



Inside The Walls

Anson Correctional Institution

Polkton, NC

We Need to Talk

by Michelle Theer



Talking about breast health isn't exactly the hot topic of anyone's "tea talk." In fact, in the not so distant past the subject was considered impolite and even forbidden in mixed company. A woman

with breast cancer would suffer alone, in silence, isolated from her community. Thankfully that has changed in much of the modern world today. Breast cancer and its treatment is more openly discussed, much like diabetes or heart attacks. Those who are receiving treatment can discuss their diagnosis, receive support and comfort, and not feel embarrassed to discuss their therapy.

But what about prevention? Are we comfortable having conversations around mammograms and self-exams? As important as early detection is, these are important topics and part of the conversations we need to have with those in our life.

What can inhibit these conversations? For one thing, it can be embarrassing for some people to talk about their breasts because breasts are sexual and the focus is "too personal." Others may feel they don't need to worry about it, because no one in their family has had breast cancer. Shame, embarrassment and busy schedules are mindsets that can lead to disempowerment around health and wellbeing.

When you want to talk to someone about breast health, set the stage by creating a safe space where they will be

comfortable. There is a right time and place for

everything, so make sure you choose wisely. Be aware of the stigmas that may come up in the conversation.

Acknowledge up front that yes, while it can be embarrassing and awkward, every part of your body needs clinical care. Let the person know you care about them and their health and breast cancer is too prevalent to not talk about.

Next, share something personal about yourself and why this topic is important to you. Be honest and genuine. Give reliable information which will let them know how important early detection is for women of all ages. For example, 1 in 8 US women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. It can happen to anyone, at any age and early detection is critical. When it is detected and treated in the earliest stages, the five-year survival rate is 99%.

Since some women may not know the symptoms, or may ignore them thinking they will go away, it is important to talk about them and what they are. Sometimes women notice these symptoms and assume they will go away. Other times they feel they are too busy to get them checked out or too afraid of confronting the truth. Talking about concerns with a trusted friend can help break down the fear. The chart on page three gives some examples of what you may hear and how to reframe those excuses into an empowering way of taking control.

One of the most key factors in safe-

(Continued on page 2)



Warden: Ms. Carol Torres

Publisher: Ms. D. Williams

Editor: Michelle Theer

Editor at Large: Gwen Moorehead

Inside this issue:

<i>My Cancer Journey</i>	2
<i>My Survival Story</i>	3
<i>Breast Cancer Walk</i>	4
<i>Getting It Right with Changed Choices</i>	5
<i>Fall Festival</i>	6
<i>IN2WORK Graduation</i>	7
<i>The Last Supper</i>	8
<i>If You Only Knew...</i>	10
<i>Fierce Ink</i>	12

Mission Statement:

Our objective is to provide a platform for the voices inside, and to inspire positive change and prosocial behavior that demonstrates rehabilitation.

My Cancer Journey

by Sonya Stephenson



My name is Sonya Stephenson. Most of you know me, some of you don't. I want everyone who cares about their health to read my story.

Back in December of 2014, I felt a knot in my left breast and had it checked out. It took the doctors at NCCIW six months after the biopsy was done to tell me that it was breast cancer. By then, it had already spread to my

lymph nodes. If I hadn't found out when I did, I would have lost my left breast.

Being told you have cancer of any kind is pure terror. I didn't know how I would survive without my family, them being at home and I was here in prison. This is a deadly disease if you don't keep up with it. I was ready to accept the unexpected.

Cancer is a very complicated disease. And if you give up or allow it to beat you, then it can kill you. Having breast cancer, I had to do four long months of chemotherapy twice a week. The chemotherapy was too strong and it caused my skin to fall off if I rubbed it too hard or in the wrong way. They had to stop the chemotherapy for two weeks for my body to heal before they started me on another type of chemo. My UNC hospital team was very compassionate and caring, they took the time to reassure me that everything was going to be alright during my whole ordeal.

My chemotherapy had to be done before they could do surgery and remove the knot. Then once the surgery was over with the removal of twelve lymph nodes, I had to do six weeks of radiation every day. It was painful, scary and something that no person should have to go through alone. No family by my side, or friends to be there to just hold my hand with reassurance I would get through this, which felt just as bad as chemo. The throwing up, the chills, the mental state you are placed in with emotional pain is some-

thing only the strong can survive, not knowing if you will live or die. I was scared, but I reached out to God to help me make it. As you can see He heard my cry. I stayed strong.

When I started losing my long beautiful hair and all the hair on my body, I begin to deal with a lot of self-loathing, I didn't feel pretty like I used too. It took my daughter and sons to tell me "Ma, you are still beautiful with no hair. You can buy any color or any style you want to, and besides, hair don't make you who you are. You are a strong and beautiful Phenomenal Black Woman who will beat cancer's butt." That helped me embrace my beauty without covering my head with a scarf and I was not worried about getting my body back right. It was more of an emotional need than a physical need.

It was God, and my inner strength, that showed me that I could handle this and not allow this awful disease to beat me, but for me to beat it. Everyone said that my resilience exceeded beyond what anyone could expect.

