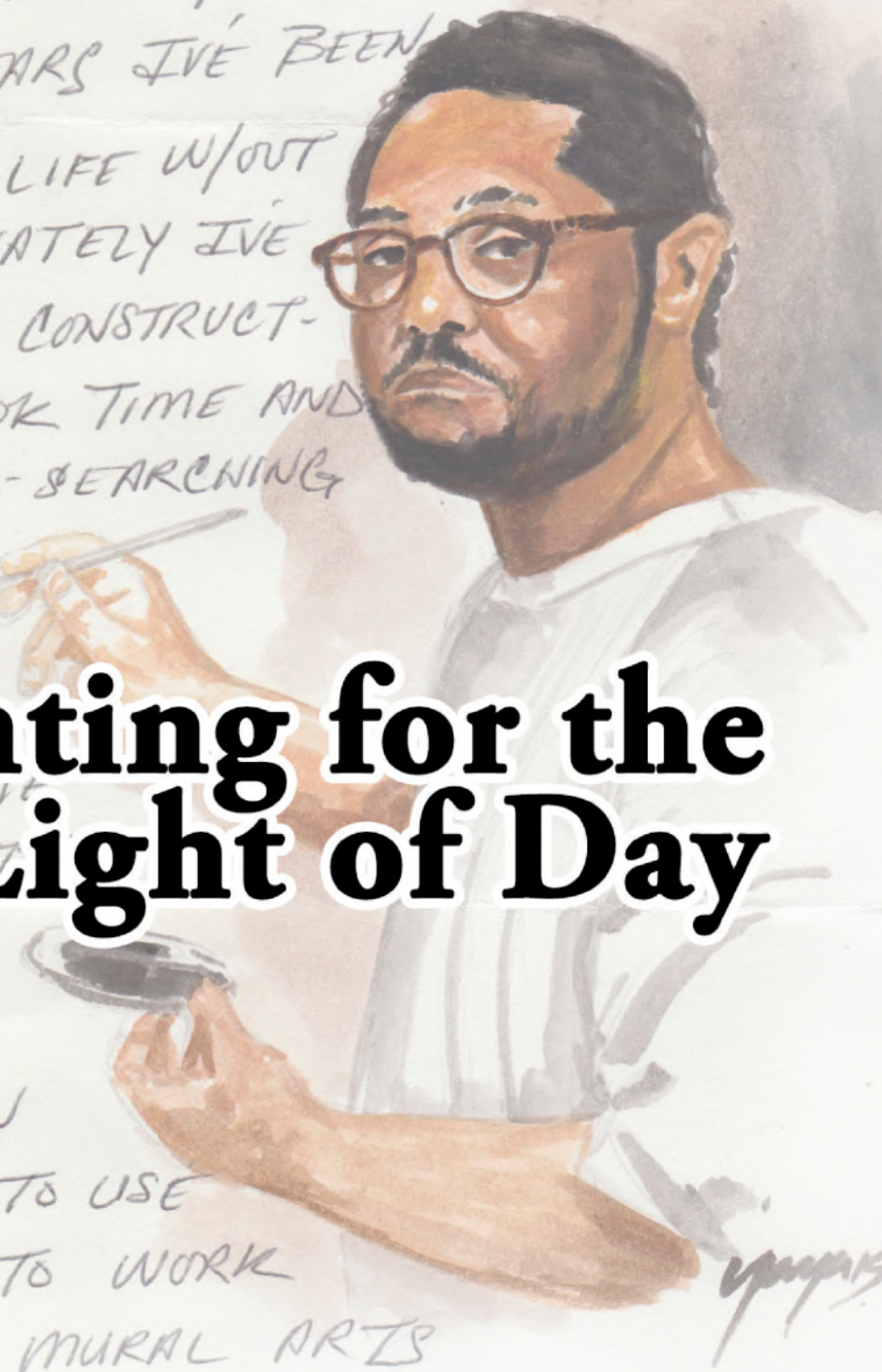




I AM FROM PITTSBURGH, PA. AT AGE 17  
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# Fighting for the Light of Day

*“As the seasons continue to change on my life and the lives around me, I want to know that I am actively doing all I can to change my actions and the outcome of such, so the world around me and at large can be better in some way. For every little bit of success I achieve, we all are safer and happier.”*

*- Terri Harper*



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Cover art and drawings throughout are by James Hough.

If you are interested in acquiring more copies of this pamphlet, please contact us by email or snail mail.

The LifeLines Project would like to thank the Leeway Foundation of Philadelphia and the People’s Paper Coop for their support in the publication of this pamphlet.

And special thanks to the eight people whose voices are featured here, for being part of this project and for their tireless work for justice and freedom.

# Introduction

*LifeLines: Voices Against the Other Death Penalty* is a media and cultural project intended to transform the nature of public discussions and understanding of Death By Incarceration (DBI)—more commonly known as Life Without Parole (LWOP)—in Pennsylvania. The project was developed to support an emerging statewide campaign to end the practice of sentencing people to die in prison. Pennsylvania prisons hold over 5000 people with DBI sentences. Successfully defeating these sentences will require as much a profound cultural shift in the public's orientation toward incarceration and punishment as it will legislative changes. This means challenging the sensationalized stereotypes of who is behind bars and why with the actual stories, faces, analysis, and visions of women and men sentenced to die in prison.

LifeLines conducts written and audio interviews with people serving DBI, which we use to create digital resources, printed literature, and visual and sound installations as tools to engage in education and dialogue with people across the state, as well as to inform larger campaign strategies in the movement to end Death By Incarceration. We use the term “LifeLines” both to refer to the fact that the project spotlights the voices of those serving life/death sentences and to highlight the infrastructures of support that are forged in resistance to mass imprisonment. LifeLines believes not only in individual transformation, but also in our collective capacity as a society to transform the repressive structures that currently limit our prospects of possibility and survival.

Outside the prison walls, LifeLines consists primarily of Layne Mullett and Emily Abendroth (with additional help coming from many quarters!), who both live in Philadelphia and are founding members of Decarcerate PA and the Coalition to Abolition Death By Incarceration. Inside the prison walls, the project consists of eight women and men located across the state: Avis Lee, David “Dawud” Lee, James Canady, James Hough, Marie

“Mechie” Scott, Clinton “Nkechi” Walker, Felix “Phill” Rosado, and Terri Harper. LifeLines was started in 2014 by Layne and Emily, with advice and support from Robert Saleem Holbrook, an incarcerated activist serving a DBI sentence. We then reached out to eight people serving DBI sentences to ask them to participate in the project. Some of the participants we already knew from other political efforts, and some were recommended to us as people who were active in social justice movements. All eight agreed, and it is their voices that are highlighted here.

While Layne and Emily have been in dialogue with all of the inside collaborators since this project began, this pamphlet was conceived of as an opportunity for inside participants in the project to introduce themselves and interview one another. All of the interview questions that appear in this pamphlet were generated by LifeLines participants in response to the prompt: “What questions would you ask the other people serving life sentences who are participating in this project?”

We arranged the responses thematically, but otherwise left everyone’s words exactly as they were originally written, and sent the compilation of questions back into the prisons. What resulted is the incredibly thoughtful, moving, and resilience-filled pamphlet that you now hold in your hands.

We strongly believe that any movement against mass incarceration will not be successful without active participation, collaboration, and leadership coming from people behind the walls. Incarcerated people are mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers, friends and neighbors. And they are also activists, mentors, artists, comrades, and freedom fighters. It is critical to center the ideas, visions, strategy, and analysis of incarcerated people as active agents in the struggle for justice.

Prisons create a huge number of barriers to building movements across the walls. We hope this pamphlet can be a small part of an ongoing dialog — inside and outside of prison — about how we can build this movement together, and why it is so critical that we do.



# Death By Incarceration in Context

Although the U.S. prison system is already an outlier globally as measured by its high incarceration rates and harsh sentencing, the punitive policies of Pennsylvania exceed the national average. Pennsylvania has the second highest number of people serving DBI sentences in the country and is one of only six states that categorically denies parole to people serving life sentences. In Pennsylvania, DBI is imposed as a mandatory sentence with no opportunity for judicial discretion or consideration of the specific or mitigating circumstances of the individual on trial.

Policy makers and mainstream media are finally beginning to question the racialized, punitive nature of U.S. policing and prison policies, but this critique is rarely extended to DBI sentences. Between 1992 and 2008 alone, the DBI population in the United States increased 230%, so that today more prisoners are serving life terms than ever before. Even in states with declining prison populations, the number of people serving life sentences is still going up, and the number of crimes for which you can receive this sentence is also rising. In other words, DBI remains a pillar of the prison system's logic of permanent exclusion/expulsion and must be vigorously challenged if we are to effectively confront the U.S. prison state writ large.



Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration  
campaign launch, June 2015

Like mass incarceration generally, DBI sentencing disproportionately targets poor people and people of color,

but in even more exaggerated proportions. In Pennsylvania, almost 75% of people serving DBI sentences are Black or Latino/a. Thus, the challenge before us is not simply to rethink DBI or mandatory minimums, but to rethink the entire system. In the face of this oppressive national landscape, the LifeLines Project draws upon the wisdom and determination of David “Dawud” Lee, Kerry Shakaboona Marshall, and Robert Saleem Holbrook, three human rights advocates sentenced to DBI here in Pennsylvania, who write:

*“[W]e struggle because we are fundamentally opposed to injustice and state repression, not because we are desperate for freedom. Every prisoner, regardless of his [or her] sentence, wants to be free, for freedom is the natural disposition of humans. As conscious and politicized prisoners however, we connect our freedom to the need to struggle against societal injustice. Therefore, if we were released tomorrow our struggle would not be over, we would continue to struggle against all forms of oppression i.e. political, social, cultural, gender, etc. We do not believe prisons are a unique problem within the United States, we believe the social contract that governs the United States is the ultimate problem and prisons are merely an extension of that problem.”*



A banner featuring the words of David Lee on display at the State House during a protest against the Silencing Act in April of 2015

As the American carceral system has become a key instrument of social organization/control and a primary means by which the state manages both deviant behavior and perceived threats to the social order, we find vividly reflected within it all the ongoing patriarchal, homophobic and white supremacist investments of our national politics. Our movements must address not just laws and policies, but the oppressive and divisive structures that allow such policies to exist.

DBI sentencing is both expensive and ineffective even as understood on its own terms – with the yearly costs per person mounting ever higher as people in prison spend the entirety of their elderly years in confinement, beset by the many health problems that confinement produces. However, more importantly it is socially and morally wrong – representing a gross human rights violation that targets members of poor and marginalized communities and condemns them to a status of permanent irredeemability and exclusion. This is an intolerable reality that must be changed.

Kempis Ghani Songster, an active member of the Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration who is himself serving a DBI sentence that he received as a child, reminds us that now is a critical time to act on those beliefs. “The winds of change are blowing across the planet,” he writes. “It’s carrying with it the fragrance of a more livable world, as well as the funk of a dying world that just refuses to let go.” It is our duty to force that dying order to release its grasp.

This project is motivated by a desire not only to contribute to that growing and welcome fragrance of resistance, but also to the many movements and visions of a different world in the making that must by necessity accompany it.

We hope you will join us!

