

**Rebuilding Families**

**The New York State Literary Center**  
<http://www.nyslc.org/>

**In Partnership with**

**Rochester Broadway Theater League**

**Office of the Sheriff, County of Monroe**  
**Monroe Correctional Facility**

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## **REBUILDING FAMILIES WRITING**

Traveler, your footsteps  
are the road, nothing more;  
traveler, there is no road,  
you make the road by walking.

Antonio Machado (26 July 1875 – 22 February 1939), translated by Dale Davis

The organizations that work together on this program for people who are incarcerated are wonderful. Rebuilding Families inspires us to know that some people do care about those of us who are incarcerated, and it gives us a chance to do something nice with and for our kids and our grandkids.

For me life has been a struggle that I must now overcome in this difficult time in my life. As I was growing up to enjoy life by any means necessary was a motto of mine. Now I know I must control my destiny. Now I know I want more, not just for me but for my wife and my grandchildren. I know you miss me a lot since I have been in here. I want to make my family and friends happy. I want to have a good life.

My children, I have always appreciated you. I have always appreciated all of the smiles and hugs you have given me when you didn't know that we were struggling. I know that life is harder for you now that I am not there. I pray that you keep your sweet spirits and know that I will be there for you when I come home. All that I ask is that you get an education so that you and your families will not have to struggle.

*A. C.*

I want to live a good life. I want to live a productive and happy life. I want to do things to better for myself and my spirituality. I want to help others. I want to do things that will make me happy. I want to build a good relationship with my family and have a job that I will enjoy waking up for and going to everyday. I am receiving help from my family to go to Mississippi for rehab when I am released. I want this to help me better myself and live a productive life. In the future I want to be able to help another individual.

*D. D.*

Today is a very hard day for me. I am in a place I said I would never be.

I'm  
in  
jail.

I remember the first time I heard my older cousin, Paul, was locked up and how it made me feel. I was sad and mad and let down. Paul was like a brother to me. He was a friend to me, more than a cousin. I told my mom and dad I would never let them down like that.

I  
could not  
keep  
that  
promise.

I remember the day I got locked up. I remember crying not for me or for where I was going or even for what I did. I cried for what people would think of me and for letting my parents down.

I am in a very lonely place, a very dark place. Hopefully this is the last time I will be in a place like this.

The only things I have that this place  
or any place cannot take from me  
are my hopes  
and dreams.

My hope is for a better life, and my dream is for a stronger will to get me there.

A happy life to me is I want my family with me. This is the biggest, starting with my little girl. My fiancé and I have been together almost thirteen years. We have an eleven-year-old girl who is almost twelve. She is my everything. We are not as close as I would like, even more so in the past year as I have been here in jail. I have only seen her a few times. I have not seen or talked to her in six months. This has been really hard for me. I am also close to my dad. I talk to him a few times a week, but I have not seen him in awhile either. This is the longest I have ever been away from my family.

I also think of a few other things for a happy life for me, like my car a 1979 Camaro. I've had it a long time and put lots of money into it.

I want to stay clean. I know I will have to want to and work hard at it. I know this will not be easy.

There is money and a house and things like that, but as long as I have my family, my car, and as long as I stay clean that's all I need. I have used drugs for so long.

I am very happy I am a part of Rebuilding Families. I think it is a great program. With this I will be able to do something with my little girl.

I want to let my daughter, Krystin, to know that no matter how dark of a place I am in because of jail she is my light at the end of the tunnel. No matter how sad or down I get she gives me hope.

*Dear Krystin*

*Daddy is in jail again. I'm very sorry. I wish I could have done things differently. I hope you never have to come to a place like this. I know you worry about me just as I worry about you. I hope some day I can make you as proud of me as I am of you. I'll be home soon and can't wait to see your beautiful face again and hug you. I miss you so much. I will do my best never to put us through this again. I just hope I do not let you down too much.*

*I am sorry I have not spent more time with you. I just did not want you to see me all messed up like this. I am going to do my best to be there for you. I am sorry this paper got a little messed up. I cried a little writing this because I miss you so much.*

*Through this project I am in I will get us tickets to the "Wizard of Oz." I hope you are not too old to enjoy it with me. I can't believe how old you are getting. I can still remember when you were born. It was the best day of my life. I remember holding you in my arms the first time. It was amazing.*

*I have sixty days now, November 1. I'll send this out in a few days. If you want, you and Mommy can write me back. I would like that a lot. Mommy might be a little jealous because she has been asking me to write to her, and I have not (lol).*

*This is the first letter I have written in a very long time. So I will end this letter with I love you very much and can't wait to see you.*

*Love,*

*Your Daddy*

I remember the last time I was on the streets. I used too much and overdosed and died. When they were bringing me back, all I remember is a voice telling me it was not my time. To this day I don't know who said it, whether it was the cops or the ambulance people or God. That voice changed me.

