Texas After Violence Project, Visions After Violence

Interview with Katelyn Smith

Interviewer: Lovinah Igbani-Perkins

Narrator: Katelyn Smith

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Summary: Lovinah Igbani Perkins interviews Katelyn Smith. Katelyn has been released under parole after serving a 3 year sentence. Katelyn talks about her experience returning home and discusses the obstacles she faced. She was provided with minimal resources upon her discharge, and mostly had to carry on by herself. She describes how the loss of her father and changes in dynamic with the rest of her family affected her mental health and transition to living outside of prison. Katelyn also discusses integrating into the workforce, and how her memories of incarceration created feelings of anxiety and fear of her surroundings. Katelyn also talks about the positive experiences she has gained since being released from prison, such as good relationships with her parole officers, adopting a dog, her relationship with her significant other, and working towards helping other people who are incarcerated.

LOVINAH IGBANI-PERKINS: Hello. Hello. Hello. I'll let you introduce your name.

KATELYN SMITH: Okay, my name is Katelyn Carnline. I have been home from TDCJ for about nine months.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Alrighty, nine months. Wow, welcome home actually! I'm so glad and grateful that you agreed to do this interview. I just want to start off with saying, Thank you so so much for your time. I really appreciate it, and I'm excited about interviewing you. So, do you like to be called Kate or Katelyn?

SMITH: Katelyn.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Katelyn? Alrighty. So, Katelyn, you say you've been home for about nine months. [00:00:43] How long were you incarcerated? [00:00:46]

SMITH: Three years, one month, and 14 days.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. That's a long time. [00:00:53] Are you still on parole or probation or anything (else) right now.

SMITH: Yeah. I'll be on parole until '26.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Until 2026 [00:01:02].

SMITH: Mhm.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Tell me, since you've been home, what has parole been like? I think I'd like to jump right into your experience with parole.

SMITH: I have been extremely blessed with my parole officers. I've had three in the time that I've been home. The first one was [inaudible] for my monitor [00:01:25], and then my second one, she was the most phenomenal human being I've ever met in my life. She helped me so much (with) the fear of messing up and going back to prison that, you know, you automatically go to as you come home. She was wonderful. They pulled her for a training operation now, so she's gone. But, I have a new one and she's just as great. So, I've been very, very fortunate..

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. That's awesome. It obviously seems like you had some great experiences, some pleasant experiences, with your parole officers. Probably, some that actually are empathetic or have a heart.

SMITH: [00:02:06] Yes, all three military veterans.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Oh wow, okay. So, thinking about right before you get ready to come home, do you feel like you were prepared by prison to come back into society? And if so, in what ways?

SMITH: I don't feel like they prepared me in any way to come home, honestly. I obviously was being released in the COVID era and so there was no release units. There was no [00:02:42] preparation for that. It was, You can go to Seg for 18 days, and then you're going to go walk out the front door, and we'll see you later. There were no resources. The few that they did give me didn't even exist. When I called and tried to reach out to these people, they were like, We don't have anything for you. So I really felt like a fish out of water. You know, there was no preparation. No understanding of what exactly was going to happen. They didn't even explain my monitor to me, my curfew, nor how or when I had to be at parole. Nothing.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow, it was completely ill-prepared. Sorry.

SMITH: Yeah, it was very scary.

IGBANI-PERKINS: I can only imagine that kind of anxiety of getting out after over three years. No resources at all. The ones they give you, they don't pan out and you're given your check, I guess, and a bus ticket and –

SMITH: Yeah, and I had just lost my dad six weeks before I got out, so it was like, I didn't [inaudible] It was very overwhelming, very, very stressful, very scary.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhmm. Will you make sure – it's like every now and then you'll go kind of in and out. It almost sounds like the microphone is covered, so just make sure it's not covered up at all.

But also I'm so, so sorry about your dad. To lose a parent right before you get ready to get out of prison. I can't even – I can't even imagine how hard that must have been for you.

SMITH: That was definitely, definitely a very [inaudible] – that was probably the one thing that almost broke me in prison.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. Wow. That's devastating, just hearing it. And then also, you know, back to right before you get ready to get released, did you take any classes or anything like that?

[Audio cuts out 00:04:55]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Oh, no, you're cutout. I can't hear you.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, a phone call came through. I had to decline it.

SMITH: Okay, no problem. Start over.

