

Texas After Violence Project, Visions After Violence
Interview with Michael Cevallos

Interviewer: Lovinah Igbani-Perkins

Narrator: Michael Cevallos

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Summary: Lovinah Igbani-Perkins interviews Michael Cevallos about his re-entry into the free world after being incarcerated for over thirty years. The interview covers Cevallos's upbringing; struggles with mental health-related and substance abuse issues; educational pursuits in prison; experiences with parole and probation officers; entrepreneurial endeavors; and trouble navigating personal relationships after his release. Igbani-Perkins has also been previously incarcerated and serves as a mentor to Cevallos. Together they discuss the hardships associated with re-entry, including the ways that the prison system fails to prepare formerly incarcerated people for their release, especially in regards to healthcare and housing security. Cevallos reveals that, at the time of the interview, he was eight months clean. He offers advice to newly released individuals who may also be struggling with the process of re-entry.

LOVINAH IGBANI-PERKINS: Alright. Hello. I just want to start off by saying thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview and I'll let you introduce yourself.

MICHAEL CEVALLOS: Alright. Hello. My name is Michael Cevallos. I'm fifty-three years old. I've been out of prison for—I got out January of 2020. So, right before the pandemic. [00:00:25]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Alright. Alright, wow so you got out actually January, right when the pandemic was getting started, when you were released.[00:00:33]

CEVALLOS: Yeah [00:00:33]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Are you still on parole or probation right now?

CEVALLOS: I am. I'm on parole. I discharge, I think, May of next year.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. So, your last incarceration you—how long were you locked up? [00:00:50]

CEVALLOS: I did (pause) I think like nine years (pause) this last time. And yeah, so I did nine years on a violation.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. Alright. So, actually I think we'll—rather than starting this conversation about your incarceration, if we could back up and if you could just share about your life prior to before you ever went to prison, before you ever encountered the criminal justice system. Like, if you want to share a little bit about your upbringing. Like who were you raised by, what was your environment like? [00:01:33]

CEVALLOS: Sure. So I grew up with both my parents— [00:01:39]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:01:40]

CEVALLOS: —and [00:01:40] I had three sisters, two older and one younger. So my baby sister didn't come around 'till I was ten, but—So, my father was a—he was kind of a jack-of-all-trades, he kind of had his own businesses and never really did great in any of them. He was extremely smart man. He just, he was an addict. [00:02:05]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:02:06]

CEVALLOS: so, you know, everything just kind of fell through eventually, you know, and—so I grew up in that type of environment. My mother was a saint. Never used, never drank or anything. And so she kind of balanced, you know. [00:02:22]

IGBANI-PERKINS: She held it together. [00:02:23]

CEVALLOS: Sure, sure. [00:02:24] And then my old man was a heroin addict, so he was, you know, he was a forty-year heroin addict. So he was present, but he was hardly ever there, so. [00:02:34]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Tell me what that was like for you as a child, your dad being an addict. Growing up, how did you feel? How did you know that as a child?

CEVALLOS: I don't know that I really knew—[00:02:47]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:02:48]

CEVALLOS: —too much about him being an addict until, you know, 'till I started going to state school and stuff like that, and just realizing from the behavior, you know, seeing the behavior. I never really saw it before. I just—I was a kid I guess, you know, didn't really notice it. And Mom always kept us, you know, protected from any of that stuff, so. And I—you know, the other night I was just crying because she went through so much for us, [00:03:17] you know, and—[00:03:19]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. She sacrificed. [00:03:20]

CEVALLOS: Yeah, I wasn't there for her and, you know, in some of her greatest times of need and it just—so that's something that I regret big time. But yeah, so Mom, you know, kept us a pretty normal household really, you know. Even though my dad was an alcoholic and drug addict, she kind of kept that away from us and kept us afloat, so. [00:03:41]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:03:40] Okay. [00:03:42] So seems like as a child, you didn't really recognize, at that time, the impact of your dad's addiction on the family. Like your mom kept—[00:03:52]

CEVALLOS: Right. [00:03:52]

IGBANI-PERKINS: —you away from that. [00:03:53]

CEVALLOS: Sure. Now I did notice his violence. He was very violent to my mother. So, you know, we grew up in that environment from– [00:04:03]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Gotcha.[00:04:04]

CEVALLOS: –since we were kids so I guess that kind of kept me from seeing the other stuff cause I was so caught up in that, in his violence, that, you know, I had a lot of mental issues when I was a kid. I remember that I used to—I was scared to go to the restroom, I was scared to take a crap. [00:04:22]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:04:23]

CEVALLOS: So I would sit—even—I would sit in the restroom, in the restroom, and shit my pants. [00:04:29]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:04:30]