# PARTICIPANTS

## DAVID “DAWUD” LEE

My name is David Lee aka Dawud. Most people inside of PA prisons refer to me as Dawud, and I unfortunately have spent the last 27 years in prison for a crime I did not commit. Over 25 of those years have been dedicated to educating myself and others, and utilizing my education in an effort to fight for my release from captivity, and toward creating a truly liberated



social arrangement here in the United States. The fight for freedom, collective empowerment, and justice are what keeps me going in my darkest hours. I grew up in an impoverished North Philadelphia community, and spent much of my time on the outside running the streets without any purpose or direction. It was not until after my capture that I began to study the political arrangement of this empire and started connecting the exploitative and political dots. My political, historical, and other related studies have taught me many important lessons about my former underdevelopment and the general underdevelopment of the masses in this social arrangement.



# AVIS LEE

**Name:** Avis L. Lee

**Age:** 54

**Born:** Altoona, PA

**Grew up in:** Pittsburgh, PA

**Marital status:** Single – celibate

**Children:** none

**Siblings:** 3 (1 sister, 2 brothers) living, one brother and one sister deceased.

**Places visited:** New York, New Jersey, West Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C.

**Places like to visit:** Miami, Key West, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Louisville, KY, New Orleans

**Favorite pets:** Cats

**Favorite animals:** Peacocks and zebras

**Favorite foods:** Fruits, vegetables, lamb, turkey, and cheese

**Favorite beverages:** Coconut water, grapefruit juice, and Welch's grape juice

**Likes:** Unity, peace, love, freedom

**Dislikes:** Chaos, discrimination, prisons

**Conviction and time served:** 2<sup>nd</sup> degree felony murder, 35 years.

**Education:** ABS Accounting/ Business mgt, Certified Braille Transcriber

**Hobbies:** Genealogy, knitting, crocheting, gardening



# MARIE “MECHIE” SCOTT



My name is Marie Scott. My friends call me Mechie. I nicknamed myself after my best friend, Peachie, whose real name is Sharon Wiggins. She is deceased now, but as a teenager I always wanted to grow up to be like her. Because of Peachie, today I am proud to be who I am. I have two children, a son and a daughter. In 2008, I lost my son to a motorcycle accident. I thought I could

lose my mind because we always thought that I would be released one day to share time with both of my children. My daughter's name is Gretta.

I was born in Harlem, New York. Growing up I was constantly molested and raped until I was fifteen. Behind it I became severely codependent. The kind who could not say “no.” I felt if a man took me to a movie, that he was in love with me, so if he took me to dinner afterwards, he wanted to marry me. Love had been distorted in my childhood.

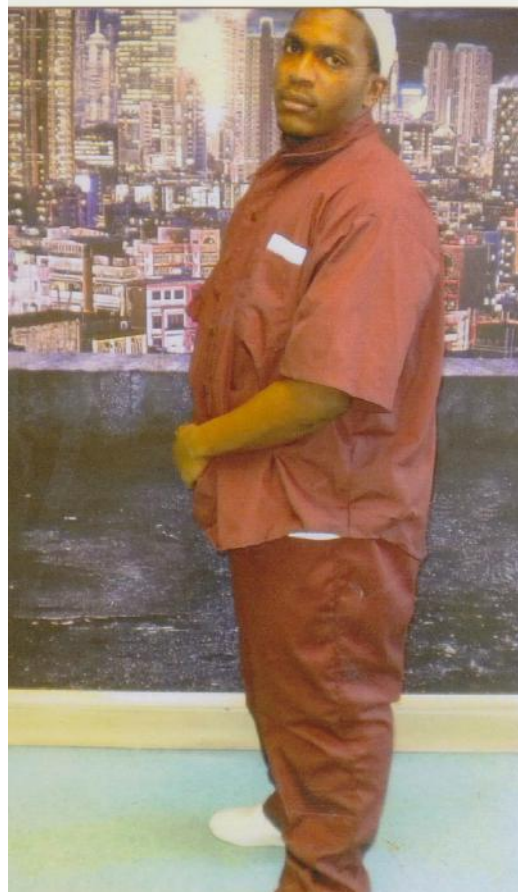
Codependence is a disease that brought most women to prison. Because codependency is a disease, I had to treat it as such. It is what caused me not to be able to say “no” to a guy who saved my life during a robbery that took place at the store I was employed by. I felt I owed my life to this guy after saving mine. How could I say no to a request to be a lookout in a robbery? Albeit, I had never robbed or stolen from anyone, my codependency just would not let me turn down the chance to help him back. Although I did not pull the trigger, I am just as guilty as my co-defendant. However, what is not fair is that

because of the Miller decision, if the U.S. Supreme Court rules retroactivity, he will be set free, and I will be left to die in prison. Not that I want him to die with me. I have forgiven him because I am an intelligent adult now who knows that as a teenager, our minds are not fully developed. The sad part to me is that my brain was no more developed than his. He was 16 and I was 19. So why should I be cut off and left to die in here!

Today I am an editor with a degree. I am currently working on a book of fiction. I love writing. I am also a pianist in training. My life does not stop because of my circumstances. Albeit, I have become infamous, one day I will turn that around with my love for writing.

## JAMES CANADY

My name is James Canaday, aka P2. I'm 23 years old and I been in prison since I was 15 years old. I grew up in a bad part of north Philadelphia, and spent most of my time following the wrong people. Since I been in prison I have gotten my GED and am still educating myself. I wanted to be involved with Decarcerate PA and the LifeLines Project because I want to help my people that's doing life and that deserve a second chance. As of March 31, 2015 I have been resentenced to 35 years to life.



# JAMES HOUGH



My name is James Hough, most people who know me call me Yaya. I am from Pittsburgh, PA. At age 17, I was arrested, charged and convicted of the crime of murder. I regret committing this act because I now fully understand how precious life is. I also know how punitive and unforgiving the system is. For the past 23 years, I've been serving a mandatory Life Without Parole sentence. Fortunately, I've used my prison time constructively. Initially, I took time and did a lot of deep soul-searching to understand the root causes of what led me to prison. I also

continue to educate myself, so I can better empower myself and others.

Since 2006 I've been blessed to be able to use my artistic talent to work with the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program as a muralist. To date I've completed over 50+ projects in Philadelphia and the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Graterford. I have had too many amazing experiences to list as a working member of Mural Arts. I wanted to be involved in Decarcerate PA! and Project LifeLines because I want to be part of changing the prison system in Pennsylvania and abolishing Life Without Parole, especially for lifers deserving a second chance.



# CLINTON “NKECHI” WALKER

My name is Clinton Walker. Some may also know me as Nkechi, which means “Loyal.” I am 34. I’m from Philadelphia and have been in prison for 17 years. I am a Juvenile Lifer, which is one who is serving a Life Sentence given to them for a crime they were directly involved in when under the age of 18. I’m a writer, a reader, and a self-proclaimed singer, though many of the people who has heard my vocals would strongly oppose the statement of me being a singer, for reasons I can’t quite put my finger on.

I’ve become a strong man in prison and strength can be viewed in many ways but in this instance, I refer to my mental strength and character. The horrors, hardships, assaults and insults that’s molded in prison and its system, has forced me to focus and cultivate the best of me in such a way as to stay human, versus becoming a bitter shell of what human is. Albeit, I have little academic achievements, yet I take great pride in my achievements of disallowing the diseases of prison to become chronic ones.



# FELIX “PHILL” ROSADO

I am Felix Rosado, known as Phill, and have been fighting a death by incarceration sentence for 20 years since age 18. I was raised in Reading, PA, where I got sucked into the street life in my early teens. Before that, I was a straight A student and projected to be the first in my family to go to college. To everyone’s disappointment, however, I went from high school to the pen, where I spent the first decade of my confinement in and out of the RHU (or Restricted Housing Unit, also known as solitary confinement), still engaged in behaviors that led me here.

Then, finally, came my awakening. I built a relationship with God and began to participate in activities that got me to take the focus off myself and put it on helping others, which gave my life meaning. I’ve never looked back.

Currently, I

coordinate and

facilitate restorative justice

and Alternatives to Violence workshops; I am a member of the

Inside Out Prison Exchange Program Graterford Think Tank

and a Lifers Inc. subcommittee, Right to Redemption; and I

am a few classes away from earning a Bachelor of Arts degree

from Villanova University. Most importantly, though, I’m happily

partnered (or as we like to say, “stuck”) with the most amazing

woman in all the universe, my Barbie. She’s my other half, keeps

my focus where it needs to be, and stretches me beyond my

limits.



# TERRI HARPER

**Name:** Terri-Joell Harper (birth name, but I don't like Joell)

**Age:** 46 (January 4, 1969)

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (spent my formative years in South Jersey)

SINGLE SINGLE SINGLE

No children by birth.

**Siblings:** Little sister Cashmere, whom I helped raise. Half-brother and sister from my father Torry and Lakailah)



I've been to a lot of cities up and down the Eastern Seaboard, and spent a summer out West. The one place on this planet I feel I need to visit most is Italy, but I also want to see Africa. Pictures I have of trips my folks have been on make me want to see so many places that I just wish for any opportunity to travel, because there is so much to see.

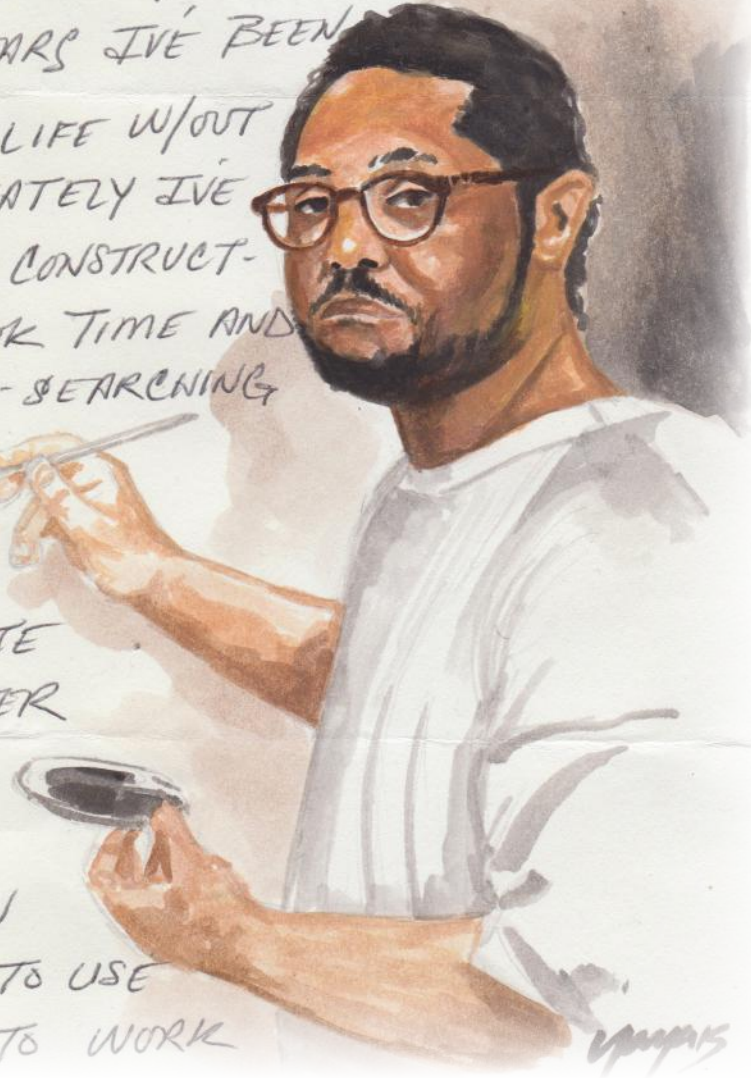
I absolutely love to cook, write, read, and laugh. I love big dogs, blue skies, and watching the seasons change. As the seasons continue to change on my life and the lives around me, I want to know that I am actively doing all I can to change my actions and the outcome of such, so the world around me and at large can be better in some way. For every little bit of success I achieve, we all are safer and happier.