IGBANI-PERKINS: So when I got my first set off is really when I started taking classes. I took "Changes". I took [inaudible 00:05:12] which were both absolutely phenomenal classes. "Changes" was actually the parole answer they gave me that they didn't realize that I had taken, I guess at the time. It doesn't prepare you for coming home, but it helps you learn to process things in a different way, which probably was beneficial to me in the long run once I got home.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Right. Now you say you took "Changes" and then you said cognitive intervention, right?

SMITH: (Nods)

IGBANI-PERKINS: Were those taught by prison staff or by outside people?

SMITH: Outside people through Windham.

IGBANI-PERKINS: I think I have the same sentiment as far as Changes. I will speak on that real quick. One of the most profound things that I got out of Changes, and I thought that was a great class as well, but they taught me about making amends and making amends with, you know, just basically verbalizing what you did. When you reconnect with your family, rather than just move on and not talk about it, but actually own up for it — to what you did— and take ownership and ask for their forgiveness. That can really bring about restoration. So, I really appreciated that because that was some insight at the time that I didn't have.

SMITH: Well, probably— the biggest blessing out of all of that is exactly what you just said — being able to have that conversation with my dad. [inaudible] [00:06:54] But when I realized I wasn't going to get that opportunity, you know, his cancer just progressed so quickly, but I'll never forget that conversation. Being able to have that amends

conversation, asking for forgiveness, and him doing the same because he had made his mistakes, you know— I don't think I would have quite understood that, had it not been for that class.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. Right. Yeah, so it seems like that class actually helped you to get some kind of — a piece of closure, possibly [00:07:24]. You know, At least I got to make amends to my dad before he passed and had that conversation.

SMITH: Yeah it was great. It was very, very helpful.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, I can imagine. So you take changes, and it's taught by other outside volunteer staff or outside staff. So then you're released from prison. Do you feel like you had any mental health issues that you noticed after you got out?

SMITH: When I first got home, everything seemed very different, for one thing.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Like, unfamiliar.

SMITH: Just not used to being alone. You're never alone. [00:08:23] Sounds, everything… you're used to doors, poking, you're used to speakers, to all of these different, weird things and nothing — [00:08:34] quiet is scary. It's the anxiety of trying to learn a new normal after you've been in such a controlled environment for so long. [00:08:45] The breakfast, the lunch, the dinner, the laundry, all of the different things that are so overly structured for you. And it's like, (I'm) learning to be okay with walking out the door on your own. That was scary for me, like I would have anxiety going to open the door because I would think I was going to get in trouble for opening the door. [00:09:10]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow, that sounds really uncomfortable. You're almost like you're a foreigner dropped off somewhere in a foreign place.

SMITH: Three weeks after I got home, we had a power outage and I had no lights of any kind. I wasn't prepared. No candles, no nothing. And that was probably the fear of what can happen when everything is closing in. Just all the different sounds and being alone completely. There's nobody to talk to. You know, when you're in prison, you always had somebody that was close by. [00:09:51] My anxiety gave me horrible panic attacks.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Hmm. Wow. I would imagine even in the midst of that, in the midst of the panic attacks, the anxiety, also (there was) probably some depression as well.

SMITH: Walking in the house, my dad not being there… the reality of what has happened, the fact of life choices that pulled me away, and have allowed me to not be there. [Inaudible] All of that while having an anxiety attack was just crippling. It was absolutely crippling. [00:10:32]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Right. So you seem to have some determination, and you deal with it as best you can, I take it?

SMITH: Yeah. Some days, it's still better than others.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. Yeah, I can imagine. Do you feel like your mental health, after being incarcerated, impacted your ability to meet other needs? When you first got out, such as whether it was housing or jobs, or anything like that. Do you feel like those things were impacted by your mental health?

SMITH: I definitely feel like finding a job was. The fear of having that conversation, which we kind of already talked about, but the fear of having a conversation with somebody about what I've been through, but also just knowing that I walk into a situation and nobody understands the little things.

I've had multiple anxiety attacks at work just over simple things. [00:11:56] People that get loud— you know, we have Super Bowl parties, football parties, and things like that in our lobby, and they get loud and they get rambunctious. Then something will fall and hit the floor and it reminds me of a door slamming in prison. It automatically feels like I'm back (in prison) and it scares the crap out of me. Then everybody looks at me like I'm a freak, like something's wrong with me. I can't help them understand what that feeling is like, [00:12:31] the anxiety; you have to keep it all under control and not let anybody see that. It's scary and it's very overwhelming.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, extremely. I could only imagine. Actually, what you're describing sounds like post-incarceration stress syndrome. That's exactly what it sounds like. It's basically a form of PTSD that is associated with people who have been formerly incarcerated or (are) incarcerated. [00:13:02] It can make life a challenge after release. [00:13:09] Hmm. That's interesting that you are describing that.

