

LIFE AFTER LIFE

A SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO SOCIETY

By
KUNTA KENYATTA
(A FORMER OHIO PRISONER)



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(A Former Ohio Prisoner)

Looking back on when this journey all began it almost doesn't seem real. The Cuyahoga County Jail with its concrete slabs for beds in closet size cells was where I got my wake up call. I was 18 years old with a 30-year prison sentence; my out date was in October of 2016. I thought I would never see the streets again; and I did my prison time accordingly, in fact, once I got settled into doing my bit, I did not even think about ever going home again. That is, until about eight years later in 1994, when I received some clemency papers in the mail from the governor's office. I didn't know anything about clemency, had not even thought about it, plus this was only about a year after the Lucasville Riot, and I was in the hole in Lucasville on an extremely violent case. So clemency was a long shot, to say the least, but I gave it a shot anyway by filling out the paperwork and sending it in. Needless to say, my request for clemency was denied but along with that denial, I was informed that I would be receiving a parole hearing in October of 1998, which was much more reasonable than my maximum out date. Knowing about that date gave me a little something to hope for, even though the parole board at that time was giving out what became known as "super flops", so, I had to switch gears and try to stay out of the way.

As it turns out, staying out of the way was too much of a task for me, you see, by now I was a marked man. After the Lucasville Riot the state of Ohio had decided that they were going to build a 500 bed super maximum security prison, whether they had 500 super maximum prisoners in the state of Ohio or not and there was never any doubt that I was going. And in Ohio you cannot be paroled from maximum security, let alone super maximum security, so I had to think of another way. Ohio's super maximum prison in Youngstown did not open up until May 1998, but the majority of those who the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections had planned to send there were kept in isolation until that time, including myself, and because I was scheduled to see the parole board that same year I was not transferred to Youngstown until after my parole hearing. I tried to prepare for my parole hearing as best as I could, being in handcuffs and shackles didn't help my cause at all, but anyway, I was told to do another 39 months with no conduct reports and I would be released in January of 2002. However, this was an empty promise, because in Ohio's prison system a prisoner's security status overrides the parole board's decision and there was no certain way of working your way out of the super maximum prison at that time. They had every intention of keeping me there until 2016.

The Ohio State Penitentiary (OSP) in Youngstown was indeed a brand new facility, the first new prison I had been in. You had your typical concrete slab for a bed, stainless steel sink and toilet, plus desk and stool that most cells had but this institution had a new space saver design that gave you much more open space to pace. Some prisoners took being in OSP pretty hard. There were three suicides in the first 18 months of it opening, that's an average of one suicide every six months in an institution that was only designed to hold 500 prisoners

and it had not yet been fully filled. Some prisoners would smear feces all over their body, while others would be screaming in their cells at the top of their lungs and banging their heads up against their cell doors. This 23 hour a day isolation had its affects on everybody in some way or another, except for me that is, or at least I thought, until I got released and to this very day I have a real hard time having people around me.

I knew that in order for me to come out of this one it was going to take a lawsuit, and a pretty damn good one. So, before I even arrived here I wrote a pamphlet titled "Kunta Kenyatta vs The State Of Ohio", to generate some outside support for the cause. But, ultimately it was the three suicides that got the attention of the ACLU. By the time lawyers from the outside got involved I had already had my paperwork done, because of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, a prisoner has to exhaust his institutional remedies before a lawyer can take up the case. But, the ACLU wanted to make this a class action lawsuit, which is understandable,; so, I had to wait for enough of the other prisoners there to do the same. In the meantime, the clock was ticking, and I had a January 2002 projected release date from the parole board that I had to meet. The lawsuit was filed in January 2001 it was due to go to trial in January 2002. I was released from OSP and sent back to Lucasville in October 2001. Being back in Lucasville was actually worse than being in the super maximum prison. The cultural differences between the prison staff down here in the Southern tip of Ohio and the prisoners who came mostly form the inner cities up North was, just too much to overcome, but this was part of the process that we had to go through at that time.

A month after being back in Lucasville I was taken back up in front of the parole board, this time minus the handcuffs and shackles (however, this time they didn't show up in person but on a t.v. screen) and the first thing they wanted to know is what did I do to get back in maximum security. I thought it was strange that they did not realize that I had never left maximum security, except to go to high maximum security that is, so my response was, "I didn't do nothing." Being that I have not had a conduct report since the last time I had seen them (and in fact I hadn't had a legitimate conduct report in nine years, by this time). This was a true statement, but if they didn't know that I had been in high maximum security for the past three years, I sure as hell was not gong to tell them. However, I was given another year and told to be out of maximum security in that year if I wanted to go home, that was fine except for the fact that I don't have a say so as to where I'm housed at in this prison system. According to the policy a prisoner was supposed to have their security status reviewed at least once a year and if they didn't have any conduct reports in that year their security level should go down, well it has not worked that way for me in almost a decade now.

The lawsuit turned out to be my ace in the hole, once the lawsuit went to trial all of those who were named in the suit were pushed out of OSP and out of the system, except for those on death row, so this seemed like my best shot yet. And sure enough, when I went up for a status review the reviewing committee recommended that I be transferred out of maximum security to Trumbull County Correctional Institution(TCI). This was both a good thing and a bad thing, on the one hand I was glad to be getting transferred out of maximum security after 16 years of doing it in the raw, but on the other hand, I was hoping to be sent anywhere other than TCI. Throughout my incarceration I have been an outspoken prisoner's rights activist, which was the source of the majority of my problems with the prison administration. Since 1995, I accumulated over one hundred published writings all of which was banned from TCI. Back in 1996, I even received a letter from the warden of TCI telling me that she did not want me corresponding with inmates in her institution. So I didn't know how I was to take this transfer to TCI, but of course, I was going.

On my 34th birthday, July 9th 2002, I was transferred out of the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility (Lucasville) to Trumbull Correctional Institution. For the first time during this whole ordeal I was out of maximum security, on the bus ride to TCI, I still could not believe they were actually going to go through with this, upon my arrival at TCI, I was immediately placed in the hole and told "happy birthday and welcome to TCI." This was done, I was told, because they did not have any cells available in the general population and I would be out as soon as a bed came open, but it still took everything I had in me to keep from going ballistic. The next night I was let out of the hole and placed in population, and surprisingly I didn't have any more problems at this institution other than trying to adjust to this new environment, this was no doubt a major change from what I was used to.

In TCI they didn't have cell blocks, they had pods. Prisoners in TCI were able to hang out in their pods all day. Each pod had a t.v. room, a library, a ping pong table, exercise equipment, microwave oven, ironing board, ice machine and general seating area. There were some prisoners at TCI who never left the pod, but what amazed me most was that at TCI, you could have a room full of prisoners watching the t.v. and another prisoner would walk into the t.v. room and without saying a word change the channel. In Lucasville, back before the riot when they had day rooms with t.v.'s in them, you could not pay nobody to touch the t.v., it was a guaranteed instant death sentence. But my mission at TCI was to stay out of the way for four months and I was out of there, home sweet home. I also had a cousin at TCI who I had not seen in 20 years, eventually we were allowed to cell together until he was transferred to North Central Correctional Institution in Marion about a month before I was scheduled to leave.

