

Who I Am Today

**Giving incarcerated
people a voice outside
the walls**

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Who I Am Today Project

Sharing the Words and Faces of Those Whose Only Hope is the Maryland Second Look Act

The following are five of the hundreds of submissions received by the Who I Am Today project, a collection of the stories of people who have served long sentences in a positive way. **The people shown here are all serving Life Without the Possibility of Parole sentences.** Correctional Services Article 7-301 (d) (3) says “If an inmate has been sentenced to imprisonment for life without the possibility of parole under § 2-203 or § 2-304 of the Criminal Law Article, the inmate is not eligible for parole consideration and may not be granted parole at any time during the inmate's sentence.” This means that without **Second Look legislation they have no path to release.** Their stories of rehabilitation, healing and giving back will speak for themselves through these submissions.

I've received numerous letters from individuals serving Life Without the Possibility of Parole sentences for felony murder, which means they participated in the predicate felony, but not the murder itself. I also have seen several cases with sentences over 100 years - the highest of which is a 300-year sentence with a current release date of Aug 10, 2243. Without Second Look legislation, none of these individuals have a chance of release under any circumstances.

There are many people who have no legal options left at their disposal. In spite of the lengthy list of possible motions, many of them only apply in incredibly narrow circumstances. In fact, 97% of charges end in a plea, and that majority has only two avenues available - a modification, which expires after 5 years, and a post-conviction, which expires after 10 years. Second Look legislation contemplates a case review at 20 years or later, at which time these options are long expired and it is the only chance these people have for release.

Sonyia Daniels



My name is Sonya Daniels, and I've been incarcerated since 2002. I'd like to tell you what I've done with the last 20 years.

I arrived in prison broken by a lifetime of abuse and mental illness, so the first thing I did was get myself stable. I knew I still wanted to be a mother, daughter, sister and aunt. I was determined to keep my family connections strong, and as of today, I'm still succeeding.

As I healed, I found a growing desire to give something back. Remorse is more than being sorry, it is changing your heart and actions too. I was surrounded by women who needed help, and I asked God to show me what I could do.

Over the past two decades, I became a mentor, a leader, and a peer recovery specialist. I helped many women get and stay on the right path here, and formed long-lasting friendships with some of them. I celebrate their successful reentries with them, knowing we may never see each other again.

Inside, I share my faith and recovery as a leader in the Celebrate Recovery program, which I helped maintain through the COVID pandemic. I meet with peers through the peer recovery program to help them stay clean, get the help they need, and not come back. I've forged strong relationships with staff, residents, volunteers, and relatives, and I let God use me to make a positive impact on the world every day.



Melwin Powell

My name is Melvin E. Powell Jr, I am the only son of Mr. Melvin E. Powell, Sr. and Ms. Betty W. Powell, I entered this world on November 2, 1968 at Anne Arundel General Hospital. My only sister, Crystal W. Powell-Davenport, was already here awaiting my arrival. My father is a retired transportation / heavy machine operator for the U.S. Naval Academy. My mother retired from teaching school after 40+ years of service. I attended school in Annapolis.

My world was undone and turned completely upside down with the loss of Mr. Edward Sherman Wilson, my grandfather, to brain cancer. Being very young when he passed, I blamed myself for years, as it was I who encouraged him to go get tested in the first place. To my young mind, if I had not told him to go to the doctor, he would not have died. Naïve as it sounds, to my mind, my hero was gone and it was my fault. This perceived reality was the beginning of my downward spiral in life.

In 1986, one bad life choice forever changed my life. I chose to start hanging out with people who, to my young mind, were men. Not real men like my father and grandfather, but those wantabe men. Flashy, loud, and with a desire to be "cool" and "tough". It was what these 'wantabe men' taught me, that led to a felony-murder conviction, along with the natural-life sentence that accompanied it. My new residence became the Maryland Department of Correction.

