

The Magazine

1664

SUMMER | 2026



**SAVING
FAMILY
TIME**

WINNER OF AMERICAN PENAL PRESS AWARD FOR BEST MAGAZINE 2025

About 1664

1664 was established on Feb. 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.



Cover photo: Joe Vonntae Sanders looks at photos of his daughter.
Inside photo: A typical family event at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.
Photos by Phillip Luna

Contents

SUMMER 2026

ESSAY

AMERICAN SON 6

ICE arrests have made my dad afraid to visit me in prison, even though he is a U.S. citizen.

IN THE NEWS



BONDED THROUGH TRAGEDY 8

Carlos Colon served a 17-year prison sentence for killing Nelson Vargas's son, but Vargas forgave Colon. Now, they visit prisons sharing their story.



HOOK, LINE AND FAMILY TIME 11

Santiam Correctional Institution hosted its first family fishing event in June.

HEIRLOOM OF HEARTBREAK 12

Two incarcerated men share experience with intergenerational incarceration.

FEATURE



SAVING FAMILY TIME 14

ODOC's budget crisis cuts into visiting time; Here's how one prison saved their annual family barbeque and why it mattered.

IN PHOTOS

WHY DO FAMILY EVENTS MATTER? 22

A look at the importance of family visiting events through photos.

FROM THE READERS

Friendship, Fellowship, Brotherhood 32

By Jacob Harper-Leonard

Family Circles 32

By Kula Paul Adric

Life Lessons 33

By Robin Thatcher

One of the Fortunate Ones 34

By Reyes Miranda

ESSAY

A WRITTEN FAMILY PORTRAIT 36

During his almost four decades in prison, Stressla Lynn Johnson finds purpose in writing. In this essay, he shares a written family portrait.

1664 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. The publication reaches the more than 13,000 incarcerated Oregonians as well as many outside the prison setting. All writing 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 Journalism Department, IWP at EOCI.

For non-incarcerated people or those outside of Oregon:

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

WHERE TO FIND 1664

For incarcerated people in Oregon:

1664 is available in limited print copies and on 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.

Sponsored by



1664

Summer 2026 Issue #6

Incarcerated team for 1664

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Phillip Luna

FEATURE WRITERS

Chris Ainsworth
Kurtis Thompson
Alex Dewhurst

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Jacob Harper-Leonard
Kula Paul Adric
Robin Thatcher
Reyes Miranda
Stressla Lynn Johnson

ODOC support team for 1664

SUPERVISING EDITOR

Ray Peters

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Tami Clark

Produced at
Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution

Outside support for 1664

SPONSOR

Pollen Initiative

ADVISOR

Berit Thorson *East Oregonian*

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Tracy Schlapp *PonyXpress*
Danny Wilson *PonyXpress*

Additional Photo Credits
Shutterstock

By Phillip Luna

THE THEME IS FAMILY for the summer 2026 issue of 1664. In these pages, you will find wide-ranging and far-reaching stories that offer perspectives on family through the lens of incarcerated people.

In our news section, we have a story about the effect of federal immigration's tactics on family visits in prison; then, we have a story of loss and forgiveness, and how two men bonded by a tragedy became like family; and next, an article about the hidden impact of intergenerational incarceration.

For the feature article, we cover how incarcerated father Joe Vonntae Sanders stays connected with his daughter through photos and the prison's family visiting events – an annual family picnic and barbeque put on by the prison. At Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, the event was almost canceled in 2026 because of budgetary cuts, but staff members reworked and restructured the event to reduce cost. Other prisons may not have been so lucky.

To supplement our feature article, we have a photojournalism piece called “Why Do Family Events Matter?” Family events may be the single most important and impactful occasion in prison each year. We almost lost them in 2026 and other facilities likely did lose them. We considered writing an article about the importance of these events, citing studies and sources that draw links between recidivism and family ties. However, data cannot tell the story the way a good photo can. We believe the photos in this section best illustrate why family events matter.

From our readers, we have several pieces that were published with PonyXpress, including essays by the late Jacob Harper-Leonard, Kula Paul Adric from EOIC, Robin Thatcher from Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and Reyes Miranda from Oregon State Penitentiary.

Finally, our magazine ends with an essay by Stressla Lynn Johnson from OSP. He shares a family portrait in writing and reflections on his nearly 40 years in prison.

We hope you enjoy this edition of 1664.



AMERICAN SON

ICE Arrests Have Made My Dad Afraid to Visit Me in Prison, Even Though He is a U.S. Citizen

Written by Phillip Luna

Originally published with the Prison Journalism Project in February 2026

I call my parents every week, which costs 9 cents per minute. It has been a few years since they made the six-hour drive to visit me in prison and phone calls are the most common way we stay connected.

They had been planning to visit me this summer for the first time since 2019. But recently my mother told me over the phone those plans were abandoned. She was still going to visit in the coming months, but would do so alone.

My parents feel it's unsafe for my dad to travel anytime soon. My mom is white, and my dad is Hispanic. They are worried agents with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, will target him, even though he is a fourth-generation American.

His fears are not unfounded. According to Pro-Publica, in just the first nine months of President Donald Trump's second term, ICE agents detained at

least 170 U.S. citizens during immigration raids of protests. ICE agents are legally allowed to detain people if they suspect they are in the country illegally, according to ICE. In 50 such cases, where agents questioned people's legal standing to live in the U.S., almost all of them were Latino.

In Oregon, the state where my parents live and I'm incarcerated, ICE arrests have skyrocketed from 113 in 2024 to at least 1,100 last year, according to reporting from the Oregon Capital Chronicle. These arrest numbers ranked Oregon in the top five states with the largest year-over-year increase in ICE arrests in 2025, according to the nonprofit newsroom Stateline that covers U.S. policy trends.

Some legal protections have arrived, as an Oregon judge in early February ordered that ICE agents now need warrants to make most arrests in Oregon. This came after ICE agents detained people in Oregon

who had citizenship or valid work visas. One of the more notable instances happened in November when four U.S. citizens, including a 17-year-old high school senior, were detained in a city an hour southwest of Portland, according to KATU-TV news.

These are the rogue antics my parents fear, even though the law should be on their side. After the disappointing phone call with my mom, I sat with the indigestion of the moment and the sober realization that I might not see my father for at least another year.

I checked out a state-issued electronic tablet on the way back to my cell. I logged into the tablet and scrolled through old photos of my family that had been electronically sent to me and stored in my account. This was the closest I would get to seeing my dad anytime soon. I was charged 4 cents for every minute I looked at photos.

