

Johnathan Smith:

Yeah.

Megan Wilson:

All right. So this is Megan Wilson and Jonathan Smith, part two. And I had just asked, what was it like for you on the yard?

Johnathan Smith:

Yeah, so the yard was just like where a lot of things happen, so many things. You had people who'd just walk the yard, you had people who played basketball, you had people who did a lot of their exchanges on the yard, you normally wouldn't see most people until you get on the yard. You had a lot of groupings of different people. Some people prayed on the yard, if they were like in religious organizations, some people did what they call checking in, which just means you have to go and talk to the people who you, whatever gang you're in. So a lot of different things. But I just think that the yard was kind of a place where you had the opportunity to not be so restricted, even though eyes are on you, they couldn't keep eyes on everyone at the same time. So you just had like the ability to kind of move freely within the confines. And yeah, I would think that, for me, most of the time when I would go in the yard, I would just work out. Either workout or play basketball.

Johnathan Smith:

But the yard was also considered like one of the most dangerous places because this is the place where people... It's so open, most yards are pretty big, that it's impossible for like the CO's to stay on top of all of the things, so there were a lot of violence on the yard. Most of the stabbings happen on the yard.

Megan Wilson:

And what was the health care like?

Johnathan Smith:

Some people say that the healthcare was horrible, but it was horrible for the common things. If you had a cold or if you just sprained your ankle or something like that, they would just tell you like ice and ibuprofen, don't walk, and stuff like that. If you had cancer or if you needed surgery, most of the time, those things are taken more seriously because the repercussions were higher for the MDOC. Right. They stand to be sued by an inmate and stuff like that. So for the most part, the more like serious injuries or health-related issues, got handled well. But the common stuff, most times you would have to, if you were like, "Yo, I have a really bad headache", they would be like, "Fill out a health care kite." And then they call you over there in two weeks, and be like, "How's that headache going?" And it's like, "Oh, you mean a headache that I had like two weeks ago? Oh yeah. That one's gone. Don't got it anymore." But, yeah, it was free for the most part. They did have what they call copays, which I think was like \$5 every single time you went. And, some people could afford that, some people couldn't, but that was the thing.

Johnathan Smith:

And for the most part, I think that when people went to healthcare, most of the nurses and doctors are kind of different mentally, than the CO's. They didn't get into their industry, the field that they were in to work in a prison or, they were still kind people and they didn't really treat you like you were in a

clinic, a medical clinic that was meant for prisoners. So you had the opportunity to have, whatever your issues were, addressed without having the prison standard applied.

Megan Wilson:

What kind of work did you do?

Johnathan Smith:

Throughout my sentence, it varied. When you first go to prison, if you have a GED, you can get a job. I had a high school diploma. So you immediately got a job. Initially the work pools are really, really long, depending on the job. Porters and kitchen staff and yard crew, the wait list on those are not long at all, because they hire infinite amounts of people. On the yard, when I want you to shovel snow, they'll have 50 people out there, so it's easy to get a job doing that. For the kitchen, hundreds of people could work in the kitchen, so it's not hard to get on that list. But the jobs that their turnover was not as fast, for like people who like worked in the school building, or people who like worked in the church, people that did the jobs that paid the best, were the ones that took longer. If you worked in healthcare, as a porter, those jobs didn't usually turn over quickly.

Johnathan Smith:

But for me, I started off, I had jobs. I would always accept yard crew or porter, depending on where I was. And it was because I didn't really want to work for them, I didn't want to work... People who worked in the kitchen, even though they may like \$50 or \$60 a month, which is considered a good, I wasn't giving eight hours of my day to the MDOC for \$50 a month. I'd rather take 12 and work an hour a day, than they work eight and get 80 or whatever. So I usually took those jobs. But as I became a little more studious, I started to request jobs that required certain, you had to actually pass different exams, take tests and stuff like that to determine whether or not you qualify to be a tutor or clerk. And I started to apply for those jobs, and I started to get them. There was one facility I went to, where I finally got the tutor job, because I was studying math and English and all of this different stuff. So I was like acing the tape tests, which is like their placement exam that determined what is your aptitude level for all of the different subjects, and I'd score really high, and the higher you score, the more likely you are to get those jobs.

Johnathan Smith:

So finally got a tutor job, probably, I would say, after about five years of being in prison. And then from there, I pretty much was a tutor every facility that I went to. The last place I was at, I was a Spanish, I was an ESL tutor. So I was like the Spanish tutor at a facility because I had learned Spanish over the years. So I did that.

Megan Wilson:

What were your relationships like with other people inside?

Johnathan Smith:

Man. It varied. I would like to say that I didn't necessarily go with the status quo. When you get to prison, there are like categories that you can kind of fit people in. There are like the people who get there, they're not certain what to expect, so they join a gang. And they joined a gang because their homeboys joined the gang and the people that they grew up with...When I was growing up there

weren't really many gangs in Detroit. There were cities, whatever, like blocks, but not bloods or Crips or vice Lords or all of this stuff. We get to prison, there's more of that. And usually, people will go there and they'd be like, "Oh, I know this person from high school." Even if they weren't really friends, they would join a gang based on what people that they knew and what gang they were in.

Johnathan Smith:

And it was for sure proposition multiple times during my sentence; being in a gang. I just never did because I couldn't imagine myself having to listen to another inmate tell me what are the do something, and then also having to listen to this guard, tell me when I have to do something. But for me, I was pretty much a loner in most prisons. I would find like one or two people I was really cool with, and I navigated prison, I would say probably one of the best ways that you can do it where I didn't get into the groups where I would be challenged or I would like be sought after as far as issues go, or I wasn't like searching for issues, but I also stood my own, where I wasn't a target, and people weren't trying to take advantage of me.

Johnathan Smith:

And I knew enough people to where I can navigate and not worry about anything, not worry about like people taking my property, or worried about like somebody doing something to me. Because you kind of have to be... If you're trying to get through prison and you don't want to cause trouble in the sense that you're going to be a target for guards, but you also don't want to be so vulnerable that you're going to be easy target for inmates, you have to find a balance.

Johnathan Smith:

So you want to be like, not super in the light and doing stupid shit, as far as the guards are concerned. Then also not looking super weak to other people who are doing time. So just find that balance, like working out, guys see you workout, it's like, "Oh, this guy's strong. He's in the weight pit. He's in shape." That's one of the things people look at, it's like a gauge on if this person can be taken advantage of. Or like who you talk to, who you associate with, what things do you do? So my relationship was like, I pretty much didn't look for trouble.

