

E V E R Y O N E ' S
C O L U M N
I S S U E 2 - F A M I L Y

#Everyone's Column

The column is made up of submissions from inmates (S1 & RCU*), desistors and staff. The purpose of this column is to allow you a space for reflection, as well as to provide a sense of community. We hope that you will be able to inspire and be inspired.

*RCU is a transformative environment that supports and strengthens renounees' prosocial identity and their resolve towards a gang-free lifestyle. They will be living as a community with a shared purpose, and there will be opportunities to learn to strengthen their prosocial identity through a series of programmes and practices.

This column is brought to you by S1 CRSEs.

In this issue

Let's embark on a journey of reflection of how our actions have impacted our family and our hope for the future.

Happy reading!

Intimate Conversations with Alvin Chiong

Alvin is a desistor and has stayed away from drugs and cigarettes for over 12 years. He enjoys cooking and spending time with family.

Q1: Share with us about your childhood

A: I came from a dysfunctional family. My father was an opium addict and my mother left home when I was still a child. I began my journey with substance abuse at age nine.

I was also often bullied by the bigger boys in the neighbourhood. Hence, I sought solace by joining a secret society at the age of 11. The camaraderie offered me comfort and a sense of belonging for my 'brothers' were just like me and did not judge me for who I was.

Q2: How did drug use affected you?

A: When I am on drugs, I could not concentrate in my work and did not give my family my full attention. Due to my repeat incarcerations, I missed the growing years of my children, the time they needed a father most. In the end, my wife divorced me.

Q3: What was your turning point?

A: I contemplated suicide in 2010 as I was in despair and disappointed with myself. However, before I made the leap, I heard a voice saying, "If you have the courage to jump down, why not use this courage to walk into a halfway house and change your life?" I decided to check myself into a halfway house (HWH). However, I relapsed. I joined another HWH, but the impact was minimal as I was still hooked on drugs.

It became clear that I required more than just breaking free from drug addiction. I needed a new purpose. I decided to commit my life to Christ as human efforts alone is insufficient. Till today, I still struggle with temptations, but I continue to preserve.



Q4: How did you manage to stay drug free?

A: I joined various support groups and got myself a decent job. I am also heavily involved in volunteering and keeping myself occupied with positive things and individuals.

Rebuilding my life allows my wife to know that I have changed. She eventually remarried me. My family has also been very supportive. I told them to call CNB and arrest me if I am ever back on drugs.

Q5: What is something that you would like to say to your family?

A: I am sorry for not being a good husband and father. As there is no way to turn back time, I can only give you my best now. To my children, I am proud of what you have achieved. I am thankful to be able to celebrate your achievements with you now.

Q6: What is some advice/ words of encouragement to the readers?

A: Do not be afraid to tap on resources and expertise of those around you. I would also like to encourage you to seek religious support.

Thank you Alvin for sharing your experience with us!

Riddles' Corner

a. Mr. Smith has 4 daughters. Each of his daughters has a brother. How many children does Mr. Smith have?

b. A boy was rushed to the hospital emergency room. The ER doctor saw the boy and said, "I cannot operate on this boy. He is my son." But the doctor was not the boy's father. How could that be?

a.5, b. The doctor is his mother

What is Family?

Family is Precious

I am an addict who has been incarcerated since 2021. As I reflect about my past fifty years, I have nothing that I could really laud about except my family and faith.

Despite my repeated letdowns, my family has never once forsaken me and has been standing by my side. Sadly, it is only after I was arrested that I realised that I had been taking their unconditional love and support for granted. My father, a traditional man with steely character and few words, shed tears during regular visits with my mother and sister. My partner who is the sole breadwinner has been continually updating me about my children and encouraging me through weekly e-letters. She also made time for monthly visits despite her busy schedule. My young children have also never judged me. They are always in high spirits and eager to share about their school lives during the visits.

With such forgiving love, I decided to cherish them by being truthful and staying away from my addiction. It will certainly be a challenging journey of recovery out there in the real world, but I know that my family is worth the cause. They deserve a better version of their son, brother, partner and father who reciprocates their love. I am committed to do so before it is too late.

