

Transcript of EDWARD WAYNE EDWARDS 1970 ALBUM "BUILD A FIRE IN THE PERSON NOT UNDER THEM"

Welcome to WWTH It is with pleasure that I come into your home today, for I know those listening to me now are interested in helping people. If this were not true, you would not be listening. Let me take this opportunity to thank the many thousands who have been writing to me. I love to receive your letters, so when you have something, or even if you don't have something to say, still feel free to write because I'll answer every letter.

Many people have asked me what I mean when I say "build a fire in a person, and not under him." My life has certainly been anything but good. Exciting, yes. Dangerous, yes. Honest, no. Rewarding? Well, you might say yes and no to that question, but then, it is through the grace of God that I am able to talk to you about the fire which was built in me.

In 1962, about 6 months after I had been sentenced to Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary for 16 years, Mr John Alexander, the guard who was in charge of me, working on construction, said to me one day, "Ed, there are a few things I'd like to talk to you about. A few things I would like to point out to you. You seem like a very reasonable person and you are a likable guy. You certainly seem to be intelligent, so will you listen to what I have to say?" I said "Yes, sir."

He said, "I have read your record in the administration building, and it seems that you were not, or have not been participating in crime for money, but you were participating in crime mainly for the recognition. If this is the case, what do you have to gain by continuing your life of crime? You have been on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List and have committed almost every crime imaginable other than crimes of violence and crimes of sex. You are certainly most fortunate to be alive today, for most people with your background at one time or another usually end up getting shot and killed. If you continue in crime now, or upon your release from prison, then the only thing that you will have gained is 6 feet of ground over your head or spending the rest of your life in a penitentiary. This certainly would not be the workings of a smart man. While you were out running around the country and committing crimes, you told people many lies. Lies such as you had a college education, and that you were a criminologist, a sociologist, a psychologist, and a psychiatrist. It seems that you were telling these lies because this is what you really wanted out of life. To have an education, and to be a criminologist, or to be able to participate or deal with crime in some way. If this is the case, why not take advantage of your time here at Leavenworth? Let time serve you instead of you serving time. Why not start back to school and get an education and learn a trade so that when you are released from the penitentiary you will have a job, you will have an education (so that when you are released from the penitentiary you will have a job and the education) you were telling people about. You could have a job and learn a trade so that you could work and live a free life, and be a free man and not have to worry about the penitentiary food or the penitentiary procedures. Think about these things and let me know if this is what you want. If it is, I will do everything possible to get you started on the right foot."

I decided that I certainly had nothing to lose by doing it, and if I liked it, I would have everything to gain. Mr Alexander was certainly a likable guy; he seemed to always be on the level, and trying to help people. If you had something to ask this man or if you just wanted to talk to him, it seemed that he always had time to listen, even when it seemed apparent that he was in a hurry. At that time, I had approximately a 7th grade education. I went on to complete my elementary and high school education, and two years of college. I received my associate (mass?) degree from Highland Jr College, completed three courses in Dale Carnegie, completed 5 years of vocational training in the building trades, three courses in First Aid including the Instructor's Course, and three courses in Civil Defense which also included the Instructor's Course.

A lot of people have asked me how it is possible to get a college education while in the penitentiary. In Leavenworth, it came about in the following way. A state Legislature (sic) passed a bill which enabled Highland Jr College to expand their campus. Highland Jr College was about 15 or 20 miles down the road. This expansion took in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. This is one reason that I can tell people that I was honestly on campus and not in the penitentiary.

Once this expansion was completed, Highland Jr College then worked out a program with the University of Kansas so that the professors from both of these schools could come into Leavenworth and teach the same college courses that they taught outside. To attend college you had to have a high school education and take an entrance examination. I managed to stay in Leavenworth for 5 years without one disciplinary report of any kind. This is what I mean when I say 'build a fire in a person and not under him.' If you build a fire in a (sic) person, all he is going to do is move to another spot where it isn't quite as hot or quite as troublesome. If you build a fire in that person and get him interested in himself, then he sets his own goals and knows where he is going. In this case, it was Mr John Alexander who put the skates on my shoes and gave me a shove. It was then up to me to keep that momentum going and to set my goals. He took the time to read my record and to absorb me. He wanted to help me and he most certainly did. He is directly responsible, through the grace of God, for my being a free man today, and he is responsible for my being able to come into your home and talk to you today.