Johnathan Smith:

So, I didn't try to befriend people, but people knew my name. I had no issues. I would be friendly to everyone, not too friendly, like to the point where people were like, "Oh, you're soft," but friendly enough to be like, "Oh, what's up, bro? How you doing, man? Oh yeah. I remember, didn't you have a visit today?" And it'd be like, "Yo man, that visit was great." Using whatever social skills I've learned throughout life on how to not get too close to someone, but also not have them look at me like, "Who is this dude? And why does he think he's better because he doesn't talk to me?" So I learned how to navigate that in such a way that allowed me to do my time and do the things that I wanted to do without being a target by either inmates or guards.

Megan Wilson:

You mentioned visits, what were visits like for you?

Johnathan Smith:

So for me, I didn't have visits. I've actually never got one visit the entire time I was in prison.

Megan Wilson:

Wow. Is there a reason for that?

Johnathan Smith:

Most of the time it was up North. I would say probably the first six years of my sentence, it was high up there, Marquette, Hiawatha, Ionia, all of these places that are really, really far. My family weren't equipped to make really really long trips to come and see me. So, you get to a point where you're like, you just put your head down, you do your time and then you write people, you talk to people over the phone whenever you can, but you don't anticipate a visit for the most part, at least I didn't.

Megan Wilson:

So who did you stay connected to outside?

Johnathan Smith:

I would say my mom, my grandma, my siblings. Friends, not so much. Because when you go to prison, there's this weird dynamic in which homeboys are not about to write you a letter and be like, "How was your day bro?" It was just not a thing. And then I wasn't in any relationships before I got arrested, so I didn't have a girlfriend or anything like that. So I just pretty much did my time, focused on like self and just getting through the years.

Megan Wilson:

So how did you sustain yourself in prison?

Johnathan Smith:

Lots of studying. I've spent, I would say, I would almost say like 50 to 60 percent of my time in prison study in Spanish, I was consumed. Probably like year two, I took a deep dive into it. I had a friend, that is my friend to this day who is still incarcerated, but I went to the library, I finally found a decent Spanish book and I'm like, "I'm going to learn this language." I started taking it seriously. And everybody, at some point, I would say like 80% of the prison population picks up a Spanish book and it's like, "I want to learn this language."

Johnathan Smith:

But I think that a lot of people aren't aware of how dedicated you have to be to learn an entirely different language, and people pick it up and they'll learn just, a lot of people just want to learn dumb shit. Like, "Yo, how do you say, 'Damn baby, you pretty' in Spanish. 'Oh, I like your smile' in Spanish." And stuff like that. They just want to say simple shit. I wanted to learn a language because I knew that all odds are going to be against me, and I wanted to have these things that were in my favor that I could use as mitigating things, for all of the bad that I've done. The fact that I have a criminal history.

Johnathan Smith:

So I hit the library, started off with these vocabulary lists, and I would just learn words and learn the different parts of speech in Spanish and similar to English, nouns, and adjectives, and verbs. And I would categorize all of my words and like learn different parts of speech and learn, in Spanish, how you construct sentences. And I got to Ionia, Bellamy Creek. Actually not, I forget the name of the prison, but I

went to a prison where there was this dude who was on my block, he was Spanish. He was Cuban. You can tell how he was talking that he was Spanish.

Johnathan Smith:

And I walked up to him and I was like, "Yo bro. Man, I'm trying to learn the Spanish language." And his response, and we talk about this to this day, if we ever talk about, "Remember the first day you walked up to me." And I asked him like, "Yo man, I'm trying to learn Spanish." He was like, "Oh yeah?" He pretty much just said good luck, and was like, get away from me. Because everybody says it, you have this person who speaks the Spanish language, and everybody's coming up to you like, "Man, how do you say stupid and blah, blah, blah." But I was serious about it.

Johnathan Smith:

So I took a different approach and started playing chess with him, because he liked chess. So I started playing chess with him and I would just talk to him whenever I could. And then I'd be like, "¿Cómo se dice, I'm going to beat your ass in this chess game?" And we established a relationship and yeah, we became friends. And then that was naturally easier for me to be like, "Yo, I'm studying this book right now. And I keep seeing this word, la película. What does that mean? Am I saying that right?" And he'd be like, "No, man, you gotta say it this way." So I stopped taking the approach of like, "Can you teach me this language?" And he became a friend and was easier for him to give me guidance in language. And we started to work out together and I had the opportunity to talk in Spanish whenever I possibly could. And I started asking him to speak in Spanish to me. And what was the question about though? I forget where I'm going with this.

Megan Wilson:

My question was, how did you sustain yourself in prison? And I had other questions that I was going to ask about, how you survived emotionally, and where you found joy and community. So yeah. Keep going.

Johnathan Smith:

This is all that. Yeah. So, Carlos, he became like, I would say he probably is my only friend that I ever met in prison. I met a lot of people, but he was like a friend friend, and he's not from here, so culturally, the way Spanish people treat each other, even in prison, is entirely different. Spanish people look out for each other. There's so many black people in prison and in the community, we don't really give a fuck about each other, and that translates inside of prison. It's like, "I don't know you bro. You're like from one neighborhood, I'm from another." But Spanish people, you fucking have a Mexican walk into prison, and some dudes from Guatemala and the Mexicans were like, "Do you need any food? Do you need a TV?" They look out for each other. So Carlos became like one of the first people that ever met in that prison where I sensed that he had no agenda, he wasn't out to get me, he was just genuinely offered friendship of. And that was great.

Johnathan Smith:

Then I started to really latch on to the Spanish language, and I would watch my telenovelas and study every day. And I think that I became a good friend of his because he saw how dedicated I was to the language. We were at the first prison together for two years, and over that two years I studied every single day, every day, no breaks. And we just got closer. There was a point in time where he went to a different prison and I was still there, and most of the time you never see people again. And then the

next person that I went to, he was there and we spent another two years together. We just kind of picked up right where we left off, where I've got to a place and he walked up, as soon as I got there, he was like, "Do you need anything?" It's kinda like when you establish relationships with people in prison, there's this like unwritten code, you look out for people you've done time with that or that you know. When you first get to a person, you tell what things are like, and where to go, and what to do, and who's what, and what gang is the biggest there, whatever.

Johnathan Smith:

And yeah, I did a lot of time with Carlos and we would build on, he knew that I had aspirations of like going to college and he would talk to me, because he's older than me. He's like 57. So he did a lot of time out here before he went in. He was a successful business person before he did prison time. So I learned a lot from him. And then, I actually got to a point where other people in like the Spanish, Latin community embraced me, and I shied away from like the Latin gang, because Carlos wasn't in a gang. He was just like, you have people who hang around each other because of the commonalities. And a lot of Latin people hung around each other. Not because they were in the same gang, because Carlos wasn't, but they kind of like intermingled in the sense.

