The Magazine 1664

SUMMER | 2025

CULTURE INCARCERATED

About 1664

1664 was established on February 22, 2024. At that time there were a total of 1,664 federal and state prisons in the United States. Together these systems along with jails, juvenile facilities and immigration detention centers hold over 1.9 million people.

The mission of 1664 is simple: to provide names and faces where there were once numbers and statistics.

This quarterly publication features stories of incarcerated people and offers an anthology of creative writing from justice-involved individuals. Prisons are often factionalized societies with institutional, psychological, geographical and sometimes self-imposed barriers. 1664 aims to chip away at those barriers by sharing stories of humanity from behind the razor-wire.

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This publication is produced at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. 1664 is available in print version at EOCI and available digitally on state-issued tablets at all correctional facilities in Oregon. This publication reaches the more than 12,000 incarcerated Oregonians as well as many outside the prison setting. All writing, artwork and photography (unless otherwise indicated) as well as the design of this magazine was produced by incarcerated people.

HOW TO CONTACT 1664

For incarcerated people in Oregon:

Send a communication form (a kyte) to IWP at EOCI.

For non-incarcerated people or those outside of Oregon mail to:

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution
C/O IWP
2500 Westgate
Pendleton, OR
97801

WHERE TO FIND 1664

For incarcerated people in Oregon:

1664 is available in limited print copies and in the free section of state-issued tablets at every Oregon prison. Incarcerated people can access the publication by selecting the "notices" icon on tablets.

For incarcerated people in the United States:

1664 is available on the Edovo app at more than 1,200 prisons in the U.S. Incarcerated people on Edovo can type "1664" into the search bar to access current and previous editions.

For non-incarcerated people:

1664 is available at www.pollenpress.org. The magazine is sponsored by Pollen Initiative and can be accessed on their online directory of sponsored prison publications.

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Introductory Letter

Written by Kurtis Thompson, Feature Writer

Traditions, customs and wisdom have a living, organic nature. From one generation to the next, these systems are often kept and passed on with the same care one would afford a family member. Through others, people absorb beliefs and social norms which were once foreign to their natural minds. A young child might learn their family's reason for observing Easter or how cutting across the neighbor's lawn is inappropriate despite convenience. These higher ways of thinking have been cultivated over time and are found across every nation and race.

It's interesting how these refinements of thought have been around for thousands of years, but the term to describe them as a whole – culture – is relatively new.

Prior to the word's current definition, "culture" referred to agriculture. The closest approximation to the modern use of "culture" is from an ancient Roman orator named Cicero, who lived from 106 to 43 B.C. In his writing of "Tusculanae Disputationes," Cicero used the agricultural metaphor "cultura animi" – Latin for "cultivation of the soul." Aside from philosophers, most people didn't define their traditions and beliefs with farming idioms.

The modern use of "culture" began during the Age of Enlightenment starting in the 18thcentury. By the 20th century, culture became a central topic in the science of anthropology.

Study revealed culture to be incredibly diverse and beautiful. It shines out from every corner of the earth in a brilliant rainbow. Those dazzling colors may blend at the edges, but there are clear degrees of uniqueness throughout humanity. The past reaches forward and the present grasps back. Together, the two points in time look hopefully into the gleaming dawn of tomorrow. From one hand to the next, stretching forth from life to life, culture reminds us of who we are, who we love and all those who've come before. It is a living history of remembrance and identity.

Kurtis Thompson is a feature writer for 1664.

This summer edition of 1664 humbly attempts to reveal some hidden gems of culture through storytelling. These are only portions of life, but the imprint of a cultivated soul is passed forward in time.

Readers will find a story of how Native American culture is passed on in the prison setting; how one Hawaiian chef shares pieces of his life in each bite; a profile on a counselor who immigrated from Taiwan and ran the Boston Marathon; the story of four incarcerated people who came together and shared their culture through art; and finally, an interview with formerly incarcerated Delores McDaniel, a mother of four who recently regained custody of her children.

Additionally, in this edition we are introducing Silhouettes: snapshots from the lives of various justice-involved people.

We hope the stories inside do more than entertain, that they spur readers to recognize the complexity and beauty of culture in themselves and others.

Thank you for reading.

On July 25, 2025, a dancer at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution's annual Pow-wow performs an Eagle Dance in regalia. The dance is meant to symbolize an eagle stalking it's prey.

A Gathering of Nations; Passing Culture to Our Children

Written by Hugh Edward Crow II | *Photography by* Phillip Luna

My name is Hugh Edward Crow II.

I am an enrolled Cherokee Tribal Citizen out of Oklahoma, from the Wolf Clan (after my Grandmother Fatema Seaboldt), and named after my Grandfather Hugh Crow, who was Blackfeet. Growing up, none of my Native American traditions were taught or talked about, and it wasn't until I was a teenager, incarcerated at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn Oregon, that I recognized I was Native.

It was through correspondence with my biological dad Carl Crow in Stafford Creek, a prison in Washington, that the interest was sparked. He was part of the Native Circle (a group of men engaged in Native American cultural and religious activities), and I sought to do the same.

The approach, however, wasn't easy. My name may have been Crow, but going from a wild and well-known white boy to a Native can be challenging. From then on, as my heart was made known, I was introduced to customs, tradition and religion as it is observed in an incarcerated setting.

Native American culture is historically passed down and taught by elders and parents through the sharing of our traditional songs, dance, drum and ceremonies. Everything, from language phrases still in practice today—even if the language is not fully spoken—to how we represent where we come from, we learn from our elders.

However, many of our families spent their time working and meeting the demands of a full house. The traditions, history, and skills our parents or rela-

tives would have taught were seldom passed down due to these responsibilities.

As kids many of us were not taught our culture; Pow-wows allow us to share traditions and knowledge with our children.

In my case, and for many others like me, we've learned from our peers, from elders who have found themselves incarcerated alongside us, and from volunteers who have poured their time, energy and love into showing us how to observe our culture despite being in prison.

Even with the many hurdles we face, there are many aspects to Native American life we're able to practice. We observe Native American culture through religious services like Smudge, Sweat Lodge, Pipe Ceremony, Spirit Run and others. The Pow-wow is the yearly culmination of our efforts, prayers and sacrifices combined in beautiful ceremony.

"One of the things [Pow-wow] really teaches you is how to put other's first," said Benjamin Jones, enrolled member of the Chinook tribe in Washington. Jones is a direct descendant of Chief Concomley, who shares Quinault blood.

Gifts play an incredible role in our Pow-wow. The act of giving has great meaning in Native American culture.

"It's a sacrifice to sit down and bead. We start making gifts for Pow-wow a year in advance, and you commit yourself to it," said Jones. "Spend an hour a day making a medallion and you'll never forget the way someone's eyes light up in appreciation of that gift."

"Gifts have always been important," Jones said. "You've made something they'll cherish for a lifetime. I love to see families with them, especially when they've sacrificed much to be here for us."

Jones said he has been to many Pow-wows in prison, but of the few he attended on the outside, one is unforgettable. In 2017, he took his daughter Kyanna to her first Pow-wow.

Hugh Crow, center, participates in the drum circle with Joseph Dexter-Merrill, right.

In the opening ceremony of Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution's 2024 Pow-wow, Benjamin Jones, second from the right, is flag bearer in the Grand Entry.

Kyanna was 7 at the Pow-wow and they had a blast, he said. He hopes to spend many more Pow-wow's with her.

Jones is an accomplished Grass Dancer. He learned in '03 at Stafford Creek, and three years later won the Grass Dance competition at a Pow-wow in Walla Walla State Penitentiary, Washington. He hopes to show his daughter how to Grass Dance.

Even though we are incarcerated, there is much to be said about our Pow-wows and how we are able conduct them to honor our coming together. I would call it a celebration of life—a religious ceremony where cultural teaching and identity is expressed in a deeply meaningful way.

Every part of the Pow-wow is culture and ceremony.

Before Pow-wow truly begins, the grounds of the dance arena are blessed and prepared for the Grand Entry. As drummers begin to sing, we create a marching and dancing circle. The drum guides all those in attendance.

"Drum is the heartbeat of our people," said Karuk enrolled tribal member Joseph Dexter-Merrill, from Happy Camp Reservation in Northern California. "That's all the power and strength of us combined. Our blood, sweat and tears."

Dexter-Merrill expressed how the drumming and singing are our prayers that go to the four corners of the universe.

"Our words and vibrations, those syllables we sing, it's our communication to the Creator," he said."As we sit in that circle of unity, all of our voices become one, and the power generated in that circle represents the circle of life, the drumbeat being the heartbeat of our people."

The Eagle Staff leads the Grand Entry, closely followed by the flags–tribal, veteran, POW and Color Guard.

When all have gathered in a circle, and our Eagle Staff and flag bearers have taken center-stage, drummers move from the Grand Entry song to a Flag song. It is a song to praise every member who ever served and sacrificed behind one of those flags. At its conclusion, a veteran's song honors our heroes and members of the armed forces.

The flags are placed and then we all wait for prayer.

Following prayer, the drummers always have a line-up of songs prepared. While they play, those in attendance can greet each other, which is part of the ceremony, too.

Two participants start the greeting. As one moves clockwise, the other moves counter-clockwise, and each is followed by other members in attendance. This continues until every person has met and they are standing in a circle. By the end, you're usually standing next to the first person you acknowledged.

In prison, Pow-wow is about gathering and recognizing our culture in a way that honors guests and family, and offers us a chance to embrace life with the ones we love.

Pow-wow also has a long history outside of the correctional setting. It is an honored and sacred tradition going back to the creation of reservations and the government's attempts to suppress Native American religious and ceremonial ways of life.

"The greatest thing about the Gathering of Nations is the respect that is shown to all Native people of the world," said a Kiowa tribesman at New Mexico's Gathering of Nations.

Though his statement was in reference to a Pow-wow in New Mexico that had more than 100,000 attendees, it is true even in the incarcerated setting.

Many different nations, tribes, traditions, sacred foods and stories represent us as a whole. While

Hugh Crow poses for a photo at the July 25, 2025 Pow-wow at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

there are hundreds of tribes and dozens of beliefs, no one way of life is greater than the others. From the coasts, plains, foothills and great mountain ranges, we all arrive as equals, bearing the gift of spirit and pride of our people.