Cancer hurts. Cancer is scary. Please get tested, even if you don't know if it runs in your family. Get your mammograms done, and stay on it. It could and will save your life. I still fear cancer coming back, somewhere within my body.

My praise report is I have been cancer-free for ten years. I am waiting for a date to go home after 28 years. AMEN!! My advice to anyone dealing with this disease is to never give up no matter what your situation may be.



Sonya is the mother of 3 grown children; 2 sons and 1 daughter. She also has 8 grandchildren who she can't wait to get home to. She enjoys listening to music, reading and crocheting.

Talk continued...

(Continued from page 1)

keeping breast health is to know your own breasts. Changes in the size or texture of the skin or nipple, lumps or discharge, will be more apparent if you regularly check your girls and know what is normal for you. This is easy to do in the shower where your hand can easily slide over the surface of the skin and the light is bright. Things to look for include:

- lump or thickening in the breast or underarm area
- change in size or shape of breast
- inverted nipple, or nipple turned inward to the breast
- dimpling or puckering in the skin or breast
- discharge of fluid from the nipple
- scaly, red or swollen skin on the breast, nipple, or areola

If you detect these changes, don't be alarmed, but don't ignore them either. Put in a request to see your

provider to be evaluated immediately. Often these changes are not due to cancer, but only a professional can diagnose and treat the problem. Don't delay in finding out.

Next, when talking about breast health, plan to take action together. This may mean doing research, scheduling appointments, or getting education materials. Finally, show your appreciation for her taking the time to open up to you. Focus on the empowerment that comes from taking control of your own health.



My Survival Story

by Heather Surratt



The years of 2021 and 2022 were two of the most challenging ones of my life. It all began the morning of June 8, 2021. I was in the shower when I felt a rather large lump on my breast. I thought, “Surely not, I’m only 47.” My instinct was to declare a medical emergency! Rationally, I decided to put in a sick call. Medical staff here was amazing! They acted quickly and sent me out for a biopsy. By July I was officially

diagnosed with stage-3 breast cancer.

Fear crept in. Fear screamed at me, “you’re going to die!” Fear taunted me, telling me over and over I was not going to make it home to my children and family. But God is bigger than that bully called fear! He wrapped me in his loving arms and whispered, “have faith, I’m going to heal you.” Once I let go of fear and trusted God, I began praying—praying for any and all medical staff and doctors that would lay their hands on me.

At my first appointment with my oncologist at Levine Cancer Center I knew God heard and answered my prayers. Dr. Browse broke the ice by telling me I was his first patient with this address, (prison). He then took my hands, looked me in the eyes and bowed his head to pray. He didn’t care I was handcuffed, shackled and accompanied by two armed officers.

Ultimately, I had three tumors in my left breast that were rapidly growing. Dr. Browse and my team of doctors wanted me to start aggressive treatment immediately. But as we all know, the state does nothing immediately. By the time everything got approved and an appointment was made the cancer had progressed to stage-4A!

I cannot express to all of you enough how important early detection is. Had I had my annual screenings and

found out at an earlier stage, I potentially could have had a simple surgery to have the tumors removed. Instead, I had to have a port put in my chest and endure a gruesome chemotherapy nicknamed “The Red Devil” due to its color and aggressiveness. After a few months of chemo to shrink the tumors, I had surgery to remove half my left breast and 16 lymph nodes.

Although my hair started growing back, my treatments weren’t quite over. Every day for two months I had radiation therapy. I now take a chemo pill that I’ll continue for ten years. The side effects of this medication are not fun but I’m happy to say I am now three and a half years in remission.

I’ll forever be grateful for my team of doctors at Levine Cancer Center, but if I’d put my faith in them, my faith would’ve been weak. By looking to God and his promises my faith grew strong. By His grace I survived. I can be honest about how I almost gave in to fear instead of relying on the faithfulness of God. Not only did he heal me and give me peace through this storm, he also surrounded me with compassionate nurses and officers. I also lived with a great group of friends who helped me on the days I was physically weak and emotionally drained.

Lastly, I’d like to take a moment to remember a very special friend named Vickie Caudle who lost her fight with breast cancer right in the middle of my chemo treatments. She knew she was dying but still she encouraged me and prayed for me.



Heather has 4 beautiful children, 2 grandsons and 1 grand-dog that she loves unconditionally. She is a member of the Anson Alliance Club, sings on the choir and works in the Chapel.

Reason for Avoidance:

Reframe:

I’m a busy parent.

I prioritize my health so I can be present for my family.

I’m afraid to get bad news.

Fear won’t make it go away. It’s best to be proactive about my health.

A well-woman exam is uncomfortable.

I can withstand a short amount of discomfort. Regular exams will give me the best chance at early detection.

A mammogram is painful.

I don’t want to inconvenience anyone by taking time out for an appointment.

My health is a priority. I am worth it.

I can’t afford a mammogram.

There are financial resources available to help me. I will seek them out.

I don’t feel comfortable with my doctor.