A faded, gray photo of Rosalio Torres-Luna caught my attention. He is my great-great-grandfather. In the photo, Rosalio has deep lines on his face, pronounced cheeks and a mouth that naturally turns down at the corners. Like him, I have a downward curve to my mouth that makes smiling an athletic movement. Most of the men in the family carry this trait. It feels distinctly Mexican to me.

Rosalio immigrated from Mexico to the U.S. in 1915 and spent his life laboring in a steel mill. He named his son Teofilo, but this was a difficult name to pronounce for English speakers. My family called him Phillip instead. After the ninth grade, Teofilo left school and started working in the mill with his father.

Eventually, Teofilo started his own family. He had a son and wanted to pass on his name, but he knew it was culturally out of place, that his son's job applications would likely be met with automatic discrimination and rejection. Instead, he named his son Phillip. He also gave his children one last name, following U.S. custom.

With his American name, my grandfather graduated high school and never worked in a steel mill.

I watched the circular loading symbol as I waited for my next page of photos. Two minutes and 8 cents in, I finally saw a picture of my dad, mouth skewered in a grimace. My dad doesn't speak Spanish. Neither do his siblings. His parents spoke English at home

because they worried their kids might develop an accent.

If immigration agents approached him, would it help that he doesn't have an accent?

As I waited for more photos to load, I realized I didn't have any pictures of my grandmother, Lola. I remembered the admiration she had for me.

When I was a boy, Lola would often grab my face and exclaim, "Look at those blue eyes!" She introduced me to people as her American son, because among my sibling and many cousins, I am the only one with white skin.

What my grandmother intended as praise often made me uncomfortable. But as I got older I realized I was a symbol for Lola and I accepted the spirit of her words rather than their letter.

I understood her immense pride in the sacrifices our family made to be American. The price was in our names, our language, our culture and, in my case our skin color. For her, each forfeit allowed our family to lead a better life. I felt regret for these sacrifices, but where I saw cost, she saw purchase.

I closed the photo app. I couldn't afford to keep looking. I lay on my bunk and found no warmth in the thin bed and cheap, wool covers. I found no comfort in the stale air and bare, cinder block walls. I thought of my family, afraid they might be harassed for simply existing.

I turned on my TV to watch the national news. A pundit said ICE was only arresting and deporting violent criminals. But more than 70% of people deported had no criminal conviction.

I know there are people who would deport my dad — a U.S. citizen without a criminal history — if they could. They would deport my grandparents, cousins and sibling, without consideration for the price they paid to be American. If they saw me out on the streets, these same people might ignore me, a person with a criminal record, because I am white. It is strangely frustrating to be excluded from harassment because of the color of my skin. Can't they see the downward turn of my mouth?

The next morning I went to work, still tired from a restless sleep. I would make 60 cents an hour for the job, a high salary in my prison. I needed every cent to keep looking at photos of my dad. I wasn't sure when he'd feel safe enough to visit me again. ■



BONDED THROUGH TRAGEDY

Carlos Colon Served 17 Years in Prison for Killing Nelson Vargas's Son, But Vargas Forgave Colon and Now They Tour Correctional Facilities Sharing Their Story

Written by Kurtis Thompson | Photography by Chris Ainsworth

"... I murdered Nelson's son," Carlos Colon said. He still cringes every time he says it, even though several decades have passed.

Colon shot and killed Nelson Vargas' son, Nelson Jr., in a gang-related incident. Now, Colon and Vargas travel to correctional facilities and give testimonies of their lives and reconciliation.

Vargas was a drug dealer in Chicago. He had multiple drug houses and a steady flow of users. But he wasn't the only one leading the operation — his son Nelson Jr. was part of it as well.

"I told my son that we were going to run Chicago," Vargas said. "I thought I was doing the right thing by my son by providing for him ... it hurts me to say I had my son dealing drugs for me."

Their drug business was lucrative, but Vargas

began using and quickly became addicted.

"I got real sick," he said. "I became a junkie. And my son was like, 'Dad, I'm going to take care of us. You just keep bringing in the drugs and I'll keep dealing them.'"

Around that time, Vargas met a woman named Yvonne. He was originally planning to use her by turning her home into another drug house.

"I was going to use her, because that's what we gangsters do is use people," he said.

But after a near-death experience, Vargas said he became a Christian and changed his life. He left the drug and gangster business — but Nelson Jr. did not.

Carlos Colon was in a small Chicago gang in the '90s, regularly fighting over territory. Colon said he crossed paths with Nelson Jr. multiple times.

“I remember as a kid, walking through the neighborhood and seeing Nelson,” he said. “In high school, we were just getting into gangs, having run-ins ...every time we see each other, we don’t like each other.”

Both were involved in gang-related revenge shootings. One day, Nelson Jr. was a driver when others in his car shot and wounded Colon.

Shortly after, the gang leaders had called a cease-fire. But Colon wanted revenge. He shot and killed Nelson Jr.

Vargas had seen his son one last time before the shooting. Nelson Jr. had asked his father for material to cut drugs, but Vargas refused.

“I’m not going to do that,” Vargas said to his son that night. “I was a bad father, a bad person. Now I want to be a good father, and if you can’t respect that then just leave.”

Hours later, while Vargas was at church, the chapel door opened. Yvonne was there, crying in slippers and robe.

“She said they just killed Nelson,” he said. “They shot him five times.”

Vargas said he looked back at the cross in the chapel and began yelling “Jesus.” The church members supported and cried with them into the night.

At first, Vargas tried to avoid thinking of his son’s killer. But 10 years later, while Colon was still in prison, Vargas received a phone call.

“I get a call from [the prison] and they say, ‘Hey, the guy who killed your son is here. What do you want me to do?’ and I said, ‘Don’t do anything! I’m a man of God.’”

Years later, after giving a testimony at a prison church service, Vargas met with Koinonia’s ministry coordinator, Pastor Nephtali Matta, at his home.

As they were eating dinner, Matta asked Vargas how he felt about Colon. He said he had forgiven him. Vargas said Matta sighed with relief.

“Then he told me, ‘By the way, he was there when you gave your testimony. He wanted to ask you for forgiveness, but felt too ashamed to approach



Nelson Vargas speaks at the rostrum in an eastern Oregon prison. Vargas and Carlos Colon tour correctional facilities sharing their story of forgiveness with incarcerated people.

In The News

you. He asked to meet with you and your family,” Vargas said.

A few months after Colon was released from prison, the Vargas family met him at Midwest Bible Church in Chicago.

“As we entered the office, I expected to see a rough, tired-looking man,” Vargas said. “Instead, I saw a scared, nervous, humble, God-fearing man.”

