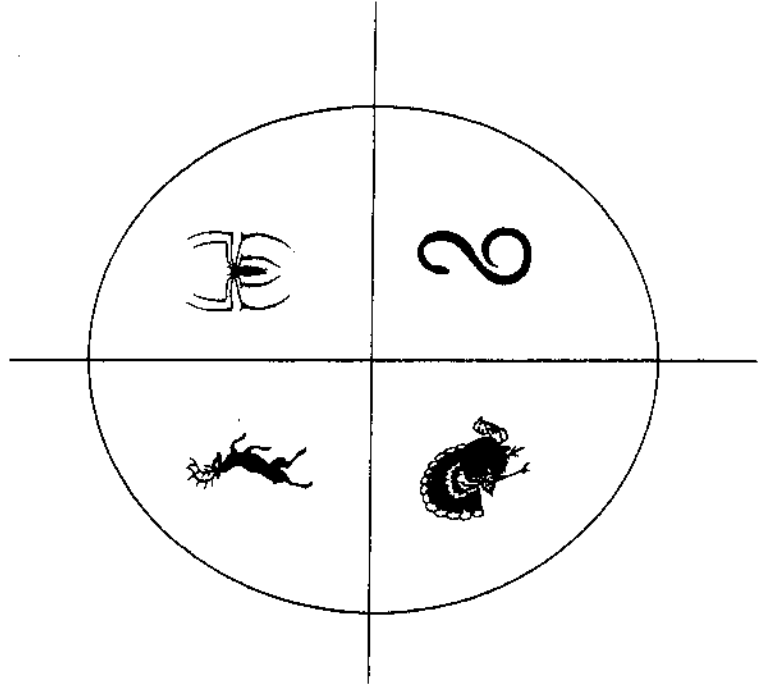


100 Morals and Values a Kid
should grow up with

By Gabriel Ochoa



Dedications

This book is dedicated to my son whom I can't be there for and for whom I haven't been there for because of my stupidity and crime. Every day I regret the choices I've made over my family. I hope my words guide my son towards a different path and lead him to be a good hearted person and a better role model than myself. This book is also for my nieces and nephews – Sierra, Emma, Bonna Bear, Gabe, Hava Jr., Steve Jr., Angelique, Moe, and Brooklyn. Much love to all of you. I know you've been through a lot, but stay strong and break this cycle of prison life, drugs, and gangs. And to all kids who are already in the juvenile system never stop striving to better yourself or your circumstances no matter what you're going through or where you're coming from. There's a lot more to life than these prison walls.

References

- **PREP/ Turning Point**
- **Youth Radio**
- **Counseling 105 College Handbook**
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Words are where it starts and I encourage all parents to take small amounts of time with conversation and words that direct them away from the street life and into good thinking. This can really go a long way in helping them discover themselves despite what they are around or see. It's the things we don't share that can leave them guessing or just following the crowd. I know this was the case for myself. But I am proud to say that my old ways of thinking have changed and I am no longer a part of a gang, use drugs, or involved in anything else that life came with. Hopefully my opened views help others before they get caught up in this pattern too. The stories that follow are from prisoners and non-prisoners with different struggles and with different reasons for why they were led down their paths. But the stories are also about what they've overcome regardless of where they're at today. Although some of these stories are from prisoners they're accomplishing goals that they would of never expected from themselves at one point in time. This can truly be any child and they could do it prior to facing what we've faced. This is the purpose of the stories, so that through us anyone can relate, see the road before it happens, and maybe change the direction ahead of them. The morals and values part is only a small guide to maturity, but altogether, with the help of everyone, my hope is that all I kids see that there is a meaningful life out there.

Prayer

I asked GOD for strength, that I might achieve.

I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do great things.

I was given infirmity that I might do better things...

I asked for riches, that I might be happy.

I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have praise of men...

I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of GOD...

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life...

I got nothing I asked for but everything I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

This book was intentionally geared toward kids within the system or for those coming from rough neighborhoods. But as I gave it more consideration I realized I was missing a bigger picture. So this book is for all kids. And I say this because no matter where we come from or where we grow up, kids everywhere face being misguided or have no one to point them in a good direction. Parents can be around, but not there. Some kids are fortunate and receive leadership through teachers, coaches, friends, or relatives, but for those less fortunate let these words build yourself into a thoughtful, strong, loving, and kind person. This is what this book is about. This book also goes out to those kids who deal with a lack of confidence, hate themselves, or are getting picked on both verbally and physically by peers or family members and think suicide is the way to go. Please realize that you are worth so much more than what someone says or does to you.

Prayer

O great spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds, and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me!

I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people.

I need strength, not to be greater than my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy- myself.

Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes so when life fades, as the fading sunset, my spirit my come to you without shame.

A-ho

The Red Road to Weillbriety

Poem

A coffin with concrete ears,
Echo's of loneliness ring out tears.
People forgotten, people missed
What once was, now wished.

Humans scorned, faces scarred
Dreams scarce, hopes diminished, momentarily burst of spirit
fleeting,

Grasping what you can until true meaning.

Real essence, out of distance, lovers now friends, progeny
desolated, a past reconstructed, but a future unfinished.

Gabriel Ochoa

Positive Quote

Maturity is the ability to control anger and settle differences without violence or destruction.

Maturity is patience. It is the willingness to pass up immediate pleasure for long term gain.

Maturity is perseverance. The ability to sweat out a project or situation in spite of heavy opposition and discouraging setbacks.

Maturity is the capacity to face unpleasantness and frustration, discomfort and defeat without complaint or collapse.

Maturity is humility, it is being big enough to say I was wrong, and when you're right, you need not say, "I told you so".

Maturity is the ability to make decisions and follow through. The immature spend their lives exploring endless possibilities and then do nothing.

Maturity means dependability. Keeping ones word and coming through in a crisis. The immature are the masters of alibi. They are conflicted and discouraged. Their lives are a maze of broken promises, former friends, unfinished business, and good intentions that never materialize.

Unknown

And if you're reading this I hope I change yours too. Give your life a new start, a different meaning, goals, and a greater sense of purpose. There is so much more to life. Your situation could be worse or similar to mine but whatever it is don't let yourself believe this is all there is and decide to be stronger than your greatest struggle. Any one of you can make your circumstances change but it's something you have to stick to.

GABRIEL OCHOA

Prisoner Story

Hello my name is Francisco Palacios Jr. and I am currently a prisoner. But that isn't what's important. Today you won't remember me by name but as the once teenage kid that struggled not to kill himself. My story is not about violence, nor is it about drugs directly. However, both of these subjects do play a huge role as to why I'm serving a 21 year sentence.

Growing up I was a normal kid, but I also had a learning disability and a speech problem. And coming from a family with seven children my disabilities made it easy to feel left out and unimportant. Although my family was close I still felt this way.

It was also hard on me because my father was an alcoholic. There was never a time where we wouldn't see him with an aluminum can in his hand. And sometimes he'd be in a pissed off rage or be as happy as can be. There was even a time where he kicked my mom and sister out of the house just so he could drink and party with 2 females. Hearing about this later in my life made me lose a sense of respect for my dad and not look at him as the male role model I wanted to be. In doing so though I looked in the wrong places for that guidance.

At 10 years old a stranger was riding his bike around my parent's property while me and my brother were in the back part of the house. He then approached us and offered to takes us on a bike ride. Since we were poor and couldn't afford a bike I easily accepted and quickly trusted this older man. But, before I knew it I was being sexually molested behind a garbage container in an alley.

It didn't make sense to me and I didn't comprehend what really happened to me until later that day. Ultimately that's when my "hell" of self-hatred began.

Avoid gangs or groups that only want to see you down and out with them.

You might have heard it over and over, or not at all, but gang members really do land in one of two places- prison or the grave. And in the end a lot of so called homies don't care about you and will forget you as quick as they came. They won't be there for you, your family, kids, or do anything for you in prison. And even worse, these homies or homegirls are always the first to turn on you the moment you mess up. This isn't what you should seek in friendship, and these aren't people you should consider family. Think twice about whom you hang around with and the things they are involved in. This lifestyle isn't worth the short term so called "friendship" you think you've found at the time. Better friends are out there, don't sell yourself short.

"If people around you aren't going anywhere, if their dreams are no bigger than hanging out on the corner or if they're dragging you down, get rid of them. Negative people can sap your energy so fast and they can take your dreams away from you too."