I can advocate for myself until I find a doctor I feel comfortable with.

The women in my family don’t prioritize health.

I am in charge of my health and can set a healthy example for younger generations.

I don’t know how to do a self-exam or what a lump feels like.

There are free resources that make self-exam awareness easy. I’ll do some research.

It’s easy to forget self-exams.

I can set an alarm on my calendar/phone. I don’t want to look back and wish I had done more.

Breast Cancer Walk

by Gwen Moorehead



Ms. Helms shared her survival story.

Anson had a Cancer awareness walk that focused on breast cancer as well other cancers that effect people in general. The event was on Tuesday October 13, 2025 there were two speakers, one of our volunteers who graces us with her jokes when she comes for church Ms. Sandy Helms who is from Mission for Jesus Ministries. Heather Surratt who is a resident here at Anson. Ms. Helms shared her story on how she found out she had breast cancer. She stated she didn't do self-breast exams, if she had she would have caught it early she could have started treatment early. May 2022, she noticed a lump under her arm she thought it was nothing, she got antibiotics for it and it went down. The lump returned and this time she had a biopsy and it turned out to be cancer. She stated that she wasn't afraid to die she allow her faith to carry her. She also told how she prayed over everyone who touched her. Long story short she had a complete mastectomy and found out she had cancer in both breasts. She had reconstruction in 2023 and she is now 70 years-old and has been a year and half cancer free.

Noelia, from Anson County Health Dept brought pamphlets. She talked about how to do self-exams. Early detection is key. When breast cancer is detected early, and is in the localized stage, the five-year survival rate is 99%. Early detection includes doing monthly breast self-exams and scheduling regular clinical exams and mammograms.

Heather Surratt found out she had breast cancer in 2021 she has been cancer free for three and half years. Heather's story is feature in this issue.

Sandy and Heather stressed that you please do self-exams on yourself and if you find something seek medical attention. Sandy left us with a song is the anthem for breast cancer, *When Pink was Just Another Color* by Dolly Parton.



Kick Cancer in the...!



Written information provided by the Anson County Health Department.



Noelia came from the Anson County Health Department to share important health information.



**photos in this story courtesy of Ms. D. Williams*

Each unit came during their gym call to hear a presentation and do the walk.



Warden Torres talked about the importance of self-care.



Residents walk around the gym after hearing information about breast cancer.

Getting It Right with Changed Choices

by Gwen Moorehead



We were blessed to be able to attend this awesome seminar with Changed Choices on October 15th, 2025. The classes were divided up into three classes, each class focusing on one specific topic.

Values in Action was taught by Olaniyi Zainabu and Gayle Eason it dealt with Core Values, where we explored what truly matters to each individual. Was

taught to evaluate whether our choices and behaviors reflect those values and saw how living out our values can positively affect others. Together, we learned practical ways to stay true to who we are — while incarcerated and learn how to create a vision to be who we want to be.

Clear Thinking. Strong Living (Responsible Thinking) was taught by Diane Hunt and Challise Cantleberry. This class was designed to explore our twisted thinking patterns we all have from time to time. It helps to discover how these patterns shape your choices and habits, and learn life giving ways to transform our thoughts. It teaches us how-to walk-in freedom, strength, and hope for the future.

Power Within (Self Control) Monique Smith and Susan Padgett, it was here that we explored the areas of our life where self-control makes the biggest difference, helps us understand how our choices shape our habits and future, and offers practical ways to nurture patience, balance, and inner strength even in challenging moments. Speaking with both facilitators after this class, they both were so glad to be able to come into this facility and teach ways to deal with self-control. Monique knows of the stresses of prison she has been home for five years, and is a house manager for the Transitional house for Change Choices. Monique plans to continue her education by get-



Changed Choices Coaches Olaniyi Zainabu, Monique Smith, Diane Hunt, Challise Cantleberry, Susan Padgett & Gayle Eason.

ting her certification in Substance and Alcohol Abuse.

The take away from this class was: we need to stop with our bad behavior and start with a new behavior. Self-discipline is following up on that change. The ways to grow in self-control is to talk it out. Learning to look at things in a different perspective. Start a journal. Writing it sometimes helps to get it out.

Those who like to see this program return to this facility please send a request to programs asking for this program to return. The thing this writer hears all the time is that we don't have anything to do, start suggesting programs you would like to see come to Anson.

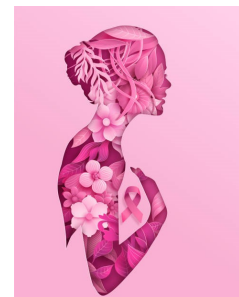
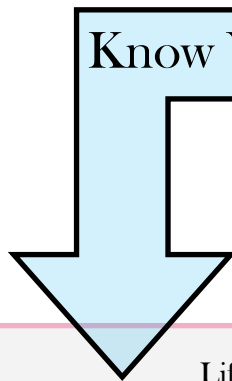
Gwen enjoys spending time reading and writing. She is 1st Chair of the Defenders Veterans Group. She gives her time to helping out wherever she is needed and is an avid Warriors and Cowboys fan.