Johnathan Smith:

That was like how I spent my time, learning the Spanish language, hanging around with Carlos and people who were similar and like-minded, and people who had goals, whatever they were, whether or not you're studying real estate or you're studying the stock market, you're starting Spanish. If you had a thing that you were focused on, and you weren't like the everyday inmate, which a lot of people get lost into like gambling, going out on the yard and looking for trouble and shit like that, that wasn't my motivation. I was like, "Yo, why the fuck would I want to look for trouble? It doesn't make any sense." So yeah.

Megan Wilson:

Where else did you find joy or community in prison?

Johnathan Smith:

I think that in prison, at a point in time, I started to dig deep, for who I was as a person. How I responded to things, which I never really did before. I would have an incident, I would get upset. And before prison, I never really thought about why I was upset, and how I was handling the situations, until prison. And I'm not sure why, I don't know if it was just the nature of prison, actually, it's not the nature of prison, because not everybody did that. It was a thing where I just actually was trying to be better. And I really had nothing to prove to anyone, before the first time in my life, I wasn't trying to be someone that I wasn't, I wasn't trying to fit in. So it allowed me to take deep assessments of myself.

Johnathan Smith:

And it was a struggle even to this day, I'm like, "Yo, why do I respond this way?" But I think it's just, over so many years of your response to conflict is violence and aggression, and you have to check that. "Why did I like feel that because this dude got aggressive with me, that I had to match that energy?" And that's kind of what it is. So I started to find peace in self-help books. Like Mind is the Master, and like Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People.

Johnathan Smith:

All of these books that trickle around and everybody knows, like The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. All of these things are like, you read about, and it's like, "Dang, I wish I thought like this on a daily." Because you're like, "Oh, this shit is cool." Anybody who reads that shit is like, "Ah, this is wack. Who wants to be in charge of their emotions? Who wants to be able to maintain their composure in the midst of conflict?" If you're reading that shit, and you're like, that's where you're mental, then you probably read in the wrong book.

Johnathan Smith:

But for me, I was like, "Man, I wish I could think like this and act like this on a daily." And, yeah. So I started reading those books and then I got into yoga, at some point, and meditation, and I found peace in just improving, improving myself and who I wanted to be. And yeah.

Megan Wilson:

Sounds like you spent a lot of time with yourself in prison.

Johnathan Smith:

For sure.

Megan Wilson:

That changed you.

Johnathan Smith:

100%.

Megan Wilson:

So how did you get to leave prison?

Johnathan Smith:

Say that one more time.

Megan Wilson:

How did you get to leave prison?

Johnathan Smith:

I served my time. Most of the time what happens is, if you've been well-behaved, you have the opportunity to see the parole board. And you go and see the parole board and they make a determination of whether or not your time throughout prison, your prison sentence, was productive. If you've done the recommendations that they had for you, if you've been violent, they kind of determine what your crime was, and based off of the behavior throughout your prison sentence, if you've learned anything from it. Like if you went to prison for assault and battery and you had 15 fights throughout our sentence, they're not letting you go. If you went to prison for armed robbery and you got caught stealing out of the library, they're not letting you go. So they look at the situation to determine whether or not you deserve to be released.

Johnathan Smith:

And sometimes they have bullshit ass reasons of why they're not releasing you, because they have this other shit why they want to keep numbers high, and so people don't get release. But they had no reason to not let me go. I had no real issues throughout my sentence. I had tickets, but those are expected. And then also at a certain point you have what they call a point spread, and the points go down within a certain amount of time. So if you behave, the last year or two you could have done the first two or three years where you were just fucking up, and then got your shit together down the line. So when I saw the parole board, I had support, I had a plan, I had all my recommendations done, I maintained employment. I wasn't considered unmanageable, so to speak. So yeah, I knew that I was going to get released and I was looking forward to it.

Megan Wilson:

Did you get your parole on the first time that you went to see board?

Johnathan Smith:

I did. Yeah. I got my parole four days after I saw the parole board. Saw them on a Monday, got my parole papers on the Friday.

Megan Wilson:

Wow. So when did you leave prison?

Johnathan Smith:

March 27, 2018.

Megan Wilson:

And where did you return to?

Johnathan Smith:

I returned to Warren, Michigan for a week before I moved to Ann Arbor. So, I paroled to my mother's house because when you leave prison, you have one of a couple of choices, go with family or go to a halfway house, or some other residential thing. The residential process takes longer, it actually extends your sentence sometimes, because they don't have bed space for you. So they're not going to just release you to the streets and tell you to figure it out. They usually want to release you to like family or whatever. So I told myself that because I, well I'm actually skipping out a big part, since if we're going post-prison is that where we're headed in the conversation? Okay.

Johnathan Smith:

So, part of my prison sentence, towards the end of my prison sentence, I actually got a college degree at the last facility that I went to, which shaped what I did after prison. So like before, when earlier in my sentence, I just studied to study. I studied whatever I can get my hands on, whatever books that were in this decade, anything that I can, because most of the books in libraries, in 10 years, we're going to have a thing called a computer. And it's like, we're in 2006 what the fuck are you talking about, this book is like from '75, there were a lot of books that were old. So, you just study whatever you can get your hands on. I didn't really have a great idea of what it is I wanted to do, I just knew that I had a list of careers of like, what would be like the shortest, education that I would require to make the most money

that I could, in a field that I would find pleasure doing. All these lists are like; electrician, plumbing, elevator installers. I had a long list of different careers that I had looked up in the occupational handbook, but I didn't really know what I wanted to do.

Johnathan Smith:

When I was at Marquette, I actually got called to the school building. They're like, "Yo, there's this program called the Second Chance Grant, and they're going to be offering this grant to a bunch of, 120 inmates around Michigan. And if you qualify, you'll go downstate and you'll get this degree." And I'm like, "Fuck, I want this. I deserve this. I've been studying my entire sentence." And I get there and I do the placement exam. And basically that determines... First step is, determine if you have the aptitude necessary to even participate in this program, because some people don't. And I literally got no questions wrong on this test, it was like math and English, and I'm a tutor at this time. I'm like, "Every single question on here. I tutor people with this stuff, about this stuff every day. There's no way I'm going to get any of these questions wrong." And I didn't, placed really high.

