

# The Vineyard

A Poetry Collection

BY: D.R. Williams

# The Vineyard

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Several poems have been previously published  
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"Warm Tears on Cold Skin" and "Pardon Me"

To The Leaves of Our Family Tree

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## INTRODUCTION

I began writing these poems in the spring of 2010 during a period of personal growth and spiritual enlightenment. While piecing together this book I combed through my journal searching for poems that touched every part of me. I came up with **Vintage 2004** which shows both the pain of being incarcerated and the hope for a better tomorrow.

In 2004 I walked reluctantly through these prison gates, like a man being led to his execution, as a sixteen year old kid. Since then my entire concept of love and life has changed and my desire for both burns brighter than ever. When you're given an eternity to be alone the most obvious thing to do is practice introspection.

This collection of poetry walks you through my childhood and the struggles of growing up in poverty with my siblings and single father. It also delves deeply into the isolation and abandonment felt from being incarcerated as a kid and it touches on the pain felt for those who suffer through poverty, inequality, and the failure to see the options to fix their broken lives.

You'll read poems of lost loves and gained friends, of social injustice and ancestral bonds. You'll read poems of total desperation as well as uncanny hope and ambition for success.

This journey will take you through the ghettos, the prison system, and the plantations only to leave you on love's doorstep. Each poem is either autobiographical or biographical.

Prisoners are often compared to cattle. We're herded from point to point, pen to pen, with guards who mimic dogs constantly barking orders behind us. I refuse to consider us cows or to think of prison as a ranch. We're much more than that, and prison is infinitely more dark, dank, and confined than any ranch. I see prison as a Vinayard and I liken the convicts to bottles of wine being stored in these cellars. Collecting dust, maturing, aging, becoming refined, anxious to share their gifts with the world. This is my first of many gifts to you.

Vintage 2004

Similar to liquors and wines

I was picked from a vine

Distilled and refined

Kept in places,

concealed and confined

I was pressed from grapes

bottled up,

left to age

collecting dust in this cellaresque cage

Packed close to others sharing these tilted shelves

Some turn to vinegar and wish to spill themselves

After twenty years I've seen some of them freed

Some who were cheap, some with prestige

I've seen some lose their minds and go crazy

telling me they'd rather be a wine than a raisin

But HEY,

I too anticipate the day

that I'll be sipped and savored

because when this corks popped for a tasting

I'll have the world intoxicated



## Wine Bottles

I remember... Playing tonk,  
while drinking liquor 'til it's gone.  
After dark, we're in the park  
20 strong.  
It was just another school night off, and  
we'd break the rules quite often  
straight sauced  
passing the bottles to my partners.  
Now those bottles are my cage.  
And it sure is strange how  
a world can change in a day.  
because each of my tomorrows  
I spend caught inside this bottle  
eternally facing my reflection at the bottom.

## JailHouse Lawyer

Recited law work  
'til my jaw hurt.

Read court transcripts  
'til nerve damage  
made my hands slip.

LexisNexis and all  
pardon my Purdon, WestLaw.

Small print left my vision blurred  
while appealing this prison term  
there's not much that I didn't learn.

Letters to my congressmen.  
Pass the bill, Politicians!!!  
Sorrow, I never wallow in.

Too busy to cry.  
Too involved to be idle.  
I have petitions to write.  
Blacks Law is my Bible.

The library?  
My Temple!  
'til I'm no longer the  
Defendant.

## Visitation

You see people trapped in cages  
and find it fascinating.  
Like a Zoo exhibit  
you're captivated  
by dudes imprisoned  
toss us vending machine snacks  
taunt our senses  
tempt us to attack  
then snap your pictures  
so you can show your friends  
that you went to the Zoo for a visit  
picked with the gorillas  
and threw food in the exhibit

## Shattered Hearts

When hearts shatter  
sparks scatter  
into dark matter.  
Pain makes us tear apart faster.  
Our tears depart, cascading  
down on dark faces.  
You and I,  
no longer we,  
became strangers.