CEVALLOS: You know, that went on for, I don't know, maybe a year, and I was already, you know, eight, nine something years old, you know what I'm saying. I guess, I don't know what it was, but I know that it really troubled my mother. She was really wanting to help me, you know, get through this [inaudible][00:04:48], you know what I'm saying. But eventually it just went away and—but I believe it was because of some of the stuff I saw. My sponsor–[00:04:57]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Trauma. [00:04:58]

CEVALLOS: Yeah. [00:04:59]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. Some trauma you were exposed to. Wow. Okay, so you grow up, you know, Mom holding it together. She's a religious woman. And then Dad's dealing with addiction. And, as a result of that it's is a violent, traumatizing, and, you know, somewhat violent household that you grow up–[00:05:26]

CEVALLOS: Yeah, he was a really violent alcoholic. [00:05:28]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:05:29]

CEVALLOS: So, [00:05:29] when he would drink, just would [inaudible] [00:05:30] everything with that.[00:05:31]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Angry angry. [00:05:32]

CEVALLOS: Yeah.[00:05:33]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Gotcha. So at what age did you first encounter the criminal justice system? Are you in juvenile or not 'till adulthood?

CEVALLOS: Yeah. No, I went to TYC. I went to juvenile I guess when I was nine or ten, I guess. [00:05:54]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:05:54] Okay. [00:05:55]

CEVALLOS: I went to juvenile in—here at Texas Youth Commission in Pyote, Texas, and it was just one of their branches they had out there, and it's actually the unit that they found all the—they were abusing all these kids and stuff there in TYC a few years ago. [00:06:15]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm, mhm. [00:06:16] I remember that. [00:06:17]

CEVALLOS: That was one of the main units that they investigated and shut down, so.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. How long did you stay there?

CEVALLOS: I was there— I mean you go back to the same one if you go back, so I was there probably four, five years as as a youth.[00:06:35]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:06:34]

CEVALLOS: And it was co-ed, so, you know, it wasn't as bad, you know, you got to talk to girls and stuff like that, but the—You know, I was looking back and there was this brother and sister. And this brother used to take me out, you know, because you could—they could check us out and take us, you know, shopping or whatever, you know what I'm saying, and he was a staff member. [00:06:59]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:06:59]

CEVALLOS: I mean he never did nothing to me, but I was looking back at that and I was like, you know, were they—because it was a brother and sister, and they both would like to take me on the weekends to go shop and stuff. [00:07:10]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:07:11]

CEVALLOS: And I started looking back and wondering if they were part of this ring of sexual abuse and stuff like that that they were having there at that unit. Because they would allow the staff members to check us out on the weekends, you know what I'm saying. [00:07:25]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:07:25]

CEVALLOS: That's kind of crazy. I look at it now and think, you know, how many people fell victim to that, you know, to people in their forties taking them out, shopping for them, and stuff like that. [00:07:36]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:07:37] Yeah, it's almost like there's no accountability, like they could do whatever when y'all leave.

CEVALLOS: Sure. And we could also smoke. [00:07:44]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Oh- [00:07:45]

CEVALLOS: [00:07:44] And I was like ten years old. [00:07:46]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. [00:07:47]

CEVALLOS: You could smoke at these facilities, you know what I'm saying. It's crazy.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. Yeah, that's definitely different. So after the TYC, how old were you when you first went into prison? How many times have you been in prison, to TDCJ?

CEVALLOS: I've been to TDCJ I guess six or seven times. [00:08:10]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. When was the first-? [00:08:13]

CEVALLOS: I went the first time, seventeen years old, as soon as I turned seventeen. I think I already had a case, you know what I'm saying, they just went ahead and waited 'till I turned seventeen and-[00:08:22]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay [00:08:23], you kind of rolled over from the TYC?

CEVALLOS: Yeah. It was like a burglary or something and they just went ahead and wait 'till I turned seventeen and then tried me as an adult. And I think I got a seven-year sentence or something like that.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:08:36] Wow. And so, I'm thinking, you know, like how many years altogether do you think—do you know how many years of flat time you served over the years, over those moments [inaudible] [00:08:50] incarcerations?

CEVALLOS: Yeah, I've done twenty-eight years in TDCJ. And I've done about five years in a state school, so.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. Over thirty years of being incarcerated. [00:09:04]

CEVALLOS: Yeah. [00:09:06]

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's [inaudible] [00:09:07].

CEVALLOS: That's why I'm still messed up [inaudible] [00:09:08].

