

#EVERYONE'S COLUMN

ISSUE 8: GRATITUDE

#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 renouncees' prosocial identities and their resolve towards a gang-free lifestyle. Renouncees 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.



DEAR SUNSET,

A great deal is said about life in DRC, but few people mention how mesmerizing you look from the buildings that make up S1. I saw you on the first day of my detention after days of not seeing you. There you were, right on time and just as splendid as I had remembered. I wondered if my family were also taking in your beauty at that very moment.

Because watching the sunset has always been a family tradition, we had last seen it a few weeks before. Bathing in your warm glow, I confidently told my mum that drugs were in the past. Alas, like so many times before, it was a false promise. I had tucked away this memory of the last family sunset but seeing you in all your glory on my first day brought these memories back to life. It also reminded me of how supportive my parents were and continue to be as I pick up the pieces of my life – my dad's quiet 'I'm with you' and my mum's confidence that I can kick the habit. People often call you beautiful, but in that moment, you were also uncomfortable – it dawned on me that my parents too, were in their sunset years. We only had that many sunsets left together...

And so, I am writing this letter to thank you for helping me to realize the value of every day. Cherish every sunset – for you never know what tomorrow brings. That will be my new mantra as I count down the days till I can enjoy a sunset with my family again.

THE GRILLS

What am I grateful for? A ridiculous proposition, I must admit. Especially as I sit on these cold hard floors, behind unbreakable grills, and sign to free-gliding mynahs in desperate hopes to make friendship. But the grills deserve credit, for they opened my eyes.

I thank the grills as he houses a sacred place for me with books. For me to wonder, on fantasy stones. For me to marvel, a language in its fullest glory. The scents and sounds that come with a page flip, they soothe my senses and relieve my fatigue. They remind me of the ones who love me. I thank the grills for unbothered time with God. I was once lost, but now I am saved. The mornings with God, my life is now remade. He showers me with wisdom on my hands, to fight my demons, and loved ones I'll defend. I thank the grills for his repair. With siblings I once fought, I had much time to share. I exposed my soul, expecting reject. But the grills gave me a chance for a much closer connection. He did not forget my friendships too, for blood and water joined hands.

And so, I thank the grills for me, for I have changed. I now breathe anew.



TO EVERYONE,

We are alive and we have our senses. We can feed, we can laugh, we can talk. Even in a confined space, we still have a choice on our actions and feelings. Our biggest pleasure in life was taken because we were careless but that does not mean we are bankrupt from blessings.

We learnt to be careful with our choices. To not give our hearts freely to anyone but we also need to learn not to harden ourselves and be skeptical of everyone.

Do not let this mistake prevent you from building yourself. Learn from it and grow. Do not deny yourself of such a blessing, you are suffering enough.

THE GAME OF LIFE

In the game of life, you are given a plot of land and about 1000 months to live. You were told to tend it and taught the basics: to plough it, water it, replenish it, and love it. Some people listened and did as they were told but stopped there, and others didn't even listen to the advice they received. Then there are some who decided to learn more, and they learnt the most important lesson: That they did not know everything. Instead, they read books, asked questions, and listened to different people.

There are people who envy their neighbour's wealth and wished that their neighbour's wealth would dry up. Tend to your own plot of land, because if you spend your time looking at your neighbour's, you end up neglecting your own. Your job is to nurture and appreciate what is given, so make it the best it can be.

Everyday is a gift. Be grateful to those who come into your life as everyone has impacted you in different ways. Don't be afraid of failures and don't let life pass you by. Love your problems, welcome the hardship. At the end of the day, life isn't what happens to you, but what you do with what life gave you.

'THE STRONGER THE WIND, THE STRONGER THE TREE.'

I AM GRATEFUL...

We often take gratitude for granted, especially from people who care about us. Most of us are more willing to show gratitude to a stranger on a bus than the people closer to us. It is obvious that we should show gratitude to people offered us loving and joyful experiences, but we should also show gratitude to our ex-bosses who we did not see eye-to-eye with as they may have given us feedback to help us grow, and even to people that have hurt us for they have made us stronger.

Gratitude can help us to break free from negative feelings. Remember that your enemy has long forgotten about you while you may still be clinging on to the past. We should remember the good that others did to us and forget those that have done us wrong. I am grateful for my current situation where I am given the time to reflect on what's important in my life, who is dearest to me, and to focus on the things I still have rather than those that I have lost.



GRATITUDE BEHIND BARS

In the hush of night, where shadows creep,
We gather our thoughts, in silence we keep.
Each moment a lesson, each day a chance,
To find strength in the struggle, to learn how to dance.

With walls that confine, yet spirits that soar,
We thank for the trials that opened new doors.
For friendships forged in the darkest of times,
In whispers of hope, in unspoken rhymes.

We're grateful for voices that echo with care,
For those who believe, for those who still dare.
The warmth of a letter, the touch of a hand,

A kindness remembered, a gesture so grand.
For dreams that we nurture, though distant they seem,

For the flicker of light in our deepest of dreams.

Each sunrise a promise, each sunset a peace,
In the heart of this place, we find our release.

Chains may surround us, our spirits are free,

In gratitude's garden, we plant every seed.
For lessons in patience, for moments to grow,
In this world of confinement, our hearts overflow.

So here we stand, in the stillness we share,
With words of appreciation, we lift up the air.

For hope never falters, for love never dies,
In unity's embrace, we rise toward the skies.