*1 out of 8 women in the US will get breast cancer in her lifetime.

*This year more than 276,000 new cases of breast cancer will be found in US women.

*There are more than 3.5 million in the US who have survived breast cancer.

Know Your Risk



Risk Factors for Breast Cancer

- ◇ Being born Female
- ◇ Age 55 or older
- ◇ Personal/family history of breast cancer
- ◇ Inheriting gene changes
- ◇ Starting menstruation early
- ◇ Having late menopause
- ◇ Having dense breast tissue
- ◇ Having radiation to the chest

Lifestyle related risk factors

- ⇒ Drinking alcohol
- ⇒ Excess body weight, esp. after menopause
- ⇒ Not being physically active
- ⇒ Not having children
- ⇒ 1st child after age 30
- ⇒ Certain types of birth control

Fall Festival

by Michelle Theer



The month of Fall Festival kicked off on Tuesday, October 21, 2025. The gym was filled with carnival-style games and fair food which delivered a fun and festive atmosphere for residents to get out of their pods for an hour. The festi-

val was sponsored by Recreation Supervisor Mrs. DeBerry in order to raise funds for the gym.

There were a variety of games to choose from, some involving luck others involving skill. 'Frankenstein's Dentist' was a beanbag game in which one had to knock out all of the monster's "teeth" to win a prize. The 'Haunted Hole' game was cornhole boards decorated with spooky pictures and skill was required for it as well since you had to get three out of three in to win. A Headless Horseman bowling game required all ten pins to be knocked down to win a prize and the 'Eyeball Toss' gave people three eyeballs to knock down a stack of jack-o-lantern pins to win.

Other games involved luck such as the 'Mystery Pull' – draw three eyeballs from the box and win if you get a matching set. Graveyard putt-putt tested the ability to manage stress since you had as many putts as you wanted to get the ball in the hole - but had to manage it in 40 seconds!

These amazing creations were designed by a team headed by Dawn Murphy and Amber Burch. They were assisted by Apryl Smith, Bryanna Jarvis, Dedric Mason, Marcy Helms, Amanda Justice, AJ Kwiatkowski, Shai Civils and Whitney McMahan.

The gym was additionally decorated with harvest and Halloween themed paintings that added to the atmosphere, many of which were done by Alliance Club member Velma Westling. There were life-size paintings of, a

Frankenstein holding a skull, gargoyles, and a skeleton opening a door. A full-size scarecrow greeted visitors next to the raffle table at the entrance arch and a coffin stood next to the bowling lanes.

Music played in the background and groups gathered around the Big Bone Limbo. It seemed to just favor those with youth and flexibility! But many, young and old, had a great time hamming it up and dancing their way under the dinosaur sized femur.

Warden Torres liked to drop in and spend time visiting with the residents and absorbing the vibe. She also liked to shake things up and help them have fun towards the end of the hour by hosting impromptu dance contests. Pumping up the music and offering prizes, she would call together the crowd and have them showcase their moves. This was a favored occurrence for both those who participated and for the observers. Many were surprised by the excellent dancing they saw. Ms. Torres would like to see more people be brave and get out there to have some fun. So, don't be surprised, there just might be something in Anson's future similar to *Dancing With The Stars*.

Tables with cotton candy, popcorn and snow cones were on sale for \$2 each. Cotton candy was the hottest item on the floor and the machine couldn't make it fast enough. There were lines every day, with people buying two or more bags every time they came. Nachos were available on Thursday and Fridays. The last week showcased funnel cakes as a grand finale. Bags of candy and cosmetic and hygiene items were also available to purchase.

This fair gave residents an hour every week to play games, enjoy fair food and music, and just escape the stress of prison.



Shakoya Smith limbos her heart out.



Headless Horseman Bowling



Graveyard putt-putt in the foreground and the Frankenstein's Dentist game in background.



A resident races to get her golf ball up the ledge onto the top platform.

**photos in this story courtesy of Ms. D. Williams.*

IN2WORK Graduation

by Michelle Theer



On Tuesday, October 21, 2025, seventeen Prison Industry Enterprise (PIE) workers completed the IN2WORK program. IN2WORK is a reentry program that aims to reduce recidivism by providing classroom education, on the job training and reentry support services upon release for food service and warehouse workers.

In this class, workers learn warehouse safety skills, PPE, merchandise receiving, food and chemical storage procedures and become OSHA-10 certified. Once they have completed this program, they have job coaching and employment assistance for the remainder of their career, not just their first job after prison. Katrena Oxendine said, "You have your skills, trade, certification and a network of people behind you. I really wish everyone was able to get this."

After a welcome from Aramark Workforce Manager Belinda Peterson, speakers for the event included Warden Torres, Chief Deputy Secretary of DAC Tamera Hill, and Workforce Instructor Ilona Curry. Ms. Curry is the National Coordinator for the program and knows what it is like being incarcerated. She has a felony record and was once incarcerated herself. She started with the program inside and completed the residency certification and OJT program herself. Now she runs the program nationally.