The parole board always comes two months before the actual time you are eligible for parole, because if you are granted a parole it would usually become effective two months after it was granted; which gives them time to do their pre-parole investigation, so I went back to the parole board in September of 2002. This time when I went to the parole board there was only one parole board member on the t.v. screen, the newest parole board member at that time, but by no means new to me or Ohio's prison system. Peter Davis was the ex head of the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee, the state senate committee that was responsible for over sight of all Ohio's prisons; the same committee that most of my complaints against the prison system over the years would end up with, now he was presiding over my parole hearing. Peter Davis had me worried for a minute there, whenever the board shows up on t.v. instead of in person that alone is a bad sign, but after a few tense moments I was granted a parole to become effective on November 26, 2002.

Being granted a parole was, without question, a major accomplishment for me, but I still had two more months of walking on eggshells before I was home free, because any conduct report at this time not only would that parole be gone, it would more than likely take me many years before I could get myself back to this point. So, the main thing was to be very careful as to who I let know that I did have a parole (officer or inmate). This was by far the hardest part of my whole bit. I'm not used to letting people run over top of me and a few times I almost lost focus, plus the closer I got to that date the more anxious I would get. I just couldn't sit still, it seems like everything was coming my way, and including advances from TCI female staff and I had to keep reminding myself that I didn't come all this far to mess this up now. But what kept me on course more than anything else was the fact that if something did happen to cause me to lose my parole I didn't know how I would have been able to explain it to my family, they just would not have been able to understand it.

I was released on parole from Trumbull Correctional Institution November 26, 2002. After signing all the necessary paperwork and collecting the little funds I had on my account, I was

taken in a van, to the Greyhound bus station in Downtown Warren. This is the first time that I had been in a motor vehicle without being handcuffed, shackled and belly chained in a long time. The Greyhound bus station in Warren is nothing more than a hole in the wall. If I wasn't dropped off right in front of it I would never have noticed it; and when I bought my ticket I was told that the buses only come through Warren every ten hours and it would not be another one until just after 5:00 pm (which was seven hours away). So I got on the pay phone to call my family, who was waiting to hear from me, so they could come and pick me up. After messing with the phone for a while I soon realized that this phone was not like the phones in prison, or like the pay phones that I remember using before my incarceration, nor did I have a clue as to how to use it. That left me with only one choice, so I just hung out in Warren for the next seven hours, and I did manage to find a clothing store that wasn't too costly, so I could get out of my prison clothes, and a fast food spot so I could have my first literal taste of freedom. But Warren was like a ghost town and it didn't take long for me to get bored with it. I couldn't help but think how lucky I was that I wasn't paroled to this city, if I was I would probably catch an escape case.

When I finally arrived at the Greyhound bus station in Cleveland it was a stark contrast, there were people everywhere, too many people and I had to get away from around there as soon as possible. By the time I got to my mother's house, where I was paroled to, it was late in the day and everybody had been expecting to hear from me early that morning; so they were starting to get worried, but once I came in the house it was all good. I was lucky to have family after doing so many years, a lot of former prisoners did not have this luxury, but they could not afford to take care of me. My first day home was for family, the next day it was time to get down to business, being on parole I had to report to my parole officer the very next morning, plus there was some lawyers in downtown Cleveland that had some money of mine. When you've been in the system as long as I have you are going to run into a lot of familiar faces down at the state building, and it's a good thing that they know the routine because I sure as hell didn't, so I was glad to see them too. When I told them who my parole officer was they all said that I've got the worse one, but that doesn't surprise me at all, I wouldn't expect anything else. The first task my parole officer had for me was to go get a piss test, and between him and applying for jobs, I would piss test an average of once every three days for the next 90 days. Of course this was a waste of time because I knew full well that, if I was going to make it in this society, getting drunk or high was not an option that I had at my disposal.

At the time I was taken off the streets I was in the middle of a lawsuit settlement that involved a car accident, by the time the money came to pay for the damage to my car I was already in the County Jail. So I told the lawyers handling the case to put the money in an interest bearing account for me. As soon as I finished my business with my parole officer this is where I was headed, by now that original \$1300 should have built up to quite a bit of change, and if everything went right I would be right back on track, but of course this would not be the case. The lawyers were more than a little surprised to see me, in fact, they were so sure that they would not see me again in life that they split that money up between themselves a long time ago. I don't know how long they had planned on giving me the run around, telling me that they were having trouble locating my money in their escrow account, but after about a month or so I got tired of playing games with them and under the threat of violence, at the risk of violating my parole, they gave me back my original \$1300, without none of the interest my money should have been earning. But in the mean time I had no money, no job and no real prospects for the future.

I had my driver's license four days after my release, which was excellent progress when I consider how long other former prisoners struggle with this, small but necessary, step towards re-establishing one's self back into society. The day after Thanksgiving my brother offered to take me to go take the written test for my temporary license, which is no longer a written test but a touch screen computer test, and after passing that I wanted to schedule the driving test about a week away to give myself time to practice, but I was told that the only opening was for the following morning, so I took it. It was my sister who took me to this test and, surprisingly enough, I passed it without having driven in 16 years. At that time my simple strategy was to put in at least 100 job applications a month that way the odds would be in my favor, after all my luck can not be that bad. But all I got out of that was a few odd jobs here and there from people who knew me, so I had to come up with another strategy or I was going to be in trouble. Because freedom in America is not free, it costs money, and lots of it.

By this time I was receiving letters from prisoners with all types of requests, because I had made an announcement in a newsletter that circulated to prisoners nationally that I had been paroled and included my mailing address; they had no way of contemplating the fact that I didn't even have bus fare to get myself to the places I needed to be. On top of that parolees now had to pay \$20 a month for their parole, or my parole would be extended (keeping that 14 years I had left on my sentence over my head longer), plus my parole officer required me to find a job, in the poorest city in the nation (Cleveland), as a condition of my parole. Not all parole officers enforce these conditions on those under their supervision, some parolees don't have to be bothered with their parole officers at all, but again I had "the worst one." One day, not too long after my release, I was at home in my room in the attic of my mother's house catching up on some reading and my parole officer came by, so after answering the door my mother let him know that I was there and she would go and get me, but instead of him letting her come get me he wanted to come up there his self so he could see what I was doing. However, instead of him catching me off guard he was the one who was caught off guard, because he could not believe that after doing 16 years in prison I would get out here to all this freedom and be sitting at home in my room reading a book; so he ordered a psyche evaluation on me.

November of 2002 was a good month for me because of my release and the little bit of progress I was able to make in the last few days of that month, by getting my license, but December was a different story. The holidays is always a good time to be home with your family, but its hard to get your foot in the door when all the business doors are closed until after the holidays, so the only thing I could do was wait. Some people are alright with being totally dependant on others, but me, I have a real problem with it, and during that month of December I tried everything from going to town hall meetings with the mayor, to signing up with local job match programs. At the town hall meeting the mayor promised, in front of the cameras that they would be doing something to help me, but of course, once those cameras were gone, her and her whole team was missing in action. And the job match program told me that their classes would start after the holidays, so if it were not for my nephews, who had all out grown me during my incarceration, giving me their hand-me-downs, I would not even have had clothes to wear at this point.

The New Year came without my participation in any of the festivities, wasn't no need me being out there in somebody's way, but once it was over I was on the move attending classes and putting in applications. There were quite a few jobs that turned me down because I did not have my own transportation, which is ultimately what forced my hand with these lawyers who had my money, but once I got that little bit of money I was in for a rude awakening. In

the 1980's, \$1300 could have got me just about any used car I wanted, in 2003 it couldn't get anything worth having; but if it was not having a car that was stopping me from getting over the hump then I was determined to have one. At the very first car dealership I went to, I was told that having no credit was worse than having bad credit, I thought that this was just a car salesman trying to get me to admit to having bad credit, but I learned the hard way that when you are in your mid 30's and you have never used a credit card, paid a bill or taxes, to the creditors you don't exist. There is no way for you to explain to them that you have spent your entire adult life in prison.