Erwin "Magic" Johnson

The answers lie inside you. The solutions to all life's problems lie within your grasp. All you need to do is ask, look, listen, and trust.

You will forget all of this unless you constantly stay focused on the goals you have set for yourself.

Unknown

Keep and surround yourself with as much positive influence as possible.

Besides true friends, get to know a circle of people at school, work, or anywhere else who bring out the best in yourself and who also want more for themselves. Forget the nay-sayers who are always saying "they can't" or "you can't". A part of believing in yourself is not having those downers around in the first place so that you yourself don't begin to view things in the way they do, or start to doubt what you could achieve. Make sure too that you don't fall off your progress when a person does try to tell you you're a failure or you won't make it, because you will come across these type of people. Ignore them, keep your eyes forward, and continue pushing on.

"If your images are positive, they will support you and cheer you on when you get discouraged. Negative pictures rattle around inside of you affecting you without you knowing it."

Virginia Satin

I am no longer controlled by alcohol, drugs, old beliefs and character defects. Believe in yourself and live one day at a time by good principles such as patience, tolerance, selflessness, humility, willingness and honesty. Learn them, live them, apply them and you will find your spirit with such love and serenity.

Rudy Mercado

Don't be afraid to make your own choices and decisions

Growing up there will always be friends, family, or others who will try to get you involved in things you know are not right. Whenever this happens, don't be afraid to make different choices than theirs. Make your own decisions based on what you think is right. Don't let someone else make decisions for you.

"I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul."

William E. Haley

Poem

I'm done chasing you ghost! It's been 27 years and 13 days too long. Ever since I was a kid I've followed in your foot steps and lost myself in the process.

Not only did I become you I set in motion a chain of inclinations for no real direction.

One by one I became you and they became me, and each chase only turned into what you see.

But I'm done chasing you ghost! My seed will not follow your breed and become me.

I will pave a new beat and teach him everything you couldn't be.

Gabriel Ochoa

Accept personal responsibility for your actions, mistakes, or wrongs doings.

Throughout our lives we will make mistakes, mess up, or say and do stupid things to others. It happens. It's not okay, but everyone makes mistakes. The important part of making a mistake though is owning up to it, work on making it right with actions, and not repeating our mistakes or wrongs. Any choice you make is yours to live up to and no one but you is to blame. So accept your faults and consequences, and apologize when you've messed up.

"When you take full responsibility here and now for all your feelings and for everything that happens to you, you never again blame the people and situations in the world outside of you for unhappy feelings that you have."

Unknown

Positive Quote

"Give yourself to others, extend your concern to others, and cultivate the thought of caring for the well being of others. Then this will have the immediate effect of opening up your life and helping you reach out"

Unknown.

Guns aren't the way

There's a much bigger impact when you use a gun than you might be able to see at the moment, especially when you're angry, hurt, in fear, or want to get someone back for mistreating you, gang issues, or school problems. But take it from me, shooting somebody creates only more issues within yourself and everyone affected. You can't take back those bullets or undo the harm you've inflicted on others. You only create more misery and anguish for yourself, your family, friends, society, and those you've injured. Gangs nor school problems are worth taking any persons life. Although it seems like violence is the way to go for retaliation or escaping pain, really think about what you are destroying. If something is heavy on your mind and you're close to taking this route, talk to someone. Don't pick up a gun. Chose more than violence.

"Replacing a negative thought with a positive one changes more than just the passing thought. It changes the way you perceive and deal with the world."

Dr. Clair Douglas

Use caution with people you don't know.

This can be on the internet, in person, or on the phone. The reality of life is there are a lot of good hearted humans on this earth, but, there are also some with messed up ways of thinking and who have bad intentions. This isn't being said to take away your good nature or kindness towards others, but rather to be aware of certain types of people who aim at only taking advantage of people, want to hurt them, scam them, or abuse them. It doesn't matter if you're younger or older, be careful with each new person you meet. Don't automatically invite them into your home, go somewhere with them alone, post pictures on your phone or internet that would give the wrong impression, or be so trusting to them. Use your instincts and set boundaries and limits until you get to know a person. Embrace others, but use caution.

"Every time you're back is against the wall there is only one person that can help. And that's you. It has to come from inside."

Unknown



NORTH / SPIDER

The North gives wise counsel and reminds us when to speak and when to listen. It also reminds us to be grateful for every blessing every day.

A Spider's message is weaving patterns of life and living throughout time. He sees the experiences of the bigger plan.

Put your guard up with people who are always talking trash about others.

If someone is quick to put someone else down or smut them up they'll be just as quick to bad mouth you when you aren't around. They'll also get you caught up in rumors that might not even be true and put things in your head that could give you a different outlook. Avoid these type of people and take their words with small value. Don't go around repeating what they say either. If all you got to talk about are rumors then you have too much time on your hands and not doing enough in your own life.

"The practice of doing affirmations allows us to begin replacing some of our stale, worn out, negative mind chatter with more positive ideas and concepts. It is a powerful technique, one which can, in a short time, completely transform our attitudes and expectations about life, and thereby totally change what we create for ourselves".

Unknown

Positive Story

Back in the days there was this wise and influential old man that lived on the side of a mountain near a lake. One day he noticed this young warrior walking on the path to his hut. As the young warrior got closer the old man said, "what can I do for you?" The warrior replied, "I was told by those in the village that you are very wise. They said that you can give me the secrets of happiness and success." The old man listened and then gazed at the ground for several moments. He rose to his feet, took the boy by the hand, and led him down the path toward the lake. As they approached the lake the old man walked straight into the water with the boy. Even as the water got deeper and deeper he kept walking until the boy was completely underwater. Finally, the old man turned the boy around, led him out of the lake, and up the path back to the old man's hut. After several minutes he looked at the boy and asked, "young man, when you were in the lake, underwater, and couldn't breathe what was it you desired most?" The boy then said, "why you old fool, I wanted to breathe." With that the old man said "my son when you want happiness in life as badly as you wanted to breathe, you will have found the secret".

Make a good impression the first time

Whether it's on a date, applying for a job, trying to get into college or anything else for that matter, make that good impression last on the people you are appealing to. Arrive on time, dress for the occasion, be prepared, and don't only tell them what you're made of, show them. Saying something good doesn't amount to nothing if you don't follow up later on. And don't just do something for a little while and for show. Stand out by bringing your best effort and persistence always.

"Affirmations have to be supported by the behavior that makes them happen"

Charles Garfield

Nothing good can ever come from drugs

This goes for using them and selling them. A majority of drug dealers end up getting busted and lose everything in the long run. They constantly have to start over and over but yet it gets them nowhere. And this isn't mentioning all the lives and futures they've ruined. Don't strive to be that person. Honest work and persistence with some sacrifices will get you further than any drug money ever could. That quick buck doesn't last. Same with drug use. That high or escape will eventually wear off and when it does you'll be back to where you started, or even worse, you'll lose yourself to drugs. Don't tear yourself down in this way or destroy the best parts of you. Be adamant in saying "No" to drugs and build yourself up, even in rough times or when struggling with life.

"Of all the drugs and compulsive behaviors that I have seen in the past 25 years, be it cocaine, heroin, alcohol, nicotine, gambling, sexual addiction, food addiction, all have one common thread. That is the covering, or masking, or the unwillingness on the part of the human being to confront and be with his or her human feelings."

Richard Miller M.D.

Fear becomes rooted in us for a number of different reasons, but you can't let it control your life.

The fear of accomplishing a goal, taking steps in a new direction, fear of failure, or a fear of life in general are just some of a long list of fears we face, both inside ourselves and outside. But don't listen to those self-doubting voices or decide not to challenge yourself because you are unsure of what might happen. Take on those things that scare you, take that new road, or put yourself up against that hard wall and oppose it. Each new fear you overcome will only form a stronger you and let you see that only you can hold yourself back.

"The more you are keenly aware of your misery creating thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, the greater your chances are of ridding yourself of them all."

Albert Ellis

If you want something to go out and get it

Nothing is worse than sitting on your butt, not doing anything, and only wishing for bigger and better dreams and goals. If you want more, you have to be a go-getter. A huge part of accomplishing things or getting out of where you're at begins with making plans and setting goals, and then going and doing them. Even if you have to start small or do one thing at a time. Work hard to get what you want in life and don't let fate, luck, or pity be how you view achievement. Don't expect others to get you to where you want to go either. Do it yourself and don't wait for what life just throws at you. If you don't know where to start, ask around – teachers, friends, families, or counselors. With help, you'll eventually learn how to take off on your own.

