

## CONTROL YOUR OWN FUTURE

When I was ten years old, my family moved to Galeton in Potter County, Pennsylvania. Galeton was a beautiful country town filled with endless possibilities. During that move, I was locked up in juvenile placement. Three years later, I was released and sent home to my mom and dad, on October 21, 2001. I was thirteen.

I started the eighth grade at Galeton Area High School and was placed in emotional support classes. My time out of juvenile placement was rough. I had problems in school all the time: fighting, detentions, walking out of class and failing my classes.

Additionally, I had to deal with the consequences of an alcoholic father, who paid absolutely no attention to me. He worked sixty hours a week at a stone quarry in Germania and Westfield, Pennsylvania. Each night he would drink endlessly, ending up fighting with my mother and me over dumb stuff that had no meaning. My father called me names, verbally abused me and at times physically assaulted me when he was drunk. All of this made me unmotivated, put me down in the dumps and made me feel unwanted, sub-human, unaccepted, unloved and emotionally destroyed. I acted out, hurting others as a result. I made a choice to hurt people and allowed what my father did to control me. I decided to give up and not overcome the cycle of abuse. I kept it alive.

One year later, on October 21, 2002, I attacked my school teacher at Galeton Area High School landing me back in juvenile placement. I never saw the light of day since. I've been incarcerated in prison for the last twelve years and still have four years to go until I can come home.

The reason for my sharing this with you is for you not to end up like me because you can't

beat the habit of drugs and alcohol. My addiction was assaulting people. I hurt myself in the end because I had no control over myself. I was out of control and my future was determined by how I acted. I decided my future, and my future has been out of control. Prison is not a healthy place to be. Don't believe what you see on TV or the stories you hear from people. More than 95% of these stories are exaggerated. The truth is:

Prison destroys you psychologically, breaks families from each other, and at times actually forces a man to decide that death is the only way to freedom. In prison you are alone with no one to help you. As a man and someone who has experienced prison, I would give anything to give my mom a hug, walk on grass, eat real food, take a walk, spend time with friends, feel the sun on my face, go to church, feed ducks at Berger Lake.

How would you feel to get a phone call in prison, letting you know someone close to you passed away? And you can't go to the funeral because you are considered a convicted felon? The system doesn't care how you will feel. You will be left to live in bitterness.

On April 8<sup>th</sup> 2007, Easter Sunday, I received one of these phone calls. My father had a massive heart attack at a stone quarry in Westfield. The last contact I had with my father was a letter from him two months before he died, letting me know how sorry he was for treating me the way he did as a child. Before ending the letter, he told me, for the first time, that he loved me.

Due to all my bad decisions, I couldn't attend his funeral. All I could do is cry and ask myself "Why? Why did I fail myself?" I couldn't see my dad buried or pay him his respects for at least trying to get back into my life.

So when you feel like flooding your system with drugs and alcohol, look at your mom, dad, brother, sister, grandma, whoever is close to you. Imagine how you would feel hearing that they are gone and you can't see them one more time to say goodbye.

Control your future at all costs. The way your life goes starts with the decisions you make. All I

ask of you is for you not to end up in prison like I did. Enjoy the comforts of your family. Please don't destroy your life. You have one life to live. Why spoil it when you can be the person your heart wants you to be? Drugs and alcohol won't achieve your ultimate purpose. You are far more important than you think you are. View yourself as worthy and your future will be worth creating.

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