It was one of my nephews who told me about the auto auction where I might be able to get a good deal on a car. This auction (although called ADESA Cleveland) was all the way down in an Akron suburb, but I was able to make arrangements for my sister to take me down there. ADESA (Auto Dealers Exchange Serving America) is primarily a dealer's auction with at least 53 auctions throughout the United States and Canada, but they do let the public bid on the repossessed cars, and ADESA Cleveland held their auction on Thursdays. In order for me to be at the auction on Thursday I was going to have to break up my routine of job hunting and miss my job match class, and attendance was very important to those running this government funded program, but I went on and took off January 9th to go get me a car. As it turns out, I wasn't prepared for the auction, it was more like being in a gambling casino than trying to buy a car, and as fast as the auctioneers were talking I needed a lawyer to keep up with them; nor did I have a big enough bankroll to compete with the dealer's that were there. Needless to say, I did not come away from there with a car, but I did leave from there with a job on the only day since my return home that I wasn't looking for a job.

Now that I had a job, that was 34 miles away from where I stay, I really needed a car in a bad way. I had heard enough about the buy here pay here car lots to not want to be bothered with them, but now I was running out of options fast, so I gave it a shot. The first car I bought since returning to society was a 1989 Nissan Maxima, it was the cleanest car on the lot, after I finished paying for it I would have spent \$3900 on it, by far the most I had every spent on a car, and it stayed on the road a full 20 minutes before it died out.

I wasn't about to play no games with these people who sold me this car and I didn't care nothing about their sold 'as is' policy. I gave them an ultimatum and they fixed the car for free, plus gave me a check for the tow. Now that I had transportation to get back and forth to my new job, I still had one more obstacle to clear before I could rest easy; my parole officer had to approve of me having a job that was in a different city from that which I was paroled to. Well he didn't like it but as long as I came right back to Cleveland after work everyday he said it would be okay, and of course he was going to be checking, on me and the job. Perhaps, I should mention that ADESA is not in the practice of hiring ex-felons, it just so happens that on their application the question was, have you been convicted of a felony within the last seven years? And of course my conviction had been long before that, so my answer was "no" and their background check only went back ten years, so I slipped in on a technicality that was discovered too late.

January 2003 ended with me having a job, a car, and because of my participation in the job match program, I would also be receiving a check from the program every month that I kept my job for up to a year. Then, while on my way to work, early in the morning on February 7th 2003, I was caught in a snowstorm, visibility was very bad so I moved to the far left lane of the highway, because I knew that traffic was not merging on and off the highway from this side, and there was a football field size divider between me going Southbound and the Northbound traffic. Next thing I know, I caught a glimpse of a shadow approaching from

the left, I did manage to react to it but I still ended up under an Ohio Department of Transportation salt truck that had crossed all the way over from the Northbound lanes into the Southbound traffic. Miraculously, I escaped without injury but, my car was demolished, however, this would turn out to be my lucky break, if you can consider getting run over by a salt truck lucky, but when you have buzzards luck, like I do, you have to take what you can get and this was going to be the fifth time that I would be filing suit against the state of Ohio.

It would take the state of Ohio nine months to pay me for this failed assassination attempt, so in the mean time, I was back to roughing it without my own transportation. I did have some fellow workers who were willing to give me a ride back and forth to work and I also managed to get my cab license with Ace Taxi, so I was able to lease a cab, any time, day or night, and make some extra money doing that. When people used to ask me wasn't it dangerous for me to be driving a cab at night I would say, "Yeah it is, but I usually won't bother people without being provoked." Then, in March 2003, I received a call from my aunt asking me to come and get my cousins truck, my cousin was in one of Ohio's prisons doing a year and his truck was in his mother's name but she didn't drive and somebody had broken into it and stolen the sound system; so I went over to her house and got the truck. This was a 1993 Eddie Bauer edition Ford Bronco, I put it back together and kept it for him until he got out in September, by that time, I had got use to it, so I bought me a 1995 Eddie Bauer edition Ford Bronco. My work with cars goes all the way back to learning how to steal them in 1980 when I was just 12 years old, long before I actually knew how to drive them without tearing them up, now I was detailing them out at the auction.

Up until this point I had been on the constant grind, I did no going out or kicking it trying to have a good time, then on March 14th my pen pal from England came to visit me. My pen pal had been writing me for two years prior to my release and awhile ago she had expressed to me that she wanted to have a more personal relationship with me. I told her that I had never been involved with a white woman before but if she was still corresponding with me by the time I got out of prison I would be willing to give it a try. But I could not understand why a beautiful woman, with money, living in England would be looking for love in a high maximum security prison in Ohio. When she came she came with one of her friends, who was a black woman who was scared to death of black people, both of them were scared to death of Cleveland. The first thing they decided was that my cousins truck wasn't good enough for them to be riding in, so they went out and rented a brand new car, which was fine with me. Everywhere we went people were curious about them because they were spending big money and talking with an accent, which caused a lot of people to approach us and this only added to their fear. One day while we were having lunch in a Downtown restaurant an elderly man came over to talk to us out of curiosity, and as he was talking he slightly touched my pen pal on her shoulder and she fell out like he had assaulted her. I had to escort the old dude out of there. Before she left she told me that if we were going to be together, I was going to have to move to England because she could not be around these type of people. I told her we don't have to worry about that because I'm just about sick of you anyway. But when she got back home she did call me and thank me for looking out for her and her friend, plus she apologized for being so fussy, so I promised her I would come to England and see her as soon as I got off parole. England would end up being my first trip abroad.

Once my pen pal was back in England, it was back to the old grind for me. My cousin's truck required a lot of repairs to keep it on the road, plus the gas needle did not work and it ran out of gas on me one time before, so I would go to the gas station every morning before I

headed off to work. At the gas stations at 4:30 in the morning is where I would see a lot of former prisoners, some of whom who were kingpins and legends in the penitentiary, were now out here pan handling and begging people for spare change at gas stations. "Go do a robbery or a burglary or something, have some dignity," is what I used to tell them. But for those former prisoners who I came across that were trying to establish themselves out here in society, I would direct them to the job match program that I went to, plus I would show them how to go about getting their cab license, and other resources that were available to us while steering them away from the shams that were out here. This was the most that I was able to do at that time, because I had not yet established myself out here in society, some followed up on the information I was able to provide, others had to find out the hard way that there is more honor in prison amongst thieves then it is out here in society.

It was around this time that I ran into Muhammad (aka Polo). Muhammad was released from prison in December of 2002 after serving 18 years and we were close friends during the beginning of my journey through Ohio's prison system, but I had not seen him since I left the Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield back in 1990. Muhammad was living in a house that rented to people just getting out of prison, off 105th street, a couple of block from my mother's house. He shared this single family house with two other people, which is not the ideal conditions for someone coming out of prison after doing so many years, but neither is trying to get by on SSI. So I showed Muhammad all the resources I had used to help me get on my feet, including job match and places where you can get free groceries once a month just for living in the neighborhood, which was one of Cleveland's empowerment zones. Muhammad followed up on all of the information that I gave him, so I felt that he had a good chance of making it. The only thing he was having problems with was his driver's license.