Taken from all I knew and deposited within a societal structure foreign to me, I set out to become the man my elders set the example for and which God meant me to be. My search began in earnest to discover what it was to be a real man. To get there, I believed I would need to grow mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. This journey began with obtaining my GED in 1993. This led to courses at Baltimore City Community College followed by an Associate's of Arts Degree in Christian Education from Amherst Theological Seminary. I have taken many other classes that have contributed to my academic and mental growth, at the present I am enrolled in International Christian College & Seminary to obtain my Ordination. My life was greatly influenced by my affiliation with and participation in the Old Town Jaycees. There I developed my skills in leadership and organization. These skills have proven valuable in my functioning in a leadership roll in various other organizations over the years. Two of

the most important leadership roles I have had and currently holds are the offices of Pastor and Mentor. In 1998, Bishop Orlando N. Hamilton and Rev. Dr. John C. Allee, Senior Bishop and General Overseer of Holy Trinity Ministry ordained me as a Pastor-Teacher. This ordination I still hold today. While I have been a mentor to many throughout my adult life, it wasn't until 2007 under the leadership of Mr. Keith Kitchen, then RCI's Chaplain, that I started mentoring in an organized group designed for that purpose. This group is called 'MEN for LIFE'. Then in 2011, I was asked to function as a mentor for the MCI-H Youth Challenge Program. In 2012, I was appointed Program Director. Through this position, I was able to utilize all the skills I had acquired and I restructured the program and revised its curriculum. In 6 years, the program had graduated over 240 men providing them with vital life skills along with the knowledge and encouragement to share what they have learned with those with whom they come into contact. I have a real passion for enlightening and encouraging young men.

When not engaged in mentoring, teaching or at work, I work out, read, play bass guitar and seek new things to learn. All of this is to help me deal with the stress of surviving daily life within this system.

My life's goal is to continue to help as many people as I can to become the person who God meant them to be, and lead as many as I can toward the Kingdom of God. I intend to accomplish this through the ministry I founded called "**Desire of All Nations Bible Fellowship**" where "**The Kingdom Of God is our Rule & The Glory of God is our Goal**".

The mission is to:

- † Inspire holiness in the lives of believers
- † Increase Faith within the hearts of growing Christians
- † Teach Biblical Manhood to younger men (Mighty Men Of God Program)
- † Instill Hope in the hearts of people struggling everywhere

Continuing to Mentor through the program I have founded "**Man UP**" Manhood "**The Ultimate Potential**" where "**Our Minimum Is Not Our Maximum**". Seeing the plight of the young men today, I have been moved to call them up to a higher standard than the one that I see many young men have for themselves. In everyone there is

Ultimate potential that God has purposed in us that society's flashy lights has blinded, causing many not to see it or feel doomed to failure when seeking it. I believe that educating them about God's plan for man will do this. Manhood Training will bring God's plan to fulfillment. **MAN UP** will do this through a series of educational discussions on:

Personal and Interpersonal Effectiveness:

Topics will cover: Self, Personal Character and Motivations

- ⇒ Understanding how private victories affect public victories.
- ⇒ Seeing how obtaining these victories will empower young men to dismantle and eradicate negative, harmful and/or self-destructive thoughts and behavior patterns.
- ⇒ Showing how knowledge gained from making and keeping promises to ourselves will inspire in them the wisdom of the value in the promises made to others.
- ⇒ Male hood's minimum is not Manhood's maximum.

Michelle Blythe



Who I Am Today

December 11, 2022

My name is Michelle Blythe (914-146). I used to exist, but today I am living, and it's with a reason and a purpose. Sometimes God disrupts what you call living for a bigger purpose and to find Him. I met a man named Jesus and He is a big part of who I am today. He saved me, forgave me, loves me, and taught me how to love others, in spite of how they might treat me.

Being 22 years of age when I got locked up until now, being 49 years old I have grown and matured into a virtuous and respectful woman. I realize my life is not about me, it's helping others and giving back to the world. I enjoy counseling the ladies in this prison, giving good advice, prayer, Bible study, and a shoulder to cry on in their time of need, necessities they may need, and most of all, love. Love with a sincere heart. I am very patient, understanding, sincere, loving, open-minded, and of strong faith. I serve on the church committee and the dance ministry.