Johnathan Smith:

At the time, I actually got denied to be in a program because it was after the placement exam, they randomized the selection and I wasn't randomly selected. To make a long story short, I sent a letter to the education director explaining to her my interest in education and what my goals were, and why I thought that I was a perfect fit for that program. And I ended up getting selected, because my approach was that, I sent a letter to her, and I said, "I know that there're going to be people who get selected for this program who by the time the program starts are going to get kicked out because of bad behavior or disinterest." I betted on that.

Johnathan Smith:

So I knew that out of the 120 people who were selected first, they were going to be spots that are going to be open. And when they needed to fill them, please consider me. And I was one of the people that they considered in the program. Got downstate, started in the program, went through the curriculum, all of this stuff, and graduated. Actually, out of 120, I was one of five, out of 120 people who graduated. Because some people got down there and they got kicked out of the program for bad behavior, found out the program was for a computer. So it was like, computer technology program. Some people were finding that they weren't interested in computers. Some people found that it was too complicated and people started to drop out. Some people tried their hardest and just didn't have what was necessary to complete.

Johnathan Smith:

So to make a long story short, I ended up meeting one of my professors who taught me a lot about computers in the inside. So before I got released, one of my professors actually offered me a job, which was completely against the rules. Because they do not want anyone who comes inside of the prison to establish a relationship with anyone who is inside of the prison, because in their mind, I'm going to get out of prison and kill my professor or go rob him. They have the worst case scenario in their mind of like, "We're protecting you from this deviant." They don't want volunteers to tell you much about where they're from or what they do or any of those things.

Johnathan Smith:

So when my professor on the low told me, he saw my work ethic throughout the two years. So in two years, I'm pretty sure he would have been able to determine if I was serious or not about shit. He basically told me, "You know my name. You know how to find me, you're smart. If you can find me, I'll give you a job." And that was my number one choice. I was like, "Yup." At the time I didn't know, actually I did know. He was like, "Do you know what Ann Arbor is?" And I was like, "I know what that is, Big House, blah, blah, blah." He's like, "That's where I am, find me and I'll give you a job." So I was like, "Okay."

Johnathan Smith:

So when I got released, I knew ahead of time where I was headed, I just needed to parole to my mother's house because you have to. And I got out, I was released to my mother's house. The first week, I got my driver's license, I got all of the state assisted stuff, like food stamps and all that. And I prepped myself to move to Ann Arbor. There were people who I knew in Ann Arbor through PCAP and through other organizations. And I started reaching out to them about, "How could I transition to Ann Arbor when I don't have any family there?" They were like, "Well, we do have A Brighter Way. We do have all of these organizations who do stuff with inmates, but those lists are pretty long."

Johnathan Smith:

So I finally talked to someone who I knew that lived in Ann Arbor and they mentioned what subletting was. I didn't even know what the idea of what subletting was, but I started doing research. And then I found that I could rent a room for three or four or \$500. And I just figured, "Well, I have \$800 to my name. If I can get to this room in Ann Arbor, start working, I could then afford to pay my rent on a month to month." It's pretty much what happened. So I paroled to my mother's house, got all my ducks in a row, moved to Ann Arbor exactly one week after I got out of the prison, subletted into this person's house who didn't do a background check because they were just like, "Do you have the money? There's a room, there's a bed. You want to sleep in it." Boom, problem solved. And I moved in and went to work and that's kind of what I did.

Megan Wilson:

Wow. That was in some ways, incredibly fortunate that you were able to get a job and housing pretty much right away.

Johnathan Smith:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan Wilson:

So did the world outside present look different to you?

Johnathan Smith:

Outside prison?

Megan Wilson:

Yeah.

Johnathan Smith:

I think that I was really prepared. I prepped for this. I don't think I could have ever been more prepared for anything ever in my life. Actually, I've never been more prepared for anything ever. I wrote everything down. I'm talking about I had plan As, plan Bs, plan Cs, plan Ds. If the job in Ann Arbor with Tim didn't pan out, I had a plan B, if the next plan didn't work out, I had a plan C. I knew what I wanted to do as far as getting transportation initially. I did all of the research on how to finance cars and all of this shit, where I can get assistance from and all of this. I think the ease of me transitioning from prison to the free world was just based on how well prepared I was for all of the things.

Johnathan Smith:

I think that it helped that I had money in my disposal, but I had shit in my head about like, "Yo, how am I going to go about this?" And I approached it in the most logical way I possibly could. Like, "I have a job out here," which is the best thing that could've ever happened because I wouldn't be talking to you from this apartment in Ann Arbor if that professor did not offer me the job, I probably would not be in Ann Arbor. I'd probably be somewhere else, but I wouldn't be here. And I tell Tim that all of the time like, "Bro, if it weren't for you, I wouldn't even be at Duo. I wouldn't be in Ann Arbor." He's like, "No," he's like, "You did the work." He always says that. Yeah, it was seamless. It was like I knew what I needed to do, I just needed to execute.

Megan Wilson:

Where else did you find support after you left prison?

Johnathan Smith:

That's hard. I think that I was my own support system in a way. I think that I was so focused on getting my shit together, that I didn't even look, and also I had been doing it on my own for so long, I didn't really look outside of me. I never reached out to my parole officer and said, "Can you get me this? Or can you do this? Or you do that?" I didn't ask for shit, not from my family, not from anyone. Because I knew that one, I've been living on the bare minimum for years, like off of like \$40 a month for years. So now I have a place to lay my head, where I'm paying \$500 a month to live in this room. I'm in a fucking city like Ann Arbor where I don't have to really worry about anything. I walk down the street, the most thing I have to worry about is someone looking at me weird trying to wonder if I belong in this place. But I'm not worried about any violence or shit like that. I can really focus on what it is that I thought that I wanted to do.

Johnathan Smith:

And I just got out and I started to go to work and I would ride my bike to work that I borrowed from my roommate, ride my bike to work every day, get to work, go home, and then do research on shit. Where was I going to get my first car? I think that my focus wasn't really getting a sense of normalcy initially. I wasn't trying to date and I wasn't trying to do all of the things because I didn't even feel comfortable. I didn't feel comfortable going on in the dating apps and asking a girl out on a date when I had just got out of prison and I didn't have my shit together.

Johnathan Smith:

I focused on me for at least the first couple months. And I finally got my car. So the process was, I got out week one moved to Ann Arbor, worked for one month, went to the bank and asked them and opened up bank a checking account, asked that bank what the criteria was to be able to get a loan for a car. Because I knew I needed a car and I did all my research on how that works. And they were like, "We

need to check stubs that are a minimum of this, and then we'll tell you what you qualify for." Went to work for one month, got the two check stubs, took it to the bank, was like, "What do I qualify for?" They're like, "Oh, you qualify for \$7,500." Went online, looked for the best car I can possibly find for that amount of money and then got that car and then paid the monthly bills on it with the job that I had.