Then one day, Muhammad told me that he had met this woman that he wanted to go see, but she lived in Elyria and he didn't have no way of getting there, so I told him that I would take him. When we started off for Elyria, Muhammad called his friend on the phone to let her know that he was on his way and that one of his partners was bringing him, so she told him that she had a friend and would he ask me if I would be interested in going on a double date. I agreed to this thinking that even if she is not my type, I could play wing man for just one night. It wasn't until we got to his friend's house that I found out that she was a 20 year old white girl, (Muhammad was 38 years old at the time) and the friend she had for me to go out with was a 19 year old white girl with a 35 year old mother (I was 35 years old at the time). Muhammad's friend was living with her father and he wasn't none too happy about us being over there to see his daughter; and she had to tell him a lie to get out of the house. So, when we got to her friend's house I wasn't about to go in the house, both of these girls were still in high school, so I told her to call her friend and have her come out to the truck.

After hanging out in Elyria and Lorain with these girls for a little while, they decided that they wanted to go to Cleveland and hang out. I said as long as they could arrange for a ride back I would take them, because I wasn't bringing them back to Elyria. They said that they would stay with their cousin over night and she would bring them back in the morning. On the way to Cleveland, a police car rode past us with its sirens sounding, the first thing these girls did is take some weed off their person and throw it down on the floor of the truck. Both Muhammad and I are on parole with big time hanging over our head, but the police were after somebody else. When we arrived in Cleveland these girls did not know where their cousin lived nor were they able to contact her on the phone, so they had to spend the night with Muhammad and the rest of the people who stayed at this house. I wasn't taking them no where near my mother's house.

Before the night was over Muhammad was yelling at these girls saying, "How could y'all be so stupid!" I had to remind him that these girls were teenagers. One was 19 and the other one had just turned 20 and that's what teenagers do, "dumb shit." We were the adults and it was us who should have known better. We didn't have no business letting these girls hang out with us and Muhammad would end up paying the price for it. One of the girls ended up getting into it with one of Muhammad's housemates, so Muhammad stood up for her. The police were called and Muhammad's parole was violated. He did get back out, but his dreadlocks were cut off as he was processed through reception because parole violators go straight back to prison from the county jail. Some lessons come hard but Muhammad did manage to get him another apartment. He also gave up his SSI for a job at H.H. Greg, plus he gave up young girls for women his age.

Then in April 2003, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) criminal justice program here in Ohio asked me to come and be a speaker at their Prison Activist Conference on Ohio State University's campus in Columbus. I had worked with the AFSC a lot in the past so I agreed as long as they arranged for me to have a ride down there, I didn't trust my cousin's truck to be going that far and I didn't know my way around Columbus at that time. When I got to the conference they were selling copies of the very first pamphlet I had published, "Criminals + Confinement = Corruption," this pamphlet was wrote in support of the AFSC National Campaign To End Control Units in 1995. This was also an award winning pamphlet that kicked off my reputation as a writer. At this conference, attorney Alice Lynd and I were to speak about the conditions at the super maximum prison in Youngstown and the lawsuit against it. There were also a lot of other prison reform advocates and groups at this conference that would be covering other prison related issues. The majority of those who were involved in these type of issues in Ohio were already familiar with me through my writings, some of them had even corresponded with me while I was incarcerated, but other than Staughton & Alice Lynd, who came to visit me while I was at OSP, none of them had seen me before.

As I move about the crowd I soon realize that these people don't realize that I'm Kunta Kenyatta. I could be standing right next to somebody and they would say, "I hear that Kunta Kenyatta is supposed to be speaking here, that ought to be interesting." I don't know if it was because of my black militant writing or my violent prison record, but people had developed a mental image of me being a 6'5" 250lb monster with a pitch black complexion. When it was time for me to go up on the podium, it blew their minds, and when I went amongst them afterwards they were saying things like: "you look so young, I was expecting a much older guy," "you are just a little guy, that was you causing all that trouble in there?" Some of the people there wanted me to stay in Columbus, host a little radio show that they were trying to put together and all type of stuff, but this I had to decline. Before I was going to be able to help somebody else I was going to have to first establish myself. I didn't even have my own reliable transportation to get to Columbus they had to arrange for somebody else to bring me here, plus I was on parole and if my parole officer had known that I was down here speaking at this conference, I would have been violated.

My parole officer even gave me a hard time about going to my family reunion in Philadelphia, I asked because I felt that it was a reasonable enough request, but he was skeptical about that. I understood that the parole board assigned to him the cases that they felt were going to be a problem, but they did not explain to him the reason why they felt I was going to be a problem, so he didn't know how to take me or what to be looking out for. He was dealing with a highly discipline soldier and the traps that he would normally have so

much success with was not going to be even a temptation for me. He told me that he didn't want me to have a cell phone while I was under his supervision, because he didn't want me using it to deal in drugs. Even the prison officials knew, when they were running drug raids, drug tests and drug investigations that it would be a waste of their time to involve me in that mess. The prison officials didn't tell him that they considered me to be a radical agitator, organizer and activist. But I never missed an appointment, payment or anything else while I was on parole, so after my year was up he had no choice but to let me off papers.

So 2003 ended pretty good for me, in October, I got my own truck that was much more dependable than my cousins, and in December I was off paper, now I was much more independent and I could finally move out of my mother's house, because that was something that my parole officer just wasn't going for, but first I was going to be flying to England. The first thing I had to do was get a passport. You can apply for these at the main post office in any city. I applied for mine at the Beachwood Post Office, at the time, it was \$75. But, the price is going up every year. The next thing I had to do was book me a flight and this I found on the World Wide Web, a round trip e-ticket for \$500. I'm still trying to get used to all this computer technology. But, on March 17th 2004 (St. Patrick's Day) I was on my way to England, this was my first time flying and I'm not too particular about heights, but this wasn't too bad. To make the trip I had to fly from Cleveland to Chicago and from Chicago to London, it was a nine-hour flight, and I arrived in London in the middle of the night. Eastern Time USA is five hours behind England's time but I got plenty of sleep on the plane, jet lag was not going to be a problem for me, but as I walked for miles to baggage claim, then for more miles to customs, I could not help but think that this was a bit excessive for an airport.

My pen pal lived in the West Midlands of England, this was near Birmingham and about a three-hour drive from London, but my pen pal was there to pick me up at the airport. This was not long after the Madrid, Spain train bombings and the follow up investigation that discovered that those who funded these attacks were in England seeking political asylum, and this is what stayed in the news during the time I was there. England has a lot of immigrants; they had a negative stereotype for every category of immigrants. Those from the Middle East and India were called asylum seekers, who were living off the British tax payers while plotting terrorist attacks around the world, and all the West Indians were either drug dealers or prostitutes, and they were convinced that I was a Jamaican gigolo with my dreadlocks going in out of this woman's condominium. When I was eating my McDonald's with my hands, everybody in the restaurant was looking at me like I was a heathen; in England they eat everything with a knife and fork including burgers and fries, which was a bit too much for me. Their money was worth twice as much as the U.S. dollar so anytime I used my bank card, I was getting charged double for it. My leather trench coat cost 225 British pounds but this was the same as 450 American dollars, but I did have a real good time while I was over there up until it was time to go. When I flew in to London my flight was the only flight that was arriving at that time of the night, but I was leaving on a noon flight and now I see why the airport was as big as it was, and I don't ever want to be around that many people at one time again in life. I stood in line for four hours, there were millions of people packed into this airport and I was mad as hell.

