

#EVERYONE'S COLUMN
ISSUE 3

Gratitude and Future Selves

Consider this day the things in life we can be grateful for
- Karam

ISSUE 03

#EVERYONE'S COLUMN IS MADE UP OF SUBMISSIONS FROM INMATES (S1 & RCU), DESISTORS AND STAFF. IT AIMS TO ALLOW YOU A SPACE OF REFLECTION AND PROVIDE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY. IT IS THE HOPE THAT YOU WILL FEEL INSPIRED AND ALSO INSPIRE OTHERS.

RCU is a transformative environment that supports and strengthens renounees' prosocial identity and their resolve towards a gang-free lifestyle. Renounees live as a community with a shared purpose and opportunities are provided to further strengthen their prospcoal identity through a series of programmes and practices.



Enjoying the Simple Things in Life

Life can sometimes be a blur. Often we are in such a hurry, we miss the beautiful things we will only notice when we slow down. Like a scene from a Studio Ghibli movie – the act of hanging clothes, watching the sunset, or taking a stroll with friends or family. I find myself not experiencing the same satisfaction or calmness after scrolling on my phone as compared to finishing a good book.

Personally, I believe it takes gratitude to appreciate the mundane things. Its only when we are bombarded with work, stressed out; that we seek the seemingly mundane or boring acts and moments as a way to ease our worries. It is only when everything else is taken away, status, affiliation or material things in life don't matter as much. But the sentimental moments, small things that we brush off as mundane we hold close.

What Can We Be Grateful For?

I was recently feeling quite frustrated over two health issues in my life. Hoping I could get over it fast yet also grumbling in my mind over it. Then I remembered the many other areas of good health I have which I wasn't thankful for. Waking up each day to life. Being able to breathe easily. The rest I get each night. The ability to move. Peace of mind.

My mood changed as I remembered these things. Felt I had so much more to be thankful for in life despite the things which may not be to my satisfaction. Gratitude is a simple but powerful attitude to have. The man with little education can be more grateful than the one with much. The poor man can be more grateful than then rich. The weak more than the strong. The powerless more than the powerful.

Consider this day the things in life we can be grateful for.

Letter of Gratitude

She lost her soulmate, her best friend, her everything on 6 September 2010. She was torn beyond words could explain. She knew life will never be the same anymore because the world is like a jungle; only the best man wins. In my case, the best woman won! My Mother Won! My mother won. She singled handedly brought us (my brother and I) up. I was just 14. But I understand her sorrows to a certain extent only because I saw her crying alone... countless number of times... She would buy us all our necessities first, before she even thought for herself.

She'd let us eat all the good food and have the leftovers for herself. She never once gave up on me despite my wrongdoings! She'd always give me words of encouragement. Without her, I would have lost meaning to live long ago. I wouldn't have gotten proper food, good education, health, and tender love if not for her.

This time, I'm going to show how much I appreciate her love, how grateful I am to have her in my life, by quitting drugs! Because it hurts from within me, to see the woman who loves me like no one else does, cry every time she sees me behind bars.

This woman dedicated and sacrificed her time, energy, and life for me. Only because she loves me and wants the best for me! I am very grateful and thank God all day for blessing me with her. I am honoured beyond limit to call her my mother! I love you.

Gratitude

Gratitude, a warm and tender feeling,
A sense of peace and joy revealing,
An appreciation of the good,
That in our lives has always stood.

It's easy to forget at times,
The blessings that have been divined,
To focus on what we don't have,
And ignore the joys that make us glad.

But gratitude, when we embrace,
Can fill our hearts with love and grace,
And help us see the beauty bright,
That shines around us day and night.

The smile of a friend, a loving embrace,
The warmth of the sun on our face,
The laughter of children, the beauty of art,
All these things can fill our heart.

So let us take a moment each day,
To give thanks for the blessings on our way,
For the love that surrounds us all,
And the joys that make life a ball.

With gratitude in our hearts and minds,
We can face each day with love that binds,
And find a sense of peace and joy,
That nothing in this world can destroy.

Thank You for Teaching Me

Firstly, I am grateful for my given life itself, grateful for my loving mother who gave me this life. Grateful for my amazing family and the great friends I've made throughout my life. I'm grateful for every new day and every new possibility I'm given. But more importantly, I'm grateful for my life's hardships and struggles. The most difficult times of my life, as they were my life's biggest teachers. From me being diagnosed with an incurable chronic (Crohn's) disease, to getting my heart broken, to even this phase of being incarcerated here now in DRC. These are the best teachers in my life and I'm grateful for them.

There is a saying "Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except for one thing: Your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation." You cannot control what happens to you in life, but you can control how you will feel about it. Of course, life could've been a lot better without my sickness, but it certainly made me who I am today. Teaching me how to be grounded, to be positive, to appreciate life's simple joys, and to be grateful for each day given to me. Sometimes the problem is that we don't even realize that we are walking a new road every day. We could make everyday count and live it to the fullest within our means.

It is this mindset that made me understand my time in prison better. To accept things as they are and take the time in here to work on my inner self. To focus and plan on the changes I could bring about in my life when I get released and go back into the world. This situation now had to happen to take me to where I need to go in my life in the coming future. And for this realization and my difficult experiences, I am grateful for! One thing I do know - life will give us whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of our consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need now? Because this is the experience you are having at this moment! Live every moment and be grateful for it!

A New Future?

Have you ever wondered different your future would be if drugs didn't exist?