Johnathan Smith:

And then from there, I would say month three, I was working for this company in Ann Arbor where I wasn't making a lot of money. I was making like 15 dollars an hour for Tim. And then I started to say, Okay, now I need to start branching out and look for work other places." Do you want me to stop and change directions?

Megan Wilson:

No, you're good.

Johnathan Smith:

Okay. So that's what I did. I bought a car and then I knew that it would be unlikely. I didn't know where I would find work. So because I got my degree in information technology and because I felt like that was the field that I wanted to be in, I started to branch out. At the time, I didn't tell my boss that I was looking for work. Because I didn't want to, it felt weird. He was the reason why I was in this city and I was looking for other work, but I knew that I needed to do that because I wanted to be able to provide a better life for myself, and \$15 an hour wasn't it. And I already had bigger goals off the jump.

Johnathan Smith:

And I started to actually get interviews through Indeed. And there was one time where, I actually had an interview during the time that I was supposed to be working and I went to Tim and I was like, "Yo, Tim, yo, I got to leave early." We were really transparent, so he'd be like, "What do you got to do?" And I was like, "Ah, just got this place that wants to talk to me." He's like, "What? What are you talking about?" I'm like, "Yeah man, I got an interview." He's like, "Oh that's fucking great." He's excited for me. He's like, "Oh, that's cool." He's like, "Were you afraid to tell me?" I was like, "Man, I didn't really know. I'm looking for other work, but not because I don't like it here, but just because..." He's like, "Just because you want to make more money. I'm not mad at you." And he's like, "This is what you do when you go in there, do this, say this." Because he's an entrepreneur and he's a business person. And he knows, and he started giving me tips.

Johnathan Smith:

And the first job offer I got was from this company named Secure-24. I got the job in less than an hour. Actually, yeah, less than an hour. I went in there, it was for a Spanish bilingual technical service position, technical service, technician position or some shit like that. Left out of there, before I could even get home, they called me. Was like, "Yeah, we went offer you the job." I was like, "Cool." My recruiter called me in that conversation, I told her that I did prison time. Actually, I said I had a felony. She's like, "Oh really? What was it for? How long ago?" And I was like, "Well, I just got out of prison three and a half months ago." She's like, "Hmm." She's like, "Oh, well I'm not entirely sure what our policies are about that. But I'll check on it." Never heard from her again after that conversation.

Johnathan Smith:

She literally called me, told me, "We want to offer you the job," sent the offer letter through the email and then emailed her and was like, "Yeah, here's my response to the offer letter. It's signed, what's next steps?" Ghosted me. This is an entire corporation that a recruiter who had been talking to me for the better part of two weeks, stopped responding to my emails. So I got super frustrated and I'm just like, "This shit is wack. Not only are you guys making the decision solely based off the fact that I have a criminal history, but you're not handling it the right way." And I started doing research on what my options were about reporting that their response. And I forget what the organization was, it was an organization that specifically investigates the interviewing and hiring process.

Johnathan Smith:

And I reached out to this lady who was my recruiter, sent an email to her and was like, "Hey, just want to let you know that it's really unfortunate that..." As it got closer to my expected start date. I was like, "It's really unfortunate that I hadn't heard from you guys in this time." I was like, "I can understand that based off of what I told you about me doing time, that maybe you don't want to move forward with hiring me, but I think that was completely unprofessional in the way that it was handled." And I was like, "Just so you know, I intend on reaching out to 'blah' organization who handles this thing." This lady responded to me in 25 minutes. After I sent her that email telling her that I was going to reach out to this organization that investigates that stuff, she reached out to me and said, "Oh my God, I've been out of the office for two weeks. And I forgot that you fell through the cracks. I'm so sorry. We're going to keep going through the process."

Johnathan Smith:

And all she did was basically sent me the proper paperwork to do the background check, the company did the background check and they came back and told me I didn't get the job. But, they were going to just basically sweep me under the rug and never respond to me again had I not sent that email, and then they finally did reach out to me, and it was like, "Based on the information that we find in your background check, we are unable to proceed with employment at this time. If you have any questions about, or if you would like to dispute what's funding your background check, please reach out to you HireRight, they are the organization who did the investigation. We hope you the best." And I'm just like, "Yeah, whatever." But at the same time, I was also getting a lot of responses from other companies.

Johnathan Smith:

My roommate, she works for Barracuda, so I ended up interviewing for Barracuda too, similar situation. Pretty much got pretty far in the interviewing process, and I was trying to gauge, because I wasn't entirely sure at which point I should tell these companies that I had a criminal history. There's really no right way of doing it. I wasn't like interviewing for, I wasn't interviewing for McDonald's or Walmart, so there's no check the box there. You submit your resume, they look at it, they call you back. There is no official of like, "You failed to disclose that you had a felony on the application." Because most jobs that I was seeking, there was no application for that to even be a question. So they were going off of what I presented in my resume and how I responded to the initial first phone interview and offer me these jobs or offer me these interviews.

Johnathan Smith:

So same thing with Barracuda. I took a different approach. I was like, "Maybe I should tell them a little bit earlier before they offer the job to me. So I don't get further along." And I got to the third interview and told the recruiter about it and similar situation, stop hearing back from them and was told that I just

didn't qualify. Though, I knew absolutely I did. What my roommate did at the time, I knew she would ask me questions about shit. Like, "Yo, I have a question. How does DNS work?" And I'll be like, "Oh, it works like this." And explain it to her. So I knew I was qualified. Then I interviewed for this company called MedHub and similar thing, I actually got an offer letter from them. After they found out that I had a criminal history, they didn't ghost me, but they told me they wouldn't be able to move forward.

Johnathan Smith:

Then I got an offer from a company name ProQuest. This is in Ann Arbor. Same situation, literally had an offer letter and a start date, also pulled the offer. And then finally in July of 2018, I interviewed with Duo. I took an entirely separate approach. I stopped telling these people that I had a criminal record until after I had the offer. And I took a different approach this time with Duo. I not only told them... I didn't actually tell them that I had a criminal record. I made a video where I sat like this and I talked to them and said, "Once, my name is Johnathan, and you're considering me for this position for the technical support engineer position at Duo Security. When you complete that background check, you're going to see that I have a criminal history. If you're at all interested in learning more about me, more so than that once fact about me, and you want to give me the chance to prove my worth, then watch this video."