Vacations is a very necessary part of life for me and each time I go on one it gets harder and harder to come back, but this was just my first one and I came back revitalized, now it was time to get back to business and the next step for me was getting my own place. The housing situation in Cleveland is ridiculous but at this time I didn't have anything else to compare it to, so I didn't know just how ridiculous it was, and I began my search here first.

At the prices they were asking for rent in Cleveland I might as well be paying a mortgage, so I teamed up with my ex-girl friend from 20 years ago, who was on section 8, I was going to get a house in my name and she was going to move in and let her section 8 help me pay the mortgage. But, because of my lack of credit, the banks wanted me to attend a first time homebuyer's class, have my job for three years, and have a cosigner and at least \$3000 down. I didn't feel like jumping through all these hoops but I didn't see any other option at the time so I got in the Key Bank First Time Home Owners class, and kept my eyes open for something better. From visiting some of my coworkers in Akron, which I was able to do now that I was off parole, I noticed that the rent was a lot more reasonable than what they were talking about in Cleveland and this was a lot closer to my job, so I was seriously considering making that move to Akron.

In the mean time, I had to make a trip to Cincinnati. I was supposed to go down there in January and speak to this local group that was involved in the rallies against the police murders that had been taking place there, but there was a snow storm which put that on hold. Cincinnati was the city that gave me the most support during my incarceration. This was probably because my writings used to appear regularly in the "Street Vibe" which is a newspaper that advocates for the homeless and has a wide grassroots circulation, so I committed my July 4th 2004 weekend to Cincinnati. I arrived in Cincinnati on Friday and parked my truck in a field in the Over-The-Rhine neighborhood. Local activist Sunny Williams and former prisoner Black Tone came down to meet me. Sunny gave me a tour of the "Street Vibe" publishing office, the Drop In Center, and the shower houses for the homeless. Tone was saying: "Damn I live here and I didn't know they had all this down her," and they did have some damn good facilities for the homeless in Cincinnati. At the Drop In Center, the first floor was a dorm area that let anybody who needed a bed to drop in, for those who wanted to participate in the program they could work their way up to a more private room on one of the higher floors, and for those who went on to get a job they could move into their own apartments across the street for \$100 a month; then they could go to the shower houses get fresh clothes plus get the clothes they had, washed. Tone said "Damn I need one of those apartments, I wish my rent was \$100 a month."

While I was in Cincinnati, I was going to be staying at Tone's apartment. Tone had spent quite a bit of time in prison himself and was in the super maximum prison during the time I was there, so after my tour I talked with Sunny a little while longer then he went on his way. Tone was saying that his apartment was a mess and he was going to get a maid to clean the place up, I'm thinking, "Where are you going to get a maid from," so he said: "We have maids down here in Cincinnati and all you need to get one is to have a place for them to stay," "My dude Veil already has one and I'll just go and borrow his." So, we headed over there stopping on Dayton Street along the way. Tone wanted to show me his Pit Bull which he kept over at this ex-girlfriend's house. He said his ex-girlfriend used to look good before he went to prison, but now she was close to 400lbs. So he just wanted to be friends with her now, but she still wanted a relationship. When we got there Tone brought out his dog. This was a big dog, and me and this dog didn't get along at all. Tone's ex also had one of her friends over at her house and she did look good. So, Tone introduced me to her and we made plans to go out before I left Cincinnati. Then we were off to see Veil about this maid. Veil was also a former Ohio prisoner who was recently released, but he hadn't been in none of the prisons I'd been in so I didn't know him personally. Veil was staying at his sister's place and she had one of those monitors on her ankle that would notify her probation officer if she left the house.

When we got there Veil's sister was having a fit about Veil having the maid over there and Veil leaving his son there for her to watch. Veil's sister was a real slim woman but she raises a whole lot of hell, so the maid had to go anyway. The maid was a young girl, I had guessed she was 32, but she was actually only 18. Her parents were on drugs so she was placed in foster care while she was under age but at 18 she was on her own, she had a lot of silk and polish for an 18 year old, she had a part time job and she would clean houses in the neighborhood for a place to stay because she didn't want to stay in the shelters. So, off we were. Me, Tone, Veil and the maid went to Tone's apartment up on Mount Auburn. When we got there we dropped the maid off Tone let her know what she needed to do and we started on our way out the door, then she stopped us asking what should she do if the phone rings? Being that Tone didn't have an answering machine or caller ID, he said, "Answer it," (but this is where all the trouble started.) After we hung out for awhile, we dropped Veil off and went back over on Dayton Street. When we got there, we ran into another former Ohio prisoner, Smoky, who was Tone's cell mate in Lebanon, Ohio, so now the three of us were standing out in front of Tone's ex's apartment talking. The next thing I know we start hearing screaming in a voice loud enough to shake the trees. "Nigga!!!!" "Nigga!!!!" "Nigga!!!!" And I'm like, "What the hell is going on?." It was Tone's ex, she had called Tone's apartment and the maid answered the phone and now she was going nuts. She then kicked the dog out and was in the process of throwing all of Tone's belongings out of her apartment.

Tone went inside to try and get things worked out with his ex, now it's just me, Smoky and this damn dog standing out here. The later it got the more people started coming around Dayton Street and it seems like they all wanted to get past where we were standing; but they was afraid of the dog, so I went to get the dog's collar so people could get by. The dog took off running from me so I chased him for a little bit but then I said the hell with him, when I got back Smoky was gone, so now I'm just standing out here. As far as I knew there was only a church sitting back behind the apartment, later I would learn that there was an after hours spot connected to the church, and people had a serious problem with me standing out here in front of this spot. Then the white T-shirt wearing boys got gathered up across the street from me showing me their guns, now I didn't want to have to leave Tone because he didn't have a ride home, nor did I want to get involved with his domestic issues, so I figured I would go Downtown for a little while then come back and get him. When I got Downtown I met a woman who invited me over to her place to hang out. After being over there for a little while, I decided that it was time to go back and get Tone but this woman told me that I wasn't going no where; so, I had to wait for her to fall asleep in order to make my escape and that was about 5:00am.

By the time I got back to Tone's apartment he was already there with the maid and the dog. So, I took the maid out to breakfast and asked her what had happened. She said, "Well she just called there and went off on me saying what you doing over there answering his phone and that she was on her way over," then I asked "What you say to her," she said, " I told her she wasn't gonna get in." After we got finished eating, I took her back to Tone's place then me and Tone went to get Veil; when we got back to Veil's sister's place, she was going off again, because she didn't have no cigarettes and she couldn't go get none with that monitor on her ankle. So she wanted Veil to go get some cigarettes for her. Veil told her, "Give me your car keys if you want me to go to the store for you, and don't worry I'm going to bring your car back." She said, "I'm not worried about you bringing my car back because your friends is not going no where until you do get back." I said, "Hold on, what I got to do with this, I been in Cincinnati two days and I've already been held hostage once already."

We also went to see Cello up on College Hill. Cello had been in Lucasville and OSP with me, he was now doing pretty good, getting SSI and working under the table, because you have to work under the table to keep your SSI which don't make no sense to me. SSI gives prisoners (who qualify) a \$1500 check when they first get out then \$500 a month after that, as long as they don't get a job. But, nobody can live off of \$500 a month so why wouldn't they want those who get SSI to be paying taxes back into the system? With the little punk jobs that ex-felons get we need to have two sources of income anyway, and Cello had been able to put that together. Later that night, I went to River Boat Gambling in Indiana with the woman I had met over Tone's ex's house, she seemed like a real nice woman and she was until she got in that casino, that's when I saw that she had some serious issues. I had \$40 that I was willing to spend in this casino, just as a night out and something to do, but if I didn't win anything by then that was it. When I went to get her she was already hundreds of dollars down, and when I tried to pull her away from the machine she said, "Get away from me." It was like once she heard those bells and whistles she transformed into another individual and she didn't snap back to her senses until she had lost everything. Now, she was wondering what she was going to do, well, I didn't know what she was going to do because I couldn't help her, so I took her on home and I went back to Tone's spot.