Family is Worth-it

Family is a word that means a lot to me. Not every family is the same and no family is perfect. Family can be siblings, relatives and even friends. Family can be close in certain ways and break up in the shortest time. Regardless, family must be always appreciated.

For me, family is the only thing that I look forward to as they are the only people that are constant. Being a multi-timer, every time I step back into the reality, they are the only ones who are there for me. They never fail or disappoint me. They accept me for who I am despite many obstacles and challenges that I face.

Family is precious. Never ever despise them even when they are mad at you. They do that because they care and are concerned about us. We are not complete without our family. We stay out of trouble because them. Their opinion matters.

I love my family and I am proud of it.

What is Family?

Family is My Remedy

Oh family my family,
Through such a tragedy,
I found a remedy,
That changed my Destiny.

Mistakes I made, to change my fate
I left you all done, to bear it on your own.

I wish I talked to you instead,
To share my shame and mistake,
To have spent my time with you,
Rather than smoking in the loo.

When I'm out, I promise with all my heart,
To be with you through thick and thin,
To share your troubles from within.
To change my fate from all the hate,
I prove myself to those who wait.

Oh family my family,
With this new melody,
Leave you so I will terribly,
Thank you for my new destiny.

Family is Eternal

My dear child,

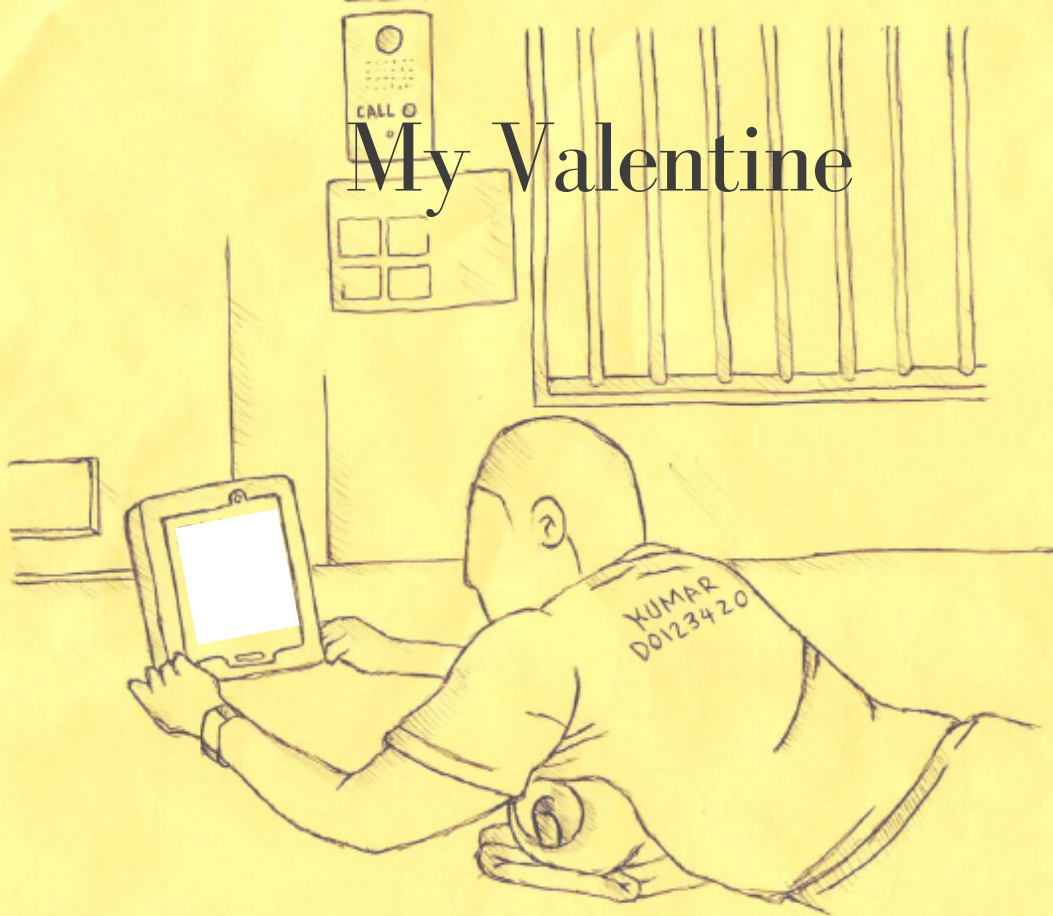
I hope you are well and recovering from the wounds of your emotional distraught. As I see you struggling to fit within the norms of society while growing up, I felt the pain that you have endured. I acknowledge that none of us could fully comprehend your struggles.