After a brief moment of immobility, Vargas forgave Colon and embraced him.

“I walked over to [Colon] and hugged him as if he were my son,” he said. “He asked me to forgive him and said that he was so sorry. I was able to look him in the eyes and say, ‘I forgive you.’”

“When you forgive somebody, not only do you release them, you release yourself,” he said.

When Colon looks at Vargas he sees Nelson Jr.—a humbling reminder of the grace he received.

“It’s a blessing,” Colon said, “because I don’t deserve this.”

But the forgiveness was more than mere words.

When Colon and his wife renewed their wedding

vows, Vargas officiated the ceremony. Vargas had become the pastor of the same church he first attended “as a junkie,” he said. He was also there when Colon’s son was born.

“He’s held my son,” said Colon. “He held him when he was born.”

Now, the two men tour correctional facilities sharing their story of forgiveness and compassion.

“I know we’ve all experienced that feeling, like, man I don’t want to forgive that person. It’s like I’m giving them freedom or relief. It’s like a power, like I don’t want to forgive that person so they stay trapped,” Colon said. “But it’s a privilege we have to say, ‘I forgive you.’”

“I don’t remember what he did to my son. I see Carlos and I say, ‘There’s my son,’” Vargas said.

Nelson Jr. has not been forgotten, he said, but the family bond forged from forgiveness has freed them.

“When I picked up that Bible, the Lord said, ‘Trust me.’ And I said, ‘Lord, if you give me the strength to do it, I’ll do it. I’ll forgive him,’” he said. “And now every time we go out and minister, my son is with us.” ■



Carlos Colon and Nelson Vargas pray at a chapel in an eastern Oregon prison. Colon served 17 years in prison for killing Vargas’ son. Vargas forgave Colon, and now the two men tour correctional facilities sharing their story.

HOOK, LINE AND FAMILY TIME

Santiam Correctional Institution and Oregon State Penitentiary Hold Family Fishing

Excerpt from the ODOC blog | Photos provided by ODOC



Photos from the family fishing events at Santiam Correctional Institution and Oregon State Penitentiary from 2025 and 2026.

Santiam Correctional Institution in Salem hosted its first family-fishing event in partnership with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

“This event had about 50 attendees,” said Rachel Good, a manager at SCI. “Tanks were brought in and filled to contain Bluegill for the catch and release event.”

The Association of Northwest Steelheaders brought the 1,500-gallon pond, supplies and fish into the facility so that incarcerated people and their families were able to spend time fishing together.

“A few were caught early on, however, when the

fish told their friends it was a trick, they all huddled together in solidarity and refused to take the bait,” Good said.

Fishing events have become more common in Oregon prisons. In August 2024, Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem held a similar event.

According to Oregon Department of Corrections blog, OSP held a two-day fishing event for incarcerated dads and their families. More than 80 “First Fish” awards were given, the blog said.

After the events, ODFW releases the Bluegill into designated local ponds. ■



HEIRLOOM OF HEARTBREAK

The Hidden Impact of Intergenerational Incarceration

Written by Chris Ainsworth and Phillip Luna | Photo by Chris Ainsworth

When Angel Oseguera was a child, he visited his uncle every weekend. His family packed into their car and made the one-hour trip from Tri-cities, Washington to Pendleton, Oregon, where his uncle lived. They waited in lines and went through security screenings to sit in a bland room with other families. They ate meals out of vending machines and he played on colorful rubber mats with outdated children's toys. Most of all, he remembered riding on an old wooden rocking horse in the kid's play area of the prison's visiting room.

Oseguera, 29, still spends his weekends in that visiting room. Although his commute from a prison cell is a much shorter trip now, much else has stayed the same.

"The same rocking horse I played on is still in the visiting room," said Oseguera. "It gives me flashbacks to when I was a kid."

When Oseguera's five-year-old son visits him, he

plays on the rocking horse — like a heartbreak heirloom passed down through generations.

"Seeing him on that rocking horse has had a really big impact on me," Oseguera said. "He shouldn't have to be going through this."

He worries his son, Exzadien, is following in his footsteps. Fighting in school. Problems at home. Oseguera's life started in a similar way.

"It worries me a lot," said Oseguera. "He says that he misses me and wants me to come home."

Oseguera will be released in November, and he hopes this year will be the last time he or his son sees that rocking horse.

According to research by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, half of people in prison have children that are minors.

"In the United States, there are 1.7 million children with a parent that is incarcerated," said correc-

tional counselor Joe Byrnes. “According to studies, 30% will follow in their parents’ footsteps.”

“Nearly every incarcerated person I work with has a parent that is, or was, justice involved,” he said.

The data is a harsh reminder of the generational impact of incarceration. An impact that Steven Smith knows too well.

Smith, 51, is an incarcerated parent. But unlike Oseguera, Smith’s son has already followed his example.

Smith has been incarcerated for 24 years. In 2023, he returned to county jail after his appeal overturned his conviction. His son was awaiting trial in the same jail and they were reunited after a 20-year estrangement.

“Try to imagine, first of all, that I haven’t held my son since he was a baby, and he was my boy. I loved him,” said Smith with a catch in his throat, pausing to control his emotions. “I wanted to take that embrace and infuse 20 some years of ‘I’m sorry’ and ‘I love you.’”

The last time Smith hugged his son was when he dropped him off for school on his first day of the first grade.

In county jail, they were housed in adjacent units and had limited time together. They made do by visiting in the yard three times a week and a once-weekly Bible study. They reconnected and, most importantly, talked about the future.

Smith had been working as a tutor in the prison’s education department and he planned to return to his job after his resentencing. Smith’s son never finished high school.

When Smith returned to prison, he spoke with his supervisor about his son’s education.

Two months after arriving at the facility, Smith’s son was enrolled in GED courses and he was his tutor. This provided them the chance to begin rebuilding their broken relationship.

“When we come here we hurt everyone. It’s not just the victims of our crime, but society as a whole,” Smith said. “It’s all the people that love and care about us.”

In 2025, Smith had the unique experience of attending the GED graduation of someone he helped tutor, who also happens to be his son.

Oseguera also earned his GED in prison.

When Oseguera graduated, also in 2025, the ceremony was held in the facility’s chapel. His uncle was an artist and during his time in prison, he had painted numerous murals for the chapel depicting animals and nature. The paintings were a vivid reminder for

Oseguera, of the influence of a family member’s incarceration and the risk he poses to his son. He believes that education is a pathway to a better future.

A 2013 study by the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research organization, found that correctional education programs lower recidivism rates by 43%.