Johnathan Smith:

And I made the video and sent it to my recruiter. And the recruiter reached out and was like, "Yo, man, I fucking love that video." He's like, "Man, you're great." He's like, "I didn't know this," but he's like, "I'm hoping that we make the right decision here." Took them a long time. They finally had me reach out. They had some person on their general counsel reach out to me and basically make a judgment call. And then the next day they called me and like, "All right, we are going to move forward." That's how I work at Duo Security, which is one of the fucking most formidable cybersecurity companies in Michigan, for sure, and slowly becoming one of the best companies to work for in the information security space in the country. I would even argue in the world.

Megan Wilson:

That's awesome, that the employment finally worked out.

Johnathan Smith:

Yeah.

Megan Wilson:

So where else did you find support on the outside? I mean community, people.

Johnathan Smith:

So as I start to feel more comfortable, showing my face, when I say showing my face, it just meant I wasn't proud that I got out of prison. Depending on the spaces that you occupy saying, "Yo, I just got out of prison," is this thing that people kind of present as if it's like a good thing. Like when you're from Detroit and you're like, "Yo, I just got out of prison." "Oh, for real? How much time do you do, bro?" "I did 10 years." "Dang man. That's crazy, bro. What was it like?" And then these other spaces that I was trying to infiltrate was like, prison wasn't necessarily a positive thing. You're not bragging about it. It's an

experience. Hopefully you learn from it. Most people are going to judge you for it, and I never really offer that up when I meet people.

Johnathan Smith:

But in Ann Arbor there's PCAP and PCAP was something that I participated in inside of prison. And I met some people through PCAP and there was people who actually I met inside of the prison that once I was released, was really no limitations on me reaching out to them and stuff like that. And I think that there's always fear, though people go in and they have really positive outlooks like, "Yo, I want to give back. And I want to go in and be a positive, the beacon of light for folks who are in there," all of this stuff. They're still at this fear with people who run these organizations and who participate in them about like, "Am I safe?" Or like, "Is this person changed?" Or like, "What should I be concerned about?"

Johnathan Smith:

And for me, I never really wanted to put myself in a place where I was trying to impose, but I did reach out like, "Yo I'm out. It would be nice to see you and just catch up and see you in a different space in which I'm not confined, and just talk to you as a normal person." And yeah, PCAP was one of those places where I saw people who actually came to the prison and participated in theater workshops or creative writing or whatever the case may be. And Ashley Lucas was great. I saw her and she introduced me to a lot more people who were in the area who had our backs, so to speak. And it was good stuff.

Johnathan Smith:

And one of the biggest things was, I think when I first got out, living in a city like Ann Arbor, which is really pretty much tied to what you do and what spaces you occupy. If you go to university, you more than likely hanging out with people that you go to school with, and if you work at a specific place, you more than likely going to hang out with those people. I didn't really have a community at first, but one of the first communities that felt like I belonged to, was this girl named Elle, she was a part of PCAP. She invited me to this dance thing. I was interested in bachata and salsa, and she invited me and I started to meet a lot of people through dance and I started to enjoy dance and actually start to meet people and develop friendships. And a lot of the people that I know in this city is because of that.

Megan Wilson:

How did you make space for yourself?

Johnathan Smith:

Post-prison?

Megan Wilson:

Yeah.

Johnathan Smith:

I would say the fact that I was in a city that I've never been in my life, it wasn't hard to, because I didn't really have many people to reach out to. I remember going to East Quad or North Campus or something and just walking around and looking at all these people who clearly had reason to be there. And I'm just walking, just observing things. And I think that those were the moments I was like, "Yeah, this is where I should be." It felt new and it felt super powerful just to be in this space. I was free to go do what I want,

and there was really no desire in me to do wrong. It was only good. There was nothing to me that was like, "Oh, that thing, or I can do this to get money." It wasn't like all of those thoughts crossing my mind in the past, were no longer a thing, and I just wanted to find my own lane because it's really weird when you get out of prison and you try to make a transition from one community into another or one society to another.

Johnathan Smith:

If you consider the criminal lifestyle being its own culture and this people who are law abiding citizens being an entirely separate culture, if people who belong to the criminal culture who look at people who decide to do the right thing, it's like, "Bro, you wack. That shit's for the birds." Or, "Man, I got to get my money," or "You a rat", whatever. Then the other people on the other side where you like, "I'm not a shiny penny. I got a couple of dents, but I'm a good person." And then they're really reluctant to let you in. So you're like in this middle where you can't go,

Johnathan Smith:

imagine two doors, the first door is locked because they kicked you out and you're not welcome to come back. And then this other door is closed because they don't know who you are and don't know if they can trust you. So you're just standing there trying to figure out, and this is why a lot of people go back to that door that that was a locked in the first place, because they know they can always go back there and those people will always accept them. No one's going to be like, "No, don't come commit a crime with me." It's rare. No one's going to kick you out of that community. So that's why some people go back to that. But then the other side of things it's like, you just got to find the door on this other side where people will let you in and accept you regardless of what your experiences were.

Megan Wilson:

So this seems like a good time to move into some reflections. So, let's start with, what does your incarceration mean to you now?

Johnathan Smith:

I talk to people about this sometimes. So for me, a lot of people, I won't say a lot of people, I don't lead with prison as a defining factor. And when people hear about it, it's obviously a big part of who I am and what I've been able to accomplish thus far. But I don't usually like to talk about it that much because of the fact that is the thing that people will remember about you, if you tell them that you did prison time. If you tell someone you did prison time, I don't give a fuck if this person cares about that or doesn't care about that, they're going to always remember that thing, that you did prison time. You have some people who are just absolutely not affected by it. You have some people who I've told who I know I sensed a shift in them the next time I saw them, just different. How? Why? I don't know, but they are. So I usually don't lead with that.

Johnathan Smith:

So how it's affected me, I think that it's positive in a sense that I made the most that I possibly could out of it. Prison isn't necessarily designed for you to do that because the fucking people who run prison and the systems that make up the prison system, they don't give a fuck if you go back to prison, to think that they really care about you staying out is fucking ridiculous because Buffalo Wild Wings wants you to come back to the restaurant. Walmart wants you to come back. Every fucking business that is monetized wants you to come back. There's no fucking... They can tell the public that they don't want you to come

back because it's in the best interest of the public to not have people out committing crimes, but ultimately if you come back, that's great because the COs have jobs, the prisons don't get closed, they still make money. So yes, they want you to come back. They give you all of these programs to show to people when you fuck up that it's because you fucked up and the system tried to give you as much assistance as they possibly could.