A Pow-wow is not just a single ceremony. Each aspect within the event — smudge, food, regalia, dance, song, storytelling, gifts — is a ceremony. And one thing it truly centers on is our children.

Pow-wow is about teaching and lifting up youth, building a wealth of knowledge for our young ones to carry on into their adulthood.

Our ways live on because of the strength and grit of our ancestors. The sacrifices they made were stronger than the opposition, persecution or plague they faced. It is a hope and determination that never gave up on passing the baton to the next generation.

So, what makes Pow-wow significant? How is it authentic to the experience beyond these walls? Those questions have been answered plainly.

But what can make it better? Our children. It is our young ones still yearning for identity and wanting to take a treasured role in our lives that deserve to be there.

Prisons current communication contracts have strained relations and made connecting tough. And our children are not allowed to attend Pow-wow, like at the yearly family events that are held at my facility.

Allowing us to pass on our culture to our children would heal wounds, bridge gaps and build lasting bonds. It is culture, community, sacrifice, talent and the best of our humanity.

My name is Hugh Edward Crow II, and it's been with great respect and joy that I had this opportunity. I hope that Native culture and Pow-wow is better understood and appreciated; my love goes out to you all. May you be encouraged to always see yourself as worthy, and be willing to grind on your goals. You can do it. ■

Above: Justice Ashpole, right, poses with his spouse and Manuel Pinedo at the 2025 Pow-wow.

Left: Anthony Miller, left, and Blaine Silversmith pose in traditional ribbon shirts.

Below: Christopher Johns, right, marches in the color guard during the a Pow-wow.

Left: Volunteers Gale Ireland and Veronica Manderjano cook fry bread at the July 25, 2025 Pow-wow.

Bottom left: Fry bread cooked and fried for the Pow-wow.

Bottom right: At Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, residents craft necklaces and dream catchers throughout the year. The items are given as ceremonial gifts to volunteers.

Left: At the 2025 Pow-wow at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, residents, their family members and volunteers play in a drum circle. The drum provides the heartbeat of the event.

About 70 residents, 60 of their family members and 25 volunteers participated in the Pow-wow.

Gary Kealoha shares part of his Hawaiian culture in a five-course meal

Written by Chris Ainsworth | *Photography by* Phillip Luna

Gary Kealoha's practiced hands had a mind of their own as they added the final touches to a plate of tuna tataki. With a knife tethered to the counter, he made precise strokes reflective of the years of training imprinted on him by Norrio Yamamoto, an accomplished sushi chef and the man he views as the gatekeeper to his skills. Kealoha arranged the tuna to accent its beautiful red flesh, framed by a perfect sear and sesame seeds.

Garnishing the tuna tataki, he added sliced mango and seaweed, the bright yellow standing out against the deep emerald. The rainbow of colors on the porcelain tableware were reminiscent of Oahu, the Hawaiian island of Kealoha's birth.

Finally satisfied, he exited the kitchen to explain the first dish of a five-course Hawaiian meal to diners—a menu that he created.

More than twenty patrons attended the pop-up style restaurant in the spring of 2025. Kealoha and the other chefs wore uniforms customary to the culinary industry—the outfits were a stark contrast to state-issued prison attire they typically wear.

The fine dining program at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton, Oregon trains incarcerated people in the culinary field. It's one of only a few like it in the nation. Kealoha was part of the program, but his experience in the industry began decades before.

Kealoha, right, slices avocado in a prep kitchen while diners for the fine dining meal wait nearby. The knife is tethered to the counter as a safety precaution for the correctional setting.

Kealoha adds an avocado puree to a pressed watermelon citrus supreme salad. He designed the five-course menu based of his Hawaiian roots. The outline of the islands are tattooed on his hand.

An outline of Hawaii, tattooed on the back of Kealoha's right hand, was visible as he placed the perfect ruby cubes of pressure-pressed watermelon next to triangular cuts of deep burgundy sweet beet gelatin, emphasized by flawless heart of palm circles, orange segments, shaved radish and cilantro sprigs. The salad was the second course in the meal.

Kealoha was provided the unique opportunity to share this piece of Hawaiian culture with members of Pendleton's community and the correctional institution's heads of department. The guest list for the event included Pendleton's current and past mayors,

A garlic aioli, the final touch, is added to Tuna Tataki by Kealoha. The course is a slightly seared ahi tuna with avocado, mango sesame seeds, wakame seeds, and wasabi in a citrus sauce.

local district attorneys, Oregon State Police representatives, and members of the local fire department, to name a few.

The meal was an opportunity for the Department of Corrections to showcase programming and allow influential members of the community to interact with incarcerated people.

What remained hidden from patrons is the internal struggle woven with love of *ohana*, the Hawaiian word for family.

Kealoha's interest in the culinary world began in his brother's shadow. With 16 brothers and sisters, he desired to make a name for himself. Specifically, he wanted to step out of the shadow cast by his closest sibling, a brother 14 years older, who was a chef.

"He came before me so I felt like I was always compared to him," said Kealoha. "My whole goal was to be better at anything he did."

This rivalry would lay the foundation for Kealoha's future, a blessing and a curse. He saw his rough-edged brother as a role model, even though his brother was quick to fight and often found himself on the wrong side of run-ins with the law.

Kealoha tapped into the rivalry to become a chef, eventually surpassing his brother.

"When I started cooking it was to be better than my brother," Kealoha said. "It just so happened I picked it up and I was good at it."

At 15, his culinary journey began when he landed a job as a dishwasher for an Italian restaurant.

Starting in the least glamorous position in the kitchen provided Kealoha a foot in the door of the industry that he was eager to make a name in. His experience working as a dishwasher didn't offer many opportunities to learn cooking skills, but Kealoha was motivated to prove himself.

Three years later he would be challenging other chefs in contests of skill – and he would win.

The hore d'oeurve at the fine dining event was teriyaki-glazed kalbi short ribs served upon a circular bed of pineapple-fried rice. Vibrant green scallions topped the caramel-colored gloss coated ribs, both a glaring divergence from the canary yellow rice.

While the guest list may have been overwhelming for some, over a decade earlier, Kealoha worked in high-end and high-stress kitchens. He was familiar with challenges he would face in the prison program.

At 18, Kealoha began participating in Taste the Range, a free-for-all culinary contest pitting five to seven chefs against each other. Each cook was given a basket of food to prepare a dish. Critics and competitors evaluated performance with discerning eyes, nodding in approval or tensing in apprehension of being beaten. Everyone wanted to win.

For six years, the other chefs would be forced to look up to Kealoha's prowess. Even the two years he did not win outright, he shared the title.

"I never lost," said Kealoha. "I tied two years in a row for first place, but I never lost."

Lao Lao is a staple Hawaiian dish of beef shoulder, salted cod and fatty pork wrapped in rainbow chard and steamed inside a giant ti leaf. During the fine dining meal, Kealoha served the entrée with minimal accompaniments. The presentation's simplicity allowed the cooking to shine, like a present to be unwrapped.

Showmanship, delicate knife work, and culinary wisdom were all imparted on Kealoha by his mentor, renowned chef Norio Yamamoto.

When he was 18, Yamamoto took Kealoha under his wing. They met because Kealoha's mother worked at a hotel Yamamoto owned.

"He needs to figure his life out," Kealoha's mother told Yamamoto. "He's *Kolohe*, so be careful."

Kolohe, the Hawaiian term for hardheaded or stubborn, was a moniker Kealoha was given by his family, a nickname that has stuck with him beyond his youth.

"He was hard on me, he was stern. It challenged me every day," said Kealoha. "But once I got into it I knew that was what I wanted to do. I went from line cook to sushi chef in six months."

The rise to sushi chef happened rapidly, but it took over two years of hard work to build the essential skills he carries with him today.

The main course: LaoLao — fatty pork, salted black cod, and beef shoulder taro steamed n rainbow chard and ti leaf.

"I took [his teaching] and tried to analyze every part of it and incorporated my own way of doing things," Kealoha said. "That was one of the biggest things I took with me. If someone can teach me how to be more efficient with anything I do, I adapt it to my style."

Sweet potato haupia pie is another culturally significant dish Kealoha selected for the fine dining menu. Purple potatoes are common in Hawaii, which give the dessert a lovely, violet appearance. The crimson pineapple hibiscus sauce set against the white tableware lent a vibrant flash to muted tones.

In April 2024, Gary Kealoha treats a beehive for Varroa mites using an oxalic acid drip at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. Kealoha was part of the beekeeping program and helped harvest honey that was later used in deserts for fine dining meals.

The pie's foundation was a graham cracker crust with a slight nod to Pendleton — the honey used to bind the crust was harvested from the prison apiary.

Aside from the culinary program, Kealoha participated in the prison's beekeeping classes. He helped harvest honey that was used in his Hawaiian sweet potato haupia pie.

The beekeeping program was one of the few opportunities for Kealoha to connect with nature. *Malama 'Aina* is something taught to Hawaiian natives from a young age — it means respect the land, the place you live, the beautiful scenery and what provides food.

Maintaining a connection to nature can be hard when surrounded by concrete and razor wire.

Outside of the fine dining program, few opportunities hold cultural significance to Kealoha. His only tangible ties to his culture are through his wife, Shaylynn. They met in middle school.

When he came to prison, he recalls her saying, "When you truly love someone, you stand by them — not just when it's easy."

Shaylynn lives in the Pacific Northwest and is the president of a non-profit organization bringing Hawaiian culture to Washington and Oregon.

Far away from everything familiar to him, Kealoha still seeks out parts of his culture to feel closer to home. But despite his homesickness, he plans to stay in Oregon after his release in 2032.

For now Keahola will focus on finding small ways to keep to his Hawaiian roots.

As he explained haupia pie to his guests, the final course of the meal, his words provide only an explanation. But, hidden behind his culinary expertise and delicate knife work hides a history and knowledge gained throughout his life — times of love mixed with times of strife. And he fills each bite with a piece of his culture. ■

African American Program

Our mission is to provide culturally-specific services to assist in the successful transition of African Americans from prison to the community.