My second degree murder and 24 years does not define the whole of who I am. It signifies what I did, and what I am trying to make amends for, and this LifeLines Project through Decarcerate PA is a great way of helping me do exactly that. It's doing work... good work, and we have to keep going. We owe it to our victims, our supporters, our futures, and to change.

# INTERVIEWS

All of the interview questions were generated by LifeLines participants in response to the prompt: "What questions would you ask the other people serving life sentences who are participating in this project?"

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MY TALENT TO WORK





# DAILY LIFE

*What's the first thing you think of when you wake up in the morning? What do you think of at night before going to sleep?*

**AVIS:** Thank you God for another day. Tomorrow is a new day, maybe something good will happen.

**DAWUD:** I wake up every morning thanking the Creator for being able to wake up and for my growth and understanding. I think about freedom, and what it would feel like to walk out of the pit of hell and back home as a conscious Black man working to destroy the forces of oppression in this society, with the power of our unity. I also wake up thinking about my family; those still alive, and the ones not with me in the physical sense. I also think about all the pain I've endured during the course of my imprisonment, and pray for an end in the near future. I think about all the brothers whom I love whom are trapped in the pit of hell with me, and how to save them as well.

I think of many things before going to sleep; it all depends on my frame of mind at the time. If I just got finished reading I might be thinking about what I read. If I have problems in the family I usually find myself thinking about that. I think about freedom all the time so that's usually a significant part of my thought pattern. I think about what it would feel like to sleep in a real bed and without all the pain associated with the bunk which I sleep on that causes my body so much agony.

**JAMES C.:** I thank (Allah) every morning and think about my family. Then at night I ask (Allah) to keep me alive to see another day.

**JAMES H.:** Usually, the first thing I do when I wake up is ask

myself “what the hell I’m still doing here?” Then I usually thank the creator (or higher power that I hope exists) for waking me up, even in a trying situation life is a blessing and to be in good health also. The cell window faces the east, so I also see the sky change colors and brighten as I wait for the C.O.s (Correctional Officers) to count the prison population block by block, tier by tier, cell by cell. By this time, I am probably thinking “how the hell do I get outta here?” Sleep usually envelops me like an obsidian fog, so I say I don’t “think” of much, maybe whatever, good or bad, stood out that day.

**MECHIE:** The first thing I think of when I wake up is, thank GOD for waking up to another day. That used to vary, depending on my state of mind. Not too long ago, I wished that I wouldn’t wake up if it had to be in jail, doing time, for any crime, much less a murder. Sometimes nightmares will make me wake up thinking, “Oh GOD! it’s not a nightmare. I’m really here!”

Sometimes at night I’ll ask GOD to let me and my deceased son, and grandson sleep together in His arms. Other nights I try to mesh mind into the last show I seen on TV. Sometimes I praise GOD until I go to sleep. When I have more faith in getting out one day, my thoughts take me to hundreds of scenarios of the day I’m released from here.

**NKECHI:** For the most part, I think about the moment when I step out of prison. I dream about how that will feel. Before I go to sleep, I usually have a wide range of thoughts. Most of my thoughts at night are usually of my loved ones.

**PHILL:** The first thing I think of when I wake up in the morning is usually a forecast of what the day might bring. I quickly preview my schedule and any conversations I might need to have, especially any difficult ones. If I’m facilitating any workshops or meetings, which is usually always the case, I’ll do a mental walk-through as I shave my head and get ready for breakfast. And, of course, thoughts of my other half Barbie are never far from my mind — morning, afternoon, night, and in my dreams!

Before going to sleep at night, I rewind any conversations that might have had extra meaning or significance throughout the day. However, I fall asleep seconds after my head hits the pillow,

so it rarely lasts long!

**TERRI:** When I wake up in the morning, the very first thing that hits me is, “wow, another day in this... okay God. Thank you for breath!” At night before I fall asleep, my thought is, “another day they can’t take away. God I hope I did alright.”



*How do you maintain relationships with people on the outside? If applicable, how do you nurture a loving relationship from across a prison wall or fence?*

**AVIS:** Letters, phone calls, and visits.

**DAWUD:** First I want to state that it is very difficult to maintain relationships with people on the outside because distance can be problematic. However, you work hard to make sure people know how much you love them and appreciate the things they do for you, the sacrifices they make for you and the love they give to you. I believe in being open and honest at all times, and I try to bring flavor to relationships with information, and trying to use it in positive ways.

Letters are very important in maintaining a solid relationship with someone you love because you want to convey your love on as many levels as possible. Also



Dawud, Layne, and Emily try to master the Coal Township photobooth in February of 2015

telephone conversations in which you share thoughts and ideas. Writing poetry to your loved one in which you may visualize the relationship on future levels, and add as much seasoning as possible to the relationship to keep people wanting to hear from you. Furthermore, you have to be mature enough to trust, and trust requires security on both sides. I want the person I love to know how special they are to me at all times. I want them to feel my spiritual presence in their lives.

**JAMES C.:** Letters, phone calls, and visits.

**JAMES H:** Maintaining relationships is hard, even within prison. Constant contact is a must, but all relationships have a point where familiarity can become corrosive. Honesty is a must. Not being a nuisance is a must. Ultimately, the goal of any prison relationship of value should end with the prisoner being released and a “new” “freer” phase of the relationship beginning.

**MECHIE:** I maintain my relationships on the outside through letters and phone calls, some visits, you know. The loving relationships I’ve had, I kept the very same way. There were never any illusions in any of my relationships I’ve had since I’ve been here. They all knew it was a great possibility that I’d never get out of prison. Even my daughter’s father is still in my life as a friend, and his son from another relationship is like my own son since we’ve been in each other’s lives, which was recently.

**NKECHI:** I maintain relationships with those on the outside by putting time and effort into helping them understand the importance of me having a connection with the outside world.



Once that is understood, with every interaction with those in the outside world, I do my best to call upon all the humanity I’ve held near and dear throughout my years in prison out of fear of taking on the traits of bitterness that could consume a person in prison and I make it my business to smother every word and every emotion with that humanity while interacting with them. I



put special effort into making all communication between me and the outside world a humane experience.

**PHILL:** I maintain relationships with people on the outside mostly through snail mail. I try to let people know how I'm doing in here as a way to keep them a part of my world, knowing it's never possible to fully accomplish. The two people I share the most of my world with are the only two I have regular phone calls and visits with: mom and my partner.

How I nurture my loving relationship with Barbie is through communication, communication, and more communication — which I'm not always the best at, but I try! It also takes a few other C's: creativity, collaboration, commitment, care, and cash. We date by watching the same TV shows at the same time while writing each other commentary, collaborate on restorative justice work and the fight against mass incarceration and other forms of injustice together, commit to making us work in the face of many hardships and obstacles, and spend a significant amount of our money on phone calls, visits, postage, gifts, and other needs.

**TERRI:** Maintaining relationships with people on the outside is challenging but I'm successful at it, because I let everyone know it must be a two way street of honesty at all times, without any boundaries. I let everyone in my life know to communicate with me, as I promise to do with them, and we stay on the same page. I make people feel appreciated, understood, and special, and let them know the difference between wanting them, needing them, or both.

I have nurtured loving relationships from across these prison walls and fences much the same way... through consistent communication. The love shared had to be expressed in creative ways on small scales that touched deeply, yet held great significance to each of us. We/I had to make an extra effort on birthdays and anniversaries. I had to also make old things new again, sometimes over and over again.



## *Who do you feel you most disappointed?*

**AVIS:** Everyone.

**DAWUD:** I disappointed many people, but I'll start with my daughter Tiffany because I was not there to raise her. My absence in her life had to have been very difficult for her; I wish there was a way to properly convey to her how much I wanted things to be different. How I was an underdeveloped and immature fool during my time on the streets. Also, the rest of my family who really could use my presence on the outside. The many years I spent developing myself could be beneficial to my family and my community as well. So, in that sense I could say that I disappointed a lot of people. Also I want to say that I disappointed my father, although he passed away while I was still on the outside, but his dying words to me were that he loved me, and to take care of my mother. However, my imprisonment came soon after his passing. Therefore, I did not take care of my mother, and now she too is no longer with me because she passed in 2010. There are many degrees of disappointment brought on by my imprisonment, nevertheless I do my best to overcome the anguish and make amends by helping those within my scope.

**JAMES C.:** The person I disappointed most is my mom Camilla.

**JAMES H.:** I feel most disappointed with: A) Myself, I could've achieved so much more out of life. I made bad choices out of fear. I've never been "perfect," but I regret not living up to my potential. Now I've learned to "live" and I get glimpses of the sparks of my potential... B) Society, it blames all the bad actions on the "criminal"/his or her family, but takes all the credit for the good... "Only in America" should apply both ways – a good analogy is: in boxing when a fighter "wins" everybody says, "We won!"; when a fighter loses, everybody says "He lost."

**MECHIE:** I feel I disappointed myself the most. Disappointment I guess is the wrong word for anyone else who knew me. My entire family was embarrassed if anything, except for my sister and cousins in Florida and Kansas. The three of us are back in each others' lives some 30 years after I was incarcerated.

**NKECHI:** I don't have any children so I feel that I let down my nieces and nephews. Due to the many barriers and barricades of prison, I'm limited and, in many ways, completely unable to pass on experiences that I've learned throughout life. If it take a village to raise a child then I am absent of that village, otherwise neglecting my responsibilities and letting down those little ones that need my knowledge.

I also feel that I let my future down. I believe I am supposed to have been more successful in life but because I did not allow myself the best chance to develop into the person that I was to be in society, I feel like I denied my future. Albeit, I am proud of the person that I am today.

**PHILL:** I most disappointed (with my incarceration) mom. This is the last thing she envisioned when we used to study together at the kitchen table every night, and when I'd come home the next day holding up a test with a big "A" marked on it. Now I make all my decisions with her in mind, not wanting to ever again put her through what I have in the past.

**TERRI:** I most disappointed two people, my baby sister and my now deceased maternal grandmother, Ms. Ellie. My baby sister was 5 ½, and I was fully engulfed in her upbringing, when I wasn't at work, so leaving forced her to get used to my mother's routine, my mother's fiancé's discipline, and all that went along with me not being around to intercede. My grandmother was like a mother to me, and was my best friend at the time. My family would say I was her 13th child instead of the first grandchild, and she had me on a pedestal, so this whole situation crushed her. She was left to do a lot of damage control and it wasn't fair. And I never had the heart to ask her if she was mad at me, and now it's too late. That sits on my heart even 12 years after her death.