After release from DRC 1, I felt very positive and driven to live life to the fullest as I missed out so much. I started to appreciate simple things in life, such as taking public transport home, enjoying my meals at the coffee shop and spending time with my family. I also started working at a restaurant as a server and I am thankful that Yellow Ribbon managed to find me a job in such a short time even during Covid period. Fast forward a year, my life became much more stable, and I had a greater sense of responsibility. I was even promoted to a team lead within three months of working.

Basking in contentment from the achievements, I began to lose focus. Initially, I thought a little self-control to discipline my usage would be sufficient. I just need to be professional at work and be smart to clear my urine test. I still remember the look in my mum and aunt's eyes when I was apprehended. Their eyes were full of grieve and that broke my heart. I have once again ruined the trust that I worked so hard to regain.

Moving forward, I would want to do things differently. I would like to be part of a religious community and further my studies in fine arts. I strongly believe that my parents would be proud to see these changes in me. I would also like to encourage all of you here to make a positive difference in your future.

Letting Go, Holding On

A Solemn Promise to Myself

I have always lived my life dismissing the importance of thinking or planning for my future. It was only during my first week in solitary confinement at CPC where I began to understand the importance of goal setting and turning my dreams into reality. After pondering, I realized that there are certain changes that I need to make. Firstly, I would need to distance myself from my negative circle of friends. Secondly, I would need to discard my ego and hot temper as they have not done anything positive for me. By doing so, I would be able to close this chapter and embark on a new path, a path where I am able to find meaning in life, enjoy new experiences and most importantly, be a good son and a future husband. A quote that really motivates me to change for the better is "You can't change what is going on around you until you start changing what is going on within you." I am the author of my own story, the captain of my ship and the master of my destiny. It is time that I take ownership of my part mistakes and work towards a brighter future, starting from furthering my studies upon release.

Armed with my newfound confidence and positive mindset, there is certainly no mountain too high for me to climb. I know that if I set my mind to it, there is nothing that I cannot achieve. Furthermore, I am confident to be able to better cope with my stress and difficult emotions. Instead of turning to drugs, I would be using the tools I have learnt- deep breathing, meditation, and healthy coping to resist my cravings and triggers. The road ahead may be challenging but I believe that I can overcome the obstacles!

A Father's Desired Future Self

Coming back to prison after 9 years was not easy for me, as my three children are all grown up and leading their teenage lives. They have only known me as a role model father, but when I was caught in Feb 2023 for my drug use all my respect from my family, friends, and society were gone. Serving my sentence in DRC has taught me a lot of lessons. The programs I attended have really helped me to go through my life. My first visit which I will never forget at all, will always remind me of how grateful I must be to my wife. My children still could not accept the fact that took drugs, but on the other hand my wife was still supporting me and telling my children that it was because of some accident where things went wrong that led me to take drugs.

After 2 months in prison my children have started adding me in e-letters and started the conversation. In every letter which I send out I will express my gratitude to them and my wife, telling them thank you for supporting me throughout my sentence, visiting me without fail whether rain or shine. I have promised to myself that this is my last and no more, as I do not want to fail in my responsibilities. I am grateful to my wife who is my pillar, and I will do the very best for my family. Thank you Dear.



A Future with My Family

Big cars, big house, rich, healthy, long life. Before I came in, this was my desired future. But today these are all my wants, and not my needs. My desired future is to be by my family's side at all moments, regardless of happiness or sadness. My only desire is just to be there for them. I have wasted too much time, lost too many good or bad memories with my loved ones. We all know that we are unable to reverse time, but we can control our future, and I just want to be by my loved ones' side whether it is rain or shine. I believe that I can do it - to be with them any moment they need me, and I will be contented. The best way to do it is to never disappoint them anymore, listen to them and follow them throughout the times.

Family must be always be number one in my heart. I love them, and I am proud of it.

Things may fall apart. That's life. But if we're wise, we can use every scrap, patch ourselves up and keep going.

Reflections of a Desistor

I was an ex-addict in the past. Now a freelance chef and also a prison volunteer. I'm grateful to those past experiences in my life, they shaped me into who I am and what I do now, of course not forgetting those prison volunteers who come into the prison to give me encouragement during my years of incarceration.

If I did not encounter those dark moments in my life, I have no idea of how hard it is for an ex-offender to be reintegrate back to the society workforce. I will not understand how much damages I have brought in to my family and loved ones. I will not even learn and know how to manage my life now, especially when I am facing struggles and temptation, who should I turn to for help and assistance.

I have learned to cherish every moment of freedom I have now, spending quality time with my family and friends.

Also not forgetting to upgrade myself by taking courses. Going back to school is not just a dream anymore, I know if I put in effort, with the help from volunteers and our government agencies, my dream will come true.

My goal now is to pass my Tourist Guide Course and get my STB Tour Guide License to become a qualified Tourist Guide in Singapore.

Many thanks to my family, friends, volunteers and all those who believed in me, your support in any ways really means a lot to me. Having a dream, set it into a goal, put in effort to achieve that goal, it helps me to build up my confidence in life, especially doing new things in future.

Never give up hope, never stop learning.

- Alvin Chiong

Reflection Corner

After reading the submissions:

- What is one story that stands out to you?
- What inspires you?
- What is one small step that you can take today to practice gratitude?
- What is something that you can start doing to move closer to your desired future?

Thank you to all for your submissions and for reading this issue. You may jot your reflections down in your map planner. Stay tuned for our next issue.

"Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow" - Melody Beattie

This column is brought to you by S1 CRSes.