I want to do better. I will try to do better for myself and for my family. I know as an incarcerated parent there are so many things I am up against. One of them is my little girl worrying about me. This kills me and tears me up inside. I should be the one worrying, but I don't even through all of the things she has been through. She is an amazing young woman. She does well in everything she does.

I can't wait for this to be over. This is hard for me to be in this place.

I  
hate  
myself.

Thus place makes me feel worthless. I hope I will never see this place again.

This lady, a writer, Dale Davis, comes in here and gives us a chance when no one else cares or is willing to help us to feel our feelings again. It has been a long time since I have felt anything. It makes me feel good about myself that I am able to touch people with my writing. It is hard to feel good about anything in here.

I don't like people to see me cry or think I am not a tough guy or think I am soft in any sort of way. This is not easy for me to write.

What is home for me? Home for me is probably different for me. I never really had a home per se. I moved around all the time, pretty much ever six months to a year. I never really had any friends, never had a chance to make any. I grew up to be a loner. I'd rather stay to myself and be alone than to be around people. My family are the only people I like to be around

*"Toto did not really care whether he was in Kansas or the Land of Oz so long as Dorothy was with him; but he knew the little girl was unhappy, and that made him unhappy too."*  
*L. Frank Baum, The Wizard of Oz*

I like that writing shows that we still have feelings and that we still care.

*W. D.*

Dear Son,

I'm writing to you today to let you know I miss you more than anything, and I love you very much. I'm completely sorry that I can't see you right now. Daddy made a bad decision and has to go to time out for a little while so I can learn from that mistake and make sure I don't do it again. It's like when you get sent to your room when you do something you are not supposed to do. When you grow up and do something you are not supposed to do you get put in a room away from your family and friends.

I can't wait to see you.

The one thing I want you to do while I am not there is to do well in school and be respectful to others. Education is one of the most important things in life, and if you stay in school and learn a lot you can have anything you want.

Respect is very important in how you treat people. You want to treat others well, the same way you would like to be treated.

Please know that no matter what daddy will always be here for you, and you can come to see me anytime you want to. Give a kiss to your brothers and sisters for me and don't worry I'll be seeing you soon. And when I come out of here, I will buy you your favorite toy.

*D. H.*

### *No Change*

Looking back on time,  
no progression comes to mind,  
just gangs of lost,  
plenty of lost young minds,  
children left behind  
only to live the lives  
of the lost before them.  
They hit the step  
with no knock on Heaven's door.  
They fall,  
rewind and play.  
There is no change.

K. H.

A good life to me means a good feeling waking up and not wanting, but having, the things I need. It takes money to be able to be comfortable with your feelings and to express yourself the way you want to and not to have someone tell you what to do. A good life to me means to love and to be loved. A good life is to have the money I need and be able to meet my needs.

D. J.

Sorry for how much pain I brought to you. I want to let you know I cry to myself because I know I hurt you so, so many times. I wish, I wish I could rewind time and be that young man you trusted and be that young man you were happy around.

I don't want to be  
the outcast in the family any more.

Mother, it is no one's fault but mine. I would never blame the beautiful life you and my stepfather gave me.

All of my life I went to sleep with a monkey on my back. That monkey was fast money and taking things that were not mine.

I hate being around  
and walking on a tight line.

I wish I could rebuild time.

H. J.

Rebuilding Families is a great idea for when I get out. I will be able to do something with my kids who I have not seen in a few months. I think my kids will be excited to be able to do something with me. Before I was incarcerated I took my kids to hockey games, the circus, and the Strong Museum. I took them to everything I could afford.

*Cheyne and Lexi,*

*I miss you both so much! I am sorry I have missed so much time with you. I know it has been hard on you both. It has been so hard on me. I will be back in your lives very soon. And when I come back we are going to spend as much time together as we possibly can. I can't get back the time I have missed, but I am going to try to make up for it. I want to get a good job and give you guys everything I can. I want to make sure you guys have the best lives possible. I want you both to know how much you mean to me. I promise to be in your lives as much as possible. Your mother and I might not be together anymore, but that does not mean we won't be.*

*I am going to do my best to stay out of this place. It kills me not to see your beautiful faces. I stare at your school pictures and think of how much you both have changed in the four months I have been gone. I miss you so much it hurts. I can't wait to hold you both in my arms again.*

*I won't be able to spend Christmas with you this year. This is crushing my heart. I pray you have the best time possible without me being there. I will be out five days later, and I plan on coming right away to see you both and do whatever is possible.*

*I hope you both have the best Christmas possible*

*I will always be in your lives. I love you and miss you both a ton.*

*Love always,*

*Dad*

Taking my kids to the theater when I am released means I will be able to share something that mattered to me while I was growing up and do something with them to try to make up for the time I have lost. I know I cannot get that time back, but I want to try to make up for that by being with them as much as possible.