Program Objectives

- **Stop:** Parole violations, criminal activities, domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, cycle of self-defeat.
- **Increase:** Education, vocational training, employment, family stability and community connection.
- **Provide:** Culturally-specific programs and services, HEAT (Habilitation, Empowerment, Accountability, Therapy) for men, and HER (Habilitation Empowerment and Recovery) for women.

To Be Considered

- **Eligibility restrictions:** will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- **No:** Sex offenses, clear and persistent mental health diagnosis, or active gang involvement/affiliation.
- Must be supervised in Multnomah County.

How to Get Started

- **Inmate:** Write a detailed letter of interest expressing why you would like to be considered for participation.
  Males: Send your letter with a kyte to: CRCI/AAP/Bruce Douglas
  Females: Submit your letter of interest to your respective counselor
- **Counselor:** Email inmate's full name, SID#, and recommendation to bruce.w.douglas@multco.us

Dept. of Community Justice/AAP,
1245 SE 122nd Ave., Portland, OR 97233
503.310.0054 | bruce.w.douglas@multco.us

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY JUSTICE
Community Safety Through Positive Change

THE LAST THOUSAND STEPS

Written by Phillip Luna
Cover photograph by Ben Wentz

After battling cancer in 2009, Sarah Hsu, an immigrant from Taiwan and a mental health counselor for the Oregon Department of Corrections, became a hobbyist runner. But a tragedy in 2013 would catapult her running career and lead her to Massachusetts, where she would compete in a uniquely American tradition: The Boston Marathon.


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At Copley Square

Each year, more than 30,000 participants run the Boston Marathon in eastern Massachusetts. The race, which is usually held on Patriot's Day, is the oldest and most well-known marathon in the United States. More than half a million spectators line the winding 26.2-mile course, which runs through eight cities and towns and concludes in the iconic Copley Square at the center of Boston.

Runners from all over the world travel to Massachusetts each year. For many, simply qualifying for the marathon is the highlight of their career.

On April 15, 2013, however, what should have been a once-in-a-lifetime memory for some ended in heartbreak. During the 117th annual Boston Marathon, two men planted homemade pressure cooker bombs near the finish line of the race. At 2:49 p.m. the bombs detonated 14 seconds apart, killing three people and injuring hundreds. Sixteen people lost limbs in the blasts.

Every major media outlet covered the incident.

On that same day, more than 3,000 miles away in a rural Washington town, Sarah Hsu was running on a treadmill at the local gym. She wasn't training for a marathon. She wasn't training at all. Hsu had been diagnosed with cancer in 2009 and, after her recovery, started running.

"I was determined to get back to my whole health," Hsu said. "I was running so the cancer wouldn't get me."

At Hsu's gym, the television was tuned in to a news station as reporters covered a once beautiful spring day that became an unthinkable tragedy.

"I was shocked, when I looked at the monitor and it showed the bombing," she recalled. "I'd never heard of the Boston Marathon before."

Hsu immigrated to the United States from Taiwan in 1994, but she didn't come as an athlete seeking to add the country's oldest marathon to her list of accomplishments. Instead, she came to pursue a graduate degree. After school, she stayed stateside and became a mental health care professional, which eventually led to a career with the Oregon Department of Corrections.

But in 2013, when the bombs exploded 200 yards from Copley Square, Hsu was a hobbyist runner, a cancer survivor, and a mental health professional working in outpatient services.

The tragedy would be a catalyst for her running career.

"Once I heard about it, I just wanted to learn more," said Hsu. "I thought, maybe next year I could show up in Boston and cheer people on."

And she did show up in Boston, but not as a spectator.

In 2025, Hsu ran the Boston Marathon and crossed the finish line for the fourth time in her running career.

In fact, since 2016 she has run 28 marathons, 21 half marathons and one 32-mile ultra marathon, as well as handfuls of 5K, 10K and 15K races. Hsu has qualified for Boston six times — a feat that if accomplished once would be considered a lifetime achievement by many athletes.

From a Small Island

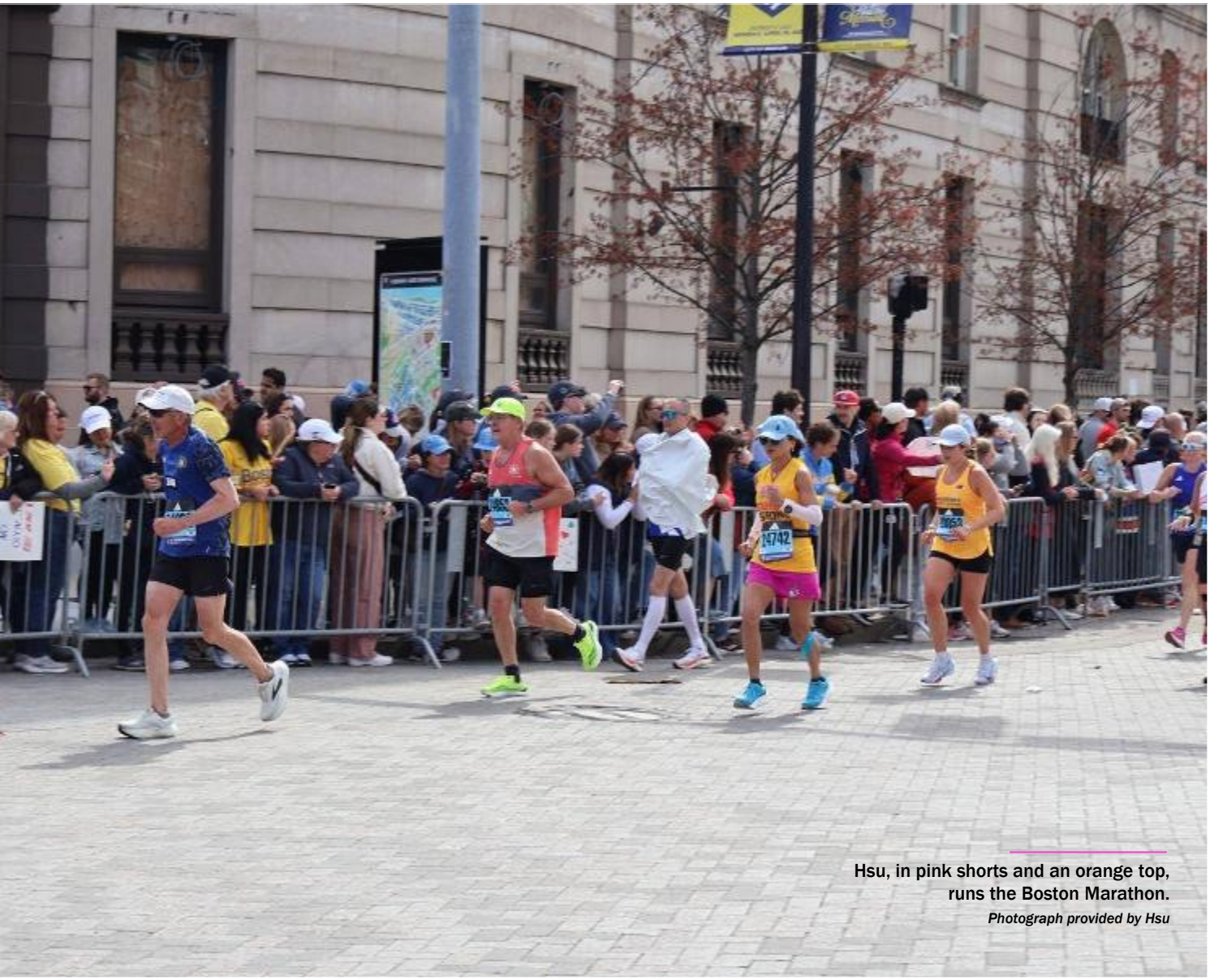
Hsu grew up in Taiwan, a small island in Asia.

"I grew up in a fatherless home," she said, "My mother raised us kids in poverty with no resources."

Hsu said that in her culture females are told they do not need an education. Their role is to serve the family. But despite cultural norms, her mother always encouraged her to go to school.

"She told us education was our ticket out of poverty," Hsu said.

Hsu's pursuit of a college degree was long and difficult. Her family could not afford to send her to college, and she spent years saving money and helping her brothers attend school. When it was her turn, she paid her own tuition.



Hsu, in pink shorts and an orange top, runs the Boston Marathon.
Photograph provided by Hsu

At 28, after completing her undergraduate work in Taiwan, Hsu moved to the United States. She attended graduate school at Walla Walla University in Washington State.

"I had one backpack and two suitcases. I left on a 747 jet plane for Portland," she recalled.

As a foreign student, Hsu was not eligible for federal financial aid. She would pay her own way, as she had with her undergraduate studies. Her American dream was paid for with the pennies and dust doled out from under-the-table jobs as a housekeeper, a pet sitter and making dumplings at a Chinese restaurant.

For many immigrants seeking education in the United States, money is only one obstacle.

Hsu struggled to learn English and after one quarter at the university, she was told her language proficiency would not be enough to continue. She enrolled in English as a second language classes at a community college and, after her English improved, she was able to re-enroll at the university.

"I worked hard and finished with almost a 4.0 GPA, first in my class," she said. She earned a master's degree in social work in 1998. "I got a job in the United States instead of going back to Taiwan."

Hsu works at her desk at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton, Oregon. Prominent in the photo is a Tibetan Singing bowl, which she often uses while facilitating mindfulness classes for incarcerated people.

Photograph by Phillip Luna

In 2016, after 18 years working in the mental health community, Hsu became a contractor with Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton, Oregon.

Eventually, she became a mental health counselor with ODOC.

"I have worked with a lot of kids and families, kids in foster care, adoption, or with attachment problems," Hsu explained. "And also victims of crimes and the adult, mentally-ill population, and now with incarcerated people."

Hsu facilitates several behavioral therapy classes in her work with incarcerated people.

"She is foundationally sound in her knowledge of therapeutic practices and application of treatment models," said Stephen Rich, a mental health professional at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. Rich and Hsu have worked together for almost four years.

"She has the ability to understand and share the feelings of others," he said. "She has been able to accentuate the concept of mindfulness in work with her clients."

Rich said Hsu is known as a consummate professional among her peers, meticulously adhering to ethical standards. But among the incarcerated people

she works with, Hsu is most well known for including Asian culture in her teachings. The classes she leads often begin with the tranquil sound of a Tibetan singing bowl and usually include a traditional Asian tea ceremony.

