



December 2015

Father Talks ... fathers connecting with their children

“People that saw me go wrong are now seeing me go right.”

These words spoken by Michael sum up his life in a nutshell. From incarceration for domestic violence and child endangering to being a 59 year old single father with full custody over an 11 month old son, Michael is a story of personal change and success as a father.

Michael grew up in a poor neighborhood in Akron and did not have a father in his life. Nearly 28 years of his life were spent being in and out of prison. He was arrested for domestic violence, child endangering, and possessing a weapon while under disability. During the trial, Michael asked the judge if he could have a “sidebar” with her and without his lawyer and the prosecutor. While the judge told him this was highly unusual, she allowed it. During the sidebar, Michael informed the judge that he needed to change his life and then asked to plead guilty to all six counts. The judge was so impressed with Michael that she gave him a six year sentence instead of expected 18-21 years.

While in prison Michael found out, through DNA testing, that the child at the center of the domestic abuse and endangering was not his biologically. Even with this information he felt a strong bond with the child and asked for and received visitation rights while in prison. During this time Michael attended every anger management, behavior modification and parenting class available to him at the prison. Deciding that he needed a vocation upon re-entering the community, he began work on a certificate in barbering. He was half way through completion of the certificate when he became eligible for a six month early release. Michael, true to form, asked that he not receive the early release so that he could complete his barbering certificate. He did and today he is gainfully employed as a barber in the Akron neighborhood in which he grew up.

About one year ago, Michael fathered a beautiful baby boy named Anthony. Unfortunately for Anthony, the mother suffers from heroin and crack cocaine addiction. As a result of his mother's addiction and use, Anthony was born as a crack baby and spent four weeks in intensive care to overcome the effects of the drugs. While this was going on, Michael's beloved brother, Bill, was in hospice terminally ill. Michael spent much of his time visiting his dying brother and then going to visit his new son. Also, during this time, Michael was asked to consider taking fatherhood courses from Summit County Children's Services delivered by Lorenzo Lewis, a father and family practitioner working with Fame Fathers who is an SCFI Partner. Michael called Fame Fathers the next day and is still in the program. Anthony was released from the hospital and into foster care. Michael asked for and received unsupervised home visits which then lead to protective custody. The court, impressed with Michael's commitment to Anthony and becoming a good father, terminated the case giving Michael full custody.

Today, Michael and Anthony live as father and son in a small apartment in Akron. Michael takes eleven month old Anthony to work with him each day. Anthony is enrolled in Help Me Grow program at the Summit County Health Department. They regularly attend Arlington Church of God.

The fruits of Michael's hard work and commitment were publicly recognized on October 15, 2015, by Governor Kasich and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio with the 2015 Family of the Year Award. As Michael and Anthony rapidly approach Anthony's first birthday and first Christmas, they are as Michael says "each other's blessing." Michael is showing his old community that he "has gone right."

Did You Know?

The fatherhood course material taught by Summit County Fatherhood Initiative Practitioners is in use by more than 6,300 organizations worldwide. It's developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative www.fatherhood.org

Fathers Talks are fatherhood stories brought to you by the Summit County Fatherhood Initiative (SCFI). SCFI is a collaborative, community initiative dedicated to helping men become better fathers through programming, education and individualized services. SCFI was founded by three, prominent Summit County fatherhood service providers - Pastor Eugene Norris of Fame Fathers, Don Lykes of Fathers and Sons of Northeast Ohio, and Frank Williams of Man2Man. SCFI is supported by Akron Community Foundation, GAR Foundation, United Way of Summit County, and the County of Summit - Department of Job & Family Services. Comments or questions about this publication can be sent to Bill Macchione, william.macchione@jfs.ohio.gov

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