After she spoke, certificates were presented by instructor Belinda Peterson. Graduates received a nationally recognized certificate in Warehouse and Logistics from the National Retail Federation Foundation upon completing the training. They are also awarded a scholarship for \$10,000 for themselves and four more they can confer on family members or friends. The scholarships are worth \$2,500 a year for four years and can be used at any accredited educational institution. This includes academic, vocational, online or in-person education.

Two graduates gave a short speech. Ahmarie Gaines talked about not giving anyone the power to tell her story for her. She has learned that she is the author of her story, which relies on the presence of the Lord. She has a determination to rise above her incarceration. Louise Coleman said that because of this program she has a measure



Table decorations



of certainty about the future of her life. She has learned bravery is not an emotion, it is a choice. It mean being scared and going forward anyway.

The final speech was given by Ms. D. Williams who gave the graduates a speech of encouragement in the form of a proposal for their futures. She ended the speech with a quote from the book *Hey Sis*, "Today is your reminder to be proud of how far you've come. You've survived things you didn't even speak on. Don't wait for the world to clap for you – celebrate yourself. You are the evidence that grace works."

After the program, graduates were served by their co-workers who had completed the program in the past. They enjoyed a light meal with family and friends who were able to attend the ceremony. Sub sandwiches, cake, fruit and drinks were offered to all.

Other guests included mental health staff, case workers, social workers, unit managers, and administration. In addition, VIP guests included Mr. John Coleman, Deputy Director of Correctional Enterprises and from Raleigh Mrs. Hutcherson who is Operations Manager of Female Command for the Central Region and Mr. Farmer, Program Director for the Central Region. They were all present to cheer on the graduates for their accomplishment.



Mr. Smith of PIE chats with Warden Torres and Ms. Hill - the Chief Deputy Secretary of DAC.



L to R Back Row : Ahmarie Gaines, Autumn Burbans, Ashley Hara, Tara Stevens, Miaciah Henderson-Palmer, Courtney Pemberton, Alejandra Bravo, Leah Helton, Joanna Julius, Misty Witherspoon, Adrienne Johnson. Front Row: Katrena Oxendine, Unique McQueen, Theresa Johnson, Kayla Stroud, Sherita McNeil.



Ms. Mims & Mr. Coleman, Deputy Director of Correctional Enterprises.

Graduates

Alejandra Bravo
Autumn Burbans
Louise Coleman
Ahmarie Gaines
Ashley Hara
Leigh Helton
Miaciah Henderson-Palmer
Adrienne Johnson
Teresa Johnson
Joanna Julius
Sherita McNeil
Unique McQueen
Katrena Oxendine
Courtney Pemberton
Tara Stevens
Kayla Stroud
Misty Witherspoon

*photos in this story courtesy of Mr. Smith & Mrs. Lamar

The Last Supper

by Michelle Theer



Mrs. Clark spoke about her experience mentoring the apprentices.

Wednesday, October 22, 2025 marked the final graduation of Culinary Apprenticeships at Anson Correctional. Graduates Lori Chappelle, Adrienne Smith and Jessica Tyson each presented a meal they cooked for the completion of their apprenticeships with alumnae April Smithey, Jeanette Blakeney and Ashley Balance on hand to assist and serve.

In the visitation center, tables were decorated with festive settings that were elegant and simple. Tablecloths in solid yellow, orange or black covered each table which was topped with a scarecrow sitting on a base of vari-colored mini pumpkins, chrysanthemums and fall shades of colored leaves. The places were set with clear dinnerware and real silverware.

As guests arrived, the chefs served iced coffee and hot pumpkin spice lattes as a sweet appetizer. Both were rich, sweet and delicious. Ms. D. Williams jokingly asked, "Can you come make me coffee every morning?"

When the program formally began, Mrs. Clark welcomed the guests. Attending from the institution were Ms. Torres, Mr. Rogers, Ms. Mims, Ms. D. Williams, Mrs. Bivens, Mrs. Presley, Ms. Polk and various other social workers and programs staff. Special outside guests included Mr. Harrington, former kitchen manager here at Anson who retired last year. Jeanette Blakeney was tearful when greeting him and introduced him as her mentor. Also attending was Ms. Thomson from Albemarle.

Ms. Clark said she was calling this meal 'The Last Supper' because this was her last culinary class graduation before her retirement. There are no other apprentices

in the pipeline at this time. She has coached two classes through the apprenticeship program and praised all the women for their talent and abilities. She said she knows they can make a difference both outside and here in this community by setting a legacy for others through their accomplishments. Finally, she expressed her appreciation for the support of the administration and asked that everyone encourage the residents in their endeavors.

The three graduates each cooked their own meal. They were able to select whatever food they wished to prepare for the meal. They took turns presenting their meal, then prepared a tasting plate for each guest.