"A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination, and hard work."

Collin Powell

However, the ground coffee beans were unique. After they were exposed to the boiling water, they changed the water and created something new.

"Which are you", he asked his daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a potato, an egg or a coffee bean?"

Skip the cheating, stealing, or lying

Stealing, cheating, or lying only limits your true character and robs others of their own hard work. Instead, be truthful and use your mind and ideas to get ahead. In this way you will always know how to come up with your own things and be proud of it. Use your mind, it's a powerful tool.

"Personal responsibility is the foundation of success because without it our lives are shaped by forces outside of us."

PREP/Turning Point

It also led to a senseless murder, a man lost his life because of my earlier life choices and being influenced by drugs and peer acceptance.

The strange thing is that everyone that I had been trying to impress, those that I thought were my friends, all left me and never looked back. Everyone that had a negative influence on my life just simply used me. In fact when I committed my life crime some of those who helped shaped me looked at me as an animal. When all along I was only being what they wanted me to be, and acting as they would have expected me to act.

That is the reason I wanted to write and say that we only have our family and a few people who genuinely care about us. We don't need to impress others with acting out or attempting to earn someone's love, respect, or, approval.

If we have to do anything that is against what we know is right in order to fit in, we are doing the wrong thing. No true friend will ever influence you to break the law or use drugs. These are lessons learned the hard way, a way that I do not wish upon any one. Life is too short to be wasting. You have been granted a gift, the freedom and the ability to make choices. We can either help or harm. I encourage you to think about every action you are considering making, because it could affect you for the rest of your life.

I have lost so many things because I did not care about others and about myself. I plead with you to first care enough about yourself and others which will help you all of your life. It took me almost 37 years to really grasp what is important in life, and that is to love, live, and to contribute to our next generation. I pray that you take what I have to say seriously and learn from my mistakes.

Mike

Change begins with you first, and then hopefully others will follow.

You can't change or help out anyone if you don't first make a turn in your own life. You also can't help out the world while turning a blind eye to things at your own home. Start by rebuilding who you are, place your center around your family, and then everyone else. If we turn away from ourselves and those we love from the beginning we create more confusion, heartache, and distance where it is needed the most. No one will spread that positive growth if they themselves didn't receive it. Of course just because you've changed it won't mean others will. But if you do keep your focus close you won't forget the most important process- that it begins with you.

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Positive Quote

Every time we turn our backs on difficulty to overcome adversity we are destroying our will. There then is deterioration of our potential. There then is the deterioration of our character, which then diminishes our ability to face difficult situations and the difficulties of life. Therefore, when we are faced with difficulties, problems, or obstacles in our paths, we are to stand firm and resolutely in the face of that obstacle, overcome it, and conquer it in order to master it and prevail.

PREP/ Turning Point

CENTER

Teaches us how to find our personal truths.

Respect your parents and elders at all times.

This should go without saying, but now a days this moral is lost for a lot of reasons. But regardless of any circumstances, frustrations, or lack of good parental guidance you must always respect your elders and parents. You don't raise your voice at them or be disrespectful towards them in any way or manner. Even if you don't like something they did, disagree with them, or have a whole different opinion than theirs, respect is to always be given.

"I believe that we are solely responsible for our choices and we have to accept the consequences of every deed, word, and thought through our life time"

Unknown

Poem

The hue in her eyes shows she's alive, but something inside her is in disarray. Flashes of the past still haunt her so she goes on with scars visibly arranged. Battling to speak from within the mask of superficiality becomes her despondency. Miserable to hope brings no care to those precious ones after, so she surrounds true essence with those who abase it faster. Clouded by the injection of negativity, she gets high on promiscuity. But worst off is only what she receives and the red roses of vibrancies are no longer traces of her humanity. A cracked heart she wears for everyone to see, while her eyes slowly create obscurity. Progress behind makes promises only come in a bind but just long enough for everyone to believe her lie. Running away from her inner demons, the cycle repeats itself every season. The spring gives rise to new seeds but they are only tattoos of what she wished they'd bring. Seeking what she can't find, she doesn't realize her crime and the hurt it confines. Turning a blind eye she doesn't realize its myopic tragic, until at last the death of each soul has turned its magic. Only if she knew, that beauty isn't outside but inside and in front of you.

Gabriel Ochoa

What is wrong is wrong

Aside from what has already been stated there will be a number of other heartless, shameless, indecent, deceitful, or tricky situations you might face around friends or others and in your gut you will know it isn't right. Whenever you feel this way voice what your gut is telling you and don't condone your wrongs or anyone else's.

"Excuses rob you of power and induce apathy"

Agnes Whistling

Positive Story

A story is told of a man who prayed to know the difference between heaven and hell. An angel came to take the man to see for himself. In hell, the man saw a huge banquet table overflowing with beautifully prepared meats, vegetables, drinks, and desserts. Despite this bounty, the prisoners of hell had withered sunken looks. Then the man saw why. The poor souls in hell could pick up all the food they wanted, but their elbows would not bend, so they could not place the food into their mouths. Living amidst all that abundance, the citizens of hell were starving.

Then the angel whisked the man to heaven, where he saw another endless banquet table heaped with a similar bounty of splendid food. Amazingly, just as in hell, the citizens of heaven could not bend their elbows to feed themselves.

"I don't understand" the man said. "Is heaven the same as hell?"

The angel only pointed. The residents of heaven were healthy, laughing and obviously happy as they sat together at the banquet tables. The man saw the difference.

The citizens of heaven were feeding each other.

Treat your guest with the best

Whenever you have friends, family, or people you've opened up your house to, offer them everything you can to make them feel welcomed. If you have invited them into your home, it's your responsibility to embrace them with nothing but hospitality and not only with the basic necessities. Give them your time, talk to them, and get to know them. They shouldn't feel as if they're only being accommodated with a place to stay. Go above that and put yourself out there with care, comfort, and conversation. Also, whenever you are a guest in someone else's home always respect the way they do things, or their traditions. Pick up after yourself and conduct yourself properly. You are their guest, humbly appreciate that.

"We first make our habits, and then our habits make us"

John Dryden

We are all unique

Each of us is unique in our own way. Just because you can do something better than another person, or because a person knows something you don't doesn't make them or you any lesser or greater than the other. We all have a purpose, are taught different things, learn at different paces, and have the potential to develop a skill, trade, or idea. So don't ever put yourself down, put someone else down, or let another person do the same.

"We are what we think. All that we are arises within our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world."

The Buddha

Learn the value of money and how to manage it.

In the process of appreciating the things you do have you will ultimately learn the value of money. But take it a step further. Learn how to manage your money and spend it wisely, and learn how to save. Put it towards building a foundation instead of just spending it. Understand what are "needs" and what are "wants", and focus more on the things you need. This part takes sacrifice and knowing that you're planning for the long run. But in the end it's worth it when you have your own car, business, or company.

"Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved."

William Jennings Bryant

It's okay to be different

Just as we are all unique we are all different. We don't have to follow the crowd or do what everyone else is doing. Create your own identity, style, or image. Be who you want to be and be proud of that. Forget popularity. Don't get caught up in what others say either. There opinions don't matter. Only you matter in this area. So do you. And likewise, let others be themselves.

"Happiness is your nature. It is not wrong to desire it, what is wrong is seeking it outside when it is inside."

Unknown

Walk a day in someone else's shoes

Sometimes when we see those people who are less fortunate than we are, or whose struggles are way worse than our own, we slowly gain appreciation for the smallest of things, value everything, and grow compassion for everyone. This is empathy and this is what it takes to get us out of that selfish and uncaring mode. None of us are in this world alone and we all face challenges. So whenever you begin to think you've had it rough and want to give up, remember there are others who've had it worse, who might have cancer, starving, born with abnormalities, or who deal with unmanageable abuse. This isn't to say what you deal with doesn't matter. It does. But in our little struggles this worth remembering. And it isn't only important to remember it. It's equally important to give back, help out, donate your time, and try spreading a laugh.

"All humans beings are periodically tested by the power of the universe... how one performs under pressure is the true measure of ones spirit, heart, and desire."

Spike Lee

If you are being bullied, or worse, talk to somebody, and always try to remember your self worth first and foremost.