As I said, I was at Leavenworth for 5 years, and not once while I was at that penitentiary did I have any kind of a disciplinary report against me. This in itself is a very very difficult thing to do especially (sic) when you start on rehabilitation program as I did, for you always have those fellas around you who are jealous and those fellas who feel that there is some scheme to your new program. They wonder whose toes you might be stepping on, who are you squealing on and things of this nature. So consequently, they agitate you. Guys who know that you can knock them down come up to you and smart off hoping that maybe you will knock them down. In doing so, you will naturally be getting in trouble and you will then have a black mark on your record and this individual can then take the credit for this.

So many times in those 5 years I turned my back and I'd eat my pride. But the fire in me was awful great and awful hot and I decided that I would put every effort into my rehabilitation program that I had put previously into my career of crime. If I could keep this up there wasn't anyone who could change me or get me away from my rehabilitation program.

After spending 5 years at Leavenworth, I transferred to the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg, PA. Because Lewisburg was closer to my home in Akron, OH and I had a good record and they no longer considered me an escape (sic) risk or a bad criminal. All men are put into quarantine when they arrive at one of the penitentiaries whether or not they have just been transferred. After I was released from quarantine I started a First Aid program and Civil Defense program at Lewisburg. Here they trusted me and even gave me a job working outside of the walls during the day and sleeping behind the walls at night. I worked hard but I loved it. Just the fact that they trusted me for the achievements which I had made at Leavenworth restored my faith in mankind and reassured me that there were a lot of people besides Mr Alexander who wanted to help me and others.

Before you can take advantage of this help, you have to know who you are and where you are going. You have to be interested in yourself and be willing to try to do the right thing. It will be hard work and it will always be hard work, but then I think that you will find your reward in the end. Upon my arrival at Lewisburg, I knew that I would be going up for parole in about 6 months. I also knew I was going to need a parole plan so I started working on one. First I needed a job. I wrote better than 100 letters to different people about getting a job around the Akron area. Only two people took the time to write back. One letter was from a Rubber Company stating that the only way they could hire me was for me to come there, take the test, fill out the application and meet them. Of course, this was impossible at that time. The second letter was from a man who had a heating establishment in Akron. He wrote to me 3 or 4 times. He wanted to help me but he couldn't because he was having problems of his own.

After I found I that I was unable to get a job by writing to the many employers around Akron, I wrote a letter to the Honorable Judge Victor in Akron, OH. I told him what my problem was, that I needed a job as well as a place to live. I asked him if he knew of anyone who might be interested in helping an ex-convict such as myself. He forwarded my letter to Reverends' Bill Denton and his son Bob at the Denton House, which is a half-way house in Akron, OH. Here, the reverends tried to help men being released from penitentiaries. If these men need a job, they would try to find them one. If they need a place to stay, they would let them come into their house and live in. If they had some money or if they had a job, then they were asked to pay \$40 a month for their keep. For this \$40, they received food, a very clean room, and nice quarters to live in. If they did not have the money, then they were not expected to pay anything.

The advantages of going to the Denton House were that it gave you an opportunity to become familiar with the city, to go out and look around and to find out what part of the city you would like to live in. It gave you an opportunity to look for a job and the type of work that you would want.

I received a letter from Reverend Bill Denton stating that if I needed a job that he would find me one and that I was welcome to live in the Denton House when I was released from prison. This was very encouraging, for I knew now that there were also people on the outside who were willing to go to bat for me. People who were interested enough to want to help, such as Judge Victor and Reverends' Bill

and Bob Denton. I appeared before the parole board in July of 1967. Two weeks later I found out that my parole had been granted and would be effective as of September of 1967. I was a very happy person. Now all I could do was sit back and anticipate what would happen when I was released.