Adrienne Smith went first. She described her meal and explained that she wanted to cook foods that she knew, but at a level above and beyond. She chose to make a chuck roast with sides of grilled asparagus, wild rice and rolls topped with grated cheese. Her meal tasted fantastic. The roast was tender and juicy and the gravy was dark and thick with deep intense flavor. Mr. Rogers commented that he does not normally like asparagus but even he liked it the way she cooked it. Warden Torres said her meal was home cooking elevated to a 5-star meal.

Next up was Jessica Tyson who talked about using this apprenticeship opportunity to learn as much as possible and how she wants to pass her knowledge and skills on to her community. Jessica can talk about food in a way that is like listening to poetry. She presented an elevated Southern meal of hot honey fried chicken, a collard green sandwich made with corn fritter cakes, roasted corn on the cob, and oven-fried fatback. This labor-intensive meal also got rave reviews and staff started to clamor for takeout boxes at this point. Several people commented that they

(Continued on page 9)



Jessica Tyson cooks & presents with passion.



Hot honey fried chicken, roasted corn on the cob and fried fatback were served by Chef Tyson.



Adrienne Smith stands ready to serve.

Last Supper continued...

(Continued from page 8)

usually did not like collard greens, but that these were delicious.

Finally, Lori Chappelle presented the meal she chose to make. She thanked Ms. Williams for having faith in her and giving her a vote of confidence when she started her apprenticeship by telling Mrs. Clark that she would make a good candidate. She explained she wanted to stick to her country roots. Her grandmother used to cook on a wood-stove and you could feel the love cooked into the food; Lori wanted to emulate this. Her meal consisted of a juicy meatloaf bursting with flavor, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole and yeast rolls. Again, everyone was full of praise and let her know that this typical American meal had been imbued with complex flavors that was superior to standard fare.

But these chefs were not done yet. Even as everyone was groaning and holding their middle, the desserts came out. That's right: blueberry cobbler, peach pie, pumpkin pie, pecan pie cobbler, and sweet potato cobbler – with ice cream to go on top. There were even decorative (yet delicious) pastry leaves cut out by hand. Luckily, there is always room for a bit of dessert! These fall delights were a sweet way to end this banquet of Americana. Mr. Farmer from Raleigh was present at the IN2WORK graduation the day previous and mentioned he regretted he would miss out on this event. He has no idea the feast he passed up!

These graduates thanked their apprenticeship classmates April Smithey, Jeanette Blakeney and Ashley Balance. They also expressed appreciation to Mrs. Allen and C/O's Gaddy and Galbraith in the kitchen for their mentoring and assistance with not only this meal but throughout the program.



Lori Chappelle answers questions from staff.



Blueberry cobbler, apple pie and pumpkin pie! Oh, my!



Pecan pie cobbler and sweet potato pie cobbler.



Warden Torres speaks to the guests.

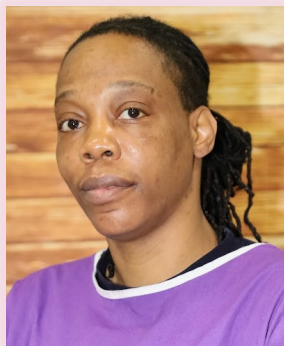
It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

~Nelson Mandela

Michelle was blessed with an invitation to this meal and could taste the love that was cooked into the food. Although she has never liked collard greens before, she ate every bite of these! This was also the first time she ever had a pumpkin spice latte. Yum!

If You Only Knew...

by Cassandra Mingo



My journey in life from the time I was born was an uphill battle - given up as a newborn, passed around from foster home to foster home until I was considered "too old" to be adopted. From there I was passed around from group home to group home or wherever child services could find shelter for me on short notice.

Early on I had a drive in me to beat the odds of a black kid from the ghetto. I wanted to do something with myself in a general sense besides be a statistic. I had small goals like stay alive, graduate high school and go to college. But it seemed like life just wanted to get in my way. If it wasn't one thing it was another and with no parental guidance I was on my own.

I loved school, so attendance wasn't a problem at first and I was a pretty sharp kid. But with an empty stomach and basic needs not being met by the group home, I made the choice to put school aside and take care of things the adults were supposed to worry about.

I soon found myself doing exactly what I told myself I didn't want to do...selling drugs. With my baby face I stuck to the school zones to avoid the older drug dealers having a problem with me being out there making money a block away. Some of you may know I was playing a dangerous game and if I was caught I would've paid clearly. After a close call with a round-up squad I had to go back to the drawing board.

I still had dreams and they didn't involve getting locked up. So, I set out to find a legal way to make money. Once I was able to find my first job, my drive and goals shifted as employment became easier to obtain without a diploma. I kept telling myself, "I'll go back to school once I'm older or when I'm financially stable." At one point I made more money than many college graduates, so I continued to feed myself excuses and lies.

Next thing I knew, getting my diploma was no longer a goal. I had money, a good job, a few cars and living in a decent neighborhood. No one was asking questions as long as I made sales. I was cool with the progress I made in life. Especially since I did it on my own. A kid from the Bronx bumping shoulders with rich people in Ballantyne was an accomplishment and I worked hard to get there. I guess perspective had me looking at life through a different scope in my late teens and early twenties.