IGBANI-PERKINS: I didn't realize you had done that much time. That's literally more than half of your life incarcerated. [00:09:20]

CEVALLOS: Yeah. And, you know, a few years of that was—I was a kid so, you know, I haven't really had much time as an adult out here. I suck at relationships. [00:09:32]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:09:34]

CEVALLOS: And [inaudible] [00:09:34] relationships, like intimate relationships. [00:09:36]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:09:37]

CEVALLOS: I suck. [00:09:37] Cause I'm just—I don't really react to, like, feminine emotions I guess, I don't know. I do—I'm extremely on the feminine side. I cry and everything. But, in a relationship I'm just disconnected, man. [00:09:57]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:09:58]

CEVALLOS: I have a-[00:09:59]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:09:59] Actually, we're gonna get into relationships in a little bit. I wanted to ask you: you got out in 2020. Do you feel like the prison, like, prepared you to come back into society? Do you feel like TDC prepared you? [00:10:17]

CEVALLOS: I don't believe that they personally did anything to prepare me. I knew I was gonna get out cause I discharged, so I'm under the old law, I got a mandatory mandatory, so I knew I was getting close, so. I mean I began working as soon as I got there, basically, I mean on my own but, you know, I went to college and stuff like that while I was there. But yeah, so no I don't believe that they—you know, they prepared some documents for me and stuff like that, you know what I'm saying? [00:10:53]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:10:54]

CEVALLOS: [00:10:54] My birth certificate and stuff like that. Real basic stuff. But, no I don't believe they prepared me for getting out with one hundred dollars and having nothing. [00:11:08]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:11:07] Right. Yeah, yeah. You would say they failed you in that area then, as far as preparing someone to reenter society?

CEVALLOS: Sure, I believe they failed me and society as a whole, our community. Because kicking me out of prison basically with noth—I'm an instant burden wherever I go, you know what I'm saying? So, I'm in somebody else's space, you know, that's—you know, wherever I—you go wherever you can go, you know, whoever will take you basically. [00:11:43]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:11:43] Yeah. And were there any classes that you did like right before you got out, Changes or anything like that?

CEVALLOS: I've taken Changes, I've taken all the Voyager, and all the different Bridges to Life, all the different [inaudible] [00:12:02].

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. Okay. [00:12:01]

CEVALLOS: I've taken them. But when you discharge under the law that I'm under, you're not required to do any of those things. [00:12:09] So, but I did do them, yes.[00:12:13]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Gotcha. [00:12:10] Mhm. Yeah. And when you did them did you—were they taught by prison staff or outside stuff?

CEVALLOS: Some of them were taught by prison staff, teachers.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay.

CEVALLOS: —taught by the chaplain. Of course, Voyager and Bridges to Life. Bridges to Life were volunteers and—[00:12:33]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:12:34]

CEVALLOS: And the chaplain taught Voyager, so.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. What was your experience like like taking those classes?

CEVALLOS: I don't know if you're familiar with Toastmasters?

IGBANI-PERKINS: I am.

CEVALLOS: Okay, so I did Toastmasters and became a competent communicator and all that stuff, you know what I'm saying. So, I did Toastmasters for about five years. So—[00:12:55]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:12:55] That's good.

CEVALLOS: Yeah. I was the president for about a year. Opened one on the Pack One unit where Jason—Jason's the head of mentoring over there now, but we opened the Toastmasters one over on that unit. So, I was the first president they had over there. It was pretty cool.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. That sounds good. Yeah, Toastmasters—I liked that. I never did take it, but I was always interested in taking it and that's pretty good. Do you feel like you got something out of the other classes, Bridges to Life and Changes, Voyagers? Do you feel like that was beneficial or how did it help you at all?

CEVALLOS: Yeah. Absolutely I thought they were beneficial. You know, the whole thing is is that I believe that, you know, it's not up to the state to prepare me. You

know, really it's not. It's up to me to get prepared and, you know, I have to take my life back at some point.[00:14:00]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. Yeah. [00:14:02]

CEVALLOS: So I think that a lot of times we tend to, you know, the fact that they might not offer anything means we can't do anything. And that's just not true. We have to fight for our, you know, for our stuff today.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. Yeah. One of the things that I can say that's positive that, from my experience anyways, about Changes is that one of my biggest takeaways was that it taught me about making amends, which I found so valuable. Like, after you've done so much time and to get out and actually work through making amends with your loved ones.

CEVALLOS: Yeah. I don't think I ever really realized how much it affects our loved ones.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:14:49]

CEVALLOS: I was always so selfish that I just looked at what it did to me.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm.

CEVALLOS: It's really done a number on my family. I mean, we're still—my sisters, I mean two of them I don't even speak to you right now because they just don't know me. They just assume i'm this person that, you know, is always going to be, you know, in prison or, you know, eventually go back, so. And I don't tolerate that anymore in my life.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah.

CEVALLOS: Because sometimes I'll take that stuff on because I love them. And before you know it, you know, I'm taking something on that, you know, is gonna send me back to prison, you know?

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah.

CEVALLOS: Through my actions. So, you know, yeah.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Sounds like they may have some fears about you going back and–

CEVALLOS: Sure.

IGBANI-PERKINS: –makes it difficult. Yeah, do you feel–did you notice any, since you've been out, any mental health issues or challenges since being released?

CEVALLOS: You know, you hipped me to PICS so–

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. Post Incarceration Syndrome.