So you had some struggles, you know, and particularly with jobs. [00:13:23] Do you feel like [00:13:27] there were any issues with getting mental health needs met after you were released from prison?

SMITH: Can you hear me?

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay, now I can, you went out I guess.

SMITH: [00:13:48] [inaudible] (Mentions it's the same person calling them as before.)

IGBANI-PERKINS: You're fine. You're fine.

SMITH: Honestly, I've talked to my primary care about it a little bit, but he [inaudible 00:14:07] knows the history, the drug history and things with my parents. I've never touched drugs or alcohol. I'm very skeptical about how to deal with asking for help and that stuff. He talks to me, and he knows that I don't like medication. [00:14:39]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Hold on, you're frozen — the last thing you said was that he knows that I don't like medication.

SMITH: Yes, he knows that I don't like medication so he doesn't force me to take them. But he always makes his office open for conversation. We've talked about me going to talk to somebody, but having insurance and being able to afford to pay for those things is difficult. People don't realize how hard it is.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, you're right. It's very difficult not having adequate health insurance as someone that is getting out of prison and needing those specific needs met. [00:15:21] I'll never forget. It was like a 150 dollar copay for therapy without my insurance at first. That's what a lot of places are charging and I'm in Houston, which is not a rural area, where the resources should be plentiful, but it can be a challenge.

Wow, so how did you deal with that? You get out, you're having some issues with anxiety and panic attacks, and you had just lost your father. [00:16:00] How are you managing? How are you coping after you got out?

SMITH: Um, honestly, at first I didn't. I really didn't. I didn't realize that I wasn't. I feel like I just kind of got stuck in a rut and just stayed there. I didn't want to deal with losing my dad. I didn't want to deal with the changes in the world. I didn't want to deal with not knowing what to do about those things.

I've always kind of been a fixer, but I didn't know how to fix things, and I didn't know how to go forward from there. Honestly, the best thing that helped me was I adopted a deaf dog. [00:16:42] And he has been the best thing in the world to me. I realized that we both have these needs, and he is so good at reading when I'm having a bad day or when I'm having a hard time. And so he may not be able to hear me…

[Audio cuts out, SMITH mentions that she is going to quickly text a woman to stop calling her so the interview will no longer be disrupted 00:17:13]

SMITH: So he's probably been about the best mental health for me, that one on one connection that we have. I don't know if that makes any sense, but you see people use emotional support animals all the time, to take them places and things; that's really what he is for me. I don't take him places, but that's what he is in a sense. He knows when something is wrong.

I may not want to take medication and I haven't found a therapist yet, but he definitely is. I can talk to him and he doesn't give me an attitude. He can't even hear me.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:18:07] That's funny, but that's really good. It seems like you were resourceful on your own and you decided, Okay, I can't afford the therapy that I really need, but I've got to have some type of support, and you figured out what works for you. Actually, emotional support animals are widely used and they have a great therapeutic value. I think that's an excellent thing that you did for yourself, being proactive in your own mental health. That's great.

So you got your dog to help you as your emotional support baby. Do you feel like your mental health impacted the relationships that you had with people in general, whether it's a romantic relationship, friendships, or colleagues at work?

SMITH: Yes, dramatically. Actually, my brother is my only living family, and he actually got married while I was gone, which is another big emotional struggle for me. He is like one of my kids. I've raised him from when he was seven years old when my parents first got really hooked on drugs. So, I think it was a mutual thing for a while— he didn't know how to deal with me, and I didn't know how to deal with him anymore.You know, he was married. He was building a house. He had moved home. He didn't need me. Between that and learning how to just adjust in everyday life, I feel like we didn't even know how to communicate with each other anymore. [Inaudible 20:04] He never came out to see me. I bet the first 45 days that I was home I saw him one time. I mean we're used to being together every day.

IGBANI-PERKINS: It changed the dynamic of your relationship, it seems.

SMITH: Yeah. He didn't know how to talk to me, and I was an emotional wreck between losing my dad and trying to just cope with the emotional things that were going through my mind from coming home, alongside the changes in the world from

coming home.[00:20:28] Everything was so emotional and he didn't know how to deal with that, so he just quit talking to me.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Hmm. How did that feel? You said that that's your only living family member. So to almost be cut off or ostracized, how did that feel for you?