With 85-90% of incarcerated people in Oregon set to reenter society, education plays an important role in reducing the chance of recidivism and intergenerational incarceration.

Education is part of the equation for Oseguera. He also plans to attend 12-step programs when he is released and hopes to distance himself from the life that led him to prison.

But the most important thing for him, he said, is to try and be a good father.

While he waits for his release in November, Oseguera tries to build an honest and positive relationship with his son during their time in the prison’s visiting room.

“The visiting room hasn’t changed much,” Oseguera said. “I showed my son games that we played together, my uncle and me. I set it up so we could play the same games.” ■

**“Nearly every
incarcerated
person I work
with has a parent
that is, or was,
justice involved.”**
- Joe Byrnes,
correctional counselor

Saving Fa

Written by Alex Dewhurst and Phillip Luna

Photography by Phillip Luna



Family Time



Joe Vonntae Sanders is a single father who swapped a life of parenthood and freedom for one behind concrete walls and concertina wire in an eastern Oregon prison. There, he deals with the limitations inherent in a correctional facility while trying to stay connected with his daughter, Ka'veah. Sanders relies on nine-cent-per-minute phone calls to hear her voice, unreliable and often faulty video visits to see her face and the prison's limited visiting schedule to hold his daughter in his arms.

And in-person visits are sometimes rare for Sanders. Ka'veah, 11, lives with one of his younger sisters. They make the 4-hour drive from Salem to see him every few months.

Until Sanders exits prison in 2030, that time is precious to him. As a keepsake, he has a photo album with dozens of pictures of his daughter. Some photos she sent in to him, and others they took in the prison's visiting room.

Twice a year the prison holds a unique visiting event – family picnics. For the event, the prison's recreation yard is turned into something like a community park, with outdoor seating, popcorn and cotton candy, games and live music, and barbequed burgers and hot dogs.

"It makes you feel like you are still human," Sanders said. "I can be joking and laughing with my family – goofy with my kid."

Sanders attended the family picnic in 2025. Participation in the event hinges on good behavior and last year was the first time he was eligible.

He's been waiting a year for the next event, but this time, it was almost canceled.

The Oregon Department of Corrections is in a budget crisis. In September 2025, Gov. Tina Kotek issued a directive for all state agencies to reduce costs because of a projected \$327 million deficit.

The department implemented several cost-cutting options. One major change was reducing overtime hours for security staff – which the family picnic and other large events often rely on. Eastern Oregon

Correctional Institution's event was on the chopping block. In fact, it was initially canceled, until some of the prison's correctional staff set out to revamp the event and reduce its cost.

"EOCI was able to keep this event with a large amount of support from Bryan Clark," said Taylor Greene, an office worker at the facility who helps set up the events.

Clark, the assistant superintendent, said the event was too important to lose. To make it work, he had to rework the structure of the event and propose a budget-friendly alternative.

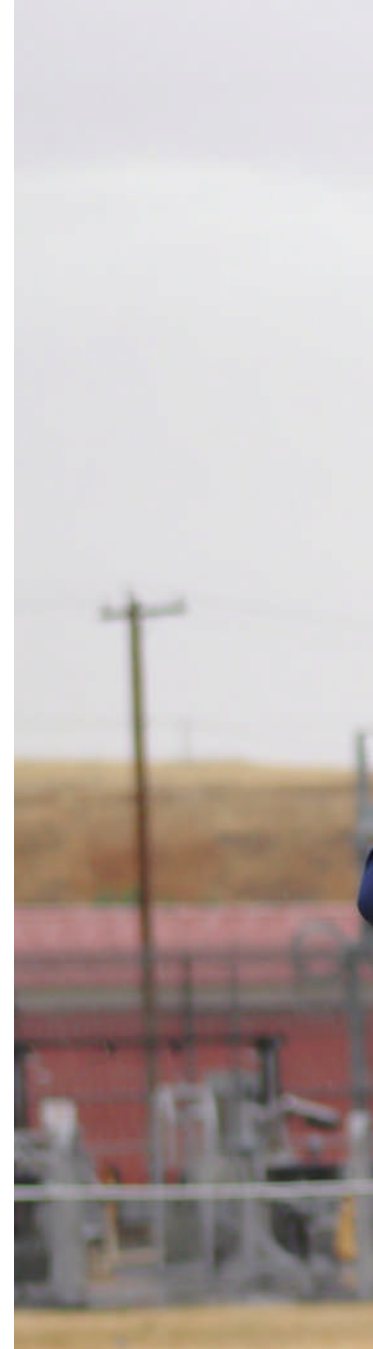
The most significant change was moving the event from Saturday to Friday.

"It's not ideal and may be harder for a lot of families, but it saves us money when you look at overtime," Clark said.

By moving the event to a weekday, correctional staff overtime was reduced, if not removed completely. However, a weekday event could create challenges for families that lack flexible work schedules.

According to Prison Policy Initiative, more than 63% of incarcerated people in the United States are housed 100 miles or more away from their families. The distance is a key contributor to another statistic — almost 70% of incarcerated people do not have monthly visits.

In another change, the event was shortened by about an hour and the capacity was reduced. The events typically have 125-130 incarcerated participants, plus their visitors, reaching around 400 people total. However, to make the cost work for the depart-





Joe Vonntae Sanders greets his daughter Ka'veah and other visitors at the family picnic, a twice-a-year visiting event, in June 2026. Sanders is incarcerated at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

ment the limit was set at about 80 attendees.

The facility houses around 1,350 people. Not everyone is eligible to attend but, given the limit, Sanders' participation was in jeopardy.

Sanders is a 36-year-old Black man from Portland. He works at the prison's call center, one of the highest paying assignments at the facility.

He spends his free time lifting weights, but he crumbles when he talks about his Ka'veah. His mature, ragged voice sounds boyish instead.

He has enough experience in prison to know it can be difficult to stay out of trouble, but getting to see his daughter at the event motivates him.

"I stay out of trouble just so I can see my kid for that family barbeque," he said.

"She tells me things like, 'I wish you were here and I could wake up and you could make me breakfast,'" he said. "The only thing I can do is make sure I let her know and continue to let her know that, 'from in here, that I'm here for you. I love you.'"





Joe Vonntae Sanders, left, and his daughter Ka'veah order sno-cones at the family event in June 2026. Sanders said the events are valuable to him and his daughter. "I used to think being a dad was spending my daughter for a few weeks, and then taking her back to her mom," he said. "... but she needs other things than that."

He said Ka'veah is his best friend.

"Me and my daughter have always been close," Sanders said. "That's my baby."