WARM TEARS ON COLD SKIN

Warm tears heated his cold cheek,  
as she peered into his stoic features,  
emotions reeling as her closed fist clinched the bag he lay in.  
Repeatedly she beat his chest while praying "Don't leave me!"  
"What about the promises you made?"  
"You promised you would stay"  
So cold and unresponsive he laid in front of doctors  
on a steel slab in Presbyterian hospital  
seven gunshots riddled his lungs and chest.  
His mother clung to her only sons flesh,  
wishing he would just wake up from this,  
awake from this ceaseless dream of death.  
But he couldn't, this was his journey's end.  
His mother mourned as her warm tears dripped on his cold skin.

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## Lifeless Pit

Hearts race and beat rapidly  
until they split apart.  
Frowned faces as tears depart  
from the depths of a soul.  
Lost love has nowhere to go,  
Nowhere to Grow  
Dead leaves drop from trees  
with more life than  
a broken heart.  
Sweet memories that won't leave,  
crushed dreams  
as fresh tears stream from closed eyes.  
There's no prize when lovers split.  
And there's no life left in this pit.

## Conditional Love

I don't think I'm a good person.  
I say I love people, but I'm not sure if I know what love is.  
Everyone I know loves differently.  
Every love I know is followed by a "but..."  
I love you, "but" you're too fat.  
I love you, "but" you're too poor.  
I love you, "but" I love this more.  
I love you, "but" you need to change.  
I love water, "but" not the rain.  
Did you know there's 16 definitions for love?  
I've read 'em all and I still don't know what love is.  
I wish it was unconditional.

## A Blizzards Beauty

Snow storms  
the cold swarms  
my bones core  
stealing my souls warmth.  
But leaving me froze more  
is the whipping wind.  
Punishing my pores  
while ripping plenty skin  
and rubbing salt in the sores  
that didn't mend.  
Misery loves many friends  
and leaves us all assaulted by storms  
what a fitting end  
from something so gorgeous.



GHOSTLY FIGURE

Rain made the window wet  
but Pain made his silhouette  
appear as if he never left.  
It's been Nine years since his death  
and yet,  
I see him through my window pane  
strolling through the wind and rain  
As clear as day  
he smiles and waves  
before he turns to walk away  
into a ghostly fade.

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## Eyes like Mirrors

Silent suffering,  
morphed into violent eruptions.  
A life of having the stuffing kicked  
out of empty stomachs clinched  
tight because of nothingness.  
Something fresh was needed  
to see that  
hope was not defeated  
before the fetus was even  
able to breathe on it's own.  
Eyes reflect like mirrors  
a life of neglect and terror  
now that the child left defenseless is grown.  
A misfit born in hopelessness  
now known as an anti-socialist  
learned to suffer in silence alone.  
In his eyes I see his agony  
but what seemed to baffle me,  
was learning that his misery was my own.

## Artificial Lights

Artificial lights block my view of the stars  
late night I hear the music from cars  
filled with occupants  
probably cruising to bars.

Full moons show grey clouds floating in black sky  
women on the stroll taking cab rides  
Maybelline covers their black eyes.

What's done in the dark will come to the light  
and what's gave from the heart only gives life.

But selling drugs in the dark under street lights  
while hiding guns in the park under the slides  
will have you under indictment  
rumbling LIFE!

I've seen it happen dozens of times.

Because artificial light blocked my view of the stars  
so I grew up watching the dudes in the dark.

## SENSELESS TEENS

We don't pay attention, we  
pray for tension intentionally  
a group of senseless teens  
who wouldn't be free to see their sweet sixteens  
some say its meant to be  
which means its meant that we  
be tried, convicted, and sentenced  
then sent to a penitentiary.  
This is deep  
the consequences of our life styles  
was once a bright child  
but my up-bringing was quite wild.  
Is that how life was meant to be?  
Childhood produces senseless teens.