SMITH: [00:20:56] I cried a lot. It was like having an amputee, like your limb is cut off. And, you know, they talk about the Phantom Pains — you know it's not there but you want it to be there so bad that you pretend it is. I feel like I pretended everything was fine just so I could cope with it. We figured it out now, nine months later, but it was probably the most devastating thing for me to not have him. The entire incarceration (he said), I can't wait for you to get home! And then I got home, and he was gone. There was nothing.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, it's like you were dropped off by yourself.

SMITH: [Inaudible 21:45] I couldn't go anywhere. I was stuck and I live 12 miles from any town, even off a paved road. So it's not like someone could just swing by and say, Hey, you need me to take you to the store and get some milk? And he didn't understand that. He couldn't wrap his head around the fact that maybe I needed him there.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:22:11] Mhmm. Yeah. That's had to have been beyond difficult to not only just get out right after losing a parent, but also to be in a situation where you literally — I mean, having a support system is a very big deal for anyone that's getting out. So I can only imagine someone getting out with no support, no family, and just having to just figure it out on their own and make it. That had to have been an extremely difficult time for you, I would imagine.

SMITH: Yeah, it definitely was overwhelming.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, I imagine so.

And until this day, you still haven't been able to really gain access to Mental Health Services due to the financial burden? Is that correct?

SMITH: Right. (Nods head in agreement)

IGBANI-PERKINS: And you live in what's considered a rural area, right?

SMITH: Yeah, I have to drive one hour one way just to go to parole.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:23:28] It speaks to the volumes of resources being more difficult for than someone who's moving to a city, like, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, or Austin. Because (in your rural area) these sorts of things that you really need are going to be even more scarce, which puts you at a higher risk for recidivism. Is that something that's been on your mind. How do you avoid going back?

SMITH: Absolutely, and like I said, I'm very blessed with great parole officers.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Explain that. It seems like parole officers have been somewhat of a support for you.

SMITH: They have been! My first female parole officer, she's actually my second parole officer, and I sat down and talked one day because I have phone check-ins. I don't even actually go to the office anymore. [00:24:23] So, I asked if I could sit down and talk to her. She was like, Yeah, sure. So, I went in there, and I sat down and I was telling her, I don't know how to do this. I'm so scared. I had someone try to break into my house less than three months after I got home. So the cops —

[Audio cuts out. SMITH and IGBANI-PERKINS sort through the technical difficulties. 00:24:42 - 00:25:23]

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:25:21] Okay, so like I was saying, it seems like your parole officers were a great support for you.

SMITH: Yeah. Basically, I was telling her, I'm so afraid of everything that's going on. The police are coming to my house because of the attempted robberies. It's just been one thing after another. When the police show up at your house, it's the scariest thing ever. [00:25:47] I was like, I don't want to go back to prison. And she was like, Listen, I'm not going to let you go back to prison. I just need you to be calm. I need you to breathe and stop panicking over all this stuff.
I was having a full-blown panic attack because I thought they were going to send me back to prison. I was where I was supposed to be but the monitor, the box, wasn't saying I was where I was supposed to be.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow, that sounds like a lot of dysfunction. [00:26:27]

SMITH: It's just scary. I don't want to go back.

IGBANI-PERKINS: I know that had to have been on your mind, and probably still is you know, with the inconsistencies with the monitor, no support, and dealing with everything mentally that you had going on. [00:26:47] That can be a real challenge. Were there any faith based organizations or anything like that that you had access to that helped, or no?

SMITH: Nope, I tried to get into the faith-based dorm over and over again, and it just never happened.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Oh, okay! Within the unit, when you were at prison…

SMITH: Yeah, and I've been trying to find a church, but it's very difficult because the judgment is real. As soon as people find out I've been in prison, it's like, Okay, we really don't want you here. I've been to three different churches since I got home, and that has been the same process. One lasted a little bit longer than others, especially with older people. They're like nope. Literally, one lady told me that she didn't want me there. [00:27:41]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow!

SMITH: It's hard because I desperately want to be a part of a church. I feel like I have a lot to offer a church but they won't let me be who I am.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:28:02] It seems like you really want to connect with something like that. It seems that you feel it could be a positive experience, but between the judgment and everything, you haven't really found that connection.