I realize this is sometimes easier said than done , but when we value ourselves above what other people say about us or what they do we become stronger, care less about what they think, and learn to stand up for ourselves in a firm and sound way. Nothing or no one can get you down when we love who we are. We can laugh it off, brush it off, ignore it, and push on. If somebody is physically harming you though tell someone. There is nothing wrong with seeking help. Whatever you do fight those feelings of giving up. They don't make you, you make you. And we are worth life.

"Ultimately, for most of us, the journey comes down to the same issue. Learning to love freely. First ourselves, then other people"

Melody Beatties

None of this was enough for me to change however, and for a long time I chose not to even think about it, and I dealt with it by giving up the rest of my life to the prison gang. I had figured "What's the use of trying; I got 27 years and 2 strikes I'm never getting out anyways!!" But that was one of the most ignorant things I caused myself to believe. I no longer think that way though because through the chaos of my life GOD led me to find my purpose in Him. My walk with GOD hasn't been perfect and I have my mistakes but Jesus helps me to be better no matter what I go through or what comes against me. I am faithful to Jesus because He is faithful to me, and He has been there for me in those rough times and comforted me when my parents died. And this is what He promises to "Never leave nor forsake us." I can testify to this, and Jesus has given me the hope that when GOD calls me home I will see my parents again with happiness, peace, and no suffering or pain.

Ever since I've been walking with Jesus faithfully my whole life and perspective has changed. I no longer hate myself or other people, and I also no longer represent a gang. I only represent Jesus and I share His word with all who will listen. And because of Him I am a better man, father, brother, son, and friend. My family has also found Jesus' salvation. This brings me the greatest joy because I know they will be okay and nothing is impossible.

As you can clearly see the choices we make have an impact in every aspect of our lives. If bad, it becomes more than we could afford. If good it's everlasting. I hope that you might see these effects and learn from our mistakes, not your own. It is an honor to be able to share a bit of my life. My best advice is to think before you act and really consider things before it comes to the worst. You will never know what you will miss out on or what you will lose because of the bad choices. It's not worth it to risk it all for something that only results in pain and suffering.

So in final words I hope you are encouraged and inspired to do better for the present and the future. I also pray that for those who believe in GOD that you will allow Him to show you your awesome purpose in life. "You are the best at what you were because you were created to be the best."

Robert

Never forget your thoughtfulness

Be polite, be humble, express your gratitude, be generous, genuine, don't be selfish, pick up after yourself, don't be rude, respect one another, be cordial, be kind, and show courtesy to everybody.

"Nobody but nobody can make it out here alone."

Maya Angelou

Poem

Even in darkness a rosed soul may be blossomed. Though there's a light hue on life, the stems of strength could still grow and be no different than a vibrant rose. The buds of love form a seed that makes intricate delicacies strong peddles of intimacies. Obscured leafs of hope may one day shine and reconnect like tiny vines. The thorns of struggle help us only see the bigger picture and it's surrounding beauty.

Gabriel Ochoa

Positive Quote

Those who make compassion an essential part of their lives find the joy of life. Kindness deepens the spirit and produces rewards that cannot be completely explained in words. It is an experience more powerful than words. To become acquainted with kindness one must be prepared to learn new things. Kindness is more than a philosophy of the spiritual mind. It is the philosophy of the spirit.

Unknown

Positive Quote

So it goes with every important goal we set. Our actions reveal whether we have the self discipline to stay on course in the face of tempting alternatives. Most students want to be successful, but wanting and doing are worlds apart... Many people chose instant gratification. Few choose the far off rewards of persistent and purposeful actions. Many begin the journey to their dream; few finish. Yet all we need to do is put one foot in front of the other... again and again, and again. A journey of a thousand miles may begin with a single step, but many more better follow.

College handbook

Prisoner Story

Hello, my name is Kevin; I have spent 23 years of my life incarcerated for various crimes. I am from Stockton California and I grew up in a good home. Not to say that my family didn't have problems. What I am saying is that one does not have to come from a broken home to fall into crime. One of the major factors that lead me to crime was the lack of identity. Having no identity led me to seek it in gangs, drugs, and crime. All of which led me to prison, which was an active choice on my part. Upon coming to prison, I still had no clue of who I was, so it was easy for me to continue in a life of crime and embrace the prison life.

It was in prison that I found my identity in the faith of my Lord Jesus Christ. There in him I found my purpose in life, and to be honest I am still learning. One thing that I do know, that is who I am. Did I have to come to prison to learn this? No! Nevertheless, I chose that path. It's those hard roads we take that bring us to the end of ourselves. It's right there in the brokenness that we find help because we are out of the way.

I hope that you let this seed cultivate in your heart – "You can count the seeds in an apple, but you can not count the apples in a seed."

Kevin

Watch out for the procrastinator in you.

Completing a task or project of any size needs foot work every day, even when you don't like it. You will get behind every time if you keep putting off what needs to get done. Choose a different option by carrying out minor task that will eventually lead you to fulfilling your outcome. Nothing should be rushed, but nothing should be slow dragged either. Discover that starting, middle, and end ground and plan it out for the long haul. Just don't let yourself get to the point of "oh well".

"All the best work is done the way ants do things-by tiny untiring and regular additions"

Lefcadio Hearn

Try hard to keep your word or your promises you make to people and yourself.

It's important to do the things you say you will and come through. This builds good standing in yourself and lets others know you will follow up on your words. Of course things can happen or come up where you are honestly not able to do what you say or something becomes out of your hands. If this is ever the case explain your situation and sincerely apologize. It is better to say something than to have someone not trust you or not believe your promises. This situation will also teach you to not make promises you can't keep.

"To me integrity is the bottom line in self-esteem. It begins with keeping ones word or doing what you say you will do, whether you feel like it or not."

Betty Hatch

Don't play with peoples emotions

If you truly love someone then nothing is wrong with saying it. But it's important to know the difference between someone you love as a friend, and someone you love with your heart. If you love someone only as a friend don't misguide them into thinking otherwise and don't tell them you love them just to get what you want or use them for sex, money, or the things they have. You also don't abuse people's emotions to make them do things for you just because they like you. People's emotions should not be played with. Be straight up with how you feel toward someone, and be truthful with yourself.

"I speak straight and do not wish to deceive or be deceived."

Cochise

Dating someone is personal, keep it that way

Finding a boyfriend or girlfriend is bound to happen at some time in life, whether you're younger or older, and when you do it's important that you don't go around telling anyone your personal relationship business, or bragging about what you did with your boyfriend or girlfriend. That's personal and should stay between you two at all times, regardless of a breakup or how long ago it happened.

"Self-discipline is self-caring"

Dr. M. Scott Peck

When it come to sex...

I hope that whoever is reading this waits for when you're older or married. Waiting for a person you love or when you're older creates a better bond between the person you want to be with and yourself because you have matured and not rushed into it. Sex is and should be a good thing that isn't just given to whomever for some attention. Respect that part of yourself. Really think about your feelings toward the other person without feeling pressured and decide if you want to. And if you are sure, see that you two are on the same page and use protection. Sex is based on being mature, so think about your actions and the possible future consequences of unprotected sex without being caught up in the urgency from others.

"You always have to focus in life on what you want to achieve"

Michael Jordan

"No" is "no" even if you're in a relationship

When attention begins to turn into something more such as kissing, holding hands, or toughing, do not pressure, threaten, or push yourself on anyone, boy or girl. And if someone tells you, "don't do that", or "no, I don't want to", you don't keep doing it thinking they are just kidding. Respect their decisions and step away. When something is right, you'll have the right moment for it. But otherwise, treat their choices with admiration, without ridicule, mocking or scorn. Be courteous. And if anybody isn't in their right state of mind, you don't take advantage of them

"When two people are relating maturely, each will be able to ask the other for what he or she wants or needs fully trusting that the other will say "no" if he or she does not want to give it."

Edward Deci

Seek the right type of love and affection

We all want to love someone or to be loved by our families, friends, boyfriends, or girlfriends, but if you look for these things in all the wrong places and in the wrong type of people you'll get all the wrong things. Just as you can't expect to get ahead or do good while hanging around people who rather get high, drink, party or use drugs, you won't find somebody who is upright, trustworthy, and dependable through someone who values the wrong intentions. Nor can you expect to find someone to push you forward if you aren't being yourself, trying to fit in, or just trying to please someone just so they do like you. Figure out who you are and what type of person you want to become so that these qualities turn into what you're automatically surrounded with. Don't lose yourself in looking for affection.

"My 'Born to lose' tattoo was written on my mind long before it was written on my arm. Now I'm telling myself I'm 'born to win.'"

Steve R.