*How do you handle aging, specifically how do you try to counteract its effects on your mind and body?*

**AVIS:** I accept aging as a natural part of living; but I do small things to curb its effect. For example, I stopped smoking almost 17 years ago.

**DAWUD:** I handle aging in prison by first maintaining a positive outlook on life. I am naturally a very optimistic type of person, so that helps. I am also a very spiritual person, so I maintain a very healthy sense of balance. I workout as often as possible, and I try to eat as best as possible. Although we're in prison and maintaining a healthy diet is extremely difficult and expensive, I do my best. Having a positive state of mind is also beneficial because you really do not have time to be down on yourself, or to stay focused on negative outcomes.

**JAMES C.:** I handle aging by keeping a positive mind, staying in shape, and I stopped smoking.

**JAMES H.:** Aging, under any circumstances, is a "war of attrition." You see that prisoners are younger, you gotta keep your mind sharp, always learning. You gotta work out, but it ain't about "training for the Olympics" because you'll only hurt yourself. You gotta get sufficient rest. You must continue to read books. You gotta mature and trust your experience because younger people will look to you for leadership (even if they won't admit it). In a male-dominated environment you may have to fight one (or several) younger (foolish) men (inmates or guards), you should never hesitate and always be calm.

**MECHIE:** I stay as healthy as possible. I eat as healthy as my income will allow me. The food here is not heart-healthy despite



what they tell you. Everything here is preserved and soy-based. We've been trying to get the Secretary of Corrections to raise our pay from 19 cents/hr for over 40 years, but no movement on that. I keep my spirit in GOD, good books in my mind and way of living, and exercise 3 times a week.

Here's a funny piece for you when it comes to aging. Ever since I cut my locks off (I could sit on a few of them), I can't seem to grow the hair around the edges. So I go to the doctor about it and they order me Rogaine medicine. I'm sure you've heard of it on TV. Well, the only thing is, instead of growing hair on my head, now I have a beard and mustache!!! Because I've been waiting for my eyes to be checked for the longest, my glasses aren't any good, so I didn't see all the hair. I kept feeling something different on the top of my lip, but my cellie said it's allergies. So much for allergies!!! LOL!!

**NKECHI:** What I try to do is identify abnormal behavior and thinking that prison life can put on a person and rid myself of it as quick as possible before it becomes a part of me. I also try to counteract its effects by constantly elevating my mind through learning and staying up on current events. I exercise to counteract aging of the body and I also try to eat healthy, though it can be a bit hard to do, due to the cost of eating healthy.

**PHILL:** I handle aging by trying not to think about it!! I gush all over whenever someone tells me I look like I'm in my twenties or that there's no way I have twenty years in, even though I am getting older and I'm getting older in here. One of the saddest parts of this is watching guys around me become senior citizens and, even worse, die. I can't put words to it. It's a nightmare.



A young Phill shows off his biking skills in Reading, PA

**TERRI:** Aging is a fact of life that I have no spiritual issue with.

On a physical level, I exercise, eat as well as possible, and pay attention to my body changes. Mentally, I constantly read, take classes to learn new things and challenge myself, and do puzzles to keep me thinking on different levels. I also help the elderly and mentally infirm, which keeps me sharp as well. I'm also close with the 20-somethings that I work out, wrestle, and chill with, so that changes things too.



*How do you stay engaged in real life matters, without wishing too intensely for something you may never have?*

**AVIS:** I watch the news and discuss current events with my friends and associates. I participate in projects such as LifeLines.

**DAWUD:** I stay engaged in real life matters by actively pursuing the most important things in life. I do not allow anything to keep me in a mentally dark place. If I fall down, I get up stronger than I was before the fall.

**JAMES C.:** I watch CNN sometimes and I discuss what's going on on the outside with Dawud.

**JAMES H.:** I stay engaged by staying as mentally connected (as possible) to the world. I read a diversity of viewpoints, and I think a lot about "other" perspectives. I have a faith that keeps me compassionate and pragmatic. I work every day as a muralist and I meet a lot of people that visit the prison. I volunteer within the prison and help inmates and families (children) that visit. I regularly engage with university students thru different activities (I had an Ivy League professor coordinate our book club, this year I have two St. Joseph's students). I've done a lot to build an active "life" outside of prison, much of this is Graterford's location and culture, but I continue to put these attributes to good use. There's so much more, but I'll drop the other shoe... I "intensely"

do wish for release (while alive) and that isn't guaranteed – That's rough to know, and it can make me question "Why even try?" if I dwell on it too much. The bottom line is that I must play my part even if I don't get everything I want, because "it's who I am." I believe that I can only do what's in me to do, while taking what life gives and making the best of it.

Doing a life sentence is particularly challenging because at times you can get lost in "a bid"/routine of prison/life and 10 years go by, but as soon as the hope of freedom/release is kindled it can trigger powerful emotions hidden deep within – those repressed wishes for freedom – and it can almost rip a person "in two" because you're still doing time with your body, but your mind/spirit are beyond that wall. You become too disconnected. Prison requires a focus akin to boxing: you gotta focus totally on your opponent, you get distracted and you could get hurt. Imagine a boxer stopping to look at a girl at ringside; it's "lights out" for him/her. Prison demands a similar focus, but instead of getting knocked out you could go insane, get killed, succumb to any number of "meds," become a lap dog for the guards or any number of undesirable fates. This is a deep question that goes toward the heart of what prisoners face, especially lifers: unrealized expectations and unfulfilled desires from an unmerciful state system.

**MECHIE:** I stay engaged in real life matters through writing, period. The power of the pen is something else. It's like I'm there. I don't think wishing for my freedom can ever be too intense. The problem with wishing is that's all that is. If I don't take it further to where my beliefs are, then what's the use in dreaming about anything in here or out there. I'm only back to where I was when I lost my son... just wishing I was dead with him. Others' knowledge teaches me how if I can see it, and if my faith tells me I can believe it, then the universe can make it happen for me. I have unyielding faith that I'll get out of here one day soon. Without my faith, everything is left up to luck and chance. I believe that's the way the commutation board works. Not my GOD. So I'll hope and pray that it is GOD's will that I should leave here one day soon. And that's all I'm willing to work with.

**NKECHI:** I've accepted the fact that I could be in prison for the rest of my life. With that acceptance, it allows me to look past my Life sentence and the restraints that come with it. It affords me the vision and ability to act on the things that I can do versus the things that I can't. In this level of confinement, I've learned how to live in others' experiences, so I actually welcome the engagement of others' real life matters.

**PHILL:** I stay involved in "real life matters" by never losing sight of the fact that this is real life. Everything I do in here counts and has a very real impact on the world. The wall doesn't mean I have to cease living or that the pause button has been pushed until I get out. I have meaningful relationships. I'm on a transient block, which allows me to meet different people every day. I stay up on current events. I'm in college, learning all kinds of new things. I facilitate workshops and draw forth the best in people. I'm active in my Catholic faith. Yes, I want out, but while I'm here, I'm going to live to the fullest and try to make up for all the harm I caused.

**TERRI:** I stay engaged in real life matters by working with the PA Prison Society official visitors and their projects; by watching the news, reading newspapers and political articles; discussing hot topics with my peers, family and friends; by participating on committees where outside guests and/or organizations come in to discuss crime and punishment, reform, and legislation; and I make it my business to look at the statistics on commutation, recidivism, and parole, to keep my reality right in my face, clear, so no false wishes pop up. I also keep my reality (TIME) front and center. I'm doing a LIFE without parole sentence, and I need to seek relief by an avenue that seems not to exist. If there is research to be done, I do it. If there's a project, I want in on it. If there's a worthy cause, count me in. If you need legs, I stand. I'm always moving and always aware that there could be a "dead end" just ahead.



# DBI STRATEGIES AND POLICY

*What strategies do you think can be used to abolish Death By Incarceration (DBI)? What can incarcerated people do?*

**AVIS:** Make the public aware of the fact that a lot of people serving life sentences have not killed. Write their legislators (Senators, State Representatives).

**DAWUD:** The strategies I think will best serve us is massive education, organizing, and challenging the mass imprisonment movement with our own movement – we must not only Decarcerate PA, but the entire country. I have no fears of the outside world because through my education I know that I'll be able to deal with all challenges in my path. My main purpose is to rebuild the African community, my family, and to free my comrades from these putrid prisons. I get hope of being free from all the activity being generated around the issues of mass incarceration. It has taken many years of suffering and struggle to get to this very point, and we now can see the possibilities of freedom right in front of us. I have never given up the hope of being free because if you lose hope you also lose the will to fight!

**JAMES C.:** Make the people aware that a lot of people that are serving life sentences do deserve a second chance.

**JAMES H.:** The strategies that I think can be used to abolish Death By Incarceration (DBI) are: First, we must communicate clearly what we want to the "public," while realizing how "far" they're willing to go. For instance, the public may



have sympathy/empathy for/with lifers who fit certain criteria, but not others. Secondly, we must expand the methods/tactics of that communication without undermining the seriousness of our cause. (I'll include several suggestions.) Thirdly, prisoners must play a greater role! We have over 5,000 lifers (and 700 at SCI Graterford alone), yet many are inactive, distracted, nonpolitical and waiting on either a "messiah"-like leader or the non-incarcerated supporters to get us out (alive). At SCI Graterford we have less than 50 lifers engaged in the struggle and it's mostly due to apathy and the fact that some guys take years to accept the fact that they can't "run." It's fight or die a miserable prison slow death. You guys shouldn't feel any responsibility for the lack of internal participation. It's a systemic issue that we (inside) must solve. Guys and women on the inside are the keys to getting families involved and the energy and money needed to win our struggle, yet it remains untapped energy. In addition, we need to "fire up our base" (within and outside prisons) and expose the rampant/venal/corrupt system of Pennsylvania politics. We literally have a functioning criminal government. I believe we could do a better job of exposing this to a wider segment of the population. I'll stop here, but I'll write more on this question separately, especially if it's helpful.

**MECHIE:** I think the strategy has to have an economic tone to it. Seems like the only thing that gets anyone's attention out there is their pocketbook. The politicians scare them into believing that crime is up so high with violence running neck to neck and that the only way to keep them safe is build more prisons. Well, what if the truth was revealed about society's pocketbooks? And what if it's revealed by the same people who put the lie out there in the first place? Seems like the only people society believes are the ones they put in office. Maybe it's time for someone to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: that putting someone in prison for the rest of their lives is not stopping crime or violence!

You know that huge screen in NYC down there at 42nd Street, Time Square? Well, how much do you think one of those would cost? Something like that kind of screen, put in the right place in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and/or Harrisburg would get the attention of not only those we want, but those we don't want. So what! Convince the public that you can prove that politicians

are lying about life-sentenced inmates needing to die in prison. You can prove it by letting one of us out as a pilot project. Howard Zehr, the grandfather of restorative justice, would sponsor it along with the Good Shepards Victims organization in Philadelphia. It would be called “A Circle of Support” of the life-sentenced inmate you’d monitor as they are released and watched on this screen.