The next day after the maid made it her business to be up and out of there early in the morning, there was a knock at the door, Tone opened it and in come two women with high heel shoes, mini skirts and spike collars on; they were talking crazy too. The one who was doing all the talking said, "I heard that you had one of your dudes from Cleveland down here and that you had went out with some other bitches last night, how you gone play us?" Tone said, "Where you hear that from?" she answered, "I called here, and where that tramp at that answered the phone?" Then she said, "We got some business to take care of right now but we gone be back tonight and we are going to go to Shakers and get our groove on then we are coming back here to get our fuck on," and they left. I said, "God damn Tone what the fuck be going on around here?" He said, "Man I been caught up in this madness since I've been out here." Then Tone got a call from a friend of his, who had been placed in an insane asylum by his family, and he wanted Tone to come see him and I went with him. I was a little bit apprehensive about letting the doors of that asylum lock behind me as we went in there, but I tried to remain calm. The guy he went to see was also a former Ohio prisoner and was indeed insane, and we were visiting right in the general area where all those held there hang out. When it was time to leave I was glad to be getting out of there, but on our way out the door guess who we see, Smoky, the same guy that disappeared on me my first night here on Dayton Street, and he's talking about, "Sign me out of here." I asked him what he was doing in there, and he said, "They just came by and picked me up when we were standing out there on Dayton Street, and they brought me here." That was it for me, I was done, I got out of Cincinnati.

During the time I was in Cincinnati I received a call from a woman who used to work at my job through a temporary employment agency, she had stabbed the guy she was living with and she wanted me to bond her out of the Stark County Jail, so I had this to deal with as soon as I got back to North East Ohio. The Stark County Jail is in Canton, Ohio, right on state route 62, and about 70 miles away from where I was staying in Cleveland with my job in the middle. Since I wasn't going to be able to do anything on the holiday I went home first, then went to work the next morning, and then to Canton when I got off work. Her bond was originally set at \$15,000 and I could have got her out for 10% of that, but by the time I got there the judge had raised her bond to \$40,000, putting her well out of my reach. At first I

didn't know why the judge had more than doubled her bond, but I should have known that racism was a factor, see, once the judge found out that she was a black woman who stabbed a white guy, her chances of coming out of this one with probation vanished. I tried to explain this to her, because I know this system all too well, but she felt that because she was defending herself that she would get a break, like other women do. If she would have stabbed me after I put my hands on her, she would have never went to jail; but she is an older black woman who stabbed a younger white dude, she is not only going to jail she is also going to prison, people with \$40,000 bonds don't get probation.

Anyway, she gave me her keys so I could look after her house plus keep her bills and rent paid until she went to court. This was something I could easily handle plus it was going to give me a little refuge from Cleveland, so I agreed. Her rent for a whole month was only \$400, this was unheard of in Cleveland. In Cleveland, you were looking at \$1000 a month rent on a whole house off the top, and you couldn't get an efficiency apartment for \$400. So now my search for my own home switched to Canton. While I was getting a little taste of being on my own, I knew now it would not be long. It was a cozy little house, completely furnished, cable t.v., but junky. So I took a page out of my Cincinnati chapter and brought a woman from Cleveland, who was fresh out of jail and needing a place to stay to Canton to keep the place clean.

My maid worked out well for a little, making it out of Cleveland can be a breath of fresh air for anybody and living in Canton was like living in the suburbs compared to Cleveland, plus I was able to live on half of what it was costing me to live in Cleveland. So I was able to take care of her and myself without driving the cab on the side, as long as she continued to cook and clean. But the more we became involved sexually the less she felt she had to do until it got to the point where she would say to me, "I'm not use to having to do work, all I have to do is look good." And this was a 40 year old woman talking like this; you would think she'd know better by now, so I told her, "Okay with your bad self." Then one day when I came home from work to dirty dishes everywhere, no food cooked while she's out getting drunk with her friends, I just packed all her stuff up in the truck and waited for her to come in and I took her back up to Cleveland and dropped her butt off. If a person wants to get out of prison and run the streets getting drunk or getting high Cleveland is the place for them, the city will no doubt accommodate you, either there or Cincinnati, but I can only help those who at least attempt to help themselves.

Once the woman who's house I was staying in went to court and got sentenced to four years, it was time for me to move on. The original plan was for me to have her belongings put into storage, but I had found me a house by then. All I needed to do was find a way to get financed without no established credit. When I first spotted my house I knew that this was the one I was going to somehow end up with, out of all the houses that I looked at this was the only one that I didn't have to write down the address to remember(1834), because I went to prison when I was 18 and I got out when I was 34, there is no forgetting that. When I went to the open house to view it there was nobody there, so I called the real estate agent who came out let me in and left, asking me to lock up when I leave. This house was built in 1965 which is relatively new for a house, it was ranch style with two bedrooms and a full finished basement, plus it was all electric which means no gas bill, and that was the deciding factor. Working through my nephew, I was able to get a financier who was willing to finance the house after I had been on my job for two years, and by this time I had been working the same job for a year and a half, so I explained this to the real estate agent who said, "You don't have to wait for that, if you want the house I can get you in there." So I did what was called a land

contract, or rent to own, with my rent payments going toward down payment and my credit rating. The house would be signed over to my name in six months to a year. So instead of having to put my friends stuff in storage, I was able to store it in my own basement, which is only around the corner from where she was staying when she caught her case. This was a good year for me I have to admit, and I am my own harshest critic, but if I continue to progress at this rate it will soon be hard to believe that I walked out of prison just a few years ago with out nothing but raw determination at my disposal.

I spent the New Years Eve in Akron and as I was leaving the city my truck took two bullets in the passenger side, this was a bad omen for the year 2005, but again, I was determined to survive. After filing my taxes for the year I owed \$1300 to the IRS and this almost put an end to my planned vacation for this year, but I know how important it is for me to take my breaks from the day-to-day grind in this dog-eat-dog society; and if I don't take a vacation I'll get burnt completely out. This year I was going to Jamaica and I used a travel agency right here in Canton to book this trip, it cost me around \$1000 for my round trip flight and hotel stay for a week. I was to leave on March 14th 2005. I was going to be flying out of Cleveland so I drove up to my mother's house the night before, left my truck in her garage and took a cab to the airport. This was a direct flight, so I didn't have to go to no other American cities or change planes, which was a good thing because airports are very stressful places and I still have a problem being in those crowds.

When I flew out of Cleveland it was 38 degrees outside, four hours later, when I arrived in Montego Bay it was 88 degrees outside. I knew that I didn't ever want to go back then. When I stepped off the plane they were asking, "You Rasta Man, why this your first time you come to Jamaica man?" As soon as I got to my hotel, I set my bags down and got out those hot clothes. I hit them streets, getting as far away from the resort area as soon as I possibly could; and it was on from ding to dong. By St. Patrick's Day I was all the way on the other end of the island in Kingston. Kingston was by far the most dangerous place I have ever been, by mid March they had over 300 murders in the city on the year. This qualified the city as a war zone, and they were walking around with A K 47s and M 16s over their shoulders. They needed their National Guard to protect armored cars when they were loading or unloading money. In Kingston there were two lines wrapped around the American Embassy, one for those who were picking up U.S. Visa's and the other for those applying for U.S. Visa's, and with a 45% unemployment rate in Jamaica all of this is understandable.