Be the Mountain

"The sound is soothing," said Logan Gimbel, an incarcerated student in Hsu's class. "It immerses you in the present moment."

Hsu rang a Tibetan singing bowl at the start of a class, and the long, hollow sound captivated her five students. On the table for each participant were a few ounces of tea in a paper cup.

A tea ceremony is a ritualized practice of making and serving tea, which is common in many Asian cultures. The ceremony accentuates the mindfulness concepts of her class.

Gimbel said the ceremony makes you more aware of the components of tea, each smell and ingredient. He said he had never been part of a tea ceremony before, but he enjoys the culture Hsu introduces into her class.

During his six years in the U.S. Air Force, Gimbel spent 14 months stationed in South Korea. He said he developed a great appreciation for Asian culture during that time.

Partway through the class, Hsu had her students stand and she instructed them in mountain pose — a common yoga move that requires participants to ground themselves in the present moment, much like a mountain.

Hanging on the wall in her classroom is a reproduction of the painting "Under the Wave off Kanagawa," which was originally created by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai in 1831. The image shows ships nearly capsizing on great blue waves. In the distance is a mountain.

"She always says, 'Be the mountain,'" said Gimbel. "The mountain doesn't move with the waves. A lot of people could benefit from this idea."

Hsu said the waves represent life — worries, emotions and stress. The mountain does not allow the outside elements to change it.

"Life is full of crests and troughs," Hsu explained. "You cannot know what comes next. We cannot control the past or the future, only the present moment."

Gimbel said the techniques he has learned with Hsu are helpful. He developed anxiety during his military service because he frequently worked around explosives. Now, prison is a different source of distress.

"The turmoil of prison life is a source of anxiety," he said.

Tibetan bowls, tea ceremonies and mountain metaphors are staples in her classroom. Each is a technique, a type of mindfulness, for reducing stress and anxiety, but Hsu said going outside and running is the best kind of mindfulness.

"Our bodies are meant to move," she explained, "I tell all my clients, walking, jogging or running, move forward. Exercise is the best medicine."

A long distance runner must understand pace and be aware of their body's needs — a mentality Hsu believes an incarcerated person can apply to their time in prison.

Gimbel said he does not know if he is ready to start running marathons yet, but someday.

"My dad ran marathons," he said, "so I would like to get in shape and run one."

He said he ran a lot during his time in the service, in basic training. Running in the military was a a kind of mindfulness, he said. But he has a new appreciation for the mental health benefits of long distance running.

Frosting the Cake

Hsu's interest in running started after recovering from cancer, but a magazine article would become the catalyst for running a marathon. In June 2013, two months after the Boston bombing, Hsu purchased a People magazine. The feature story was about survivors of the tragedy making remarkable recoveries after limb amputation. It was a story of perseverance and hope.

"I looked at this magazine that talked about survivors," she said. "It talked about recovery. The human body is capable of recovering well."

Hsu felt inspired. She set a goal to run three half marathons in nine months. "I thought, if I can run three half marathons it will be a template to train for a full marathon," she said.

She ran her first half marathon in September. By the end of 2013, well before her nine-month goal, she had run two more half marathons.

"I ran three in 90 days," Hsu said. "I just couldn't help myself."

By 2014, Hsu was competing in full marathons. In her second race, she qualified for Boston. To qualify a runner must complete a standard, certified marathon course in adequate time for their age group and gender. Runners must qualify for Boston each year.

"I was shocked when I qualified the first time. Qualifying is the cake," Hsu said. "Running the marathon is the icing on the cake."

The first time she went to Boston, she didn't know anyone. She navigated the prerace process and the stress of preparing on her own. No trainers. No instructions. No help.

"I have no coaches and I'm representing a rural eastern Oregon town," she said. "How many Asian women from here show up in Boston?"

But Hsu said there is nothing like the community she felt when lining up with 30,000 other people for the marathon.

"Once I got there, I saw people with disabilities running and doing their races. I was inspired," she said. "I see different shapes, different running forms, different struggles – and I am one of them."

The Boston Marathon is deceptively difficult. The first 16 miles are gradually downhill, which makes it challenging not to run faster than planned. Miles 17 thru 21 has a series of four uphill climbs, known as the Newton hills, the last of which is called Heartbreak Hill. It's a 0.4-mile ascent between mile markers 20 and 21. Although Heartbreak Hill only rises 88 feet, it comes at a section of the race where many runners' energy stores are depleted and inexperienced runners are often forced to a walking pace.

"If you go too fast on the first 16 miles, you'll trash your quads," she said. "The first 20 miles is really preparation for the last six."

Hsu said a few sections of the race are quiet as the track goes through smaller towns. In the last two miles, however, spectators line the course six or seven people deep cheering for the racers.

"It was loud. I got emotional," she recalled of her first race. "I show up and I don't know anybody, this immigrant, this Asian woman. I navigate all the stress, the whole process, and then—there is the finish line."

After running 26 miles through eight Massachusetts cities and trudging up the four iconic Newton Hills; after beating cancer; after working her way through college while learning a new language; and after a one-way trip on a 747 jet plane that left her home behind; Hsu was spurred forward by tens of thousands of spectators she had never met before, as they cheered her down the last quarter mile.

"The last thousand steps was the most important time, and I could hear everyone cheering for me,"

> The last thousand steps was the most important time … That's when I needed to charge forward with everything I have.

she said. “That’s what I needed to charge forward with everything I had.”

When she crossed the finish line, Hsu knelt down, exhausted, and kissed the ground.

“I did it, yeah. I did it,” she said. “Enjoy the frosting on the cake. I already got the cake.”

Stepping Strong

“My running friends said I was insane,” Hsu said, “to which I agreed.”

The insanity Hsu is referring to is a 32-mile ultramarathon trail run through Bennington and Walla Walla, Washington, which she ran in about six hours on April 12, 2025 — nine days before she flew to Massachusetts and ran the Boston Marathon.

Of her nearly 30 marathons, she has a personal record of 3 hours 40 minutes and 46 seconds. But times, she said, are irrelevant and not what she considers the most important part of running.

“The outcome is about doing my best and reaching the finish line,” she said. “It is not about time.”

Running, Hsu said, fosters a sense of community. When she started in Boston, she went alone. But the running community came to embrace her.

For the past few years, Hsu and her running friends have been supporting Stepping Strong, a fundraising group that donates its proceeds to Brigham and Women’s Hospital. In 2025, she was one of 153 qualified runners at Boston supporting the organization.

Stepping Strong was founded by the Reny family after Gillian Reny, who was standing near the finish line as she waited for her sister to complete the race in 2013, was severely injured in the Boston bombing. First responders took Reny to the hospital, where doctors and nurses were able to save her leg.

“At the time she went to the hospital in critical care,” Hsu said. “The parents worried their daughter’s leg would be amputated.”

Hsu runs a 32-mile ultra marathon through Bennington and Walla Walla Washington on April 12, 2025.

Photograph provided by Hsu

In various photos, Hsu poses with her running friends and members of the Stepping Strong team. Stepping Strong is a fundraising group that donates its proceeds to Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Photographs provided by Hsu

Through multiple surgeries and rehab she was able to recover."

In 2017, after incredible success in fundraising, The Gillian Reny Stepping Strong Center for Trauma Innovation opened — a physical therapy center that helps traumatic injury survivors worldwide.

The foundation has had continued success for more than a decade. After the 2025 marathon, Stepping Strong had raised $1.8 million for the year.

Hsu said she feels grateful and blessed to work with Stepping Strong and to be part of a community. She hopes to recreate the sense of community she has experienced in the correctional setting.

Hsu poses in front of a reproduction of the painting "Under the Great Wave off Kanagawa," which was originally created by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai in 1831.

Photograph by Phillip Luna

In addition to working at EOCI, Hsu volunteers at Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla, helping with their running club every week.

"I'd like to start a running group here, at EOCI," Hsu said. "Running is not about solo running. It is recognizing the benefit of community."

Runners support each other, she said. They help each other and share in the challenges, triumphs and failures. They are cheered on by spectators who urge them to take each step forward. Running is a community, a culture all its own.

"I think prison is a culture too," Hsu said. "This is a marginalized society. In their background is trauma, family dysfunction, abuse, poverty, addiction and brokenness — and that is a culture itself. But in a culture there is community."

In her class, Hsu regularly gives her incarcerated students a reading assignment. They read the article from People magazine that inspired her more than a decade ago. Her copy is in near perfect condition, its gently folded pages barely creased. She makes photocopies of the feature story: "Strength and Courage, Boston Bombing Survivors."

"We read this and I ask, 'What did you learn?'" she said. "The point is recovery. Survivors and amputees, they can get back to their life and so can you."

There are parallels between recovering from tragedy, running a marathon and serving a prison sentence. It is about overcoming odds, perservering despite the struggle — a mountain in the storm. Everything is about preparing, pacing and building the right strengths to move forward.

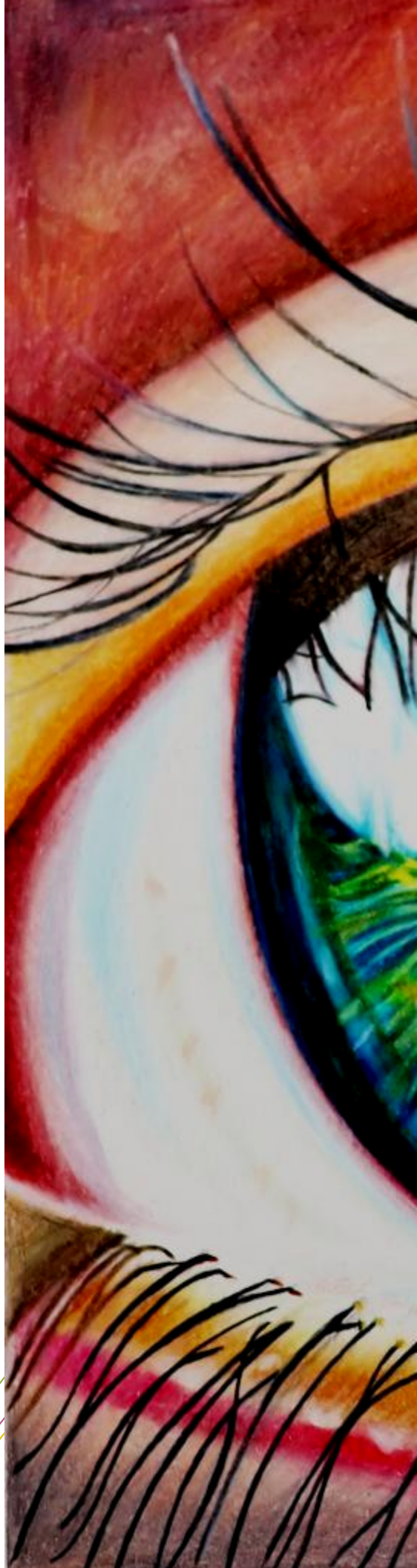
"Recovery from anything is possible," she said.