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## Illiteracy

Foreign symbols scribbled on clean parchment.  
Big words from big men resemble obscene jargon.  
My ignorance isn't bliss!  
Entire conversations are held in script.  
I sense that I'm mentioned in  
your world of sentences, but I'm dismissed  
as if I'm just insignificant.  
Your iniquities will not be continuously  
hidden in these paragraphs.  
Secrecy ignited a rapturous burning  
that took shape as a passion for learning.  
Watch as the incorrigible  
fish tails around the learning curve.  
Conquers grammar with the simplest ease  
and laughs in the face of illiteracy.

## Dementia

People, places and things cluttered.  
Memories jumble  
as the figures of his past  
trip over each other.  
Criss-Crossed and tangled  
the truth gets lost in fables  
and now we hardly recognize  
our friends from strangers.  
Missed birthdays and anniversaries.  
The last person introduced  
is the first to leave.  
Dementia the barrel's bottom  
a life that's been forgotten.  
A bright mans mind has turned to mush.

## Starving Artist

Starving Artist

Jobless

yet bombarded with charges  
from credit card debt  
to student loans  
and rent on her apartment.

She's honestly swamped,  
her drawings

are hardly acknowledged  
and when regarded  
she's harshly admonished.

Criticized,

talent minimalized

while she's looked on by the dismissive eyes  
of visionless guys.

Only if they could see  
the pictures elicited  
from her gifted mind.

## Faded Beauty

She knew it all, fiction or fact  
whether true or false.

She happened to slip into crack  
after using raw.

Her puny arms scarred from  
her self-inflicted beauty marks  
She knew she was addicted but perhaps  
it wasn't doing harm.

She could remember way back  
when she could do no wrong  
now she's stripping for scraps  
at all the booty bars  
or on the hookers track  
chasing after moving cars.

She's just a glimmer of her past self  
hard times contributed to her bad health.

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## Chasing the Night's Dreams

I rise with the Sun  
eyes as dry as my tongue  
clear my throat  
wipe the sleep from my eyes  
here I go  
another try to reach my desires  
Chasing the nights dreams  
might seem  
like insanity  
my quiet screams  
kept inside my mind, pleading  
for understanding, we  
were left together alone  
my thoughts and I  
either to rise  
or just rot and die

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## Defying Reason

Dreams of elevations only obtainable  
by knowing no limitations.  
Secure words planted in fertile minds  
childs dreams come to reality  
watching is worth the while  
Unlimited their vision  
Reason is non existent  
They emerge from canyon diving unscathed  
and levitate as they ascend to heavens gates unphased  
Only to return to the world  
of ineffectual intellectuals  
Boggled by the reason defying  
Nature's Law rewriting  
Person who abides by being open minded.

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Nature Speaks

On the perfect night  
purple skies  
shine so bright  
they'll hurt your eyes.  
Magnificence is incomprehensible  
nature speaks in tones  
that we chose not to listen to.  
The intellectuals  
riddled by the mystical.  
Frustrated 'cause we've missed  
the message delivered to us.

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## Asleep Machines

During the night hours we're most creative  
closest to greatness.

Anxiously we twist in our sleep like landed fish.  
Street lights flicker within the late night mist.  
Our worlds are silent save for the random mouse  
or the light snor of an enamored spouse.

As we rest we burn energy  
fueling the machines of our dreams.

Still pictures of better living, as vivid  
as if we lived it. We envision happy endings.

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Spirit's In the Ether

Magical it seems, the songs that nature sings  
the connectedness of all things  
the reality in our dreams.  
The cosmo's where lost souls  
are found again  
earth where rebirth produces profound men.  
The life that's in the ether  
contains the lives of every creature  
whether insect or amphibian  
from the trees, to animals living in them  
We breathe the freed souls  
who were lifted from their burdened forms  
But the mind of man is riddled by the mystical  
conflicted by the simple truth.