When we see a criminal, even on TV fiction shows, what they did shocks our consciences so bad that we want them to pay with their lives. So when you show the public a murderer, they spit on us and any request we may be asking. They don’t care anything about how we’ve changed! How we’re no longer that person! But I tell you what, who do you know can read a book about a protagonist who was once the antagonist, and not forgive them and want the best for them? Every novel knows how to grab their readers! Sure! They want the bad man caught and tried and sentenced! Even for life! But look at *Shawshank Redemption*. Morgan Freeman really did kill his victim. But tell me a reader wasn’t happy to see him finally get that APPROVED stamp on his application for clemency? Maybe if society finds out how the government has been draining their pockets to build prisons by using bogus statutes to sentence people to life with, that will make them say, “What? What do you mean bogus statutes?”

**NKECHI:** A good strategy to end DBI would be to bring as much international awareness to the issue as possible. Doing so would cause embarrassment to this nation that seems to need and want to be the just and moral poster child of the world. By outing the unjust, immoral, and shocking reality of the outstanding rates of incarcerated individuals versus those incarcerated rates of other civilized nations, the amount of individuals serving Life sentences versus other nations, and the racial disparity regarding those serving Life Without Parole, it threatens scrutiny from other world powers that this nation aims to influence. Such scrutiny has the ability to apply pressure to correct policy.

**PHILL:** Strategies to abolish DBI must include raising awareness about who is actually serving these sentences — and

for how long. Very few people know that “life” means forever. The name “life without parole” must be abolished. It does nothing to convey that this is indeed a death sentence, and as a result pits us against the opponents of capital punishment who see it as a viable alternative.

People must be educated about how DBI flies in the face of all acceptable theories of punishment: incapacitation, deterrence, retribution, and of course rehabilitation. It must be attacked in terms of morality, economics, and public safety. The mandatory nature of the sentence in PA might be something that can be fought in the courts. Incarcerated people must become educated first, and then educate their families and supporters. We must, most of all, stop bickering among ourselves and use that energy to fight the forces that maintain DBI and other draconian policies.

**TERRI:** To abolish DBI, the best strategies to be employed would come via new sentencing guidelines, especially doing away with mandatory LIFE and LWOP, the TIME BAR issues that most people don't see coming, and an honest commutation process that doesn't require a majority vote or take 3 ½ years for a decision. Incarcerated people can and must convince their family members, friends and/or anyone they have in their lives that's eligible to vote, to get out and vote for above aforementioned changes, get them to make our lawmakers accountable to them (the taxpayers... the voters who got them in office), get them to rallies and town hall meetings where they can learn the truth about new bills being proposed, or we can educate them ourselves about laws, bills, or the like that are on the books to hurt us and get them more aware of how important it is for them to protest through voting. Incarcerated people can and must write more letters, get more calls to legislators and activists put in. They must act as if their lives are on the line, because IT IS LIFE AND DEATH!! The sense of urgency seems to be missing among the inmates, and I can sense the defeat, but they gotta raise up again or we'll all die inside these walls.





*How informed do you think you are about the politics of DBI? Have you read any books, studies, reports, articles, etc. on DBI? Seen any movies, documentaries, TV specials, etc.? Any recommendations to the rest of us?*

**AVIS:** Very informed. Read criminal statutes and studies.

**DAWUD:** I think that I am pretty informed about the mass imprisonment movement in this country, and what comes along with this ugly process: much death and pain. I do a lot of reading about prison-related issues and consequently learn about various aspects of DBI. There is a lot of information out now about the subject and one book which I am currently reading is *The Political Roots of Racial Tracking in American Criminal Justice* by Nina M. Moore. It is a book which I got from the library and it is very good. Most people have already read *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander; another good read is *No Equal Justice* by David Cole and *Race to Incarcerate* by Marc Mauer. There are other important books around that we can read and learn much about what is taking place in this society.

**JAMES C.:** Without “sounding” (writing) like a know-it-all jackass, I believe I’m very well-informed on DBI from a variety of perspectives: experiential, book research, study, etc. Here are some info/media to consider:

“Doing Life” by Victor Hassine (R.I.P.)

“Kenneth’s Story is to Life” – PBS POV Documentary

“In the Place of Justice...” by W. Rideau

“Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson

**MECHIE:** I am very informed about death by incarceration. I’m living it. I’ve read studies, been involved in them, read books, wrote articles, and the rest. Is it that hard to believe that this Commonwealth has been lying to their people all these decades? What would society know? Most of them don’t

know about laws that govern the people who are governing the commonwealth. This knowledge alone is enough to get a lot of us back in court with appellate rights reinstated. Something former Governor Ridge stripped from us. We can plug up the judicial system so bad that more attention will be put on us and while the whole commonwealth is listening, then you guys show them how much money they're owed by a commonwealth that knew what it was doing all along and how they were using their own society!

**NKECHI:** I'm not too informed about the inner politics of DBI therefore I can't recommend much material on it. I do know of the consequences of DBI which are broken homes, destroyed communities, misuse of tax payers' dollars, etc.

**PHILL:** I think I'm fairly informed about the policies of DBI, but can always learn more. I've read *Life Without Parole: America's New Death Penalty*, edited by Ogletree and Sarat, and have led discussion groups on it; *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*, edited by Hartman of the Other Death Penalty Project; several reports by the Sentencing Project; and many journal articles written by various criminologists. I've yet to see any movies or docs, except a couple docs on juvenile DBI. One was a Frontline special, the other was a doc on PBS I think called "Kenneth's Story."

**TERRI:** I don't know how informed I am about the politics of DBI. I say that, because I am dying by incarceration and have been for 24 years and will continue to do so until society, a judge, the commutation board, or Almighty God says differently. It's emotional, physical, and relative, but I never focused on the politics of it, beyond the statistics, as in voting, lack of commuted sentences and the disparity between the races. I read a lot of articles but haven't finished any books or studies on DBI, nor have I seen any movies or documentaries. Sorry, I don't have any recommendations.



## *Do you feel as if there is gender disparity inside of the commutations process?*

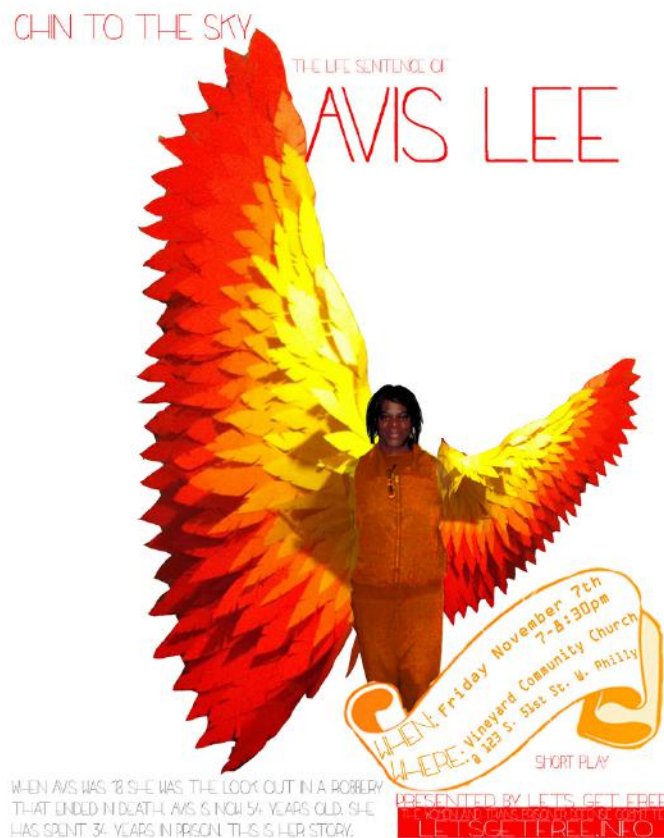
**AVIS:** Yes. Women have not been taken seriously, have been overlooked perhaps because of our significantly smaller numbers. There are fewer women serving life sentences than men, and there are even fewer women who apply for commutation.

**DAWUD:** There are gender disparities throughout the entirety of the American judicial process, therefore I naturally think there are gender disparities in commutation. I cannot remember the last time a woman was commuted.

**JAMES C.:** Yes, women have been overlooked in this matter.

**JAMES H.:** Yes, there is a gender disparity. Females are not being commuted (female lifers). This is really sad.

**MECHIE:** Damn straight I do. I know we are the minority, but I also know that the commutation board was and will always be a patriarchal system with the minds that think like the ones that made the “Muncy Act!” The very same illegal act I was sentenced under! Here’s a quote from a page off of the History Database Search called “Muncy Act”, by a supporter of Pennsylvania’s Muncy Act, explaining the state’s reasoning in a 1913 issue of the *Journal of Criminal Law and*



Poster for “Chin to the Sky,” a play based on the life of Avis Lee

*Criminology*. The author writes that: “women delinquents... belong to the class of women who lead sexually immoral lives. [Passage of the act] would... rid the streets... of soliciting, loitering, and public vice... There is nothing the common prostitute fears so greatly as... the possibility of prolonged confinement.”\*

I received a letter from a friend of mine serving life at Graterford. You know what he told me? He said that he was SELECTED to sit in on an audit of programs, how viable they might be, and what is now being considered by the D.O.C. (Department of Corrections) for lifers. One specific consideration that is now being seriously considered is to allow lifers programs at other institutions coming under the umbrella of SCI-G Lifers, Inc. He suggested that we as women write to Sec. Wetzel.

Well I did, and you know what happened? I was called over to my counselor’s office and told that what I was told was 1/2 true, but nothing is being put into motion yet, that they are only at the talking stage. I was told that this Mr. Fenstamoker [spelled wrong I’m sure] said that he didn’t want to put his answer in WRITING because I would only have more questions! The woman counselor who relayed this info to me looked at me and said, “Which I’m sure you still have questions even coming from me right?” I said, you are correct.

All policies are still being created around MEN, so why would the questions of the commutation board, or the mindset of the men who sit on the Board of Pardons be any different? They still think that when a man kills, it’s conventional, but when a woman does, it’s sensational.

**NKECHI:** Whether there is gender disparity inside of the commutations process is a question I have to look into. Honestly, I haven’t given commutation much thought being as relief in the form of commutation seem to be so far in between.

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\* Note: Passed in Pennsylvania in 1913, the Muncy Act required that any woman convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment of a year or more had to be sentenced for an open-ended, or indefinite, period of time. If a woman was convicted of a crime punishable by more than three years’ imprisonment, the Muncy Act mandated that the woman must receive the maximum sentence possible. Pennsylvania women sentenced under the Muncy Act spent over 50 percent longer in prison than did men convicted of similar crimes.



**PHILL:** I'm not that informed on the gender politics of commutation, but I am aware that few — if any — women have been commuted, which I believe is a crime!

**TERRI:** The commutation process as a whole is a sham, and that has nothing to do with gender disparity. True, more men put in applications, but there are more males incarcerated. In my opinion, more support is given to incarcerated males than females, as with information, education, and opportunities. The ugly truth is that incarcerated females are looked at more harshly than males, as if it's a cardinal sin to commit a crime as a female and only a tap on the wrist as a male. The gender disparity within the commutation process falls in line with the gender disparity throughout all parts of the DOC. Granted women are outnumbered 48,000 to 3,000, so we should "never expect equality," but we should expect fair treatment by law of chance. This commonwealth doesn't do anything consistent and that's why there's overcrowding, backlog, lost records, abuse, suicides, corruption, and major budget issues. Gender disparity can't get time for all the other issues.