Do you feel if there was some healthcare insurance that was available to you as you got ready to leave prison… Let's say they gave you a card and said, Whether it's Mental Health, Medical, etc., you can use this card for your first year after incarceration. Do you feel like if you had access to some type of Health Care upon release, that you would have sought help or do you think you still would not have connected to that resource?

SMITH: I absolutely think that would be huge. I think that would be such a detriment to people that are coming. If somebody had told me or even given me three months of time to find insurance of some kind— For example, if someone said, Okay here is your insurance. You can only go to select people, but here is an option for you to make sure that you can immediately go home, get your medications filled, or you can see a doctor about anything.

You and I both know the medical system in prison is not great. The option to go get checked out for any concerns that you have, or for mental health — I think that would be an unbelievable [00:29:36] resource to people coming home. I would have absolutely utilized that in a second.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. [00:29:46] I wholeheartedly agree with you. You know, if I had that when I was getting released I definitely would have used that as well. I think if you want to really help someone and lower recidivism, you should at least give them something to work with as we get out. They should do that rather than literally nothing.

SMITH: They basically say here's $50. Here you go! Good luck!

IGBANI-PERKINS: I know, right? Yeah, exactly. [00:30:30]
What advice would you give anyone who is getting ready to be released from prison and they have some mental health issues? What advice would you give to them?

SMITH: Don't take it lightly. Don't think that you got it all figured out because you're getting ready to walk out the door, so you think, Oh, it's not going to affect me like that. It's not going to be that bad. It is. It doesn't matter how short of time or how long of a time, it doesn't matter how great your support system is or isn't… It's going to affect you. Don't throw that to the wayside. Take care of yourself because no one else is going to do it for you. Stop and focus on you.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:31:30] Yeah, I think that's great advice. What was one of the first things you did when you got out of prison? Did you immediately look for a job?

SMITH: Actually, I was very fortunate because my previous employer from before I went to prison actually hired me back. I didn't get to stay there long because the corporate office didn't want me there, but the day after I came home, I went back to work.

So I got home on the third and I went back to work on the fourth. I wouldn't suggest that, honestly. It was very stressful because you want everyone to think that you're fine, and you're not.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. Wow.

SMITH: [00:32:40] But to answer your question, the first important thing I tried to do is get a driver's license, and it still took me 6 months.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Well, how do you feel prison has changed you?

SMITH: [00:32:58] It made me grateful for life. I feel like prison probably saved my life. I've never been in trouble. I only had one traffic ticket in my whole life. You know, I don't smoke. I don't do drugs. I don't hang out with all these people. I was very oblivious to the world and prison opened my eyes to something that I didn't understand.
I thought that people in prison were the worst of the worst. I believed that they were unhelpful and that there was nothing done for them, and that nobody cared about them. [00:33:43] Prison opened my eyes and helped me see. I met some of the best people I've ever met in my life in a prison. I've never seen God move more than in a prison, and [00:33:59] that reshaped the direction of my life. Wholeheartedly. Prison reform and prison ministry. People are like, I don't ever want to come back to this place, and I'm like, I can't wait to walk back in the front door. I can't wait to go back in there and try to do something to help people because I know how broken the system is.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:34:25] Well, you remind me so much of myself hearing you say that, because I said those same words when I got ready to get out. Everybody was like, I never want to see this place again, and I felt like I had an assignment. I felt like that assignment was to get my life together, and get back (to the prison), and give them hope and do what I can. So, it's like a reflection of myself hearing you say those words right now.

SMITH: [00:34:59] Whenever we're done with this, I've got to tell you another story about prison ministry. But, it's definitely something that I can't wait to do. I know you have to be out 18 months before you can even consider that option, but I can't wait.

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's awesome.That's awesome. I'm so glad that your heart is postured in a way that you want to be able to give back and try to help someone else. What would you tell anyone, like youth, teenagers, and people that are really young, in early adulthood, and are living a life of crime? [00:35:43] Maybe they grew up like you,and there were some problems in the home with their parents or they were around substance use and a lot of trauma.

SMITH: [00:35:55] In answering that, I'm going to tell you this. I have been actively working on a program called "Kids of the Incarcerated". It shows children that have been exposed to those things, whether their parents are actually in jail or prison, or just detrimentally exposed to those things and think they have no other choice to help them. Our program is going to educate them and help them move forward to stop that cycle. [00:36:25]

I guess that I would just continue to tell them that there's more to life. They are worth the effort. They are worth the time, they are worth the financial part of education, and that they are worth more than the fear of following the life that they are living.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:36:55] That makes so much sense. That is such profound advice to give someone who's young, maybe had a rough childhood and that trauma from that childhood is leading them to making some bad decisions. It is so important to remind them that they're worthy. I say that speaking from my personal experience. I know how it is when you feel so worthless and you question what's the point of anything in life? When you're having those kinds of thoughts in your mind, it feels like nothing matters and you question, Who would care about me? It is so important to remind them in so many different ways that they are worthy.