As her students near their release date, approach the parole board, or just strive to be better human beings, Hsu is there to help. She shows them how to build the right strengths, to set the right pace, and then, when they need it most, she cheers them on, propelling them forward for the last thousand steps. ■

Editor's note: On Aug. 10, 2025, Hsu completed her 29th marathon and qualified for Boston in 2026, which she plans to attend.

CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH ART

Written by Kurtis Thompson
Photography by Phillip Luna & Chris Ainsworth



A multi-colored eye, right, was drawn in colored pencil by incarcerated artist Andrew Slover. He is part of a group of artists that meet and draw together, sharing their art techniques despite their various backgrounds and styles.

Clockwise from left, Michael Ledbetter, Caleb Asher, Andrew Slover and Oscar Chavez-Mandujano create artwork, collaborating on techniques and sharing pieces of their culture. The four are residents of Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

Four men sit at a long table, heads tipped forward to carefully pour from the inkwells of imagination. Images drip out through their hands, the tips of colored pencil and pen gently spill thoughts on paper. They are artists.

Each works mostly independently, but they collaborate and share their experiences, art techniques and pieces of their culture.

The soft silence of focus is occasionally broken with a joke and laughter. If one didn't know better, it would sound as if they were in a library or art studio.

However, this unofficial group is officially in custody at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton, Oregon.

Creativity began early for these artists, but it was after incarceration when they truly began to develop their skills. Andrew Slover, Caleb Asher, Oscar Chavez-Mandujano and Michael Ledbetter have poured thousands of hours into their artwork.

The path of each person has led to the long table near a tall, dirty window where sunlight streams in. Sitting there they ply their craft, using art to express themselves to others both inside and outside prison – confines of concrete and concertina wire cannot contain them completely. For them, art is another way to connect, right next to phone calls and visits with loved ones.

I Love You in Color

Michael Ledbetter's artistic ability simmered for years until recently. His original introduction to art came from a woman two generations before him: his grandmother.

She had converted her basement into an art parlor and showed him how to communicate with colors when he was 10 years old.

He used to watch her, a bit mystified by her ability to transform plain white canvas with splashes of color and abstract shapes. Paradoxically, abstract art wasn't something he liked until later in life, but his grandmother sparked the interest.

"I couldn't help but be intrigued," Ledbetter said.

Intrigue drew him in, but emotional communication became his artistic drive.

"I want you to look at [my art] and feel what I was feeling when I drew it," he said. One piece, a phoenix rising from the ashes, holds meaning for him. "It's a good representation of what we're all going through [in prison]. We've burned everything down to the ground and here we are, trying to fix it all and come back better."

Prison is where Ledbetter was inspired to improve his art skills. After seeing other incarcerated people invest thousands of hours in to developing their skills and creating art, his motivation went from simmer to rolling boil.

Over the past several years, he has also put thousands of hours into his art.

The group of artists have toiled over their pieces, helping one another improve their capabilities. Colorful camaraderie such as this can be found in many prisons, and the healthy outlet helps people cope with common stressors.

One stressful circumstance in the prison setting is maintaining connection with family. When something goes wrong with out-of-reach loved ones, incarcerated people often feel helpless. Ledbetter experienced this firsthand after getting some hard news concerning his son.

"It wasn't until I was locked up and going through all this," he said, and paused. The imprisoned father looked to the side as if searching for the right words. "That I found out he had autism," he finished.

His 4-year-old child Jaxson is autistic and nonverbal. It's too early for doctors to predict what Jaxson's autism will look like later in life.

"I can get on the phone and tell him how much I love him, but it doesn't translate," he said.

But even with verbal barriers, creativity is a universal dialect.

Jaxson's favorite TV show is Puffin Rock. Before Ledbetter was in prison, he had discovered the children's show with his son at home. Two years old at

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Michael Ledbetter works on an art piece.

Michael Ledbetter draws a rose in pink and reds.

the time, Jaxson got excited when his father put the series on the family television. Ledbetter, recalling this memory, brought the characters to life in a personalized card and sent it to Jaxson.

"Now he runs around the house all day with it. It's glued to his hip and he carries it everywhere he goes," he said. "That's like a piece of me with him."

A Father-Daughter Venture

Ledbetter isn't the only parent in the four-man art group. Oscar Chavez-Mandujano is a Chicano man who has been mentoring his daughter as an artist since his incarceration in 2022. He's trying to parent and develop marketable skills for the future.

"My hope is that one day she'll be tattooing side by side with me," he said.

Tattoos are a special kind of expression placed on malleable, curving surfaces and carried wherever the owner goes.

The practice of tattooing has an ancient history which spans across human existence, exhibiting social and cultural significance the world over. Nigh

indelible, this ink records, communicates and represents identity.

Mandujano's daughter, 14-year-old Klarisa, recently took an interest in tattoo culture and asked her mother to buy a tattoo set. The answer was no at first, but Mandujano convinced his wife this was healthy for their daughter's growth.

"I told my wife to let her develop the skills now while she's young," he said. "Just supervise it – we don't want to take this from her."

Klarisa is too young to work in a tattoo parlor, however, she can practice on artificial pig skin. Mandujano is very supportive of his daughter's new interest, especially after experiencing the limitations of prison.

Prisoners wear the same clothes, carry the same identification lanyard and purchase personal items such as shoes from the same vendor as their neighbors. In a sea of sameness, identity may drown.

But Mandujano is determined to express himself and teach his daughter to do the same.

Oscar Chavez-Mandujano poses for a photo at the art table. Mandujano uses art to stay connected with his daughter.

"I try to steer away from violence in drawings I send her," he said. "But I send her stuff with war heroes, like Pancho Villa and others."

He said he is careful to shield her from the gang lifestyle which has been part of his life. Mandujano was 18 when his daughter was born, and quickly realized he wanted to protect her from walking the same path he had.

Instead of writing letters, Mandujano and his daughter exchange drawings. He mentors her through the mail.

"I'm always encouraging my daughter to draw because she's naturally gifted," said Mandujano. "She likes to do what I do, and that's an amazing feeling as a father."

His daughter is able to accurately draw something she has seen. Mandujano said her focus is on beauty and photorealism.

For Mandujano and Klarisa, art has strengthened their father-daughter bond and provided a platform for parenting.

"We talk about art all day … it's a good foundation we have," he said. "It's a beautiful bond. We both relate to art."

Mandujano uses art to bond with his daughter and tattoos are an interest they share. He is in good company at his table, as many of the other artists have also explored tattoo artwork.

Out of the Dark Isle – Exile Inc.

Another of the four artists, Caleb Asher, is hoping to start his own tattoo brand he calls Exile Inc. The dark surrealism in his work has roots in an awkward childhood.

"If I can take a picture of a celebrity and turn it into something that makes you feel like you're having a nightmarish fever dream, then I think I've hit the mark," Asher said with a chuckle.

He grew up with two brothers, who he said were his best friends. His family had a home in the woods, isolated from the community. When school started, Asher said he had trouble connecting with peers. He struggled to make friends.

"I would go to school and didn't know how to integrate myself," he said. "I wanted friends, but I was pretty socially awkward. I didn't know how to interact."

Alone in a crowd, Asher separated himself to a secluded corner during recess and doodled on his notebook as other kids played.

"I felt like I was standing on this dark island," he said. "But then people see my artwork and it draws them in. It gives me a new opportunity for conversation with somebody."

Asher's curious behavior drew the attention of some classmates. An awkward kid, lonely for friends, became the center of attention when the other kids saw his artwork.

Art has been a bridge to the mainland of friendship

for Asher. Now he bonds with others in a much more permanent fashion – tattoos.

"A lot of my ink represents my journey through life," he said, pointing to the tattoo sleeve on his left arm. "I have the outward appearance of, 'wow, maybe I shouldn't talk to that guy,' but inside I'm like, man, I just want friends."

Asher began learning tattoo art in 2018, prior to prison. During his incarceration, he has been honing his drawing and shading skills, coming up with ideas for his future tattoo work. He said the other three artists – Ledbetter, Mandujano and Andrew Slover – have all helped him grow.

He said Slover is a "colored pencil wizard" who taught him color theory and how layered colors interact. Mandujano helped him develop softer pen shading techniques. Ledbetter inspires him to come up with "outside-the-box" concepts.

"Art lets you express yourself, but also help others in their journey. I've tattooed people and it's changed their whole life around, changed their whole self-image," he said. "That's probably the biggest part of tattooing for me, is being able to help somebody else."

His tattoos help people feel comfortable in their own skin, Asher said.

"It's like you're wearing armor," he said. "As if your soul's ink spilled to the outside of you."

Asher hopes to help others stand out and be recognized with body art.

He said of the three other artists, Slover has been the most constant support for him. They share the same cell.

"We're best friends, always growing together,"

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Andrew Slover, left, and Michael Ledbetter discuss gridding an image while Caleb Asher, right, looks on. The artists meet regularly at a table in their unit's common area. They often collaborate on art pieces, sharing advice and techniques.

Andrew Slover, left, and Caleb Asher work on their respective projects. Slover's piece took 40 hours to complete. He sent the art to his friend Lauren, a peer support specialist for the LGBTQ community. The art hangs on a wall in her office.

Asher said. "We push each other to be better … if I'm stuck in life or in a piece, I look to him for inspiration."

Beating the Odds – a 6% Legacy

If there's one person who has reason for inspiration, it's Andrew Slover.