*Do you believe the new governor will have the “unanimous decision” in the commutation process repealed? Have you heard talk of the commutation board supposedly letting people out? If so can you be more detailed in what you heard?*

**AVIS:** I don't know if the new governor will have the “unanimous decision” in the commutation process repealed or not. I sure hope so.

**DAWUD:** I do not know if the governor will have the unanimous

decision in the commutation process repealed; notwithstanding I do know that the process is in desperate need of fixing. As currently situated it is not very beneficial to us. We are profoundly in need of a process that actually gives people a fair opportunity at being able to be commuted, and that is not the current reality.

I have not heard about the commutation board letting people out of prison, but again, that would be a major plus that I personally do not see coming without major pressure being placed on this system. The commutation process is very political and without huge amounts of pressure, not very much will change. I do not have a lot of faith in politicians because they are usually not guided by principles. I do believe in our struggle for change and all the possibilities that exist there.

**JAMES C.:** I really don't know if the new governor will have the "unanimous decision" in the commutation process repealed or not. (Insha-Allah) he do.

**JAMES H.:** No, I don't believe the Governor will repeal the unanimous decision rule/law. I've heard rumors of possible future commutations, but nothing of substance. It's wish-based magical thinking. I deal with the truth: power concedes nothing without force. In order to avoid the mistakes of the past (McFadden and "Mudman" Simon) we need a process with integrity, not parole as a reward for informants – cooperators – etc.; we'd need an independent commutation board where lifers in that prison would vote for the guys/girls and submit all relevant evidence to our supporters who would either support or protest this person's release to the state board and the public.

I also suggest we get our people appointed to the board (commutation) by "hook or crook":) By infiltrating the system yet maintaining our integrity we can improve the progress.

**MECHIE:** I can only pray that the governor will do more than change the unanimous vote. I pray that he'll make life with parole when the 26 page bill is introduced by Senator Wheatley (I believe his name is) and Daylin Leach. The bill is something that PA Sentencing has come up with but refuses to let anyone see until it's introduced in June of this year supposedly.

**NKECHI:** I'm not sure what the new governor will do. I can say that a solution needs to be reached to reverse the ruinous path this country is heading, and where this land has been heading for some time now.

**PHILL:** Changing the "unanimous decision" part of the commutation process will require a constitutional amendment, which is a very long process that is initiated in the legislature, not by the governor.

I haven't heard anything about the Commutation Board letting people out. The last three were Tyrone Werts and two others at least five years ago. Then-Attorney General Tom Corbett chose not to sit in on the vote, for political reasons, which is how they were able to get 4-0 unanimous votes. Then-Governor Rendell emphasized the fact that none of the three men were the shooter as his reason for signing off.

**TERRI:** There hasn't been enough time with Governor Wolf in office for me to say, but I can hope, based on his moratorium on the death penalty, that he will repeal the "unanimous decision" in the commutation process. With prison overcrowding as it is, I'd love to believe that letting out deserving lifers would be a part of the plan to reduce that problem, but I have heard nothing about that Board doing any freeing.



*If Lifers were given the opportunity to make parole, what would be a good plan/strategy to be put in place that would ensure the public that every measure will be taken to guarantee that convicted murderers are not being released prematurely and that the safety of the community can co-exist along with forgiveness by the community?*

**AVIS:** Report to parole agent once a week instead of once a month. Pass urinalysis testing. Give back/be involved in the community by volunteering at least once a month at a local agency that needs volunteers.

Be a speaker at schools or youth organizations in an effort to prevent delinquency and truancy. Pay fines and costs. Have stable housing. Maintain drug and alcohol recovery. Community support.

**DAWUD:** Communal participation in the process is vital because who better to evaluate and determine the value of people trapped inside of prison than the community. Thus we could all benefit from community review boards in which elected members of the community, who do not have allegiance to the prison system, were in a position to evaluate us, and ultimately decide whether they see positive changes in the people in Pennsylvania prisons. There are no real guarantees in this process, but if the community sees fit to release someone that would take the politics out of the process. Human beings should not be wasting away inside of prison because of politics.

Furthermore we need to really put an education process in place inside of these prisons. The current educational process is very flawed because it refuses to change. If you do not understand the cultural and socio-economic background of the people you are charged with educating, how can you understand and then educate those people? Most of the people we encounter in the educational system are parochial in their thinking and can be of little benefit to the average person of African and Latin descent and we are the vast majority of the people they come in contact with on a daily basis.

If prisoners are properly educated, it reduces the opportunity of reoffending. Also, real opportunities for successful return to the community must be put in place. Thus there must be some serious structural changes in the way this system operates. The system cannot be about the business of oppression and exploitation and at the same time correcting their victims. Therefore if we are not going to be honest about what is truly taking place, nothing will change! We always talk about correcting the individual, but what about correcting the society which produces the individuals? You cannot intentionally

underdevelop, exploit, oppress, and basically enslave people, and then turn around and expect them to be functional beings. This whole process is totally insane.

**JAMES C.:** Give back to the community, be involved with the youth.

**MECHIE:** If lifers were given the chance to make parole, I'd propose that a restorative justice component be used. It's called "Circle of Support and Accountability". It was going to be used on me over a decade ago.

**NKECHI:** My answer to that question would be that I think the best plan and strategy to ensure the public that safety is the first priority and that Lifers won't be released before they are ready is to create a program strictly catering to the re-integration into society. The basis for the program would be to make sure that the individual is not overwhelmed upon his/her release and is fully prepared for the world that he is entering. Also, the program would be one that would establish confidence in the public that security and safety is a priority and that only the top prospects will be allowed the privilege of a second chance at life.



Nkechi at SCI Rockview

From the direction the legal system and its sentencing scheme seem to be going in other states, for the most part, a Lifer would first have to average an incarceration time of 15 years or more in the PA prison system before the eligibility of parole. During that span, so much would have changed within the society concerning technology and all its facets – social networking, living expenses and conditions, etc. Virtually everything would have changed, especially if it's true that the world changes every



ten years. To release someone into a world that they no longer know and require them to survive without proper preparation is sinister in itself and is nothing more than encouragement for the person to return to the lifestyle he or she has known and survived in throughout the years.

It would be good for the DOC to actually close and keep closed one of the prisons they said they would close. That prison could then be used as a facility to rehab and familiarize longtime Lifers with current ways of society. The facility would specialize in programs that teach many skills that individuals may have forgotten or never known, such as basic computer or other electronic use, innovative entrepreneur skills, social and job etiquette, or any other basic social skills one will need to maneuver in society. After assessment, when one reaches a particular level in the program, the individual would be required to get a job in the outside world--similar to the work-release program that some county jails have. With that job, the individual would also be required to wear a type of monitor that would track their every move and any deviation from their destination or removal of the monitor would immediately alert authorities, victim's families, media, etc. After further assessment, the person would be released into a home plan or half-way house under the normal rules and regulations of parole.

Of course, more thought and calculation would have to go into this idea, but the message is simply this: the more prepared and ready the offender is for society, the more it would allow the person to thrive and prosper in society. The better the chances of prosperity, the safer the community will be.

**PHILL:** I don't think there is anything "premature" about releasing anyone after a decade or two of incarceration. Also, we must stop using labels like "lifers" and "convicted murderers" to describe ourselves. We are people who are much more complex than just one aspect of our identities. We shouldn't define ourselves by our worst act, which might have occurred in the fraction of a second.

To ensure that every measure is taken to determine if someone is ready to be released, the normal parole process should be used. Each person should have to make his or her own case based on what has been done over the years. There is no measure that can guarantee with 100% certainty a person will

go out and never commit a crime again. We as a society must come to terms with this reality. The truth is, though, whenever people serving DBI do get out (as rare as it is), they recidivate less than a percent of the time — as opposed to two-thirds for everyone else.

**TERRI:** If lifers were allowed parole, a few of the rules that apply to everyone going on parole would be put into place. However, due to the fact that no plan is foolproof and no one is perfect, there'd be no guarantee of any one individual not being released prematurely. All that can be done is that there needs to be a standard set where the people selected to determine which lifers were granted release would be individuals that had more than paperwork to go on. It should begin with the forgiveness aspect. We as incarcerated folks are not allowed to reach out to our victims, except through the victims' advocacy center, and there's no guarantee that your letter will ever do more than sit inside a file cabinet. There needs to be a registry website, so the whole world knows I'm trying to make amends (along with anyone else that submits letters). If there's a standard number of years, program(s) completed, and other preparedness steps/courses to achieve first, in addition to having a stable home or center to go to, or even a possible job lined up, that would be beneficial. I'm not talking about lifers who did everything at the start of their time and nothing in the last 10 years, but those striving every day, from year to year, educating themselves and seeking growth, and not so behind smoke and mirrors, who've managed to stay out of a negative limelight. These lifers would definitely have to submit to a life plan, as that would denote that he or she had been ready and awaiting the opportunity and not flying by the seat of their pants. They'd also have to be willing to accept a bunch of restrictions without whining, which would show the gratitude and acceptance of the reality of the magnitude of the Blessing named freedom.



# WHAT SUSTAINS YOU

*What is it that keeps you fighting after spending so many years of your life in captivity, with no light at the end of the tunnel?*

**AVIS:** Hope. Faith. Believing that everyone deserves a second chance.

**DAWUD:** First of all I believe that we can collectively create light at the end of the tunnel, so that is one reason to keep fighting. Also I do not want the younger brothers whom I love to have to endure this madness for the rest of their lives, and I want my comrades to one day see the light of day! We cannot accomplish such goals without believing in what we're doing. My purpose travels well beyond my own self interest because I want to be a part of creating a truly just world for us all to share.

**JAMES C.:** My faith in (Allah) and my family.

**JAMES H.:** I refuse to give up because I'm not a criminal who deserves lifetime imprisonment. I have deep faith in things stronger than bars/chains.

**MECHIE:** The thing that keeps me fighting is instinct. Imprisonment is not our natural habitat. This is not my home. Every creature wants to be free to go wherever they want. Humans are no different.

**PHILL:** My family and loved ones keep me fighting for my freedom, as well as my desire to continue this fight on the outside where I can really make some noise! Simply speaking, I have no idea what it's like not to fight against this sentence and other injustices.

**TERRI:** After spending so many years of my life in captivity, seemingly with no light at the end of the tunnel, my promise to both my little sister and my now deceased grandmother is what keeps me in the fight. Those promises are directly connected to my faith, so I see light in the tunnel although I cannot see through to the end of it. Although the meat of the promises will remain private, I can share that it revolves around my seeking knowledge and taking every possible opportunity to get relief from my current status.

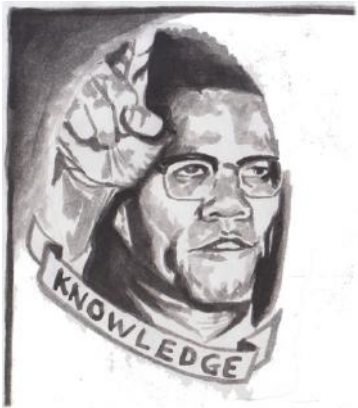


*How do you cope with the fact that the vast majority of us will perish inside of a cell alone and in pain?*

**AVIS:** I don't believe this will be everyone's outcome. However, there can be peace and beauty even at death's door if one's life was impactful on other's lives in a positive way. When this occurs our prison stay is not in vain. Although we haven't had a chance to accomplish many of our dreams and goals, if we can steer someone else in the right direction to reach theirs then we very well may have SAVED SOMEONE'S LIFE. I read a saying once that I've never forgotten. It read: "Some people's sole purpose for existing is: To be a warning to others."