CEVALLOS: Sure. So that's something that I have kind of studied since, you know, you turning me on to that. And I definitely have probably every one of the symptoms of this disease. And, you know, I think that I'm good but, I mean, I have trouble with relationships. Every relationship I have, I have trouble. So that's definitely something that I need to work on. My compassion and maybe my emotional intelligence, I don't know. I just need to be more present and not kind of brush off other people's emotions, you know, cause I don't really deal with mine. I just–you know, it's like, prison has like desensitized me or something. So, you know. You know, I don't really cry over my stuff, I cry over other people's stuff kind of.
[00:17:02]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:17:02]

CEVALLOS: [00:17:02] You know, I feel empathy I guess.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. I guess do you feel kind of like you disassociate with–or detach others?

CEVALLOS: Yeah and holidays like I don't really do holidays. You know, stuff like that. I do birthdays. I've been [inaudible] [00:17:23] everybody happy birthday for [inaudible] [00:17:26] so that's something I do like. [00:17:27]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:17:29]

CEVALLOS: But yeah, that's pretty much it.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. Yeah. So you get out. One of the biggest things I think I'm hearing you say is that you notice, as far as your mental health is concerned, is your inability to maintain healthy relationships with people close to you? Is that fair to say?

CEVALLOS: Sure. Yeah, yeah. And it's a lot of it because I'm just not—I guess I don't really show enough interest in people's—like my girlfriend tries to tell me about her dreams. Okay, I like explain her dream by the day before I'm like, Well you remember we went over here and we did this and we did that? And it basically is her dream, you know what I'm saying, so—but that's real insensitive because she believes that it means something else and it very well could, you know, I'm just [inaudible] [00:18:33] what I see and it—things like that. I just kind of discount people's—the important things in people's lives. And I'm— [00:18:42]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah [00:18:42]

CEVALLOS: —and I'm just still really selfish. [00:18:44]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah [00:18:45]

CEVALLOS: [00:18:44] I'm still really working on my narcissism and my selfishness, you know what I'm saying?

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. Yeah. Do you feel like your mental health caused you to have some other issues with other things that other needs being met like employment, housing, or parole?

CEVALLOS: Definitely parole. I mean, I'm not a good communicator with them. I'm frustrated. I've been on parole forty years. You know, I'm like, you know, you get this rookie coming. I get a new parole officer and she wants to put me through the wringer. And, you know, I've had three other ones that did the same thing prior to her, and I'm just like, Look, man, look in my file, it's in there, you know, I don't know what to tell you. And I'll leave. I pissed, I reported, I'm gone. I paid my fees, I'll holler at y'all. And that's how I handle them. And sometimes it gets me in trouble, you know, because they don't really—like I just got into it with my parole officer week before last. We got in an argument, like a almost a shouting—I mean he's this big old black dude in Austin. He's a youngster and he's fly, you know what I'm saying. He said something smart to me and I said, Bro. I said, Man honestly man you're nobody, you know what I'm saying? You might be somebody here, you know what I'm saying, but in reality, in my world, you're nobody, you know what I'm saying? And he got pissed off and he said, Man I don't owe you shit. He talk crazy to me. And I told him, I don't owe you shit. He said, I've been here fourteen years. I said, I've been here forty bro. I said, you know, you know, Get up off of me man. I'm just, you know, I report, I piss, I pay my fees. I ain't had a dirty [inaudible] [00:20:30] in fucking ten years. So I'm like, you know, you know, I don't—I'm out man. But anyway, he was the main guy— you know, I just went to jail for an old ticket. I just got out Thursday and always put a blue warrant on. No matter what. Because it was—it turned warrant, and I got arrested. And

he came up to the jail and cut my monitor off and he said, Man, I ain't gonna put no blue warrant on you. He said, Call me when you get out of jail. I said, All right. And I did, Lovinah, we had the best talk. We talked for like an hour and a half. We're not client—we're friends now, you know what I'm saying? [00:21:04]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. [00:21:05]

CEVALLOS: [00:21:04] We really got really close and shared a lot of things and, you know, so it turned out to be a good thing.[00:21:13]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. Wow. Well, what about any—do you feel like you're—any issues with employment that you feel is a result of your mental health?

CEVALLOS: No. No, not necessarily my mental health. I mean, I've been self-employed for, you know, most of my life. I started my first business when I was eighteen years old and have been fairly successful in business when I was free. So, right now, I just started an eBay business, and we're doing about two or three hundred dollars a day already, you know, and it's only getting better. So I'm just learning more about it. The more I learn the better I'll get. And hopefully—my goal is into one year is to build it up to a million dollars in potential revenue and then sell it. So, that's what I just started two days ago and we've got—on a new store, the one I'm gonna sell. So, we've got already three or four thousand dollars up on there, and if I can put a couple thousand dollars a day on there in a year, you know, I'll be pretty close to meeting my goal—[00:22:23]

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's awesome. [00:22:25]

CEVALLOS: —and hopefully [00:22:25] we can—It'll be categorized, it'll be, you know, it'll be easy for anyone to access. So, that's my plan and my son's helping me, so I think we'll do well.