Don't run or hide from yourself or life's problem.

How we handle our disappointments, heartaches, pain, setbacks, or grief will either give us the opportunity to figure out who we are inside ourselves, or be one big pain in the ass. We may even want to escape our emotions through drug use, alcohol, partying all the time, self-destruction, or self-abuse. And there are a number of other ways we can give up on ourselves. Life though is a continuous up and down ride for everyone at some point, and only you are going to determine the result. If you only keep setting yourself back by trying to escape and not looking at the obstacles as stepping stones, or a learning process, you won't see what you need to learn or how to change it. So don't focus on what's not going right, figure out why it's not going right and what it would take to get back on track. Face your emotions without dodging them or running away from them somehow.

"The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we likely step out of our ruts and start searching for a different way or truer answers"

M. Scott Peak M.D

Positive Story

There was a man taking a morning walk at the beach. He saw that along with the morning tide came hundreds of starfish and when the tide receded, they were left behind. With the morning sun rays, they would die. The man took a few steps, picked up one, and threw it in the water. He did that repeatedly. Right behind him there was another person who couldn't understand what this man was doing. He caught up with him and asked, "What are you doing? There are hundreds of starfish. How many can you help? What difference does it make?" This man did not reply, took two more steps, picked up another one, threw it into the water, and said, "it make a difference to this one."

Learning is so much more than an education

I'm sure this has been said a hundred times, but staying in school is really where it begins if you want to make something of yourself. A higher education not only builds endless possibilities, it also develops a huge view of choices, opportunities, and ideas for your future. With everything we read and learn we see how to access our goals and reach above what we think we don't know or can't do. And it shouldn't begin and end in school. Make it a point to carry that learning attitude all throughout your life and in a variety of things. School may not always be fun but hang in there, find your interest, remember your focus, and don't stop when it's all said and done. This will keep you fresh and motivated. You're never too old to learn something new.

"Educations purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one"

Malcolm S. Forbes



SOUTH / TURKEY

The south protects the child within and reminds you when to be humble and when to trust so that innocence will be balanced in your personality.

The Turkey represents a give away. The give away is without regret and with a joyful heart, or the give-away has lost its true meaning.

BELOW

Teaches us about the inner earth, and how to stay grounded and on the path.

Practice forgiveness

Do this toward yourself and towards others. If you're stuck in bitterness for something that happened yesterday or years ago you'll only be stressing out about something that has already passed. This will hold you back and prevent you from recognizing that the old is gone. So instead, when you have regrets about something you've done, or if somebody has wronged you kick that feeling to the curb, forgive, and work on building amends. This doesn't mean you forget your mistakes or the wrongs that happened. You learn from them for the next time you are faced with a similar situation. But if it has already passed get rid of your ill will.

"Living life as an art requires a readiness to forgive."

Maya Angelou

Prisoner Story

My name is Robert Frank Velasco Sr. I'm 33 years old. I've been in prison for the last 5 years. But even before this case I had been in and out of the prison system. My first arrest was when I was 12 years old for possession of a controlled substance. After that, at the age of 17, I was tried as an adult for second degree robbery and sentenced to 3 years in prison. Today I'm serving 27 years for an attempted robbery and gun enhancements. Because of my past convictions I was given a high sentence, but if I had known my past would come back to haunt me, I like to think I would have made better choices. But I didn't and it took away my life and my freedom.

I can't say I'm surprised at where I'm at today or even shocked for that matter. Growing up as a gang member and choosing the life style I chose I knew I would have ended up in prison or dead. As an adolescent though it was easy to accept what I didn't know or understand. I glorified this life and talked about going to prison and dying for the gang. But being where I'm at today nothing is as it seemed and everything is exactly the opposite of what I stood to believe. Since I've been incarcerated I haven't got no letters, visits, or any support from anyone I once called my homies.

For awhile I even lost the support of my family because of my bad choices and selfishness. I lost my wife, my children, and my parents who passed away. When you're in prison or any jail the biggest fear is losing a loved one and for me I had just lost everything and I continued to lose more everyday such as being their for my children and raising them. There is nothing I can do to restore all the lost time, or heal all the wounds from the pain and suffering I've put them through, including my ex-wife. I'm missing out on so much and it's been almost unbearable to deal with. I've hated myself so much for so long for leaving my children, wife, and family out there by themselves. I hated myself for everything I've done and for hurting all those people who were victimized because of me.

Be appropriate when wanting to meet a new boy or girl

As we mature we develop a natural attraction toward others. It's normal. But it's important to be respectful and appropriate in displaying your attraction to someone you like. Don't catcall any boy or girl, whistle at them like their a dog, make rude comments about their bodies, or inappropriately grab them. That is not the right way to get a person's attention. Introducing yourself, talking to them, asking questions, and getting to know them are better ways of connecting. In other words, just be yourself.

"Be kind to one another"

Ellen

Positive Story

As a man was passing these elephants, he suddenly stopped, confused by the fact that these huge creatures were being held by only a small rope tied to their front leg. No chains, no cages. It was obvious that the elephants could, at any time, break away from their bonds but for some reason they did not.

He saw a trainer nearby and asked why these animals just stood there and made no attempt to get away. "Well", the trainer said, "when they were very young and much smaller we used the same size rope to tie them and at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free."

The man was amazed these animals could at any time break free from their bonds but because they believed they couldn't, they were stuck right where they were.

Like the elephants, how many of us go through life hanging onto a belief that we cannot do something, simply because we failed it once before?

Clowning around with a bit of fun teasing is one thing, but be mindful in not going too far.

This is about bullying, picking on someone or just outright being mean to others with gossip or rumors. There's no excuse to being hurtful no matter what. It's rude and messed up, and says more about yourself than the other person. Maybe you became a certain way because of a certain way, but decide not to pass that part on to others. Remember what you felt like and see it in them because the reality of what you say and how you say it can and will make a person feel sad, worthless, depressed or unfortunately suicidal. No one should be made to feel that way. So be considerate, have compassion, and think before you say something. And, if you ever witness anyone getting picked on say something, speak up, and offer a kind word to the person insulted. Don't just allow bullying to continue because then you are just as guilty as the person bullying.

"What is hateful to you, do not to fellow man.
That is the entire law, all the rest is commentary"

The Talmud

Be glad for what you have

Being young, it's easy to fall into the trap of wanting all the new gadgets, products, shoes, clothes, rims, cars, and everything else. But living a better life doesn't come with name brand clothes or the most expensive shoes. It comes from being content and taking care of the things you do have whether or not they came from the goodwill or a big chain store. So whatever you have regardless of the cost, or where it comes from, be thankful. In this way you'll learn to value everything that comes your way.

"The happiest people don't have the best of everything;
they make the best of everything."

Unknown, but it was sent to me from my niece.

Get to know someone before you judge them.

Where we are raised sometimes plays a big part of how we view others including the color of their skin, religion, appearance, or sexual preference. But before you judge someone based on what you might have been taught or don't know about, open your mind and see that people are people no matter what they look like or believe in. Instead judge a person by his/her character and not how they look. Everyone is not the same and shouldn't be categorized as if they are because they look or act similar. When we aren't stuck in one belief system you'll be surprised on how alike someone else is or come to realize that what you thought, or were taught was all wrong.

"If I were to summarize in one sentence the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal relations, it would be this: seek first to understand, then to be understood."

Stephen Covey

As a youngster be a youngster

Life is short and times can get hard so don't take nothing for granted, or miss out on the good, fun, stupid, or silly stuff all around you. There is an abundant number of things you can enjoy. Don't get stuck thinking where you live and who you're around is all there is. Open your insight to the unlimited experiences, events, and places you could visit. Travel, go to shows, go to concerts, and get into a little mischief outside. That's what being young is about, and getting older doesn't mean that needs to change. There is nothing like viewing the world. Get out there. Share a smile and don't take life too serious.

"It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are"

E.E Cummings

Being there for others is about balance.

This story is a prime example that we can't always think about ourselves in order to be happy or live a good life. Giving and receiving is both needed. But you have to create a balance of caring for yourself and for others. You have to know your limits on what you could do and what you can't, otherwise you'll be stuck in too much of one or the other. With our family and close friends this is especially true. Sometimes we don't know how to say "No" out of love or fear of the lack of love they'll feel. But recognize that balance is how we can continue assisting each other without just giving up on ourselves or others. And if it takes building a support system or depending on others yourself, don't feel ashamed of that. It takes all of us to work together.