I would like to take my children to "The Wizard of Oz." Growing up this was one of my favorite movies. I want to let them know this was one of my favorite movies. I want them to know me and to share this with them after my being away for so long.

*A. K.*

What does it mean to me to have a good life? To me it is having a normal life of working at a job that I love, having a stable place to live, and being able to raise my children to be productive members of society. To me it means to be able to take care of my family and to ensure that they are safe and that they have food to eat.

*R. M.*

For me the meaning of a good life is that I need to think before I act. I need to stay out of the streets. I need to be with my loved ones. I need to change and to ask for forgiveness and stay away from the bad crowd that acted like they were my friends. I need to change my way of thinking and realize what I will lose if I don't change.

It was good to see "Echoes of Incarceration" and hear what young kids go through when their moms or dads go to jail. I am one to know. I know what it is like to lose a parent to incarceration.

I think it is good that Rebuilding Families is giving us the opportunity to help build the relationships with our families that we have lost. Tickets to a musical make me feel good that finally I am able to do something for my family.

*F. N.*

### *Three Letters*

Dear Degsig and DeShawn,

I know that you are not my biological children, but I love you two as if you were mine. The happiest day of my life was being able to be a father to you two and being able to see you and be a part of your

lives everyday.

I truly miss you, and I apologize for putting you guys in this hateful situation and missing out on your lives.

Thank you for accepting me as being a dad to you and loving me as I love you. Your mother is the best thing that happened in my life. When I get out of here, I am going to make it right and be home with you and be a real family, the family that you guys deserve.

I love you with all of my heart, and I am so proud to call you my children. Hopefully I will be home soon.

*Love,  
Daddy Terrell*

Dear Dad,

This is your son Terrell writing. I apologize for being disobedient and not ever listening to you and disrespecting you. I wish I had listened to you when you were teaching me how to work on cars instead of going out there following the wrong crowd leading down the wrong path.

I  
just want to know  
why you gave up on me.

Why didn't you keep pushing me?

I am sorry for hating you for so many years. When my brother died I never heard you tell me I love you. That hurt. I love you Dad, and I apologize for being a pain, but do you know all of the pain and hurt you caused in my life because you weren't there when I really needed you?

Dad, I want a father son relationship. When you had your strokes and heart attacks it made me realize how much I would hurt if you were gone. I had to learn to be a man on my own. The only thing I remember you teaching me was how to make a legal hustle by working on cars and working for what I wanted instead of looking for a handout.

Dad,  
I wish I had listened.

*Love,  
Terrell*

Dear Mom,

This is your son Terrell. I apologize for being a pain and a disobedient child. I apologize for not listening when you were telling me what was right.

It  
just hurt me  
to never hear you say

I love you.  
and when you would tell me,  
"You'll never be shit."

Mom, I apologize for being part of the reason you drink and causing you so much heartache and pain.

Mom,  
thank you for all you have done for me.

I apologize for putting this extra stress on you. When I come home, I want to make things right so I don't cause you any more stress or pain. I just want to have a mother son relationship.

*I apologize, Mom and I love you,  
Terrell*

*T.*

I want to start a new life when I am out. I want to have a great life with my daughter, Jasmine. I want to be a good father.

*Jasmine, I know that it was rough because things were not the best when I was out. I need a chance, and I need time for you.*

*Life is always hard, never easy. You have to keep pushing and not letting it get the best of you like I did.*

*Jasmine, I have made mistakes I am not proud of. The most important thing is I don't want you to make the same mistakes.*

*Trust me with my being in here. This is as wake up call for me. I think of you and the family, and it tears me up inside. Nothing is worth me taking the risk of being away from the people I love. Always think about your choices and the consequences. Mine were not the best. Just one really bad choice put me in jail. This is not the life for me, and I do not want it for you.*

*Jasmine, I am sorry. I want to be in your life more. I want to continue to see your beautiful smile. I never want it to be difficult for you. I have been very lost so much of the time.*

*Never doubt that I love you. You are always on my mind. The time I have spent inside jail has been making me think about life a lot more. All of the craziness from the past has taught me to know the true meaning of life. Always keep God in your heart. Don't let others talk you into doing anything wrong. Jail is no place for anybody. Baby girl I want you to be better than me when you are older.*

*I want to have everything better when I come home. My first step will be to show you the change inside me. I want to make you happy. Please Jasmine stay on the straight path, not just for me or for the family because the system is set up like it is waiting for people to mess up.*

*Jasmine all I need is you. Always keep me in your heart. Stay true to yourself. This time it will be better because I will be a father.*

*Love,*



*Your Father*

*P. T.*

For someone who has spent over three-quarters of his life infested with drugs, alcohol, crime, and violence and twenty years plus incarcerated while eighty percent of his family passed on and whose children were given to new families, this is it means to live a good, happy, productive life.