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's awesome. You had mentioned a little while ago about Post Incarceration Syndrome. What problems have you had since being home with trying to get your mental health needs met?

CEVALLOS: You know, I say I'm not really sure how it affects me completely. I know that it definitely affects me in relationships. But—what was your question Lovinah, I'm sorry.

IGBANI-PERKINS: What problems—have you encountered any problems trying to get mental health needs met since being home?

CEVALLOS: Yeah. Yeah, I guess so. I mean, I haven't really sought after any mental health help. But, when I had my hearing—I had a hearing not too long ago and I requested an attorney because of my mental health, because of PICS and PTSD and whatnot, and I was denied. So that was my main thing in the hearing. I continued to bring it up, I continued to tell them that I'm, you know, having to represent myself, that, you know, I'm not, you know, I've got issues. I've got, you know—and at the end of the hearing he was like, Dude, I've never had anyone defend themselves the way you did. He said, You went off. He said, I ain't never had an attorney defend somebody that well.[00:24:13]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. [00:24:14]

CEVALLOS: I fought emotions and all, you know, I did all that stuff and they let me go. But I didn't have no case, Lovinah. You know, one thing I hate about this re-entry is that on parole if you do anything, they put you in jail and put a blue warrant on you before you've even had your day in court.[00:24:32]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Right.[00:24:33]

CEVALLOS: And [00:24:33] I don't think that's right. I want to change that because it really creates a lot of problems for the formerly incarcerated person. Because they lose everything. [00:24:44]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Right.[00:24:43] Presume—

CEVALLOS: You know, and then you gotta go through it again. Yeah. It's crazy. It's, you know—and, you know, sometimes you just go to hearing and they'll let you go. Oh, we're sorry, you know, you [inaudible][00:24:57], you know, it wasn't that serious or whatever. But, you've already lost everything, you know?

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah.

CEVALLOS: Your place to live, you know, relationships, everything. Job, so.

Speaker 1: Yeah. It's almost like guilty until proven innocent.

CEVALLOS: Sure. I mean that's exactly what it is. And it's—I think they're trying to get away from that but, you know, it's still, it's affecting too many people. And another—[00:25:24]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah.[00:25:24]

CEVALLOS: Yeah. No. Go ahead. I don't want to get off track. I keep getting off track.

IGBANI-PERKINS: No, you're fine. You're fine. And you mentioned, you know, your intimate relationship with your girlfriend. Do you feel like, you know—or how has, rather, your mental health impacted other relationships with family members? Friends?

CEVALLOS: I think that (pause)—I think because the way I am that I don't really, you know, if I say no or if I do something, like with my girlfriend. Like she asked me something today because someone—one of the viewers on Cell Life, people I've never even met Lovinah, you know what I'm saying, said something and she heard about it. And so she's like questioning me about my loyalty or something, about my—you know, and I'm like, Whoa. I've been out two—I've been with one woman and that's her, Lovinah, and that's straight up, that's the God's honest truth. So they can, you know—and me, that's loyalty to me because, you know. And there probably should be some other things I should do in top, but that, to me, is enough to let someone know that you respect them and who they are and you're not going to do that. But, if I did do something, I surely wouldn't be hiding. I don't hide today, I'm fifty-three years old. If I do something—now I, you know, I hid my drug use from y'all because—for several different reasons, none of them were good, but I still did that. But, you know, I had—in my mind I thought I was, you know, doing something right. But anyway—but other than that, I mean, I don't have anything to hide anymore, Lovinah. I don't play games. I don't argue in a relationship. You know, I'm not going deal with a whole bunch of arguing. If you're tripping all the time, I'm gone.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. What about other relationships outside of the intimate one? Like with family and friends. Do you feel like your ment—that has also been impacted?

CEVALLOS: Yeah, I'm just a—I'm a real harsh communicator, I guess.
[00:27:38]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:27:39]

CEVALLOS: And my family doesn't really respond to that that well, you know. [00:27:43]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Gotcha. [00:27:44]

CEVALLOS: They're [00:27:43] so easily offended with me. And I think because I've been gone for so long that, you know, if I say something kind of negative or contrary to what, you know, to how they're doing it or however they see it, it kind of creates a chasm between us because (pause)—I don't know, it just does. They don't really respect my knowledge, I think. You know, they just assume there's no way I could have that answer, you know what I'm saying? I mean, I've been locked up for—kinda, that's how I feel anyway.

[Inaudible crosstalk] [00:28:24]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Like your opinion is not valued?

CEVALLOS: Yeah, like it's not valued because of the fact that I've been incarcerated. [00:28:38]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. [00:28:38] Yeah. [00:28:40]

CEVALLOS: You know? [00:28:40] As if we don't have any type of learning tools in there. We don't watch the news or we're not up with current events or—

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. Wow. [Inaudible] [00:28:50]

CEVALLOS: You know, whatever—[00:28:50] Yeah and it just kind of makes me feel like shit, you know?

