

# Titan Tribune

Issue 10

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## COVID-19 hit MYA hard recently

**By I. C.**

When COVID came upon us recently, things got messed up.

School was postponed, teachers had to leave the building, and church people, mentors and our families were stopped from coming in.

We went back to remote learning and it was boring without the teachers physically in the classroom.

Most of the cool things stopped, including our upcoming outings and watching movies and eating snacks with the church people.

Also, visitation stopped, which was sad because I wouldn't be able to see my family. It's a sad time.

**By N. H.**

Recently I was infected with COVID here. I am one of the few who caught it. I was quarantined and tested.

This has affected many of the youth here, causing a domino effect. We weren't able to get the proper hands-on education for two weeks because the teachers were not able to come in. We had to have classes online until recently, which was not fun at all.

I'm just glad the teachers are back now, so I can focus on studying for my GED.

Still, visitation is not back, which has taken a toll on us. We can no longer see our family members.

I have been blamed for the shutdown and I have apologized to the youth. Hopefully, they open up visitation soon so that we can all see our beloved family members.

**By J. S.-M.**

When two youth here came down with COVID, everyone became extra careful with cleaning and masks. Every time the infected youth went to the bathroom, the staff had to spray and sanitize everything down before the next person went in.

Also, visitation stopped, so I could no longer see my family in person on the weekends any more. If they brought back visitation with restrictions, then that would make things better.

My hope for my future is that I will stay on track to get home to see my family.

One positive thing that happened was that we got grilled food for Black History Month made by the staff. It was the best food I've had in a long time. It reminded me of the good food I had back home. What would make things better would be getting home and enjoying that type of food with my family again.

My hopes for the future are to go back to school, get a job and to stay out of trouble.

**By A. F.**

I feel we should talk about how everything was shut down because of COVID. Visitation was stopped, which makes our time here way harder because now we don't get to see our families. That is not easy to deal with.

Also, our classes were on a Zoom-like internet connection for two weeks, which made it way harder to pay attention. It was the second time that happened. We get more work done when there are in-person classes with teachers.

# What I learned at MYA

**By A. W.**

I know it's a waste of time being in jail, but I can honestly say the program has taught me a lot.

I've learned how to control my impulsive behavior and how to walk away from negative peers when I transition home.

My goals when I transition home are to finish school, get a job and make Ma Dukes proud and keep a smile on her face.

When I first came here, a staff named Kevin Capehart used to tell me to do my time and get out. I know that he really cared about me because he used to go out his way to talk to me and prayed with me. He knew I was a good kid. I just had a temper that I couldn't control.

Not just him. There were a few more staff members who went out of their way to help us through our time and tell us right from wrong.

I can honestly say the program is good the way it is because when you are here it doesn't feel like you're in jail. But I'll be home in 21 more days. I did six months and I'm going home. Anybody can do it.

**By J. G.**

At MYA, I learned how to control my anger, ADHD and my depression.

My goal for when I get out is to never come back to a place like this.

One of my other goals is to play sports. Another is to finish high school and go to college. And to do better in life.

To be honest, MYA is good. The only thing they should do is make the rec yard bigger so the youth can play more sports.



## WELCOME

This is the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of the Titan Tribune, a newspaper about Miami Youth Academy that is reported and written by the journalism students here.

The class and newspaper is a collaboration of MYA, Exchange for Change and Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Educational Opportunity and Access. Exchange for Change is a nonprofit that teaches writing classes in youth commitment and adult correctional facilities.

The paper is edited by retired newspaper reporter Mr. Henry Unger, an Exchange for Change volunteer. He is assisted by MYA teacher Mr. Jesus Gonzalez. The paper's layout and design were done by Miami-Dade teacher Mr. Daniel Wynne.

# Once, Right Now, Someday

Students wrote poems reflecting on their lives over time: Once ... Right now ... Someday....

## By C. E.

Once when I was 13 years old, I saw a falling star and I wished that I would be the best rapper alive

Once I got badly hurt and had to go to the hospital for breaking my finger

Right now I'm in a program for some very bad charges and I'm still fighting some, but I pray they run all my charges concurrent

But once they let me free I'm going to spend the rest of my life with my kids and I'm never going to leave them again

Right now I'm still in this depressingly stupid program waiting on my freaking release date

Someday I will be the best rapper alive

But right now, I'm stuck in this program waiting to go home

Someday I will be a billionaire, and buy my mama a house on the beach, and my kids will be football players, and my baby girl will be a cheerleader

Someday I will be on top of the world, and everybody will be asking me for handouts

## By J. B.

Once I was in elementary school

Once I was in middle school

Right now I'm about to graduate high school

But once I didn't even know my ABC's

Right now I'm working on getting my GED

Right now I'm thinking about going to college

Someday I'll make my family proud

But right now I'm working on becoming a better me

Someday I'll accomplish all of my goals

Someday I will make an impact on the world

Never will I give up

But someday I'll be great

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## By I. C.