*A new hunger for living and dying has come into my life.  
Sadness for all I have done and become haunts my days and nights.*

I want to start my new life with my girlfriend, my wife to be. I now have a soft heart for the younger and less fortunate people around me. I would like to continue my studies and learn as much as I can about life so I can help instead of take away before people end up like me or worse. I'd like to be a part of something big. I would like people to be proud of me, and I would like to be someone my children would like to call dad and have in their lives. I want to help and be loved.

I'd, also, be pretty happy with a piece of land and a home out in the country where I could be free in a beautiful world and make furniture and whatnots in my own little craft shop.

I enjoy making people smile.

We all have a longing to be better in life, and I think Rebuilding Families will help us come out of our shells so our children and families and others can see there is good inside each and every one of us.

*My children, I can only begin to imagine what can be going through your minds since being taken away from your mother and me so many years ago. There has not been a day that goes by since last seeing and holding you in 2000 that I haven't thought of you, prayed for you, and let tears pour from my heart. I long for the day to see and hold all of you again, and I pray all of you will give me a chance to explain why I am in jail now and why my life has been full of so many poor choices. When I do get a chance to stand in front of all of you I want to stand as a proud man who has missed his children for way too long.*

*Please forgive me and know that I love all of you so very much, and I hope that you will give me the chance I lost so many years ago to be your dad.*

As far as the writers in this class are concerned and the thousands of others like us who share our stories of sorrow, suffering, and sadness, who feel alone, empty, unfulfilled, and helpless due to our addictions and poor choices, I believe for me and for the countless others like me we are all looking for the remedy that will take away and help us forget all the pain that our poor choices have caused us and the lives of those we were supposed to be loving and caring for, not hurting.

For all of those who don't understand addicts and criminally infested people, most of us were using and running wild trying to numb our sadness and pain by any means possible and by the time we hit bottom, there was no one left to care or love us anymore. They had either passed on or we burned too many bridges and lost all trust.

Regardless of the problems and issues we have all had to live with and suffer through, I think and believe there is still hope for me and for us. For me my bad outweighs my good, my sadness outweigh my happiness. I want to change that and do some good and enjoy some happiness.

*I hope and pray my loved ones are in a happy hereafter because I have made such a mess of this life and the lives of so many. I want to see all of my loved ones again so I can tell them how much I miss and love them and how sorry I am for all I have done. I want to ask them to please forgive me.*

I am sorry, but I have to apologize for a paragraph. I can't speak for the writers in this class or the thousands of others who share our stories. I can only speak for myself.

I want to turn my life around for my family, my wife to be, and my children. I want to make a difference in the world. I can only hope my classmates feel the same.

This program is here for those of us who really want change with our families and in our lives. For me rebuilding my family and my life means the world to me. I am very grateful to be a part of this program.

I am stuck in one area I am unable to get out, the labeling of being criminal and misfit. And yes, I did this to myself, but it does not define me as a person. I have worked hard in many categories of my life to become a better man and a better member of society. It just does not seem to matter how hard I work and try, I am still stuck with a horrendous label. I have to learn how to live in society just like everyone else. It hurts.

I just want to love and be loved and to enjoy life.

My breathing clouds the air.  
I am not passing by.

*My life has been cluttered with apologies, and rightly so. My precious children I am truly sorry I have caused you to grow up in fear of the unknown, afraid of relationships, and being denied my comfort and love.*

*I am sorry I have caused you to grow up with low self-esteem or being disadvantaged in any way, feeling powerless and angry to the point of turning on yourselves or others in any way.*

*I am sorry if I have caused you to grow up believing that the world and people are dangerous and hurtful. In fact there are beautiful places and good people that I hope and pray surround you.*

*I am sorry if you are ashamed of yourselves of me in any way. I am sorry if you have to hide your first family from your new family, your friends, or your teachers. You have nothing to be ashamed of regarding yourselves or me. I do that enough for all of us each and every day.*

*I am so very sorry for so much. I just hope and pray you will give me the change to be in your lives. I am really not a bad man; I have just made a lot of bad choices. Please believe in yourselves and in me. I miss you, think of you, pray for you, and wish you my love everyday*

Love,  
Your Dad

*T. W.*