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah.

CEVALLOS: Like I just went to jail because my sister—just last week—because I was staying at her place and she wanted me to do something a certain way and it was wrong. And I said, No, I'm not gonna do it that way. You know, that's not the correct way to do it. And I know how to do it. You know, I'm not—you can do it however you want, you know, I told her. But this is how I'm going to do it, you know what I'm saying. And she took that as like a direct disobedience or something in her house, you know. And she felt she couldn't communicate with me. She left, didn't come home for a couple days, and when I did talk to her she asked me to leave. And I couldn't leave because I had the monitor. So I called my PO. He said, It's gonna be a couple days. So I told her that and she wanted me gone, you know. And honestly, Lovinah, it baffles me that she felt like—I'm such a communicator, but she felt she couldn't communicate with me what she was feeling or what she was—I mean, I love my sisters to death, you know what I'm saying? I mean, I agonize over the fact that I wasn't there for them and certain times—you know, one of them was raped—you know, different times in their lives when they needed their brother, you know, and protect them. And so, you know, for her to think that she couldn't come to

her house or communicate with me really, really hurt me man, really did. And, you know, she called the police told them I had a warrant and they came in and took me to jail basically. And—

IGBANI-PERKINS: How did you feel about that?

CEVALLOS: Man, Lovinah. I cried, girl, I cried. Because she couldn't look at—I cried because of what it's gonna do to our relationship. Because I love—she's my baby sister. [00:31:00]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:31:02]

CEVALLOS: And [00:31:01] we've been on the streets together, you know, we've hustled together. She's sold pussy on the streets when I was out there with her, you know, all that, you know what I'm saying? And I just don't understand where she—I don't understand her thought process with me on this particular issue because, you know, I'm forced to be there. I'm in her living room twenty four-seven cause I got a monitor, you know. So I can't leave her living room. Any time she comes home, I'm right there, you know what I'm saying?

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah.

CEVALLOS: And it's gotta be difficult. But you knew that before I came over you. [00:31:38]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:31:38]

CEVALLOS: You know what I'm saying? [00:31:38]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Right. [00:31:40]

CEVALLOS: [00:31:40] But, you know, she just couldn't handle it. Couldn't handle my, you know, my saying no I guess. I don't know.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. And I'm sure for you, you probably felt like just a huge burden. Like but—but with no choice is either like what could you do, you know, you're on parole, you can't go in here, you probably felt really stuck like—

CEVALLOS: [00:32:04] Yeah.

[inaudible crosstalk] [00:32:05]

CEVALLOS: When you're in somebody else's space—[00:32:05]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:32:07]

CEVALLOS: When you're in somebody else's space like that, I mean, I'm already walking on eggshells. I'm cleaning everything. I'm making sure everything's right, because I don't want, you know, her to feel uncomfortable with me there. [00:32:18]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Right. [00:32:19]

CEVALLOS: I'm trying to [00:32:18]—but the main thing she told me is that I work too much and, you know, I mean I guess I'll take that one. You know, I like to work. I mean it's something that I enjoy doing, you know so—[00:32:36]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, it's not a bad attribute. [00:32:36] (laughs)

CEVALLOS: No. And I know that that's the only way I'm gonna, you know, get progress in my life is I have to work, you know? [00:32:44]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:32:43] Yup.

CEVALLOS: I've been doing Cell Life for two years and it ain't popped off so I gotta do something.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, yeah. Has anyone tried to help connect you with mental health services since you've been home?

CEVALLOS: No. No, not really. I have thought about, you know, seek—now I've counseled with David Morganstern for a while. [00:33:11]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:33:12]

CEVALLOS: So he's a licensed—you know, we had a weekly counseling session that we did for quite some time, and we worked through a lot of things, you know, worked through a lot of my childhood stuff that I had never really taken a look at, you know what I'm saying? I mean, I knew it was there but I didn't really [inaudible]. [00:33:31] You know, I had a phobia about sexual abuse in my life. And I don't believe that I was personally sexually abused, but I remember some instances in my neighborhood where us kids would be, you know, in the neighborhood going, you know, and this old man down the street would invite us over, you know what I'm saying? These kids, me and my sisters and shit. And I remember he exposed

himself to us one time, you know what I'm saying? But I never really wanted to admit that. It was like, I didn't see the dick or whatever, you know what I'm saying? Just like some weird thing that kept me from really taking a look at that. And I don't know—I don't think I was sexually abused, but, I mean, who knows? I mean, maybe I've suppressed that shit. [00:34:25]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mmm. I was just gonna say that. [00:34:27]

CEVALLOS: Yeah, you know, so that was something I was wanting to really work through and find out what was going on.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. Did any—since you've been home, have you connected with—have you found any faith-based organizations helpful in assisting you with anything?