"Don't be fooled into thinking you are alone on your journey. You're not. Your struggle is everyone's struggle. Your pain is everyone's pain. Your power is everyone's power. It is simply that we take different paths along our collective journey toward the same destination"

Benjamin Shield

Respect peoples privacy

This includes personal space, their personal belongings, their personal time, and their bodies. We all have certain things we like to do by ourselves or that we like to keep to ourselves. And when anyone invades that we feel angered, violated, and insecure with ourselves and our surroundings. So unless you are given permission from that other person, don't do nothing that is otherwise to that. We all want our freedom to enjoy our privacy and expect others to honor that as well.

"Sow a thought, reap and act, sow an act, reap a habit, sow a habit, reap a character, sow a character, reap a destiny"

Anonymous

Prisoner Story

My name is Robert Ruiz. In 2002 I was arrested for a series of robberies including being in the possession of a fire arm. I took my case to trial but due to my gang involvement, I had no chance. I lost my trial and was sentenced to 47 years in prison. As a youngster I had no real direction, I came from a broken home. My mother left when I was still a baby. My dad is a good man and loves me but he had to work hard to provide so he wasn't always there. My grandmother helped raise me but while I was incarcerated she passed away and I miss her dearly. She gave me good advice but I never listened; now I wish I did. Instead I ran the streets. I became a gang member at the age of 12 years old. I dropped out of school and began to sell drugs. I was always getting into trouble and violence seemed to find me. I started going to juvenile hall, camps, and eventually I landed in prison, were I am now sitting wasting my days away, while some of the friends I grew up with now have nice homes, cars and families. I wish I could turn back the hands of time, this time I would listen! But it's impossible. I miss my family, girls, my freedom, and even the little things like the beach. You don't know what you have until it's gone. I had to learn the hard way. I've learned the real meaning of respect. That is to love and respect myself first in order to then give respect. Everyday is an opportunity to make a new start, keeping in mind that the decisions I make will affect my future. So whoever reads this I hope you will learn from my mistakes. Don't throw your life away. Don't be a follower, be a leader and fight for a good future. Set goals, make plans! Sky is the limit.

Robert Ruiz

Regardless of what you see or hear on TV, in music, or by others, don't call people out of their names.

Girls and women are not bitches, whores, sluts or anything else you hear. Same goes for boys and men. Just because there are songs or shows that use these terms, it doesn't mean you should go around using them yourself. Music is music, TV is TV, and your friends are not you. These girls and boys are brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, moms, dads, and grandparents and I doubt you'd want someone to describe your family members or yourself in this manner. So don't get it mixed up in what you hear and say. It's disrespectful any which way.

"The most important thing is to have a code of life, to know how to live."

Hans Selye

A mothers reflection

I gave you life, but I cannot live it for you.

I can give you direction, but I cannot be there to lead you.

I can take you to church, but I cannot make you believe.

I can teach you right from wrong, but I cannot decide for you.

I can buy you beautiful clothes, but I cannot make you beautiful inside.

I can offer you advice, but I cannot accept it for you.

I can give you love, but I cannot force it upon you.

I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you unselfish.

I can teach you to show respect, but I cannot force you to show honor.

I can advise you about friends, but I cannot choose them for you.

I can advise you about sex, but I cannot keep you pure.

I can tell you about alcohol and drugs, but I can't say "no" for you.

I can tell you about lofty goals, but I can't achieve them for you.

I can teach you about kindness, but I can't force you to be gracious.

I can pray for you, but I cannot make you walk with god.

I can love you with unconditional love all my life. And I will.

Unknown



EAST / DEER

The East Guides our greatest Spiritual challenges and guards a path to illumination.

Deer teaches us to use the power of gentleness to touch the hearts and minds of wounded beings who are trying to keep us from sacred mountain.

Don't quit or give up on something just because it's too hard.

Prisoner Story

Our commitments to our goals or projects will always be tested. Some goals will be easy to achieve, while others may make you want to give up or make you bring up an excuse to why you don't need to finish what you started. But don't rob yourself or your potential by self doubt. Put it in your head that you could see things through and figure out ways to make them work. Put in that extra effort for your accomplishments even when it seems impossible. Each test will only make you stronger and give you the ability to tackle the next goal. And even if you fail the first time, keep trying, keep trying, and keep trying.

"The major difference I've found between the highly successful and the least successful is the highly successful stick to it. They have staying power. Everybody takes his knocks, but the highly successful keep coming back."

Sherry Lansing

As a young boy growing up in a big family I always felt as though I didn't fit in anywhere or with any one group. My older brothers did not want me to hang around them, and I felt as though most of the kids my age were not cool or just were not into the same things as myself. So I was confused as to where I belonged and I did not feel as though I could talk to any one about it. I did not think that anyone cared enough to hear me or help me. However I was totally wrong.

I chose to hang out with people that were much older, and I was expected to do things to fit it. I remember trying alcohol and marijuana for the first time. I did not want to use these substances, but those that I was around encouraged me to try them. They would say things like it would make me cool and that girls would think that I was more mature than I was.

My brothers would always make me do things first sort of as a trial run, so I took on the role of a dare devil, or better yet a crash test dummy. I've learned that is exactly what I was. Wanting to fit in and be accepted is what I believed led me to do pretty much everything. I did not to think about the consequences of my actions, or about how my actions were affecting other people.

I have broken many laws such as buying and selling drugs, stealing cars, bicycles. Pretty much everything that was not bolted down. I've lied to my parents, I've abandoned my daughter and wife, beaten people, robbed people, and committed murder. Those were just some of the things that I did before coming to prison 23 years ago.

I want to be perfectly clear that I am not proud of any of those things. I also want to point out that I was not born to cause pain, theses are the results of wanting to fit in and be accepted by people who were simply using me.

It started the first time I wanted others to accept me, the first time I did something that I knew was wrong, the first time I did something that others would not do themselves. The first time that I used marijuana and drank alcohol was to fit in, which led to a long addiction to drugs.

Real men and women are...

Responsible, supportive, caring, loving, and strong on the inside. They don't abuse others, woman, or children for fun, power, or control. They protect and provide for their families first and foremost, but are also kind hearted to others in need. They stand up for what's right and don't give in to the shady side of things. They strive in everything they do and show strength in all forms.

"In developing our own self awareness many of us discover ineffective scripts, deeply unworthy of us, totally incongruent with things we really value in life."

Stephen Covey

Positive Story

Once upon a time a daughter complained to her father that her life was miserable and that she didn't know how she was going to make it. She was tired of fighting and struggling all the time. It seemed just as one problem was solved, another one soon followed.

Her father, a chef, took her to the kitchen. He filled three pots with hot water and placed each on a high fire. Once the three pots began to boil, he placed potatoes in one pot, eggs in the second pot, and ground coffee beans in the third pot.

He then let them sit and boil, without saying a word to his daughter. The daughter moaned and impatiently waited, wondering what he was doing.

After twenty minutes he turned off the burners. He took the potatoes out of the pot and placed them in a bowl; he pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl.

He then ladled the coffee out and placed it in a cup. Turning to her he asked, "daughter what do you see?"

"Potatoes, eggs, and coffee", she hastily replied. "Look closer," he said, "and touch the potatoes." She did and noted that they were soft. He then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard boiled egg. Finally he asked her to sip the coffee. A rich aroma brought a smile to her face. "Father, what does this mean?" She asked.

He then explained that the potatoes, the eggs and the coffee beans each faced the same adversity – the boiling water, however, each one reacted differently.

The potatoes went in strong, hard, and unrelenting, but in boiling water, it became soft and weak.

The egg was fragile, with the thin outer shell protecting it's liquid interior until it was out in the boiling water. Then the inside of the egg became hard.

Lead by doing

It's easy to go about telling others to do what is right or modest, or to do this or that, especially with our brothers, sisters, or cousins. But if you're saying one thing and not doing what you're expressing others will see it as a double standard and won't take your words to heart. So lead by an example in life, school, and in yourself. Be that leader in an upright way too. Guiding others can be used in both a positive or negative direction, and not all advice is good advice. That's why you should understand what you're doing or saying and influence noble things. This will also help you because when you walk with conviction in both areas you'll be able to separate those who only want to control things for the wrong reasons.

"You will always be in fashion if you are true to yourself and only if you are true to yourself."