Johnathan Smith:

"We gave them thinking for a change. I'm not sure why that didn't help. It was six weeks long. We went through all these modules and it showed them how to be objective and how to handle conflict. We even went through a curriculum about how to fill out a resume". And yeah, of course, all that stuff, but that's for them to spend taxpayers' dollars on some bullshit, a pamphlet that's this thick and it's like, "That should have changed you. You should be a different person now." Meanwhile, they're just banking on that shit. So they don't care. And I wouldn't say they as an all, but they as a whole, don't give a fuck. The majority don't care. The COs don't care if you come back, they have a job. The people who are the private entities like Aramark and fucking whatever other organizations who invest in prisons, they don't care because they continue to make money and money is focus. I don't even know what the question was or where I went with that.

Megan Wilson:

You were talking about how your incarceration affected you.

Johnathan Smith:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I think that for me, I made the decision to make the most out of my prison time, prison didn't change me. Sidebar, since I've been working at Duo, I actually got offered another job at another company because I don't know, it's always good to see what your options are out there. I never knew this company. They actually reached out to me, I didn't reach out to them. They reached out to me on LinkedIn, asked me if I was interested, because they saw my resume, they saw that I worked at Duo. They offered me a job for more than a hundred thousand dollars a year. I declined that offer because I was like, "Nope". One, I don't want to go through this shit about the background check. Two, the company, it's in the e-commerce space. They're doing really well, but this is right on the heels of COVID, and I was like, "I don't know, it's really volatile. Duo's pretty stable. I don't know if I want to transition." I declined the offer.

Johnathan Smith:

They offered me 10,000 more than what they initially offered. So talk about \$102,000, to \$112,000. I accepted that offer. I went through the process and then told them I had a criminal history. They pulled the offer. This was four months ago. So they shit about, it doesn't matter what I do. I can be working in this space for 10 years and prove my worth, and people are going to still have the thoughts that they have. This other company who is nowhere near as, what's the word I want to use? They don't make as much money as Duo. They don't make as many waves as Duo and now part of Cisco, and I proved my worth to this company. It's like, what's the word I want to use? If I'm good enough for... Oh, okay. I guess you can say... Ah, I don't know. I am horrible at analogies sometimes. But it's like, "How can you not think I'm good enough when this other company thinks I'm good enough?"

Johnathan Smith:

So I guess I'll go backwards to how it impacted me. I think that oftentimes I'm still really reluctant on who I tell and why. Yeah, I don't know what I was saying.

Megan Wilson:

Did you tell me before that there was someone you interacted with in a work environment who said that they thought that the system had worked for you?

Johnathan Smith:

This was that. So, yeah. So when I got offered that job, the company was StockX, it doesn't matter. The company was StockX, they offered me the job, the guy who was my recruiter, he was pretty progressive. He was like, "Yo man, that's...", as soon as I told him, he was like, "Wow." He's like, "What?" Because considering what they were willing to offer me, showed how they valued my abilities, my skill set, what I could bring to the company, because I learned an awful lot working at Duo for these last couple of years, and it's extremely valuable. So many companies use us. What I learned in the two years, that we do everything with everyone, and this company recognizes that. And having someone who worked for the company who they integrate with on so many levels, they offered me an amazing job.

Johnathan Smith:

So the guy, when I told him about this, at some point in the conversation, when I told him that I did prison time, he pretty much said like, "Yo, man, I think that you served your time." He's like, "The system did its job. And I think that you paid your debt and it's all good." And I didn't say anything because he wasn't aware of what he was saying, but in my mind, I'm thinking like, "No, the system didn't do its job". This is not something that the system produced. The system produced me and all of the bad decisions that I made, because it was designed for me to not ever do good. It wasn't designed for me to do well in life. The communities that I grew up in, this education that I was offered, all of those things were designed for me to fail. When I went to prison, it wasn't designed for me to fail, but it also wasn't designed for me to achieve much success. My own determination, my own steadfastness, my own persistence made me get to the point where I'm at.

Megan Wilson:

Yeah. That's quite a perception about the carceral system. So what are your perceptions about the carceral system now that you've been through it?

Johnathan Smith:

It's interesting because, so when I participated in that program, like I said, there were 120 inmates offered the program and most everyone was excited for different reasons. Some people were excited because you're like, "Fuck, I get to go downstate. I don't need to be up North anymore. I'm going to get closer in my family and get visits towards the end of my bit." Some people were like, "Man, I didn't really know what I wanted to do but this computer shit sounds like a way I can make money." And other people were just like, "You know, it's something to do." Whatever bucket you fit in.

Johnathan Smith:

I learned during that program that there are so much fault on so many levels, not just the system itself. I watched people squander away the best fucking opportunity that they could have gotten. And when I say that, I mean, at the time where I was focused on studying and making sure that I got good grades

and making sure that I got these certifications that were being awarded or at least offered to us during this program, I also watched a bunch of dudes not take advantage of it. Not study, whose books looked as new as the day that they got them, but be in the day room playing poker all fucking day. And then will come to me and be like, "Jay, bro, I forgot to study yesterday. Man, can you help me real quick? Give me a run down." And I used to be like, "Yeah, bro, whatever." But at some point I got this negative idea of like, "Yo, bro, for the 120 of us, we have no fucking excuse." Because this is beyond what the MDOC could have ever offered.

Johnathan Smith:

Even though it was a pilot program and it wasn't out for everyone and most everyone doesn't get this opportunity, the people who did, I would say 80% of them fucked it over. The ones who did take it serious, some of them didn't have the abilities necessary to pass it. And then the few that did, I'm not entirely sure what they're doing now, but I haven't really heard much about that, but I do know that out of the 120 people, five people passed. And I only know one other person out of all of the people because I got to a point where I was really involved in the program and knew everyone and knew everything about who was getting what on what exams, because I was a tutor. And I know one other person who's out in the streets right now who makes six figures in this industry because of that program or what he learned in that program.

Johnathan Smith:

And you have other people who I know, still talk to this day, who got into truck driving or got under these other, "I'm going to be a chef." Because they didn't take advantage of the time that they had while they were sitting there doing nothing. And they tell me, "Jay, I really wish that, man, I should've been studying with you bro." Because they'll see what I'm doing in my time and how I'm progressing, people I'm hanging around and stuff like that. So I would say the system isn't really designed for you to do great. And you have these really rare offerings in which people do get opportunities and it's up to those people to take advantage. But what I learned is it seems as if even if you are offered those opportunities, some people still fuck it up, no matter what. And I won't categorize.