I've overcome two major 3-way bypass heart surgeries, fear of dying in this place, being kind to others when they treat me unfairly, I left my daughter when she was just one year old. She is now 28 years old. She admires me and looks up to me even though I didn't raise her, my mom and sisters did. I have good family support that value my opinion, see the good in me, and most of all loves me.

Today I don't let my heart lead me. I lead my heart. I submit and allow change to take control. I had to change me in order for others to see that change is real and it's okay to be sensitive and vulnerable and not a product of your environment. The ladies here are in school, jobs, church, and some are counseling the younger generation most of all a change of attitude, they thank me, but I say it's not me, it's God that uses me as His vessel.

Thanks to God.

Success Station



Jeffrey Ebb

October 19, 2022

Jeffrey D. Ebb, Sr.
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WHO I AM Today,
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Dear Maryland Legislature:

I am sending this letter hoping that it will make a difference with the campaign to change the narrative about long term incarcerated citizens, who have been diligently laboring to demonstrate that no one deserves to be defined for the rest of their life by the worst thing they may have ever done.

I am Jeffrey D. Ebb; I was born in East Baltimore's Lafayette Housing Projects and raised in West Baltimore's Edmonson Village. I am an incarcerated Veteran, currently serving a "Death by incarceration"; life without parole sentence as a direct result of the disease of addiction. I am in no way attempting to minimize the pain and loss nor excuse my conduct. I simply want to acknowledge I have been afflicted with a mental health disease since childhood. My parents were substance users, but my father was an alcoholic and poly substance abuser. He was both physically and verbally abusive. My parents separated when I was about eight years old as a result of my fathers' abusiveness and alcoholism.

By the Grace and Mercy of the Creator, I was blessed to graduate from Carver Vocational Technical High school with a trade in carpentry and even joined the military (Army National Guard) to get my life moving in the right direction. I knew that if I did not get away from the negativity, my life would not be progressive. My son was born around this time and I wanted to be the best father I knew how. I wanted to marry Ms. Rita Jackson, the mother of my son, and pursue a stable and responsible life. At my core, I have always wanted to have a positively progressive lifestyle. However, substance abuse challenges and resultant criminal record contributed to my discharge from the military. Every time I would apply for jobs, my record would prevent me from being hired. To take care of my responsibilities until I could find stable employment, I started selling drugs. My addiction caused me to become unmanageable.

Having now been incarcerated three decades (30 years), I have been serving my fellow incarcerated citizens and demonstrate my remorse through progressive programming, self-improvement, commitment to strengthening the interconnected fabric of our communities and persuading youth to embrace their citizenship and anti-violence in order to make something productive of their lives and healthier communities. I am a staunch advocate of rehabilitation through education and service. I have over twenty five years of programming as a facilitator, mentor, mediator,

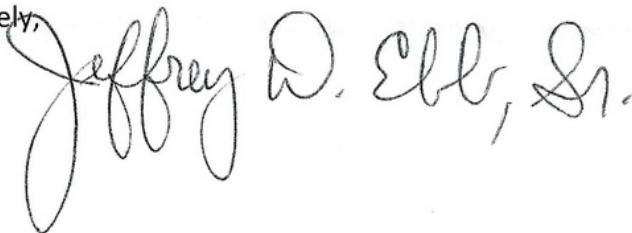
and role-model to help guide youth activities at this institution affecting hundreds of lives, and creating a safe environment for staff and incarcerated citizens. Five of the main programs for that purpose of accomplishing this task are;

- **Peer Recovery Support Specialist-** this program teaches the value of building and maintaining motivation, coping with urges, managing thoughts, feeling, and behaviors, and learning to live a balanced life.
- **Alternatives to Violence Project-**this is a creative conflict resolution and experiential program that includes values with hopes of seeking non-violent ways of dealing with problems and issues.
- **Houses of Healing-** this program is a cognitive behavior therapy and emotional literacy program that helps participants understand why they have made so many bad decisions and gives them the tools to make better decisions.
- **University of Baltimore Second Chance College Program-** I mentor students in this awesome program which is a real life changer for those students that offers access to higher education and a pathway to a better life.
- **Outback Observer Editor-** This in the institutional newsletter that I helped to create and been managing for twenty years.

