my loved ones not to? After all, I am aware of the harmful effects drugs could do, so why did I keep on hurting myself by repeatedly breaking my loved ones' trust? With the classes provided and with some self-help books, I devoted my time here to learn how to help myself.

These were some of the fundamental lessons I had learnt:

1. It is hard to change my habits if I never change the underlying beliefs. I can make new plans and goals but if I stay with drug-abusing peers and think that taking drugs is the only way out of stress and boredom, I will definitely sabotage my new plans for change.

2. Negative self-talk can be detrimental too; If I tell myself that I can't change or that drugs are the only way to be happy or have fun with friends, then it will be easy to slide into these mental graves and to accept them as facts.

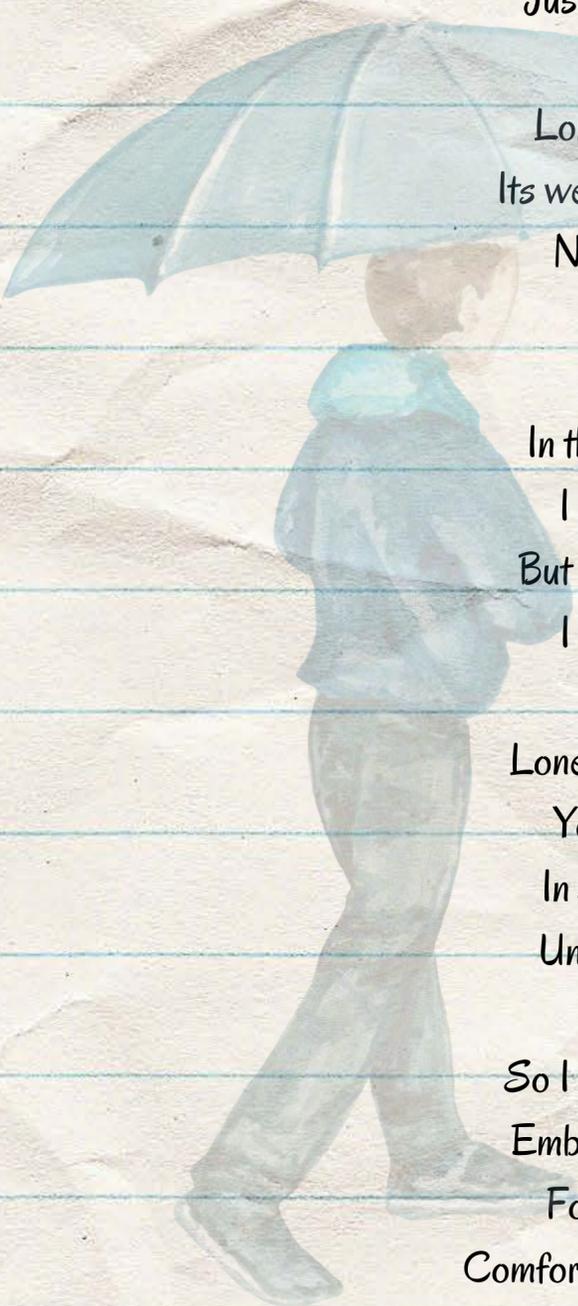
3. I have to decide on what type of person I want to be and to prove it to myself with small wins.

4. I have the power to change my beliefs about myself, I have the choice in every moment.

5. Ultimately, my habits matter because it will help me become the type of person I want to be. They are the channel through which I will develop my deepest beliefs about myself.

With all these in mind, I will strive to be a responsible man to myself and my loved ones and embark on this journey of change.

As the psychologist Carl Jung said, "Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."



In Solitude's embrace, I find my home
A world where loneliness freely roams
No laughter echoes, no voices near
Just echoes of silence, my constant fear

Loneliness whispers in the silent nights
Its weight upon my shoulders, a heavy plight
No hand to hold, no shoulder to lean
I navigate this loneliness, unseen

In the vast expanse of a crowded world
I stand apart, my emotions unfurled
But within the depths of my solitary mind
I discover strength, resilience I find

Loneliness may sting with its piercing dart
Yet it carves a space for self and art
In Solitude's refuge, I explore my soul
Uncover passions, make myself whole

So I walk this path with courage and grace
Embracing loneliness as my sacred space
For in Solitude's depths, I learn to be
Comforted by the whispers of my own company

****This is a submission from a volunteer.***

In the depths of prison, I discovered a profound truth about myself - that I am resilient and capable of transforming my past into a positive force. It was a daunting realization, but I refused to succumb to despair. Instead, I tapped into my inner strength and made a conscious decision to turn my life around.

This newfound knowledge completely changed my perspective. No longer did I see myself as a lost cause. I understood that my past mistakes did not define me. Instead, I had the power to rewrite my narrative and make a difference in the lives of others. Moving forward, I am committed to further understanding myself. I want to explore the root causes of my past actions and uncover the motivations, fears, and insecurities that influenced me. This self-discovery will not only benefit me but also enable me to support others facing similar struggles.