Maya Angelou

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Make change a good thing

Everyday and in different stages of our lives we will go through a lot of changes. Some of these changes effect our outlooks, thoughts, or emotions. Whenever you come to this point change whatever bad habits you're dealing with and reinvent yourself with more positive things. Don't go backwards. Grow to be better within yourself.

"Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely".

Keirven Kaiser Clark

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Don't be the fool that drinks and drives.

If you're under the age and shouldn't be drinking to begin with I strongly urge none of you to go there. However with peer pressure, and since parents can't be around to watch your every move I suggest you take the dangers of being messed up and driving seriously. The harsh reality of one bad choice, such as a car crash, can lead you to kill yourself, another person, friends, families, or even kids. Hopefully anyone reading this has gained enough will power to turn away from alcohol use, but if there is ever an incident where you are faced with driving while high or drunk call a friend, someone you trust, or a family member. It's better to have called somebody and be in trouble than to have killed, paralyzed, and gone to jail for something you could of easily avoided.

"Your abilities you develop as a critical thinker are designed to help you think your way through all life's situations"

John Chaffee

Take what works, but let the rest go.

In certain situations, someone will have an opinion on how to do something, which way you should do it, or say their way of doing something is better. This may be true. It might not. But always use your better judgment, personal know-how, or experiences to decide what works, what doesn't, or if the other person's idea is worth applying. If something works, all the better. If it doesn't, dismiss it. Be open to ideas but let the rest go.

"Successful people acknowledge their strengths without false humility and they admit their weakness without stubborn denial."

Prep/Turning Point

Live by what is important to you

Just as the story states, when we want something bad enough we "breathe" it. And this is true not only for success, but for our families too. When someone or something in life is really important to you, you do everything in your will power to put that or them first in everything you do, and in a right manner. Otherwise it is meaningless.

"The end results of your life here on earth will always be the sum total of the choices you made while you were here."

Shad Helmstetter

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Respect Yourself

Out of all these morals and values let the biggest one be respecting who you are. Everything else will fall in line if you hold to this. Respecting yourself means you love yourself. Respecting yourself means you'll respect others. It also guides a path and gathers self-esteem. So let this be what you hold on to the most.

"Self-esteem is the capacity to experience maximal self-love and joy whether or not you are successful at any point in your life."

David Born M.D.

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Prisoner Story

Overcoming was my goal when it came to addiction. My name is Ricardo Contreras and I'm a 31 year old serving a 14 year sentence in a California State Prison. When I was first incarcerated I had huge drug problem and I had a lot to go through. I was a teenager when my addiction first started and it began with weed. I thought it was nothing big then but I could look back now and see one thing only leads to another. At 12 years old someone had given me some pills, and after that all I remember is waking up in an ambulance with paramedics asking me what I was on. I had O.D'ed. But the sad part was I really didn't comprehend how quick life could end. I kept experiencing with drugs from heroin to every thing else. And I wasn't using them for fun anymore. I was now getting high to help handle problems of everyday life. Each close call lead to the next and I kept on using all the way up until I was 29 years old. Deciding not to use anymore wasn't an easy choice to make because it was how I escaped. But once I did make that critical decision to stop using I went at it with an open mind and a willingness to challenge what I was facing inside myself. I haven't been faultless but I have avoided those old friends who shared my addiction, and for this I'm glad. I've come a long way compared to where I was. The first reality of overcoming had to be my responsibility though, and when I did take that step more productive things came my way. Let it also pay off in your life.

Ricky Contreras

If you're caught up in the wrong things and don't want to change, don't jeopardize your family or friends.

This book is about change and picking ourselves up through the hard times in all lives, but if your not at a point of wanting to change in any form or way don't put your family or friends, or your kids through your addictions or violence. You endanger the people you say you love by these choices and you expose your brothers, sisters, sons, or daughters to following in your footsteps if you aren't careful. Love them more than that by not involving them in what you're drawn into and don't want to let go of.

"Whatever reason you had for not being somebody, there's somebody who had that same problem and over came it"

Barbara Reynolds

Positive Quote

If someone is negative all the time or does not respect you as a person, you turn them off and stay away from them. Okay that sounds easy right. Well it is if you are a strong disciplined man/woman who really wants success. It is very important to be honest with yourself. Recognize your addictions, accept and respect that which you can change. Understand that change takes strength, time, and commitment. Keep in mind fighting your addiction is the same as boxers in the ring, you want to win and eventually become the world champion. Yes, the prison world has a life of I own, lies take place of truth, phony people surround you, and often you are phony and negative. One day you want to fight your addiction, and the next day you don't. You may get in the ring and are knocked out by alcohol, drugs, or even committing a crime in the first round. Have respect for yourself. Get back up and fight for your life.

Prep/Turning Point

Care for where you live

In this I'm referring to earth. We wouldn't be alive if it weren't for the earth and everything in it. This is also where our kids and their kids are going to be raised. And just as anything that isn't looked after or cared for, eventually it gets damaged. So care for this place, not only for yourself, but for those who will come after. Don't ruin the earth with mindless wastefulness, destruction, trash, pollution, misuse, or carelessness. Think about everything you make, create, or use, and be conscious so that you aren't destroying life.

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

Eleanor Roosevelt

Stand up for what you believe in, but use more than your fist.

First off, standing up to someone or standing up for something you believe in isn't the same as fighting. Fighting as a way to resolve issues, prove a point, act tough, or to show off isn't how you should protect or defend your beliefs, opinions, yourself, friends, or family. There are plenty of other ways to speak your mind for something that is unjust, unfair, or rude. But do it in a way that gets your point across without harming or injuring someone.

"The way you use words has a tremendous impact on the quality of your life. Certain words are destructive; others empowering."

Susan Jeffers

LEFT SIDE

Protector of our female side and teaches us how to be appreciative as well as to nurture ourselves and others

Your parent's flaws don't have to be yours.

As a kid the things our parents say or do to us or around us can affect how we feel about ourselves or make an impact on our choices growing up. The things they do around us could also lead us to be like them. But you could be so much more. It doesn't matter if you were given up for adoption, don't have a family, grew up in the system or have parents who are drug addicts, abusive, and put you down. You can make something great of yourself and create a better life than the one you've been raised in. It might be challenging but refuse to give up. See in your parents what you don't want to be like and fight that side instead of being like them. Even when the hurt of feeling unloved arises, see yourself as valuable, lovable, confident, joyful, and happy.

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives."

William Jones

Prisoner Story

As I've reflected on my life up to this point, it sadness and shames me to say that I begun at the age of nine to get into trouble. My defects of character were fed and groomed very early.

My destructive lifestyle escalated quickly. By the age of 13 I was already a criminal, drug addict and heavy drinker. Not quite the alcoholic I would later become. I fell down into that rabbit hole. I made choices that although were detrimental to others, my family, friends, and myself I made excuses and rationalized due to my selfishness and pride.

I was then drawn to the gangs, searching for an identity and self-worth. I sought attention and approval from those I had believed had my best interest in mind. Boy was that a major misjudgment!! As I began another chapter of my destructive lifestyle I then committed the ultimate sin - murder. And all in the furtherance of a warped belief that my loyalties were to the gang. I was so clouded by my addiction and criminal mindset that I did not even have the decency to question that we were willing to take a life.

As I sit here at the age of 42 in a California prison, 26 years later, I am thankful. Why? How? Prison saved my life by having the opportunity of participating in self-help groups the have encouraged me to face my fear and insecurities. To recognize that I created a trail of victims and that I needed to make amends in any way that I could.

So little by little I peeled away the mask I wore and revealed the true me. With continued support from family and friends I grew. Having the great honor of attending the sweat lodge the Great Spirit has healed me mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

It's never too late to change

Nothing in life is permanent and any condition can be turned around. The goal should be to work on your life now and improve what's screwed up instead of waiting until you've dug yourself a deeper hole. Even if you're caught up in a tough spot, don't let yourself sink into not wanting to change or progress. You can choose to get away from anything or anyone that is holding you back and transform any obstacle or barrier at any time in your life. This doesn't mean you should just keep on doing what you're doing because you know you could eventually change it. Make it right today so that you don't have to look back and wish you had done something differently.

"If we don't change direction soon we'll end up where we're going."

Professor Irwin Corey

Positive Quote

You will receive a body. You may like it or hate it, but it will be yours for as long as you live. How you take care of it, or fail to take care of it can make an enormous difference in the quality of your life.

You will learn lessons. You are enrolled in a full time, informal school called life. Each day you will be presented with the opportunities to learn what you need to know. The lessons presented are often completely different from those you think you need.