I would go to the Denton House to live, but Rev. Denton wouldn't have to find me a job because about a week before I went before the parole board I met a fellow in the institution who was able to arrange to get me a job. This fellow was another inmate and a friend of mine who happened to know a couple people who did a lot of hiring so he went to bat for me. I received a telegram from Akron, Ohio shortly afterward stating that upon my release from prison I would have a job. When I was released, I went to the Denton House to live. I went to work as a dock man for Mr Harold Shantz of Shantz Cartage of Akron, Ohio. Mr Shantz is probably one of the most wonderful people I have ever met. He gave me a good paying job and loaned me money when I needed it. He even arranged for me to get a car. He helped in every way possible. To this day, I still work for him, although at the present time I am off work because I injured my back and my neck in April of 1970 when I fell approximately 25 feet from a part of the building in which I was living. By the grace of God I was able to live through that fall.

Now riding the bus back and forth to work, I met a young lady who was going to the University of Akron studying to become a school teacher. I got to know her quite well. After two weeks of riding the bus with her, I bought an automobile and started taking her to school every morning on my way to work. In late September of 1967 I met this young lady and in December of 1967, I gave her an engagement ring. I told her all about myself before we were engaged, but not before she had the chance to know me. I did not tell her about my past right away because she may have had a tendency to prejudge me, like so many other people prejudge others. We were married in July of 1968. At this time, we have two children. A daughter 2 years old and a son 1 year old.

I love my wife and children dearly. My wife, through the grace of God, is really responsible for my being able to remain a free man and to be able to do the right thing. For it is she who is there at my every turn and step. I love my children very much. I tell them every day that I love them and I take the time every day to play with them.

Things in our home are never taken for granted. One day, in 1969, because of my past record, I was approached by an associate professor affiliated with the University of Akron and asked if I would be interested in addressing a group, a committee, known as the Betterment For The Ohio Penitentiary. I told him that I would be glad to, although I did not know what I could go for them. After this meeting, I met a Doctor of Sociology. He started talking about writing books, for he is the author of a text book being used at the University of Akron where he teaches. So again, I had found somebody building a fire in me and getting me interested in doing something. He pointed out that if I wrote a book I might be able to help other people and be able to point out the pitfalls in life and the consequences of committing crimes and how easy it is to get into reformatories and penitentiaries and how hard it is to get out once you get in, and what the conditions inside the penitentiaries are like.

He also pointed out that I could talk to people, parents around the country, about the lack of communication between the parent and the child. After I started writing this book, I became more

involved in community affairs. I started teaching First Aid for the American Red Cross and lecturing to various junior and senior high schools about crime. I then got the idea of forming the club known as the WWTH which means "We Want To Help". The reason for this club is to help others. I have a post office box where people may write to me about their problems or to express their feelings about what I have to say. For someone to write to me they first must be interested and have the time. If they can give me their time and that much interest, then the least I can do is answer their letter.

WWTH is a non-profit organization intended to do just what it says: Help others. If people are interested enough to write to me about my program, then I know these same people are interested in helping others. It's not hard to find someone who has a problem and needs some advice. Even the Boy Scouts are taught to do a good deed every day. This is the whole function of the club WWTH. Get involved, look around you, look for people who you can help. Naturally there isn't much recognition for doing this. But then, you are being watched and you will gain some recognition, because it is a fact that God is watching you. Get involved, become a member. Look around and help others. This is what is meant when I say build a fire in a person and not under him. We taxpayers should start building a fire in a lot of people and not under them. The people I am speaking of right now are those responsible for our prison reform. We as taxpayers have to support prisoners whether it is their first or their 50th time in the penitentiary. If this is the case, why not put our money to work for those in the penitentiary? I'm not talking about giving them wall to wall carpeting . Since we have to pay to keep them there, why not we use our money for such things as getting trained personnel in the penitentiary and putting in a rehabilitation program. Then the inmates can get an education and learn a trade such as barbering, radio and television repair, typewriter repair, shoemaking, tailoring, drafting, construction work, and other similar trades.