Little did we realise that you resorted to drugs for the past 14 years to deal with the stigma you faced. I was part of stress and so were the rest, but I do not want you to live with the pain of addiction to make you feel good about yourself. My hope for you is to embrace yourself and seek proper treatment for the issues that you are struggling with. There are many of us who would like to be part of your recovery journey should you allow us.

Remember to be kind to yourself and others will accept you for who you truly are. You will grow to love yourself too as you learn to cope without drugs. I will always be praying and watching you for afar even though I am no longer around.

Love,
Mummy

My Valentine



Ever since I could remember, the person I was raised by was my grandmother. A little about me is as follows. I am mischievous by nature. My antics during my childhood were hilarious and brought a touch of adorability for that age. My grandmother would often reminisce those moments in my presence as an adolescent. It often left me embarrassed. I had to sheepishly accept and acknowledge my now not-so-adorable moments.

Time passed and adulthood loomed for me. I get enticed by bad company, which led me to dabbling with drugs. I spent less time with my family, even my grandmother. During this period my grandmother would often cajole me into visiting her. These all unfortunately fell upon deaf ears. We had get our long-awaited reunion during my first incarceration at DRC. My grandma was in tears. At that time however, I failed to register the significance and emotions felt.

Fast forward a couple of years, I am incarcerated yet again. To hammer home the message this time, my grandmother is much older and ailing in health, which led to my family not disclosing my incarceration. It saddens me to know my transgressions have a knock-on effect beyond the radius of myself. This led to a shift of paradigm within me. I feel gears of positivity along with change turning into perpetual movement. This will be the metronome upon which my life will be dictated upon. With this renewed perspective, it allows me to view the moments my grandmother shared with me from a different angle. A shocking revelation doomed upon me; I haven't given her any new memories of joy.

Her 77th birthday falls on 13th February. I pen this declaration to make her my valentine. I promise to give her the love, care, and attention she has blessed me with infinite-fold. With God's grace, I hope to make everlasting fond memories for her to reminisce on.

Happy Birthday my love.

You Are my Brother

(*Family Narratives Book)

In the hot stall kitchen,

My mobile rings,

Same familiar news, Hilmi is back at Changi.

Stare at the ceiling,

Wondering why,

It has happened again

Have I failed,

It is not an exam,

His vicious cycle keeps repeating.

My brother, he is older, unfortunately.

I only have hope,

But it is not enough,

He must change himself.

Oh Allah (All Mighty),

Please answer my prayer,

Return back my brother,

Before you take either one of us.