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Desire Driven

Night sounds,  
the hype crowd just died down.  
Hear imaginary crickets chirp  
Lights flicker, minds centered  
on plans that didn't work.  
It stands to reason  
that the believers of their dreams  
are conceiving schemes to insure  
they finish first.  
People who believe they won't need to sleep  
until they're in the dirt.  
Sun down, Lights out, Lamp on, Candles lit.  
The drive of a man who never plans to quit.

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Raw Desire

Defiant souls fighting with a fire  
as bright as gold.

Hearts race and stomachs tighten  
staunch faces as palms perspire  
Their bodies rocked by a calm excitement.  
RAW DESIRE!

Taking on all challengers  
no matter how powerful  
fully committed to weather what may come.  
Some call it courageous  
yet others may say "dumb"  
These defiant souls jump into their dreams  
and claim what they want.

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## The Old Oak

He'd drift to sleep  
leaning against  
the beaten bark of the old withered tree.  
Although the old oak is aging also  
time sure takes its toll.  
Each winter breeze brings with it grief  
as the degrees tumble  
her leaves shrivel  
dropping lifelessly to the hardened earth.  
Beneath this tree stories were shared,  
and lives were lived.  
She's been here since  
his parents were just nippers  
and will live to witness  
his descendants.  
One day his children will know the luxury  
of reclining in her old oak branches comfortably.



Gambia's Heartbeat

Trees danced to the jungle drum  
every creature in the jungle sung  
the lands from which my ancestral mothers come.  
Where my ancestral fathers fought  
where Aisba was bought  
after she was stolen  
robbed of her freedom,  
beaten until broken  
Spirits weep  
and we hear their despair in the breeze,  
see sorrow in every meadow  
feel suffering in the trees.  
Every creature cries 'cause the drums no longer beat.

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## Aisba's Offspring

A prince by birth right  
since my first cries  
but my mind wasn't aware of it.  
My royal ancestors were  
despised by the heretics  
mobbed on by derelicts  
and robbed of our heritage.  
In Gambia Aisba's kidnappers shackled her feet.  
She was raped chained battered and beat.  
Encaged in a slave ship, left abandoned to bleed  
then auctioned of in Carolina to a scandalous fiend.  
Made to pick his cotton  
and raise his misbegotten.  
That's how I happen to be  
an African trapped in the "Land of the Free"  
Labeled racist by people blind to what I manage to see  
visions of slaves hanging from my family tree.  
Worried I'll fail at everything I plan to achieve.  
Working to exceed the expectations demanded of me.

## Broken Branches

A family became strangers  
once names and birth dates were forgotten.  
We were indifferent and sometimes indifference  
can seem malicious.  
Our intentions weren't to forget  
but that's just what we did.  
Leaving a single relative  
to hold tight to one-sided relationships.  
So destructive was our selfishness  
that our children no longer know their own cousins.  
Sisters don't know their own brothers.  
How despicable are we to know  
there's no love for our own blood.  
Our ancestors would be ashamed of what had become of us.  
A family tree of broken branches.

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## Stay Positive

The rare letters I receive are signed "Stay Positive"  
stay positive although I'm locked in prison  
and the authors of these rare letters never stop to visit.  
Instead they wait for me to contact them  
through telephone calls and missives  
and when they feel the urge to reply they do every time with

"Hey, Stay Optimistic"

I want to tell them where to shove their optimism.

I want to tell my siblings that they're the worst bunch.

They tell me they love me,

I tell them "I can't tell"

I was sixteen, 110 months ago.

Now I'm 26 with 190 months to go.

Never a single visit.

The drive is only 51 miles

that's all of 45 minutes.

They say I forfeited my right to a family

I say that's their excuse for abandoning me.

I'm told to stay positive

and I am

I'm positive that their love is not love.

## Margaret Child

Offensive as the heartless smile  
of the discarded child  
whose mother was too embarrassed to be a parent.  
She quickly deserted this blessing, Margie  
who she considered to be worthless  
because her own self image was derided.  
He wasn't born with a silver spoon,  
he was marooned  
21 months from the womb.  
His mother pretended for an age  
that she didn't see the pain  
misery and hate  
that was clearly written on his face.  
Through it all he deeply loves her  
just for being his birth mother.