He said he realized the importance of being in his daughter's life after reflecting on his own experience. Sanders grew up in the foster care system. He was the eldest of eight, the only boy. He entered the system at three years old because his mother suffered from substance use disorder. His father was absent for most of his childhood.

During the majority of his time in foster care, Sanders was separated from his siblings.

"I've been to thirty-something different foster homes," he said.

He said the instability led him to a life of crime.

"There were nights I didn't want to go back to the foster care home, so I started selling crack," he said.

He was 14 and the money was quick and easy. It was more money than he had ever had in his life. But this path lead in one direction – to prison.

"I never want my daughter to go into foster care, because of what I went through," he said.

Luckily, Sanders' sister has been able to take care of his daughter while he is incarcerated. Because of his experiences, Sanders said he tries to be there for her, even if he is imperfect as a father.

"[Before prison] I used to think being a dad was spending my daughter for a few weeks, and then taking her back to her mom," he said. "... but she needs other things than that."



Sanders and his daughter
Ka'veah goofing around and
posing for a photo at the 2026
family picnic.



The only thing I can do is make sure I let her know...
I'm here for you. I love you.



Sanders and Ka'veah play
a game of Connect Four
in the rain.



Sanders' newfound perspective paid off. His application to attend the event was accepted, the second year in a row. It's a milestone for Sanders – the longest period of time he has stayed out of trouble while in prison.

Having strong family ties reduces the likelihood of returning to prison. And, monthly in-person visits actually decrease misconduct in prison by 14%, according to Prison Policy Initiative.

Equally importantly, perhaps, is that correctional staff get to see another side of incarcerated people when they interact with their families.

"It's about humanization and normalization," Assistant Superintendent Clark said.

Green said she has attended a few family picnics before. The events have changed her perspective.

"Meeting families and sharing in small moments of celebration lets staff see the people behind the state ID number," she said.

On June 26, a Friday, Sanders stood in the west yard at his correctional facility in the flickering rain. He was waiting with around 80 other incarcerated people for their visitors to arrive. He watched the entrance gate, looking for his daughter. Ka'veah would be easy to spot now because she is almost as tall as he is.

"I'm 5'10" and she's like right here," he said, gesturing to just below his nose.

On the grass, next to where Sanders waited, a large event tent had been set up, offering protection from what was supposed to be the sun, but the weather was a cathartic contrast to the 90-degree days just the week prior. Most attendees ushered their loved ones under the tent or into the gym to avoid the rain. In the gym, a live band made up of incarcerated people played music – a jazz ensemble playing songs like those heard on A.M. gold radio.

Towards the front of the gym, families took photos with a variety of murals and backgrounds. The facility provided each family with five free photos and Sanders would surely use all five.

When Sanders saw his daughter, they embraced. Then she asked if they had any cotton candy. Last year, Sanders said his daughter ate seven bags during their visit.

"She was laughing a lot because she's a goofball," he said. "I have to stay positive when I talk to her. I always let her know, 'You're beautiful, you're doing good.'"

At the event, it is easier for Sanders to stay positive. He does not have to deal with the antics of a prison or the often-inflexible rules of day-to-day life as an incarcerated person. The concrete walls are gone. The concertina wire does not exist. The event offers more freedom than most. Here, he can spend a few hours doing the thing he likes to do the most — be a dad. And when the moment is gone, when the prison returns to its normal regimen and routine, he'll have photos to remember. At least until their next visit. ■



Why Do Family Visiting Events Matter?

At Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, family events are twice yearly outdoor picnics that allow incarcerated people spend time with their families in a normal setting. Unlike standard prison visiting, at these events people can walk around, share food, play games and listen to live music.

The journalism department at EOCI has taken many family event photos over the years. Here are some of our favorite photos that we believe illustrate the impact these events have on incarcerated people and their families.

Photos by Phillip Luna



Family events matter...



**...because
Dads can tie
their son's
shoe at a
family event.**

Above, Beau Wilcox's two children jump into his arms at a family event in 2025. Left, Wilcox ties his son's shoe at the foot of the bouncy house.

At a normal visit, incarcerated people must stay seated for the majority of the visit.

Family events matter...

...because Dads should teach their kids to fish (even if it's pretend)



At a 2026 family event, Xabien Riley teaches his daughter to fish at a mock fishing station while his son and their mom watch.

**...and
teach their
son how
to play
baseball.**

Ryan Belt tosses
a softball to his
son at a family
event in 2023.





Family events matter...

**...because memories are
made in the small moments**



Gerry Cunningham visits with his daughter at a family event in 2024. His daughter regularly attends the annual events.

Cunningham and his daughter play with blocks, eat popcorn or sometimes just walk and hold hands.





**...and because she will always remember
when grandpa got her a new sno-cone.**

David Derrick visits with his grandchild at a family event in 2024. She dropped her sno-cone during the event, but Grandpa got her a new one.





Jeremy Adams, a trainer for EOCI's service dog training program, brings a canine and two bags of cotton candy to greet his sister and niece during the 2025 family barbeque on the west yard. Incarcerated people pay to attend the event, which includes the lunch meal as well as cotton candy, sno-cones and popcorn.



Augustine Lara-Lopez and his wife and son eat burgers and bratwursts at a 2025 family event. Lara-Lopez had not seen his son for 11 years prior to the event.

Family events matter...

...because visiting is better with cotton candy and a puppy

...and because sometimes visits are rare and you have to make them count.

Family events matter...

...because even though you are over 40, you have to make sure your teenage son knows you can beat him in a foot race



James Renfro races his teenage son, Logan, on the track surrounding the west field during the family event in 2024.



**...and because
you can't do
cartwheels
and backflips
in the visiting
room.**

**Carl Sehy watches
while his daughter
demonstrates a
backflip.**



Dan Gajhabuka embraces his sister Dative while siblings Aline and Clemance look on during the 2025 family picnic. During standard visiting events, incarcerated people are allowed to hug their visitors briefly at the start and the end of the visit for 3-5 seconds.

Family events matter...

...because hugs should not have a time limit...





Jacob Whitman lifting up his daughter at a family event in 2025.



At a 2026 family event, Matthew Gilbert poses with his step-mom and father and their matching t-shirts.

...and some hugs need a running start!



Jeremy Bonsignore is greeted with a running hug from his niece and nephew during a 2026 family event.



Family events matter...

...because visits should be stress free

Above, Niaz Khoshnaw spends time and eats cotton candy and sno-cones with his family at family event in 2024.

Right, James Paulk sits with his family members, shoes off and in the grass, at a 2025 event.