Moving forward, I was in the fast lane of life. I thought I had it all figured out and didn't pay attention to the red flags coming from the people in my life, mainly my baby's mother. I was so focused on "making it" that I missed things going on at home. As a result, I lost the only man I've ever loved - my son. Those of you that actually know me, know my story. Those of you who don't may have your own version. But either way, poor choices and throw-

ing caution to the wind landed me in trouble.

Once I ended up in prison I was so focused on how wrong the justice system did me. Instead of taking the time the judge gave me and focusing on my education I decided to be that street kid that ran away in the Bronx.

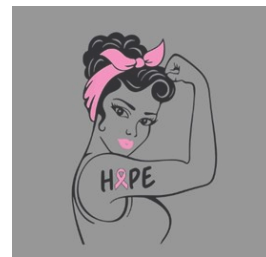
I've done Max-Cons, ICONS and was never on the yard for more than two weeks before I was back in seg for assaulting someone. That went on for a few years, but I can honestly say my love for reading and writing pulled out the dormant goals I once prioritized. While I sat in that small cell for months on end wondering what to do next, I realized I was wasting away in that cell and I could be doing something to fight the same system I was upset with. After all, isn't that how this all started?

So, I wrote to Programs once I was close to getting out ICON and let them know that not only was I interested in attending HSE classes but I was also ready to fully commit to taking it seriously and graduating. There was plenty of time to change my mind but I was determined to leave prison with my diploma. For those of you that know me, you know how I am when I have my mind set on doing something.

When I finally got selected to start classes, I was excited to be in school but I knew it would be a little difficult considering I haven't been in a classroom in over twenty years. I clammed up taking a test, but Ms. Walker definitely has something special. Once she realized I was afraid of myself, she took over and pushed me. When I said "not yet," Ms. Walker said "ok" and signed me up for a test anyway. Ms. Walker proved me wrong every time and also built my confidence in the classroom. When I would doubt myself, I'd literally tell my thoughts to shut up and replace my doubts with Ms. Walker's voice. Even when I didn't want to do something, I do it if Ms. Walker told me to because she hasn't steered me wrong yet.

Now that I have my diploma, the fire in me is lit. I'm back to setting goals and making plans for my future, only now I don't have to avoid the issue of not having a diploma. Ms. Walker helped me save a part of myself that was lost for a long, long, time. Once I'm released I plan on writing books and starting a non-profit and a business consulting agency. I'm going to take a business course at a local college so I can keep as much of my future millions in my pocket as possible.

One thing I won't have to worry about is whether or not an employer is going to find out or care if I have a diploma or not. Having a diploma has opened so many doors for me and I can confidently walk through them and into my greatness. I made a decision and Ms. Walker helped me help myself. Her grit and determination to remind us that we can be more than our circumstances and break the many generational cycles led me here and I'm so thankful the hard road ended with her.



(Continued on page 11)

When Pink was Just Another Color

Written & sung by Dolly Parton, Jordan Sparks, Rita Wilson & Monica

Someday Pink will just be a color,
not a ribbon to remember,
A best friend or a mother.
Someday you won't have to put a wig on,
And a baseball cap will just be a hat.
Not something to hide under cause
Your hair is gone.
Someday is coming any day.
You gotta believe without seeing,
You gotta keep going, keep breathing.
When you face a day that feels like you're gonna break,
Lean on the ones that love you.
The guardian angels above you and think, about when pink,
Was just another color.
Someday your time will be your own time, no
Waiting rooms or doctor's news, that
Make you wanna cry, and someday, we're gonna have a party,
We'll pop pink balloons, with people who know,
Love can be an army (Is an army)
Someday it's coming, any day
When Pink is just another color.

Only Knew continued...

(Continued from page 10)

To future graduates, the best advice I could give you would be to forget where you've been and focus on where you're going. Give into "the pressure" and trust Ms. Walker's process because there is sure to be a method in the madness. I'd like to thank Ms. Walker for all that she does and investing in us all. I would also like to recognize Mr. Ingram, Sgt. Pressley, Capt. White, Mr. Woodard, Ms. Holt, Mr. Larue, Mr. Glover and Ms. Pearson for your part in my success.

Mingo is a recent graduate of Mrs. Walker's HSE class and a frequent writer for the newsletter. He is also an avid reader who enjoys writing fictional novels and plans on becoming an author. He is being released in November.