## Abandoned House

He and his spouse  
constructed a brick house.  
Something they built out of  
love for each other.  
She as his wife mother  
so they became prenatals.  
But for one reason or another  
sharing was become uncomfortable.  
Divorce papers,  
in court statements  
the course fate of  
four kids, now separated  
who over the years became strangers.  
The broken home was sold  
back to the bankers  
and remained vacant  
until it was claimed by vagrants.

Nobody

I cry, Nobody hears.  
I scream, Nobody hears.  
I've knocked on the door, no  
Nobody's there.  
Nobody cares  
to answer my calls  
because Nobody's scared  
of this generous dog.  
Loneliness caused  
my whole body pain.  
Although I hope, I know  
it probably won't change.  
When I sent for help  
Nobody came.  
That's why I refuse to write Nobody's name.  
My heart will only let Nobody in  
so I'll forever be nobody's friend.

## Gift of Friendship

Where time gives way  
& lives live, suspended together on public transit,  
a kind gift was given freely by a complete stranger,  
who initially screamed "Seat Taken!"  
when greeted by the vagabond with yellow teeth, stankin'.  
Until he realized the drifter was serving a sentence with  
mental deficiencies, he who didn't speak, didn't see a path to  
travel, nor could he grasp the babble chattering about him.  
But clearly he comprehended the man taking his hand  
was taking it in friendship.

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## COLD HEART

A freezer burnt heart was thawed  
mildewed from the frost  
trying to beat again,  
feeling secluded and lost.  
This heart was unusually calm  
never irregular,  
but it was abusively harmed  
and trapped in unpleasantness.  
Nevertheless,  
blood started to flow  
the pump started to grow  
love started to show  
from something so hopeless  
once discarded and cold.  
Life isn't always sink or swim  
so think before you leave your friends  
because a cold heart can learn to beat again.

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When we're together

When we're together it's... Special  
each moment is pressureless  
your smile alone puts me in the presence  
of heavens bliss.  
Your words encourage  
they project me toward perfection  
when I felt cursed and burdened  
you soothed my stresses with affection.  
I cherish you  
and you accept my imperfections.  
Since I share your views  
I listen when you correct my misdirection  
And I often find myself in awe.  
Of such a little woman who's so gentle & yet so strong  
but if theres ever a time that you feel weak  
I'd do my all to make it better  
because I feel most complete  
the times that we're together.

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PARDON ME

Pardon me gorgeous but I'm amazed  
by the wonderous way  
you tend to articulately illustrate  
without saying a thang.  
You're so flawless and full of grace  
as sweet as the summer's breeze  
the complexity of your essence  
your presence is where I want to be.

So PARDON ME

for trying so hard to be regarded so heartlessly.  
I played my cards and discarded you thoughtlessly.  
How foolish of me, I stupidly kept a joker and lost a Queen.  
I'd give my all for your call but love don't cost a thing.  
So it seems that you're gone from me  
regardless of how hard I fight.  
Baby please don't view me harshly  
Pardon me for my slight.

## Infidelity

The open door  
summoned her  
from her slumber.  
She suddenly saw the covers  
and wanted to get under.  
She wanted me  
in her stomach,  
urged me,  
to gently kiss her  
pleaded,  
for sensuous whispers  
demanded,  
to meet my member.  
I obliged in my weakened state  
and now I must  
plead and beg  
for my wife  
to understand I wasn't  
thinking straight.

Peace in Each others Arms

Sweet whispers to troubled minds,  
deep whimpers mistaken for subtle cries drowning in cheap  
liquor.

We held hands strolling past street venders  
in our quiet city square,  
we stared at over head stars while venders peddled their wares.  
Silly caratures of us kissing.

She giggled at my jibs, her lips quivered.  
Our stresses relieved, the pressures of our days were eased,  
and we found peace in the arms of our lover, we found peace in  
each other.