Once I was a little kid playing basketball, then I became a juvenile

Once I was a gamer playing in tournaments for a reasonable amount of money

Right now I am in a program called Miami Youth Academy, serving my time till I go home

But once I was 14 years old, living a cool social life and doing normal things teens shouldn't and should be doing

Right now I am typing about my past, present and future

Right now I am watching staff talk to a youth about threats

Someday I will be home playing basketball, watching TV, playing games or chilling with females

But right now I am looking around, daydreaming about how I would change on the outs

Someday I will pursue my dreams or work a family business

Someday I won't have to look over my shoulders

Never will I ever have to come back to jail

## **By A. F.**

Once I was a kid, all happy, with my whole life in front of me  
Once I was sitting in a cell, wondering if I would ever go home  
Right now I'm 90 days from going home  
Never did I think I would make it home again  
But once I was given hope that I would be going home, it's  
what kept me pushing  
Right now I'm looking back on when I wasn't going home  
Right now I'm about to go home and going to live my life like I  
was supposed to  
Someday I'll be home looking back on never going home  
But right now I'm excited and prideful with my second chance  
at life  
Someday I'll be home remembering the struggle that I put my-  
self through these last two years  
Someday I'll be a dad and I'll teach my kids not to go down the  
same road I did  
Never will I be in that position again  
Someday I will spread my story of hope and how I was blessed  
with a second chance

## **By D. K.**

Once I was young, too bold and got into trouble in a robbery	But right now I'm sitting in a program wishing I was out with my family
Right now I'm in a program and I can't even go home	Someday I will finally be free and go home and never come back
But once I leave I won't go out and do it again	Someday is coming real soon so I got to get ready to leave
Right now I'm thinking too much and I'm feeling really sick	Never will I ever be broke or ever go to prison because I'm going to stop myself from going
Right now I can't stop thinking of my kid, so I need to stop coming here so I can take care of my baby	Someday I will make it back home to my family and be the man my mom wants me to be
Someday I'll become a billionaire and I'll help my family and move them out of the hood	

## **By D. T.**

Once I was young  
Once I was dumb Right  
now I'm smart But  
once I was not Right  
now I'm locked up Right  
now I feel the pain  
Someday I will make it  
But right now I'm not  
Someday I will make it  
Someday you will see  
Never change on me  
But someday I'll be free

## **By A. M.**

Once I was selling dope

Once I was kicking doors

Right now I'm in this program and I've got a long way to go

Right now I'm reminiscing about them times when I was on the road

Right now I could've been in that booth, in the studio

Someday I'm going to be snapping on stage, rocking out on shows

But right now I'm counting down the days waiting until I've got 30 more

Someday I'll be home and I won't even have to wait no more

Someday I'll see them millions of dollars and won't even have to hurt no more

Never would I lie or tell stories or go snitching, though

But someday I'll make it and live up to tell my story, bro!!!

## **By A. W.**

Once I was that young boy growing up in a neighborhood with nothing but people my age committing crimes

Once I was that young boy getting picked up from school by the police

Right now I am sitting in my cell overthinking about the charges that I am facing

But once I get over these consequences I am going to show my mom that I am better than what I was before

Right now I am learning how to walk away from negative problems that will leave me dead or in jail

## **By J. S.-M.**

Once I was a baby

Once I was a toddler

Right now I'm writing about my past

But once I was thinking about my future

Right now I'm thinking about my mistakes

Right now I'm doing time

Someday I'll get out

But right now I wake up each morning to another headache

Someday I'll make my family proud

Someday people will know my name

Never will I jeopardize or risk my friendship with my family

But someday I'll get out

Right now I am working toward being a better man

Someday I will be that man telling the young people that this ain't the type of life you want to live

But right now I am on the road to going home next month to be a better man

Someday I will be back out there with my family doing better and staying out of trouble

Someday I will be walking through these doors with a huge smile on my face

Never looking back on my past life

But someday I will be a successful young man making billions of dollars



# MYA Letter Exchange with San Quentin

Students at Miami Youth Academy and men who are incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison have been exchanging letters.