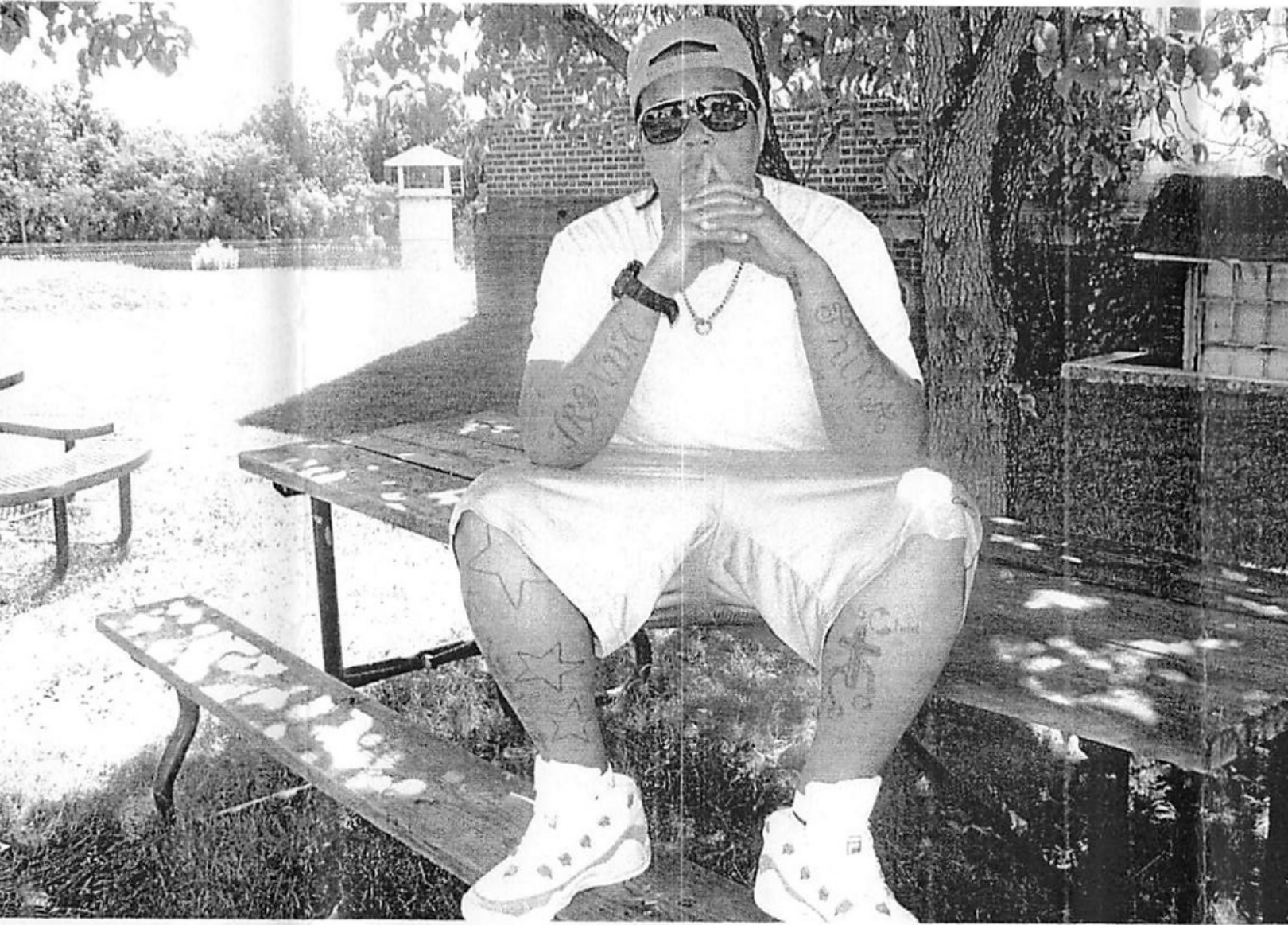
Please note additional accomplishments are identified in the attached resume.