There are no mistakes, only lessons. Growth is a process of trial, error, and experimentation. You can learn much from failure, as you can from success. Maybe more.

A lesson is repeated until it is learned. A lesson will be presented to you in various forms until you have learned it. Then you can go on to the next lesson.

Learning lessons does not end. There is no stage in life that does not contain some lessons. As long as you live, there will be something more to learn.

"There" is no better than "here" when your "there" has become "here". You will simply discover a "there" that will look better than your "here". Don't be fooled by believing that the unattainable is better than what you have.

What you make of your life is up to you. You have all the tools and resources you need. What you create with those tools and resources is up to you. Remember that through desire, goal setting, and unflinching effort, you can have anything you want. Persistence is the key to success.

True Friends

True friends are those that encourage you to be better. They influence the good things, and bring out the best of your thoughts, goals and hopes. They also stand by you in difficult times or when in need, and challenge you to grow. Instead of just talk and saying they'll be there for you they actually are! Actions speak louder than words so pay attention to these things. Look for good friends at every age and more importantly work on being this type of friend yourself.

"Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher."

Oprah Winfrey

RIGHT SIDE

Protects our male side and teaches us that no matter where we turn we are never alone. This side also carries our courage and warrior spirit.

Positive Story

One day a boy and his grandfather are out and about. In a way of explaining life, the grandfather told his grandson about two wolves that live inside us and fight for our soul. "One is good and one is bad", he explained.

With curiosity the boy asked, "which one wins grandpa?"

"Whichever one you feed the most grandson."

Life had lost all meaning for me and I blamed myself. I felt I deserved it for being so stupid and slow. And this was something I constantly told myself. I also became isolated, felt unwanted, unloved, and unworthy to be alive. Words like "die already" or "you not worth anything" played over and over in my mind. I didn't know how to reach out either. I had no father in my eyes, and I didn't want to see my mother cry, so I kept all this bottled up. It was numbing and I felt hopeless.

Eventually I began to entertain those stupid thoughts by trying to suffocate myself, drown myself and then went on to cutting my self. When none of this worked or brought me comfort I resorted to drugs like cocaine, speed, and meth. At 14 years old I began to feel normal again through the drugs so I used more and more and tried different things. Soon enough though cops were sticking guns in my face and I was landing in juvenile halls. Years later all of this would set me on to the course to prison for being an accessory to a home invasion. I'm not proud of it but I can say my final arrest somewhat saved my life. I didn't automatically stop hating myself or stopped wanting to kill myself, but over the years, and with family support I started to find reasons to live and be motivated again. I got into self-help groups, colleges, bible studies, and a number of other programs that helped me get back on my feet and rise above what happened to me. I also realized I can't justify my crimes for what happened to me either. I had to change that attitude and eventually I did. And this is what I pass forward. I wasn't responsible for what happened to me and I shouldn't have let it lead me down this path and not care about myself or others. This is what I hope my message relays. And if any of you feel as I once did I personally urge you to reconsider taking your life and look at my situation and see how I've overcame. You can too. Don't lose you hope. That is the worse thing anyone could do. Don't remain quite either. Reach out and speak up.

Francisco Palacios

Prisoner Story

In 2004, just five months after serving a four year sentence, I was facing charges of attempted murder. I didn't see it then, but that would become my biggest regret. Not because of the time, but for so many other reasons. The main one being I had left the woman I said I loved out on the streets pregnant and alone. I have no excuses and only me to blame, but I was in a whole different mind set then. Growing up mostly inside the system and around gangs, I only knew how to handle things one way and that was with violence. I also glorified the gang life. My parents came from gangs and so did other family members, so the things I heard and seen were how I wanted to be. Gang life was also how I escaped the drama at home and being responsible. As a kid with 5 younger brothers and sisters and with parents doing their own thing partying, in prison, or on drugs I should have stepped up in being that better role model. But I didn't. And like most kids do I found comfort in the worse of places. I didn't believe that those who would be there for me in the end would only be my family. More importantly I didn't see the effects my choices would create and how I would ruin more than just my life in the future. Instead I had set in motion heartache and struggle for my family and the person I shot. Twenty five years is nothing compared to the cycle I created and the people I let down. It took a long time to get out of that gang mentality, but I can see this life for what it is now, and nothing is as it seemed when I was younger. These homies aren't true to you and their cause is only money. Not for your people, or for your neighborhood. And real men aren't those out there gangbanging, drug dealing, trying to call shots, or those stuck behind bars. These people, including myself, took the easy way out. We escaped to this way of life instead of being stronger, more responsible, more caring, and with goals and principles. Real men take care of their families and kids. Nobody should aim for this life style. Today my outlooks and views are very different and it doesn't matter where I'm at. I live my own life and I'm prouder for it. I strive only for my family and build on who I am and want to become. As a father and uncle I work on changing my son's, nieces, and nephew's points of views.

ABOVE

Teaches us how to honor the great star nation, and reminds us that we come from the stars and to the stars we will return.

Positive Quote

On the best sunny day, the most powerful magnifying glass will not light paper if you keep moving the glass. But if you focus and hold it, the paper will light up. That is the power of concentration.

A man was traveling and stopped at an intersection. He asked an elderly man, "where does this road take me?" The elderly person asked, "where do you want to go?" The man replied, "I don't know." The elderly person said, "then take any road. What difference does it make?"

How true when we don't know where we are going, any road will take us there.

2

WEST / SNAKE

Unknown

The west leads us to our personal truth and inner answers. It also shows you the path to your goals.

Snake represents transformation from our physical self to our spiritual self. It's a transformation that needs to take place everyday. Shedding the old and beginning anew.

NOTE

This book should not be taken as a general guide to all situations in life. As with anything, take out of this what you find appealing and apply it when needed at that time and place. My main goal is to give anyone reading this a greater sense of morals and values than I had growing up and possibly make them a better person for it. A lot of this stuff I had to think about or come about on my own through reading or some personal experience. And I know I'm not alone. Kids are stuck wondering what's right or wrong in a number of circumstances, or curious about how to define themselves. So all I'm trying to do here is share my thoughts and views with those dealing with what I've dealt with and give some guidance to those who don't have none or who are misguided so that in the long run they'll have an inner voice to challenge them when it is needed the most. I know that's what I would of wanted or what I'd want for my son, nieces, nephews, cousins and so on. This is my purpose. I don't hold no moral high ground or carry a degree. I am only reaching out to make a difference.

Special thanks

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me out in some way or another in producing this book, and thanks to those who have been there for me through the ups and downs of my incarceration. My mother deserves a lot of credit because she has been a rock for my family and has put up with a lot, but she still remains strong. I pray she stays that way. And to my kid's mother, I give her an immeasurable amount of gratitude for a number of different things in my life and I commend her on raising our son by herself. She's done a great job. To the rest of my family and friends I love and think about you guys daily. Stay strong and determined to walk in a good way- Nicole, Michele, Bretado Family, Ruiz Family, Rubio Family, Wallens- much love. Time for change. I would like to thank PREP/Turning Point for their self-help programs across these prisons. They have truly helped and I am thankful. I hope to one day return their contributions. Big shout out to Youth Radio for providing the youth stories and to the youth that shared their lives in this book. Same goes for the prisoners that volunteered. I am very thankful. I believe that the more we see or hear outside of our own personal experiences the more we will relate, come together, grow, and feel we aren't alone. If anyone reading this is interested in reaching out or wants to be heard themselves you can check out Youth Radio at www.youthradio.org or catch them on KOEP, KCBS, or on The National Public Radio Stations. All are welcomed and the youth on there are more about bringing each other up than pulling each other down. Hit them up.



About the author

I was born in Santa Barbara California and raised in Santa Maria. I've spent most of my life in and out of the system since I was 11 years old. For 35 years I've gone from placement, foster homes, camps, Youth Authorities, and have seen just about every part of the prison system, including the SHU (Security Housing Unit). I hate every part of it! As a kid though this was all I knew and because of this, I would eventually catch my 25 year sentence due to my involvement in gangs and for an attempted murder. My father was always in and out of prison and involved in gangs, and my mother had her own issues with men, drugs, physical abuse, and partying. And these are the exact footsteps me and my 5 brothers and sisters followed in. It's an unfortunate and sad truth about this life-a lot of kids will get lost in what there parents did or what they're surrounded with the most. And even worst, some parents aren't instilling better morals and values in our kids or inspiring them to do better. This is why this book was written.