**DAWUD:** By working diligently to change the current reality into something more conducive to what I think we all deserve as human beings. I have a lot of faith in our struggle, and wherever this lands me, I have no choice but to deal with the consequences. Moreover, our children are depending on us to change this madness because if we fail to do so, this will become their burden. That I cannot live with!

**JAMES C.:** I really try not to think about it, because I really do



believe that change is coming for us.

**JAMES H.:** I cope by abandoning the fear of death. Everything dies – I focus on living, the dying will come naturally:) If I live right, a death in prison could be an honor in a wicked society like this.

**MECHIE:** I don't think about the majority who will die in here, whether that includes me or not. I focus on what keeps me from becoming complacent in prison for the rest of my life!

**PHILL:** I don't cope with the "fact" that the vast majority will perish in a cell. It's what I'm fighting to prevent, and I believe there will be a change in the laws and policies of this sentence. I believe it with all my heart!

**TERRI:** Our reality is life then death. Death is singular and absolute, no matter where you are physically. Because I have an unshakable faith in Almighty God, I do not fear taking my final breath or allow myself to concentrate on where I'll be when it comes. All I can do is prepare my record the way it should be to get me favor with God, with that I'm NEVER alone. The deep part is that I'm always in pain, so I'm accustomed to praying it down or away, and dealing with its restrictions. To be clear, my pain is mental (I'm away from my baby sis and family) physical (I've had three surgeries and am now getting steroid shots in my foot) and intellectual (I've learned a lot but my learning here is so stifled by my sentence, my financial limitations, and criminal "history")... It is constant and unnerving at times but is also a motivating force by which I constantly want and seek freedom.



*What are some of your fears about life on the outside?*



**AVIS:** Being behind in technology. Seeing the changes in the environment on the outside.

**JAMES C.:** Being behind in technology. Trying to cope with the youth.

**JAMES H.:** I don't "fear" this, but I do not get excited about returning to a hyper-violent, sex-driven society... It's in many respects a bigger prison.

**MECHIE:** One of my fears used to be relapsing. Now that I have a Circle of Support, that fear is dispelled.

**PHILL:** I have no fear about life on the outside. By God's grace, I have jobs doing what I love already lined up, a partner who can't wait to get married and have a boatload of kids (as do I!), a wonderful family, and countless supporters. I AM READY!!

**TERRI:** My fears about life on the outside would be retaliation by my victims' families, even after more than two decades; rejection by the community I was once a part of, that I know to be very different than it was when I left it; having two generations of my family not know me and not want to know me; my points of view not being relevant or taken seriously because I'd be an ex-con; having to settle for less than what I'm skilled at because of my record just to have an employer take a chance on me; most importantly, not having any family left by the time I'm released.



*Who or what are you living for/what's your purpose?*

**AVIS:** To be an inspiration to others, to be the best me that I can be.

**JAMES C.:** My purpose in life is to worship my lord and to get back home to my family.

**JAMES H.:** I'm living first for me and my purpose, chiefly, is to live my life to its fullest potential. In a wider sense, I'm living for my family and community (local, national, global) and moving with the purpose of bringing my visions of justice, fairness, and love into the interactions I have with people, through my life and collective actions.

**MECHIE:** My purpose, the thing that I live for, is to give back in any form I can, in here and out. I know that's what my purpose is. I'm to give to others who don't have, in any form that may be within reason.

**PHILL:** My purpose is to repair broken relationships, restore communities, and save lives. I did a lot of damage and now it's all about trying to reverse some of it.

**TERRI:** Who I am living for is my baby sis (Cashmere) and for me, and what I have to give back that hasn't been realized due to my incarceration. My purpose is to reach the groups of youngins who are all wrapped up in the make believe and only seeking glitz and glory... to awaken their senses of reality, understanding, identity, and worth, so that they begin to measure themselves by standards they set, based on inner personal wants and needs, not TV, radio, and the media... All this set up by truth and a harsh reality shared freely and without hesitation.



*What gives you hope of one day being free? What do you do to keep hope alive concerning regaining your freedom?*

**AVIS:** When SCI Muncy was co-ed, I saw 3 men and 2 women get their life sentences commuted. I saw 2 women get new trials

and get released. I believe that PA laws concerning LWOP will change... soon.

**DAWUD:** For me it is my belief in my comrades and our ability to persevere despite all the obstacles in our paths. Plus now more than ever before in the past I can see all of our hard continuous work bringing forth fruit. The outside activist community and the inside activists are now working together on higher levels and we can see the benefits of this relationship. Changes are coming, so it is no time to give up the fight for justice. In fact, now is the time to push harder.

**JAMES H.:** I believe, like Martin Luther King Jr. that “the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

**MECHIE:** My belief in GOD is what gives me hope. I try each day to make a better person out of myself so one day when the door opens, I might be the one leaving out of it under the restorative justice program that I’ve enclosed. Not through commutation though. Through some other form of being released because I’ll never apply for commutation again.

**PHILL:** My hope comes from my faith in God and from my loved ones, whose hope spills over onto me. I know that death in a cell isn’t in my future, I just know!

**TERRI:** Every day that I’m blessed to be awake, seeing, breathing, and going about is my hope of freedom. Every battle somewhere in this country for lifers brings a battle closer to PA. Besides that, as long as I breathe, I’ll believe that with every difficulty there is relief, and this time rates as a major difficulty, so I’m waiting on the relief. I keep hope alive by keeping in contact with people in the political arena, with people who advocate for change in prison policies and sentencing guidelines, and I remind myself of the family who is riding with me that is counting on me to stand strong. Those efforts and sacrifices stand as motivation for me to do my part, so I do. Besides all that, I pray.

# LIFELINES AND OTHER ORGANIZING

*Who are you doing this for?*

**AVIS:** I'm doing this for myself and all of the women and men who wake up each day hoping this is the day of their freedom.

**DAWUD:** I am doing this work for everyone who is in prison and deserves a second chance at life on the outside, and for all the innocent people who tarry in PA prisons like myself. Also for those people who believe in me on the outside, and have provided me with an outlet for my voice. Decarcerate PA, HRC, and other organizations have provided us with this unique opportunity and I thank them for all the support and work that they do on our behalf.

**JAMES H.:** I'm doing the LifeLines project because I totally support Decarcerate PA! You guys/girls are amazing! Finally, we have real advocates. I want to put my best self forward for lifers, this project is me pulling a nail outta the coffin.

**MECHIE:** I am doing this for people who are good-spirited enough to care about what happens to people like me and who want as much as I do, my release and a second chance.

**NKECHI:** I would say that I'm doing this for myself because through my thought sharing it allows me to have a sense of relief and release by having a platform to share my experiences. I'm also doing this for the public who may not have a clear, true, or full view of prison life in its lasting horrors.

**PHILL:** I'm doing this for me, my loved ones and supporters, everyone serving this sentence, and the world, which would be better off once we stop throwing people away.

**TERRI:** I am doing this for myself, my peers who can't or won't

speaking up for themselves, for those who don't get how important it is to participate in projects like this, for everyone who supports and believes in me and other lifers, but most especially for the lifers we've lost that won't get to see things change when the real change that they put in work for comes. I'm doing this for change itself... change that victims want to see happen.



## *Who do you think is best served by your realizations/growth/development?*

**AVIS:** Everyone.

**DAWUD:** I think that my growth, realization and development can be beneficial to anyone interested in knowing the truth about prison. And especially all the young people who must learn how to avoid the many traps out there in society.

**JAMES H.:** I think those best served by my growth are: those who support lifers, by seeing another lifer worth supporting. Also, the prisoners here with me and those who I've had the privilege of helping. Finally, me because I've been and am transformed into a better me by serving myself and others.



Decarcerate PA members march with a banner made by people serving DBI at SCI Graterford.

**MECHIE:** I believe the public at large is best served by knowing the truth about what this Commonwealth is doing behind their backs with their money.

**NKECHI:** I honestly don't believe that many people are being best served by my realization/growth/development, and there lies



the problem. In order for someone to benefit from the maturity of one in my situation, an opportunity would have to be awarded them. That opportunity is to re-enter into society. The man that I've become and the potential I have seem to be wasting away with every day that passes due to my urge to make meaning of the rest of my life; yet not being able to do so. I seem to be that phoenix that turn to ashes but can't rise due to those ashes being crucified and denied any sense of human forgiveness.

**PHILL:** Everyone mentioned in my previous answer is best served by my growth. I try to live in ways that are life-giving and no longer life-taking. Everyone benefits from that!

**TERRI:** My realizations/growth/development best serves the generation that's secretly watching and learning from me and then talking in hushed tones to the tune of "I don't know how she's doing that time... I'd have been lost it" first and foremost, but I can't deny that it benefits everyone that comes into contact with me also. How so? That's so because growth, development and realizations over two decades allow for higher levels of trust, dependability, understanding, knowledge, clarity, and respect. I also believe that the public I'll eventually, prayerfully, be released to will be best served by the collection of my growth/development/realizations, as they factor together into my better behavioral responses, and the outcome for everyone is what's best.



## *Why are projects like Lifelines important?*

**AVIS:** They're important because they remove the invisibility and break the silence.

**DAWUD:** Political, historical, cultural and other forms of education are important tools for everyone, but especially Black youth out there struggling to survive. This project is vitally important because it can inform people on levels that they will not get from any other source. The 27 years I've spent in prison

gives me a very unique perspective on prison life, survival, and the ability to grow in these cesspools known as prisons.

**JAMES C.:** They give you hope to know people do care and support lifers.

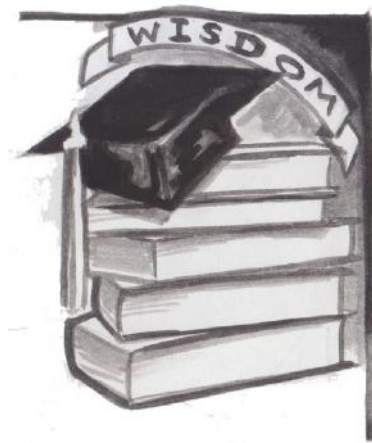
**JAMES H.:** Project LifeLines is important because it is about recovery, repair, reconstruction, restoration, and release. It's about cashing that second chance check that this country loves to brag about and moralize to other nations about.

**MECHIE:** Projects like these are so important because it keeps the government in check and holds them accountable as "it" holds offenders accountable.

**NKECHI:** Projects such as LifeLines are important because it allows an outlet for the voiceless to have a voice. Personally, it gives me a sense of life with knowing that I can express myself, along with my experiences, and know that it is folks that are listening. How I see it is, if there is people who are willing to listen, then there is hope that's willing to become reality.

**PHILL:** Projects like LifeLines seek to raise awareness and put human faces on issues that are mostly delivered to the public in ways that are impersonal and decontextualized. This gets at the stories and people behind the numbers and soundbites.

