

I even thank God for prison



"Happy birthday to you ... Happy birthday, dear Rodney ..."

The day was April 24, 2001, his 18th birthday. The next day Rodney received his "gift" – the beginning of a 10-year prison experience. "Happy birthday" indeed.

This sort of irony marks the entire life of now-28-year-old Rodney George.

- He loves and respects his father but could never manage to live in the same house with him.
- He did well in school despite having been born to an unwed teenage high school student.
- He is of a quiet demeanor, yet has discovered a natural inclination to motivate others.
- He has dealt with painful racial slurs, much of it coming from his own race.
- He didn't get into real trouble until age 17 – the same robbery that led to his arrest the day after he turned 18.
- Even behind bars, his keen business acumen let him buy two fine cars [legally!].

If you met him, you would see more irony. There is nothing about the young man to hint that he has been touched by a hard life. He is a well-spoken, pleasant conversationalist; dutiful son, brother and uncle; good student; physically fit and active; and spiritually minded. Both his father and mother, though separated from one another, are supportive and invested in their son's success.

So what happened to Rodney in his late teens?

"Just the typical stuff," he says; "It was what we did," indicating the influence of the guys with whom he hung out. He gives the impression that drugs and drinking were not really responsible for the choices that sent him to prison. "All the guys I grew up with just did robberies," he tries to explain.

His mom was there to warn him; his father, a successful executive in the sugar cane trade, did the same and set his son a good example. But Rodney got snagged in the powerful net of peer pressure.

Following his arrest, he was sent first to Hennepin County Jail in Minneapolis. Then on to four state prisons: St. Cloud for 28 days, then Stillwater, then Faribault and lastly Red Wing ... finally arriving at Damascus Way on June 8, 2010. Rodney graduated from Damascus Way six and one half months later. He continues his schooling in downtown Minneapolis where he takes a full load and spends much of his time studying.

You may be interested to know that this journey is quite familiar to us at Damascus Way. Each Minnesota state prison represents a successive phase of incarceration and rehabilitation; in general the toughest facilities are on the front end and the greatest freedoms are saved for the final two facilities. Rodney won't be entirely finished with parole until 2013 but has earned every right to the independence he now enjoys.

We met Rodney toward the tail end of his prison journey when he had qualified himself for work release at

Continued on the other side

I would not trade my prison experience

Damascus Way ... and we had questions. What led you to make bad choices as a teen? What happened to help you turn a corner in prison? Where does God fit? Do you have regrets? What's next for you?

One of his first discoveries, he says in answer, was that he harbored a great load of resentment. So he had to recognize and deal with that. As resentment slipped away, Rodney was able to forgive. With forgiveness came a restful spirit ... and a restful spirit allowed him, in time, to draw closer to each of his parents.

In prison God led him to Denny, a God-fearing, deeply spiritual brother in Christ and fellow inmate. Denny urged Rodney to get involved in church services held there in Faribault prison, eventually getting him hooked on personal Bible study. The course of his life began to change. God continued reshaping him at Damascus Way and He's not done yet.

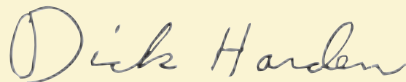
"I like to stay busy," Rodney says with a grin. Besides taking a full school load, he likes to work out and plays basketball with a league. He visits his mom, sees his father when he can (his father travels internationally for business), and enjoys his role as an uncle.

"I keep right company, stay positive, stay disciplined," Rodney reports. And he's crazy about his Ford Mustang and Cadillac, cars he bought with cash he managed to save even while incarcerated. "God is good," he says, casting a fond eye over the fine lines of his vehicles.

"I'm peace," the young man says gently. It's his colloquialism – he knows he is loved and led by God now. He's learning the discipline of "keeping God first." The tall, confident young man surprises us by declaring, "I would not trade my prison experience for anything. All of that made me who I am today, and made me strong. I appreciate all I have been through, and I appreciate Damascus Way."

We believe it takes a mature individual to express appreciation for very difficult circumstances. It is rewarding for me and our staff to be used by God in the lives of the men He sends to us; it is rewarding to see how God has reclaimed Rodney George.

For the men of Damascus Way,



Dick Harden, Executive Director
Damascus Way Reentry Center, Inc.

P.S. Will you please locate the envelope and reply card I sent with this letter ... and **ask God what He would have you do for Damascus Way?** We want to be here and be strong for the men God continues to send our way. (You may prefer to make your secured donation on-line.) Thank you. We appreciate everything you mean to us.