Johnathan Smith:

And also I'll say this; if I had a choice, I would have picked 120 people better than they did. They fucked up, they picked the wrong people. I know people who would have benefited from this program way better than the people who were in it. So they didn't give a fuck. They just needed the numbers. They needed to show the department of justice that they gave 120 people the opportunity to take this curriculum and properly spend the \$800,000 that they were given for this program. But I know people who were studying and focused on learning and dedicated to education, who weren't a part of this program, who wished they were, and would have did great with it. So I think that though the MDOC tried in this instance to do good, they offered it to people who squandered it away. They probably could have given it to people who could have made the most out of this. Probably had a lot better success at it if they would've picked people who were better equipped to go and be focused with it.

Megan Wilson:

So how did your perspective on the world change after your incarceration?

Johnathan Smith:

I moved to Ann Arbor and I had this idea of just being accepted in the normal law abiding community, people who work, people who have 401(k)s and stuff like that. I always imagined those are the people I want to hang around. You are who you hang around, hanging around people who are doing good in life, making good decisions, and that's what was my focus. Ann Arbor is a really progressive place. It's really diverse in the sense that there are a lot of different types of people here. The university kind of accounts for a lot of that. People from everywhere, from all different countries, different walks of life, speak different languages, different interests, all of these different things.

Johnathan Smith:

And then, you have this other side of Ann Arbor that's the working class of Ann Arbor, which is the people who live here and pay taxes here and all that stuff, which isn't as diverse as people think. When I think about like Ann Arbor, I split it off into the university and then everything to State Street towards Maine, which is fucking all of the regular people who work and live in the city. I think that my perspective about the society is shaped in a different way. One, I didn't want to go back to the community that I was a part of because I just saw that it's like sending an alcoholic back to a place where people drink alcohol daily. I didn't want to go to the city that I grew up in where crime is, common and be right back brought into that. And even if I thought that I had the best mindset possible, be presented with an opportunity to break the law.

Johnathan Smith:

A person may be super focused on ensuring that they will never drink a drop of alcohol, but if you're sitting there drinking alcohol, you're like, "Yo, I know that you're trying to be sober here, but I don't think one drink will kill you", and you drink once, and then you go back into that cycle. So my mindset was, I never wanted to be back in that place. So I figured I'd go to a place where I didn't imagine that these bad things were happening. Then I get there and I realize that no matter how much progress I make, I'm not necessarily really ever accepted. At this point, I no longer consider myself as this person who's trying to find his way in this world. I accomplished what I need to accomplish. And I feel pretty stable in who I am as a person.

Johnathan Smith:

But when I walk into a place, no one knows what my background is. They don't know that I went to prison, but they also don't know where I work and what I do in the day to day and how I contribute to society as a whole. They don't all pay taxes in the city. They don't know any of that shit. For all they know I'm some fucking person who joyrided here from Bellville and I'm looking to take someone's car. That's how I vision people looking at me when I walk in these places. So when I think about that, I think about how much progress we made, but also how much people say that they support all these different causes on the surface, but really deep and underneath people still have really, really deeply rooted prejudices and stuff. Just about people that are different from them in general.

Megan Wilson:

I think that's really wise. So, I think it's about time for one more question.

Johnathan Smith:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan Wilson:

And it's another big one. What do you want people to know about incarceration in the U.S?

Johnathan Smith:

Oh, that's a hard one right there, dang.

Megan Wilson:

If it helps, you can think about different kinds of people, you can think about, what would you want policy makers to know? What would you want activists to know? What about members of your own community?

Johnathan Smith:

It's not one group of people's problem. It's not the criminal justice system's problem to solve. And it's systematic because it starts long before you ever actually reach prison. It starts in elementary school, in middle school and high school, starts in the community. It starts with people who belong to the community and how you are. Even if you don't think of yourself as a role model, kids are looking at you. Like the Black community and how we talk about how things are not designed for us to do well, which is true. It's just like this cycle. It's like, "Ah, I fucking sell drugs and commit crimes because the people before me did, and that's all I saw. And then now the people after me are going to do the same things because that's all they see."

Johnathan Smith:

And at which point do we stop? Because it's like, who is this hurting most? I think that it's heard in our community the most. Ultimately, these others communities are not necessarily affected. They are affected if they are the victims of crime, or if they have to pay higher taxes or whatever, but our community is the community that's being shattered through all of this stuff. But if I had a say so, I would, one, tell people who are the entities of these communities to stop playing the victim. Stop playing the victim not because you're not the victim, because it won't get you anywhere. You can't cash that in at the bank. You can't do anything with it by saying "My community, my society, my culture is the reason why I'm like this", because then who does it hurt? Hurts you, hurts your family.

Johnathan Smith:

And then the flip side, these people who make these really, really important decisions, they need to stop feeding millions of dollars to public schools like Pioneer, but not do the same thing for public schools that exist in Detroit. And we know that naturally different cities have different budgets based on the people who live there, and Detroit doesn't really account for a lot of money for the people because it's usually low to middle waged folks are making money. The people who make the most money live in these places like Ann Arbor and stuff like that, Bloomfield Hills and blah, blah, blah. But I think that if there's going to be any change it has to start with education. Trying to actually change communities, doing more outreach work. It's hard to get a group of people to change their mindset after adults, and show them something different where there's so many layers to this shit, in music, in culture, in general, and what matters, values, all of this shit plays a part in all of this shit.

Johnathan Smith:

Like me going to prison, it wasn't because I was naturally violent or I just wanted to break the law. It was because the things that the people around me found of value were clothes and shoes and watches and

glasses. And I didn't have the money to buy those things. So how do I get those things? By breaking the law. And whatever I needed to do to get those things, to be accepted in the community that I belong to, I'll do. It starts with all of that shit. Yeah, I just think that if I was talking to people, policy makers, I would say that it's not all on you, that it has to start in the community too.

Johnathan Smith:

But they play a huge part in it, like giving people's sentences, you'll see those side-by-sides of like Jacob who lives and born in Ann Arbor who caught a home invasion and same, no priors, but he was 17, he got sentenced to probation. But Robert, who committed the same crime in Detroit, or Ferndale, or whatever place, but black, seven years in prison. Those are the things that makes the difference. So yeah, that's what I would say.

Megan Wilson:

Thank you. We've had, I think a lot of insights here.

Johnathan Smith:

I think so.

Megan Wilson:

Johnathan Smith, thank you for talking to me.

Johnathan Smith:

My pleasure Megan Wilson.