**This is a submission from a desistor*

A WOMAN'S RISE BEYOND THE STORM

A woman stood where shadows lay, her heart weighed down by yesterday. Grief had stolen love so near, left her drowning, lost in fear. Yet deep inside, though dim, though small, a fire burned beneath it all. At first, the steps were faint, unsure, a whispered vow, endure, endure. She walked through doors once faced with dread, where echoes of her past had bled. But shame no longer held her tight— she faced the dark, she found the light. The nights still called, the sorrow grew, old wounds would ache, as old wounds do. But she no longer bowed or broke, she stood her ground, her strength awoke. She carried loss, but not its chains, her soul was free beyond the pain. With lessons learned through fire and fight, she turned her pain to guiding light. She reached for hands as lost as hers, softened voices, silenced stirs. She built a bridge from where she'd been, and led the broken home again. Through books, through work, through wisdom gained, she stood where once her hope was strained. A woman, strong, with love so wide, became a shelter, became a guide. No longer lost, no longer small, she rose—and now she lifts them all.

This is a submission from a desistor

TO MOTHER,

*This is a submission from RCU

The more grateful we feel, the happier we become. This is because gratitude helps us realize we are all connected. Nobody feels like an island when feeling grateful. Because gratitude awakens us to the truth of our interdependent nature. This is a story of how me and my mum is connected by heart and soul. I have been in and out prisons many times and my mother have never failed to visit me no matter rain or shine, my mother has the thinking that by visiting me I won't be locked in a cell 24/7, so she decided to visit me every day while I was in remand as a form of portraying mother love to me when I needed it most. There was an instance when she fainted and was admitted into hospital, the doctor asked her to be admitted for observation, but she insisted to be discharged so she could come and visit me. No words could describe how much love I have for her. My mother has been my greatest pillar of strength and being grateful for what she did is very important because if I were to be ungrateful, I will never know the amount of love she has for me. A piece of advice for all my friends out there. If you would like to sleep more peacefully, as you lay your head on the pillow, think of the people whom you are grateful to, or the times you helped others and felt good about yourself. It will warm your heart, gifting you with more peaceful sleep.

THANK YOU.

Growing up wasn't easy for me and my sister, watching our mum singlehandedly bring us up. The sole breadwinner, working those extra hours just to create a better childhood for us. In DRC, I saw my mum through a glass panel for the first time. With tears in her eyes, she asked me if she ever did anything so wrong to be restricted to see and touch her own son. I felt helpless and remorseful, my heart wrenching. Even after being a disappointment, they still chose to support me throughout my journey in DRC. I couldn't be more blessed.

To my mother, I am grateful for the unconditional love you have showered me with, even in times I have upset you or even when I have broken your heart. But you never failed to be there when I fell, cleaning every mess that I have caused, and yet I have never properly shown even a slight appreciation towards you.

Thank you mum, for all the love and guidance you have provided me with, even after countless disappointment I have cost you. I have no one to blame for my own disastrous fate, for I am my own greatest enemy. I am sorry for making you worry. Thank you mum, for granting me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

PRACTICING GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the act of being thoughtful towards the good things that people do for us which makes us happy. However, on a deeper level, it is also good to show gratitude towards negative things that happen in our lives. In my opinion, this form of gratitude has a far greater impact to our lives because there is a very valuable life lesson that we can learn out of negative situations as compared to positive situations. However, this is also not easy.

My life changed when I got caught; My freedom was taken away from me, I lost my job and good income. The thought of life post-release scared me a lot at first. I didn't understand why taking drugs as a form of entertainment would lead to such serious consequences. I felt a mixture of disappointment and anger. I blamed bad luck for being caught, blamed my country for not giving me a second chance in my career, and I blamed the whole world except myself. I could either continue with my current negative thoughts and continue feeling dejected while nothing changed, or I could change my thoughts and focus on analyzing what went wrong and how I could solve the problem that led me here. Instead of DRC being a consequence, I learnt to view it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which I am extremely grateful for. I had the chance to reflect on what my life was like before being caught; I was using drugs for entertainment without realizing it was affecting my health and finances. I was putting more focus on my friends at the expense of my future. Friends who I didn't expect to support me were there during my time in DRC, but friends who I expected to support me were nowhere to be found. I failed to realize that while I had a good income and job, I was stagnant in gaining knowledge and was becoming redundant in my career. I stopped trying to improve myself. Now, I have new ideas for my career and have thought of new fields of knowledge I wanted to pursue. Most importantly, I am so much happier than before after I learnt to be grateful rather than blaming everything, and I can't imagine what direction my life would have went if I wasn't caught.

I believe that the biggest challenge in practicing gratitude is our mindset. Often, our mind is clouded by how unfortunate we are and the unhappiness that problems bring to us. But if we could change our mindset to start focusing on the valuable life lessons around us, we only stand to gain.



INTROSPECTION

Before coming in, I didn't think that I could be making any friends as I had a preconceived idea of the company I would be surrounded by. But I was proven wrong from the first day. I have met many different people from all walks of life, and I have learnt so much from listening to them talk about the lessons they have learnt in their own journeys. It is almost as though I have lived life through them vicariously. I am grateful for the wide array of colours that make up the human nature.

The time here has been filled with much introspection. Coming into prison, I knew that God was trying to talk to me. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend religious counselling classes here, as I was given the chance to attend Mass on Sundays after 20 years of trying to push this away. I am finally learning how to surrender my life to God. I can feel that my outward mannerisms now come from a place of peace and not from a place of trying to prove something. I have gained a renewed sense of spirit.

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