



Get Free And Stay Free are stories of hope, and transformation told only by those who have been in prison and who have become productive and honorable returning citizens. All stories are recorded by audio and transcribe into words. All transcripts are available for free at www.GetFreeAndStayFree.com

DAVID L. GARLOCK

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

David L. Garlock is a successful returning citizen and criminal justice reform leader. David and his brother received 25-year sentences in Alabama after taking the life of their abuser. A client of Equal Justice Initiative, he was released on parole in 2013 after serving more than 13 years and pursuing several educational opportunities while incarcerated.

GFSF: Today, I have the opportunity to speak with David Garlock in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. How are you doing today, David?

David: I am doing great, and thank you for allowing me to be interviewed for this edition of Get Free and Stay Free.

GFSF: It is my pleasure, and thank you as well. The best way for you to connect with our readers, David, is to share your story, starting wherever you would like.

David: Well, my story begins when I was 11 years old. My brother and I were sexually abused for eight years. He was a non-family member. When I was 19 and my brother was 22, we made an irrational decision to take the person's life as the only way to get out of the abuse. At 20 years old, I was arrested for a murder charge in Alabama. When I was arrested, that first weekend was probably the hardest weekend of my life. I was thinking I would get the death penalty or life without parole. On November 1, 1999, I was taken in for questioning. I was in an interrogation room for seven hours, and if you are in that type of place for that long a time, you have a lot of time to think.

I was thinking about the time and the abuse, and I finally decided to confess. After I confessed, the detective took me back to the county jail. I was asking him about what type of sentence I would get. He turned to me and asked me if I believed in God. I was like, 'I am not studying God right now; what is going to happen to me?' However, that instance was the thing that really changed the whole trajectory of my life. I got back to the county jail, got a Bible, started reading in Revelations, and I just cried out to God, not knowing what to expect.

That changed my mentality because I was going to do the time. I took advantage of all types of educational opportunities in the county jail and prison. I was able to get a GED, a drafting certificate, and a master's degree in Theology. In 2008, Bryan Stevenson and Equal Justice Initiative started working with my brother and me, and they helped both of us get out of prison. On April 1, 2013, I was released after 13 and a half years. Nine months later, I moved to Pennsylvania to attend college, and I graduated in 2017. As of this interview, I work at New Person Ministries, which is a Christian Reentry Home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. We primarily work with men who have committed sex offenses.

GFSF: Can you share what your time incarcerated was like?



Website www.GetFreeAndStayFree.com
Email contact@GetFreeAndStayFree.com
Mailing Address Get Free And Stay Free
P.O. Box 326 Gilbertsville, PA 19525

David: One of the main things that helped me do the time was my faith in God. When I was incarcerated, my mom, dad, grandma, and sister had all passed away. Dealing with these difficulties with God made it so much easier than if I did not have God during those instances. Just being able to take different education classes helped. Education is key to incarcerated people to help them think about themselves differently. Many people who are in prison do not have a GED. Once they start taking education courses, they begin to see their potential because we have been told that we were never going to amount to anything all their lives. Now they can achieve. Once they get their GED, sometimes they can get an associate degree or bachelor's degree. One of the main things that I am fighting for now is to restore the Pell Grant.

GFSF: What is the Pell Grant?

David: Before 1994, about 350 colleges and universities offered college courses in the prisons. In 1994, President Clinton enacted the Crime Bill, which took out the Pell Grant for incarcerated people. It went from 352 to about 30 universities still teaching on their own dime. In 2017, President Obama started the Second Chance Pell Grant, which allowed about 65 institutions and about a thousand inmates to receive an advanced education.

In April, we had a hearing with the Honorable Betsy DeVos and other high-ranking officials in Washington, D.C. After that, she allowed the Second Chance Pell Grant to continue, and she has also allowed more colleges and universities to be involved. At Eastern University, we are starting a prison education program. We are applying to become one of the new universities as part of this Second Chance Pell Program. There are also bipartisan bills in the House and the Senate, which hopefully will restore the Pell Grant to everyone. It would not just be a small list of institutions and a small number of inmates. When prisoners get educated, it reduces the recidivism rate by 43% to 49%.

GFSF: Some good things are going on. I don't think we hear enough of it because that's the nature of life on this earth as we know it. Bad news sells, and good news doesn't. The education piece is one of the more important things, and it sounds encouraging that progress is being made in that area. On another note, Society Human Resource Management (SHRM) is one of the most prominent human resource advocacy organizations in the United States. Over the years, employers were leery of advising employers to hire ex-offenders. Recently, however, they have teamed up with the Koch brothers and are now encouraging employers to hire returning citizens.