***It does not matter how
slowly you go as long as
you do not stop.***



Fierce Ink

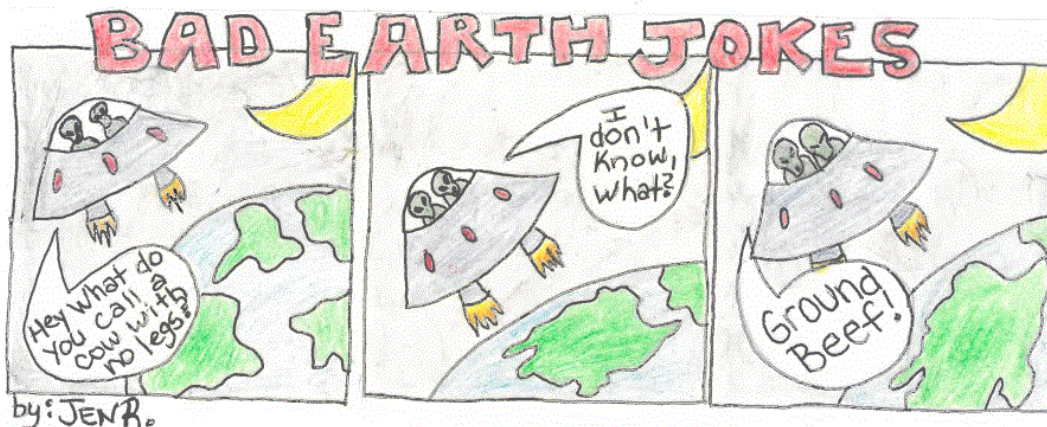
Remembered Then Forgotten

Gifts are given, not to be taken away
 One would most likely say!
 Use your heart for good, not for evil
 Or unspoken things.
 Brought about from the heart of a child,
 Given to us a life worthwhile.
 The Father gave us His Son
 Only to be abused, lost and forsaken
 Tortured and beaten!
 Never was He broken, and always
 Stood on His own two feet
 To carry our burdens
 Without complaining and
 Tears in His own eyes.
 It was us He claimed
 As His own children to love and
 Not to forsake, and for us
 To do the same for Him and
 Each other, He once spoke.

By Tina Cairnes

Remembered when everyone called on me to be there for them & look out for them then, I'm Forgotten the moment I was sentenced to 78-106 months to prison. Remembered when I was needed to fight battles with family & friends & was only a call away, but Forgotten now that I'm away in prison & need a little help here & there. Remembered when friends & family needed a babysitter or somebody to have their back; then Forgotten when its time to send a letter, love & support to me while I'm in prison. I'm only remembered when I'm beneficial to my family & friends when I was able to do whatever to help them then Forgotten when my babies need something or my Moms need a babysitter for my children. Remembered when I always stop what I'm doing to do for everyone while forgetting myself then Forgotten when I call on those same family & friends I was always there for don't ever pick up the phone & won't put money on the phone. I've learned that I'm always remembered for the things I can do or have done to please & help everybody else in my life but then always Forgotten when I need anything or any love while I'm away behind these prison walls. It hurts to only be remembered when in my family & friends physical presence then Forgotten because I'm away in prison for six & a half years!

by Taya McCathern



Cancer Won't Have

The Last Word

Tell Us Your Story!
U R Valuable!

Jailhouse Lawyers Handbook

Write to ask for a free copy of the book that will give you keys to survival and strategy during your incarceration. Know your rights and how to fight for them.

National Lawyers Guild – Prison Law Project
PO Box 1266
New York, NY 10009-8941

HUGE Shout Out to Mr.

Stanback for all the amazing ID badges he has made for the different work projects: kitchen, warehouse, canteen, gym workers, maintenance and last but not least INSIDE THE WALLS!! Thank you Mr. Stanback for providing such personalized, adorable cartoon avatars for all the people here at Anson. We appreciate you taking the time to see our personalities and recognize us for our jobs in the community.



Rant of the Week: Whether you are inmate or staff, when you say the words, "This is prison!" you are simply justifying your own bad behavior. Regardless of our location or circumstances, life is lived in the here and now. Please, stop saying this and just treat everyone like the valuable human beings they are and give them respect they deserve. It will make you look better too.

Photo Credits: Thanks to everyone who contributed photos to this issue of the newsletter. We couldn't do it without you! Mr. Smith, Mrs. Lamar, Mrs. DeBerry, Ms. D. Williams, Ms. Bivens, and the Changed Choices team too!

Call for Essays & Stories: The American Prison Writing Archive (APWA) is a growing public internet-based collection of non-fiction writing about direct experience with the US prison system. Anyone who has been incarcerated or has volunteered inside can send handwritten or typed pieces. All writing skill levels are welcome. 5,000 word limit. They will read and respond to all writing submitted.

A signed Permission-Questionnaire (PQ) form is required for writing to be included in the APWA. For more information, or to receive the PQ form, you may write to:

American Prison Writing Archive
Johns Hopkins University
3400 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218

You may also have a staff member print the PQ form from:
www.prisonwitness.org

We ♥ our Carpenter! Thanks so much to Mr. Vance in maintenance for making 4 custom bookcases for the library and also looking out for others to bring in. The more bookshelf space we have, the more books we can offer for you to choose from!

I would rather be ashes than dust. I would rather that my spark would burn out in a brilliant blaze than stifled by dry-rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet.

~Jack London

**STRONGER
THAN CANCER**

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the facility or NC DAC. We will not print content that is obscene, degrading, misleading, or promotes violence. All items submitted are subject to editing for clarity, content and space. We reserve the right to accept and reject items submitted based on the needs of the newsletter.