

The Prison Garden

And how it changed my life.

By Bobby Bostic

In December, 1995, Donald Hutson and I committed two robberies in inner-city St. Louis. Sixteen years old, I was charged with 17 counts and sentenced to 240 years in prison. The rest of my life.

Three years later, at Crossroads Correctional Center in Cameron, Missouri, I signed up for garden duty—just to get out of my cell. To my amazement, I found peace of mind and tranquility in the prison garden.

Being in prison can make a person feel dirty, and here I was picking weeds from the dirt. But with every weed I pulled out of the garden, I felt like I was pulling out an old part of my criminal self. Weeding became a form of therapy for me.

I looked at the dirt and wondered how something so beautiful could grow from dirt. Then I thought about my own life. My criminal street life was a life of doing dirt, a hard life, like a garden when it is in a drought and does not get watered or weeded. A garden can even look ugly at this time. But when it rains and the weeds get picked, the garden turns into one of nature's beauties. As I worked there, I wondered: How could I turn my dirt-filled life into something beautiful?

I determined right then and there that I would turn my troubled life around. Surrounded by hardened criminals, I would rehabilitate myself and make my life beautiful. In that beautiful prison garden, I made a vow to feed my mind with books and become a contributing member of society.

Now it is 19 years later. I am 38 years old. When I look at the garden, I remember my youthful vow. I am proud of my accomplishments since then. I have written 15 nonfiction books and eight books of poetry, become a paralegal, obtained a basic business studies certificate, and am currently enrolled in a university to get my Associate of Science degree.

Like a garden that dies in the winter and revives in the spring, I got a new life. Recently the United States Supreme Court ruled that juveniles who were under the age of 18 when they committed crimes cannot be sentenced to life in prison. They must get a new sentencing hearing. So now I have a chance for freedom, as well.

The prison garden really helped me along my difficult journey. It let me know that something beautiful can grow from dirt. Now I hope for the day when I get released—to grow my own garden at home and continue to heal myself in the process.

Bobby's Crime & Punishment

Adapted from freebobbybostic.com.

In the winter of 1995, Donald Hutson and I were walking down a street. We saw some people and decided to rob them. There were five people in this crowd, but we only robbed two of them. One victim was shot but not injured. About 30 minutes later, we committed another robbery. We also took this victim's car and drove a few blocks away.

I was charged with 17 counts from these incidents.

A jury found me guilty of all counts. The jury recommended 30 years for three robberies, 15 years for the first-degree assaults and kidnapping, and 5 to 10 years for the attempted robberies and armed criminal action charges. The final decision was left to the judge: Run the sentences concurrently for a 30-year sentence or consecutively for a total of 240 years. The judge chose 240 years. He said, "Mr. Bostic, you will die in the Department of Corrections."

Two hundred and forty years was cruel and unusual punishment, the equivalent of life without parole. I was only 16 years old and no one was injured in my crime. Several months after I was sentenced, my adult co-defendant (he was 18 years old) was sentenced to 30 years for his crimes. He goes home in 8 years.