If we get interested enough to find out where our money is going, then I'm quite sure that in the long run we will have men and women coming out of the penitentiary who will have an education and know a trade. Therefore they will be able to go to work and help relieve us of the burden of supporting the men and women in the penitentiary. We must also be willing to give ex-cons a chance to prove themselves. Don't prejudge them just because you happen to know someone who was a victim of a theft or a burglar. Give him a chance! After all, we are paying the taxes to keep him in there and it certainly doesn't make much sense to pay to educate them and get them out and then turn around and try to put them back in because we don't trust them because we want to prejudge him. People who prejudge ex-convicts are responsible in large cases for them returning to the penitentiary. It is a proven fact that more state prisoners return to penitentiaries than federal prisoners, because in your state penitentiaries there are not any rehabilitation programs to speak of. Prisoners make license plates but if they get out of the penitentiary and start making them, they will be taken to court, tried and convicted and sent back to the penitentiary. This is not the type of rehabilitation that I am talking about.

On the state level, most of the men hired as guards are of very little use to anyone. It is the only type of work they could find. It was their last resort. A lot of them do not have a high school education and a few of them do not have an elementary education. To them, being a prison guard means working 8 hours a day. Making sure that you do not escape (sic). Making sure you do not smoke when they are

not supposed to smoke. And making sure you do not talk when you are not supposed to. They look forward to only two things: The hour when they will go home, and the day that they will get paid.

It is much different in your federal penitentiaries. Here, rehabilitation is the program of the day. When a guard goes to work in one of the federal penitentiaries he first must have a high school education and many of them must have a college education. All the time they are working for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, they stay on one job only 3 months and then rotate to another job. This enables them to get to know all the jobs within the institution and the men and women in the penitentiary. These guards are instructed to go to the Administration Office and read various men's records so that they might find out something about the person, such as, what type of personality does he have, what kind of a home background does he have and what types of crimes has he committed.

By reading these records, the guards are able, many times, to spot a man's problem, and to help him. In your federal institutions, there is also a lot of incentive for the guards. For every warden in the federal penitentiary, including the Director of the Bureau of Prisons, was at one time a guard who had to work his way up. Again, it boils down to what I have been saying: Build a fire in a person and not under him.

How can you help the man when he is released from the penitentiary? As I have said, do not prejudge him. Give him a chance. Should you see him doing something that you feel is wrong, it is really not necessary that you call up the man's parole officer to report every minor infraction. Let me tell you what happened to me not too long ago. I was supposed to lecture at a nearby college and a young lady was supposed to call me to set a time for this lecture. The day she called I was out of town and my wife answered the phone. There was a lot of static and crackling noise on our end of the phone and all my wife managed to hear was that this young lady was a college student and that she wanted to talk to me. My wife can remember the girl asking "What is all that noise?" and then the phone went dead. What actually happened was our area telephones were out of order because men were working on the cables. I was told about the call and just assumed that it was the girl who was supposed to contact me in regards to my lecturing at her college and I figured she would call back. About two days later after I got back in town I called a friend of mine and found out that my parole officer had been trying to get in touch with me, so I called him. He told me that a young lady had called his office and said she felt her voice was being recorded over my telephone so she was not going to call me again in regards to the lecture.

Here's what could have happened. When I found out that my parole officer had wanted to talk to me, I could have become quite worried whether I did something wrong or not. The fear of maybe doing or saying something wrong and the fear of returning to a penitentiary could have been so great that I could have exaggerated things so much that I could have packed up my clothes and left. In doing so, I would have violated my parole and later be caught and returned to the penitentiary. But why? Because someone out there felt that it was necessary to harass me by calling my parole officer or maybe my wife and telling them things that were thought to be true. Give the people who are being released from the penitentiary a halfway chance to at least prove themselves. Now I am not saying that every person

released from the penitentiary is going to remain a free man or a free woman. What I am saying is that if you are willing to give this person a chance in life, if you are willing to step forward and offer this person assistance, to show this person that you sincerely care, not only will you find another friend and be helping someone who is down on their luck and doesn't really know which way to turn, but you will also find that by building a fire in that person and not under him, that you will be able to look at yourself in a mirror at night and like what you see. When you go to bed at night, you will be able to get a good night's sleep without being preturbed (sic) at yourself for the little wrong incidents that day. Why not be one of God's helpers and help those around you who are in need of your help. You'll never be sorry for it and the reward will be tremendous.

There is an old saying which goes like this "Don't throw stones if you live in a glass house." One day you may need help. Should this be the case, do you know where will it come from? Have you helped others? Give what I have just said a try. Won't you please? I am sure that if you will, you will love it. Thank you very much, and this is Ed Edwards.