When I travel to foreign countries I don't like to hang around no tourist spots, I like to kick it like I would in the hood, and the key to not having problems is to not letting anybody know that you are from America. The best part of the Trip was the fact that \$100 U.S. was worth 6030 Jamaican dollars, and I spent one thousand dollars which was around three quarters of a million Jamaican dollars, so I lived the life style of the rich and famous for a week. Coming back to the U.S. was the hard part, and I mean this literally, they did not want to let me come back through customs. I only had a few little bags but they searched me three times, they wanted to know where I worked, where I was born and all sorts of things like that. They figure that I was either trying to sneak into the country with a fake passport or I was smuggling drugs. I couldn't be just going over to Jamaica on a simple vacation. Maybe if I was from there or it was occasion like a honeymoon or something, but not just a simple vacation.

Now that my fun was over, it was back to reality; which was between the money I spent on vacation, paying the IRS and few other misfortunate mishaps. I was dead broke and gas prices were sky high, so I couldn't even afford to be driving that long way back and forth to

work. So June 2005 I took the other week of paid vacation I had at my regular job and worked temporary jobs through a temp agency down here in Canton, this is how I got back on my feet, getting paid by two jobs while working one, we have to do it that way sometimes. During this time my part time freelance activism involved finding out the whereabouts of the family members of some prisoners from Canton who had lost touch over the years, this issue becomes very important when they are getting close to seeing the parole board and need a place to parole to, but little did I know that I was about to be right back smack dab in the middle of this prison activist stuff.

Around this time I received a letter from YSU journalism professor Daniel Sturm, who was going to write an article about the super maximum prison in Youngstown, and he wanted to interview me. I agreed to do the interview and it was to take place at my house on July 9th 2005, my 37th birthday. Not such a big deal at the time because the O Jay's were in town for the weekend, having a street named after them, and I was going to celebrate by seeing them in concert; but, these things have a way of taking on a life of their own and you never know how one thing can lead to another and another and another, until you are knee deep in, all over again. But in the meantime, I was still doing my thing it was hot out and that meant that almost every weekend I was on the road, and couple of weeks after the interview, while in the area I decided to drop in Steubenville. At that time Steubenville was one of the only two significant sized cities in Ohio that I had never been to. Now I've been everywhere from Zanesville to Painesville; from Lucasville to Steubenville; I've toured all of Ohio. If you were in the Youngstown area and want to travel to Steubenville, Ohio, state route 7 will take you there, but while half of Youngstown is Cleveland Browns fans, the other half is Pittsburgh Steelers fans. Once you start getting close to Steubenville, you will start seeing the skull & cross bones signs saying, "No Browns fans beyond this point."

When I first arrived in Steubenville, I was in the wrong area, I had old ladies coming up to me asking me if they could touch my hair because they never seen anything like that before, so I had to find out where the hood was at and I know they had a hood because there are too many people in prison from Steubenville for them not to have a hood; so, I went to the downtown area. Downtown Steubenville is just a few streets this way and few streets that way and that's it, if you don't pay attention, you'll miss it. So I parked my truck and got out and walked. Downtown Steubenville sits right on the Ohio River and if you cross one of those bridges going over the river you will be in Weirton, West Virginia. It's the same way that the Cuyahoga River separates the East and West side of Cleveland, but standing right there on the Ohio River you can not help but notice the contrast between Ohio and the Mountain State of West Virginia. While I was walking I met an elder lady by the name of Ms. Shirley who offered to show me around, and it was her who introduced me to her daughter Laurie. Me and Laurie hit it off real well from the start and she gave me the rest of my tour of the city. The following week, Laurie came up to Canton to see me, which meant alot to me and we have been together ever since.

Then, Daniel Sturm's article came out in the press, my name being in the article caused my mail load to increase with more prison mail. One of the main requests now was for me to help with bringing some publicity to these cases that stem from the Lucasville Riot, which have innocent people still locked up in OSP, and because these are people I know and have broke bread with over the years. I can not say no. So, I began to make copies and send them to the different places that I think might be able to do something. Then, I made arrangements to personally take some of this information to the next CURE-Ohio meeting in

Columbus to see what would this organization that I was still a member of, be willing to do, since it had been awhile since I've been to one of these meetings.

I became a member of CURE-Ohio back in 1996, not long after its rebirth in Ohio. I was in the middle of pushing the Afrikan Name Change Drive when another prisoner sent me one of the CURE-Ohio's newsletters that was announcing that one of Ohio's senators had introduced a bill in the Ohio House of the Senate that would ban people in Ohio who had been convicted of a felony from being able to get their names legally changed and CURE-Ohio was against the bill. So I joined CURE-Ohio at that time and immediately began pushing a CURE-Ohio membership drive along with the Afrikan Name Change Drive and the Reparations Education Drive and my Community Petition for Release that I was pushing at that time. After that CURE-Ohio went through some trouble times with prisoners because the then president, Paula Eyre (who was teaching college classes in one of Ohio's prisons in the Dayton area when she met and married an Ohio prisoner), had sabotaged a statewide prisoner work stoppage that was organized by prisoners in support of state senator Jeffrey Johnson's Senate Bill 182(parole reform) in order to get her husband out of prison on parole. Prisoners were furious and I was one of those actively involved in calling for her expulsion from CURE-Ohio in 1998 for this betrayal. She continued to run the organization but under fire from prisoners; a Prisoner Advisory Board was created and I was selected to serve on this board in 1999.

Anyway, when Paula Eyre's husband did get out he left her and ran off with a younger woman, so she quit CURE-Ohio and wrote a nasty article in the newsletter that contradicted all the work she did in the last ten years. So now you had the three remaining members of the Board of Directors: Karen Thimmes, Ellen Kitchens, and Michelle Baker doing everything that they could just to hold this huge statewide organization of prisoners and their loved ones(out in society) together. When I got to CURE-Ohio's general membership meeting in November of 2005 on the agenda for the meeting was to fill vacancies on the board, and me and Beverly Seymour were nominated to serve on the Board of Directors. I spent that night in Columbus and I called Laurie and I let her know what it meant to be participating in this type of thing on this level(that our whole lives will be consumed by this) and she said that she thought that was good and that she think I should go for it. So at the next CURE-Ohio meeting in January 2006 I was confirmed to serve on the Board of Directors as Prisoner Liaison, and from there it did not take long for my prediction to come true, I was right back in the thick of things.

Also, at this meeting in January 2006 there was a discussion of cutting off the subscriptions of the newsletters of the prisoners who had not paid their dues, and this I was totally against because I know that when I was in prison that the state of Ohio's then Attorney General Betty Montgomery had found away to rob all prisoners who had successfully sued the state of any funds on their account, and I was one of them. So I said that they have grants for this type of work, and with CURE-Ohio's long history of non-profit work in the state, we are eligible for them and I was willing to go and meet with a professional grant application writer in order to possibly acquire a grant. So the following weekend I went to Youngstown to meet with Angela Jancius (the wife of Daniel Sturm) because she is an accomplished grant application writer. While in Youngstown, I got involved with organizing Youngstown Prison Forum Prison Conference that Angela & Daniel was a part of; I was also to be a speaker at this conference. Because of his article on the super maximum prison in Youngstown, (which I gave an interview for) Daniel was also invited by the American Friends Service Committee to represent Ohio at their National Stop Max Campaign organizing meeting in Chicago (from

March 31st to April 2nd of 2006), but he was unable to attend so this invitation was offered to me and I accepted it.