...and because sometimes moms need a hug...

...and some hugs matter more than others.

Above, Parker Whitsett hugs his mom at the start of a family event in 2024.

Right, Jacob Harper-Leonard hugs his mom goodbye at the end of an event in 2025. Harper died while in custody on April 2, 2026. This was the last family event he attended.



FROM THE READERS

The “From the Readers” section of 1664 includes writing from incarcerated people. In this issue, we are featuring several writers from PonyXpress, a travelling writing workshop in Oregon prisons.

1664 accepts submissions from any incarcerated or justice-impacted person in Oregon. To submit writing, send a first-person narrative about the upcoming theme, 500 words or less is preferred.

UPCOMING THEMES

Life — due by September 30

Incarcerated people can submit writing via communication form (kyte) by sending their submission to:

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

FRIENDSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, BROTHERHOOD.

by Jacob Harper-Leonard

Friendship, Fellowship and Brotherhood: the building blocks that transform a stranger to a member of the family. The bonds built stronger than a holiday card or an obligatory meal. These become the strings to your heart that are proven time and time again. The late night of drinking to process the loss of another love, the silent consideration of pain that words do not define. These are the people who see the need and fill it, without you asking, these are the people who roof your mother's house because you're in jail. These brothers do not forget you, do not forsake you. The difference between friendship and brotherhood is the sacrifice, the need which your love binds.

For my friends, I would dare much.

For my brothers, I would dare anything. | **JHL**

FAMILY CIRCLES

by Kula Paul Adric
Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution

Family, to me, will always be my blood family. My foundation. Since my creation. First and foremost. That's just how I was raised. Second is my street family. My hood. The neighborhood I grew up in, Felony Flats. My tribe, all the people who looked out, my roots. But something happened in the past eleven years: I've found yet another family, my prison family.

Family is very important to me. Family is sacred. My mother is from the Islands and she brought me up with a very strong sense of family. Of course, God comes first! Family is very, very close second. So, that's how I've always kept it.

This environment makes it difficult: the cost of phone calls and video visits; the ridiculous rules and regulations with snail mail; the long road trips our families must take, just to see us for what seems a brief

yet wonderful and fleeting moment.

You have no choice but to adapt. You learn. Creating a family circle within these walls is a real thing.

But who do you let in? Who can you trust? Growing up the way I did, I learned quick that you can't trust anyone – sometimes not even your own family. Inadvertently they could be your worst enemy. It's always been very hard for me to open myself up to others, especially enough to, eventually, become family. I never thought in a million years that I would make family in prison. Yet, it happened. I've gained fatherly types. Many, many brothers, and as time passed and I grew older, I've had sons. Prison fathers, prison brothers, prison sons ... It's more than just friendship. It's a bond that far exceeds fellowship. They become people we can count on, depend on and even trust.

These prisoners become my family. They know what it feels like to be stripped of everything. Everything we were, everything we knew and everything we ever loved taken away and then thrown into darkness.

These prisoners become a light, a cornerstone for support. They are there for the highs, the lows, the rises and the falls, the good, the bad and the ugly.

Vessels of understanding of what I was going through, unlike anyone else but someone who is or has been in this situation. The life of an inmate. I thank God for my new family, my prison family. They know nothing can replace our biological families and would never try. So I will pray for the day we are returned to our first families, and until then I will internally cry. | **KPA**

LIFE LESSONS

by Robin Thatcher
Coffee Creek Correctional Facility

My father taught me some important lessons when I was a little girl that have stuck with me throughout my life and surely molded my character.

When I was six years old, my family and I lived in Fairbanks, Alaska, on Yellowsnow Road (a name that hints at all the dog-sled teams the neighbors had) in a one-bedroom log cabin with no indoor plumbing and an outhouse for a bathroom. I grew up taking sponge baths from water warmed up on the woodstove and dreaded when I'd need to use the outhouse in the frozen winter, as the seat would be as cold as the air outside. I already knew my way around building a campfire, as we would enjoy these year-round. I knew how to collect moss and twigs and small sticks, and I knew how to chop up small pieces of wood with a hatchet. I enjoyed helping my dad start and tend to the fires.

One day I was walking home from where the school bus dropped me off, about a half mile from the cabin, and my dad was waiting for me on the porch to announce today was "Survival Training Day." He set the scene: I was lost in the wilderness in wintertime (which it was, of course, at about 25 degrees that day). He told me I needed to get a fire started or I would not last the night. I only had one match.

I'll never forget how he pulled out a book of matches, tore off every match but one, tossed them over his shoulder, and handed me the book with a single match – I know now this was for dramatic

effect. "You only have one shot," he said. "Now go gather your wood. You know what to do."

I set off into the snow-covered trees surrounding the cabin to gather my moss and twigs and smaller sticks, and then some bigger ones, and returned to set up my fire.

I got my fire ready to light with my one match. I started to light the moss when a gust of wind blew out my only match. I looked up at my father, knowing I failed. With a quivering lip, I said, "I'm not going to survive."

He looked at me for a second, then pulled out another book of matches and ripped away every match but one and handed it to me again, saying, "In real life you don't get second chances." With that second match I got a roaring fire going, and because of that I can say with confidence that I've known how to start a fire in the snow in the dead of winter with a match since I was six years old. Not many people can say that.

As a teenager, I looked back at that lesson and thought my dad was an asshole for basically traumatizing me. I was too young for boot camp. This lesson wasn't the only one he gave me, and at six years old I really thought I had to succeed at these "survival lessons."

We moved to Barrow, Alaska, when I was eight years old. Barrow is in the very northernmost region of North America, and it was really a large Inuit village with a population of 2,500 at the time. There were no trees, the ground was frozen solid a few feet down year-round with permafrost, and the

ocean would literally freeze solid in the winter. We shopped for all our clothing in catalogs and about once a year somebody would get eaten by a polar bear.

June through August are the months that give Alaska the nickname the "Land of the Midnight Sun," because the sun never leaves the sky. It only dips low in the evening before coming right back up. November through February are the months of total darkness. Other months are transitional between the total light and total dark.

I always wondered why in the hell my parents would pack me and my little sister up and force us to live in a frozen, depressing Inuit village of all places. Many years later I found out the main motivation was that my dad and his Native friend Jewel were smuggling booze up at a huge profit. My dad drove a cab and was the high school janitor, and my mom had a really good job working as the records manager for the

**I'LL NEVER
FORGET HOW
HE PULLED
OUT A BOOK
OF MATCHES,
TORE OFF
EVERY MATCH
BUT ONE,
TOSSED THEM
OVER HIS
SHOULDER,
AND HANDED
ME THE BOOK
WITH A SINGLE
MATCH**

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

North Slope Borough School District. She would sometimes fly to the other villages for a few days at a time to do her job.