David: Yes, hiring returning citizens is definitely something that is coming to the forefront. There are actually quite a few businesses in Pennsylvania having job fairs within the prisons for individuals who will be released. That's something you've never really heard of before. It's like, why would a business go into a correctional facility to have a job fair? Society is beginning to understand that if you want somebody to come out of prison and be successful, there are two main things that they have to be able to acquire. That is a job and housing. For so long, people have told individuals coming out of prison, "oh, you need to come out, you need to succeed, you need a job, you need a house, but you can't get this job, and you can't live here."

We need to get to where we say, okay, this person committed a crime, but that does not necessarily define who they are now. Let's look at who they are today, and that's where we have to get to. We can't continue to have labels and stigmas on people. Society would look at me and call me a murderer. What I call myself is a man who committed a murder. I take myself and separate myself from the crime that I committed. When people can do that, they can see the humanity in the individual and say, okay, I am going to give this man or woman a second chance.



Website www.GetFreeAndStayFree.com
Email contact@GetFreeAndStayFree.com
Mailing Address Get Free And Stay Free
P.O. Box 326 Gilbertsville, PA 19525

GFSF: That is a paradigm shift opportunity in thinking, not only for the man but also for society. When people begin to look at this situation in that scope, it's a real game-changer.

David: It is because, for so long, I was a number. For 13 and a half years, I was known as 2145, but now I'm known as David Garlock, and it's empowering because I'm no longer a statistic; I'm no longer a label. I can believe in myself. It is something that I could not do before because of the way the prison system made me view myself and believe in myself. Anyone in prison or who gets out of prison has to change the way they think if they think against themselves. They must not continue to see themselves as an inmate or a number, but as a person who has potential. They need to believe that they can add value to a business, company, or society.

GFSF: Great stuff, David. Let's go back to your incarcerated period for a moment again and look at your transformation. You have shared that your transformation was spiritual and that it happened suddenly. What can you share with those who don't have or can't find the spiritual side of their journey to help them through?

David: I have a saying that there are two types of incarcerated people. You have the person who does the time, and you have the person that allows the time to do them. The person who does the time is the one who is looking for any opportunity such as programs, classes, and education to better themselves. The person who allows the time to do them is the person who just exists in prison. They often become involved with drugs, alcohol, cell phones, and those kinds of things. And or they become institutionalized. I would think of doing time as a race. The winner isn't the fastest or the slowest; it's the person who finishes their race for better and not worse.

Someone incarcerated should want to be prepared to get out of prison. There are about 2.5 million people incarcerated. 96% of those people are going to get out of prison someday. It is all about rehabilitating yourself. Yet, our system is not ideally set up for rehabilitation. I went before a judge as a youthful offender status, and he told me rehabilitation was a 70-year-old joke. If we have judges who believe that rehabilitation is not possible, it is our job to prove them wrong.

GFSF: Doing the time and not letting the time do you have a lot to do with emotional intelligence. Part of emotional intelligence sometimes involves digging down deep, being honest with oneself, and addressing issues that have kept themselves from healing. Do you have any thoughts about emotional intelligence?

David: It's a personal thing. You have to make that decision to say, 'okay, I don't like crime anymore.' I have to make specific changes. These changes will not be overnight, and it's going to be a process. I was in a behavior modification program called the Therapeutic Community in prison in Alabama. When I went there, I didn't know much about what happened to me with my sexual abuse. I didn't understand why it happened and stuff like that. I read many self-help books, and that began the healing process. Everyone in prison has experienced different types of trauma. If that trauma is not dealt with, you're going to continue to carry out destructive behaviors. There's a saying that "Hurting people hurt people." The flip side is, "Healed people heal people." I encourage people to be willing and open to looking at their trauma, which will open doors to a better life forward.

GFSF: There is a book called ***Houses of Healing: A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom***. The book was written by Robin Casarjian, who founded the Lionheart Foundation. Robin volunteered inside of prisons for many years. An excerpt from the book states, ***"From the outset of her work in prisons, it was clear to Ms. Casarjia that until prisoners were able to heal issues that were, for many, at the root of their criminal and addictive behavior, they would be unable to extract themselves successfully from the criminal justice system.*** Regardless of one's spiritual or religious beliefs, healing from trauma is key to living a life of joy instead of bondage.

David: It definitely is. I speak a lot at different events, and I always have people come up to me and say, "How can you be so open about what happened to you?" I tell them it's because I've had healing.



For somebody who doesn't have healing, it's like having a scab on our arm. We know that if we hit that scab, it will come off, and bleeding will begin again. I'm a person who has had a wound, but there's no scab anymore, just scars because of the healing process. Those experiences will always be there; however, I have the scars to remind me that I am healed. I can't bleed anymore from those particular injuries. It doesn't have that power over me anymore.

GFSF: What a great analogy! Let's move forward to when you were released. What were your three most significant challenges, and how did you overcome them?

