

From Inmate to Advocate: A Journey of Transformation

By Edward A. Julian, Sr.

The Begin Within Initiative, LLC

1. How did you become a poet, and why did writing become so important to you?

I didn't set out to become a poet. Writing became part of my journey. A poem my mom gave me in seventh grade called Don't Quit stayed with me throughout my life. During incarceration, writing became my release. What started as journaling turned into poetry, then books. Writing helped me survive and eventually grew into over 300 poems and multiple books.

2. Why did you decide to revisit your incarceration and reentry story now?

I wanted to be a real example of change. Growing up, you become what you see, and I wanted to be what people don't usually see. I want others to look at my life and say, "If he can change, I can change."

3. Who was your biggest source of support while writing this book?

My biggest motivation was never going back to prison. That fear kept me focused and disciplined every single day. My wife stood beside me through the final stages, helping refine the book, challenging me to sharpen my message, and pushing me to get it right. Anne, my editor and friend, stayed consistent with editing, guidance, and helping me build the website, making sure the vision came together the way it was meant to.

4. What do you want people who've never been incarcerated to understand after reading your book?

People don't just make mistakes — we make bad decisions — and we all deserve a second chance. Prison does not rehabilitate people. Real change has to start from within.

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PAGE BREAK

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5. What do you hope

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shows people about real change?

I hope it shows that change is possible no matter where you come from or what you've been through. Your past does not have to control your future.

6. What's one truth about incarceration or reentry that most people don't see?

Incarceration strips away identity and confidence. When people come home, they're expected to just figure life out. Reentry isn't just release. It's rebuilding.

7. How did basketball shape your life growing up?

I grew up playing basketball right in my neighborhood, sitting on the rails waiting for the older guys to pick me if someone didn't show. I played from elementary school through college, and the court became my safe haven — a place to clear my mind and just be myself. It was also the one place where I could laugh, compete, and forget about everything else for a while.

I kept playing throughout prison and still play twice a week today. Growing up, I looked up to Michael Jordan, who will always be my favorite, and later admired LeBron James and the way he carried himself on and off the court. Basketball taught me discipline, structure, teamwork, and accountability. It helped shape the man I am by teaching me to follow rules, stay focused, and keep showing up no matter what.

8. What message do you want listeners to leave with today?

Change is a daily decision. Your past may explain where you've been, but it doesn't define where you're going. I did the work — and if I can do it, you can too.

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