As a caregiver for my mother with Alzheimer's, I witness the impact of this disease firsthand. It fuels my passion for advocating for better resources and treatment options. Furthermore, my work with ex-offenders in their reintegration journey highlights the importance of support and understanding. By delving deeper into my own story and continuously striving for self-understanding, I hope to inspire others to do the same. Life's challenges don't define us; it's how we rise above them that truly matters. Through my journey, I aspire to empower those around me to find their strength, overcome adversity, and embrace their true potential.

*This is a submission from an RCU inmate

“The choices we make now define who we are and will be in the future.”

I have always wondered since the day of my incarceration, how would I cope physically and mentally serving a decade behind bars? It was not something that could be taken lightly nor was it something that can be avoided but eventually I had to accept my fate whether I liked it or not. My journey of self-discovery and purpose had just begun. For the first year in prison, the realization that I had would have to serve a long sentence didn't really affect me. I was rebellious and arrogant, claiming that I was this and that, but the truth was that I had nothing, not even my dignity. After the first year, I received a letter from my nephew stating that my cousin brother had passed away and then it hit me, the taste of freedom would cost me 9 calendars. And without hesitation, I wept and wept and wept. My loved ones would be affected the most. Friends that were close to me passed on, I was left with an ageing mother who had slight dementia and my sister who had lost all hope in me.

“An idle mind is the devil's playground.”

After receiving 16 strokes of the cane, I told myself that I did not want to waste time. I started to reflect on the decisions I made in the past and how it affected me. I discovered something about myself that was the cause of my predicament, it was boredom. Boredom made me reckless and lazy, and I became involved with all sorts of drugs. That was the start and main cause of my multiple incarcerations.

To be or not to be, that is the question.”

The one quality I saw in me was patience. I was able to secure a diploma on film production and develop video editing skills that would benefit me. I got to know myself even better when I attended the Peer Support Academy (PSA). I found out my strengths and weaknesses, learnt about empathy and how to apply it when the need arose. Restorative Practices (RP) was also an eye opener. RP taught me to address problems holistically. Ingenuity occurs when your mind is focused as great things can be achieved with enough patience, focus, and versatility.

“Carpe Diem.”

If there is one thing for me to do now, I would like to seize the day and finish the race that I have started. If you do not take the effort to make the first step for change, then when?

Have you ever thought that strength and softness could actually come together?

Although many people might see that they are of two different things, but they can work hand in hand to help you navigate challenges in life. Being strong doesn't have to mean being cold or insensitive and being soft doesn't have to mean being a pushover. To me, I would like to think of strength as a sturdy foundation that allows me to stay grounded and resilient in tough situations, while being soft is being willing to be open and vulnerable, to connect with others, and to seek support when we need it.

The question is how to be strong and soft then? It's actually all about building mental strength and gentleness at the same time, rather than being rigid when faced with challenges.

I encourage everyone to find a balanced solution between rational thinking and emotional intelligence. By being aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can respond to any difficult situation in a thoughtful and deliberate manner.

The blood on the floor was either my mum's or my dad's, my parents usually quarreled a lot. I grew up in a toxic environment, my dad would often come home drunk and the fight would often end in a bloodbath. I was 5 years old when I first saw blood dripping from my parents' bodies.

Today, I am 43 years old and I am married to my childhood sweetheart, my wife. Despite spending over 13 years behind bars for various crimes, I was that notorious, rebellious, and arrogant man until my first child was born in 2009 while I was in prison. Since my release in 2012, I stopped all crimes and put my full focus on my kids. Me and my wife were happily married for nearly over 10 years before the ghosts of my past caught up with me. I started taking drugs again and was sent to DRC in 2022. After getting released in the same year, I got caught again and was then released in 2023. My family was devastated because of my selfish actions; my children were broken and my wife was depressed.

I pen this column with a heavy heart as I received terrible news from my wife that she had been diagnosed with blood cancer. When I heard the news, my head started spinning and I was taken back in time – a flashback to when I was a 5 year old boy who saw blood for the first time. Suddenly, a sheer terror gripped my heart and I realized I was no longer the man who people described me as, a “heartless, egoistic, criminal drug addict”. Instead, I was the little boy who was scared and worried and wanted his parents to love each other, but that did not happen.



I then realized that after all these years of falsely believing the words people had used to describe me, a “heartless, egoistic, criminal drug addict”, all became nothing to me as I found the power to believe what was right about myself and that I was able to change for the better. I finally realized that we all have a child within us, a child that once yearned for love, a child that was once happy, a child that was too innocent to even harm an insect.

Change comes from one's heart, if you focus and find that child within you, then you would have learned something new about yourself.

Thank you to all for your submissions and for reading this issue.

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