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BUTTERFLY

She floats in the gentle breeze  
scarcely flapping her elegant wings.  
Her movement is so effortlessly fluent  
that she attracts the eyes of admirers  
and her eyes descry the desirous.

SHE GLOWS!

Her smooth beautiful complexion.

SHE FLOWS!

She majestically glides through a room with effervescence.  
My Butterfly.

She smiles and flutters eyes  
while she flutters by.

She has me hypnotized by her aura.

But I'm pained to know she'll never feel the same for the  
florist.

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A Breezes Message

Winds whisper sweet nothings

to my steaming cup

of tea and honey.

Soft rains send people running

hurried paces and worried faces

as they scurry hastily to working places.

Leather seats and dash boards are getting wet

from open windows of cars owners forget to check.

Under skies the color of smoke from cigarettes

lives intersect

but only for split moments

a woman's umbrella closes as a previously unnoticed co-worker

holds the offices door open.

He smiles as she approaches

while his eyes reflect hopelessness

She strolls through the open door

while simultaneously thanking him for holding it.

Only if he wasn't to hesitant

to relay the breezes message.

Only If...

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APPLE

She was sweet and slightly bitter,  
Firm but also soft enough to nibble.  
She had thin skin but a thick core,  
and she smelled as good as she tasted.

DELICIOUS.

I remember her from my youth. We grew together.  
Familiarized ourselves with each other.

I learned to love her.

She sustains life, protects the heart & lightens spirits.

Her kiss is juicy and crisp,

Consuming.

All fruit should taste like this.



## EQUALITY

Is it a vision of deluded minds?  
A sight seen only by secluded eyes?  
Where equal pay and equal rights  
equally exist for all of people kind.  
Is it a figment,  
a fairy tale?  
A story that many know very well.  
A concoction of hopes and aspirations  
that never came to pass.  
Or is it just some ones fabrications  
they made to get a laugh?  
Because I've lived  
and never seen  
even the most minute,  
smallest piece  
of what you call equality.

SANFORD P.D.

Hello Ms. Martin  
I'm Officer Stalling  
of the Sanford Police Department.  
I am calling  
to say I'm sorry  
for your loss.  
You see, a neighborhood watchman  
began following Trayvon when  
he caught sight of his dark skin.  
After a scuffle the murderous marksman  
held Trayvon down and shot him  
while he laid face down screaming for help,  
an eye witness says he seen it himself.  
But we refuse to charge him.  
So, while you and I are talking  
please call off Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton  
along with the new Black Panther Party.  
They're all causing Sanford problems  
what with all these marches  
the media coverage is constant.  
If you don't stop it  
you'll expose our corrupt police department.

## Quality of Life

My childhood home was in squalor,  
plus the lights,  
were barely on  
to the delight  
of the roaches who lived amongst us,  
just as squallid as the mice.  
So when politicians  
talk preposterously like  
we're all equally impoverished,  
check my quality of life.

## Crabs

They rumble  
for position  
they scuffle.  
They grab at each other  
like crabs in a bucket.  
Constantly disgusted  
'Cause one can't climb upward  
without a claw pulling them down  
agitated they keep moving around.  
Is it stupidity  
or selfishness  
that prevents the unity  
of shell fish.  
What about the communities  
we dwell in?  
No plan is a "nigga's" plan  
instead of helping each other  
we blame the fisher man.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robert Williams' father continuously pushed him to speak the "King's English" in order to discourage the use of slang or "dialect" making him fully appreciate the English language in its proper form. His father instilled in him a strong sense of community and moral principles during his childhood in Missouri, bringing forth in him both the desire to help the less fortunate and a deep concern for social inequalities.

When he is not writing poetry and articles, he is volunteering his time with a local non-profit organization and mentoring young men in prison to get them to open their minds to a world of opportunities and possibilities.

Mr. Williams currently lives in Independence, Missouri and is a freelance writer.