



HELP ME GIVE ANTOINE A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

Antoine and I are about as different as two men can be. Right now the most significant difference is that he is serving a sentence of life without parole in a Pennsylvania prison, and I am retired, living in an apartment in Philadelphia, and free to do whatever I please.

But we are different in many other ways: he is black, I am white; he is thirty-two years old, I am seventy-eight; he is a Muslim, I am a Quaker; he grew up in poverty and dropped out of school at fourteen; I grew up in a comfortable suburb of Boston and have two degrees from Harvard.

In spite these considerable differences, Antoine and I have become friends over the past four years. I have been impressed with how much he has changed his life and how much he has accomplished. That is why I am organizing this fundraising campaign to try to raise \$20,000 to hire an experienced attorney to represent him in an appeal to federal court.

Please take a few minutes and read my story and then, hopefully, make a donation to help me achieve my goal. Your contribution could help Antoine get a second change at life. Thank you.

John Andrew Gallery

My Story

When I decided to contact Antoine Riggins in 2014, I did not know him personally; however, I did know *of* him. He had been a student in a charter school of which I was a co-founder. I am sure that most people forgot about him when he was convicted and sent to prison in 2007 after having been convicted of committing a murder when he was nineteen. But for reasons I can't explain—or rather, can only explain in spiritual terms—I could not forget about him. Each year for seven years I wondered what happened to him and where he was and then each year I forgot about him and went on with my life. But each year the memory continued to return—it would simply not go away. I truly felt that I was being called by God to reach out to him for reasons I did not understand.

Finally, in 2014, I wrote him a letter and introduced myself, intending to become a pen pal. A few weeks later I received a letter from him that was so moving, so inspiring, that I was in tears when I finished reading it. As a result I made a commitment to write him every two weeks, then we started talking on the phone, and then I started visiting him—first by taking a five and a half hour bus ride to a prison near Pittsburgh and now via a three and a half hour bus ride to a prison northeast of Harrisburg.

What I found when I visited was a mild-mannered, thoughtful, and considerate young man who had clearly changed his life dramatically. While in prison he has completed his GED, taken a business course to learn various forms of computer software, and begun training to be a licensed barber. He has maintained a close relationship with his daughter, trying to be a positive presence in her life. I helped him self-publish a book of letters he wrote to her along with descriptions of his own life. (The book, *Dear Imani*, is available on Amazon.com) He also inspired another inmate to write his book (*Me, My Mind and My Ink*, also available on Amazon), and, as @Mr.inspirational on Twitter and Facebook, he tries to encourage and inspire others to accomplish their best.

Antoine is definitely not the same person he was at nineteen. He has grown, matured and transformed himself into a caring young man with a strong commitment to helping others.

I believe everyone has the potential to change, to be able to recognize the errors of their past ways and to change their life for the better—even those who have committed serious crimes. Not everyone who has that potential is able to so, but those who make the change deserve the opportunity to demonstrate that and eventually return as a productive member of society. Antoine has, in my opinion, successfully accomplished such a change and deserves such a chance.

There were several issues in his trial that merit an appeal in federal court. If successful, the appeal would probably result in a new trial and most likely in a new sentence that would make him eligible for parole at some time in the future. Such an appeal requires an attorney experienced in criminal law and federal court appeals. Fortunately, a Philadelphia attorney with that experience has agreed to take Antoine's case; I have met with him and am confident he will represent Antoine well. However, he cannot provide his services pro bono and Antoine has few resources to draw on. That is why I am trying to raise \$20,000 for these legal expenses. I guarantee that 100% of all funds I receive will go directly to the attorney for legal expenses.

I hope you will make a donation. and also share this with your network of friends. My network is limited and I need all the help I can get. Thank you. — John