I was the tallest white girl in the entire school, and I was picked on a lot because of it. I became depressed and lonely; on top of that, my parents were about to divorce. And while I was unaware of the divorce, I was fully affected by the household tension. One day when my mother was away at one of the other villages, I was sent to the counselor's office because I got in a spat with a bully. I told her that I felt like dying, so she phoned home. My dad got the call. Normally it would have been Mom, and she would have handled the situation completely differently.

When I got home my father was waiting for me in the *cunnichuck* (arctic entry) with his Ruger pistol. He said, "I got a call from your school today and they say you want to kill yourself." He started to slowly load the gun. One bullet at a time. I know now this was for dramatic effect. It was very effective. He wanted me to know the gun was loaded. I was trained from a very young age about gun safety; a loaded gun is never to be pointed at something you don't want dead.

He handed me this loaded gun and guided both of my hands onto it, positioning it under my chin. It pointed at the back of my skull, and he told me, "If you really want to die, pull the trigger." I froze for a few moments before I handed him the gun and ran to my room and locked my door and didn't speak to him on purpose for years.

I hated him for that lesson. What if I had pulled the trigger?! What if he was wrong about calling my

bluff! My mother would have come home to her twelve-year-old's head blown off – what then? Thankfully there was no tragedy that day, but there was now a deep wound in the relationship between me and my father. My parents divorced, and I stopped speaking to my father at age sixteen.

Almost two decades later, I ran into him at a truck stop in Portland, Oregon. I had been living like a vagabond for a couple years in a hippy van and happened to be coming out of the showers at the Jubitz truck stop when a man said my name as I passed him in the narrow hallway.

"Robin?"

I looked up and recognized him. "Dad?"

It was an awkward but pleasant surprise. Turned out he became a long-haul trucker and had stopped to shower and fuel his semitruck. I happened to be a homeless hippy who liked to take advantage of the free Wi-Fi and nice clean hot showers for \$10. We found ourselves at the same place at the same time.

My mother hated my dad and had no problem adding to my opinion that he was a jerk most of my life. But when I left Alaska to go soul-searching and travel in my van, my mother decided she hated me too and quit speaking to me. I asked her why, and she told me because I look like my dad and I act like my dad and she fucking hates my dad. Makes a lot of sense now why she always favored my blonde-haired blue-eyed little sister, who looks nothing like him.

So here I am – after years living on my own without family, I have a dad again. We began talking regu-

larly and he'd visit me occasionally. On a camping trip together, I brought up my childhood memories and I asked him about the Ruger incident. He said he knew I wouldn't pull the trigger, though he would also never take a chance. Turns out the gun wouldn't fire, he had removed the pin. It was all for show.

His lesson was effective; I've never considered killing myself since. He taught me a very important lesson that has shaped who I am. Even though that lesson caused me pain, I am better for it. I know to choose life, and I know how to survive. My father knows I could be lost in the world and find my way through it no matter the obstacles, just like he knows I'll make it through prison and come out having learned valuable lessons that will only make me a better person for having the experience. | **RT**

ONE OF THE FORTUNATE ONES

by Reyes Miranda
Oregon State Penitentiary

I was born one of the fortunate ones, if that's what you want to call a Native Mexican who is born north of that imaginary line called the border — a line that divides our land in two and calls one half Mexico and the other half the United States. This imaginary yet physical line seems to have also created a division in the culture of our people – or has it?

Yes, I'm one of the fortunate ones. I went to some of the better schools that this side of our land has to offer. As a child, I had the opportunity to learn a lot. I learned what prejudice is, and how this communicable disease affects the minds

**SOME OF
MY FONDEST
MEMORIES
ARE THOSE
OF MY FATHER
COMING INTO
MY ROOM
LATE AT NIGHT
TO TELL
ME STORIES
ABOUT MY
PEOPLE ... A
PEOPLE RICH
IN CULTURE
AND PRIDE.**

and hearts of those who, unfortunately, contract it. I learned what racism is, and how this deadly virus is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths. Yes, racism's hands are well bloodstained.

I also learned a wide vocabulary of words, words that don't even appear in the dictionary! Words like *beaner*, *chili choker*, *taco-bender*, *wetback*, *spic*, and let's not forget *hey esse* ... just to mention a few. Yes, I learned a lot in my younger years.

Now that I'm older, I'm still learning a lot of those same childhood lessons, only this time I'm being taught by my (own) people. I'm learning that the same people my father spoke so highly of, and I always admired so much, are infected with that disease called prejudice.

Some of my fondest memories are those of my father coming into my

room late at night to tell me stories about my people, as he put it. A people rich in culture and pride. Others are of the trips we would take to Arizona, Mexico, and other parts of the land to watch Los Yaquis dance, and other celebrations ... such precious times.

He would tell me, "*Mi'jo*, these people are your blood. As rugged as they look, they're very beautiful people ... don't ever forget who you are or where you come from." And, as we were picking tomatoes in San Jose, or oranges in Fresno, he would say, "Look around, *mi'jo*, you see all these people, they are your people, too. They are your heritage, your blood ... It's something to be proud of. They are hard workers. They have strong family beliefs, and are not afraid to put in an honest day's work (for an honest day's pay?). Always remember who you are and where your blood comes from. Be proud of your heritage." | **RM**

Go to Edovo on tablets for writing courses, original music, and a catalog of incarcerated writers published by Bridgeworks



tell friends & family to visit:



WRITING FROM OREGON PRISONS

WWW.THEPONYXPRESS.ORG

SUBSCRIBE FOR FREE

SPREADING THE WORD BUILDS AUDIENCE

UPGRADE TO PAID FUNDS THE PROGRAM





A WRITTEN FAMILY PORTRAIT

*Essay by Stressla Lynn Johnson,
Oregon State Penitentiary*

“

Some forms of change start in the conditions that I found myself in, at a low point of my existence. A point that was without purpose or intentional actions. This catalysis, once acknowledged, was my stepping stone and the cornerstone for the permanence to success and transformation.

”

»»

once asked a mentor of mine, “Is there any redemption for an individual like me that is personally responsible for the death of two human beings? And if so, can I have a voice in social and political discourse?”

It has been more than 25 years since that conversation and the response that put me on the path for change, reclamation and healing.