CEVALLOS: Sure. You know, I'm a Christian so, you know, I got a church that I've been going to for years off and on.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Okay. [00:34:53]

CEVALLOS: So, definitely my pastor there, or the associate pastor, I mean, I talk to, you know, maybe once month. And my boy at the radio station, the Psalmist Voice. He's my pastor as well. So, I speak to him all the time and he counsels me, and he loves me, and I know he does, so I can always receive something from him, you know what I'm saying? [00:35:19]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:35:20]

CEVALLOS: He always calls me out, you know. He'll be watching the show, I won't even know, he'll call me a couple days later and tell me, you know, ask me some questions and ask—you know, he's just a great guy. Really great guy. They're like family to me, so.

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's good. [00:35:38] It sounds like you've had some impactful relationships and people that did pour into you, assist you with, you know, whether it was counseling sessions or, you know, ministry. But you've had some impactful relationships since being home.

CEVALLOS: Sure. And I consider our relationship a very—you know, I consider you a mentor. I consider you someone that I look up to. And it's—I love to see your progress. It really inspires me. Not that I want to do the same things you're doing, but it inspires

me because I love you and I know that you're on the right path. And it just—it really makes me happy, you know what I'm saying, it really does. You have been someone—even though I haven't told you enough—you've been someone that I've really—you know, you've said a lot of things to me during my addiction and you were always right. And I've never forgot those things, you know what I'm saying? And I know you—[00:36:38]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Don't made me cry here now. You the interviewee now, stop. [00:36:41]

CEVALLOS: No I, you know, I know—[00:36:43]

IGBANI-PERKINS: But it means so much to hear that from you. It really does. Mmm.

CEVALLOS: I knew that you cared about me and it really—you know, it might not have made a difference, right then—it did even then—but I definitely examined our conversations over and over and over and try to do my best to, you know, make you proud, so.

IGBANI-PERKINS: I appreciate that it—when I say it means a lot, it really does. I don't take those words lightly, and you inspire me to—[00:37:15]

CEVALLOS: I've been clean eight months. I've been clean eight months, so. [00:37:20]

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's good. [00:37:20] Congratulations for real. That's good because I—and I know that them eight months ain't come easy, so. [00:37:33]

CEVALLOS: Yeah, no. A lot of them were in jail, but I'm still clean. (laughs)

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, yeah. It counts. [00:37:35]

CEVALLOS: My son said, Dad, can you give me a year sober? You know what I'm saying? [00:37:43]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow. [00:37:43]

CEVALLOS: And I was like—

IGBANI-PERKINS: Up for the challenge, huh?

CEVALLOS: I said, I can do that. So we're right at eight months, so it's pretty cool.

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's good. You gonna make it, you gonna make it to the year.

CEVALLOS: I gotta do something for me, cause he smokes weed, you know what I'm saying?

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. Yeah.

CEVALLOS: [inaudible] [00:38:00] do something for me after I get through my year. So, we'll see.

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's good. I just have a couple more questions, like, if you had, before you got out, if there was some healthcare coverage that was available do you feel like you would have used it to access mental health or other things? Or probably not?

CEVALLOS: Sure. Absolutely. I was definitely—I know—I've been on medication before and some of them have helped me tremendously. I didn't necessarily like all the side effects, but they definitely helped me cope with my issues, so. But yes, I definitely would. [00:38:46]

IGBANI-PERKINS: [Inaudible] [00:38:48]

CEVALLOS: If we had some coverage—if we had some kind of state coverage that, you know, they afforded us because of our, you know, incarceration. [00:38:54]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Mhm. [00:38:55]

CEVALLOS: And because we served the whole time we were incarcerated, and worked. [00:39:00]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, working for free. [00:39:01]

CEVALLOS: Yeah [00:39:02], you know I worked down there twenty-eight years in [inaudible] [00:39:07] and so, yeah, I definitely think we [00:39:10]—

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, whatever. [00:39:11]

CEVALLOS: [00:39:11]—we should have some type of system that gives us all those little things that will initially help us get back on our feet, you know what I'm saying? We're not worried about those things, you know? Even housing needs to be part of this re-entry thing because housing's probably the most worrisome thing that we go through, you know? Is having our own space, you know? When you don't have your own space, man, you're always uncomfortable. [00:39:42]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:39:43]

CEVALLOS: It just [00:39:43], it sucks.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah, it sucks. [00:39:46]

CEVALLOS: It sucks. [00:39:46]

IGBANI-PERKINS: You're absolutely right. So a little while ago you had mentioned about Cell Life. Tell me about, and tell everybody about, Cell Life. What is Cell Life? And how did that get started? And what's going on with that right now? Because I know that's like your own creation. You established—[00:40:08]

CEVALLOS: Sure.[00:40:08]

IGBANI-PERKINS: —and created that, and you—so, talk about that if you will.