However, it was vacation time once again for me and vacations always come first in my eyes, plus this year I was going to Brazil; so I was going to be in Chicago for half of that meeting when I got back. When the head of CURE-National, Charlie Sullivan, got word that I was going to Brazil, he contacted me to ask me to put together a report on the prison conditions in Brazil for the National CURE Conference that will be held in Washington D.C. in the end of June 2006. I thought this was going to be an impossible task because I don't even speak the language that is used in Brazil, but Laurie learned enough Portuguese to interpret for me and put the report together, plus, we were able to get a DVD on the Carandiru prison massacre. Carandiru was a prison in Sao Paulo Brazil that had a riot after a prison soccer game in 1992. After the police surrounded the prison, the prisoners surrendered, but the police went in and shot everybody they could find whether they took part in it or not and when international human rights organizations started looking into the matter the prison was demolished to destroy the evidence. But my trip to Brazil was lovely, Laurie and I spent our first two days in Sao Paulo, the next two in Rio De Janeiro, then back to Sao Paulo for the last two days. In addition to our passports, which are good ten years, we also had to have visa's to go to Brazil, and these are good for the next five years so we may have to go back some day.

Our flight out of Sao Paulo, Brazil took us to Washington D.C. where we changed planes and continued on to Cleveland. In Cleveland I got Laurie into a cab to my mother's house and I had to jump on another plane to Chicago, the further West I got the colder the weather was and after coming out of the warm weather of Brazil, I wasn't enjoying the windy city of Chicago too much. There were a lot of big names in the prison reform movement there, and big name prisoner advocates, but it was also a lot of people that I'd never heard of before in attendance. The main thing everybody was struggling with was how to get the people from the affected communities involved. I suggested that we make sure that people see the benefits to doing this type of work, because there are some benefits to doing this besides those who are getting paid \$35,000 to \$40,000 a year for doing what I do for free. I also should have mentioned going to the prisoners and asking them to pull together their personal supporters. I've been finding it surprising as to how many people there are doing this type of work that have absolutely no contact with prisoners.

The following weekend after the Stop Max meeting, I went to visit Siddique Abdullah Hasan in OSP (Ohio's High Max). Ohio's DRC started two new policies: one was to allow Ohio's prisoners to receive money from anybody who wanted to send it to them and the other was to allow Ohio's prisoners to have up to 15 people on their visiting list without having to prove a relation to their visitors. Nobody seems to know what made the DRC do this now because this was one of those things that they were dead set against in the past. But in this policy (that was sent to me by my cousin Tony Harris from one of the prisons in Marion) they had no mention of whether ex-felons would still be banned from visiting or would they continue to stop people from visiting more than one Ohio prisoner unless they were kin. Hasan was the ultimate test case for this policy, not only was he on death row in the highest security prison in the state for being the "ring leader" of the Lucasville Riot, but he was also in an institution that I had been in and sued so all the prison officials there knew me, so the theory was if they let me in OSP to visit Hasan then anybody could visit any prisoner in Ohio. I have known Hasan since 1987 back on 3 southeast in the old Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield, where I did my first four years before being transferred to Lucasville. We were

also in Lucasville and Youngstown together so it was good to get to see him again; and see that he is still holding up despite the situation (being on death row for not being able to control the violence that took place during the Lucasville Riot) and he was glad to see me too.

Now that the first part of the test had passed and I was able to get in and visit with Hasan, it was now time for the second part of the test, which was to see if after letting me in to visit Hasan, were they going to let me in another prison to visit another prisoner? So, I waited until the weekend of the Power Net Reentry Conference in Dayton, because I was going to be on that side of the state anyway to visit my cousin Tony Harris in Marion. It was harder to get in this medium security prison than it was to get into high max, but throughout my experience with the system, these lesser security prisons have always been pettier, and I did eventually get in. My cousin was also glad to see me, I had got to cell with him at TCI, briefly, before he was transferred to Marion and I was released. A lot of time has passed since then and a lot of things have happened, but it seems like it was only yesterday. After that visit was over I headed on down state route 4 to Dayton.

The Dayton conference was by far the most elaborate conference I had ever been to, there was a lot of pump and pageantry involved, \$40 a plate meals, a host of celebrities and plenty of state officials. I had come there to help man the table for CURE-Ohio but when we got into the workshop it was the people who had been to prison who they wanted to hear. And there were quite a few of us there with a story to tell: Gary Reece, served 25 years before being freed by DNA evidence; Walter Smith, served 11 years before being freed on DNA evidence and Khalil Osiris, my comrade, who served 15 years and is now a professor at Write State University. It was at this conference that I saw the need for there to be a pamphlet such as this one, and as much as I hate writing, all this got started with me coming to the realization long ago that if I want to get something done I have to do it myself, so here I go again.

The weekend after the Dayton conference I went back to visit again with Hasan. This time I was able to see both Hasan and Bomani Shakur (aka Keith Lamar). Bomani was also on death row because of the Lucasville Riot and in his case people who admitted to committing murders during the riot was given lesser sentences and protective custody if they were willing to say that, "Keith Lamar made me do it," in court. And the list of people being held in high max on death row or doing double life goes on and on: Greg Curry, Derek Cannon, Eric Scales, Kweisi Mugabe (aka Derrick Mathews)...The state was able to get an average of seven murder convictions for each person killed during the riot, when in fact, in most cases, only one or two people who did each killing. But during that time, prosecutors were able to get a jury to do anything they wanted to a bunch of people who were already in prison anyway.

The Dayton Conference went a long way in preparing me for the upcoming Youngstown Conference, this one I played a part in organizing and I was hosting a workshop, which is a lot of work for grassroots organizers who do not have access to a large amount of funds. It's a good thing that I've been doing this for so long; not only can I host a workshop without having time to prepare, but also because I have a lot of old friends and comrades who I can count on for support. In order to rally some support for the conference, I gave an interview on a Cleveland radio station two days before the conference with Justin Hons (aka J. Uprising). Justin published my pamphlet "Kunta Kenyatta Vs the State of Ohio" when he was a college student at Kent State University, back in 1998/1999. He also re-published my first pamphlet "Criminals + Confinement = Corruption." He is still active within the community, and is now indeed a veteran activist and prisoners advocate. The interview went well by all

accounts that we received, and now it was on to the Youngstown Conference. The turn out for the Youngstown Conference was not what we hoped it would be, but all the workshops were very good and the media was all over it, so this conference was a greater success than any of us expected. Even my baby, Laurie, was on t.v. and I expect a lot to come out of our efforts. But in the meantime, I'll just keep on doing what I do; hopefully we'll get some more people to pick up the slack too. Some prison reform workers ask me how can I go back in a prison to visit after being locked in one for so long, I tell them that they turned the old OSR in Mansfield into a haunted house and I even went there this past Halloween. They say they'll give anybody who can spend the night in there \$100, if they were offering that during the four years I did there, I would be doing alright by now. When your whole life has been like a horror movie, where you had as many close calls and pit falls as I have and still manage to come out of no worse for ware, there is not too much left to be afraid of. So being that I got drafted into this battle, I'm going to continue to give it my all and at the rate things are going sooner or later something has got to give, and I'm willing to bet that it won't be me.