

## **DUECE KING (WILLIAM MORRIS)**

### Second Chance

“I knew I was coming back home to do wrong, so I didn’t change. I might’ve changed in some sense, but in many ways I didn’t. I still had the same mindset. I just wanted to do things a little bit smoother, or slicker.” This is Duece King’s recount of his first release in 2006. He went right back to selling drugs and hanging around the same people, and parole caught wind of it.

To him, it wasn’t a surprise that he ended up back in the system. “I’m a realist,” says Duece (pronounced Doo-See). “So living the life that I used to live, I knew that...prison comes with the territory. Death comes with the territory.”

Change came the second time around, but it wasn’t instant. Change is not an epiphany, nor a swift jolt in the face of consequence. To Duece, it was a series of honest conversations, hours upon hours of writing, and a sequence of thought-provoking books.

One memorable conversation happened after Duece’s return to prison. His then-twelve-year-old daughter said to him, “Dad, this is getting ridiculous.”

Those words were simple yet stunning. Duece suddenly understood that his young daughter not only perceived what was happening, but was also absorbing all of it. His family resided in Buffalo while he served his sentence in Georgia – a long distance that made regular contact difficult.

“I didn’t call or write home for a long time,” he says. Eventually his wife reached out, worried that something had happened to him. The prison administrators urged Duece to call back.

What ensued was another honest conversation that impacted his perspective. He recalls his wife saying, “You’re selfish. I know you’re going through something, and I understand that, but we’re going through something too out here.”

In that same conversation, she also helped him realize he could write a book. That same day, Duece went back to his cell and picked up a pen and paper. Writing became a task that would often occupy up to fifteen hours of his day.

“I fell in love with writing. It became my escape away from the penitentiary,” he recalls.

He exercised serious discipline. He didn’t gamble or watch TV. He played the occasional game of chess, worked out, and stayed to himself. And he started reading – a lot.

During this time, he came across the 1712 Willie Lynch letter, “The Making of a Slave.” Lynch was a slave owner whose last name is attributed as the root of the word ‘lynching.’ This letter addressed to other slave owners lays out what Lynch explains as a guaranteed way to “control the slaves for at least 300 years.”

Don't forget, you must pitch the old black male vs. the young black male, and the young black male against the old black male. You must use the dark skin slaves vs. the light skin slaves, and the light skin slaves vs. the dark skin slaves. You must use the female vs. the male, and the male vs. the female. You must also have white servants and overseers [who] distrust all Blacks. But it is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us...Keep the body, take the mind!

- Willie Lynch, "The Making of a Slave," 1712

To Duece, this letter provides stunning comparisons to the current state of the African American community. "We're not enslaved physically anymore but we still have chains on our minds. Where it's almost like a self-hatred," he explains.

He describes a current pitting of young against old: an unwillingness to listen and to teach, respectively. He perceives a divide between black men and women, which contributes to the fragmentation of families and dependence on government systems. Incarceration is an extension and a perpetuating factor in this conundrum.

"I start reading things...and I start realizing that I'm part of the problem," Duece says. "So now this is where the paradigm shift come in at, where I said you know what, I gotta do something different. I can't go home and just think about money, money, money...Now I'm becoming a man behind prison walls,"

The Willie Lynch letter, in all its ugliness, prompted Duece's ardent fight to reverse the tides. This meant returning to his family, to his true values, to responsibilities that had been lost.

Duece compares his experience to the parable of the Prodigal Son. He had strayed from the values that his mother taught him. He blames the decisions he made, the people he chose to be around. "I didn't have to become that environment," he says, referring to the negative influences of his neighborhood.

But he would return to the principles his mother instilled. He recognized his responsibilities: being there for his family, raising his children, fulfilling a role as a provider. He understood he couldn't thoroughly satisfy those responsibilities while in prison.

Duece's habit of writing remained both a passion and an outlet after his second release in 2010. Remember that book Duece's wife encouraged him to write? It is now published on Amazon under the title *Pure*, and Duece is producing a movie based on the book.

And what of repairing the broken bonds between "young and old"? Duece is committed to speaking to at-risk youths at schools and community centers. He speaks to them on a relatable level and aims to show them they can aspire to greater things than street life.

“I don’t go [to speaking events] with a suit and tie on, or a blazer,” he says. “I go in with my hat cocked to the side...so they can identify with me. And then I let them know, ‘This is what I’ve been through, but now I’m doing this.’”

He has even invited some of the most at-risk kids to be in his movie, a prospect they had never considered possible before.

“We’re giving them hope. I’m letting them know you don’t have to be a drug dealer, you don’t have to be somebody that’s out there swindling or scheming,” says Duece. “You can be an entrepreneur, you can be a writer, you can be a producer.”

Certainly, the “old life” can continuously call back to a person. For some, drug dealing might look like an easy out, a relief from the everyday grind – and with higher profit. As the saying goes, If one does not know what to do, one does what he knows.

So Duece takes it one day at a time. His biggest challenge, he says, was “just getting people to believe in me.” When your friends and loved ones are used to broken promises, they begin to not take your words seriously. He had to prove himself, he explains. He took advantage of certifications and trainings to develop new skill sets.

“I worked two or three jobs. I used to walk to work, get on the train. Living the life I used to live, that was kind of difficult...I’d see some individuals when I was out and about and they was laughing at me, or thought I’d gone crazy because they thought how am I going to turn my back on such a lucrative business.”

But his old life wasn’t truly lucrative, he explains. “It cost me seven years of my life. It cost me time away from my family, time away from my mother. The price that I had to pay – why would I go back to playing a game that I know I’m destined to lose?”