"We all have a story to tell, but if you continuously point out all the bad things about yourself, then you'll just never live," said the man who beat a 94% chance of death.

At age 12, Slover was diagnosed with a rare type of cancer. Doctors discovered the cancer by accident after a football injury led to medical imaging.

"It was a germcell tumor, pretty rare," said Slover. "I actually had every tissue to make another human."

It was a cantaloupe-sized mass growing between his heart and lungs.

According to the Mayo Clinic, these types of tumors are growths formed from reproductive germ cells. Causes of germ cell tumors are unclear, but the root appears to be changes in the cell's DNA, research shows. The type of growth Slover had is called an extragonadal germ cell tumor.

He and his family were sent to Legacy Hospital in Portland. He was given a sedative so surgeons could take a sample of the tumor.

Slover woke up a week later.

"They said it was malignant and cancerous, and I needed treatment," he said. "I had no idea what was going on. I just thought it meant a bunch of bald kids in the hospital."

Slover ended up going through two years of chemotherapy. Doctors estimated he had a 6% chance to live – but live he did.

"After I survived cancer, they told me it was going

to come back," he said. "My mom told me to just live life, and live it as full as I can."

By the time Slover was 14 years old, he joined the job corps in Moses Lake, Washington where he participated in creative art programs. After opening his artistic eye, he started skateboarding, which he said is steeped in art.

It wasn't until he came to prison in 2015, however, when he began drawing. Slover found out he could sell his art on websites such as Instagram with the help of family outside prison. His rendition of Gene Wilder playing Willie Wonka sold for $150.

But he said money isn't the motivator.

"It's therapy for me," he said. "It ends up in someone's home, and whether they know you or not, you became part of their history. Anytime they look at the picture, it's something you did."

He doesn't draw for fame — his art is for legacy.

"I want to leave something behind in my history," he said, "and I want to do it through art."

It's been more than 18 years since the doctors predicted a cancer resurgence in Slover. But the thought doesn't stop him from living.

"I remind people a lot that there's going be a day when the curtain comes down and we don't get any redo's," Slover said. "This isn't like a movie where you get to take a drug or become a robot and you get to restart. I'm not saying every single day you've got to be your best person, but yesterday's gone. You have but one life to live, so find what makes you happy." ■

Clockwise from left, Andrew Slover, Oscar Chavez-Mandujano, Michael Ledbetter and Caleb Asher pose for a photo. The group regularly meets to work on art pieces, share techniques and parts of their experience with each other. They are residents of Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

Michael Ledbetter featured artwork

Left: Michael Ledbetter's Rising Phoenix took about 40 hours to complete. He said the piece represents a choice — that at any point a person can choose to be reborn.

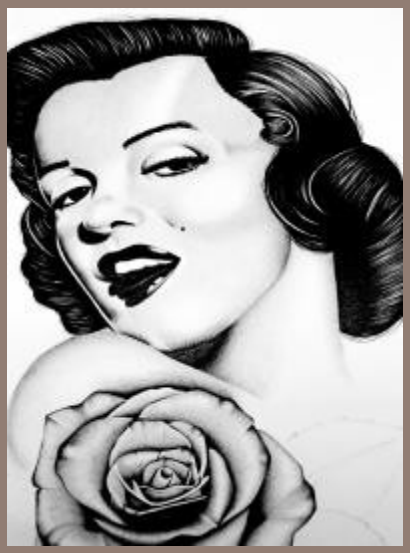
Right: The grizzly bear in black and red is Michael Ledbetter's piece. The claws of the bear appear to be coming through the page.

Oscar Chavez-Mandujano featured artwork

Right: Mandujano's version of Marilyn Monroe.

Bottom left: Art in blue ink is of a Chicano man. Around the man is the image of a woman, a set of prison bars with a skull, a ski mask and a rose.

Bottom right: A portrait of a woman with a rose.



Above:

Ledbetter, Asher and Slover collaborated in this artwork. Ledbetter created the art, but Asher drew the concept and Slover helped with the color selection and shading techniques.

Caleb Asher
featured artwork

Right: Asher's colored pencil drawing of good versus evil.

Middle left: More typical of Asher's artwork, a horned three-eyed woman with cracks and scars on her face. She is wearing a chartreuse colored crown of thorns.

Middle right: A black and grey skull with a crow above it, surrounded by splashes of bright green.

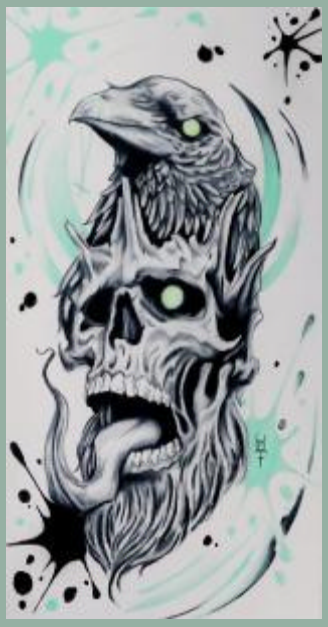
Andrew Slover
featured artwork

Bottom left: Slover's cat in a yellow raincoat with a red balloon. He said the piece includes features from the novel "It," by Stephen King.

Bottom middle left: Slover's "space Rose" is drawn in colored pencil. "Seems like every artist has a rose," he said. Slover wanted to try a new approach to flowers.

Bottom middle right: A portrait of a Spartan man with warriors reflecting in his helmet.

Bottom: right: The "Woman with a Serpent" was drawn in blue Bic pen and colored pencil. It took about 20 hours to complete, Slover said.



FROM THE READERS

From the Readers is a section which features the readers of 1664. For the Summer 2025 edition, writers in Oregon's prisons have contributed narrative essays on the topic of culture.

1664 accepts submissions for the From the Readers section. Submissions must be 500 words or less and relate to the theme of the magazine. Submissions will not be returned and must be received by the due date for consideration. Submissions will be edited for clarity and content.

UPCOMING THEMES

Addiction— Due by October 30 (deadline extended)

Family—Due by December 30

Change—Due by March 30

For those outside of EOCI, mail submissions to:

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution C/O IWP
2500 Westgate
Pendleton, OR
97801

Please keep in mind, we cannot return submissions.

CULTURE IN AMERICA

By **John P. Summers**

What exactly is culture in America? I often wonder. I find the answer to be recondite and elusive.

I could say that the culture in my country is drinking beer, shooting guns and yelling at a television that displays politically charged propaganda.

I could say it's being chronically ill, struggling with overwhelming healthcare costs and being charged 1,000% market value for life sustaining pharmaceuticals.

I could say it's getting shot by a middle eastern radical fundamentalist freedom fighter and bleeding out in a mud hut while your squad mates fumble to deploy signal smoke.

Maybe you left your culture in the sun of the same middle eastern desert with so much of yourself that you couldn't bring home to family.

Some of us have inherited the culture of our immigrant parents and ancestors, and we carry that in place of what might exist naturally as culture here in America. Perhaps our culture is the great melding of those colorful and numerous "micro-cultures."

My family is originally German-Irish, but neither of these cultures were passed on to me. Perhaps too many generations went by and these things were forgotten. Maybe they were replaced with football, money and Spaghetti-O's.

I want my culture to be potato chips and peanut butter. I want my culture to be machine guns and baseball bats. I'll identify with Apache helicopters and white phosphorous. Burn, baby burn.

In India they burn the dead as per religious custom. In America burning is one of the expensive options – you can also have your loved one's fluids replaced with costly chemicals and their organs removed for one last game of dress-up, to look their best at the going away party. This very popular form of burial will run about $5,000 USD. That's America.

In Denmark, people are happy. In America, they're fat. There's never been a richer, fattier, or more militarily powerful and war-centric nation in the history of civilization on Earth. Our culture here is that we blow stuff up, big time. Exciting.

The fact is, I love my cultural heritage in America. God bless the USA. I love guns, and bombs, and greedy corporations digging in my pockets and listening to my cell phone while trying to rip me off. I want to get fat, and worry about the level of stress my cat has. I want to get lit until my heart explodes while watching free porn on the internet. My kids will pay $80,000 to have me stuffed. I'll love every minute of it. That's culture in America. | **JPS**

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE WITH WHO?

By **Jacob D. Stursa**

"Hey man do you run white?" Audibly, I had responded with "no, I don't politic," which received the response of "oh, well, it doesn't matter if you do or not, this is where each race sits."

However, internally I had replied "No, I don't politic. But if there is an Asian table or even more specifically a Korean area, please let me know!"

This type of encounter is one that, in my 35 years of life, I have grown familiar with.

I come from a mixed family. Korean on my mother's side and various flavors of European on my father's side. To look at me, it's likely that you'd only see an average looking white guy, except maybe if you focused on my eyes for a bit. For as long as I can remember, though, I've always been obsessed with Asian culture and have been very proud of my Korean heritage.

I was fortunate growing up to experience quite a bit of Korean culture. From enjoying my favorite food and drinks such as kimbap, dukk soup, kimchee, and Bacchus-D (a Korean "health tonic"), to being familiar with the smells of a Korean refrigerator, giant jars of fermenting bean paste and fish head soup. I had even attended my second cousin Joohee's traditional arranged Korean marriage. Of course, I'll always remember the sounds of my grandma watching Korean soap operas, quite literally, 24/7.

Even with getting to experience as much of the culture as I did growing up, being mixed often led to me being in an uncomfortable position. It's common for us to see ourselves in a different light than others do, and that being the case, I've always grappled with not feeling "Asian enough" to fit in with other Asians, or not feeling "white enough" to fit in with other white folk, regardless of how accurate my perception is.

There are times when I feel like I'm not Korean enough to be proud of or partake in my own heritage and culture.

Prior to arriving at prison, I had hoped there would at least be a small Asian population—I was really hoping for some other Korean people to practice speaking with. But even with those hopes I still had the nagging feeling that I'd probably look too white to fit in.

Unfortunately, since I arrived here I have not met, or really seen, any other Asian people. I was considering inquiring about starting an Asian heritage club as a way of accessing more aspects of the wide range of cultures, but who wants to join an Asian heritage club ran by a white guy?

Even with my perceived lack of representative people and canteen items, I intend on doing what I can to honor and partake in my heritage and culture, despite how others, or even I sometimes see myself.