Abah (dad) and Emak (mum) if you can hear me,

I feel helpless,

I feel lonely,

I feel useless,

I feel unappreciated

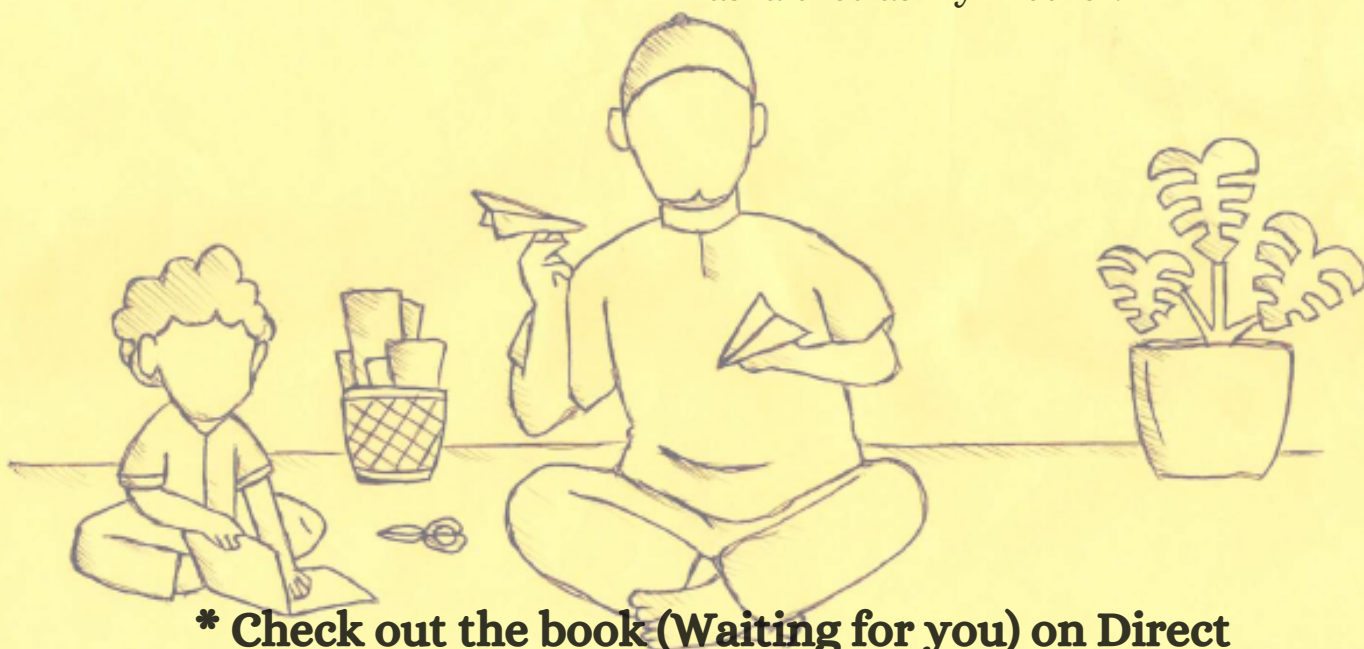
I feel lost,

What would you both have done if you were still around?

Give up? Can I?

Not bother anymore, should I?

At the end of the day, he is a person whom God has faithed as My Brother.



*** Check out the book (Waiting for you) on Direct Infocentre. Sharing by family members!**

I Will Be a Better Man

I was a gang member for more than 13 years. It wasn't easy for me and I believe, for those who had chosen to come forward to renounce. They say the first step is always the hardest and I couldn't agree more. But now, I've already done so and it feels like a load off my heart.

Perhaps, let me relate on how I even consider to renounce my affiliation to my former gang and criminal self. I recalled during my first visit and my wife came alone. She told me something that hit me like a truck.

“Your daughter refuses to go into her Grandma's room every night telling everyone, I want to wait for Papa to come home.”

But my poor daughter had no idea her daddy will not be coming home for some time due to 'work, overseas.' I returned back to my cell feeling helpless and devastated. This is enough and I do not want to be separated from my family again. Therefore, I reckoned the first step I have to do is renounce not only from gang, but from crime as well. I told myself, I have to Renounce, Restart, and Reintegrate back with my family and society. In the law of Economics, there is a term, called, “Opportunity Cost.” In life, you can't have the best of everything, you must choose the next better option. Previously I risked to gain substantial wealth but at the cost of separation from my dearest daughter and family.

I hope my daughter and family will be proud of me in future. Knowing that her father, despite making a mistake, eventually chose to forsake his criminal past with hope to change and be a better role model for her. In life, our values and perceptions change at different point and stages. Now, I value my family more than landing myself in prison again. I hope my sharing will be able to help others who are halfway or almost there, to tip the scale, and work towards changing ourselves for our loved ones.

Thank you to all for your submissions and for reading this issue. We hope it has been meaningful for you. You may jot your reflections down in your MAP planner.

If you would like to share your stories in future issues, do keep a look out for the submission poster!