In the exchange below, San Quentin participants were asked if there was a key moment in prison that helped them redefine how they lived their life.

Here is a response by one of the participants, Edwin Chavez, and replies from MYA students.

Edwin E. Chavez  
Arrested at 19 years old  
Incarcerated for 26 years  
Committed first-degree attempted murder

Dear MYA students,

Was there a key moment or incident in prison that helped me redefine how I saw or lived my life?

I came to prison with an ugly and dark attitude driven by an adopted belief system; that I was a lifer and that I was going to die in prison anyway. I continued to refuse to take accountability for my own crime and actions even in prison. I was very immature and irresponsible and I continued the gang and criminal mentality and illicit activities inside prison.

I now regret to admit that back then to me there were no consequences and if there were I didn't care after spending years in "the hole". "What can they do (meaning the prison officials) send me to jail?" This was my attitude. I got deep into the dope game and I became more selfish and wreckless. I wanted money and power at any cost.

It was not until 2008, when I was at a level IV prison, that it hit me like a 18- wheeler going downhill ready to crash and explode. I had made some illegal money and my then girlfriend was not answering my calls or my mail so I had my sister call her on a 3-way connection. I was upset and all I cared was about my money. I raised my voice and demanded my money. My sister heard the whole conversation and called my mother telling her that I was extorting this girl. I was a manipulator and my loved ones were oblivious to my criminal life style inside prison.

My mother came to visit me. I was all excited to see my mom. I hugged her and didn't want to let go. I love my mother dearly, and every time I am around her, I feel the love. She is my rock and supporter. Unaware as to what was coming next, I smiled at her and all I saw was tears rolling down her wrinkled face as she started to cry. Saddened, confused and heartbroken I asked her what was wrong. She replied, "My son, what's wrong with you? I didn't raise you to be this way." At first, I couldn't understand what she was talking about, until she shared with me what she had learned about my 3-way conversation.

As I write this defining moment of my life, I am overwhelmed with sadness. Because of my past attitudes, behavior and actions I hurt a lot of people: my ex-girl and even my sister, who I am sure was also hurt hearing me being abusive to my girlfriend. I indirectly hurt the woman that means the world to me. I deprived her of having her son in the free world and now in prison I'd broken her heart and trust because all I cared for was me, and some miserable coins, and a false sense of power.

Watching how I hurt my mother made me realize the profound impact I continued to have on those who loved me the most. I realized I was living in denial and did not have the courage to ask for help, since I did not know were to begin to change my life. This was my turning point, the moment in my life where I said "enough is enough." Ever since, I stopped being afraid

of looking into my past and dealing with all the trauma and pain that I have endured. I needed to heal, no matter how difficult the process would be. Today I find myself having a healthy relationship with my mother and I have regained her trust based on my rehabilitation. I have educated myself, and have several Associate in Arts degrees, which is something that I never thought would have been possible for me. I learned how to believe in myself and through it all I received love and support from my counselors, teachers, and my family. Believe in yourself and you will be surprised how even the sky is not the limit.

What do you have to lose? Give it a try! Your journey will be what you make of it and I believe that you have the potential to accomplish anything you set your mind to.

Sincerely,

  
Edwin E. Chavez

## Students reply to Mr. Chavez

Thank you for your insights. They give me perspective. You have given me give an idea of the types of things I could've been dealing with.

I need to keep myself from going in the wrong direction. I would like to experience life to the fullest with my freedoms, not locked up having people tell me what to do and how to do it.

I have to learn to not let anger and pride get in the way of my decision-making and I must learn how to think about consequences before actions, so I can stay free and not put myself in the situation I was already in at 15 years old, facing life.

I would like to have kids and be there for them and not be in prison while they are growing up, like my father. I now only have 70 something days left till my life restarts after being down two years. I plan on taking advantage of it and doing what I should've been doing these two years.

I thank you for your wisdom. When I get out I will live it up, because I missed out. But I know, like you have said, it's time for me to take a new narrative in my life. I want to have a better life being free.

Best of wishes to you. I hope you keep your head up. There are better days coming.

Sincerely,

**A. F.**



# More student replies

Thank you for inspiring me to change my ways. After reading your letter, it has given me a different perspective on things in life.

You have shown me that I should take advantage of the little things. I need to spend more time with my family because being in here doesn't only affect me, but it affects them too. I have little siblings who look up to me who are always asking when I'm coming home. I tell them that I'm visiting my dad's house and will be home soon.