David: The main one for me was employment. It took me two months to get my first job. I worked only one day and two hours at a restaurant. They had "The box" on the application, and I checked it and wrote, "Will discuss at the interview." They didn't ask me about it at the interview. The second day, the general manager wanted to know more about my crime. I told her that I had a violent crime and explained the whole situation to her. She said she was sorry that happened to me, and I was fired. I found out two weeks later that I was fired because of her attitude and that the company did not have policies like that.

People who come out of prison have to deal with employer hiring regulations and sometimes with individual people's thought processes. A week after I was fired, I obtained a second job, and the person who hired me said, "Man, you had a crap story. Because you are open and honest, I'm going to give you a job." I advise the men that I work with to be open and honest. I also tell them they have to believe in themselves and be a salesperson. Sell yourself and give them a reason why they would want to hire you.

Another challenge was getting out and not having my mom or dad to talk with me. And I realized that they were gone. Even when I graduated from college, just realizing that they weren't there to celebrate that with me was kind of overwhelming. I know that they would have been very proud of me and everything I am doing now.

The third challenge was housing-related. When I came to Philadelphia, I was trying to get an apartment in North Philly, and the only way they would rent to me was if the Equal Justice Initiative folks cosigned for me. After I got married, my wife and I tried to put myself on her lease, but the apartment landlord would not allow that. So, we had to look for another place. God provided an amazing home that we're still in today. I've been out five years, and they still don't want to put me on a lease or rent to me. Those issues can cause somebody to 'say, okay, forget this I'm not going to do right' and things like 'I'm going to go back to my life of crime because no one wants to give me a second chance.' Of course, they are not options for those determined to live an honorable life.

The box refers to a checkbox on job applications, housing applications, or college applications. It's that box that says, "have you ever been convicted of a felony?" In Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I know they have banned the box. What that means is on initial applications; they are not permitted by law to ask that question anymore. However, it can come up later in the hiring process.

When they take that box away, it gives the applicant more hope to pursue employment. It also allows the employer to see an applicant as a human being. Before, many applications were thrown directly in the trash right away because of someone's past. Businesses can now look at the person and potentially find out that some returning citizens are the hardest-working employees available. They are also beginning to realize that returning citizens are more likely going to prove themselves and succeed.

GFSF: Many times, a good work ethic is hard to find across many industries. This fact should encourage returning citizens, who can quickly make good first impressions by merely showing up for work on time, doing their job every day, and not creating or being a part of the drama.



Website www.GetFreeAndStayFree.com
Email contact@GetFreeAndStayFree.com
Mailing Address Get Free And Stay Free
P.O. Box 326 Gilbertsville, PA 19525

David: Absolutely. One of my jobs early on was in another restaurant. I started as a dishwasher. The owner noticed my excellent work ethic in three days and moved me to prep chef work. A good work ethic is a precious commodity for one to have. Many of my former employers have quickly learned that I would put 110% into everything that I did for them. That's a mentality that people coming out of prison should have too. They should think these people are giving me a shot. They don't have to do this, so let me go in here, let me grind, and let me take care of my business and show them that they did not make a mistake by hiring me. It's a win/win/win for the employer, employee, and future returning citizen employees.

GFSF: Great content, David! Please share some final thoughts with our readers before we end this interview.

David: Absolutely. One of the main things I would want to share is that you need to find hope even though you might have lost hope. Also, even though you might have had big dreams when you were a kid, that does not mean you cannot dream again. You can still achieve many things. You are like a seed. If you plant an acorn, that acorn might not sprout up immediately. There are times it might be in the ground for five years before it takes root and sprouts to become an elm tree. The thing you have to realize is that potential is in you. You must want to tap into it. Those men and women incarcerated now have the time to tap into that potential. Look closer at your drive, passions, and what you want to do in life. Set goals for what you want to do in the first month, the first six months, the first year, and start to live your life instead of letting life do you.

GFSF: Thank you for sharing your story of transformation, David! Congratulations on the work you continue to do passionately for those returning to society. It has become your full-time job, and your reach and influence are growing nationally. As Get Free and Stay Free publishes more editions, we look forward to inviting you back to discuss in detail more specific topics.

David: I appreciate it. I would be more than willing to come back and speak about anything that your readers may be interested in. It's like Glenn E. Martin says, "Those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution." We have been there. We've worn the orange jumpsuits; we've worn whatever color prison suits there are. We're coming from that empathy, whereas we've been there. We just want to provide support to those who are getting ready to come out and help them succeed just as we have succeeded.

GFSF: Your story reminds me of the saying...."The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step."

David: Absolutely. It is up to each person what they do with their time while they are incarcerated. It can be a time of healing, growth, and preparation; or time wasted.

GFSF: Thank you again, David.