

Spotlight on Redemption by Shari Swanson

With the dawn of each new year, we vow to make changes, usually little things--lose a few pounds, eat better, exercise more, be more patient. Sometimes those changes stick; sometimes by February we are wondering where our resolutions have gone. But what of the big changes--atoning for a life of crime, or giving up destructive or selfish pursuits, for instance? Are those sorts of big changes possible? Do we have the potential to stop in our tracks, consider our lives, and turn another way if we find ourselves far down the wrong path? In this Daily Good Spotlight on Redemption we look back through old columns to revisit stories of people who have reversed a destructive course in favor of positive, life-affirming choices, resulting in a fruitful blessing to others.

Former Gang Member Becomes Youth Leader

Martin Leyva dropped out of school in 9th grade, falling into gang life, crime, and repeated incarceration. On release from Chino State Prison, Leyva vowed to break the cycle and never go back. Now a college graduate, certified drug and alcohol treatment counselor, and a skilled gang intervention and prevention facilitator, Leyva works with at risk youth. He finds the work both vital and healing:

This job really requires you to be who you say you are because we lead by example. We don't tell youth what to do. We honor what's going on with them and model the fact that there are always options. It's the most amazing experience to get up in the morning and go to work feeling as if the youth need me, but also that I need them. We're all part of this community that we've created. So we're all getting paid, one way or another...

There are still a lot of areas in my life that never got dealt with; a lot of stuff from my childhood. So when I work with these youth, it's as if I'm seeing a mirror image of myself as a kid. As I support them in healing their own issues, I better understand some of my own issues, like meeting my biological dad; or my stepfather leaving me; or getting incarcerated away from my community and family. The youths give me their stories, their truths, and that helps to shed light on who I was when I was little Martin. When a youth tells me his story and I can say, "Yeah, I totally understand because I've been there," it's empowering for both of us.

Read more about Leyva's journey [here](#).

Man in Solitary Confinement Becomes Transformative Artist

Encouraged by a pen friend, Moyo, a man sentenced to Death Row vowed to use his solitary confinement as a monk's cell, transforming his mind and creating art for others. Together, they presented that art in the exhibition, Buddhas on Death Row, in the spirit of Moyo's main body of work— a series of Buddha portraits—and the notion that within all of us, there is potential for transformation. Moyo explains:

I try to make use of discarded or ignored bits in my art because we all have something worthwhile for another, we just have to find it – and it took me coming to death row to find my worth as a human and as a citizen of the world.

I have committed some grave acts in my life and I will never be able to undo them. Yet the very least I can do is to improve myself.

It is my hope that someone else will also take control of their narrative and tell themselves a new tale, a grander story of themselves. For all of our benefit.

For more about Moyo and his transformation, go [here](#).

Former Inmate Teaches Meditation to Prisoners

Incarcerated for 14 years, Fleet Maull found meditation and, with it, the power to transform himself. Upon release, Maull returned to prison to teach other inmates meditation and to help them find a way they could cope with their circumstances and build better futures. As described here, Maull works with inmates toward forgiveness, peace and freedom. Maull's story challenges us to always embrace the potential for transformation and the responsibility we share in helping each other find our paths to freedom.

In each of these stories lies the kernel that no one event or mistake defines us forever. We each carry the power to transform ourselves, to take a new path, to make different choices.