**TERRI:** Projects like LifeLines aren't important. They are Critical!! Critical to public awareness, to family support of inmates, to the public's knowledge of legal truths/legal clarity, to what legislators are inclined/urged to do with and for sentencing and prisons, to the future of how crime and punishment are reported and used as learning tools, and to how strongly long-termers and lifers hold onto hope.



# CLOSING

## *What's next for you?*

**AVIS:** Freedom, parole, job search, employment/taxes, establishing credit, apartment rental, leasing a car, volunteering to set up community vegetable gardens, becoming a first-time homebuyer, marriage, retirement, death, resurrection.

**DAWUD:** I will continue to fight the fight that started 27 years ago. Even if I get out tomorrow this fight is far from over for me because there are far too many people whom I love still living this nightmare.

**JAMES C.:** Freedom and keeping the fight going for lifers. Thank you LifeLines project for everthing.

**JAMES H.:** Next for me is: 1) Working on my legal case, 2) Working on the million art projects I have within and outside of prison (currently working with Swoon, Shepard Fairey, and Sam Durant on separate projects), 3) Preparing to do a storytelling project with the Million Persons Project, and 4) Using every day to improve myself in as many ways as possible.

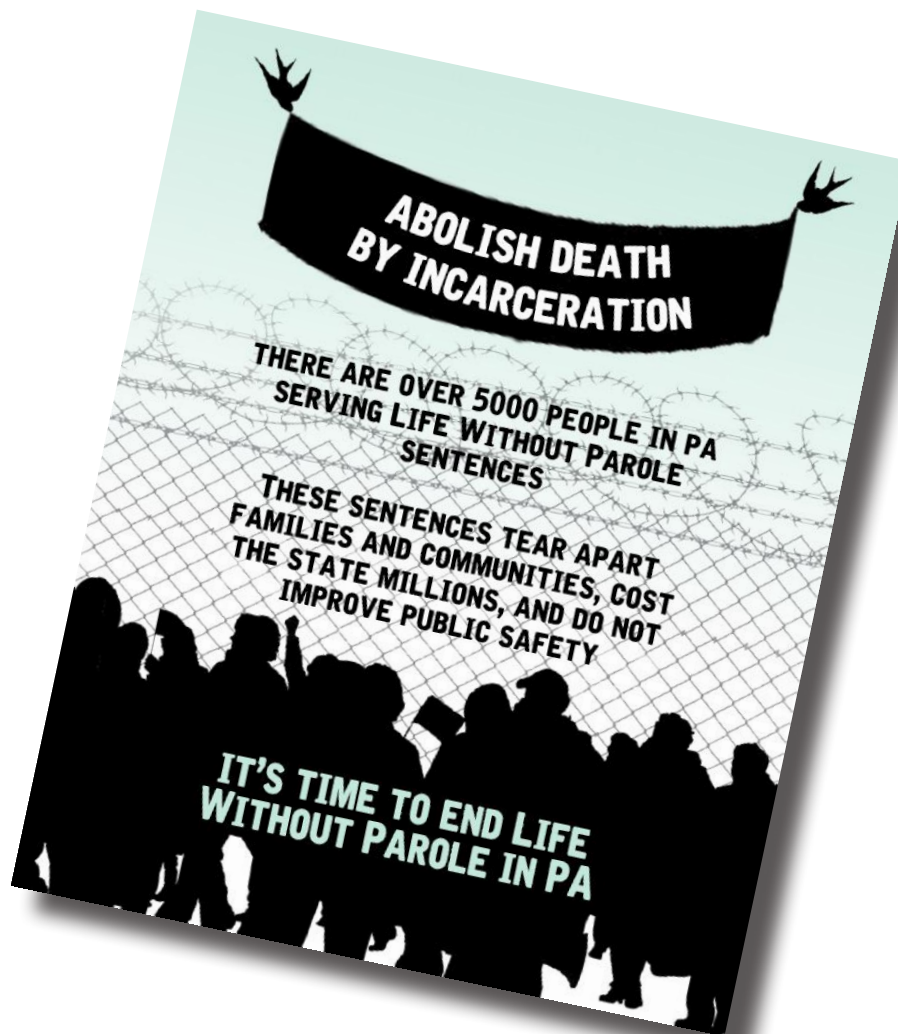
**MECHIE:** Whatever comes before me in my life will be what's next. Hopefully, it will be with DECARCERATE!

**NKECHI:** What's next is to continue to bring awareness to the issues of prisons and continue to fight to regain my freedom.

**PHILL:** Next for me is wherever God leads. After I get my Bachelor's, I'll probably try to get into a Masters program. I'm working on developing facilitation manuals for restorative justice workshops I helped create so they can be spread to other places in and outside of prisons. I'll continue to work at my partnership

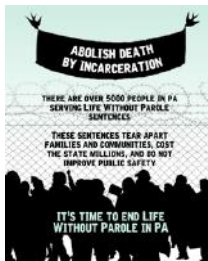
with my other half to make sure it flourishes, grows, and deepens. Ultimately, what's next is my freedom!! After 20 long years, I'm ready. I just wanna go home. This never has been and never will be my home.

**TERRI:** Next for me are my commutation papers, a writ of habeas corpus, continued outreach and work with the Pennsylvania Prison Society, more work with the elderly and mentally infirm inside these gates, any worthy project that comes along geared toward helping lifers and long termed incarcerated individuals have a better future than their present. I also intend to start work on a book I've been urged to write. There's a lot in my head and on my heart that needs to be shared, that truly can help someone avoid some of the loss, suffering, humiliation, embarrassment, guilt, and failure that I have experienced.



# GET INVOLVED

There are many ways to get involved in the movement to end DBI, including simply talking openly to your friends, family and neighbors about the profound need for far-reaching, fundamental change in this country's criminal justice policies. These include calling or writing legislators, holding informational sessions inside the walls, sending postcards, attending protests and events, etc. Below you will find the contact information for four organizations who would eagerly welcome your participation and support.



## **The Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration (CADBI)**

CADBI is working to end Death By Incarceration in PA. If you are currently incarcerated, get involved by writing to CADBI c/o Decarcerate PA, PO Box 40764, Philadelphia PA 19107. CADBI currently meets on the third Wednesday of every month at Project Home (1515 Fairmount Ave in Philadelphia) from 6:30-8:30 PM. Get in touch at [CADBIphilly@gmail.com](mailto:CADBIphilly@gmail.com) and by phone at 267-606-0324, or check out <http://decarceratepa.info/CADBI> for more information and news on upcoming events.



## **Decarcerate PA**

Decarcerate PA is a grassroots campaign working to end mass incarceration in Pennsylvania. DPA demands that PA stop building prisons, reduce the prison population, and reinvest money in our communities. There are many ways to become involved in Decarcerate's efforts. Get in touch at [decarceratepa@gmail.com](mailto:decarceratepa@gmail.com) or by phone at 267-217-3372. Individuals on the inside can sign up to receive our quarterly newsletter (which includes featured action steps in every issue) by writing to Decarcerate PA, PO Box 40764, Philadelphia PA 19107. Find us at <http://decarceratepa.info>.





## **Let's Get Free: The Women and Trans Prisoner Defense Committee**

Let's Get Free is a group in Western Pennsylvania that has come together to fight for the freedom of Avis Lee and Charmaine Pfender. These two cases are representative of many women incarcerated throughout the country. Charmaine and Avis are both sentenced to death by incarceration and the journey for their liberation is connected to the broader movement for transformative justice and healing. While Let's Get Free is currently focused on two cisgender women, they believe prisons are a form of violence against women & trans people and want to work with and support as many people as possible within their capacity. They meet in Pittsburgh on the 2nd Monday of each month. Contact them by phone at 412-932-7786 or by email at [LetsGetFreePA@gmail.com](mailto:LetsGetFreePA@gmail.com) or visit <http://letsgetfree.info>.



## **The Other Death Penalty Project**

Started by people in prison serving life without parole, this project hopes to end all forms of the death penalty including death by incarceration. It's run by people currently in prison, so they don't have much ability to respond to mail. If you have loved ones on the outside who can visit the website ([www.theotherdeathpenalty.org](http://www.theotherdeathpenalty.org)), they can find advocacy and support information there, as well as advice on how to involve themselves in this effort. If you are currently incarcerated and would like someone to print and send you a copy of "The Other Death Penalty Project Prisoner Organizing Kit," please write to Prison Health News, c/o Institute for Community Justice, 1207 Chestnut Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

# LIFELINES PROJECT

The ultimate goal of the LifeLines project — and the bigger movement of which it is a part — is to end Death By Incarceration in Pennsylvania. Our more immediate goal is to provoke questions about the need for DBI sentencing and to mobilize people to take action. In order to challenge the dominant narratives of imprisonment, LifeLines has incorporated audio excerpts and edited interviews into events, publications, town halls, workshops, youth education, and other forums. If you are part of a community group, classroom, congregation or organization that would be interested in working with LifeLines to arrange a presentation or workshop, please do not hesitate to contact us.



Layne and Emily read the words of Terri Harper at a protest against the Silencing Act at the State Capitol in April of 2015.

**Emily Abendroth** is a poet, university teacher, and anti-prison activist living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She has been involved in the struggle to end mass incarceration, abolish prisons,

and eliminate police violence for more than 15 years. Much of her creative work attempts to investigate state regimes of force and power, as well as individual and collective resistance strategies to the same. Her poetry book *JExclosures* is available from Ahsahta Press, and *The Instead*, a collaborative book with fiction writer Miranda Mellis, is forthcoming in the Spring of 2016 from Carville Annex Press. She has been awarded artist residencies at the MacDowell Colony, the Millay Colony and the Headlands Center for the Arts, and was named a 2013 Pew Fellow in Poetry. She is a founding member of the Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration, as well as Decarcerate PA, and is co-founder, along with politicized prisoner Robert Saleem Holbrook, of Address This! (an education and empowerment project that provides innovative social justice correspondence courses to individuals incarcerated in Pennsylvania).

**Layne Mullett** lives in Philadelphia and is a founding member of Decarcerate PA and the Coalition to Abolish Death By incarceration. She has been active in radical social justice movements for over a decade, including organizing against gentrification, austerity, and the prison industrial complex, and working for the freedom of political prisoners. Her writing has been published in the journal *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* and in the anthology *Life During Wartime: Resisting Counterinsurgency*.

*My family and loved ones keep me fighting for my freedom, as well as my desire to continue this fight on the outside where I can really make some noise!*

— *Phill*

**"I believe that we can collectively create light at the end of the tunnel, so that is one reason to keep fighting. Also, I do not want the younger brothers whom I love to have to endure this madness for the rest of their lives, and I want my comrades to one day see the light of day! We cannot accomplish such goals without believing in what we're doing. My purpose travels well beyond my own self interest because I want to be a part of creating a truly just world for us all to share."**

**- David Lee**

INMATE MAIL-PA  
DEPT OF CORRECTIONS



**LifeLines Project**  
**<http://lifelines-project.org>**  
**[lifelinesphilly@gmail.com](mailto:lifelinesphilly@gmail.com)**

P.O. Box 40764  
Philadelphia, PA. 19107

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