Currently, I'm hoping to get a couple Asian food items added to the canteen sheet. Who knows, maybe I'll be able to snack on Kimbap and kimchee again! | **JDS**

CULTURING CULTURE

By **Tyson Weddle**

My grandmother worked for a group of linguistics and Bible translation organizations after her children left home. She eventually lived in and visited countries on every continent. After retiring, she fulfilled her life-long dream of circumnavigating the entire globe. Growing up, I heard about languages and cultures from all over the world.

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As an adult, I worked for temporary employment agencies for about fifteen years and met people from many countries, cultures, ethnicities, religions, and social and financial statuses. I became especially interested in East Asian cultures—Korean being my favorite, only partly because of my cousins of Korean descent.

One theme that I found in every major culture and religion is what the western world calls the golden rule. The idea that treating others well results in better treatment for oneself is nearly universal.

Another is showing honor and respect to others, especially those older, wiser or more accomplished.

I observed that the more focus is placed on others, the happier people generally are. In countries without oppressive governmental or social dynamics, respect, honor and care for others usually results in a longer lifespan, healthier relationships, better education and less poverty.

This results in less crime, lower jail and prison populations and fewer destructive relationships.

I was raised in a very conservative Christian home. My parents taught my siblings and I to love God, to live with honor and integrity, and to care for others.

But all three of us kids followed ego-centric popular American culture instead and became completely self-centered and self-absorbed.

And each of us has paid a heavy price.

As I have returned to the Christian values of my upbringing and tried to incorporate positive values from other cultures, my relationships, mental state, and emotions have all become healthier. Even strangers treat me better.

Focusing on my relationship with God and on helping others, instead of worrying about my current and future difficulties, has almost completely eliminated my need to self-medicate.

Obviously, I can't guarantee the same results for everyone else, but there are two more relative universal truths worth mentioning:

If you search for the truth with sincerity and determination, you will find it.

And, the truth will make you free. | **TW**

LOST AND FOUND

***By* Brian Daniel Bement**

On a sunny and cold morning, a reality shined through my mind as I prayed. At that very moment, the imaginary world I was living in fell away like a thick, infected scab. The manufactured importance I had absorbed in the last 15 years making me emotionally crippled seemed to vanish. The chaos of doing everyone else's time and cleaning up other people's issues despite any real importance to my life was to be no more.

This was the morning I found the strength and courage to step back from the gang life. I pissed a lot of people off and my jaw and nose got broken when I was attacked. And as I laid there in my own puddle of sweat and blood all I could think was, "I deserve this."

In my experience of gang life, everyone is waiting to move up by stepping on the people they pretend to love. Members earn stats by dirt-bagging the one ahead of them in the line of sucession, exaggerating faults or creating situations to get rid of them. I was the best at screwing people over and getting rid of them. I know the game. I had been a real piece of work.

I'm the lucky one in this situation. It was the best butt-kicking I had ever had in my life. The violence against me saved my life. Let the chips fall where they may. And boy did they fall – on my head. I couldn't do it anymore. I didn't care anymore.

I even considered suicide, but I'm not that guy.

Out of 183 months in prison, I lived in solitary confinement on and off for 86 months. Most of the time I was put in the hole for just being a gang member. It wore me down. I didn't care anymore what was going to happen to me. I had to get out.

Imagine this – it could be the last time you would see or speak to someone you love. What would say to them? If it was the last time you would hear your mother's voice or your child laugh, how would feel? Or if it could be the last time you hugged a friend or told them you loved them, what would you do if you had five minutes to live?

Now, I view my life like every moment is my last, not the "screw it all, let's party" delusion. I live my life with the love and kindness of goodbyes. In a blink of an eye all we have is a moment – that's what life really is, a moment. Living your life treating people with positive farewells.

There is a comfort in this; your affairs are always in order.

My decision to step back was the hardest thing I have ever done. And, I survived a death penalty trial. I found the courage to get out of a toxic relationship and there is nothing punk about standing up and saying, "I want to be a better person." | **BDB**

SADDLE UP

By **Amir'Whadi Hassan**

Growing up in the South, I was introduced and raised in the African American, cowboy culture.

It is unbeknownst to most in the world, that the word "cowboy" originated as a term used to describe men of African decent that were only allowed to handle the laborious tasks, such as branding, roping and driving at times. With "boy" being a word used to belittle and not of endearment, "cowboy" was the term used.

Yet cowboy culture in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was one of pride, love, and community. To own land, horses and cattle is a badge of honor and prosperity. Being able to rope and "hogtie" a calf at the age of 13 was a sign of manhood in Southern cowboy culture.

Big belt buckles that you see today, on mainstream TV, worn by youth as a fashion statement, was one of cowboy culture's signs of status and the symbol of a true cowboy.

Cowboys, known as "Bronc-Busters" and "Bull Riders" would risk life or serious injury riding in rodeo competitions for a small monetary award and the prize trophy which was an engraved big belt buckle. Boots and Stetsons was the daily fashion.

At the Black rodeos in the South you'll notice a whole community, with it's own language and way of life and mannerisms. Women not afraid of getting down and dirty, Levi's and Wranglers are their choice of attire.

Square dancing, bobbing for apples, hay rides, and dummy calf roping is the entertainment at get-togethers. In this day and age of technology, cell phones, social media and reality TV, the average individual would experience a severe culture shock stepping outside of city life and hip-hop culture into the world of the cowboy.

It has become a forgotten lifestyle.

Nowadays most county songs have that pop or hip-hop feel; long gone it seems are the classical styles of Johnny Cash or the "Lonesome Dove" style of sound that Garth Brooks became an Oklahoma native's favorite.

To know me, my background and history, you would be shocked and surprised to find out that as a teenager, me and my homeboy's favorite saying when getting ready to go out and party was the phrase "saddle up."

Cowboy culture in Oklahoma is just a way of life. | **AH**

Nigeria, Africa

Adefemi Adefioye

Despite being born in California, Adefemi Adefioye was raised by his grandmother in Nigeria.

Nigerian roads aren't paved outside of major cities. Busses are rare, and most people travel by foot – or animal.

"My grandmother, she was the one who taught me and my brother how to ride an elephant to get around," said Adefioye. "If we wanted to travel we had to get on an elephant."

Transportation in Nigeria could be dangerous. He would often spend weeks traveling to visit family in other parts of the country.

"There are crocodiles, black mambas and all kinds of animals," he said. "We had to depend on elephants to keep us safe."

Adefioye is currently incarcerated in Oregon.

New Zealand

Lieutenant Vaafusuaga

New Zealand customs are similar to old-fashioned United States when politeness and manners were expected of everyone, Lieutenant Vee said.

During a visit back to New Zealand, she was headed to the airport with two bags of luggage. She came across two high-schoolers headed for a bus who voluntarily dropped what they were doing to help carry them. It was a 15-minute walk to the airport.

"That's really just part of our culture," she said, "just good, old-fashioned manners."

She was originally from Samoa, but she and her family moved to New Zealand when she was still young.

Their culture is imprinted on her – one centered on family, community and coming together. They are friendly, outgoing and unguarded with each other, she said.

"We stop for everyone on the sides of motorways, and driving country roads means you acknowledge everyone who drives by you – a short, quick wave," Vee said. "We just do for others and hope it turns out for the best."

Arkansas, United States

Johonnis Hunter

Johonnis Hunter stepped off a daytime flight in 2010 to the beautiful mountains and serene landscape of Oregon.

"When I arrived from Arkansas I was in awe at the Oregon hills, the mountains and all the white people," said Johonnis Hunter.

Minorities were flipped in Oregon. He said the majority of Arkansas' population is African American. Hunter's roots are Native American, however.

He brought with him the culture and Southern recipes that were passed down by his elders. His recipes include catfish, squirrel and fried dumplings.

Arkansas jargon dragged on his tongue for years. He said words like "ya'll" took most Oregonian's by surprise.

Hunter is currently incarcerated in Oregon.

Rwanda, Africa

Dan Gajhabuka

"In Rwanda $20 gets you a bunch of clothes," said Dan Gajhabuka.

He said he remembers school shopping with friends around age 10. His mother had given him $50.

In a store he saw the price of a pair of pants – $60. His friends made up the difference.

"When I got home with just a pair of jeans my mom was mad," he said. "I kept those jeans for eight years. Not to wear, but as a 'Welcome to America' reminder."

Gajhabuka is currently incarcerated in Oregon.

Australia

Carl Gwynne

"We just do all the things in Australia a little different," said 11-year U.S. resident Carl Gwynne. "Like how we live, how we interact with each other."

All the food in America Gwynne said was a stark contrast between his 36 years in Australia.

"All the different sorts of food you guys eat here is crazy," he said.

Gwynne, who is currently incarcerated in Oregon, grew up on the beach. He would surf every day and fish was a part of his daily diet.

Cooking fish on a barbeque didn't mean turning on gas or lighting coals. Fish would be cooked over open flame.

He grew up speaking English but can understand bits and pieces of Aborigine.

"When you live somewhere for so long then come to another country it is hard to adapt to different ways of how people are," said Gwynne. "Even the way they speak, words or how they use their words are different sometimes."

Guadalajara, Mexico

Lieutenant Victor Alvarado

Lieutenant Victor Alvarado was born in the city of Guadalajara, capitol of Jalisco in Mexico.

Alvarado was about 10 years old when he came to the states with his family in 1990. He ended up being a translator for his parents.

"After enrolling in school and only having minimal English, I was expected to translate for my parents," he said. "I learned quickly that I was going to be asked to do most of the translating – anywhere from medical appointments, legal matters, bills and school conferences."

The thing he misses the most about his country is that it's more laid back – time constraints aren't as much of an issue in Mexico.

"Everyone's life here [in the U.S.] is always ran by time," Alvarado said.

Chuuk State

Katwell Kinsio

Chuuk State is a small island near Guam, unknown to many, but home to Katwell Kinsio.

Kinsio is currently incarcerated in Oregon. He said when he came to the United States he found it challenging to adjust to the food.

"I miss the spicy food we have in Chuuk," he said. "Food is prepared differently on my island."

A cultural dish Kinsio has not been able to replicate is a chicken kelaguen wrap - spicy fried rice, ginger, chicken, hot peppers and lemon.