CEVALLOS: Okay. Cell Life is basically like a podcast, a video podcast, that I do. I usually come on every night, if I'm able, at 8:30 PM, and it's just a—we serve the formerly incarcerated community and their loved ones. And anyone that's in this space of incarceration and re-entry and prison reform and whatnot. At one time I believe we were probably the lead information source in prison, you know what I'm saying? We've gotten away from that. We had different people coming on every night and it was a nice little flow of information. But, I think that Cell Life has become more of a community now. We're—everybody on there's a friend of mine, a personal friend of mine, that I've probably talked to outside of Cell Life at some point and—but it's definitely—what it's done for me is probably the most important thing and it's allowed me to reconnect with my family members that I hadn't seen in, you know, thirty years.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Wow.

CEVALLOS: And it really brought my family together, my—not my immediate family, but all my other family members. They didn't [inaudible] [00:41:38] or hadn't seen me since we were kids or whatever. I've reconnected with all of them, and they're all followers and really interested in what's going on, you know what I'm saying? But the—it allowed me to have some responsibilities, allowed me to have somewhere to come everyday and share my experience. And it's helped people, so that's a wonderful thing for me because that's really what I wanted to do was maybe share my experience and have someone, you know, get some healing, you know, out of something that they've gone through or whatnot. But—so yeah, it's something I love, it's my baby. We are sticking with the brand and we're doing another YouTube channel. I also resell, so we're doing Resale Life. And it's a resale channel. We got an eBay store where we sell—we recycle. We recycle items that have been in circulation and, instead of throwing them in the landfill, we're tryna save some footprints, some— you know, we're eco friendly. So we want to resell these things and put them back into circulation until they're no longer able to be used, so.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Pretty dope. That's good, that's good. So yeah, seems like you inherited that that good side from your dad probably. That entrepreneurial, you know—

CEVALLOS: That's probably the only good thing I got from him, you know what I'm saying? But, I'm grateful. I'm grateful. [00:43:20]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. [00:43:20] Yeah. [00:43:22]

CEVALLOS: Yeah.[00:43:22]

IGBANI-PERKINS: If you could give anybody advice, somebody's getting out—getting ready to get out—of prison and they realize that they're struggling with relationships, they realize they're having some mental health issues and that maybe they've done almost thirty years or over thirty years and they know that their mental health has been impacted by the incarceration, what advice would you give them? They're getting out tomorrow.

CEVALLOS: I would say that—be sure to listen. Listen more than you speak. People, they have stigmas about us. About [inaudible] [00:44:02] incarcerated people. And a lot of times I've encouraged those stigmas through my actions and through my impatience. So, I would say, Listen, love your family, look past their faults, and just allow them to be them and just be present with them because what they truly want is your time and your, you know, and your ear. They want you to listen to them. They haven't—you haven't listened to them in quite some time. We've been gone, out of their lives, and they have a lot to tell us. And so that's something that I'm learning. I'm learning. Like I used to always step over my—my son would—we'd be having a conversation, I'd just constantly be stepping over his words, you know

what I'm saying, cause I got so much to say to him. But, what I realize, he's got a lot to say to me too, you know? He's got a lot he wants to tell me and I need to be the dad and listen, you know? And so I'm learning to do that. [00:45:08]

IGBANI-PERKINS: : Yeah. That's good. [00:45:10]

CEVALLOS: So that's [00:45:09] one of the main things I would say.

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's good. Yeah-[00:45:13]

CEVALLOS: Give yourself [00:45:13] a break. Give yourself a break, realize that, you know, you have been through something serious, but you've come through it and you can do anything. There's really nothing—I'm real big on the law of attraction right now and manifesting things in my life. So, you know, if we stick with the principles that people that have come before us and have conquered, if we stick to some of those principles of the things that they don't want us to learn, we can actually be creators of our own destinies, you know what I'm saying? And create. You know, we need to be creators and not combators, you know, incompetence. We need to, you know, create. So-[00:46:04]

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah.[00:46:06]

CEVALLOS: That's where I'm at right now. [00:46:06]

IGBANI-PERKINS: That's good. I'm so proud of you. I've always felt like you would get it together, and I'm really proud of where you are and you inspire me as well because you're doing something that I don't really have the courage to do, but I would love to be able to do that. Like, I don't—yeah. So anyways, I just wanted to say that I really appreciate your time and you doing the—sharing your story, your truth, and agreeing to do this interview. So thank you so, so much.

CEVALLOS: Well, Lovinah, you've been a big part of—just a big part of—you know, without y'all, without you people, you, Jason, the different people that have impacted my life, I mean, I probably would've been back in prison, you know? I appreciate y'all taking the time to care about me. I really do, you know? So, I love you, man.

IGBANI-PERKINS: Yeah. Hey, iron sharpens iron, so.

CEVALLOS: That's right.