I am incredibly serious about saving lives, preventing victimization, and redirecting at-risk youth and those affiliated with gangs. Take a close look at the transformation I have made during his lengthy three decades of incarceration. I am firmly committed to progressively metamorphosing lives and public safety. Please allow me a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate my resolve to be an asset to the social contract. If you sense I can be of assistance working with youth to prevent them from making choices that diminish their freedom and put them on the path to incarceration please do not hesitate to call upon me; I am ready, willing, and qualified to handle the work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey D. Ehl, Sr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Brittany Barclay



Dear Legislature,

12-12-2022

I am writing this letter because I am very intrigued to the fact that I can have the opportunity to write about who I am today, oppose to what led to my imprisonment.

I currently have "Life Without Parole". I have been incarcerated since January 2009. I was 19 years old. When I first came to MCI-W I had no idea who I was or where I was going in life.

My first few years in the beginning were rough because I was in my own way. In 2012 I became enrolled in school because I wanted better. Since 2012 I have also been categorized as a Model Inmate.

One day I eventually woke up and was hungry for change. I knew change could be difficult. However, that didn't stop me. I became so aware of the things I had to do to better myself so I put my feet to work. I signed up for all kind of groups that I knew would help me positively in all areas. While I continued to go to school as well my grades only improved because of my determination to succeed and I graduated and received my Diploma in 2013. Throughout years of dedication I also received "29 certificates" as well as "certifications in ① Blood Spill, ② Sanitation, ③ Floor Tech, and ④ MCE.

I had to live and learn. What kept me going was the fact that I believed in

my ability to change. I imagined myself as the person I wanted to become. Basically, I would finish what I start and I didn't allow setbacks to discourage me it only challenged me more to do what I had to do. The key to so much in this place is that "It takes nothing to join the crowd it takes everything to stand alone"... I STAND ALONE... I work for "MCE" on my OFF days I participate in cleaning details in which I buff and strip floors. I also train other inmates so that they can receive certifications.

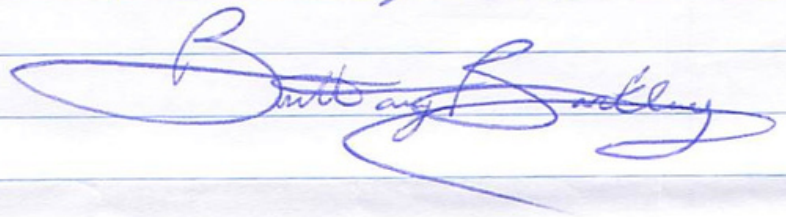
So much is easier said than done but I overcome many trials, tribulations, obstacles that life may throw at me because nothing is worth me losing everything I have worked so hard for. Yes, some things are inevitable that's when challenges are faced then decisions are made. For instance I live to lead by example. Isolation has helped me become a leader. I find my own truth. I'm not swayed by fear nor opinions. I'm faced with my own decisions. I examine who I am as an individual. I know what's important to me. I overcome many challenges because to me personally things ain't always about the process it's about the results.

I never judge a book by its cover. So many are misunderstood. My purpose is to help people and I welcome to help any and all regardless of their skin color, religion, preference, or charge. I give people honesty not what they want to hear. I don't judge, neither do I

pacify. I treat people how I want to be treated. I have helped many find themselves from my own personal truth and acknowledgement. Everyone deserves a chance to be heard.

Outside of here I have a huge family very supportive, loving, caring and amazing. I am 33 years old now still till this day my entire family is still here by my side. For that I am gratefully blessed as well as honored. I'm just as equal as anyone else. I'm no better than anyone. God deserves the glory. I give back in here in all the ways I can. I can't wait to be able to give back to my community. I have a destination, I know my purpose, I have a heart.

kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anthony Bradley". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.