Despite missing foods from home, Kinsio has adjusted to life in the United States. He said he's most proud of the fact that he learned English.

Russia

Ivan Savitskiy

Arriving in the United States from Russia in 1996, Ivan Savitskiy lived in Portland, Oregon. He learned English in a few years by hanging out with friends.

Savitskiy said responsibility in Russian and American cultures is different. He has grown accustomed to not being forced into certain lifestyles in the United States, such as work or family.

"[In] Russia you have to work. You can't just chill, you have to get your family started soon," said Savitskiy. "Here you can do whatever you want."

He said he misses the Russian countryside. He remembers farms with garages that would double as workshops.

Savitskiy is incarcerated in Oregon.

Tanzania, Africa
Office Specialist Claudia Bethel

"I still think and even dream in my native tongue," Claudia Bethel said.

She's from Tanzania – a place in eastern Africa which became a republic in 1964. She currently works for the Department of Corrections at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.

Her native language differs from English in many ways, but one stark difference is that there are no gendered pronouns. Everyone is referred to as "they" or "them."

"If you want to specify gender, you say 'sister' or 'brother,'" she said. "This sometimes causes confusion when I speak English because I'm translating my thoughts in real time from my native language."

Bethel speaks six languages – mostly because she grew up surrounded by children of various tribes and countries.

"Curiosity helped us learn about each other's cultures, respect them and find joy together," she said.

It also helped that in Tanzania, most children don't have phones and other devices, Bethel said. They spent more time socializing and learning each other's languages.

Officer Milan Fietz said the best way to describe the culture difference between the United States and Czech Republic would be with a movie.

"Life in Czech is like hitting the slow-motion button," he said, "and the fast-forward button is the U.S."

He was born in and raised in the city of Prague. It was a culture shock when Fietz and family immigrated to the United States in 1990. People are more stressed and work too much compared to the easy-going pace of Czech, he said.

Even simple things, such as dining in a restaurant are different. When eating out, diners in Czech set their utensils in an "X" to indicate they are still eating and parallel lines when finished.

"U.S. restaurants can be a bit annoying when a waiter comes and takes your plate before you're even done eating," he said. "I've experienced that many times."

He also said his home country has some of the most beautiful architecture in the world because many buildings are never rebuilt, only repaired.

"I really miss my old friends and family," Fietz said. "I miss the slow-paced life."

Prague, Czech Republic
Officer Milan Fietz

THE RAIN BROUGHT ME BACK

Interview by Phillip Luna | *Photos provided by* Delores McDaniel

Delores McDaniel is a single mom to four kids. But after struggling with substance use disorder, McDaniel lost custody of her children. A week after losing her children she overdosed on drugs. Laying in the street, she said the rain brought her back to life.

A day later she was arrested.

During her incarceration at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, Oregon, McDaniel joined a band called Unbroken. Through music she found purpose and focused on her sobriety and preparing for reentry. In August 2024, McDaniel was released.

Nine months after her release, after finding a stable job and a good home, she finally regained custody of her children.

But then tragedy struck.

Two days after being reunited, McDaniel's oldest daughter was hospitalized in the intensive care unit of Randall Children's Hospital. She had respiratory failure.

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Delores McDaniel poses for a photo with three of her children. Her oldest daughter was hospitalized with a life threatening illness in May.

Delores McDaniel poses with one of her sons at the Oregon Zoo on Aug. 4, 2025.

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted on May 15, 2025, through video call while Delores McDaniel was in Randall Children's Hospital with her child.

1664: Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We understand your daughter has gotten sick unexpectedly?

McDaniel: Yes. I just got my kids back Tuesday [May 13, 2025]. It's been a long time coming to get my kids back. But my daughter got really sick. I'm in the ICU and she is on life support.

1664: I'm sorry. I can't imagine. Are you sure you want to interview right now?

McDaniel: Yes, it's a welcome distraction right now. My daughter is a fighter. This is a welcome distraction.

1664: Is she your oldest daughter?

McDaniel: Yes. I have four children: a 6-year-old son, an 8-year-old son, a 9-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old daughter. I'm a single mom and I just got my kids back.

They all love music. My family is everything to me. My mom has been the glue holding us all together.

I was incarcerated for 15 months and was released in August 2024. Music has affected my life tremendously. Ever since I was a kid I have been drawn to music. It is what keeps me balanced, helps me through my emotions – the good and the bad ones.

1664: Where are you from originally?

McDaniel: I'm from Beaverton, Oregon. I grew up out there; I was a good kid. College is where I started falling, at Western Oregon University.

I never drank, used drugs or anything. That first day of college I drank for the first time. As soon as I had that little bit of freedom I took it and ran with it and didn't stop. It just kept escalating. Then, I was living in homelessness.

This year for the first time, I have my own place. To get the keys and open the door and know that this is mine, for my kids and me. It is an amazing feeling.

1664: That's amazing. Congratulations. That must be an incredible feeling to have your kids back and to have your own place.

McDaniel: It is. It's been a long time coming.

1664: You mentioned music, where does your passion for music come from?

McDaniel: When I was younger I was in the church. And my favorite artists were Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston. I always loved singing.

1664: And you sing together with your kids?

McDaniel: Yes, we have this karaoke night. I've been trying to find sober things to do. I got up to sing with my daughter, and I just put my mic down and let her sing. It was just beautiful.

1664: While you were incarcerated, you were part of the band Unbroken at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. How did that happen?

McDaniel: When I first ended up in prison, I was trying to find normalcy. As soon as I heard there was a band, I wanted to be a part of it. There was a person I was in county with, and it was her birthday. So I asked the guard if I could sing her happy birthday. They said I could.

When I sang, everyone just stopped and listened.

I decided then I wanted to be a part of something here that makes people feel like they are not in prison.

When I got to [minimum security], I found my cousin, who was in the band. She introduced me to Kerri Das, the Life Skills Coordinator at Coffee Creek. I joined the band.

I was able to let go of a lot of my shame and guilt helping others through music. Das taught us to sing music with a message. A message of survival, hope and being healed. That saved me. And it helped many others get through their time. I went there broken, but became unbroken.

1664: Do you keep in contact with the members of Unbroken?

McDaniel: Yes, I do. Sheena [Hays-Murray] is on her way here right now, because I needed a hug.

We all want to reunite our band when we get out.

When I was incarcerated, my family was the band members. We knew all about each other. When one of us was falling the other was there to pick us up.

1664: How did you overcome addiction?

McDaniel: Before prison, when I lost my kids I was at the bottom. My kid's foot had been run over by a maintenance man's truck. At the hospital, they found drugs in my kid's systems from me smoking in hotel rooms and having my kids there.

I fell hard after that. I stayed in my addiction and eventually I stopped seeing my kids. I prayed to God, because something had to give. I knew I could not get off these drugs myself and I was not good enough for my kids anymore.

Delores McDaniel takes a selfie with her daughter at the Oregon Zoo on Aug. 4, 2025.

So, I remember walking the streets and praying and singing at 3 o'clock in the morning.

A week later, I overdosed and the rain had brought me back. No Narcan. The rain brought me back.

I believe that was God saying it was not my time to go. A day later, I was arrested.

1664: So, incarceration was almost a blessing?

McDaniel: Not almost, it was a blessing. I can tell you if I was not incarcerated, I do not think I would be here right now.

When I met Das, she asked, "Why are you here?" and she goes, "Not the charges that brought you here. You need to search yourself and ask, why are you here?"

Ever since she asked me that question, I knew it was my addiction. I knew I needed to be a different

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person because I was not who I was supposed to be. I started working on myself. I started taking parenting classes, well-being classes and music, of course.

1664: I met Das briefly while we were putting together the Unbroken article for the last issue of 1664. She seemed pretty great.

McDaniel: Ms. Das is like that sparrow who flies over the prisoners and when someone actually accepts that help, she helps them. She helps them get through that. All the yuckiness you feel, she helps you heal. She guides you along the path.

1664: Have you always been religious?

McDaniel: Raised in the Church, used to be in the choir. I prayed for an intervention when I first got to prison.

Spirits/Spirits/Would you guide me

Spirits/Spirits/Set me free

Those words guide me through my situation and set me free from my chains. God and really working through my stuff. I am singing through this. I keep singing through this, because what I am going through right now is scary and they only thing that is going to get me through this is God.

1664: You strike me as a singer no matter what the situation – as a person who just breaks into song often.

McDaniel: Happy, sad, scared, there is a song for every feeling!

1664: I know you were a part of a program called Women First. What can you tell me about that?

McDaniel: Upon my release, I went to Women First. Someone told me about a program that helps Black women get out of prison and conquer. I have a mentor, they help you with life skills. I took a women's empowerment class. I started in August and graduated early, in February. It is supposed to be a yearlong program.

Everything I said I was going to do in prison I did. I graduated all the classes I needed to; I was approved to see my kids two weeks after I got out. I got a place. I started my job in January, and by March they promoted me. I am now a care-coordinator. Women First has been there through everything.

1664: That's so great! Tell me about the job.

McDaniel: I am a care-coordinator making $26 per hour and I get to help people and tell my story. I organize events with music. I let my stuff out through music. I chose a job where I could share my story and help other people.

1664: Considering all your successes and looking back on your experiences, what advice do you have for people just starting their prison sentence?

McDaniel: Don't sit there and stay stagnant. Don't wait for the next time you are going to be there. Your life does matter. The people you come in contact with, they matter. You have the ability to change you; you just have to want it.

Find something that can ground you and help you get through. And stick with it. Life starts again when you hit those doors.

Life is what you make it. I went from using every day, being homeless, going to prison to now having my own place, a job and my kids back. ■

Editor's Note:

1664 followed up with McDaniel a few weeks after her daughter returned from the hospital on July 25.

After 75 days on life support in the hospital, McDaniel said her daughter had to relearn to talk, walk and play again. But her daughter is healthy.

On Aug. 4, she took her children to the Oregon Zoo.

"It's a blessing," she said. "Feeling helpless to was the worst feeling. But I couldn't lose myself in the pain. I had to focus on the happy. I got four babies counting on me."

At the Oregon Zoo, McDaniel poses for a selfie with her oldest daughter on Aug. 4, 2025. Her daughter spent 76 days in the hospital on life support.