You let me believe in myself and continue to do good in this program, so I go home on time. I've missed out on a lot, including watching my siblings grow up, their birthdays, holidays and more.

What I have to say is keep your head up. I don't know what you're going through, but I hope that this letter gives you faith in yourself.

Sincerely,

**J. S.-M.**

I find your letter very helpful as I go through the same things you are going through. I don't have much of a support system at home, and I don't seem to get noticed much by my family.

I look forward to hearing from you so I can have some type of support to change my life around for the better before it's too late.

I am working towards getting an education while I'm in my program, so I can go to college if I am able to. I know I can do it if I put my mind to it.

Thank you for your support and I hope you keep sending letters to us. God bless you.

Much love from Miami Youth Academy,

**D. K.**

Thank you for your letter.

I'm almost 18 and have been in and out of jail my whole life. It put a lot of hurt on my family's shoulders.

This is my third program and this time I'm realizing the problems in my life. I am the key to changing them, to think harder on my choices, and to change my perspective on life.

I'm trying my best to complete this program successfully and this time learn something I can use in completing my dream of being a tattoo artist and owning my own shop.

Sincerely,

**A. D.**



# The moral of my fable is ...

After reading some of Aesop's fables, students tried their hand at writing their own.

**By J. G.**

Once upon a time there was a dove named Tom and Tom was the least popular of the doves.

But all the other doves thought that Tom was unathletic and dumb, by the way he looked. He looked unusual. He had a different beak, feet and eyes.

One day, Tom woke up and wanted to play sports, so he joined the football team. When he joined, his teammates thought he was going to be trash at football.

Tom went to practice and outshined all the other doves. He became the most popular dove at school.

The moral of the story is to not judge a book by its cover.



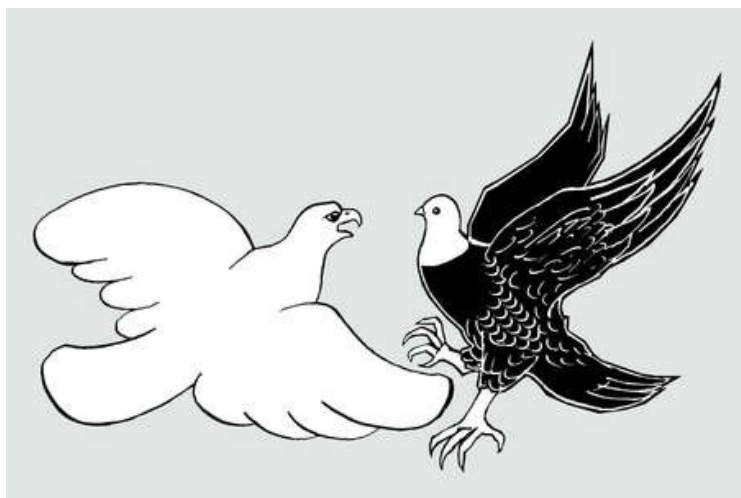
**By A. M.**

One morning, a dove was sitting by the water when all of a sudden an eagle came and swooped down by him.

The dove started to feel uncomfortable and scared, because the eagle sat too close. So the dove started to move away and yelled at the eagle.

All the eagle wanted to do was have a conversation with the dove. The dove didn't know that until the eagle called out to the dove and said, "Hey, I just wanna be friends. I don't mean any harm."

The moral of the story is to be kind to others and don't judge people before you get a good picture of who they are.



# The moral of my fable is ...

After reading some of Aesop's fables, students tried their hand at writing their own.



**By N. H.**

One day, the parrot and the eagle were venturing out to the palace of doves. The eagle was a bit more aggressive, shouting battle words, but he simmered down with a little help from the dove.

The only way to get into the palace was for them to work together. They both went to the king and spoke their proposition.

The eagle learned to use soft and kind words, which made the dove so excited. The dove spoke his part and the next thing you know they were able to camp in the village of doves.

The moral of the story is that working together can really pay off.

**By D. K.**

One day there was an easygoing dove that was walking down the street and ran into a controlling owl.

The owl had asked the dove to fetch him a pail of water. It sent the dove over the seas and into the forest to fetch some exotic water.

Then when the dove came back, the owl asked the dove to do one more thing.

The owl asked the dove to go find the most exotic gold and bring it back as fast as possible.

So the dove went as asked.

Then when the dove came back, it was told to do one more task. But this time the dove said no to the owl and proceeded on.

The moral of the story is that you can't be too easygoing, because people will try to get over on you.