My personal journey for changing and reclamation – while unique to me – has happened to numerous men and women serving prison sentences in Oregon and around the United States. Change and changing requires a lot of self-reflection, honest self-appraisals and intentional actions in behavior. This was not always an easy endeavor but, with work, support and dedication, an individual can succeed in constructing meaningful change to their life.

Over the years I have developed and adopted various activities and behaviors for the prospects of change and growth. The one consistent activity that allowed me to physically and emotionally track the changes, whether it was dealing with personal challenges, social issues, or just the day-to-day encounters of doing time was journaling, writing poems, and mentorship to youth and elders.

Oh, and a little yoga.

A Foundation

I was born April 9, 1957 in Portland, Oregon. Raised by my mother Clara Mae Brox-Smith and my stepfather Clarence Smith, I grew up during the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s. I have been physically separated from the community and the majority of my family for almost 38 years. I maintained varying degrees of contact with family members. I got yearly updates on how family members were doing, however, the detachments brought with it a lot of uncertainties.

Reflecting on my childhood, I have arrived at understanding the intelligence and wisdom of my elders who provided care and safety for the children in the neighborhood. A great gift was the lessons taught by the elders – that in the neighborhood we were all on big family. The words, adages, and phrases connected to the many lessons were implanted in my mind, like seeds sown in fertile soil. The same words, phrases and adages became an integral representation of my healing, redemption, transformation and the process of my becoming an

elder inside prison.

My Great Fall: Put Behind A Wall

In 1987 I was charged with two murders. In 1989 I was convicted and sentenced to death. The conviction and death sentence was reversed by the Oregon Supreme Court in 1992. In 1993, I entered a no-contest plea for both murders and was sentenced to two concurrent life sentences.

The facts and circumstances of my crime are not relevant to this essay. By not going into the details, it is not intended to minimize, diminish or hide from the impact on the families and the Portland community. I understand and acknowledge the devastating harm I caused and take full accountability and responsibility for my actions.

Disconnecting

The fact that I was being taught that the people in the neighborhood were like family, is evidenced by the number of adopted uncles, aunties, cousins and even moms I acquired as a child. These lessons filled with the intelligence and wisdom of the elders became obscure, buried and abandoned in the midst of my childhood trauma.

Between the age of 5 and 13-years-old, I completely abandoned the lessons of the elders and succumbed to distortions and a warped sense of reality. The lessons were buried deep in my mind and body – and remained buried until I began to restore them during a period from 2004 to 2017.

In spite of the persistent barriers and obstacles inherent in this prison, I have joined an amazing group of writers. Under the direction of two outside volunteers from Bridgeworks Oregon, we have created a writing workshop, held once a week here at Oregon State Penitentiary.

Recognizing the parallels for connecting the spirit of writing in this incarcerated community, with the lessons learned about family, neighborhood and community, we have expanded the definitions for healing and change.

Reconnecting: Reminding Myself What to Keep and What to Get Rid Of

During my incarceration I have been deliberate and intentional in addressing the underlying issues that were present before, during and a few years after

my crimes. I was surrounded by effective caring mentors, friends and even some staff members that provided truth and guidance as I traveled on my journey of healing and change. I started to read self-help materials, participated in cognitive skill programs, practiced yoga, meditation and reflective journaling.

I connected with individuals with shared challenges. We talked about our children, families and supported each other, creating spaces inside the prison walls that encourages growth. I began to uncover words, adages and phrases from the depths of the emotional burial grounds.

The Circular Connections

In 1998 my mother passed away, this was the second major death of a family member during my incarceration. The physical separation from my family during this period of grieving seemed to intensify my memory center. It was not just my immediate family that came to mind. I recalled a lot of the people and families that lived in the neighborhood that knew Clara Mae, my mother. While struggling with the emotional and psychological aftermath of my mother passing, several individuals came to give comfort and were very supportive. They made spaces for me to talk, cry, laugh, feel, hurt and heal.

This was the period when I was reconnecting to my body and memories of family and community. Some of the literature I started reading was about the brain and childhood developmental trauma. Over the next several years – 15 to 20 years – I surrounded myself with likeminded people and groups that allowed us to heal. The words, community, family, safe spaces and healing came up a lot in our discussions.

Change in The Wiring Writing

I have contributed to improving the OSP community. As an African American gay man, I co-founded Equality Eight, the first LGBTQ special interest group of adults in custody in the Oregon Department of Corrections. I am the cofacilitator for the Uhuru

SaSa African Culture Club's Legal Workshop, a biannual class designed to improve legal literacy for AICs. I am a member of the PonyXpress editorial board, an online site featuring the writing incarcerated people inside ODOC's facilities.

This is a meaningful connection. This also allows the family members that were born after 1987 to know me in the mental, emotional and spiritual state I exist in now. They can read other works produced in my writing and enjoy the stories of mending and liberation.

I have written reflective pieces that have their creative nascent from the PonyXpress workshop's prompts: "Intelligence and Wisdom" as it relates to tribal scars.

During our workshop, the practitioner Tracy Schlapp of Bridge-works Oregon read a piece by Gretel Ehrlich about men. The prior week it was Ehrlich's piece about resiliency. After a five minute free write, we read our free write into the space with some discussions after each reading.

This particular session on Mar. 5, 2025, educed words and phrases such as tribal, memory, elder, healing, etched, sacred and other words that felt ceremonial which led to phrases such as: being in groupness, family elders, intelligent memory, becoming wiser

with age, safe spaces. And it was suggested that the spirit and essences of these words can be linked to family, tribe and our scars and memories.

It Continues Because It Must

I have no way to fully determine the emotional impact my incarceration has had on my family and friends; however, it was important to have their support during my journey. In the process of changing I fostered a method that allowed me to sit with my thoughts and feelings. Writing in my journal proved to be a great start to overcoming the residue of childhood deprivation. It also required that I understood the need for changing while serving a life sentence. My purpose had to come from something other than doing time. I learned to ask "What if?" instead of "What now?" ■

“My purpose had to come from something other than doing time. I learned to ask “What if?” instead of “What now?””

1664

Summer 2026 Issue #6

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



HOW TO CONTACT THE ECHO AND 1664

The Echo and 1664 are created in the journalism department at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. The Echo is a monthly newsletter and 1664 is a quarterly magazine.

For incarcerated people in

Oregon: Send a communication form (a kyte) to Journalism Department, IWP at EOCI.

For non-incarcerated people or those outside of Oregon:

EOCI, C/O Journalism Department, IWP
2500 Westgate
Pendleton, OR 97801

For non-incarcerated people:

1664 and The Echo are available at www.pollenpress.org.

We are sponsored by Pollen Initiative and our publications can be accessed on their online directory of sponsored prison publications.