SMITH: Yeah I grew up like that too, you know. I was wondering, why were my brother and I not more important than drugs and alcohol? Like were we not worth making that choice to put us first? [00:37:56] Sometimes your parents or whoever you're around is not capable of that, but you have to put yourself first. You have to know your own worth, and you have to say, I'm worth putting myself first and nobody else is going to. You have to realize, I can't fix everything else for everybody. I have to fix myself first.

IGBANI-PERKINS: When you're in a situation like yours where you get released and you don't have support, it's crucial for yourself and for your freedom that you really put yourself first, love yourself, and learn what that looks like. And it seems like you didn't have much support, but you did have some good parole officers that I imagine poured into you. They imparted into you, and they were somewhat of a backbone when you needed someone to talk to you at times.

SMITH: Yep, definitely. I definitely agree with that.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, that's good. I'm so glad that they were there for you like that. What’s one of the scariest things that's happened since you've been home? [00:39:15]

SMITH: Probaby, the power going out that night was scary to me, just because— Being at Lane Murray, I was in the middle of a riot one time, and I felt like everybody was coming from every direction. When I was stuck in that dark, I didn't know what was going to happen or what was coming around or behind me. It was just very scary. [00:39:42] Being stuck at my house with a monitor knowing I couldn't go where and knowing that I had nothing (was scary). Nobody was bringing me food, nobody was taking me to the grocery store.

My two days a week that I worked, I had such a short time frame before and after you have to be at work to get home. I lived over 30 minutes from where I worked so I just grab a couple things here and a couple of things there, and hope for the best. It was very scary thinking, What if you

can't eat? I don't know if that's what you're looking for, but those things we're extremely terrifying to me.

IGBANI-PERKINS: I agree. Like you wonder, how am I going to survive? Wow. Well, I guess one of my last questions is, is there anything you want anyone to know about how prison impacted you, how it impacted your mental health, or just anything that you want people to know about your experience while you were incarcerated?

SMITH: [00:40:56] It's not all bad. I feel like the one thing people ask me a lot is, How horrible is this? But it's not all bad. They're not all monsters. They've all done something that they shouldn't have done, but I can't tell you how many officers just checked on me regularly, especially when my dad was dying. They would call me out in the middle of the night and say, Hey sit down. How are you doing? There are people that care, you just have to look for them.

[00:41:38] There are some bad apples, but if you look for the good ones, they're there. As far as mentally, knowing that one day, there's an end in sight — I mean not for everybody, I guess there's not.

It could be eight years or a month. But, you have to keep going forward. You can't give up. There's so many people that can't give up. I mean nobody wants to die in that place, and it's easy to be depressed. It's easy to feel like you're drowning and you can't come up. But look for people because there are people there if you look for them. They want to help you. Going through Plane State [inaudible] [46:00] felt like it was going to be the most horrible thing I've ever experienced in my life. I'm never going to survive.

So when I got to Lane Murray, I tore my PCL right after I got there, and they had me upstairs and they would not move me. I had an officer that carried me downstairs four days a week to take a shower.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Oh my goodness! Wow!

SMITH: If you look for people, they are there. [00:43:23] There is somebody there to pull you through when you feel like you can't.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow, that is amazing. Did you happen to make any friendships there, any meaningful relationships or was that not a thing? I know sometimes in prison people are like, Don't get close to anyone. Don't talk to anyone! Just stay to yourself. But sometimes I believe true friendships can be formed.

SMITH: Most definitely! Yes, I did. I met a couple of people that will be a part of my life for the rest of my life… That's just a relationship that I never saw coming.I do have two people that I made friends with that will be part of my life for the rest of my life.

IGBANI-PERKINS: [00:45:59] Wow! That's so special. That's so special! Anything else that you want to share before we get off? I'm looking forward to the interview after the interview. (IGBANI-PERKINS laughs) But no, is there anything you want to share before we get off?

SMITH: I think we covered everything.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, I think so. I appreciate your time so much.

SMITH: Thank you.